

**To the Dolls' House:
Children's Reading and Playing in
Victorian and Edwardian England**

PhD Thesis
submitted by
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I, Wei-Ning Chen confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the construction of upper- and middle-class children as readers and consumers in Victorian and Edwardian England, a period which witnessed the Golden Age of children's literature and major reforms in education. Through the examination of dolls' house play and representations of dolls' houses in English children's literature from the 1860s to the 1920s, as well as autobiographical accounts of childhood reading and playing in adult women's memoirs, this thesis engages with recent scholarship on children's literature, material culture and gender to demonstrate the relevance of dolls' house play to children's everyday life and their roles as readers, players, and consumers.

The first part of the thesis gives an overview of dolls' houses in history, looking at dolls' houses in museum collections throughout Europe, from the seventeenth-century Nuremberg houses to Queen Mary's dolls' house now on display at Windsor Castle. Part Two examines dolls' house play as represented in and inspired by children's books and children's reading practices. Drawing from children's magazines, toy-making guides, and picture books featuring dolls' house making, furnishing, and playing, I argue that playing with dolls' houses and making their own toys enabled children to balance work and play, labour and leisure. I also show how dolls' house play was important in the period's development of pedagogical theories, of a children's book and toy market, and in the construction of children as consumers. Part Three explores works by Edith Nesbit, Beatrix Potter, and Frances Hodgson Burnett, alongside other non-canonical children's fiction that makes the dolls' house a setting for fantasies about miniature worlds. I discuss the dolls' house as a perfect domestic household in miniature and an enchanting miniaturised spectacle and argue that imagination and play contribute to girls' learning and negotiating with domestic roles and domestic space.

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INTRODUCTION

It is an old story, and for some a sad one, that in a sense these childish toys are more to us than they can ever be to children. We never know how much of our after imaginations began with such a peep-show into paradise. *I sometimes think that houses are interesting because they are so like doll houses* and I am sure the best thing that can be said for many large theatres is that they may remind us of little theatres [...]

I look forward to the day when I shall have time to play with it [...] I shall retire into this box of marvels; and I shall be found still striving hopefully to get inside a toy-theatre.

— G. K. Chesterton¹

The allure of small things

Chesterton is not alone in his fantasy about visualising houses on a minute scale. The human delight in miniaturisation is felt by many nostalgic adults. Thomas Schlereth likens the interest in miniatures to our longing to be children once more and suggests that collecting material objects proportional to children's size allows adults to 're-examine life at a Lilliputian level'.² Indeed, to Chesterton the toy theatre was not only a toy for children; it tempted him to peep in and aroused a narrative impulse to create stories about the lives of the people in it: after 'a peep-show into paradise', the 'imaginations began'. Moreover, in his eyes houses were like dolls' houses; such fanciful miniaturisation reveals the aspiration to see familiar objects from the real world recreated on a reduced scale. It even aroused in him a desire to be small enough to go inside the miniature world. As Flora Jacobs suggests, people scale

¹ Quoted in Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 225; italics mine.

² Thomas J. Schlereth, *Cultural History and Material Culture: Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research, 1990), 90.

down things and ‘enjoy the miniature itself, just because it is *small*’.³ Small things appeal in many ways. From Fabergé eggs, crèches made in Naples, to ‘The Birthday of the Grand Mogul Aurangzeb’ created by the Dresden court jeweller Johann Melchior Dinglinger (1664-1731), and Colleen Moore’s (1899-1988) extravagant Fairy Castle (1935) held at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, the love for small things and the human instinct to cherish tiny and delicate objects show the significance and popularity of miniatures throughout human history.

Miniature objects are created for various reasons. As a way to save time and expense, model houses or model vehicles are made as part of the design process before they are produced in full size in quantity. In some civilisations, however, model houses were perceived as the abode for the souls of the dead. Model buildings found in Egypt, dating from 1900 B.C., were used to enable the deceased to continue their existence in the afterlife.⁴ The British Museum holds several objects like these, which were often placed in burial sites to ensure that the dead should want nothing in the underworld. There were also small household objects and figures excavated from Greece and Rome associated with ritualistic and funerary purposes.⁵ However, there remain different interpretations on miniaturised domestic objects—even though many of these items are found in a burial context, it is hard to decipher their associations with the deceased as small artefacts retain ambiguous functions. While they could be ritual items significant for the afterlife, some archaeologists argue that these curious objects from the distant past might represent the material culture of children, toys that children treasured when they were alive.⁶ There is evidence

³ Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Doll’s Houses: Four Centuries of the Domestic World in Miniature* (London: Cassell, 1954), 21; her emphasis.

⁴ Constance Eileen King, *The Collector’s History of Dolls’ Houses, Doll’s House Dolls and Miniatures* (London: Hale, 1983), 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-20.

⁶ Sharon Brookshaw, ‘The Material Culture of Children and Childhood: Understanding Childhood

showing that children in Greece might have played with a selection of models of household articles, mainly of a teaching nature and not necessarily intended to be housed in tombs.⁷

There are also accounts of miniaturised household objects used as educational toys for girls in Renaissance Italy. In a treatise on female education published in 1545, Lodovico Dolce suggested that ‘all the tools concerning household activities, reduced in miniature, and made [...] of wood or various metals, should be put in the young girl’s hands [...] the familiarity with these objects will make sure that she will pleasurably learn the name and the function of each of them’.⁸

On the one hand, the attempt to scale down everyday objects shows the long-standing tradition of the fascination for miniatures. On the other hand, reducing the size of ordinary objects from everyday life helps encapsulate familiarity and daily routine in a graspable form, which in turn creates a sense of security and reassurance. Moreover, holding miniature objects in one’s hand makes us feel in harmony with things in our surroundings. The magnification of a small creature or an ordinary everyday object can terrify us with the grotesque size and distorted contour—imagine how threatening the gigantic bee, or broom or the lawn-mower appears to be in the film *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989). In contrast, the miniature makes us feel at ease and invites possession.⁹ Possessing miniature objects not only

Objects in the Museum Context’, *Journal of Material Culture*, 14.3 (2009), 369-70. See also Mary Harlow, ‘Toys, Dolls and the Material Culture of Childhood’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. by Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin and Roslynne Bell (New York: Oxford University Press), 322-40; Sanne Houby-Nielsen, ‘Child Burials in Ancient Athens’, in *Children and Material Culture*, ed. by Joanna Sofaer Derevenski (London: Routledge, 2000), 151-66; Sally Crawford, ‘Children, Grave Goods and Social Status in Early Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Children and Material Culture*, 169-79.

⁷ King, 15.

⁸ Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo...Della Institutione delle Donne: Secondo li Tre Stati, che Cadono nella Vita Humana* (Venice, 1545); quoted and translated in Marta Ajmar, ‘Toys for Girls: Objects, Women and Memory in the Renaissance Household’, in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation* by Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley, et al. (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 86-87.

⁹ Steven Millhauser, ‘The Fascination of the Miniature’, *Grand Street*, 2.4 (1983), 130.

reveals the innate curiosity to see small things but also perfectly fits Walter Benjamin's definition of ownership. Benjamin declared that 'ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects', and it is 'not that they come alive in [the possessor]; it is he who lives in them'.¹⁰ Miniatures appealed a great deal to Benjamin as a child because, as Esther Leslie notes, they 'condensed the world into handleable, studiable form'.¹¹ Indeed the tangibility and tactility of miniature objects satisfy the owner's desire to have full control over his possessions. As reassuring as the sight and the touch of small things are, they not only allow the owner to 'live in them' but also to be one with them, and even, at some primal level, to help him feel alive.

Furthermore, the miniature offers a panoramic view of things. As Steven Millhauser suggests, 'The fascination of the miniature is in part the fascination of the mountain view. To be above, to look down, to take into the yearning eye more at a single glance: here we are at the very threshold of the lure of the miniature'.¹² We feel comfortable with the miniature because as we see it we see 'everything that is actually there': 'the miniature holds out the promise of total revelation'.¹³ Millhauser suggests that the dolls' house, when compared with a normal-sized house, satisfies the viewer's desire to consume it and to possess it with the eye: 'We can know a house room by room, on the inside, but we cannot take in with the eye all the rooms on a floor. A dollhouse allows us to possess a house in this way, to see it more completely'.¹⁴ In many cases, as details of the dolls' house demand intense attention, the eyes are drawn closer to zoom in to examine the fine execution of the interior. The viewer's face is brought close to the house. The fixed focus on the dolls' house

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library', in *Illuminations* (1968; London: Pimlico, 1999), 69.

¹¹ Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 134.

¹² Millhauser, 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129-31.

and the close proximity to it brings the viewer a transcendental visual experience and a sense of intimacy with the viewed object. It is a soothing sense of comfort and delight, as Schlereth observes: adults are interested in collecting miniature objects exactly because ‘the [...] world of the diminutive and the dwarf is both cognitively relaxing and aesthetically pleasing’.¹⁵ In this regard, it was not coincidental that Princess Augusta Dorothea von Schwarzburg-Arnstadt (1666-1751) named the model town she had commissioned *Mon Plaisir*, literally ‘My Pleasure’.¹⁶

The dolls’ house is pleasurable to the eye not only because of its enchantment as a miniature object with rich diversity in forms and structures. The pleasure the dolls’ house encourages is familial, emotional, and intellectual. More than the sentiment it evokes to care for the tiny and the exquisite, the dolls’ house embodies the passion and determination to have a more comprehensive knowledge of the world in microcosm. Playing with a doll or a stuffed animal is usually an act of handling an object simply by itself, and the play is not normally set in a particular time or location. By contrast, playing with the dolls’ house demands the understanding and appreciation of spatiality, temporality, and materiality all in one setting. As the arrangement for the dolls’ house with all the miniature figures and furniture it contains requires the knowledge about domestic life, social systems, and family relations, it reveals the player’s perceptions and imagination of an individual’s relationship with others and with the material objects in his surroundings in a specific space at a particular time. All of these attempts to negotiate with space, time, and materials as represented in the engagements with dolls’ houses together reflect the

¹⁵ Schlereth, 90.

¹⁶ *Mon Plaisir*, now displayed in the Schlossmuseum in Arnstadt, Germany, consists of eighty model rooms and settings, with over 400 dolls and 2,670 miniature items, portraying the everyday life in her court and the town of Arnstadt where she lived in the first half of the eighteenth century. This ostentatious project is an accurate and fascinating record of everyday life of all the layers of society in the Princess’s life time. See Faith Eaton, *The Ultimate Dolls’ House Book* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1994), 19-41.

practical and sensual expressions of material culture central to the experiences of everyday life.

Dolls' houses and material culture

As early as in the mid-1780s, English children's literature showed children play with their own dolls' houses (which were then also called 'baby houses', as baby was an old English word for a child's doll). For instance, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* (1783) by Lady Eleanor Fenn (1743-1813) contains a dialogue on 'The Baby House' in which two girls are vivaciously talking about the clothes and accessories of their dolls. One of the girls stores them in her dolls' house as she declares: 'Bless me! What a nice press! I have a trunk at home, in my doll's house; but I have no press'.¹⁷ Later, Mary Martha Sherwood (1775-1851) described in *The Fairchild Family* (1818) a dolls' house owned by a haughty little girl. The girl guides her visitors through 'a pair of grand stairs, and along a very long gallery full of pictures, till they [come] to a large room', where she proudly shows them her baby house among other toys she has:

In one corner of the room was a baby-house.—Do you know what a baby-house is? If you have not seen such a thing, I will endeavour to describe it to you. It is a small house, fit for dolls, with door and windows, and chimney outside; and inside there is generally a parlour and a kitchen, and a bed-room, with chairs, tables, couches, beds, carpets, and everything small, just as there is in a real house for people to live in.—Besides the baby-house, were a number of other toys; a large rocking-horse; a cradle, with a big wooden doll lying in it; and tops, and carts, and coaches, and whips, and trumpets, in abundance.¹⁸

The introduction of the baby house serves as one of the earliest fictional accounts of the dolls' house as a child's plaything in England. Because dolls' houses as children's

¹⁷ Mrs. Lovechild [Lady Eleanor Fenn], *Cobwebs to Catch Flies, or, Dialogues in Short Sentences Adapted to Children from the Age of Three to Eight years* (1783; New York: C. S. Francis, 1851), 49-52.

¹⁸ Mary Martha Sherwood, *The History of the Fairchild Family; or a Child's Manual* (London: J. Hatchard, 1818), 94-95.

toys were a relatively new concept in the early nineteenth century, Mrs. Sherwood had to provide a concise definition of it. Interestingly, the surplus of toys in the home and the display and show of them reflect the emergence of a bourgeois childhood, a lifestyle that helped the evolution of dolls' houses from opulent adults' treasures to more affordable children's toys. The bourgeois mania of acquiring, possessing, and displaying a vast array of goods in the home in the nineteenth century was associated with various aspects of changing ideas of decoration, housekeeping, domestic leisure, and consumerism. Moreover, the abundance of material objects related to the concept of childhood and the need of children provides an interesting insight into child-rearing and the everyday life of young children at home in the nineteenth century.

In nineteenth-century England, the middle classes became more numerous and more powerful. In addition, other significant social, economic, and structural factors, such as technical improvements in manufacturing, education reforms, better provision of healthcare, and changing attitudes to childhood worked together to facilitate the rapid expansion of the market for childhood commodities. Just as personal goods possessed by adults and what they chose to display demonstrate attitudes towards ownership and consumption, the objects children owned and used and the toys they played with reveal much about the child as consumer. In addition, they reflect the imagination, creativity, and aesthetics of the material world of childhood. Books of the period show children forming personal attachments with objects. Depictions of the practices of buying and owning material objects in children's books encouraged juvenile consumerism and influenced the child reader's imagination and experience of things in an everyday setting. Their engagements with

objects reflect the period's domestic and material ideals, and express a fantasy of domesticity as a basis for individual happiness and familial well-being.

The last two decades have seen much research on how material objects form the everyday experience of individuals. Along with the rise of 'thing theory', which aims at 'complicating things with theory' and explores literary representations of things, as outlined by Bill Brown in 2001, the study of things and material culture has become a dynamic phenomenon in recent years. Contributors to this field have examined ways in which people purchase, manufacture, possess, use, and imagine things. They have argued that our relationship with material things shapes ideas about self-identity, and that the analysis of human relations with 'things' will provide a more comprehensive understanding of people's interactions with social and cultural structures at large.¹⁹ Considerations about the meanings and representations of objects and social relations with objects are addressed in works that examine early modern history from the perspective of material culture.²⁰ Scholars of Victorian literature and culture have been paying increasing attention to the literary representations of material objects. In 2003, Lyn Pyket identified a 'material turn in Victorian studies'.²¹ Thomas Richards's *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (1990), Andrew Miller's *Novels behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (1995), Deborah Cohen's *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (2006), Elaine Freedgood's *The*

¹⁹ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 1-22; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 'Why We Need Things', in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, ed. by Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian, 1993), 20-29; Jules David Prown, 'The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?', in *History from Things*, 1-19; Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (London: UCL Press, 1998); Tim Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

²⁰ For example, Marius Kwint, Christopher Beward and Jeremy Aynsley, et al., *Material Memories: Design and Evocation* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, ed. by *Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010).

²¹ Lyn Pykett, 'The Material Turn in Victorian Studies', *Literature Compass*, 1.1 (2003), 1-5.

Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel (2006), and Talia Schaffer's *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2011) all reflect a growing interest in the consumption and commodification of material things in Victorian England and the attempt to understand the manifestations of culture through material objects. In brief, these studies demonstrate what Victoria Mills describes as the examination of 'how the material is brought into collision with literature'.²²

This interest in things has also stimulated fruitful historical and social queries in the studies of childhood. Schlereth remarked in 1982 that 'To date, surprisingly little work has been done with the artifacts of childbirth and early child-rearing practices. One rich area of future material culture research would appear to be in the social and cultural history of children's toys'.²³ Since then, object-based and museum-centred studies of the history of childhood have opened up the discipline of childhood studies. Sally Kevill-Davies's *Yesterday's Children: the Antiques and History of Childcare* (1991), Karin Calvert's *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (1992), Anne Buck's *Clothes and the Child: A Handbook of Children's Dress in England, 1500-1900* (1996), and Gary Cross's *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (1997) all seek to evaluate the changing images of children and adults' attitudes towards the concepts

²² Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (London: Verso, 1990); Andrew Miller, *Novels behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006); Talia Schaffer, *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Victoria Mills, 'Introduction: Victorian Fiction and the Material Imagination', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 6 (2008), 1.

²³ Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture Studies in America* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 71.

of childhood.²⁴ They have examined children's furniture, clothing, toys, and other material goods associated with social and cultural expectations of what children should be like. In addition, there are also numerous histories and guides about toys and dolls mostly written by collectors or enthusiasts.²⁵ As some of the authors have curatorial backgrounds and many of them are collectors themselves, their contribution has shed different light on how the objects of children and childhood have been collected, exhibited, and interpreted. However, studies of material culture of children and childhood are somehow limited to the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, and cultural history, and there is room for more criticism focusing on the representation of childhood objects and children's material practices in literature.

There has been relatively little discussion on the various kinds of literary representations of dolls' houses comparing with writings about other toys and childhood commodities and collectors' guides. Concerning dolls, apart from collectors' books there are already several extensive academic studies on doll culture and doll-making industry in the nineteenth century, such as Miriam Formanek-Brunell's *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930* (1993) and Maria Eugenia Gonzalez-Posse's 2012 thesis on the representation of dolls in Victorian literature.²⁶ However, despite the

²⁴ Sally Kevill-Davies, *Yesterday's Children: the Antiques and History of Childcare* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1991); Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: Northeast University Press, 1992); Anne Buck, *Clothes and the Child: A Handbook of Children's Dress in England, 1500-1900* (Carlton, Bedford: Ruth Bean, 1996); Gary S. Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²⁵ See for example, Constance Eileen King, *The Encyclopedia of Toys* (London: Hale, 1978); Kenneth Fawdry, et al, *Pollock's History of English Dolls and Toys* (London: Benn, 1979); Edward Gelles, *Nursery Furniture: Antique Children's, Miniature and Doll's House Furniture* (London: Constable, 1982); Constance Eileen King, *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* (London: Hale, 1983); Caroline Goodfellow, *The Ultimate Doll Book* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1993).

²⁶ Miriam Formanek-Brunell, *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Maria Eugenia Gonzalez-Posse, 'Galatea's Daughters: Dolls, Female Identity and the Material Imagination in Victorian Literature and Culture' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2012).

proliferation of collector's guides to dolls' houses, literary criticism on the dolls' house is relatively scarce. To date, Frances Armstrong in her 'textual history of dollhouses' has read dolls' house stories in the long nineteenth century in relation to the maturation and development of the little girl.²⁷ Similarly, other critics taking literary approaches focus on the metaphorical and symbolic importance of dolls' houses (and more broadly, the miniature world) with regard to the ideas of miniaturisation, anthropomorphism, gender, and sexuality.²⁸ More recently, Hannah Field has analysed the depictions of children making and furnishing dolls' houses in children's books published in the 1950s and 1960s. She argues against the idea of the dolls' house as encouraging the display of wealth and gratifying primarily adults' desires and wishes instead of providing a site for children's creative play. She sees the activity of crafting and constructing dolls' houses as a creative process providing children with an outlet for their imagination and a chance to associate their real-life experiences with the dolls' house projects.²⁹ Besides, scholars of art history and cultural history address the dolls' house from a more historical and object-centred perspective. They evaluate some of the most well-known historical dolls' houses preserved in museums throughout Europe in relation to constructions of domesticity and changing ideas about domestic space.³⁰ In addition to historical dolls' houses

²⁷ Frances Armstrong, 'The Dollhouse as Ludic Space, 1690-1920', *Children's Literature*, 24 (1996), 23-54.

²⁸ Caroline C. Hunt, 'Dwarf, Small World, Shrinking Child: Three Versions of Miniature', *Children's Literature*, 23 (1995), 115-36; Lois R. Kuznets, 'Taking Over the Dollhouse: Domestic Desire and Nostalgia in Toy Narratives', in *Girls, Boys, Books, Toys: Gender in Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. by Beverly Lyon Clark and Margaret R. Higonnet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 142-53; Chris Hopkins, 'Arrietty, Homily, Pod: Home, Size, Gender, and Relativity in *The Borrowers*', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 25.1 (2000), 21-29.

²⁹ Hannah Field, '100 Ways to Make a Japanese House', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 37.2 (2012), 153-63.

³⁰ James E. Bryan, 'Material Culture in Miniature: Historic Dolls' Houses Reconsidered' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003); Michelle Moseley-Christian, 'Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women', *Home Cultures*, 7.3 (2010), 341-63; Susan Broomhall, 'Imagined Domesticities in Early Modern Dutch Dollhouses', in *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries: Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past* by Susan Broomhall and Jennifer

commissioned and possessed by adult collectors, scrapbook houses for paper dolls (i.e. dolls' house collages pasted in albums) or paper dolls' house books created and played with by children have attracted some serious scholarly attention, although the majority of source materials they consulted are in North America.³¹

My study explores a wide range of dolls' house-related materials, rich in scope and variety. Literary criticism enables me to consider the historical and cultural significance of dolls' houses and their symbolic functions. But besides looking at the dolls' house itself as a material and symbolic object in fictional works, my thesis further explores the social and cultural aspects of dolls' house play in Victorian and Edwardian England, particularly the ways in which dolls' houses as children's toys were actually played with and perceived by their makers and owners. Relevant accounts could be traced in autobiographical records such as adult women's memoirs and recollections of childhood, children's magazines, advertisements, book illustrations as well as genre paintings, although the actual voice of contemporary children could not be easily located, possibly because of the trivial and ephemeral quality of dolls' house play. In spite of the academic neglect and the difficulty in finding first-hand records of children's play experiences, the dolls' house as an important object integral to the concept of childhood, the construction of domesticity and femininity, the dynamics of consumption, leisure, household management, and the formulation of children as readers, players, and consumers, deserve a wider audience and more scholarly attention.

Spinks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 99-122.

³¹ Roth Rodris, 'Scrapbook Houses: A Late Nineteenth-Century Children's View of the American Home', in *The American Home: Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*, ed. by Eleanor McD Thompson (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1992), 301-23; Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, 'The House That Collage Built', *American Art*, 7.3 (1993), 88-91; Beverly Gordon, 'Scrapbook Houses for Paper Dolls: Creative Expression, Aesthetic Elaboration, and Bonding in the Female World', in *The Scrapbook in American Life*, ed. by Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 116-34; Christie D. Jackson, 'With Paper and Glue: Building the Commercial Success of an Arts and Crafts Toy', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 44.4 (2010), 351-86.

Overview of chapters

Indeed the richness of children's lived experience of their material world demands further examination. This thesis therefore uses interdisciplinary research to explore the relationship between children's books and toys, reading and playing, and to understand the material culture of children and childhood.³² I focus specifically on the representation of dolls' houses and dolls' house play of upper-and middle-class girls in English children's literature from 1860 to 1925 in order to examine how children's engagements with dolls' houses reflect their engagements with the wider processes of social and cultural changes in the period, which in return constructed their everyday life and their roles as readers, players, and consumers. The period between the 1860s and the 1920s saw the Golden Age of English children's literature and key reforms in education.

An important advice manual for girls, *The Girl's Own Toy-maker, and Book of Recreation*, was first published in 1860.³³ This book taught girl readers useful manual skills and how to use their leisure time properly. More importantly, it reveals concerns about over-consumption of useless toys and the new excess of mass-produced factory toys. Debates and anxieties about toys, and particularly the possession of dolls' houses as a form of what Thorstein Veblen defined as 'conspicuous consumption', continued well into the twentieth century. The completion of two significant historical dolls' houses in the first two decades of the twentieth century marks the culmination of craftsmanship and extreme luxury in

³² Brookshaw suggests that the distinction between the material culture of children and the material culture of childhood should be made more clearly. She suggests that the former applies to items that children make themselves or adapt into their own culture from the adult world that have a different use intended by the adult manufacturer. By contrast, the 'material culture of childhood' refers only to items made *for* children which reflect adult attitudes towards them. Brookshaw, 381.

³³ Ebenezer Landells and Alice Landells, *The Girl's Own Toy-maker, and Book of Recreation* (London: Griffith, 1860).

modern English history. One of these is Queen Mary's Dolls' House, which was moved to Windsor Castle for permanent exhibition in 1925.

During this period children's authors, publishers, toy traders and advertisers started to diversify, expanding their subject matter and their range of merchandise in much broader social and cultural contexts. These materials showed a new understanding of the educational potential of children's books, magazines, and toys, and the role of playing in the child's emotional, intellectual, and creative development. Examining children's books and magazines published within this period and memoirs of Victorian and Edwardian childhood published subsequently, this thesis explores how middle-class prosperity, mass production, and the commodification of children's literature worked together to shape the reading and marketing of children's books and toys. My thesis then discusses in detail the production and consumption of children's books and toys depicted in primary texts featuring dolls' houses and dolls' house play. Considering how children's reading affected and shaped their imaginative play, I show what playing with dolls' houses meant to them and how dolls' house play reflected children's understanding of everyday life. Drawing from literary texts as well as images of children at play in realistic paintings and book illustrations, I argue that through dolls' house play, children—and girls in particular—gained pleasure and agency in constructing and remodelling their ideal homes. Playing with dolls' houses, girls not only learned common conceptions of domesticity and femininity, but also to be imaginative story-tellers and stage designers. As the thesis of *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* asserts, children did not simply exist within the adult-defined cultural context, in fact they took an active role as agents in its formation.³⁴

³⁴ Dennis Denisoff, 'Small Change: The Consumerist Designs of the Nineteenth-Century Child', in *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff (Aldershot, Hampshire:

To place my discussion of dolls' houses in a larger historical and social context, Part One begins with the history of dolls' houses.³⁵ Chapters in Part One draw from a wide range of primary and secondary sources including museum catalogues, dolls' house collectors' guides, and histories of dolls' houses, and from research in libraries and museums as well as visits to historical dolls' houses. Chapter One provides a brief overview of dolls' houses in history, beginning with the first dolls' house in mid-sixteenth century Germany.³⁶ Contrary to the common concept about dolls' houses being toys specifically—if not exclusively—for girls, the early German houses functioned as symbols of status and wealth and were luxurious artefacts commissioned and owned by aristocratic men. This chapter takes a close look at a group of German and Dutch dolls' houses throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These include several seventeenth-century Nuremberg baby houses held at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. I also discuss several Dutch dolls' houses including Petronella Dunois's cabinet house (c. 1676) and Petronella Oortman's cabinet house (c. 1686-1705), both housed in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Petronella de la Court's cabinet house (c. 1674-90) in the Centraal Museum, Utrecht, and two of Sara Rothé's cabinet houses (1743) respectively on display in the Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem and the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. Although the Nuremberg houses were prestigious collectibles owned by adults, they also appealed to children, who took pleasure in viewing the dolls' houses, even if they were not allowed to touch or play with them. On the one hand, the houses provided for the children a visual example of proper household management, an ideal

Ashgate, 2008), 4.

³⁵ For the sake of clarity and consistency, apart from using a direct quote from other materials, the thesis spells 'dolls' house' throughout. North American English normally writes 'dollhouse' and the English convention spells 'dolls' house' or 'doll's house' with the apostrophe either before or after s, depending on the size of the family in residence. See Jacobs, 6.

³⁶ The oldest doll's house recorded in detail was made to the order of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in 1558. It was probably destroyed in the great fire at the palace in Munich in 1674. Known as the Munich House, it is considered the forerunner and pattern of all later German and Dutch dolls' houses.

that they could aspire to. On the other hand, their ambiguous status as educational tool and children's delight provides a significant insight into the contemporary social attitudes towards the relation of children's playthings and child development. Different from the realistic representation of domestic everyday life exemplified by the Nuremberg houses, Dutch cabinet houses were more sumptuously furnished and the exteriors finely executed, altogether showcasing an aura of prosperity and displaying an era of material abundance in the early modern Netherlands. Furthermore, these Dutch cabinet houses substantiated the ideas of idealised domesticity promoted in later dolls' house literature. Although these German and Dutch dolls' houses were manufactured earlier than the period of my research, they are essential in the thesis as they set the scene for the discussion of the development of the dolls' house being a child's plaything in relation to the ideas of child-rearing, domestic education, and domestic virtues.

In the nineteenth century, dolls' houses began to be manufactured on a large scale. They were now seen as toys for children, and playing with dolls' houses became a popular pastime which I will discuss in detail in later chapters. Chapter Two considers the early twentieth century and focuses on two modern dolls' houses: 'Titania's Palace' (1907-22) and 'Queen Mary's Dolls' House' (1920-24). These two virtuoso artefacts, well-known in the history of modern dolls' houses, are much grander than commercial or homemade dolls' houses. Furthermore, as these two examples were almost entirely designed and furnished by male artists for female collectors, they reflect masculine fantasies of luxurious living and ideals of the perfect household recreated in a miniature world.

The consideration of dolls' houses can help us understand conceptions of everyday life and domestic space. Part Two of this thesis develops our examination

of dolls' house play by considering the relationship between children's reading and playing. In the nineteenth century the production of and the market for children's books and toys grew enormously. Looking at children's roles as readers, players, and consumers, chapters in Part Two evaluate how children integrated their reading with playing, the ways in which they treated books as toys, and how child readers were trained to become child consumers.

Chapter Three explores the historical development of concepts of play, and of ideas about the importance of children's playing. These ideas were shaped by new theories of child development and new understanding of pedagogy. The chapter specifically examines the place of play in writings about children's education. Although the ideas of play and the recognition of children's need to play changed over time, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, education reformers and authors of children's books shared a growing interest in the role of play in a child's life. From the late seventeenth century, major philosophers and educationists including John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Richard and Maria Edgeworth all evaluated the significance of play in the context of children's early education. Their education treatises stimulated new concepts about pedagogies and the boom of the publication of children's books, in which play was an essential element. Influenced by new ideas about educating children through play, kindergartens were founded: this new education system established by Friedrich Froebel in Germany in the 1840s used 'toy teaching' and 'play learning' as part of a comprehensive programme for young children.

Chapter Four discusses how the ideals of learning through playing were implemented in a variety of children's reading materials. Primary sources I consulted include 'puzzle toy books', a special kind of picture book requiring readers'

participation in completing a story (either the narrative or page layout, or both), interactive narratives such as ‘how to’ articles popular in nineteenth-century children’s magazines, and toy-making manuals. In these texts, making and furnishing one’s own dolls’ house was a favourite topic, and all of them promoted the positive values of children’s hands-on activities and hand-made toys. These picture books and toy-making guides echoed the new learning approach introduced by Froebel and his followers which emphasised creativity and interactive activities. Child readers were taught to use their leisure hours profitably by making their own toys, through which they learned manual dexterity and aesthetic tastes, and acquired practical knowledge and training in altruism. They were also expected to exercise their creativity by working with various common materials found at home and to learn something useful from their leisure activities. I use *Warne’s Picture Puzzle Toy Books* (1869-70)—a hybrid of toy and book—as a case study to examine how this particular genre incorporated play and work and motivated readers’ imaginative thinking through the activities of cutting and sticking. These books and the reading and playing experiences associated with them not only confirmed the central idea of Froebel’s pedagogical principle—playing at work and learning through playing—but also enabled children to define their roles as players, readers, and consumers.

Chapter Five looks more specifically at girls as readers and players. It shows how girls, when they played with dolls’ houses, were also role-playing and ‘play-reading’. Drawing from the depictions of girls playing with dolls’ houses in children’s literature and adult women’s autobiographical recollections of childhood play, I argue that through role-playing (in particular children ‘playing at adults’, which helped prepare them for adulthood) and using dolls as characters to act out imagined scenarios and emotional relations, girls defined and demonstrated their

identities and tastes and expressed what everyday life meant to them. Meanwhile, using literary references as inspiration and instruction, girls made sense of their reading materials and their play objects and at the same time created a story world in which they were both directors and stage designers. I have coined the term ‘play-reading’ to refer to their interactive reading and playing experience. Play-reading could include children’s playful reading of literary texts or acting out the stories they read. This kind of play-reading is frequently described in Edith Nesbit’s *Treasure Seekers* (1899), Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess* (1905), and numerous other autobiographical records of childhood reading. In this make-believe world young readers were able to retell, re-enact, or even subvert their reading experiences, using the book as an object of fun in their games. Such features of story-telling and retelling were widely used by contemporary writers and publishers of children’s books to allow readers to show their creativity as they participated in the production and consumption of children’s literature. These descriptions of play-reading provided an opportunity for the child to react imaginatively to literature, and to become a creator, not just a passive consumer.

Continuing to explore play-reading, Chapter Six investigates the formation of child consumers in the light of the marketing of children’s literature and childhood commodities. In addition to discussing children’s experience of playing with physical dolls’ houses, this chapter also looks at dolls’ houses in advertisements and dolls’ house competitions held by children’s magazines to examine how child readers were encouraged to create a culture of their own. The chapter describes how a profit-orientated market for children’s books was developed. This child-centred market focuses on the connection between books and toys. Moreover, children’s literature as a genre depended from the start on a close connection with children’s

playthings and distinguished itself from other literature by its alliance with material culture.³⁷ Through the examination of reader participation demonstrated in nineteenth-century children's magazines, such as their contributions to correspondence columns and competitions held by these magazines—many of which involved dolls' house making and furnishing—and advertisements in these magazines, I suggest that the marketing of children's books or child-related products relied heavily on the shared presentation of books and toys. Instead of being passive recipients, child readers contributed to the making of these magazines by sharing their works, stories, concerns and desires. They were the readers, consumers, storytellers, and eventually the co-producers in a comprehensive industry of childhood commodities.

After these chapters considering the materiality of books and the significance of material objects in children's reading and playing, Part Three of the thesis shifts its focus toward the representation of dolls' houses in English children's literature. It looks at the dolls' houses literally and figuratively as a 'spectacle in miniature', whether the dolls' house is a mass-produced commodity, a family heirloom, or an artefact representing great craftsmanship and prosperity. The dolls' house epitomises an idealised, self-contained world of perfection and completeness for both children and adults. Alluding to various primary texts that depict adventures in the dolls' house world and encounters with dolls' house dolls coming alive, these chapters aim to explore how, in the tradition of stories of miniature heroes and heroines such as Tom Thumb and Thumbelina, dolls' house literature is widely used to represent the ideas of miniaturisation, the conflicts of different sizes, and the blurring boundary between reality and fantasy.

³⁷ Clark, Beverly Lyon and Margaret R. Higonnet, eds, *Girls, Boys, Books, Toys: Gender in Children's Literature and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1.

Chapter Seven explores ideas of miniaturisation and enlargement through reading some lesser-known and long-neglected children's fiction such as *My Dolly's Home* (1921), *The Mary Frances Housekeeper* (1914), Edith Nesbit's *The Magic City* (1910), and her short story, 'The Town in the Library in the Town in the Library' (1901). Drawing on Susan Stewart's analysis of narratives of the miniature and the gigantic, which traces the tension between inner and outer spheres and of interiority and exteriority, I suggest that these dolls' house texts not only juxtapose big and small, but also mobilise anxieties about the boundary between imagination and reality, and an ambiguous status of 'in-betweenness', a puzzling predicament that occurs inside the miniature world.³⁸ In addition to texts that play with the notions of big and small and of imagination and reality, there are also stories which dynamically explore the act of looking and dramatise the relationship between the spectator and the viewed object. In the final section of the chapter, I turn to *The Doll's Play-House* (1914), *The Live Dolls' House Party* (1906) and Katherine Mansfield's short story, 'The Doll's House' (1923), to discuss tensions between the viewer and the viewed object and concerns about the boundary between reality and imagination when the action of looking takes place.

Chapter Eight continues the exploration of the anxieties about the meaning of the 'real' through a close reading of Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (1904), a typical Potter tale of anthropomorphised animals using a dolls' house as its background setting. Referring to other non-canonical children's stories set inside the dolls' house, adult women's recollections of dolls' house play as well as theories of children's play by psychologists such as Jean Piaget and D. W. Winnicott, which emphasise that making-believe is crucial to children's imaginative play, this chapter

³⁸ Susan Stewart, 'The Miniature' and 'The Gigantic' in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 37-69; 70-103.

shows how Potter challenges the value of pretending and making-believe. Inasmuch as dolls' house play intends to faithfully reproduce everyday life in the real world on a diminutive scale, it also requires the player to imagine that the reproduction is exactly the same as the original. In this tale Potter questions the oxymoron of disguised reality and the irony of 'pretending to be real'. Her narrative and illustrations work closely together throughout the story to tell us that the house and all its belongings are designed to impress rather than to serve a practical function. I argue that this story is not a celebration of happy domestic life as featured in many other dolls' house narratives. Rather, it mocks the practice of pretension and provokes further thought about the idea of reality.

Following the discussion of the somewhat negative aspect of dolls' house play—the destruction of domestic space and reconstruction of the displaced domesticity as presented in Potter's tale—Chapter Nine evaluates the aesthetics and domestic ideals of dolls' houses in relation to aesthetic standards at the turn of the century. Ideas about perfect domestic interiors were frequently discussed in children's books and magazines at the turn of the century. In these discussions the dolls' house served not merely as a toy for children but a space for both children and adults to express their perception of changes in fashions and tastes in the period. Dolls' house furnishing provided an opportunity to explore the considerations of beauty and utility promoted in the latest aesthetic movements.

As well as presenting the period's artistic ideals in the spatial arrangement of dolls' houses, dolls' house narratives also reflect the paradox of the dolls' house both as a place of confinement and a space to show the player's agency and creativity. Victorian novels for adult readers generally used the dolls' house as a metaphor of a confined world defining and foreshadowing girls' common future roles as

housewives and mothers. Similarly, in real life the dolls' house was often regarded as the convenient means to instruct domestic tasks and inculcate the ideology of ideal women. However, scholarship of women's studies has pointed out that the dolls' house could also be a female utopia in miniature, a 'saturated world' where the player could indulge.³⁹ Inasmuch as dolls' house play could be a means to produce socially-acceptable gender patterns and the presentation of idealised domestic space, it was also a way to explore creative and subversive possibilities through spatial and material (re)arrangement.

Indeed girl readers in the early twentieth century could find that dolls' house stories did not always convey a singular message about the importance of domestic duties and good behaviour. They read in stories such as Burnett's *Racketty-Packetty House* (1907), and Mrs. Graham Wallas's short story, 'Professor Green' (1906) that life in the dolls' house could be full of creativity and fun. Girl readers of the period learned that in dolls' house play, although they seemed to passively accept their assigned social gendered roles, they were also able to gain agency through remodelling and redefining their familiar world. More importantly, contrary to the stereotype of the dolls' house as a girl's toy, Edwardian dolls' house stories show both boys and girls enjoying dolls' house play. Playing with dolls' houses enabled boys and girls to develop their own culture of fantasy and the imagination.

³⁹ Frances Armstrong, 'The Dollhouse as Ludic Space, 1690-1920', *Children's Literature*, 24 (1996), 24; Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

PART ONE. DOLLS' HOUSES IN HISTORY

From PLAYMOBIL® World to Sylvanian Families, the dolls' houses we know today as little girls' toys sold online or in high street shops are promoted by toy manufacturers as objects which help the child develop, stimulate the child's imagination and creativity, and allow her to 'recreate and experience the world in miniature'.¹ Even though these plastic commercial dolls' houses are different in structure and material from their early predecessors, the toy manufacturer's statement describes something essential to the dolls' house: a miniature world in which the environment of human living is reshaped by imagination and creativity. The dolls' house creates virtual reality on a diminutive scale that brings fun and delight to the players or collectors, pleasures not always to be found in the 'real world'.

The dolls' house has taken various types, styles, and functions through its long history of over four hundred years. Dolls' houses provide valuable insight into the history of domestic life. The term 'dolls' house' to some historians of toys is comprehensive and can cover a wide range of miniature buildings including houses, farms, shops, garages, or even hospitals and fire-stations, either on a grand or modest scale.² With its great variety of styles and structure, the dolls' house represents a microcosmic view of the world and of ways of life in different periods. Despite the common belief that the dolls' house appeals specifically to girls and is of no interest to boys, early in the sixteenth century dolls' houses were made by skilled craftsmen specially for wealthy male collectors. They were the adult version of idealised

¹ The PLAYMOBIL® Official Website, 'The Fascination of PLAYMOBIL®' <http://www.playmobil.co.uk/on/demandware.store/Sites-GB-Site/en_GB/Page-Show?cid=CONTENT_UEBER> [accessed 26 December 2013].

² Deborah Jaffé, *The History of Toys: From Spinning Tops to Robots* (London: Sutton, 2006), 156.

domestic life as well as the embodiment of the male perception of a well-ordered social system.

CHAPTER ONE.

HISTORICAL DOLLS' HOUSES AT A GLANCE

Precursors of dolls' houses: the early German examples

Many world famous toy brands today are of German origin, and hence it is not surprising that the early models of dolls' houses also came from Germany, particularly the town of Nuremberg, which has been known as the 'toy city' since the sixteenth century. Nuremberg's reputation as an international trading centre that drew a variety of craftsman and makers of toys in folk traditions from the surrounding areas and its geographic location at the intersection of important European trading routes made it an attractive site for merchants, who could buy a wide range of goods from the town and travel with them to trade in locations as far away as Russia and England. These Nuremberg craftsmen were especially skilled at making miniature objects representing everyday life, such as saucepans and kettles and other kitchen utensils. As the specialist craftsmen in the seventeenth century had to work with materials appropriate to the guilds they belonged to (such as copper, silver, or wood), there were usually a large number of people involved in the making and furnishing of a single model house. All these factors helped to solidify Germany's preeminent status in the toy industry and the dolls' houses made in Nuremberg are regarded as the origin of modern dolls' houses.¹

The terms dolls' house or 'baby house' (as baby is an old English word for doll), or German '*Puppenhaus*' or '*Dockenhaus*', were used to refer to the size of the house

¹ Constance Eileen King, *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* (London: Hale, 1983), 27-28.

rather than its purpose. (*Docken* is an old word for a lathe-turned wooden doll, hence *Dockenhaus* refers to a doll-sized, miniature house.²) The term 'baby house' continued to be used till the late eighteenth century, mainly in Germany, the Netherlands, and Britain, to describe hand-built miniature houses.³ The earliest recorded *Dockenhaus* of this definition is thought to be one owned by Marie Jacobäa von Baden, wife of Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria in the early sixteenth century. The Duchess had a display case containing a number of dolls and a model house arranged in the manner of a court.⁴ However, the earliest known baby house with features typical of modern dolls' houses was the cabinet house commissioned by the Duchess's son, Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, made between 1557 and 1558. It later became popularly known as 'the Munich House'. Although it has been said that Albrecht V originally intended to have the house as a gift for his daughter, it is unlikely that the house served as a children's toy because of its lavish and delicate nature.⁵ Rather, it is recognised as an early example of the dolls' house crafted for the ruling or elite class and as a luxurious artefact for adults' amusement.⁶

The detailed inventory of the Munich House compiled in 1598 by Johann Baptist Fickler, the court chamberlain of Albrecht V, provides a fascinating insight into this early dolls' house. According to Fickler's inventory, the house was a four-storey structure set in a cabinet with open doors revealing the rooms inside. It was equipped with a wine cellar, pantry, and stable in the basement, all complete

² Heidi A. Müller, *Good Housekeeping. A Domestic Ideal in Miniature: the Nuremberg Doll Houses of the 17th Century in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum*, trans. by Sarah C. D. Slenczka (Nuremberg: Verlag der Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2007), 13.

³ Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses from the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 14. However, there were occasional uses of the term at least till the 1870s. For example, John Everett Millais had a sketch entitled 'The Baby-House' (1871-72; now in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery), portraying two little girls playing with their dolls' house.

⁴ King, 29.

⁵ Leonie von Wilckens, *Dolls' House: an Illustrated History* (London: Bell & Hyman, 1980), 7.

⁶ James E. Bryan, 'Material Culture in Miniature: Historic Dolls' Houses Reconsidered' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), 42.

with relevant furnishing, miniature articles and figures.⁷ Being an active and prominent patron of his day, Albrecht V was enthusiastic about exhibiting his extensive collection of curiosities and knew the propaganda value of this elaborate dolls' house.⁸ It was a common practice for visitors to donate an object to the house, in order to show their appreciation of this exquisite miniature house and of the Duke as an important ruler.⁹ Albrecht V's baby house with the 6,000 miniature objects it contained was included amongst a range of miniature curiosities held in the Duke's '*Kunstkammer*' (literally, art chamber, referring to collections taking the form of either a whole room which served as an art gallery or as an opulent cabinet).¹⁰ This expensive and fashionable hobby of collecting and displaying various curios in *Kunstkammern* was popular in aristocratic households in southern Germany in this period. The *Kunstkammer* combined works of art and craftsmanship and also helped define the male collectors' intellectual and artistic identity.¹¹

Before the Munich House was destroyed in a fire in 1674, it had inspired the construction of some other dolls' houses of the period. Following the example of the Munich House, art dealer Philip Hainhofer commissioned a 'little manor farm with farm house, barn, livestock and poultry' for Duke Philip II of Pomerania-Stettin in Augsburg in 1610-17. Even though both houses were created to serve as a sumptuous display of the owner's wealth, taste, and sophistication, in contrast to the Munich House, the '*Meierhof*' (manor farm) made for the Duke of Pomerania-Stettin focused

⁷ Lorenz Seelig, 'The Munich *Kunstkammer*, 1565-1807', in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinets of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 78; Deborah Jaffé, *The History of Toys: From Spinning Tops to Robots* (London: Sutton, 2006), 157; Bryan, 48-49.

⁸ Bryan, 48; 69.

⁹ Seelig, 78; Bryan, 48.

¹⁰ Michelle Moseley-Christian, 'Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women', *Home Cultures*, 7.3 (2010), 345.

¹¹ Bryan, 47. On the comparison of male and female collectorship and the trend of curiosity collections, see Susan Broomhall, 'Imagined Domesticities in Early Modern Dutch Dollhouses', in *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries: Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past* by Susan Broomhall and Jennifer Spinks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 99-122.

more on mundane daily items. It presented not just the vivid picture of an aristocratic country estate in its grandeur, but more importantly, the realistic reproduction of everyday life characteristic of other dolls' houses of Nuremberg in the seventeenth century.¹²

The four Nuremberg baby houses held in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum—the 1611 House, the Stromer Doll House (1639) [Fig. 1.1], the Doll House of the Kress von Kressenstein Family (late seventeenth century), and the Bäumlér Family's Doll House (late seventeenth century)—all feature fastidious attention to details of everyday living and daily necessities, which bring an earthy tone to the miniature world. These Nuremberg houses constitute the focal point of the museum's toy collection which occupies an entire building designated for the exhibition of 'Worlds of Play, Children's Toys and Adults' Games from 1550-1950'. The display of these grand historical baby houses in the museum context among all the toys for boys and girls and adults' entertainment (toy soldiers, toy kitchens, Noah's ark, paper theatres, board games, etc.) not only provides fascinating insight into the life at home in seventeenth century Nuremberg but also reflects the ambiguous status of the dolls' house as a child's plaything and an adult's collectible for show and pleasure.

¹² Müller, 16-17; Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses from the V&A*, 13.



Figure 1.1 The Stromer Doll House (Nuremberg, 1639);
Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg

Good housekeeping: Nuremberg baby houses in the seventeenth century

The interest in miniature houses had extended across Europe by the mid-seventeenth century. In a 1652 record, the Lord Mayor of London was reported as possessing two Nuremberg houses among his collections and proudly displayed them to his visitors.¹³ Apart from dolls' houses for adult collectors, miniature houses made specifically for children also emerged in the sixteenth century. Constance Eileen King observes that in the beginning of dolls' house history, there were already two extant standards of dolls' houses: the ones crafted for adult collectors and other ones catered for children.¹⁴ James Bryan in his studies of the historiography of dolls' houses also categorises dolls' houses as adults' collectibles to be viewed and admired and as children's toys for instruction and delight.¹⁵ Not long after the Munich House was made, Anna, Electress of Saxony, ordered a miniature kitchen set to be made as a Christmas present for her three daughters in 1572. This toy kitchen was fully equipped with all necessary utensils made of pewter, with which the girls could make play food for their dolls.¹⁶ According to King, this piece contained no expensive materials and therefore was essentially different from the stylish examples belonging to adult collectors.¹⁷ Whereas the purpose of dolls' houses for adults, like those of the Duke of Bavaria and the Duke of Pomerania-Stettin, was to impress the viewers and show off the owners' wealth and rank, the dolls' house intended for children had a more didactic purpose and was seen as part of the child's training in domesticity. One such dolls' house was the Nuremberg baby house built for Anna Köferlin in 1631.

¹³ Jet Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis: Interieur en Huishouden in de 17de en 18de Eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 17; quoted and translated in Broomhall, 108.

¹⁴ King, 34.

¹⁵ Bryan, 8.

¹⁶ Jaffé, 158-59.

¹⁷ King, 34.

We know little about Anna Köferlin's life, but it appears that unlike other connoisseurs of wealth and status with showy miniature houses and other objects, Anna was a commoner who proudly exhibited this house to visitors for money.¹⁸ According to a woodcut broadsheet which accompanied the display of this 1631 baby house, it was of a large size (240cm high × 134cm wide × 100cm deep) and was in a typical style of Nuremberg town houses of the period, featuring a steep roof and bottle-glass windows [Fig. 1.2]. A surviving example similar to this is the 1673 Nuremberg House now stored at the V&A Museum of Childhood, which is also the oldest dolls' house in the museum collection and the only authentic Nuremberg house outside Germany [Fig. 1.3].

With insufficient financial resources Anna Köferlin managed to have the house built and showed it to the public on the payment of an admission charge. It is noteworthy that public display of this sort was not the convention in the seventeenth century, as most dolls' houses belonging to the wealthy were meant to be viewed at home.¹⁹ The doggerel Anna Köferlin wrote on the broadsheet advertising the house vigorously demonstrates the significance of proper domestic organisation this baby house intended to teach:

But what is there placed before your eyes, prepared without complaint over some years for the young, put together with industry and much effort, to provide instruction for the young, that they, too, shall from their young days become accustomed always to be doing [...] Therefore, dear children, look you well at everything, how well it is arranged; it shall be a good lesson to you. So when in time to come you have your own home and God willing your own hearth you will for all your life put things nicely and properly, as they should be, in your own households.²⁰

¹⁸ von Wilckens, 15.

¹⁹ Müller, 20.

²⁰ The broadsheet of Anna Köferlin's baby house; reproduced and translated in von Wilckens, 15.

In this early example, we see the educational value associated with the dolls' house, which was emphasised over and over in later parenting guides and advice manuals.²¹ Anna Köferlin's house was not the only example of a visual teaching tool at that time. Miniature houses like this had been known among the aristocrats and urban burgher class in southern Germany and were meant to be viewed at home by the children of the family.²² Interestingly, to contextualise the Nuremberg baby house collection in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, a duplicate of Anna Köferlin's broadsheet is the first item on display before the museum visitors start their journey into the miniature world.

²¹ Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Doll's Houses: Four Centuries of the Domestic World in Miniature* (London: Cassell, 1954), 43.

²² Müller, 20; 23.



Figure 1.3 The Nuremberg House (1673);
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Heidi Müller in her research on seventeenth-century Nuremberg dolls' houses suggests that the 1631 house as a miniature reproduction of an actual household was created in the tradition of using pictures to educate young children about the physical world around them. This kind of teaching method was also used later in *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (*The Visible World in Pictures*) by the Moravian educational reformer John Amos Comenius (1592-1670). This book was first published in Nuremberg in 1658 and is acknowledged as a forerunner of picture books for children. Originally written bilingually in Latin and German, it was translated into English the following year and remained popular in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²³ Furthermore, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* also set forth an

²³ Brian Alderson, 'The Making of Children's Books', in *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. by M. O. Grenby and Andrea Immel (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 37-38; Katie Trumpener, 'Picture-book Worlds and Ways of Seeing', in *Cambridge Companion to Children's*

example of using auxiliary teaching aids followed by later educators such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, who adopted the pedagogy of using sensory materials to supplement their teaching and whose method of teaching carried out in the form of play also inspired Fredrick Froebel, the Father of the Kindergarten Movement in the early nineteenth century.

Comenius's title tellingly reveals the significance of instructing children about the world with an illustrated primer appealing to their senses. Similarly, Anna Köferlin's baby house shows how dolls' houses could be useful visual and tactile teaching aids. In this regard, Anna Köferlin's house could be seen as a precursor of teaching children with three-dimensional models in addition to written or pictorial information.²⁴ From the perspective of the development of educational literature Anna Köferlin's baby house can be seen as an instructional and interactive tool for the transmission of knowledge about household management. In addition, the Latin phrase, 'PRINCIPIO RESPICE FINEM' ('Consider the end at the beginning'; or, 'Look to the end') on the frieze of the house, visible on the broadsheet, corresponds to Köferlin's verses about the importance of careful thought about domestic organisation when managing a household. Significantly, according to the broadsheet illustration, both boys and girls were invited to see the house: the dolls' house was not a toy exclusively for girls as we perceive today. Just as girls were expected to learn housewifery skills through the arrangement of miniature objects in baby houses, boys were also called upon to learn about housekeeping. Similarly, household manuals (known as '*Ökonomiken*' or '*Hausbücher*' in Germany) popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries targeted the head of the house and aimed at giving male readers advice about running a household efficiently. Köferlin's message

Literature, 55-57.

²⁴ Müller, 19.

addressed both boys and girls because her objective was to prepare them for their future roles as the master and mistress of the house.²⁵ Even if there were enough domestic servants to do all the household services, they needed to have sufficient knowledge in order to supervise the servants. Indeed the genre of domestic instruction in the period, as Müller argues, was not simply about how to keep things in order in the domestic household; rather, it also involved the guideline for ‘prosperous social co-existence between man and wife, parents and children, master (or mistress) and servants, thereby formulating a practical canon of domestic virtues’.²⁶

As such, Anna Köferlin’s baby house represented the educational function of the dolls’ house and supported the notion stressed in contemporary household manuals that prosperous living relied on good housekeeping. In other words, the broadsheet shows that dolls’ houses could never be regarded simply as children’s toys. All play with dolls’ houses had an educational aspect. Whereas the dolls’ house for adults was used as a status symbol enhancing the patron’s reputation, the dolls’ house for children further promoted family values and domestic virtues commonly found in household manuals and housekeeping guides well into the nineteenth century. An 1823 booklet for girls (*Heft für Mädchen*) published in Nuremberg, for example, includes an engraving of girls playing with a toy kitchen set in the playroom (*‘Das Spielzimmer’*), alongside other illustrations representing domestic everyday life to reflect the booklet’s subject matter of entertainment and instruction [Fig. 1.4]. The relationship between the dolls’ house and the presentation of perfect domestic interior as well as the morals revealed in nineteenth-century domestic guides will be discussed in detail in Chapter Nine of the thesis.

²⁵ Ibid., 15; 22.

²⁶ Ibid., 15.



Figure 1.4 Engraving of ‘Das Spielzimmer’ (The playroom), in Johann Michael Voltz, *Kinder Bilder zur Unterhaltung und mündlicher Belehrung: zwölf Blätter für Mädchen*; illustrated by Horst Kunze (1823)

In addition to the surviving examples of historical dolls’ houses stored in museums across Europe, images of children playing with dolls’ houses provide vivid insights into how dolls’ houses might have been used. Two Dutch paintings in the seventeenth century offer a snapshot of girls playing with dolls’ house objects, and so present a particular moment of dolls’ house play. The first picture is an engraving from Jacob Cats’s emblem book (a type of literature containing woodcuts or engravings accompanied by verses pointing to a moral), *Huwelijk* (*Marriage*), published in 1625. This picture as one of the earliest images of children at play celebrates the serious value of children’ play as shown by the Latin banner on the top, ‘Ex Nugis—Kinderspel—Seria’ (‘Out of Children’s Games—Seriousness’) [Fig. 1.5]. Among the fanatic crowd of children at play, two seemingly more composed girls at the bottom left of the picture could be found busy arranging some dolls’ house

objects and taking care of a doll. It is significant that Cats chose to have this engraving as the frontispiece. The verse accompanying the engraving tells about the emblematic significance of the gender-specific games and toys boys and girls play respectively in the picture:

Little girls play with dolls,
 The little boy shows greater courage;
 The little girl rocks the cradle,
 The little boy beats the drum;
 The little girl plays with small objects
 That are serviceable in the kitchen
 The little boy plays with a useless lance, as do rough men.²⁷

Such carefully preserved gender divisions anticipated the distinction between men and women's respective gender roles and assigned duties in the family life after marriage—the very theme of this emblem book—as the married man was expected to 'go to the street to practice his trade' while the wife had to manage the kitchen in the house' and 'pay attention to [the] family'.²⁸

As a contrast to the image of children playing in the public space, the other picture shows an indoor setting with detailed depiction of a hearth, bench, windows, and candlestick. In this painting we can see a girl sitting by a toy kitchen set and miniature furniture and doll accessories scattered on the floor carefully nursing her doll [Fig. 1.6]. Both images interestingly depict girls focusing on dolls' house play, which served to train the girl in housewifery. Indeed the use of toys as didactic tools to enforce moral and social order for children was a Dutch tradition associated with the genre of emblem books and household manuals circulated in the

²⁷ Jacob Cats, *Huwelijk* (Amsterdam, 1625), 8; quoted and translated in Moseley-Christian, 348-49.

²⁸ Cats 72; quoted and translated in Moseley-Christian, 354.

seventeenth-century Netherlands.²⁹ On the other hand, these pictures also implicitly reveal that in the seventeenth century there was a transition of the dolls' house from a male-oriented artefact to a female-organised model of domesticity, which reflects an increasing cultural focus on the home and women's role in the family.³⁰ According to Simon Schama, Cats's visual and textual representation of the separation of boys and girls—boys learning their duties to defend the commonwealth as they dress up as little soldiers sounding the trumpet and beating the drum and girls attending to their proper domain through using kitchen utensils and doll's cradles—shows that despite their different duties and destinies, both men and women were needed in the national project of the construction of civic virtue.³¹ Thus the images of dolls' houses and dolls' house play served more than as a forum for didactic messages about domestic duties. As Michelle Moseley-Christian further suggests, the dolls' house could be 'a representation of a fully equipped, miniaturised house within a home, just as the Dutch home itself was seen as a structural model of the Dutch Republic'; in other words, dolls' house play reflects women's household experience and even the experience of the community.³²

²⁹Moseley-Christian, 346; Mary Frances Durantini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Epping: Bowker, 1983), 178-91.

³⁰ Moseley-Christian, 349-50.

³¹ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Cultures in the Golden Age* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 511-12.

³² Moseley-Christian, 352.



Figure 1.5 'Children's Games' ('Kinderspel'), in Jacob Cats, *Huwelijk* (Hovwelyck, Haarlem: H.P. van Wesbusch, 1642); Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 1.6 'Young Woman Taking Care of a Doll', artist unknown (c. 1630-50), pen and brown ink and black and red chalk and grey wash; Yale University Art Gallery

Adult women's fantasy: Dutch cabinet houses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

Cabinet houses commissioned by wealthy female patrons that were popular in the Low Countries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could be viewed as sumptuous extensions of girls' pastimes of imaginative play involving spatial arrangement and domestic organisation. They could also be seen as a model of women's participation in the creation of the home as a microcosm of state government.³³ The passion for collecting and the specific interest in skilfully-made scale models among the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Netherlands prompted the emergence of these cabinet houses, many of which were made for grown-up daughters or wives of regents and merchants.³⁴ Cabinet houses provided a means for these adult women to connect the pretend play related to

³³ Broomhall, 106; Moseley-Christian, 352.

³⁴ Pijzel-Dommisse, 446.

household management they might have enjoyed when they were little with the arrangement of the domestic interior they were now in charge of. Meanwhile, these cabinet houses also fitted into the established tradition of curiosity cabinets (i.e. display cases containing art objects) extant in southern Germany. But what made these Dutch cabinet houses more intriguing was that instead of taking the form of a house, like the Nuremburg baby houses, they were incorporated into the form of a cabinet. Inside these intricate cabinets (usually made of opulent materials such as oak and walnut and tortoiseshell) are separate compartments each containing a completely furnished room with extremely ingenious miniature furniture and objects presenting a display of minute craftsmanship and creating a miniature theatrical spectacle of the households of these mercantile and elite female collectors.

Notable examples include the one belonging to Petronella Dunois dated from 1676, which she purchased as part of her dowry, and the one assembled by Petronella Oortman in the late seventeenth century; both are now exhibited in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam [Fig. 1.7 & Fig. 1.8]. When I visited the Rijksmuseum in October 2012, as the museum was still in the process of renovation, only a selection of museum highlights were displayed. The two cabinet houses temporarily held in a corner room created a tranquil atmosphere in contrast to the hustle and bustle in front of the masterpieces of the Dutch Golden Age, such as Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642), shown in a spacious gallery at the other end of the museum. The spatial arrangement of these artworks elicited quite different aesthetic experiences as visitors tended to react differently to objects that mainly appealed to female audiences: they gasped at the extraordinary view of *The Night Watch* at a distance yet they smiled when they—after waiting in a long queue—were finally able to step on the ladder to look further into these exquisite cabinet houses. The great painting can be

worshipped from afar but the miniature house invites a closer and more intimate gaze. Interestingly an early eighteenth-century painting of Petronella Oortman's cabinet house by Jacob Appel (1680-1751), being the only surviving contemporary example as a portrait of a cabinet house, is displayed together with the Oortman house in the Rijksmuseum [Fig. 1.9]. Although the poses of the figures in Appel's painting are much more realistic than that which could be achieved by the dolls made of wax or wire, the painting together with the house give valuable information about the luxurious lifestyle in Amsterdam canal-side mansions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁵ The curtain and the opening door that could be seen covering the cabinet also show how the contents of the cabinet house were displayed and protected.

³⁵ Petronella Oortman lived in Amsterdam when the cabinet house was made. Most wealthy patrons who assembled cabinet houses that have been preserved lived in prosperous cities such as Amsterdam, Leiden, or Delft, and these collectors usually belonged to a small group of people who knew one another. It was not the fashion in court circles in The Hague to enjoy this costly hobby. See Monique van Royen-Engelberts, *Sara's Dolls' House: Sara Rothé's Dolls' House in the Frans Hals Museum*, trans. by Lynne Richards (Haarlem: Frans Hals Museum, 2011), 7; Pijzel-Dommisse, 446.



Figure 1.7 Petronella Dunois's Cabinet House (1676);
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Petronella de la Court also owned a cabinet house during the last two decades of the seventeenth century, now located in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht [Fig. 1.10].³⁶ The fourth and fifth examples are the two cabinet houses assembled by Sara Rothé, wife of a wealthy Amsterdam merchant, Jacob Ploos van Amstel, between 1743 and 1751. The two cabinet houses of Sara Rothé are respectively held in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem [Fig. 1.11] and in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

³⁶ The three Petronellas were not related, although they might have known each other—de la Court and Dunois certainly did—as they lived near each other.

[Fig. 1.12]. Among them, Petronella Oortman's cabinet house and Sara Rothé's cabinet house in The Hague are the most well-preserved and contain no addition of objects produced at later dates, and so they faithfully reflect the domestic interior of the period.

Like their German counterparts, these elite Dutch women used the unique form of the curiosity cabinet to signal their wealth and prestige. And because of the restriction of space for display, the purposeful appointment of rooms in the cabinet houses further reflects the aspirations and identities of these female collectors. On the one hand, the inclusion of luxurious feature rooms, like the art collector's room and the music room in Sara Rothé's cabinet house in The Hague [Fig. 1.13 & Fig. 1.14], to some extent demonstrates the splendour of the real world these women lived in.³⁷ On the other hand, unlike the male-oriented German houses that include a greater range of male domestic servants and objects such as stables and stablemen's quarters, so as to attract a male audience, the female-directed Dutch cabinet houses reflect a female perspective on the perfect domestic household and of family grandeur through the inclusion of amply-stocked linen rooms and kitchens, as well as elaborately-furnished lying-in rooms which appealed mainly to female viewers [Fig. 1.15 & Fig. 1.16].³⁸

³⁷ Pijzel-Dommisse suggests that in some cases the function of the house as a display cabinet influenced the rendition of the interior of the actual house the collector lived in. Whereas sometimes the furnishing of the cabinet house was less realistic and should not be perceived as the exact mirror of the collector's own house, cabinet houses in general do bear close resemblance to elite domestic practices. Pijzel-Dommisse, 447.

³⁸ Broomhall, 116-17.



Figure 1.8 Petronella Oortman's Cabinet House (1686-1705); Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 1.9 'Dolls' House of Petronella Oortman' by Jacob Appel (c. 1710), oil on canvas; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 1.10 Petronella de la Court's cabinet house (1674); Centraal Museum, Utrecht



Figure 1.11 Sara Rothé's cabinet house (1743-51) in the Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem



Figure 1.12 Sara Rothé's cabinet house (1743-51) in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; © Gemeentemuseum



Figure 1.13 The art collector's room in Sara Rothé's cabinet house in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; © Gemeentemuseum



Figure 1.14 The music room in Sara Rothé's cabinet house in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; © Gemeentemuseum



Figure 1.15 The linen room in Sara Rothé's cabinet house in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; © Gemeentemuseum



Figure 1.16 The lying-in room in Sara Rothé's cabinet house in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; © Gemeentemuseum

Both the linen rooms and the lying-in rooms serve as a powerful visual reminder for the female owners of their domestic duties and obligations as perfect housekeepers and fertile mothers. The arrangement of linen rooms and lying-in rooms presents a microcosm of the world virtuous women lived in in the Protestant Netherlands in the seventeenth century.³⁹ Because washing was done only on an annual basis, it was important to have a plentiful supply of linen.⁴⁰ The well-supplied linen room with the vast quantities of linen and fabrics thus were used by the mistress of the house to show her wealth and status as well as her careful awareness of the sanitary condition of the household. In the same manner, the appointment of the lying-in room, which served both as the bedroom and nursery for the mother and the new-born baby where the mother could receive her guests after the baby safely arrived, also signals desire to display the prosperity and well-being of

³⁹ Jet Pijzel-Dommisse (email to the author, 10 January 2014).

⁴⁰ Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses* (Oxford: Shire, 2001), 13.

the family. After all, only the very wealthy could afford to have a designated space for such purposes.

Another fascinating feature of these Dutch cabinet houses concerns the ways they were furnished and assembled. Whereas we know little about the involvement of early German male collectors in the planning of *Dockenhäuser* they commissioned, these Dutch patrons were enthusiastic and particular about every detail of the house as it was constructed and furnished. Besides acquiring miniature objects available on the market which might be put to use later in their cabinet houses, they themselves made articles for their own collection and kept meticulous inventories of the miniature objects and accessories. Sara Rothé for example, in a small notebook accompanying the cabinet house in The Hague, recorded in detail each object included in the house—its maker, price, and where she acquired it.⁴¹ She was also known as a good seamstress. She and her niece, maids, and family friends would together make knitting, linen, and fabrics for use and decoration of her house. In furnishing and decorating the cabinet houses these female collectors showed their exceptional household skills and ability to run a house and ‘felt a high degree of personal investment in the houses’.⁴² This kind of female collaboration exemplified how furnishing the dolls’ house could be a family project and how the amusement of a dolls’ house came from the creation of its furnishings. Later in Victorian England girls would make and decorate dolls’ houses together with intimate family members.

As adult women took delight in organising and arranging the details of dolls’ houses, these cabinet houses became more than displays of affluence or didactic purpose. Although these cabinet houses were mainly made for show rather than to be ‘played with’, Moseley-Christian suggests that they fostered a kind of ‘ritual play’,

⁴¹ van Royen-Engelberts, 16.

⁴² Broomhall, 119.

encouraging the female owners to ‘visualize, participate in, and perform an ideal domestic environment through the arrangement and display of the dolls and furnishings’.⁴³ Jet Pijzel-Dommisse questions Moseley-Christian’s argument, pointing out that the setting of the cabinet houses was usually fixed once it was fully furnished, and the doll figures remained in their appointed rooms and were not likely to be moved from room to room.⁴⁴ But even if the adult women did not move the figures about, it seems likely that preparing for the miniature items to be displayed in the house aroused a childish delight in playing with miniature objects. The poem on the scroll originally hung in Sara Rothé’s cabinet house in Haarlem portrays the child-like fascination the dolls’ house excited in the adult collector and its viewers:

Everything one sees on earth
Is doll’s stuff and nothing else.
All that man finds
He plays with like a child.
Ardently he loves for a short while
What he throws away so easily thereafter.
Thus man is, as one finds,
Not only once but always a child.⁴⁵

The choice of this particular rhyme from a seventeenth-century emblem book interestingly exposes the transient nature of the dolls’ house in the way that it mirrors the real world and its fashion and is seen as enticing, like a toy tempting one to play. The longing for play aroused by the miniature objects reveals that there was no clear division between the house as an expression of domestic virtues and as an object of

⁴³ Moseley-Christian, 357.

⁴⁴ Notes taken in private conversation with Jet Pijzel-Dommisse in the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague on 1 November 2012.

⁴⁵ The text on the scroll in Sara Rothé’s Haarlem house is taken from Johan de Brune’s emblem book, *Emblemata of Zinne-werck* (1636); quoted and translated in Faith Eaton, *The Ultimate Dolls’ House Book* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1994), 11.

great pleasure for adult women. Whether the dolls' house was for adults or for children, it embodies our love of small things and our childhood desire to play.

In the hands of these prominent female owners, as Susan Broomhall suggests, the cabinet houses became a representation of their contradictory desires: the urge to escape duties in childish amusement, and the need to attend to domestic responsibilities.⁴⁶ Whereas the early modern Dutch emblem books saw elements of play as opportunities for learning about responsibilities and obligation, Dutch cabinet houses further show tensions between women's awareness of their domestic roles and duties and their desire to retreat to the simple pleasures of childhood.⁴⁷ These tensions remained evident in English girls' experiences with dolls' houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the dolls' house gradually developed from privately-commissioned elegant baby houses into mass-produced commercial toys, and 'must-have' items in the nursery of middle-class homes.

English dolls' houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

The earliest written evidence of girls playing with dolls' houses in England comes from the baby house owned by Ann Sharp, who was born in 1691 to John Sharp, the Archbishop of York. This cabinet house with nine furnished rooms and a top shelf storing miniatures was given to Ann as a present from her godmother, the future Queen Anne of England. For more than three hundred years Ann Sharp's baby house has been a family heirloom and continued to be played with by future generations who also added their own miniature furniture and objects to the house. It is the family tradition for generations of descendants to put the dolls' house dolls exactly

⁴⁶ Broomhall, 120.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

where they were first intended to be, as Ann Sharp herself had written down names belonging to each doll on paper slips pinned on them.⁴⁸ There is 'Fanny Long' the 'chambermaid' standing in the middle of the Lady's bedroom; the master and mistress are 'Lord Rochette' and 'Lady Jemima Johnson', surrounded by a group of guests in the drawing room. 'Roger, ye butler' standing by the cellar door waits on the dinner table, while 'Mrs. Hannah' the housekeeper could be found in her room next to the kitchen.⁴⁹ Apparently the names of the dolls and the roles they each represent based on the different costumes they wear reflect the custom and society an Archbishop's daughter might be accustomed to.⁵⁰ In this regard Ann Sharp's baby house as a children's toy also served as a useful means to help its little owner familiarise herself with the social and spatial aspects of a proper domestic environment.

Unlike the lavish Dutch cabinet houses popular in this period, and in spite of its royal connection, Ann Sharp's baby house consists of a simple and rustic structure that lacks extravagant craftsmanship. The bizarre atmosphere of the house gives an impression that the interiors were made even earlier than those Nuremberg baby houses. Far below the artistic standard Dutch cabinet houses demonstrate, the contents in Ann Sharp's baby house show no uniformity in quality and scale, and they were rather informally arranged. Some of the furniture inside the house was made from old playing cards, and picture mouldings were used to make chimney-breasts in the kitchen.⁵¹ Another unusual item is a paper dolls' house with paper furniture that could be found in the nursery of this baby house. The dolls'

⁴⁸ Gwynfryn Jones, 'A Doll-House of Queen Anne's Reign', *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, 1 October 1870, 708; Vivien Greene, *English Dolls' Houses of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Batsford, 1955), 87.

⁴⁹ Jones, 715.

⁵⁰ Jacobs, 292.

⁵¹ King, 180.

house inside the dolls' house appeals greatly to modern dolls' house collectors and is not uncommon in modern dolls' houses, yet such a fascinating feature is extremely rare in antique examples.⁵² Overall, the casual air and the improvised dolls' furniture in Ann Sharp's house make it a delightful example of the dolls' house as a child's plaything instead of a status symbol utilised by wealthy adult collectors of the time.

Ann Sharp's dolls' house is unique because the period saw the popularity of delicate Dutch cabinet houses and other elaborate baby houses commissioned for and possessed by aristocrats in England. Unlike the Dutch examples, most English baby houses were replicas based on real houses with open fronts and staircases and do not necessarily resemble cabinets or cupboards. Remarkable eighteenth-century English baby houses include the one made between 1735 and 1740 in Nostell Priory in West Yorkshire, now owned by the National Trust, the baby house in Uppark House, another National Trust property in West Sussex, the Blackett Baby House (1760) now in the Museum of London, and the Tate Baby House (1760) held in the V&A Museum of Childhood [Fig. 1.17]. Among them, the Nostell Priory Baby House is an exquisite example, which compares favourably with Dutch cabinet houses. Commissioned by Sir Rowland Winn, it was designed by his architect James Paine based on the Palladian style of the real Nostell Priory. The furnishing of the dolls' house interior was traditionally attributed to the famous furniture designer Thomas Chippendale, who also made the full-sized furniture for the actual Nostell Priory house built around the same time.⁵³ Lady Susanna Winn and her sister Miss Henshaw were responsible for supervising the furnishing project. They also made their own contributions in decorating the rooms as they might have cut out paper

⁵² Ibid., 186.

⁵³ Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses from the V&A*, 21-22; Greene, 118-19.

prints from books published about this time to decorate the splendid drawing room on the middle floor.⁵⁴



Figure 1.17 Tate Baby House (1760); © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Uppark Baby House is another masterpiece which dates from the 1730s and the 1740s and showcases the high quality of construction and furnishing for adult collectors. It was originally owned by Sarah Lethieullier who was married to Sir John Matthew Fetherstonhaugh in 1747 when she brought this baby house with her to the West Sussex estate.⁵⁵ Interestingly the Uppark Baby House did not survive through the inheritance along the female line as is often the case. Rather, Sarah's only child was a son, Sir Harry, under whose ownership the house became the 'rendezvous of all that is gay and fashionable in the country'. It was believed that the Prince Regent was one of Sir Harry's frequent visitors who shared the same

⁵⁴ Valerie Jackson, *Dolls Houses and Miniatures* (London: John Murray, 1988), 57-58.

⁵⁵ King, 212.

enthusiasm for this extraordinary model.⁵⁶ In H. G. Wells's novel, *Tono-Bungay* (1908), the novelist also describes this elegant dolls' house which he might have seen as a boy at Uppark, where his mother worked as a housekeeper.

Inasmuch as the ownership of noble baby houses was a fashion among the upper classes in eighteenth-century England, the privileged women who had the money and leisure to afford this hobby, such as Lady Winn and her sister, were eager to employ their time in making small pieces of fabrics or articles for their houses simply for pleasure rather than making something that served a useful end. And although on special occasions children of these families would have been permitted to approach the houses under strict supervision, these English baby houses show more about adults' concern and interests.⁵⁷ In contrast to the early Nuremberg baby houses which were mainly used in housewifery training in order to prepare girls to grow up into perfect women, these eighteenth-century English baby houses do not suggest any explicit didactic intent. In addition to their function as status symbols, these English baby houses could be viewed as a diversion for the adult collectors, allowing them to escape from the serious aspects of their real lives. They also represent the idea of the dolls' house as a token of childish delight, which paved the way for the development of dolls' houses from ostentatious adults' treasures made by established architects and designers to commercially-produced children's toys made in large quantities.

Throughout the eighteenth century, dolls' houses became more available and affordable to a wider group of consumers. Although exceedingly grand baby houses remained desirable objects among upper-class collectors, the dolls' house as a child's

⁵⁶ *The Craftsman*, July 1785; quoted in King, 220.

⁵⁷ King, 200.

plaything became common at least by the 1720s.⁵⁸ Jonathan Swift alluded to ‘a London Toy-shop, for the Furniture of a Baby-house’ in *Gulliver’s Travels*, first published in 1726.⁵⁹ A 1762 trade-card shows that the London toy shop Bellamy of Holborn not only sold ‘the greatest variety of English and Dutch Toys’ but also offered ‘Fine Babies and Baby-Houses, with all Sorts of Furniture at the lowest Price’.⁶⁰ In the 1790s, the Nuremberg novelty merchant, George Bestelmeier, advertised doll’s houses in his catalogue, enticing children to ‘arrange the furniture inside and play with it’.⁶¹ Bestelmeier is also known as the first person who produced an illustrated catalogue of toys, in 1803.⁶² A similar example from the 1840s, produced by the German firm of Eduard and Louis Lindner of Sonneberg provides valuable information about the range of dolls’ houses and dolls’ furniture available on the market and their price [Fig. 1.18]. Sonneberg was a significant manufacturing town and toy trading centre in rivalry with Nuremberg in the second half of the eighteenth century. A lot of dolls’ house china was made in the small towns around Sonneberg. It was also known for the special design of *papier mâché* adapted by the dolls’ house dolls produced here.⁶³

Although many of these trade-cards and catalogues suggest that these sellers also sold all sorts of trifles and extravagances such as fans, boxes, puffs, and trinkets rather than specialised in dolls’ house items, they do show that before the beginning of the nineteenth century, dolls’ houses and dolls’ house furniture could be purchased in shops as ready-made children’s playthings. As Vivien Greene observes, dolls’ houses evolved from adults’ pastime to children’s toys before the 1800s, as ‘there

⁵⁸ Greene, 49-52.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 95.

⁶⁰ Bellamy’s trade-card, dates 14 December, 1762; reproduced in Greene, 50.

⁶¹ Anthony Burton, *Children’s Pleasures: Books, Toys, and Games from the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood* (London: V&A Publications, 1996), 96.

⁶² Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls’ House Furniture* (Oxford: Shire, 1998), 22.

⁶³ King, 398-400.

may have been one of those undocumented changes of taste'.⁶⁴ By the 1820s, the adult craze for extremely stylish baby houses had yielded to dolls' houses aimed primarily at children, and few nineteenth-century dolls' houses showed the fine levels of craftsmanship demonstrated by earlier baby houses.⁶⁵

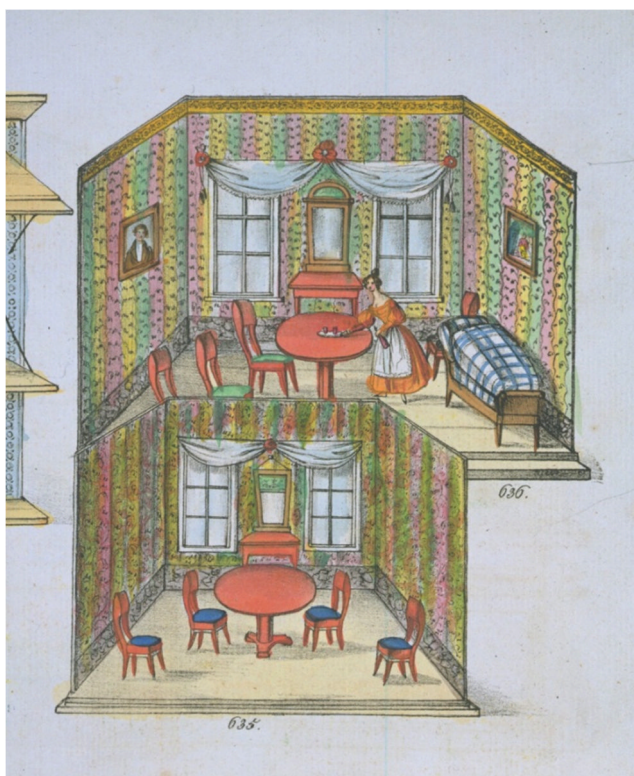


Figure 1.18 Hand-coloured toy catalogue by Louis & Eduard Lindner (c. 1840-42), featuring sample dolls' house rooms; © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Dolls' houses and furniture of all kinds could be purchased more cheaply and easily from toy shops or street toy hawkers. A children's book published in the 1840s contains an illustration of a toy seller showing a group of children a well-equipped dolls' kitchen in a London toy shop [Fig. 1.19]. These toy sellers sold toys made by individual toy makers who worked privately in their own workshops, such as Dickens's Caleb, the poor dolls' house maker in *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), as

⁶⁴ Greene, 33.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 51.

well as the cornucopia of German imports which flooded into England in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Although there were still odd examples of aesthetically pleasing dolls' houses commissioned for adults, in general dolls' houses of the period were characterised by their badly proportioned interiors, a great disadvantage that often irritated their little owners. Meanwhile, silverware and glassware were replaced by cheaper and more practical materials to make stronger children's toys and thus copper and pewter items made in large quantities filled the dolls' house interior. Cheap wood such as pine was used to form walls and furniture. Mass-produced commercial dolls' houses offered minimal style and decoration and were 'only realistic enough to satisfy a child's modest requirements'.⁶⁷

By the end of the nineteenth century, dolls' houses could even be bought via mail-order catalogues, from department stores with expanding toy sections, such as Gamage of Holborn, and from important toy-selling centres like the Lowther Arcade and Burlington Arcade.⁶⁸ In addition, there were also established toy firms known as the dolls' house manufacturers, such as the London-based company G. & J. Lines, founded in 1876, which became Lines Brothers in 1919 and continued to produce their signature Tudor-style houses till the 1950s [Fig. 1.20].⁶⁹ The company also proudly took part in making some of the miniature furniture in the dolls' house dedicated to Queen Mary, consort of King George V, which marks the growth of the British toy industry in the 1920s.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ King, 260.

⁶⁷ Jackson, 81.

⁶⁸ Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses from the V&A*, 84; Burton, 48-49.

⁶⁹ Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses from the V&A*, 130.

⁷⁰ Kenneth Fawdry et al., *Pollock's History of English Dolls and Toys* (London: Benn, 1979), 95.



Figure 1.19 Illustration of a dolls' kitchen in *Grandmama Easy's Wonders of A Toy-Shop* (London: Dean and Co., c. 1845), 4; Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, University of Florida's Digital Collections



Figure 1.20 The dolls' house produced by Lines Bros. Ltd. (c. 1932-35);
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

And of course what could not be acquired from stores could be home-made, as handicrafts were regarded as useful training for children in the nineteenth century, enabling them to learn manual skills. A carpentry kit could keep a boy busy while helping his sister make her dolls' house. Girls were also encouraged to furnish their own dolls' houses with inexpensive materials found at home. Victorian children's periodicals such as *Little Folks* and *The Girl's Own Paper* regularly provided detailed instructions on making dolls' house furniture with all sorts of materials, including odds and ends. These children's magazines often held dolls' house competitions involving charity projects. Such competitions and magazine articles not only successfully stimulated reader participation but also reflect how dolls' houses affected and shaped the ways children lived and played. Meanwhile, *The Girl's Own Toy-maker* (1860), among other domestic guides of the period, devoted a lengthy chapter on the making of dolls' house furniture to teach girls how to employ their leisure hours more sensibly as well as to learn to keep their house in uniformity and proportion.

The educational value of dolls' houses was constantly under debate throughout the nineteenth century. In line with the idea of learning through playing, which was fully explored by theorists and educators concerned with the educational and environmental needs of children, the period's parenting guides and advice manuals discussed the potential of the dolls' house to act as much more than a simple toy. Attitudes towards this question were not uniform. In contrast to Anna Koflerlin's belief in the baby house as an aid to learning, for some educators the dolls' house was not a suitable toy for children—Maria Edgeworth even judged that a completely-furnished dolls' house did not help to develop a child's imagination.⁷¹

⁷¹ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, vol.1 (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 4.

Despite all these disputes, throughout the Victorian period, children's books and magazines contained numerous accounts—both fictional and autobiographical—of children's lived experience with dolls' houses. Ideas of play, concepts of domesticity, possession and ownership, the values of family, as well as the middle-class consumer culture and way of life were all encapsulated in the ways children played with their dolls' houses.

CHAPTER TWO. MODERN ENGLISH DOLLS' HOUSES:

REFLECTIONS ON QUEEN MARY'S DOLLS' HOUSE

AND TITANIA'S PALACE

With the growth of the toy industry at the turn of the nineteenth century, dolls' houses continued to charm new generations of girls. In addition, the increasing awareness of the importance of providing good design in children's everyday surroundings also stimulated innovative dolls' house designs. More and more artists of the period participated in decorating children's nurseries and some of them also made dolls' houses to be included in the ideal nurseries they envisioned. Together with Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, the painter and art critic Roger Fry set up the Omega Workshops in 1913 in Fitzroy Square, London, to encourage young artists to design and decorate everyday items in a new way. Fry designed a dolls' house based on his own house near Surrey, which contained objects connected with the Bloomsbury group.¹ This dolls' house was one among the many toys the Omega Workshops designed and was similar to the model included in the Nursery Showroom decorated by the artists in the Workshops in a 1913 exhibition.²

By the turn of the century, dolls' houses were much more affordable than earlier models enjoyed only by the select few. Commercial dolls' houses and furniture intended as children's playthings provided more variety and were circulated more widely. The London department store Gamage, for example, advertised in their 1913

¹ Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses from the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 50.

² Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses* (Oxford: Shire, 2001), 31-32; Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 150-51.

illustrated catalogue a range of dolls' houses including 'Handsome Dolls House', 'Handsome Villa', 'Superior Model Dolls House', 'Smart Doll's Villa', 'Handsome Doll's Mansion', 'Strongly made Doll's Villa' and 'The New Screen Doll's House' among hundreds of other fancy toys available for the Christmas season.³ Inasmuch as girls from middle-class families enjoyed playing with dolls' houses purchased from toy shops, they also took pleasure in making their own dolls' houses with cardboards, or creating scrapbook houses for their paper dolls.⁴ In fact, in some autobiographical reminiscences adult women reflected that the less opulent the house was, the more fun it offered compared to luxurious and posh houses, as they learned to improvise and create their own pretend play. Besides, some young girls were not even allowed to play with exquisite dolls' houses intended for display rather than for play. Therefore they wanted to possess a house they could claim as their own. Children's author Alison Uttley for example, fondly remembered: 'No child ever got more fun out of the most luxurious doll's house than I from my converted sugar box'.⁵ Meanwhile, devoted readers of certain juvenile periodicals could play with free dolls' houses given by traders and publishers, such as the 'Lettie Lane's Doll House' distributed by the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1912 and 1913, which shows promotional efforts by retailers to boost sales of magazines and advertised products.

Since children usually acted out their dolls' house play based on their own family life, dolls' houses were utilised in some studies of child development from the early twentieth century. The child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, for example,

³ *Gamage's Christmas Bazaar, 1913, Being a Facsimile Reprint of the 1913 Christmas Catalogue of A. W. Gamage Ltd. of Holborn, London, with Some Pages from the 1911 General Catalogue, etc.* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles Reprints, 1974), 134-35.

⁴ For more detailed accounts of scrapbook houses, see Beverly Gordon, 'Scrapbook Houses for Paper Dolls: Creative Expression, Aesthetic Elaboration, and Bonding in the Female World', in *The Scrapbook in American Life*, ed. by Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 116-34; Beverly Gordon, 'The Paper Doll House', in *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 37-61.

⁵ Alison Uttley, *Ambush of Young Days* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 92.

emphasised the value of play in the psychoanalysis of children. She introduced techniques of using toys to work with children and in some cases also adopted dolls' house furniture and figures for the diagnosis and therapeutic treatment of children suffering psychological trauma.⁶ Also, in the early twentieth century, the educational value of dolls' houses became more broadly recognised. This development reflects the influence of pedagogical reformers such as Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori, whose belief in toys and their educational ethos inspired toy designers to customise dolls' houses and create models of houses specifically aimed at younger children.⁷ Part Two of the thesis will provide a detailed consideration of the actual uses of dolls' houses at school and at home in England from the 1860s to the 1920s, to evaluate the roles dolls' houses played in a child's everyday life. The present chapter will examine two modern English dolls' houses completed in the 1920s which are not conventional dolls' houses as children's toys, Queen Mary's Dolls' House (1921-24) and Titania's Palace (1907-1922), and discuss their historical and cultural significance in the evolution of dolls' houses.

The craze for small things

In April 2012, the Royal Collection, the trust managing the treasures of the British monarchs, announced the publication of a fairytale, *J. Smith*—one of the two hundred leather-bound miniature books belonging to the library in Queen Mary's Dolls' House—at life size.⁸ A month before that, the Dolls' House Emporium, a

⁶ Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-analysis of Children* (1932; London: Vintage, 1997), 32-33; Deborah Jaffé, *The History of Toys: From Spinning Tops to Robots* (London: Sutton, 2006), 157.

⁷ Anthony Burton, *Children's Pleasures: Books, Toys, and Games from the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood* (London: V&A Publications, 1996), 96.

⁸ Alison Flood, 'Miniature fairytale for royal dolls' house to be published full size', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2012 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/18/miniature-fairytale-royal-dolls-house>>

manufacturer of dolls' house furniture, had proudly promoted a series of authentic reproductions of the Queen's dolls' house furniture under an exclusive licence.⁹ These duplicates of selected items from Queen Mary's Dolls' House not only appeal to enthusiastic dolls' house and miniature collectors today but also reveal an incessant passion for preserving and reproducing a particular fantasised lifestyle in miniature. When the Royal Collection refers to Queen Mary's Dolls' House, now on permanent display at Windsor Castle, as 'the largest, most beautiful, and most famous dolls' house in the world', its significance and unique status in the history of modern dolls' houses are emphasised.¹⁰ From the outset, this legendary dolls' house manifests the best of British craftsmanship in the early twentieth century and, as Lucinda Lambton points out, it is 'a symbol of Britain's post-War renewal', even 'a beacon of national importance'.¹¹ In other words, Queen Mary's Dolls' House is meant to remain untouched in the gallery showcase, to be literally looked up to, and to be forever admired.

Following the long-standing tradition of virtuoso dolls' houses for adults' delight, the Queen's dolls' house is not a nursery toy that wears out over time. Since its first display in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, which marked the nation's industrial recovery from the Great War, Queen Mary's Dolls' House has been strictly kept away from the hands of Glumdalclitch. The dolls' house project's leading architect Sir Edwin Lutyens's (1869-1944) then thirteen-year-old daughter Mary is believed to be the only fortunate girl who had the chance to handle the tiny

[accessed 4 November 2013].

⁹ The Dolls' House Emporium Blog, 'Exclusive Queen's Dolls' House Collection—news update!' <<http://www.dollshouseblog.com/2012/03/27/exclusive-queens-dolls-house-collection-news-update/>> [accessed 4 November 2013].

¹⁰ The Royal Collection, 'Queen Mary's Dolls' House' <<http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/queenmarysdollshouse/house.html>> [accessed 4 November 2013].

¹¹ Lucinda Lambton, *The Queen's Dolls' House* (London: Royal Collection, 2010), 13-14.

articles in the house during its construction.¹² Furthermore, Queen Mary's Dolls' House differs from the luxurious cabinet houses popular among the wealthy burgher classes in the Low Countries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas the cabinet houses were bourgeois women's collectibles that kept them busy during their leisure time and provided a symbol of their wealth and status, Queen Mary's Dolls' House differs in several respects from an object of conspicuous consumption. It functions as a snapshot of the life of aristocrats in a perfect domestic household in the early twentieth century, providing future generations a detailed account of what the contributing artists, craftsmen and manufacturers believed to represent the best craftsmanship and most advanced technology in the 1920s. As the essayist and poet A. C. Benson suggested in an introduction to this dolls' house, future spectators should look at Queen Mary's Dolls' House in astonishment and value it as a historical document.¹³

Viewing the Queen's dolls' house as a time capsule prepared for future spectators changes its status. More than an expensive gift to the Queen, it acts as a record of a certain idea of civilisation, of an idealised lifestyle. The idea of building a dolls' house for Queen Mary, consort of King George V, was conceived in 1920 by Princess Marie Louise, Queen Victoria's granddaughter and a close friend of Queen Mary since their childhood. With her relentless passion for miniatures, Queen Mary was a zealous collector. She was renowned for her mania for collecting all things small, occasionally with the disputable method of acquisition by 'point-blank admiration of other people's possessions'.¹⁴ Her genuine love of tiny craft objects was expressed in the way she referred to the state rooms which displayed her

¹² Mary Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary's Dolls' House* (London: Bodley Head, 1988), 15.

¹³ Arthur Christopher Benson, 'Introduction', in *The Book of the Queen's Doll's House*, ed. by A. C. Benson and Lawrence Weaver (London: Methuen & Co., 1924), 13.

¹⁴ Stewart-Wilson, 10.

treasured collections as ‘My Dolls’ House’. In ‘My Bedroom’, as she called it, there was a Fabergé mouse sitting on her writing table, along with a miniature of the King.¹⁵ The V&A Museum of Childhood holds several of the dolls’ houses given by the Queen that she personally furnished and decorated [Fig. 2.1]. The Queen’s obsession for small things was well-known and helped the proposal to make her a gift full of diminutive treasures gain support from some of the nation’s most outstanding artists.



Figure 2.1 A dolls’ house given by Queen Mary, with miniature objects bought and collected by the Queen (1920-24); © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The distinguished English architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, well-known for his design of the Cenotaph in London and the India Gate in New Delhi, was appointed by Princess Marie Louise as the chief designer of the project. Between 1921 and 1924, there were more than 1,500 artists and craftsmen working in various ways on

¹⁵ Lambton, 8.

the construction of this intricate dolls' house and its contents. Among the cohort of contributors were the garden designer and artist Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932), who supervised the creation of the miniature garden, and Sir George Frampton (1860-1928), sculptor and craftsman, who was responsible for the dolls' house's exterior ornamentation. (He was also notable for his stone lions guarding the entrance of the British Museum and the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens.¹⁶)

Structured in Luytens's trademark Neo-classical style, the house is built on the standard scale of one inch to one foot and the precise ratio of one twelfth is maintained throughout. It is 102 inches wide, 58.5 inches deep, and 5 feet high, standing on a base of 116 inches by 72 inches, which is 39 inches high [Fig. 2.2 & Fig. 2.3]. Inside this miniature palace there are all the mod cons never dreamed of in the past, such as electric light, piped hot and cold water, water closets that really flush, Hoovers, electric irons, and passenger-lifts, among all the labour-saving devices. The miniature mansion encompasses over forty rooms and vestibules on three levels and a basement that houses a wine cellar, a garage and a garden. Below the stairs the garage contains six limousines with real engines, proclaiming 'the supremacy of British motor manufacturing in the 1920s'.¹⁷ Above the stairs, the King's Library gives the most extraordinary sight. With its impressive walnut pillars and panelling, the library holds over seven hundred prints, watercolours, drawings, etchings, engravings, all by famous artists of the day. There are also two hundred miniature books, each in the size of a postage stamp, written—and some even illustrated—in their authors' own hands. Among the contributing authors are G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Conrad, Walter de la Mare, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H. Rider

¹⁶ Ibid., 14, 26.

¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

Haggard, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Edith Wharton, and W. B. Yeats.¹⁸ To make the dolls' house an even more extreme example of precision and perfection, in the King's sitting-room there are microphotographs of all the daily newspapers and periodicals, and the notepaper is an exact reproduction of the one in use at Buckingham Palace.¹⁹

The construction of the dolls' house attracted extensive media coverage. Such enthusiasm culminated in the year the house was ready for the public gaze. Details about the house—its size, scale, structure, decoration, furnishing, paintings to be hung in the royal chamber, and even the way of filling the bottles in the wine cellar—all aroused great curiosity. Reports in contemporary newspapers and magazines successfully created an impression that the dolls' house was not just a gift for the Queen individually. But, as the public were reading the stories about the dolls' house, they also witnessed the production of a national treasure, 'A Miracle In Miniature', as *The Times* put it in their headline in an 1924 issue.²⁰ Curiosity about the dolls' house—the desire to see a beautiful model home reproduced on a small scale—drew 1,617,556 visitors to the Wembley Exhibition between April and November 1924.²¹ In addition to having a close look at the dolls' house that the visitors had read about for years, there were a variety of souvenirs they could purchase at the Exhibition, such as a piggy bank in the shape of the dolls' house or a porcelain model of the house.²² Toy manufacturers saw that there was a promising market for tiny objects similar to those of the Queen's. In the festive season in 1924,

¹⁸ Ibid., 95-113; 119-21.

¹⁹ Princess Marie Louise, *My Memories of Six Reigns* (London: Evans Brothers, 1956), 201.

²⁰ 'Queen's Dolls' House. A Miracle In Miniature', *The Times*, 29 July 1924, xxi.

²¹ Stewart-Wilson, 16.

²² These were some of the objects on display at the Museum of Brands in Notting Hill, London, which I visited on 10 November 2012.

Christmas shoppers could find ‘new models in furniture and kitchen equipment [...] obviously inspired by the Queen’s Dolls’ House’ available in toy shops.²³



Figure 2.2 The exterior of Queen Mary's Dolls' House (1921-24); Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2014

²³ 'Round the Shops. Toys for Christmas', *The Times*, 1 December 1924, 14.



Figure 2.3 Queen Mary's Dolls' House—the rooms revealed
(Photo Credit: Rob Sangster; CC BY-SA 2.0)

Even though Queen Mary's Dolls' House is an elaborate artefact, a collective masterpiece created by a prominent group of leading artists and craftsmen of the time rather than a child's plaything, it evokes in the spectator a desire to play with it. One anecdote intriguingly depicts how the Queen and the King were as excited as children when one afternoon they visited the Lutyens in London's West End to inspect the construction of the Queen's dolls' house. There they 'stayed over four hours, arranging and playing with everything, much to the chagrin of a lady in waiting who was kept firmly outside the drawing room'.²⁴ In January 1924, when the house was near completion, the Queen went to check the house twice in four days according to her own diary entry. The first time she went with her son, the Duke of Kent; they spent one and a half hours 'going over the beautiful miniature things'. Later she went with a friend and 'arranged some of the rooms'.²⁵ The Queen was so keen to be able to open the dolls' house herself, without calling servants—Lutyens

²⁴ Stewart-Wilson, 15.

²⁵ Ibid.

afterwards recalled in a letter with a repartee, 'Can you see the Queen going hush hush to play with the dolls'.²⁶ Apparently these miniatures appealed to the monarchs and aroused in them an impulse to look after small and delicate things. These tiny objects satisfied the childish desire of seeing the world in reality again in miniature and provided what A. C. Benson described as 'a touch of childlike fancy', as well as 'the instinct for play pure and simple'.²⁷

A fairy world

Another extraordinary miniature construction was emerging at the same time as Queen Mary's Dolls' House. 'Titania's Palace' also exemplifies the period's artistic expression, the desire to create tiny objects and to care for small things. In summer 1907, Sir Nevile Wilkinson (1869-1940), an indulgent Edwardian father, promised to build for his daughter Guendolen a cosy mansion for the fairies that she believed lived in the garden in their Irish home in Mount Merrion near Dublin. Guendolen, then aged three, claimed that she saw a fairy running under the roots of the sycamore. His little girl's vivid description of the fairy inspired Wilkinson to build a fairy palace for Titania, the Queen of Fairies, her consort Oberon, the Princesses Iris, Daphne, Pearl, and Ruby, and Princes Noel and Zephyr, a group of fairies inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.²⁸

The construction of Titania's Palace commenced in 1907. Like Queen Mary's Dolls' House, the palace was built on a scale of one inch to one foot, a standard one twelfth ratio adopted in artistic dolls' houses. The palace is 116 inches long and 19

²⁶ Quoted in Christopher Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens* (London: Country Life, 1950), 451.

²⁷ Arthur Benson, in *Book of the Queen's Doll's House*, ed. by Benson and Weaver, 6.

²⁸ Gerard O'Kelly, 'Titania's Palace and the Mount Merrion Connection', *Dublin Historical Record*, 51.2 (1998), 105-06; Constance Eileen King, *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* (London: Hale, 1983), 335.

inches wide, with the main bulk standing 30 inches high and a dome on the chapel adding another 65 inches to its height [Fig. 2.3].²⁹ It was constructed in eight sections divided into seventeen rooms, including the Hall of the Guilds, the Hall of the Fairy Kiss, Titania's Chapel, Titania's Boudoir, the Royal Dining Room, the Day Nursery, Morning Room, Bathroom, the Private Entrance Hall, the Royal Bed Chamber, Oberon's Study, Oberon's Dressing Room, Oberon's Museum, Bedrooms of the Princes and Princesses, and finally, the Throne Room. Each section has a removable façade. Moreover, it is set on a curtained pinewood stand surrounded by a protective rail which also functions as a seat for younger children.³⁰ The thoughtful design made the dolls' house more accessible for children, who can look into each room more clearly. Comparing to the magnificent size of Queen Mary's Dolls' House, Titania's Palace matches the height of a child and appears to be more inviting as if it really is a fairy world for the little ones. *The Times* had a picture in 1938 showing young Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret visiting the palace in the company of Sir Neville Wilkinson, in which the little Princess Margaret sits comfortably on the rail to look into the palace.³¹

It took fifteen years before the palace was inaugurated in the Women's Exhibition at Olympia in 1922. Even then, it was not in a finished state, but Wilkinson wished to show Titania's Palace before Queen Mary's Dolls' House was open to the public.³² Queen Mary, the most distinguished guest among Titania's first batch of visitors, left her tiny signature on the first page of the visitors' book at the palace's Private Entrance Hall.³³ The fairy palace brought the Queen so much delight that she even had some exquisitely carved ivory cabinets sent to Titania's

²⁹ O'Kelly, 107.

³⁰ King, 337.

³¹ 'Picture Gallery', *The Times*, 25 July 1938, 9.

³² King, 337.

³³ 'Titania's Palace: Woman's Exhibition at Olympia', *The Times*, 23 July 1922, 12.

Palace after her visit.³⁴ The palace received some 17,000 visitors within sixteen days since it was put on display and raised a substantial sum for various charity schemes Wilkinson supported. It then travelled to 160 cities in the British Isles before going on an international tour as far as to the Netherlands, Canada, the United States, Argentina, Australia, and New Zealand.³⁵ Sadly the palace was put up for auction and was sold to Legoland in Denmark in 1978 and now finds its permanent home in Egeskov Castle in Kværndrup, Denmark.



Figure 2.4 Titania's Palace (1907-22), now in Egeskov Castle, Denmark; author's own photo

Whereas Queen Mary's fondness for miniature crafts is not surprising, Wilkinson's interest in fairies and miniatures might seem to be at odds with his career as a professional soldier. Indeed Wilkinson had served with distinction in the army, but he was also so interested in heraldry and art that he enrolled and studied etching in the National Art Training School (later the Royal College of Art in South

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ O'Kelly, 108.

Kensington) and was appointed Ulster King of Arms in 1908.³⁶ In this same year another miniature mansion created by Wilkinson, known as ‘Pembroke Palace’, in Wilton House, Salisbury, was opened for exhibition by Queen Alexandra.³⁷ Hence it is not entirely incongruous that Wilkinson was attracted to the fairy palace, which gave him a chance to show off his artistic skills and conception of excellent craftsmanship.

At the time Titania’s Palace was constructed, literary culture was fascinated with childhood and with ideas of enchantment. Stories portraying the joys of childhood and describing children’s imaginary realms, inaccessible to adults, were a major force in the children’s book market. For example, Edith Nesbit’s *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (1911) and Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) all represent the period’s preoccupation with childhood fantasies and desire to retreat into nature. The deep longing for a pastoral past and the escape from the strictness and stresses of the adult world are recurrent features in these works.³⁸ These Edwardian children’s books presented an attempt to recapture the good old days when fairies could be seen and children did not have to worry about growing up. They reflected an idealised childhood that Adrienne Gavin describes as a ‘non-urban existence apart from adults [...] a sense of timelessness in an endless summer, and instinctive closeness to nature’.³⁹

Titania’s Palace echoes the strong nostalgia for childhood found in these books for children. Wilkinson’s project of building a dolls’ house for fairies, of creating a

³⁶ King, 337.

³⁷ O’Kelly, 105.

³⁸ See Adrienne E. Gavin, ‘Unadulterated Childhood: The Child in Edwardian Fiction’, in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Construction of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. by Adrienne E. Gavin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 165-81.

³⁹ Adrienne E. Gavin, ‘Introduction’ to *The Blue Lagoon* by Henry de Vere Stacpoole (1908; Kansas City, MO: Valancourt Books, 2010), xvii.

habitat for these tiny, innocent, and vulnerable creatures, as Constance Eileen King contends, ‘appears less an eccentric indulgence than a model completely in line with the preoccupations of artistic people of his generation’.⁴⁰ Titania’s Palace as a *chef-d’œuvre en miniature* embodied not just little Guendolen’s imagination but even more Wilkinson’s own fantasy; after all, by the time Titania’s Palace was open to the public, the little girl who requested it had already grown up. Although it was initially made for the amusement of a little girl, like Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House, it has aroused the admiration of all adults who delight in miniatures and has become a symbol of the idyllic days before the First World War.

Wilkinson’s imagination about fairies is visible in his designs for the palace. Motifs from the fairy world are everywhere in the details. To begin with, there is no kitchen in the palace, as fairies proverbially are nourished by the mere smell of fruits. Ironically, there is a dining room fully equipped with silverware on the dinner table, despite ‘the absence of knives and forks and baked meats’.⁴¹ Spare pairs of wings are stored in the cupboards of the princesses’ bedrooms, and the wings are dyed in a rock crystal basin in the bathroom.⁴² The bathroom, despite the profusion of domestic utensils, does not have drains or taps because the fairies bathe in dewdrops ‘brought in roseleaves by attendant fairies’.⁴³ Moreover, none of the doors in the palace have handles or knobs because fairy doors open by themselves.⁴⁴ What I find more fascinating is Wilkinson’s tribute to the six great authors of fairy tales, whose names could be seen as inscribed on the mosaic ceiling in Titania’s Chapel. The

⁴⁰ King, 336.

⁴¹ Neville Rodwell Wilkinson, *Titania’s Palace. An Illustrated Handbook*, 17th edn ([London]: [n. pub.], 1926), 21.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21; 27.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴ Jackson, 148.

names honoured for posterity in the fairy queen's private oratory are: Aesop, Spenser, Shakespeare, Charles Perrault, Lewis Carroll, and Hans Christian Andersen.

Interestingly, Queen Mary's Dolls' House also contains an object associated with the fairy world. It was no coincidence that Lutyens chose to include a *Peter Pan* toy theatre in the day nursery, for J. M. Barrie was a life-long friend of Lutyens, who in turn designed the nursery setting for the original stage production of *Peter Pan* in 1904. More enchantingly, the Lutyens children were taught to believe that their father had invented Nana. They were also convinced that Wendy and the boys fly with Peter Pan to the Neverland from their own night nursery window in Bloomsbury Square.⁴⁵ Just as Lutyens relished amusing his children with wondrous stories, he also imbued the Queen's dolls' house with many fantastic and imaginative details. As a humorous touch in the design of Princess Royal's Bedroom, Lutyens placed a real pea underneath the mattress of the four-poster bed, after Andersen's fairy tale, 'The Princess and the Pea'.⁴⁶ His friend Lady Sackville described Lutyens's genius as fairy-like, 'as if he had touched the houses with a wand'.⁴⁷ In his account of Lutyens's career as an architect, E.V. Lucas went further, calling Lutyens 'an eternal child, an apostle of beauty, an apostle of thoroughness, a minister of elvish nonsense'.⁴⁸

The fascination with the fairy world and the spirit of playfulness appealed to many intelligent and creative adults in the early twentieth century, and influenced children's stories and illustrations. Barrie, Lutyens and Wilkinson were all adults who embodied Barrie's notion of the child-in-adult and represented prolonged boyhood in their works. The adult whimsy of creating a fairy world together with the

⁴⁵ Stewart-Wilson, 129.

⁴⁶ A. C. Benson and Lawrence Weaver, eds, *Everybody's Book of the Queen's Dolls' House* (London: Daily Telegraph & Methuen, 1924), 67.

⁴⁷ Lambton, 91.

⁴⁸ Benson and Weaver, eds, *Everybody's Book*, 159.

Edwardian period's fascination with the world of magic and enchantment give the dolls' houses, Titania's Palace in particular, an alluring air of fantasy on top of the refined craftsmanship they demonstrate. Indeed when both houses were exhibited in England in 1925, a newspaper reporter attributed their origin to a supernatural power, and suggested that they were perhaps created by 'some unexplained movement of the spirit'.⁴⁹

In this regard, Titania's Palace is not just yet another example of an astonishing miniature house showcasing unrivalled craftsmanship. It expresses the romantic and nostalgic social ethos surrounding ideas of childhood and maturity in the early twentieth century. Like the *Peter Pan* stories, which depict children playing at being adults while adults behave childishly, the fairy palace Wilkinson created was not merely for the supernatural creatures of his daughter's imagination. Rather, in this fairy world the adult Wilkinson was able to feel a close companionship with his little girl, to share her enthusiasm for playing out the imaginary adventures of fairies, and to express a deep nostalgia for childhood. In Barrie's version of adult fantasy, Peter is the boy who refuses to grow up, while in Wilkinson's visual representation of the fairy world, he himself became the boy, remaining forever small in a dream-like miniature world. Inasmuch as girls' dolls' house play was used as training to prepare for adulthood and was a crucial aspect of the development of girlhood, reminiscent of Wendy taking on the role of mother, adult men's perception of fairyland and miniature worlds allowed them to have a prolonged boyhood, a perpetual childhood in a fantasy world where they stayed children forever.

The booklet Wilkinson wrote to accompany the exhibition of Titania's Palace in 1922 shows his indulgence in the fairy world and his child-like enthusiasm. In his

⁴⁹ 'History from Toys', *The Times*, 30 April 1925, 17.

portrait used as the frontispiece of the booklet, there is a fairy, ‘Her Iridescence’, standing on his shoulder (the portrait is a photograph, with the fairy painted in afterwards)—almost like Peter and Tinker Bell—encouraging the visitors to join their adventures in the fairy world. In addition, Wilkinson wrote several other fairy tales published around the time when Titania’s Palace was first exhibited, all featuring Queen Titania and her courtiers. His gifts of imagination and passion for story-telling were commented on in the reviews of one of the fairy tales he wrote; one reviewer claimed, ‘The book will charm not only children but all those who have succeeded in not irretrievably growing up’.⁵⁰ Another reviewer noted that ‘the romance of that super doll’s-house, like all good fairy-stories, never comes quite to an end’.⁵¹ The mystical style of contemporary descriptions of Titania’s Palace forcibly reminds us that the dolls’ house is more than an embodiment of excellent craftsmanship. Rather, it is an expression of the period’s literary and decorative movement that celebrated the attraction of intricate miniature craftsmanship and articulated a longing for peaceful sumptuous worlds of the imagination. Moreover, it captures something quintessential about the dolls’ house: a perfectly complete world in miniature where the deepest human desire to stop time is realised.

The house of absolute perfection

In addition to being fabulous artworks that exude an aura of fantasy, Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House and Titania’s Palace are also culturally significant and distinct from the opulent historical dolls’ houses discussed in the previous chapter. As Susan Stewart

⁵⁰ Quoted from a review of *Yvette in Italy and Titania’s Palace*; reproduced on the back cover of Wilkinson’s illustrated guide to Titania’s Palace.

⁵¹ ‘More about Titania’s Palace’, *The Illustrated London News*, 12 August 1922, 266.

suggests, the dolls' house has two dominant meanings: wealth and nostalgia.⁵² The Dutch cabinet houses and the English baby houses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were status symbols. They were mainly commissioned for, or furnished and decorated under the supervision of the women who possessed them, whereas the two modern English dolls' houses, as objects presenting 'nostalgic versions of childhood and history'—to borrow Stewart's phrase again—manifest a male perception of life in microcosm.⁵³ Although there were male artists commissioned to oversee the design of the Dutch cabinet houses and English baby houses, many of their female patrons were very involved in the construction of the houses and put considerable effort, both sentimentally and physically, into their design, construction and completion. Queen Mary's Dolls' House and Titania's Palace, however, were constructed according to the directions of male designers and architects. Whereas the earlier cabinet houses and baby houses represent domesticity in a very particular social milieu and class—reflecting the material world of the Dutch bourgeoisie and the English upper middle class—Queen Mary's Dolls' House and Titania's Palace represent a fabulous and extremely lavish male fantasy of an idealised and almost impossibly perfect lifestyle. The earlier female collectors demonstrated in their dolls' houses a version of their own social and domestic lives. On the other hand, Queen Mary's Dolls' House and Titania's Palace provide the spectator with a vision of life to marvel at, to gaze at in wonder.

These two dolls' house projects—one a luxurious wish-fulfilment made by an affectionate father who, like his daughter, believed in fairies, and the other a labour-intensive and meticulously executed artefact dedicated to the Queen that enshrines the best of English architecture and craftsmanship in the 1920s—are

⁵² Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 61.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 69.

extremely important records of the aspirations and fantasies of the period. The Edwardian cult of small things certainly appealed to a group of enthusiasts and artists who contributed to the design and construction of these spectacular miniature houses. Titania's Palace aimed to make fairyland visible to the human spectator. It demonstrated its separation from the contemporary human world by taking inspiration from Renaissance Italy. This made the palace distinct from the real world and created a magical atmosphere.

Whereas Titania's Palace represents a nostalgic attempt to portray a romantic, imaginary realm, Queen Mary's Dolls' House beguiles the viewers with the pure essence of realism. Sir Edwin Lutyens's insight into a well-to-do and well-appointed mansion with everything real down to the smallest detail is revealed in *Everybody's Book of the Queen's Dolls' House*—an illustrated book sold alongside all the visitors' guidebooks and postcards that satisfied the public's curiosity about the house. As the editors declared:

We should be aware that one main reason for building the House is that we are to lose it. It has been built to outlast us all, to carry on into a future and a different world this pattern of our own. It is a serious attempt to express our age, and to show forth in dwarf proportions the limbs of our present world.⁵⁴

Indeed Lutyens himself was determined to show future generations the works of contemporary authors, artists, and craftsmen and how the monarchs lived in his life time.⁵⁵ This ambition went far beyond presenting an intricate gift to the Queen, as the dolls' house was intended to create an emblem of British cultural superiority and the impressive achievements of British art, architecture, and technology. If Titania's Palace embodies our longing for the past, Queen Mary's Dolls' House freezes and condenses the present. The desire to see the objects of real life reproduced on a

⁵⁴ Benson and Weaver, eds, *Everybody's Book*, 21.

⁵⁵ Marie Louise, 199.

diminutive scale does more than demonstrate the great skills of all the craftsmen, technicians, and artists involved in the project. More intrinsically, it portrays the way of life of a great age passing by, ‘at a scale of one inch to one foot, for the delight of children and historians forever’.⁵⁶ In other words, Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House acts as a defence against decay, to preserve the present as a physical relic which will resist the ravages of time. It preserves, in a three-dimensional space, an idealised image of the present for future generations.

This desire to showcase Edwardian opulence in all its glory inspired the contributing craftsmen to work with consummate skill and meticulous care. These contributors included voluntary as well as paid and commissioned artisans. The manager from the Gramophone Company, for example, wrote a letter to Lutyens in 1922 offering a miniature gramophone to be included in Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House, which would make it ‘quite complete as an example of the present day home’.⁵⁷ At least seventy workers collaborated to produce a four-inch gramophone that really functions—it plays ‘God Save the King’, ‘Rule Britannia’, ‘Home, Sweet Home’, with records smaller than the size of a halfpenny.⁵⁸ It is intriguing to see how these contributors relished working for the house and how they perceived the royal commission not only as a great opportunity to promote their companies but also as a way to show their allegiance to the Crown. The bookbinder responsible for the binding of the miniature library wrote to Princess Marie Louise in excitement that this assignment ‘will be a pleasurable holiday recreation from [...] hum-drum work’ and saying that it was a joy to bind ‘one of the most wonderful libraries in the

⁵⁶ Hussey, 449.

⁵⁷ The letter from The Gramophone Company to Sir Edwin Lutyens on 10 October 1922; reproduced in Lambton, 129.

⁵⁸ ‘Miracle In Miniature’, xxi.

world'.⁵⁹ Indeed as A. C. Benson later testified, 'One of the pleasantest things about the Queen's House is that it has not been got together by the overwork and anxiety of a few, but by the enjoyable and willing co-operation of many delighted designers, craftsmen, and donors'.⁶⁰

Moreover, Lutyens's view of the Queen's dolls' house as a historical document insisted that the miniature mansion should be made in precise proportion and extreme perfection. The house should be a real home that 'the King and Queen might fittingly inhabit, were some enchanter suddenly to diminish them'.⁶¹ Hence, although bearing the title of a 'dolls' house', Queen Mary's Dolls' House, like Titania's Palace, is not occupied by dolls. The reason for the absence of dolls in Titania's Palace is easily understood. As this fairy mansion was dedicated to Titania and her entourage, the palace was left uninhabited so that the fairies (should they exist) would be free to occupy it at any time. However, the question of whether dolls should dwell in the Queen's dolls' house was discussed at length while the house was being built. According to the novelist E. F. Benson in a chapter he wrote for *The Book of the Queen's Doll's House*, the project's committee, after a prolonged debate, came to the conclusion that 'Her Majesty's Dolls' House should have no domestic staff, nor any visitors staying there'.⁶²

Unlike Nuremberg baby houses and Dutch cabinet houses, as well as commercial dolls' houses possessed and played with by girls in the nineteenth and

⁵⁹ The letter from F. Sangorski & G. Sutcliffe the Bookbinders to Princess Marie Louise on 11 March 1922; reproduced in Lambton, 128.

⁶⁰ Benson and Weaver, eds, *Everybody's Book*, 18. However, not all the King's subjects perceived contributing to the dolls' house as a way to show their loyalty and devotion. George Bernard Shaw was among the few contemporary authors who declined to write for the miniature library. According to Princess Marie Louise, Shaw's declination was made 'in a very rude manner', and she '[failed] to see how he could have missed this great opportunity to have one of his works included in the Doll's House as a record of an outstanding author in the reign of George V'. Marie Louise, 201.

⁶¹ Lambton, 53.

⁶² Edward Frederic Benson, 'The Dolls of the Queen's Dolls' House', in *Book of the Queen's Doll's House*, ed. by Benson and Weaver, 159.

early twentieth centuries, which were almost always populated by dolls, Queen Mary's Dolls' House is not a house *for* dolls. It was intended to be the mansion of the monarchs, only seen through the wrong end of the telescope. Some argue that the presence of dolls adds interest to dolls' houses as they represent the people who might really occupy the room and make the domestic setting more complete and vivid. However, no matter what materials they are made of, the dolls inevitably remain in a stiff and awkward posture.⁶³

Dolls, lacking the vitality, balance, grace and equilibrium of the human figure, can compromise the perfection of aesthetic form in a dolls' house interior. As Queen Mary's Dolls' House was intended as an example of absolute perfection and precision, it was felt that it should not contain imperfectly proportioned objects and figures that would disrupt its harmony. When the house was first exhibited, a newspaper article solemnly reproached those who wished to see it peopled by fairies or dolls and insisted that

the Dolls' House must remain uninhabited. It is no place for diminutive folk living under a toad's-stool and rural in every taste and habit. Rather is it a home for strictly urban fancies; a model for the ages of the best the 20th century can do in domestic architecture, decoration, and furnishing.⁶⁴

On the one hand, the imperfect proportion and odd postures of dolls would be 'like a discordant note in music or a blot in a copy-book', even 'the most gross of solecisms' in the dolls' house the designers had imagined.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the very absence of dolls makes the house seem even more real, for the dolls' house is made—as Lutyens envisaged—as a real house shrunk to proportion by a magic spell. The very fidelity of the miniature house suggested that it could be magically 'restored' to the size of a real house. The dolls, however, will never be the same, or

⁶³ Faith Eaton, *The Miniature House* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990), 16.

⁶⁴ 'Miracle In Miniature', xxi.

⁶⁵ Edward Benson, in *Book of the Queen's Doll's House*, ed. by Benson and Weaver, 161-64.

appear the same, as miniature versions of real people. They do not create the illusion that they would be flesh-and-blood humans if they were enlarged to human dimensions. As E. F. Benson wrote, 'anyone can easily imagine what a monstrous deformity a Doll would be if it was magically restored to human size'.⁶⁶ Without dolls, the house can suggest to the imagination that it is occupied by humans. Although the presence of the inhabitants is unseen, the trace of their existence is everywhere. The well-set dinner table, the pots on the hob, and the newspaper left on the desk in the King's library all produce an impression that the real residents of the house are only absent temporarily and will come back later. This tantalising illusion and the exquisite realism of the house continue to enchant visitors year after year and remind us of the intrinsic nature of the dolls' house as virtual reality in miniature.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 161.

PART TWO. PLAYING WITH DOLLS' HOUSES:

CHILDREN'S PLAY, CHILDREN'S READING, AND THE

MARKETPLACE IN VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN

ENGLAND

Ideas of play and recognition of the need for children's play varied over time. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, education reformers, philosophers and writers of children's books were fascinated by ideas about the role of play in a child's life. Starting from the late seventeenth century, major philosophers of the Enlightenment Movement and education reformers including John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Richard Edgeworth, and his daughter Maria Edgeworth emphasised in their writings the value of play and recreation in a child's early education and considered ways in which play could help and stimulate children's learning. Their innovative views of educating and entertaining children fostered new concepts of pedagogy and child-rearing and inspired the development of children's books that highlighted the importance of play. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, publishers of children's books experimented with Locke's idea of appending playthings to books to make learning 'as much a Recreation to their Play, as their Play is to their learning'.¹

Although early education remained a matter of rote memorisation well into the nineteenth century, pedagogies that incorporated instruction and delight and teaching methods in which play took a central role began to take shape. This change in

¹ John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (London: A. & J. Churchill, 1693), 77.

emphasis helped fuel the expansion in the production of children's books and toys late in the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. The methods of 'toy teaching' and 'play learning' were further explored in new formats of interactive narratives targeted at child readers in the Victorian period, as a response to the growing awareness of children's need for play. Among the philosophers that stressed the significance of play, Friedrich Froebel, the German education reformer and pioneer of the Kindergarten Movement, put into practice the idea of 'learning through playing' in systematic approaches, such as the handiworks he designed for use in kindergartens burgeoning in Europe in the 1840s.

By the turn of the century, Froebel's ideas of kindergarten training were frequently adopted and discussed in pedagogical writings in Britain and America. The contemporary reception of Froebel's theory shows that there were continuing debates about the didactic function of educational toys, the balance between practical manual skills and imagination in children's play. The complex relationship between playing and learning raises key questions about what objects children should play with and what adults expected children to learn from these hands-on activities. Writings of the time also considered patterns of play and the roles of playing and learning in children's lives before they started formal school education. Furthermore, the idea of incorporating playing into learning influenced the material format and textual content of children's books of the period.

Focusing on debates about education theories and pedagogical principles which considered what children could learn from handiworks, particularly dolls' house making, chapters in Part Two will first discuss a spectrum of attitudes towards the place of play in children's education. The social ethos of the significance of making one's own toys and how children could benefit from these activities are also taken

into account. In addition to looking at how Victorian society responded to on-going educational campaigns, it is worth examining the contemporary reception of the advent of a particular genre: the advice literature of toy-making and ‘toy books’ (i.e. cheap, mass-market colour picture books) that invited readers’ active participation, which reflects increasing awareness of the benefits of children’s reading and playing. Finally, through the examination of evidence of reader participation in Victorian and Edwardian juvenile magazine, such as children’s contribution to correspondence columns and competitions held by magazines publishers, I will discuss the making of child readers and child consumers in the context of the development of the industry of childhood commodities, as well as the creation of the material culture that children could claim to be their own.

CHAPTER THREE. THE PLAY OF CHILDREN

Children's play was perceived by Michel de Montaigne in the sixteenth century as a serious matter not to be underestimated. When Montaigne declared that 'it must be noted that children's games are not games, and must be judged in children like their more serious actions', he was telling us that children's play was their main business in life.¹ To Montaigne, children's unique status as beings in their own right and the significance of play as their privilege and profession in life needs to be acknowledged. Anthropological findings and histories of toys also show that generations of children started playing from an early age.² However, as Philippe Ariès argues in *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, which is an important guide to the history of family and of childhood since it was first published in 1960, the representation of realistic childhood and images of children at play did not appear in genre paintings until much later in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Ariès's central argument is that in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist, although this did not mean that children were neglected or badly treated.³ Ariès associates the absence of the concept of childhood as a distinct phase of human existence in the Middle Ages and

¹ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. by Donald M. Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), 79.

² Lesley Gordon, *Peepshow into Paradise. A History of Children's Toys* (London: Harrap, 1953); Deborah Jaffé, *The History of Toys: From Spinning Tops to Robots* (London: Sutton, 2006); Mary Harlow, 'Toys, Dolls and the Material Culture of Childhood', in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. by Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin and Roslynne Bell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 322-40.

³ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by Robert Baldick (1960; New York: Knopf, 1962), 128. It is noted, however, that Ariès's argument has been widely criticized. Linda Pollock questions Ariès's methodologies and the conclusion he made from the evidence he used. Rather than generalising adults' sentiments based on pictorial materials as Ariès did, Pollock emphasises the significance of looking at the 'actual' experience of parenting and childhood. She draws from a wide range of primary sources such as diaries and autobiographies of English and American origin and other first-hand accounts and suggests that the history of childhood is in fact a case of continuity rather than drastic changes we might have perceived. See Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

early modern period with the lack of concern about preparing children for adulthood and making an emotional investment in them. In medieval society there were also no special activities assigned to children to characterise the separation between children and adults. At the age of four or five, although children played with dolls, they also took part in parlour games played by adults.⁴

The significant evidence of ‘the discovery of childhood’ at the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century, as Ariès describes, not only marked a distinct segregation between childhood and adulthood, but also offered artists a wider range of themes for their portrayal of scenes of everyday life.⁵ By the seventeenth century, depictions of ordinary life multiplied in Dutch and Flemish genre paintings.⁶ In 1560, Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder ambitiously portrayed a massive street scene, in which hundreds of children are engaging in at least eighty different games including girls’ doll play [Fig. 3.1]. Genre paintings and engravings in this period show that images of children were no longer restricted to religious paintings featuring the Holy Child and Virgin Mary, or to group portraits in which children are solemnly depicted alongside adults and are dressed as small adults. These representations of children in a quotidian, domestic context rather than in religious iconography aroused new feelings and emotional attitudes towards childhood.

⁴ ‘A Modest Contribution to the History of Games and Pastimes’, in Ariès, 62-99.

⁵ Ariès, 33-49.

⁶ Anthony Burton, ‘Looking forward from Ariès? Pictorial and Material Evidence for the History of Childhood and Family Life’, *Continuity and Change*, 4.2 (1989), 218.



Figure 3.1 'Children's Games' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1560), oil on panel;
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Feelings towards children and concepts of childhood were complex. They were also subject to change as economic and social conditions changed; in addition, children were treated differently in different social and economic contexts.⁷ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, childhood became more established as a separate social identity in European society, and the child was more widely regarded as a distinct state of being rather than a miniature adult. Over time, the gradual changes in the perception of the nature and the needs of childhood and in attitudes towards children produced something like a whole culture of childhood envisaged particularly in middle-class households. As the concept of childhood defined by middle-class life and values began to take shape, there emerged special artefacts and activities emphasising the differences between children and adults.⁸ Meanwhile, as the dichotomy of work and

⁷ Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995).

⁸ Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: Northeast University Press, 1992), 7-8.

play was mapped on to the binaries of adult and child, the separation between the social worlds of adults and children also gradually developed.⁹ Play became rather ‘a childish thing’ and ‘increasingly relegated to childhood’.¹⁰ The attention to children’s need of play reflects the arising awareness of the well-being of children. Furthermore, the study of children’s play and games provides an important insight into the exploration of different aspects of children’s social lives.

The place of play in education

Children, as the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) declared in *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, ‘must not be hindered from being Children, or from playing, or doing as Children, but from doing ill; all other Liberty is to be allowed to them’.¹¹ As Locke associated children’s identity and privilege with playing, he suggested that to be a child is to have the freedom to play, subject to certain restrictions: above all one must not ‘do ill’ or cause mischief. He wrote that education was the means to perfect the mind and prevent man from being evil and useless.¹² First published in 1693, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* went through numerous editions and was popular on both sides of the Atlantic, making Locke an important authority of child-rearing in the period.¹³ Widely known as the Father of Liberalism, Locke outlined in this education treatise his thoughts of education of the mind, many of which were considered advanced of his time. To Locke, play was the successful key to learning:

⁹ Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 90.

¹⁰ George P. Stone, ‘The Play of Little Children’, *Quest*, 4 (1965), 25.

¹¹ John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (London: A. & J. Churchill, 1693), 71.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ John Brewer, ‘Childhood Revisited: The Genesis of the Modern Toy’, *History Today*, 30.12 (1980), 35.

I have always had a fancy that learning might be made a play and recreation to children: and that they might be brought to desire to be taught, if it were proposed to them as a thing of honour, credit, delight, and recreation, or as a reward for doing something else; and if they were never chid or corrected for the neglect of it.¹⁴

Although corporal punishment still existed and traditional methods of learning through catechism or rote memorisation remained common practice, more and more parents and tutors, at least from the middle class, started to accept Locke's idea that education was a matter of carrot rather than stick and were willing to replace scolding and flogging with prizes and rewards. His most influential argument is the statement that 'the chief art is, to make all that they [children] have to do, sport and play too'.¹⁵

Indeed Locke's theory recognised the importance of children's pleasure and delight and his pedagogy further marked the central role of play in education. He advised that learning should not be 'imposed on them as a Task'; rather, it should be made 'as much a Recreation to their Play, as their Play is to their Learning'.¹⁶ He described how he was inspired by a father who experimented with the method of learning combined with playing, which successfully tricked his son into spelling lessons:

I know a Person of great Quality (more yet to be honoured for his Learning and Virtue than for his Rank and high Place) who by pasting on the six Vowels (for in our language Y is one) on the six sides of a Die, and the remaining eighteen Consonants on the sides of three other Dice, has made this a play for his Children, that he shall win who, at one cast, throws most Words on these four Dice; whereby his eldest Son, yet in Coats, has play'd himself into Spelling, with great eagerness, and without once having been chid for it or forced to it.¹⁷

In addition to making changes in educational principles, Locke also invented and popularised one of the earliest educational toys. He used a set of lettered blocks later

¹⁴ Locke, 176.

¹⁵ Ibid., 63.

¹⁶ Ibid., 75; 77.

¹⁷ Ibid., 180.

known as ‘Locke’s blocks’ to aid the learning of the alphabet and to promote his pedagogy of learning through games.¹⁸ Locke’s theory, as John Brewer contends, ‘heralds the genesis of the toy both as a plaything peculiar to children and as an educational device [...] Both play and playthings, which had previously been regarded either as an obstruction to learning or as matters of no didactic consequence, became crucial to the educational process’.¹⁹ Jill Shefrin also observes that Locke’s endorsement of instructional play, ‘in conjunction with the expansion in education and publishing, spawned a whole industry and encouraged the modification of teaching methods’.²⁰ By the end of the eighteenth century, other educational playthings were produced by booksellers and publishers as a lucrative sideline in their business.²¹ The advent of instructive toys such as playing cards, jigsaw puzzles and board games helped to impart knowledge about geography, history, political events and technical innovations and characterised the qualities of industry, competitiveness, patriotism, as well as morality. Under such inspiration parents were also motivated to educate their children with forms of entertainment rather than merely through disciplining them.²²

However, Locke’s concept of the role of toys and games was very much circumscribed, as the idea of the toy as an object bearing the sole function of amusement of the young did not emerge until the eighteenth century.²³ In Locke’s time, the toy was defined as a ‘small article of little intrinsic value, but prized as an ornament

¹⁸ Brewer, ‘Childhood Revisited’, 36.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jill Shefrin, “‘Make it a Pleasure and Not a Task’: Educational Games for Children in Georgian England”, *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 60.2 (1999), 253.

²¹ Emma Laws, *Miniature Libraries from the Children’s Books Collections*, exhib. cat. (20 May-17 November 2002) (London: National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2002) <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/wid/exhibits/miniaturelibraries/introduction.html>> [accessed 15 July 2014].

²² Shefrin, 252-53.

²³ Brewer, ‘Childhood Revisited’, 36; John Brewer, *The Cottage of Content: or, Toys, Games and Amusements of Nineteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1977), iv.

or curiosity', and in Dr. Johnson's words 'a petty commodity'.²⁴ Writing in the late eighteenth century, children's author Lady Eleanor Fenn (1743-1813), also emphasised the practical functions of toys. In her introduction to *The Art of Teaching in Sport* (1785), a volume accompanying *Set of Toys*, a series of games designed to educate young children, she wrote:

Toys should tend to some useful purpose; otherwise they produce habits of idleness; toys which are of little value, and easily replaced, are apt to be destroyed [...] Let the toys be such, as will serve to convey instruction, and the precious hours of childhood are improved to good purpose [...] Letters ought to be the most attractive toys; the study of them, the most sprightly play that can be invented. The first sounds of syllables should likewise be so acquired; this may be effected with ease, by means of a set of letters [...] The fun of all this, is, that *reading must not be a task—No! it must be a lively amusement.*²⁵

Fenn's lengthy and self-explanatory subtitle corresponds to Locke's pedagogy of learning through playing, which was carried out as structured and supervised play. Even though Locke did acknowledge that children's 'game-some humour' was natural and could be encouraged to improve their strength and health, he stressed that recreation did not equal idling and children should be guided to employ their recreation time to learn some skills which might afterwards produce something profitable.²⁶ According to Brewer, these ideas about and reforms of toys and play transformed the 'imaginative and unstructured pursuit of the "no toy" culture into a rigorous training in social duties and family obligations'. Meanwhile, the new toys and games also 'epitomised the bourgeois attributes necessary for commercial, industrial and social success in adult life. They were not puzzles and problems but the concrete expression

²⁴ Def. of 'toy, n.'. *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. < <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/204133?rskey=mWj1hQ&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> > [accessed 7 April 2014].

²⁵ Lady Eleanor Fenn, *The Art of Teaching in Sport; Designed as a Prelude to a Set of Toys for Enabling Ladies to Instill the Rudiments of Spelling, Reading, Grammar, and Arithmetic, under the Idea of Amusement* (London: John Marshall, c. 1785), 8-10; italics in original.

²⁶ Locke, 63; 246.

of a strict morality'.²⁷ The belief in the significance of 'making amusement the vehicle of instruction'—borrowing Fenn's description again—was crucial to the evolution of the toy industry as a promising commercial market and the incorporation of toys in children's education.²⁸

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the eighteenth-century French philosopher, also remarked on children's right to play in *Émile* (1762), both a novel and an educational treatise on character formation in a domestic setting.²⁹ Like Locke, Rousseau did not regard unstructured play as appropriate to children. He warned that letting children indulge themselves in imaginative activities or showing them 'the misleading picture of the happiness of mankind', such as taking them to pageants or theatres before they were capable of evaluating the true worth of these activities, would sow the immoral seeds of pride, vanity and envy in them.³⁰ Rousseau considered that play in every sense should only be undertaken as a means to educate the young and to regulate their emotions and desires, for he believed that emotions intensified by an overactive imagination would result in social problems and a society corrupted by envy and desire.³¹ As Jenny Holt observes, 'Surprisingly, given our understanding of the Romantics as devotees to spontaneity and imagination, early educationalists such as Rousseau disregarded or condemned many aspects of leisure time play that modern psychologists deem essential to "normal" development'.³²

²⁷ Brewer, 'Childhood Revisited', 38.

²⁸ 'In making amusement the vehicle of instruction, consists the grand secret of early education'—argued Lady Eleanor Fenn in her *The Rational Dame; or, Hints towards Supplying Prattle for Children* (London: John Marshall and Co., c.1795), iv.

²⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, trans. by Barbara Foxley (1762; London: Dent, 1974).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

³¹ Jenny Holt, "'Normal'" versus "Deviant" Play in Children's Literature: An Historical Overview', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 34.1 (2010), 35.

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

Although Rousseau's *Émile* does play, his play activities are directed by his tutor. It is the tutor's imagination rather than *Émile*'s that sees through his play. *Émile*'s tutor is cautious about the reading materials to be provided to him. As Allan Bloom points out, the tutor deplores the books that 'excite the imagination, increasing thereby the desires, the hopes, and the fears beyond the realm of the necessary'.³³ In addition, *Émile* plays in the sense that work and play are the same:

*Work or play are all one to him, his games are his work; he knows no difference. He brings to everything the cheerfulness of interest, the charm of freedom, and he shows the bent of his own mind and the extent of his knowledge. Is there anything better worth seeing, anything more touching or more delightful, than a pretty child, with merry, cheerful glance, easy contented manner, open smiling countenance, playing at the most important things, or working at the lightest amusements?*³⁴

Rousseau went on to suggest that through constructive play which involved the practice of manual labour, children would learn to respect the labour of others who help to contribute their welfare and the economic success of the nation.

Inspired by Locke and Rousseau, Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), the English-Irish novelist and educationalist, also saw work and play as equally important in the education of middle-class children. Edgeworth shared Rousseau's concern about training children to learn ideas about property and labour, 'a concern that is strongly echoed by British children's writers of the industrial revolution period'.³⁵ She was particularly well-known for her insistence on developing children's practical manual skills through the games they played rather than promoting the primacy of imagination. Her preference for mechanical and useful toys was later criticised in Charlotte Yonge's *Womankind* (1887) as 'want of poetry, and failure to perceive the way in which toys

³³ Allan Bloom, Introduction to *Émile, or On Education* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 7.

³⁴ Rousseau, 126; my emphasis.

³⁵ Holt, 41.

deal with the imaginative, the tender, and the aesthetic sides of children's minds'.³⁶ Moreover, Edgeworth's lack of enthusiasm for children's playthings that failed to stimulate further manual tasks is explicitly revealed in *Practical Education* (1798). This book emphasises the practical value of the everyday life experience of a child and supports non-book-based methods of learning, such as using toys which 'afford trials of dexterity and activity'. It also encourages children's engagement in 'observation, experiment and invention'.³⁷ Edgeworth even proposed to open a 'rational toy-shop', where parents could purchase a variety of carpenter's tools 'for the young workman'.³⁸ To Edgeworth the best kind of a child's plaything was one that helped parenting and taught children useful domestic tasks and skills. Useful and instructive pursuits were more desirable than mere pleasure. Hence, 'although an unfurnished baby-house might be a good toy, as it would employ little carpenters and sempstresses [seamstresses] to fit it up', in her eyes a completely furnished baby house could be an object of derision and

tiresome to a child, as a finished seat is to a young nobleman. After peeping, for in general only a peep can be had into each apartment, after being thoroughly satisfied that nothing is wanting, and that consequently there is nothing to be done, the young lady lays her doll upon the state bed, if the doll be not twice as large as the bed, and falls fast asleep in the midst of her felicity.³⁹

A historian of dolls' houses argues that it is likely that Miss Edgeworth 'had never watched a child playing with a model house with that complete concentration engendered only by the most successful of toys'.⁴⁰ Indeed playing with a dolls'

³⁶ Charlotte M. Yonge, *Womankind* (New York: Macmillan; London: Mozley and Smith, 1877), 61.

³⁷ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, vol.1 (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 17; 32. Based on the preface, the young Edgeworth alone wrote the chapter on 'toys' in Volume One which summarises her belief in the instructive value of toys to be provided for children.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰ Constance Eileen King, *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* (London: Hale, 1983), 244.

house—whether furnished or not—could be an effective means of enabling a girl to become a playwright and the dolls her actors, for ‘each doll has its own character, the house has its own situation’.⁴¹ However, Edgeworth’s hesitation about acknowledging that play could also be a kind of non-instrumental activity, as introduced and emphasised by later writers such as Lewis Carroll and J. M. Barrie reflects anxiety and debate about the interdependence and interaction of work and play in relation to the formation of young consumers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an age when the market for children’s books and toys began to prosper.

Froebel’s pedagogies and the Kindergarten Movement

Like their predecessors, many nineteenth-century education theorists also believed in guiding children in interactive play which trained both their mind and hands. Maria Edgeworth’s contemporary and German counterpart, Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), known as the founder of the Kindergarten Movement, was the most prominent figure among those who emphasised the importance of educational toys and teaching by means of active exercise of all faculties. Unlike Locke, who sought to locate education primarily in the home, a concern aligned to notions of bourgeois domesticity and gentility, Froebel’s ideal was to provide education in a controlled environment in the form of a ‘kindergarten’.

Born the son of a Protestant Pastor in Oberweißbach near Thüringen Forest, Froebel grew up in a Lutheran family. His upbringing, as he recalled in his autobiography, brought him under the influence of nature, and taught him the usefulness of handiwork and religious feelings, which were of great value to him in

⁴¹ Ibid.

his later life.⁴² In 1805, Froebel worked as a teacher in Die Musterschule (a grammar school) in Frankfurt, where he made acquaintance with the Swiss education reformer, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), and eventually became his follower. Pestalozzi maintained that the best way to learn was not through verbal teaching but based on the senses, therefore the perceptive powers must be cultivated. He designed the curriculum called 'the object lesson', which enabled pupils to learn not from recitation or rote memorisation but by examining and exploring objects found in their environments, often with minimal guidance from their teacher.⁴³ Froebel was inspired by Pestalozzi's child-centred method focusing on the individual's sensory experiences and began to investigate elementary education, the value of educational methods advocated by his master, and above all, the purpose of education.

Based on his training as school teacher, his university experience, and observations of his pupils, Froebel advanced beyond Pestalozzi's idea that education should be given through perceptions. He took Pestalozzi's ideas of fostering cognitive capacities but went on to suggest that the body also requires education as much as the mind. He regarded man not only as a receptive being, but also as creative and, in particular, productive. Froebel's insight concerns the awakening of eager desire for learning and creative activity in children.⁴⁴ The foundation of his system is that 'Play is the labour of the child', and for this motto he advocated an education system in which all physical and mental education should be carried out in the form of play.⁴⁵ In 1816 he founded the 'Universal German Educational Institute' in Griesheim, with the

⁴² Friedrich Froebel, *Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel*, trans. and annotated by Emilie Michaelis and H. Keatley Moore (1896; London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), 7.

⁴³ Jane Mill, 'The English Kinder Garten; Or, How We Taught Our Little Ones', *The Lady's Newspaper*, 24 January 1863, 216; Elizabeth Gargano, *Reading Victorian Schoolrooms: Childhood and Education in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 167-68.

⁴⁴ Johann Arnold Barop, 'Critical Moments in the Froebel Community', a supplement to Froebel's autobiography in *Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel*, 129.

⁴⁵ Mill, 216.

aim of providing a teaching system opposed to conventional methods of education, particularly learning by rote.⁴⁶

To carry out his pedagogical reforms, in 1837 Froebel began to manufacture playthings known as ‘Froebel’s gifts’, including a kit of geometrical toys such as soft balls of different colours, cubes divided into smaller cubes, tablets, sticks, and rings [Fig. 3.2]. In addition, he invented a series of related activities called ‘occupations’ (modelling, sewing, stick-laying, paper-weaving, etc.). Froebel firmly believed in the value of children’s play as the means of cultivation of the mind and announced: ‘There is always a high meaning in childish play [...] Nothing is trifling that forms part of a child’s life.’⁴⁷ Furthermore, in order to ensure that such play was intelligent, Froebel proposed that adults should encourage children to talk about the things they made using these gifts. For example, ‘a series of objects shall be connected together by weaving them into a short story or song, having some bearing on the child’s own life. In this way the cubes and bricks are transformed—they are no longer dead blocks of wood, but become living expressions of thought’.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel*, 114-17.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Henry Morley, ‘Infant Gardens’, *Household Words*, 21 July 1855, 578.

⁴⁸ The Preface to Margaret E. Nuth, *Kindergarten Gift Plays* (London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1900), iii.

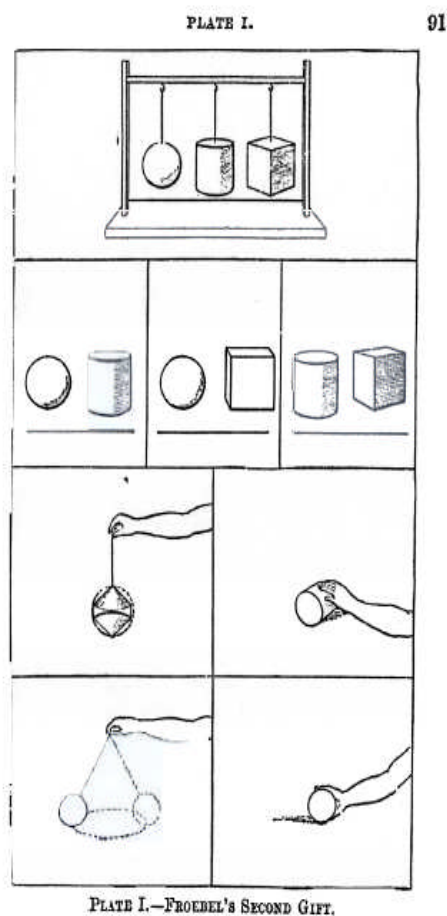


Figure 3.2 'Froebel's Second Gift' in Jessie White, *The Educational Ideas of Froebel* (London: University Tutorial Press, 1907), 91; Froebel Archive Digital Collection, University of Roehampton

In 1840 Froebel coined the term 'kindergarten', literally meaning 'children's garden', to further advocate his commitment to natural and experiential education. The superintendents for children were called the 'gardeners', and he viewed the kindergarten as an enclosure in which young human plants are nurtured.⁴⁹ The world's first kindergarten was opened in Blankenberg on 28th June in the same year. The teaching scheme was designed in the belief that children's chief employment should

⁴⁹ 'Froebel and the Kindergarten', 13-14; a pamphlet (year unknown) in one volume as part of the Froebel Archive Collection held at 372.01 FRO/PAM in Roehampton University Library. Froebel Archive Digital Collection at University of Roehampton <<http://studentzone.roehampton.ac.uk/library/digital-collection/froebel-archive/pamphlets-froebel-principles/Froebel%20&%20Kindergarten.pdf>> [accessed 27 May 2014].

be play. The educational objects—the ‘gifts’ Froebel invented for children to play with—as he himself described, were designed to give children activities in harmony with their whole nature, to strengthen their bodies, to exercise their senses, to engage their awakening mind, and through their senses to bring them close to nature and their fellow-creatures. In the children’s garden, children should grow like plants ‘following their own natures’ and be ‘harmonized with the totality of Nature’. In sum, the objective of his educational methods was to ‘give the child a sense of a great systematic unity underlying the world’.⁵⁰

Froebel then travelled with his co-founders in various regions in Germany to promote the Kindergarten Movement. He did not live to see how the movement migrated from Germany to other parts of Western society and how it attracted liberal thinkers, especially women, who found a way of self-expression through their training as kindergarten teachers.⁵¹ The first kindergarten in England was established in Hampstead, London in 1854. Henry Morley was one of the English pioneers keen on introducing Froebel’s system to this country. He proclaimed in *Household Words* in 1854 that

Wise and good people have been endeavouring of late to obtain in this country a hearing for the views of this good teacher, and a trial for his system. Only fourteen years have elapsed since the first Infant Garden was established, and already infant gardens have been introduced into most of the larger towns of Germany. Let us now welcome them with all our hearts to England.⁵²

During this time, educational toys used in kindergartens were also brought to England. Some of them were once on display in the Education Collection at the South Kensington Museum (later Victoria & Albert Museum). According to the museum’s

⁵⁰ Anthony Burton, *Children’s Pleasures: Books, Toys, and Games from the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood* (London: V&A Publications, 1996), 91.

⁵¹ Marina Warner, ‘Out of an Old Toy Chest’, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 43.2 (2009), 8.

⁵² Morley, 578.

guidebook published in 1857, there were ‘specimens of instructive toys, among which the kinder-garten may be especially mentioned’ [Fig. 3.3].⁵³

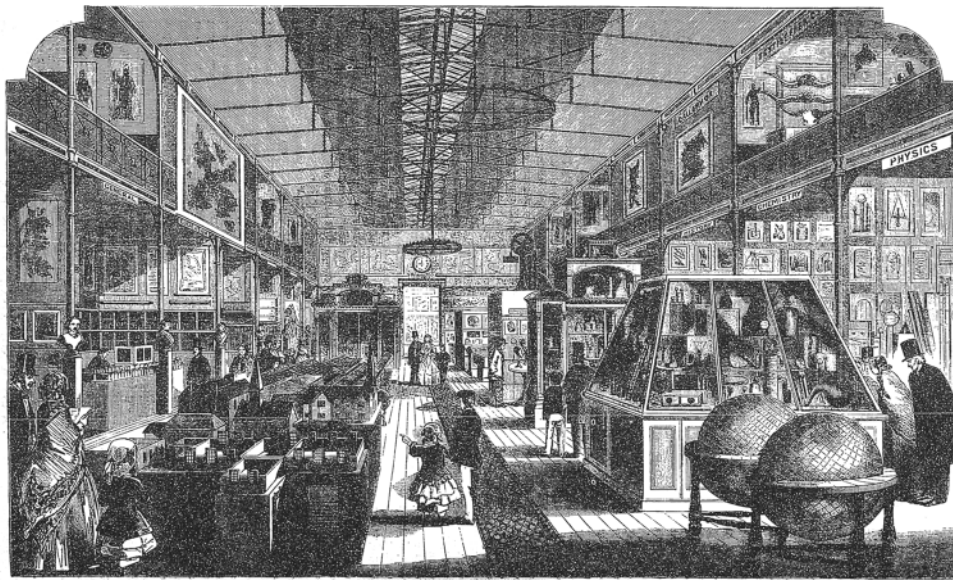


Figure 3.3 The Educational Collections in the South Kensington Museum,
The Leisure Hour, 14 April 1859, 233

The upright case contained examples of object lessons used in kindergartens and other instructive toys.

The spread and growth of kindergartens in England was slow in the first few decades, yet by 1890 there were at least two hundred kindergartens and the number was rapidly increasing.⁵⁴ By the turn of the century, Froebel’s ideas of kindergarten training were frequently adopted and discussed in pedagogical writings in Britain and America. In 1883, Ward and Lock published *The Child’s Instructor; or, Learning through Toys* as a response to the idea of learning through playing. The publisher emphasised in their advertisement that the book served as suitable material for parents and teachers to carry out methods of ‘toy teaching’ and ‘play learning’ in ‘the new

⁵³ Anthony Burton, ‘Designing History and the History of Toys: Defining a Discipline of the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood’, *Journal of Design History*, 10.1 (1997), 6; see also James Macauley, ‘The South Kensington Museum’, *The Leisure Hour*, 14 April 1859, 233–34.

⁵⁴ ‘Preface’ to *Froebel’s Letters on the Kindergarten*, ed. by Emilie Michaelis and H. Keatley Moore (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), viii.

celebrated Kindergarten System'.⁵⁵ The public discourse of the Kindergarten Movement inspired other works such as *The Art of Teaching* (1898), *Education by Plays and Games* (1907), *Children's Play and Its Place in Education* (1913), *Child Training* (1922), as well as *Child Life* (1891-1939), a journal published by the Froebel Society highlighting Froebel's pedagogy and philosophy.⁵⁶ John Dewey, the renowned American education reformer, also wrote for the journal about educational activities for children and argued that 'it is through production and creative use that valuable knowledge is secured and clinched'.⁵⁷ Another article by E. R. Murray that appeared in the same journal considers a variety of games. Murray proposed that he 'must pass on to the questions of what good the children can gain from such games as we can give them in school. First and foremost [...] comes social training; and, as a part of that, the cultivation of originality and freedom of expression'.⁵⁸ In addition to the promotion of Froebel's pedagogies through publications, there was a Kindergarten College and Practising School in London established by the British and Foreign School Society, providing two-year training (including practice in teaching and the use of the toys and games) for students over sixteen years of age to become kindergarten teachers. The occupation of kindergarten teacher was considered decent employment for young women at that time.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ See the advertisement of *The Child's Instructor; or, Learning through Toys: A Complete Course of Elementary Instruction by Means of Toys, Pictures, and Stories* published by Ward, Lock & Co.'s in *The Athenaeum*, 3 November 1883, 579.

⁵⁶ David Salmon, *The Art of Teaching* (London: Longman, 1898); George Ellsworth Johnson, *Education by Plays and Games* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1907); Walter de Burley Wood, *Children's Play and Its Place in Education* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1913); Angelo Patri, *Child Training* (New York & London: D. Appleton & Co., 1922). All issues of *Child Life*, except some of 1917 and 1918, are available online at the Froebel Archive Digital Collection at University of Roehampton <<http://studentzone.roehampton.ac.uk/library/digital-collection/froebel-archive/child-life-journals/index.html>> [accessed 16 July 2014].

⁵⁷ John Dewey, 'Froebel's Educational Principles', *Child Life*, 15 January 1901, 5.

⁵⁸ E. R. Murray, 'On Kindergarten Games', *Child Life*, 15 July 1901, 175.

⁵⁹ Arthur Talbot Vanderbilt, *What to Do with our Girls* (London: Houlston & Sons, 1884), 151.

However, the contemporary reception of Froebel's theory shows that his educational methods were not accepted by the public unconditionally. Two novels for children, *The Young Pretenders* (1895) and *A Romance of the Nursery, etc.* (1902), both include references to the effects of kindergarten theory in English families and provide an interesting insight into the reception of kindergarten education.⁶⁰ The author of *A Romance of the Nursery* offered a distinct perspective to look at Froebel's pedagogies as her heroine declares that even though their mother is an enthusiastic supporter of Froebel and 'ventilates her experience, her difficulties, and more frequently her "views" as to the proper bringing up of children',

kindergarten pursuits played but a very secondary part in our education. We were taught to read and to know our multiplication-tables, whether we found the process pleasing or not, but if, as was sometimes the case, we found the kindergarten handi-crafts profoundly distasteful, they were not insisted upon.⁶¹

When the children in the novel are forced by their governess to thread coloured strips of paper as a kindergarten occupation, their mother announces, 'It's certainly not pretty [...] nor is it of any earthly use. Paul needn't make any more; he may do sums instead'.⁶² No matter how desperately education reformers wished to see an end of rote learning, it still took a crucial place in many people's childhood experiences well into the late nineteenth century. And despite the fact that the mother in the novel is willing to experiment with Froebelian pedagogies, her reaction reveals that in some cases kindergarten activities were systematised into fixed and formal training. David Salmon reminded us in *The Art of Teaching* that 'without the right spirit the kindergarten may be a prison, the gifts unwelcome, the occupations unprofitable, and the games

⁶⁰ Edith Henrietta Fowler, *The Young Pretenders* (London: Longman, 1895); Lizzie Allen Harker, *A Romance of the Nursery, etc.* (London: John Lane, 1902).

⁶¹ Harker, 223.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 224.

irksome'.⁶³ Or, as Murray pronounced more seriously: 'it is easy to err in the direction of the Kindergarten manuals'.⁶⁴

Similarly, Charlotte Yonge had expressed in a letter her disapproval of kindergarten children playing with artificial rather than real flowers. After reading the translation of a book by Baroness Bulow on Froebel's theories on pre-school education, Yonge wrote:

I don't know whether it was my fault or the book's—I stuck in what seemed to me solemn nonsense especially when I found that das Kind was to be trained to water sham flowers with sham water, to learn to take interest in watering real ones with real water an art in which I never saw a child who did not take quite sufficient interest untrained!⁶⁵

In like manner, Kate Douglas Wiggin, the American author of the classic children's novel, *Rebecca of Sunny Brook Farm* (1903), herself also a kindergarten teacher, criticised the invention of the 'altruistic doll'. The automaton was designed so that the child who played with it (after pressing a button on it) was told to 'Give brother *big* piece [of candy]; give me little piece!'.⁶⁶ Toys of such kind were manufactured for training in altruism as well as other moral lessons and were welcomed by some devout child-rearing professionals. Gillian Brown suggests that even though these educationalists did promote play as a means of moral instruction, the form and content of the directed play 'stripped it of its fun, imagination, spontaneity, and flexibility'.⁶⁷ It is particularly true that with the development of the toy industry—as toys evolved to be more representational—equipment-based games in the late nineteenth century to

⁶³ Salmon, 259.

⁶⁴ Murray, 175.

⁶⁵ Charlotte Yonge to the Reverend Richard St. John Tyrwhitt, May 4th [1881?], *The Letters of Charlotte Mary Yonge (1823-1901)* <<http://www.yongeletters.com/wordpress/2724/to-the-reverend-richard-st-john-tyrwhitt-2>> [accessed 16 July 2014].

⁶⁶ Kate Douglas Wiggin, *Children's Rights: A Book of Nursery Logic* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), 61; quoted in Gillian Brown, 'Child's Play', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 11.3 (1999), 92.

⁶⁷ Brown, 'Child's Play', 92.

some extent became more formulaic or even ritualistic, which might deprive children's play of imagination and creativity.⁶⁸

The notion of the imagination which characterised the market of childhood commodities and shaped the nature of children's literature, as Holt points out, did not have a consensus in the nineteenth century. For example, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, and Sarah Trimmer, among authors of moral, religious and rational stories for children, were particularly against the idea of providing children with fairy tales. Attitudes towards imagination and the suitability of fairy tales as children's reading materials changed over time. As Holt observes, at some point child psychologists and authors of children's books appeared to have adopted the notion that 'social and imaginative skills are a more important indicator of functional normality, and a more important concern for children's literature than practical and creative manual skills'.⁶⁹ In 1853, Charles Dickens insisted on the importance of childhood fancy as expressed in fairy tales, suggesting that a nation's strength depended on it. Dickens asserted that

In a utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that the Fairy tales should be respected [...] every one who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.⁷⁰

The children's book illustrator Walter Crane made a similar claim in the Cantor Lecture in 1889 that in a 'sober and matter-of-fact age,' children's books 'afford perhaps the only outlet for unrestricted flights of fancy'.⁷¹ Indeed Victorian intellectuals constantly debated on the (dis)advantages of the imagination and

⁶⁸ Thomas E. Jordan, *Victorian Childhood: Themes and Variations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 196.

⁶⁹ Holt, 53.

⁷⁰ Charles Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies', *Household Words*, 1 October 1853, 97.

⁷¹ Walter Crane, *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), 158.

considered childhood imagination, as Holt describes, ‘a double-edged sword’.⁷² Charlotte Yonge, for instance, suggested that fairy tales should only be regarded as ‘treats’, and that parents and educators should be careful selecting what tales to give children, and in deciding how many tales children can read.⁷³ Whereas some attacked books and activities fostering in children the false pleasures of the imagination and held a rather rational and moralistic view of children’s reading and education, still others privileged imaginative play that stemmed from the reading of fairy tales and considered the world of fantasy as a means of protection, quarantining children from premature knowledge of the reality of contemporary society.⁷⁴

The games of imagination and make-believe played by children often seemed separate from activities involving work, such as handicraft, domestic chores, and manual labour. However, the myth of ‘all play and no work’ also remained contentious. It is worth noting that the Victorian work ethic and the necessity of leisure time involving imaginative activities were depicted with equal visibility in juvenile periodicals and children’s books. These ideas were affirmed by educators in the early twentieth century. For example, George Ellsworth Johnson held that ‘All play involves work’ and the main objective of education is ‘to develop a habit of joyousness in work’.⁷⁵ Walter Wood coined the phrase ‘the play spirit’ to suggest that a child possessing this quality, which develops the child’s patience, perseverance, concentration and skill, promises to become a successful worker: ‘If he is in the habit of exercising these qualities in play he should have them at his command in later life, so that the child who plays well should be able to work well’.⁷⁶ Children’s play

⁷² Holt, 46-47.

⁷³ Charlotte M. Yonge, *What Books to Lend and What to Give* (London: National Society’s Depository, 1887), 75.

⁷⁴ ‘Juvenile Literature’, *The British Quarterly Review*, January 1868, 139.

⁷⁵ Johnson, 18.

⁷⁶ Wood, 132.

therefore was not merely about spontaneity and fun—at the same time it was associated with some highly acclaimed qualities such as patience, diligence, and resolution crucial to the child's future success.⁷⁷

Notwithstanding the debates and concerns about the pros and cons of regulated play and imaginative play, by the end of the nineteenth century, play took an integral part in early childhood education and pleasurable activities were commonly regarded as a useful method of instruction. Inasmuch as play was considered central to a child's education, retaining the play spirit while at work was also essential.⁷⁸ Children's authors of the period also supported the idea of treating work as a kind of game and created images of joyous 'little workers'—chubby children busy helping with household chores and enjoying their assigned tasks [Fig. 3.4].⁷⁹ The happy little workers are almost like the ones praised by Marry Poppins, the titular character in the film adaption of P. L. Travers's original story; as Mary Poppins sings: 'In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun. You find the fun and snap, the job's a game. And every task you undertake becomes a piece of cake'.⁸⁰ In this regard, the operative distinctions between play and work, amusement and instruction, leisure and labour were blurred. And all of these factors motivated contemporary authors and educators to produce new toys and reading materials for children in which all the opposing elements could be incorporated and reconciled.

⁷⁷ James Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood, 1800-1914* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 80.

⁷⁸ Wood, 132.

⁷⁹ See, for example, *Little Workers* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1884), in which little girls are playing 'little cook', 'little nurse', 'little dress-maker', and 'little tablemaid', etc.

⁸⁰ Lyrics of 'A Spoonful Of Sugar', a song from Walt Disney's 1964 film and the musical adaptations of P. L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* (1934). The song was composed by Robert B. Sherman and Richard M. Sherman.



Figure 3.4 Frontispiece of *Little Workers* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1884), i; Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, University of Florida's Digital Collections

CHAPTER FOUR. INTERACTING WITH BOOKS AS

TOYS

In the late nineteenth century, there was an explosion of ‘how-to’ articles that appeared regularly in children’s magazines. They appealed to readers with an emphasis on reciprocity and interactivity, a conventional feature of the genre of interactive narratives. These how-to articles, in line with other advice manuals and toy making guides of the period, also supported new learning approaches introduced by Friedrich Froebel and other educators that stressed creativity and interactive activities. Jacqueline Reid-Walsh has reviewed the idea of interactivity in her study of historical movable books, such as paper doll books and toy theatre and modern interactive narrative media. She points out that the definition of interactivity has shifted over time and has multiple meanings. In the eighteenth century, the term ‘interactive’ was used to describe theatrical entertainment that occurred between two acts. By the early Victorian period, it also involved the idea of reciprocity and influence between forces, whereas it is more widely used now to refer to a mode of engagement between men and machines.¹ In reception theory, interactivity also refers to the cognitive interaction of book readers, theatre and film audience ‘with a text by filling in the gaps’.² In other words, the language and design of these interactive narratives not only create a space for suggested activity but also promise a reciprocal, interactive reading experience. These interactive narratives went beyond

¹ Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, ‘Harlequin Meets *The Sims*: A History of Interactive Narrative Media for Children and Youth from Early Flap Books to Contemporary Multimedia’, in *International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*, ed. by Sonia Livingstone and Kirsten Drotner (London: Sage, 2008), 73.

² Margaret Morse, ‘The Poetics of Interactivity’, in *Woman, Art, and Technology*, ed. by Judy Malloy (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 2003), 18.

solitary reading and encouraged readers' active participation to finish a given task and to interact with the book as a physical object.

Victorian children's magazines and advice manuals for the young often gave children instructions to make toys of their own, which fostered this kind of interactive reading. Activities involving interaction with the book as a material object shaped the ways in which children played, and spent their free time. Major monthly magazines such as *The Girl's Own Paper* (1880-1956) and *Little Folks* (1871-1933) frequently included enticing titles that encouraged readers to engage in the making of arts and crafts. 'Some New Year and Birthday Gifts and How to Make Them', 'Pretty Work for Little Fingers: How to Make a Doll's Carpet', 'How to Build a Doll's House', 'How We Furnished Our Dolls' House', and 'My Doll's Drawing-Room, And How I Furnished It', are all examples drawn from the table of contents of these magazines between the 1870s and the 1890s.³ Articles like these and competitions encouraging children to make gifts, as well as furniture and other objects for dolls' houses, all endeavoured to make children use their leisure hours profitably, to learn useful activities while playing. In this way children's magazines influenced the day-to-day lives and activities of nineteenth-century middle-class families. The idea that leisure and work should be combined in activities for children was supported by Froebel. Family life could be educational, he claimed. He

³ The title of *Girl's Own Paper* changed several times over its life span. In 1908, it was changed into *Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine*. It was called *Woman's Magazine and Girl's Own Paper* between 1928 and 1930. In 1931, it became known as *The Girl's Own Paper and Heiress*, and then simply as *Heiress* for a short period of time in 1950. Beginning from June 1950 till the end of its publication in 1956, it bore the title, *Heiress, the Magazine for the Older Girl*. The initial publication frequency of *Girl's Own* was weekly; it subsequently became monthly as a response to readers' requests for a larger magazine with more illustrations. Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), 309; 72. Source of the titles: 'Some New Year and Birthday Gifts and How to Make Them', *Little Folks*, January 1878, 49-51; E. C., 'Pretty Work for Little Fingers: How to Make a Doll's Carpet', *Little Folks*, April 1879, 282; T. C. H., 'How to Build a Doll's House', *Little Folks*, July 1879, 30-32; 'How We Furnished Our Dolls' House', *Little Folks*, October 1887, 211-12; 'My Doll's Drawing-Room, And How I Furnished It', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 21 April 1894, 451-53.

advocated that children should have ‘exercises in representation of outward forms, by means of paper, cardboard, wood-working, modelling, etc.’ and should be provided with materials ‘for drawing’, ‘for embroidering’, ‘for cutting paper and combining the pieces’ and ‘for interlacing’.⁴ While the titles of these magazine articles constantly created a close affinity between leisure and labour, it is worth enquiring to what extent leisure activity might be used as an editing and marketing strategy inviting readers’ participation.

Mrs. Isabella Beeton, the guru of household management in the Victorian period, not only provided advice on cooking but also gave instruction on furnishing dolls’ houses:

Endless as is the variety of amusements to be found for the little ones, nothing gives so much real and lasting satisfaction as a doll’s house, and this, like many other things, can be made at home if there happen to be a good-natured big brother who will condescend to interest himself in the work. There are always packing-cases about, stored away in cellar or attic, one of which could be spared for the purpose; this then, with a few deal boards, some two-inch screws, a pair of hinges, some nails and smaller screws, a hasp for the door, glue-pot, and last, but not least, the willing brother or uncle with his box of carpenter’s tools, can be quickly converted into a charming doll’s-house.⁵

⁴ Number six of the list of ten educational methods created by Friedrich Froebel linking the teaching of the school and that in the home. The list is complemented by twenty recommended play items which include such materials. See David Salmon, *The Art of Teaching* (London: Longmans, 1898), 251-53.

⁵ *Beeton’s Book of Needlework* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1875), 2. The book was published after Mrs. Beeton’s death and many of its contents and illustrations were excerpts or reprints from the book of the same title published in 1870, authored by Samuel Orchard Beeton, Beeton’s husband. It is difficult to identify whether it was a posthumous collection of Mrs. Beeton’s original writing (or compilation), a book entirely of Mr. Beeton’s own hand, or co-authored by husband and wife, as Mr. Beeton wrote in the preface of the 1870 edition: ‘The idea of combining a series of minute and exact instructions in fancy needlework with useful patterns was conceived some years ago by one whose life was devoted to the inculcation of the practical duties of woman’s life, and to assisting her sex in their daily work of HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT and REFINEMENT’. Another possibility is that this might be a pirate edition borrowing the famous name, as the Beetons had shared a professional partnership in launching a series of popular Beeton titles including dictionaries and advice books, not to mention that the Victorian publishing industry was keen on creating fictional authors. See Margaret Beetham, ‘Beeton, Samuel Orchard (1831-1877)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45481>> [accessed 18 August 2014]. Margaret Beetham also notes elsewhere that Mrs. Beeton became a trademark, a brand name and the idea that a real person existed and continued to write was still propagated after her death. Margaret Beetham, ‘Good Taste and Sweet Ordering: Dining with Mrs. Beeton’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36.2 (2008), 395.

Beeton was not alone in using such an excitable tone. Many nineteenth-century writers and publishers—especially those who produced children’s books—knew how to catch their readers’ attention. Such texts were deliberately written in an intriguing and intelligible language, usually full of inviting illustrations of the final products, so that readers were able to picture what their playthings might look like. *The Girl’s Delight* (1861), for example, attempted to attract its readers with an intimate and understanding voice engaging them to make handicrafts:

My dear Little Girl,

You have a Doll, I dare say; and I am inclined to think, you would also like to have a Doll’s House. Well, I have done my best to provide you with this; but it will require some care on your part to put the House together, and make up the several articles of furniture; for I am sure you would wish that every thing should look well, and will be creditable to your own taste and ingenuity. A very little trouble, if you carefully follow the directions given, will enable you to accomplish both.

[...]

You will require neither gum nor paste, and if you exercise but a moderate share of care, you will be possessed of as handsome a House and as well furnished as you can possibly desire.⁶

The editor’s emphasis on careful execution and call for attention to detail shows that the target readers were expected to be industrious and attentive. Even though the readers who could afford to possess these books were likely to come from well-to-do families who did not have to—or even have the chance to—worry about how to use screws and hinges properly, the manner in which the readers were treated conveys an explicit message that they were not expected to be spoilt by mass-manufactured commercial toys.

Like the plethora of ‘how-to’ articles in children’s magazines, advice manuals for young readers were equally keen on instructing children how to make toys of

⁶ *The Girl’s Delight: Showing How a Doll’s-House May be Made and Furnished out a Sheet of Cardboard* (London: Dean & Son, 1861), n. pag.

their own. Young readers were told to develop their own taste, ingenuity and industry by making their own toys. Moreover, these periodicals and advice manuals guaranteed the intended audience that they would be able ‘to think and do a little for themselves’—a goal set forth by the editors of *Little Folks* since they first began the mission of amusing and educating their young readers.⁷ Although there might not be a ‘willing brother or uncle’ in every household, there was at least an interested young reader who took up the idea of making his or her own toys manually and economically. Certainly the ideology of being ‘good, gentle, and industrious’ was clearly promoted in *Little Folks*, as Simon Nowell-Smith observes. He also indicates that the magazine owed much of its success to an editorial policy that was less didactic and less ‘goody-goody’ than that of rival publications, such as those by religious organisations like the Sunday School Union, the S. P. C. K. (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) and the R. T. S. (Religious Tract Society). Its strategy of including reader-contributed stories, puzzles, games, and ‘things to make with hammer-and-nails or needle-and-thread, competitions of all kinds’ not only gave more colour to its pages but also stimulated excitement and participation from its readers.⁸

Looking at advice literature together with reader-centred competitions requiring young readers’ participation, I want to further suggest that the allure of this particular genre, inspiring readers to make a product from their imagination and labour, ties in with Gaston Bachelard’s notion of ‘cosmic childhood’. Bachelard has defined ‘the being of cosmic childhood’ as a state of mind that ‘binds the real with the imaginary’, a mode of playing with the images of reality in the imagination. He suggests that ‘all

⁷ ‘Preface’ to the first issue of *Little Folks*, *Little Folks*, January 1871, n. pag.

⁸ Simon Nowell-Smith, *The House of Cassell 1846-1958* (London: Cassell, 1958), 128-29.

these images of its cosmic solitude react in depth in the being of the child'.⁹ Literature motivating reader participation and encouraging handiwork often inspired children by appealing to their ability to combine the real and the imaginary, and to 'relive' reality or to create different realities in their imagination. As Beverly Gordon also notes in her study of paper dolls' houses made by girls in their scrapbook albums, 'the pages contain a more abstract kind of layering whereby diverse realities and references are freely intermingled'.¹⁰ Hence, through the process of cutting and rearranging, children were able to visualise and reincarnate imaginary domestic interiors into a tangible form and marry imagination with reality. The handicrafts the reader made as her playthings and the interactive activity initiated by the reader's reading experience established a connection between the object and its creator, who was, at the same time, the reader and the player. Meanwhile, such connection was intensified through the tangibility of things created by the child's own hands. Roland Barthes speaks in a somewhat nostalgic tone about the warmth of the touch of wooden bricks, with which children could create various forms. He dislikes the mass-produced modern toys made of plastic materials and argues that children are now owners and users of these ready-made toys but never the 'creators'.¹¹ Yet with the wood 'which does not sever the child from close contact with the tree, the table, the floor' and wears out over time—'it can [...] live with the child, alter little by little the relations between the object and the hand'.¹² Surely when a child reader handled a hand-made toy, the tactile imagination reawakened personal memories of

⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 108.

¹⁰ Beverly Gordon, 'Scrapbook Houses for Paper Dolls: Creative Expression, Aesthetic Elaboration, and Bonding in the Female World', in *The Scrapbook in American Life*, ed. by Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 121.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, 'Toys', in *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Cape, 1972), 54.

¹² Ibid.

the process of making it from scratch and of the interactive narratives that triggered the completion of the work of art.

The fun of making one's own toys was also addressed by editors of children's magazines when they carried out toy-making competitions. Catherine Van Horn points out that in many of these competitions, 'the editors wrote in the first person as they praised children's artwork from the last competition and established the rules for the next one'.¹³ One of the judges (the editor himself) cheered the readers who had entered the *Little Folks* Special Prize Competitions in 1888:

We can only say to all our young workers, 'Well done—for if you have not all won prizes, you have all given good gifts where they will be valued.' And remember that for those who have not won anything in 1888 there is a good time coming in 1889. The failure one year has given good practice for the next, and with care and neatness it is easy for any boy or girl to win a prize.¹⁴

As an interesting side note, boys were criticised for not performing as well as girls did in these competitions. Hence the conclusion proclaimed: 'Let them prove to us that they are as clever as the girls—if they can. "Of course we can!" say the boys. All right then; let us see what you can do in the 1889 Competitions'.¹⁵

In a study of the relationship between child readers and the publishing industry, Diana Dixon also observes that 'A similar friendly tone crept into correspondence columns, and readers were treated much more sympathetically than in the early years.

¹³ Catherine Van Horn, 'Turning Child Readers into Consumers: Children's Magazines and Advertising, 1900-1920', in *Defining Print Culture for Youth: The Cultural Work of Children's Literature*, ed. by Anne Lundin and Wayne Wiegand (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2003), 124. Accounts of appraisals of prize competitions include: 'The Editor's Pocket Book', *Little Folks*, January 1879, 52; Vale, 'A Peep at the Dolls', *Little Folks*, February 1879, 174-76; 'The *Little Folks* Workers of 1888', *Little Folks*, February 1889, 101-03; 'How Our 1889 Special Prizes Were Won', *Little Folks*, February 1890, 34-35.

¹⁴ 'The *Little Folks* Workers of 1888', 103.

¹⁵ Ibid. Note that although many of these competitions focused on domestic crafts such as needlework and doll making, they were not essentially gender-specific and boy readers also actively took part in them. In categories which girls might have more interests and advantages, sometimes the prize winners were boys. In 1879, two boys shared the second prize in *Little Folks*' dolls' house making competition. According to the judges' appraisal, they 'certainly deserve much credit' as for their wood-work 'being extremely firm and strong'. Vale, 175.

The changing attitudes of editors toward their readers undoubtedly reflect the change in society's view of children in this period'.¹⁶ On the one hand, the use of the first person suggests that readers were no longer kept at a distance. They might have 'viewed the magazines on the personal level' and the personal relationship between readers and editors was thus reaffirmed—a crucial strategy in the establishment of readers' loyalty to the magazines.¹⁷ These magazines addressed their readers quite intimately as a circle of 'friends' and in so doing constructed a strong shared identity for its readership. On the other hand, as the fun of making one's own toys was appreciated by readers on a personal level, the activities of toy-making also became something about identification, that is, the development of self-identity and the personalising of an object. While children were making their own toys, they were in fact going through the process of creating narratives involving themselves and the works they made. As Marina Warner indicates in her analysis of children's object-oriented play,

a child beams her projective imagination upon inert material things and animates them with fantasy, infusing objects with meaning. She thus renders the world of things intelligible, transforming them with her imagination and committing them to mind in this metamorphosed form.¹⁸

Indeed the status of the book as a plaything, a material object the child reader could play with, enabled her to create her own narratives and to articulate these stories with a physical product that she was able to show and tell.

¹⁶ Diana Dixon, 'Children and the Press, 1866-1914', in *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. by Michael Harris and Alan Lee (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986), 147.

¹⁷ Van Horn, 125.

¹⁸ Marina Warner, 'Out of an Old Toy Chest', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 43.2 (2009), 9.

Making one's own toys

The nineteenth century saw the introduction of mass-manufactured commercial toys. However, as mass-produced factory toys replaced home-made ones, there were anxieties about the over-consumption of 'useless' toys and a questioning of this new excess.¹⁹ Despite the growth of a child-centred market, parents were aware of the risks of spoiling their children and were anxious to impart moral values, and so they were uncomfortable when their children asked for what was considered frivolous. Children needed to learn values such as thrift and charity, and to understand the danger of excessive spending. Charlotte Yonge vividly remembered that her parents refused to buy her a doll and a set of doll's service, worrying that her consumption was unreasonable:

The two ungratified wishes of those days were for a large wax doll, and a china doll's service. I was seriously told the cost, and that it was not right to spend so much money on a toy when so many were in need of food and clothes.²⁰

Teresa Michals observes that as early as in 1776, Adam Smith worried that consumption of the frivolous and useless would be privileged over the expenditure on the common good.²¹ In response to such concerns, writers and educators started to emphasise the benefits and fun of making something useful in one's leisure time, of creating a perfect balance between work and leisure, as an antidote to unwelcomed idleness and naughtiness, and a means of resisting the over-consumption of luxury goods. Or, as a Froebelian educator argued in the early twentieth century, having children learn useful manual skills would help 'turn the age of the market into that of

¹⁹ Ginger Suzanne Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2009), 95-96.

²⁰ Quoted in *Records of Girlhood: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women's Childhoods*, ed. by Valerie Sanders (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2000), 201.

²¹ Teresa Michals, 'Experiments before Breakfast: Toys, Education and Middle-Class Childhood', in *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 34.

the workshop'.²² While work was prescribed by Victorian society as a spiritual therapy for unhappy and idle minds, contemporary writers of children's literature also echoed this work ethic by presenting their little heroes and heroines diligently at work. Even when the fictional characters in children's novels are allowed to enjoy the pleasure of being children, they are constantly reminded of the significance of work, the virtues of labour, and the utilitarian aspects of their activities.

Ebenezer Landells, and his daughter Alice Landells, authors of a series of toy-making manuals, addressed such links between work and leisure in their preface to *The Girl's Own Toy-maker, and Book of Recreation* (1860):

Nothing is more becoming than to see a home neatly and tastefully embellished by the handiwork of its inmates: while the formation of habits of industry and usefulness are not only satisfactory in enabling young ladies to decorate their own homes by employing their leisure hours profitably, but also in furnishing the means of making suitable presents for their friends, or of having the pleasing gratification of adding by their skill to the funds of some charitable or benevolent institution.²³

Children's books and magazines often promoted the idea that children could learn charity and domestic virtues through making toys by hand. For example, in the annual competition of children's handicrafts held by *Little Folks* in 1888, all entries would later be given as Christmas presents to 'poor little invalid children to play with'. A letter from a reader feelingly declared, 'I am not very sure that I shall get the prize; I am glad that some little girl in the hospital will get my dollie to play with'.²⁴ The value of giving and being useful to others was also instilled in the young minds of kindergarten children, as Alice Wood claimed in a later account:

little children of four and five take keen delight in making for themselves dolls' houses out of an old box, in painting and papering, making carpets and furniture.

²² Alice Wood, 'On the Mental and Moral Value of Hand-Work', *Child Life*, 15 April 1902, 69.

²³ Ebenezer Landells and Alice Landells, *The Girl's Own Toy-maker, and Book of Recreation* (London: Griffiths, 1860), vi.

²⁴ 'The Little Folks Workers of 1888', 103.

But we may surely add that children should make things for the use of others, which will give them still more delight and an added sense of power and usefulness.²⁵

The Landells' writing, like other works that highlighted the value of handmade toys, reflects the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the relationship between work and leisure and constitutes an early response to the increasing awareness of the advantages self-made toys could afford, such as the development of manual dexterity and aesthetic tastes, the acquisition of practical technical knowledge and a training in altruism. All such characteristics promoted by the writing of the Landells paved the way for later imitators in the genre of instructive guides for children. As the Landells' book title suggests, girls were encouraged to provide their own entertainment and keep themselves busy; that is, to utilise their leisure hours and produce something beneficial for themselves and for others.

The practice of making one's own toys was not uncommon in girls' daily life in the late nineteenth century. When girls today play with computer games such as *The Sims* or dress up the princesses on Disney's website, they are entertaining themselves by controlling virtual characters in cyberspace with their fingers. As they do this they play their favourite roles and gain power by defining and modelling the order of the world of virtual reality in a way they cannot achieve in the real world.²⁶ Their great-great-grandmothers, on the other hand, might have found equal pleasure in toys made by their own hands. Girls in the nineteenth century often created their own playthings and enjoyed playing with their handmade toys. The pleasure was intensified when other family members also took part in making and playing. The nineteenth-century

²⁵ Wood, 69.

²⁶ In a conversation with Celia Pearce from *Games Studies*, a journal of computer game research, Will Wright, the designer of *The Sims* said that his initial aspiration was for 'a doll house come to life'. But as people start playing it and engaging it with storytelling, eventually the metaphor becomes more apparent as that of 'a director on a set'. Celia Pearce, 'Sims, BattleBots, Cellular Automata God and Go: A Conversation with Will Wright', *Game Studies*, July 2002 <<http://gamestudies.org/0102/pearce/>> [accessed 17 July 2014].

novelist Mary Cholmondeley recalled that her parents used to produce and perform toy theatre for the children: ‘He [her father] made a toy theatre, painted the scenery, and acted five-act plays with dolls. Mother wrote the plays and he “produced” them’.²⁷ Mary Whitley, the editor of a nineteenth-century advice manual for girls, suggested that the mother could help make miniature things for her daughter’s dolls’ house as the little girl’s ‘rewards and encouragements for doing the duty of this toy house’.²⁸ Similarly, Lady Barker remembered that she had ‘a dear good aunt’ who made carpets and curtains for her dolls’ house.²⁹

Girls made toys with the assistance of their family members, particularly when the task demanded skill and a great deal of work, as in the case of making dolls’ houses. *The Girl’s Realm* advised its readers in its correspondence column in an 1899 issue that ‘The assistance of the elder sisters and brothers will have to be called into requisition, as some of the work will be too hard to be accomplished by the tiny hands of the little ones’.³⁰ Harry Brooker (1848-1940) portrayed such a condescending big brother in ‘Making a Doll’s House’ (1897), in which one of his older sons is helping his little sister to make a dolls’ house [Fig. 4.1].

²⁷ Mary Cholmondeley, *Under One Roof: A Family Record* (London: John Murray, 1918), 27.

²⁸ Mary Whitley, ed., *Every Girl’s Book of Sport, Occupation, and Pastime* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1897), 470.

²⁹ Lady Barker [Mary Anne Barker], ‘About Toys and Games’, *Good Words for the Young*, 1 January 1871, 140.

³⁰ ‘Flora’, ‘The Children’s Own Corner’, *The Girl’s Realm*, January 1899, 210.



Figure 4.1 'Making a Doll's House' by Harry Brooker (1897), oil on canvas

These dolls' houses made by and for girls were not only a type of amusement. As the mother, brother, or aunt who took part in the creation of the dolls' house dedicated their time and affection, the house became a memorial of a loving relationship and a marker of childhood experience. Moreover, the process of making was also an emotional process, a family ritual involving a girl's rite of passage. In 1896, Mary Marks, author of juvenile fiction, recollected vividly how her whole family were involved in her dolls' house project after they saw a certain dolls' house exhibited, as her mother said:

'The boys shall make a dolls' house like the one Dr. Julius made for the hospital. I'll pay for the wood, and I'll help with the dolls and the furniture.' Father thought it would be a good thing, and would keep the boys out of mischief, so the wood was ordered, and the boys began upon it, and Reg, who is awfully quick at whatever he does, had knocked it together in no time, and we thought it was finished. But when father came home, and went into the workshop to look at it, he said, 'Oh, this won't do! It's all wrong—not a bit like a real house! I've a good mind to do it myself.'

The fact is, father loves carpentering, and was very glad of an excuse. And Reg wasn't sorry, for a friend had turned up, and he wanted to go out with him; and as for James, he would rather be drawing, though he does now and then make a model of something. And they had to go back to school; so when father said he would make the dolls' house, mamma was very glad.³¹

As Marks concluded that her mother was happy with her father's contribution to this project, the dolls' house play went beyond a girl's pastime and became a common form of entertainment for the entire family. Parents or older siblings making dolls' houses, or indeed children themselves (under supervision), were depicted in a wide range of fictional and factual records, which reveal strong bonding and connectedness among family members. Making dolls' houses, it seems, created an atmosphere of happy domesticity which was intrinsic to dolls' house play. More than providing personal happiness and satisfaction, the dolls' house defined a three-dimensional space representing domestic felicity. It was used as a metaphor for the celebration of happy family life and the well-being of the whole household.

It is also of interest that Marks's parents believed that such a task would keep the boys out of mischief. Advising children to occupy their leisure time by making something useful reflects a belief in the acquisition of practical skills fostered by these activities. Another salient reason for encouraging children to engage in physical work, especially under adult supervision, was precisely to prevent them seeking entertainment outside the home. The merits of making one's own toys were presented by many contemporary children's writers and educators and were usually bound up with anxieties that boys might resort to antisocial alternatives, such as drinking, gambling, and illegal acts such as stealing, if not safely domesticated. Wood stressed the moral value of hand work and declared in a paper read in the conference of the Froebel Society in 1902: 'Hand-work—of some kinds, at any

³¹ Mary A. M. Marks, 'Our Dolls' House', *Little Folks*, April 1896, 267.

rate—develops character. It means progress; it lessens crime’.³² On the other hand, the message also shows concerns about the proper development of girls’ femininity. As the contemporary norms of femininity often required women to avoid participation in cultural and intellectual debates, it was believed that girls ought to look for recreation in sedate and manual pursuits, such as toy-making or dress-making, to be able to amuse themselves indoors. Most importantly, they were expected to find delight and comfort in domestic duties of all kinds, as a way to familiarise themselves with their future roles as mothers and wives.

Learning to be useful

Much children’s fiction, and many autobiographical accounts and images of children at play, reveal ways in which children had fun even in the most mundane activities. It seemed to be acceptable for children to exploit their childlike temperament and imagination in everyday settings, such as treating chores or daily events as games or adapting ordinary household articles into playthings to improvise for their pretend play. These were ways of intensifying childhood pleasure and showing children’s creativity and imagination. Both Harry Brooker’s ‘Children at Play’ and Charles Hunt’s (1829-1900) ‘Cinderella’ capture a fascinating glimpse of children’s improvisational play in the domestic interior. In ‘Children at Play’, the boy at the centre takes his play seriously while he turns over a high chair and holds a jug, as if to play horse-and-cart in front of a group of amused spectators. The little boy sitting on the floor might be pretending to drink something from the mug (presumably milk, as the make-believe cart could be a horse-drawn milk float). ‘Cinderella’ features two

³² Wood, 65.

girls vividly acting out a scene based on the famous fairy tale, using whatever is to hand for their amusement and entertainment [Fig. 4.2 & Fig. 4.3].



Figure 4. 2 'Children at Play' by Harry Brooker (1888), oil on canvas



Figure 4.3 'Cinderella' by Charles Hunt (1867), oil on canvas

There were not only visual representations of children's imaginative play. Children's authors also depicted exuberant playing scenes in which children create their own make-believe games. Juliana Horatia Ewing wrote in *Dolls Housekeeping* (1884) about a girl and her older brother using an empty jam pot, an old tea-chest, a box of toy tea things, and other household items to furnish and repair her dolls' house while their father is refurbishing the house they live in.³³ Their dolls' house eventually becomes a mess as the boy is trying to put together bits and pieces that do not fit and not doing it 'in the regular way'.³⁴ These children maximise their imagination and pleasures in unrestrained activities, which Lockean or Rousseauvian authors and educators might consider as a serious lack of reason and control. Even though Victorian children enjoyed more freedom in imaginative play, the contemporary social ethos still held that it was more agreeable for them to learn how to entertain themselves and others by effectively employing their leisure hours. In other words, children were expected to exercise their creativity in making the most of various common materials and to learn something useful from their leisure activities.

Under the pseudonym, 'Aunt Louisa', the productive children's writer Laura Valentine taught her young readers to be industrious and economical through one example of her fictional character furnishing her dolls' house:

I stuff [the pillows] with tiny scraps of paper, curled round an old penknife. In the twilight when I could not see to do anything else, I used to sit by the fire and curl my little thin strips of paper. Papa gave me all his old envelopes for it. Preparing for a Doll's House teaches one not to waste anything.³⁵

Similarly, children's author Elizabeth Tabor recalled how her mother had advised her to play with toys contrived with her own hands using all sorts of resources at home.

³³ Juliana Horatia Ewing, *Dolls Housekeeping* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1884), 5-16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ 'Aunt Louisa' [Laura Jewry Valentine], *Aunt Louisa's London Gift Book. Edith and Milly's Housekeeping—Milly's Doll's House* (London: Warne, 1866), n. pag.

She argued that the ‘girls of present day’ who were provided with miniature toys purchased from toyshops would not have pleasures comparable to hers when she used to ‘[keep] house upon two lumps of sugar and a piece of seed-cake in that dear old oriel window, with pieces of writing-paper, twisted up at the corners for dishes and nut-shells for cups and saucers’.³⁶ When she was a young princess, Queen Victoria used to play with toys made by her own hands. She had the habit of dressing her own dolls and making her own dolls’ house furniture—‘for the dolls’ comfort’.³⁷ A reviewer of *The Girl’s Own Toy-maker* also regarded the practice of children making their own toys as ‘one of the arts of education’ and noted that the book succeeded in ‘blend[ing] employment with amusement’ and that ‘industrious children’ might acquire ‘industry, thought, construction, and order’ through this guide.³⁸

The recurring scenes and records of playing in children’s literature and autobiographical records, and more specifically, the depiction of children learning moral or practical lessons from the games they played and the toys they made, suggest something more than pastimes. These texts helped child readers to associate play with work, leisure with labour. For young children, their main business of life was to play. However, as emphasised in contemporary child-rearing literature, their play was not meant to be underestimated merely as a leisure activity or detached from an educational purpose. Two disciples of Froebel extolled the benefits of plaiting, folding, cutting, and pricking paper:

In this occupation, not only the eyes and hands of the children are educated, but the taste for beauty is developed; order, neatness, and industrial habits are

³⁶ Eliza Tabor, *When I Was a Little Girl. Stories for Children* (London: Macmillan, 1871), 44-45.

³⁷ William G. Fitzgerald, ‘Personal Relics of the Queen and Her Children’, *The Strand Magazine*, June 1897, 607-08.

³⁸ Excerpt of the book review was originally from *Art Journal* and used as an advertisement which appeared in the appendix of *How to Make Dolls’ Furniture and Furnish a Doll’s House, etc.* (London: Griffith & Farran, 1871), n. pag.

promoted; they exercise their inventive powers, and prepare themselves for useful occupations. The mats can be applied to useful and ornamental purposes, and when more durable materials are substituted, the same principle can be applied to the production of articles of general utility.

At the same time this occupation has a moral effect, because when children know that they can do *something useful*, their self-reliance increases.³⁹

The terms ‘useful’ and ‘industrious’ are conspicuous in educational literature of the period about children’s play. Between the 1860s and the 1920s, legislation increasingly ensured that children were freed from the labour market and compulsory education was enforced. William Forster’s Education Act in 1870 introduced the system of school boards to set the foundation for elementary education. The state, replacing religious associations, became more active in the provision of schooling. In 1880, a further Education Act made school attendance compulsory for all children between the ages of five and ten. Finally, in 1891 compulsory elementary education was made free of charge. Meanwhile, the 1891 Factory Act raised the minimum age for employment in factories from ten to eleven. During this period, as Viviana Zelizer and Lisa Makman have both pointed out, it became less common to measure a child’s worth by his productive power but than by his moral, symbolic, and emotional value to adults. The emergence of what Zelizer calls ‘an economically worthless but emotionally priceless child’ signalled a new way of viewing children.⁴⁰

Children, regardless of their social class, had more freedom to play, more opportunities to go to school, and they began to work less in the labour market. However, their play was still very much connected to the Victorian work ethic, and

³⁹ J. Ronge and B. Ronge, *A Practical Guide to the English Kinder-Garten* (London: Hodson and Son, 1863), 46; italics mine. Henry Morley gave this book very high regard, declaring that it is the perfect guide for all those who desire to have a closer insight into Froebel’s system. He also recommended readers to visit one of the earliest ‘infant gardens’ established in London by the authors, Mr. and Mme. Ronge, at Tavistock Place, Tavistock Square. Henry Morley, ‘Infant Gardens’, *Household Words*, 21 July 1855, 582.

⁴⁰ Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic, 1985); Lisa Hermine Makman, ‘Child’s Work Is Child’s Play: The Value of George MacDonald’s Diamond’, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, 24.3 (1999), 119-29.

the virtues of industry and utility were stressed in children's books. It is also worth noting that children were transformed from being wage earners to being 'part of the world of consumption rather than production, toy-like objects for whom to buy'.⁴¹ In other words, children were now objects on which adults expended money and energy. Children's fundamental task shifted from contributing concrete economic value to learning how to be useful to adults and to make them happy. Lydia Child, a prolific author of nineteenth-century conduct books, urged straightforwardly in her constantly reprinted advice manual *The Girl's Own Book* that 'every girl should learn how to be *useful*'.⁴²

Indeed, as Makman further suggests, children's literature written at this time participated in registering and reconfiguring new ideas about children and 'childhood became an increasingly popular locus for fantasies about leisure and freedom for adults'.⁴³ But the question is, as children learned to be useful through the books they read and the leisure activities they engaged in, to what extent and in what ways was the leisure displayed in children's literature written by adults different from work, and how far did work and leisure intersect? Separating games from work seemed not to be an easy task, especially when so many children's games in fact involved hands-on activities—the exercise of manual labour as part of an artistic and moral training. Meanwhile, as girls in particular were unceasingly told to prioritise domestic duties among all other pursuits and that such activities should make them happy, how did children's book and toy markets convince girl readers and consumers that domestic labour could be a form of leisure?⁴⁴ Furthermore, as Maria Edgeworth asserted that

⁴¹ Makman, 119.

⁴² Lydia Maria Child, *The Girl's Own Book*, 13th edn (London: Thomas Tegg, 1844), vi; italic in its original.

⁴³ Makman, 119.

⁴⁴ One of the contributors to *The Girl's Home Companion* wrote: 'Home duties [...] should have the first place with girls, because home is the nursery in which they learn the lessons which will make

‘the pains of idleness stimulate children to industry’ and adults ‘should associate cheerfulness, and praise, and looks of approbation, with industry’, how far could the tensions between play and work, leisure and labour be neutralised?⁴⁵

These questions can be answered through the examination of a variety of types of dolls’ house play. From individual amusement to household entertainment, and from following the guides of advice literature to creating a unique dolls’ house for a competition, all activities crucial to children’s reading and playing experience in fact point to the essential idea of Froebel’s pedagogical principle: playing at work and learning through playing. Through the reading of interactive narratives which encouraged, incited, and defined children’s play, it became possible for these opposites—imagination and reality, fantasy and practicality—to be reconciled in children’s making and playing with their handmade toys. Most importantly, children were taught that work and play were interdependent and not to be understood as incompatible.

their price beyond rubies, and their name blessed among their own daughters. Let every young girl, then, look well at home, and see whether she can make any one in it happier for her existence’. ‘Graver Hours of English Girlhood. The Girl at Home’, in *The Girl’s Home Companion*, ed. by Laura Valentine (London: Frederick Warne & Co., c. 1894), 751.

⁴⁵ Maria Edgeworth, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, vol.1 (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 15.

Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books

Four decades before the publication of Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* series, which established Frederick Warne's world-wide reputation for illustrated children's books, the publisher had produced a series of picture books that caught the public's eye. In tune with all the 'how to' articles in and competitions held by children's magazines that encouraged readers to make something useful for themselves, *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* series (1869-70) was an early example of a similar approach that motivated readers' imaginative and physical participation in the construction of their own playthings.⁴⁶ With the advance of printing technology, particularly the aid of chromolithography, an innovative way of making multi-colour prints, publishers were able to increase the supply of inexpensive illustrated children's books. Generally known as 'toy books' by nineteenth-century readers and publishers, these cheap picture books represent a genre that features brightly-coloured illustrations accompanied by short nursery rhymes or fairy tales. These books seem designed more to amuse and entertain children rather than instruct them. In this light, *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* series are more like what we would today call activity books or sticker books. Each volume in the *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* followed a uniform cover design and a similar format throughout, so that each book comprised six different scenes and two key pages containing the objects and figures belonging to the blanks left in each of the settings. All the objects were to be cut out carefully, and pasted to the pages they belonged to [Fig. 4.4 & Fig. 4.5].

⁴⁶ Titles in this series include: *The House We Live In*; *Our Holidays*; *The Nursery Play Book*; *Holiday Fun*; *The Doll and Her Dresses*; *The Horse*; *Book of Trades*; *Our Kings and Queens*; published respectively between c. 1869 and c. 1870. An advertisement in *The Bookseller* says, 'Four Books will be issued this season, of which Two are now ready, viz.: *The House We Live In*; *The Nursery Play Book*', suggesting that the idea of packaging these books as a whole set was not contingent, as the publisher specialised in conceiving toy book series. 'Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books', *The Bookseller*, 1 September 1869, 797.

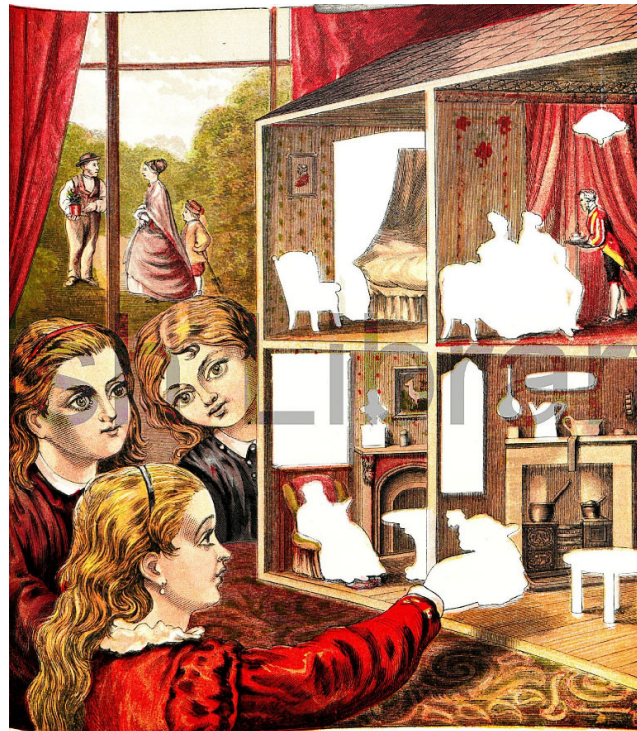


Figure 4.4 'The Doll's House' in *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books. The Nursery Play Book* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1869), n.pag.; British Library Shelfmark: C.194.b.171



Figure 4.5 'The Kitchen' and one of the key pages in *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books. The House We Live In* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1869), n.pag.; British Library Shelfmark: C.194.b.171

Alternatively, readers could choose to colour the blanks by themselves, using the key pages as an example to follow. On the endpaper of each title the editor

provided detailed instructions on ‘How to Use This Picture Book’. The instruction to cut out the miscellaneous items ‘neatly and very exactly’ suggests that the guideline not only supported moral notions such as tidiness and good grooming but also emphasised the aesthetic value of precision and accuracy. This notion echoed the central thought of the Arts and Crafts Movement about making things both useful and beautiful, and the mantra of contemporary advice books, as Edith Nesbit instructed her readers, that one ‘must try in work and play, to make things beautiful every day’.⁴⁷

With lavishly-illustrated pages, eye-catching cover designs, a wide range of topics that satisfied both boys and girls—from domestic life to recreations of all kinds, from historical figures to working-class people—each volume was designed to educate and entertain children from middle-class families. These volumes present an overview of Victorian family life and children’s popular culture. They also provide valuable insights into social history, the history of children’s books and the study of childhood. The series remained in print at least until 1903.⁴⁸ Although it is difficult to trace the actual reception of the series, various advertisements give some clues as to how contemporary readers might have appreciated these books. An advertisement

⁴⁷ In *Wings and the Child*, a non-fiction work addressed to parents and educators, which was built on her bestselling children’s book, *The Magic City* (1910), Nesbit composed a nursery rhyme to instil morals to her young readers in a vibrant way:

I must not steal, and I must learn
Nothing is mine that I do not earn.
I must try in work and play
To make things beautiful every day.
I must be kind to every one
And never let cruel things be done.
I must be brave, and I must try
When I am hurt never to cry,
And always laugh as much as I can
And be glad that I’m going to be a man.

E[dith] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child, or the Building of Magic Cities* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), 87. Further discussion about the Arts and Crafts Movement and the aesthetics of dolls’ houses will be made in Chapter Nine of the thesis.

⁴⁸ An advertisement of Frederick Warne and Co.’s Children’s Publications which included the *Picture Puzzle Toy Books* series appeared in *The Publisher’s Circular*, 16 May 1903, 526.

in *The Bookseller* praised this series as an ideal gift for children who are ill: ‘For a sick child, we have seen no prettier toy, or one more absorbing and entertaining’.⁴⁹ Another advertisement commented on the essential amusement of playing with these books—the fun of cutting and rearranging: ‘The legitimate gratification of destructiveness is really ingenious, and as all books are destroyed more or less by the small fry, perfectly allowable’.⁵⁰ In addition, the remarkable marketing strategy carried out by the publisher cannot be neglected. The marketing strategy was firstly represented on the endpaper of each volume that cross-refers to another title in the series, as the quotation from *Holiday Fun* suggests: ‘As no doubt you have found great amusement in completing these merry pictures, I advise you to obtain additional pleasure by asking mamma for *Our Holidays*, which ought to accompany *Holiday Fun*’.⁵¹

While the publisher made sure that another volume was named in each volume in the series, the cross-reference also set up a regular reminder for readers that these books were meant to be collected and that readers would capitalise on the pleasure of reading if they managed to obtain every single title of the series. The desire to ask for more was also aroused by the advertising of related products that appeared on the back cover of *Our Dollies*, a later issue of the series. While the editor advised that the cut-out items should be ‘stuck on in the blanks which they fit’, the back cover advertised a special kind of glue:

Stickphast Paste is recommended for use in this book.

It is much cleaner and sticks better than gum.

⁴⁹ ‘Warne’s Picture Puzzle Album’, *The Bookseller*, 12 December 1870, 1137;

⁵⁰ ‘Christmas Books of the Season’, *The Publisher’s Circular*, 8 December 1869, 781. This series might also have been used by kindergarten teachers as teaching materials—the Opies mention that they purchased a copy of *Holiday Fun* in a kindergarten emporium. Iona Opie, Robert Opie, and Brian Alderson, *The Treasures of Childhood: Books, Toys and Games from the Opie Collection* (London: Pavilion, 1989), 179.

⁵¹ *Warne’s Picture Puzzle Toy Books. Holiday Fun* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1869), n. pag.

Nice People Use Stick-Phast Paste. It Is Too Good for Nasty People.
 Of all Stationers—3d., 6d., & 1/- per bottle.
 With strong useful Brush.⁵²

The advertising slogan aligned itself with the editing and publishing strategy that promoted the skill of careful execution and the virtue of being tidy and accurate. The price list also made it explicit that the series was designed as a commercial product, viewing children as its target consumers. In addition, as the cover picture of *Our Dollies* vividly portrayed the scene of a group of children enjoying the fun of cutting and gluing, it is an interesting setting for us to consider what should be offered to children to play with and what adults expected children ought to learn from the games they played [Fig. 4.6]. As the image demonstrated the fun of cutting and gluing these toys books entailed, it showed to child readers ways in which they should approach these toy books as they saw the pictures of the group of children cutting, pasting, and folding the pre-printed coloured figures and objects that accompanied the very books they were holding. While contemporary readers were cutting and pasting these images, visualising and reproducing the scenes corresponding to their own everyday experience, just as the children on the cover do, they might be able to perceive that children's play was children's work and children's reading their consumption. Moreover, as the presence of cook and housemaid in these books gave children an insight into working-class life, child readers might be able to imagine what it was like to be at work, even though they were in fact engaging in activities for pleasure.

⁵² *Our Dollies* (London: Frederick Warne, 1904). The entry of the British Library record suggests that the item is not catalogued with other *Picture Puzzle Toy Books* series yet the front cover clearly bears the brand, and on the endpaper there is also an advertisement mentioning 'List of Other Picture Puzzle Toy Books Uniform with This Volume'.



Figure 4.6 Book cover of *Our Dollies* (London: Frederick Warne, 1904); Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, University of Florida Digital Collections

The sophisticated role and hybrid nature of *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* should be seen in relation to the book market, to the question of how the books were sold and purchased. Indeed, since readers were persuaded to ask their mothers to get hold of more volumes, it suggests that women played the key role of selecting, purchasing, and providing children's reading materials, just as educators in numerous contemporary child-rearing literature advised that parents should carefully select, supervise, and censor children's reading. Mothers were keen on buying books with

stylish design highlighting family values, middle-class prosperity, and nationalism as the titles in this series revealed. Moreover, *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* show that toy books' and advice literature's primary attraction lay in the charm of interacting with the books—throughout the interactive reading experience, children engaged in hands-on activities and thus learned to enjoy the fun of story-telling and making-believe.

Christie Jackson notes in her study of the popularity of another toy book, *The House That Glue Built* (1905), which initiated the *Glue Books* series published in the first decade of the twentieth century, that the series was similar to a 'guidebook that directed readers to think about their home as a blank slate on which to build this important moral and visual scheme'. The statement alludes to Locke's theory of the *tabula rasa* that the mind is like an empty cabinet.⁵³ The viewing of toy books as material objects and the allegorical use of them suggests that toy books became a 'blank slate' inviting readers' participation in filling up all the blanks and implementing their own building project [Fig. 4.7 & Fig. 4.8].

⁵³ Christie D. Jackson, 'With Paper and Glue: Building the Commercial Success of an Arts and Crafts Toy', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 44.4 (2010), 367. Other titles in the *Glue Book* series include: *The Fun That Glue Made* (1907); *The Stories That Glue Told* (1907); *The Railway That Glue Built* (1908); *The Ark That Glue Built* (1908); *The Games That Glue Played* (1909); *The Tracing and Coloring Book of Animals* (1909); *The Children's Theatre: Rip Van Winkle as Played by Scissors and Glue* (1909); *The Farm That Glue Made* (1909); *The Pin-wheel Book: To Cut and Glue* (1910); *Puzzle Pictures of Farmyard Friends to Cut and Glue* (1910); *The Ships That Glue Sailed* (1910); *The Children's Store* (1910); *The Doll's House That Glue Built* (1910); *The Airships That Glue Built* (1913); *The Doll's Play-House* (1914); *The Story Book of Silhouettes* (1914); all published by Frederick A. Stokes in New York and by W. & R. Chambers in London.

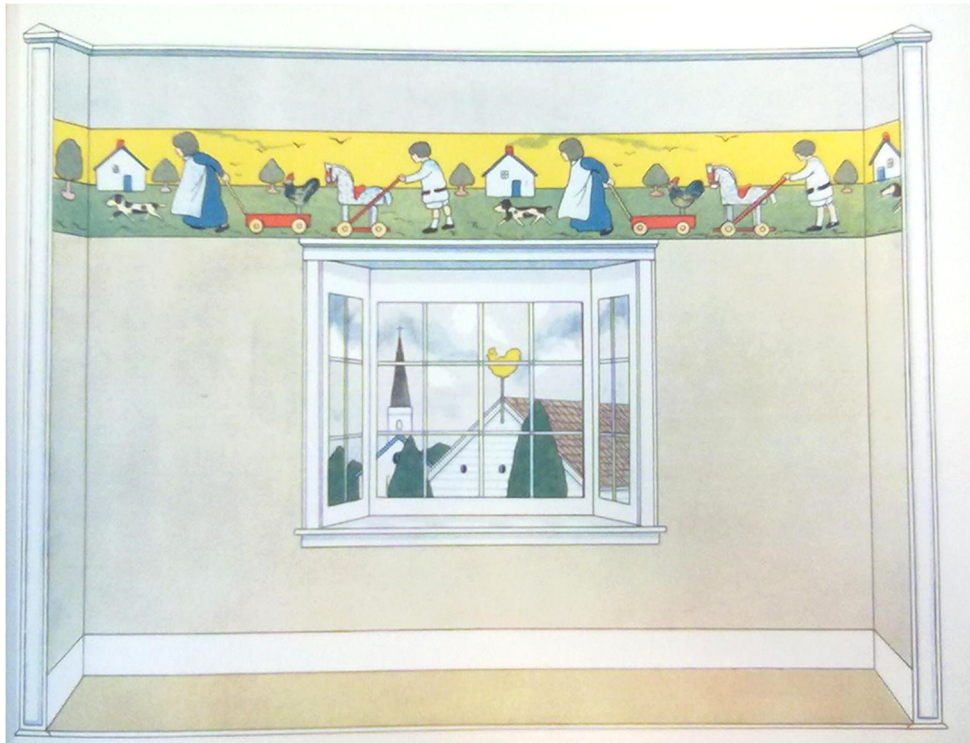


Figure 4.7 'The Nursery', in *The Dolls' House that Glue Built* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1910; London: W. & R. Chambers, 1912), n.pag.; Cambridge University Library Classmark: 1912.14.12



Figure 4.8 The key page of nursery furniture in *The Dolls' House that Glue Built*, n.pag.; Cambridge University Library Classmark: 1912.14.12

The diagram in the corner suggests what the furnished nursery might look like.

Furthermore, the toy books functioned as an open text, waiting for readers to act out the story outlined in each scene and thus create their own narrative. Both *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* and the *Glue Book* series invited readers' participation in filling all the blanks on the page as a canvas, which enabled readers to become their own storytellers. But different from the *Glue Books*, which comprise both narrative and illustration, what makes *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* fit better into the 'blank slate' metaphor is precisely their lack of narrative. On the one hand, the editor of *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* constantly encouraged readers to make the books complete, to fill up the blanks with their creativity, patience, and labour. On the other hand, the books drew attention to the need for readers to complete the narrative itself: as the illustrated pages were not accompanied by a narrative describing each setting, unlike those of the *Glue Books*, *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* enabled child readers to become their own narrators and storytellers. As children read and played with the books, they not only read themselves into the stories but also played the roles of creator and storyteller. More importantly, the feature of interactivity allowed children to merge reality and imagination and satisfy their desire to make complete and fill up the empty space, something also apparent in girls' playing with dolls' houses.

Being 'complete' was a catchword consistently promoted in *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books*. On the endpaper of each volume, the editor announced that the book 'is now complete', or that the 'completion' of the book must have afforded readers much amusement. Like reading puzzle toy books which required readers' participation to make the text complete, playing with actual dolls' houses was also delineated and dominated by the idea of completion and completeness, for the chief fun of dolls' house play was to make complete the house by furnishing it. In addition,

both the book and the dolls' house were made approachable by opening the front case: the book was opened from the front cover just as the house was usually opened from the facade [Fig. 4.9]. The action of opening the book or the house indicates that both objects gave readers and players access to the interior. Moreover, because dolls' house play and reading puzzle toy books trained the child to make a piece of art work complete and fulfil a given task with due patience and attention, both the dolls' house and the book were open texts, waiting for the little storyteller to complete the narrative and to fill up the space literally and figuratively with a variety of furniture or cut-out items.

Even though there seemed to be only one designated space for each cut-out item in *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books*, and the series' instruction clearly outlined that their primary concern was to teach accuracy and dexterity, readers were not utterly deprived of creativity, for they could feel free to add something more to the page, either by cutting or drawing furniture of their own design. Just like furnishing a dolls' house, regardless of how complete or how fully furnished it was, in a sense the house remained an unfinished product and the dolls' house player could always rearrange, reorganise, and remodel the layout. This is how the dolls' house and toy book could be treated as an open text with multiple layers of narratives. Through the process of filling the blank slate, children as readers and players took part in the creation of meanings and stories and in the meantime they themselves, as the *tabula rasa*, also had opportunities to act out all sorts of domestic dramas and the values of domestic life they had been taught.



Figure 4.9 'Dolly's Home Inside', in *Our Dollies*, n.pag.; Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, University of Florida Digital Collections

Overall, *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* combined both toy and book, which in turn incorporated the characteristics of play and work and provided an integrated reading experience. Through the emphasis on cutting and sticking, they stimulated readers' imaginative thinking and served to support the belief in the value of children's play. However, some scholars of the history of children's books maintain that profit was the toy book publishers' principal concern and that the publishers only

devised such novelty books to impress the market.⁵⁴ In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were already publishers of children's books who created books for 'picture-colouring', 'paper-sticking', and 'card-cutting'.⁵⁵ Indeed it might be inaccurate to make Warne and other publishers sound like leaders of progressive insight into early education. Nevertheless, it is also fair to argue that the profit motives might have a complex relationship with creativity. After all, the people who worked in the children's book publishing industry were influenced by contemporary fashions and new ideas about education and play. The ways in which toy books developed show the influence of current thinking about children's play. The device of cutting and pasting recalled the activities designed by Froebelian educators and would have seemed to be quite modern to contemporary book purchasers. Moreover, these toy books were purchased with a variety of motives. Some purchasers might be just looking for a Christmas present for a niece, some might have more advanced views on education and child-rearing, and some might have been trying to nurture imaginative thinking.⁵⁶ These different concerns helped shape the niche for publishers in the children's book and toy market around the turn of the century. These toy books represent an innovative publishing strategy that inspired readers and later writers of children's books to have a more sophisticated consideration of reading and playing.

⁵⁴ Answering to my query regarding the publishing history of *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books*, the eminent children's book historian Brian Alderson wrote, 'I don't think that you can read any grand educational plan into it. Those toybook publishers (Warne, Nelson, Routledge etc) had no educational ambitions in devising these novelty books. Profit was their main aim and their experiments with novelties of that sort were done just to impress the market'. Brian Alderson (email to the author, 2 August 2012).

⁵⁵ Iona Opie and Peter Opie, 'Book that Come to Life', *The Time Literary Supplement*, 19 September 1975, 1055. An example of these is *The Nursery Picture Gallery and Child's Own Picture Colour Book* (1875), in *Warwick House Toy Book* series published by Ward, Lock & Tyler in London.

⁵⁶ For concerns about buying books for children, see Andrea Immel, 'Children's Books and Constructions of Childhood', in *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. by M. O. Grenby and Andrea Immel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19-34.

Together with toy-making guides and various other advice literature *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* packaged contemporary belief in the value of children's play in education in an intricate form and aroused children's enthusiasm for producing something useful and amusing. At the same time, these texts inculcated the idea that handiwork could be an alternative form of play. This particular genre of educational and entertaining material struck the balance between work and play and provided a way for children to conceive their ideas of playing, working, and reading, as well as to incorporate these ideas into an object to be played with. In addition to the pleasure brought by the interactive reading experience, the genre also enabled children to explore diverse forms of play and helped to define their roles as readers, players, and consumers.

CHAPTER FIVE. ACTIVE READERS AND IMAGINATIVE

PLAYERS

A dolls' house by itself is just a thing, like a cupboard full of china or a silent music box; it can live only if it is used and played.¹

Dolls' house play and everyday life

When children made and played with handmade toys, such as dolls' houses, they brought together work and pleasure, fantasy and practicality. They were also acting out a version of everyday life. Virtually all nineteenth-century children's novels about girls playing with dolls and dolls' houses and anecdotes drawn from memories of dolls' house play tend to regard this play as a means of acting out an accurate reproduction of girls' everyday lives. In 1900 Alice Corkran, the editor of *The Girl's Realm*, claimed that the dolls' house she played with in her childhood was 'the faithful mirror of what happened in [her own home]'.² However, sometimes dolls' house play also created a world of bad behaviour, in which things that girls were forbidden to do in real life were acted out. It provided a legitimate space for subversion and mischief, a place that Frances Armstrong defines as 'ludic space'.³ Playing with dolls' houses without adult supervision or participation therefore often led to a scene of chaos. Dolls' house players might mess up the drawing room or start a fire in the kitchen. In some cases dolls' house dolls were even beheaded, maimed,

¹ Rumer Godden, *Impunity Jane. The Story of a Pocket Doll* (New York: Viking, 1954), 14.

² Alice Corkran, 'In Doll-House Land', *The Girl's Realm*, November 1900, 41.

³ Frances Armstrong, 'The Dollhouse as Ludic Space, 1690-1920', *Children's Literature*, 24 (1996), 23-54.

or mutilated by their little owners. Alice Pollock (born in 1868) recalled that her brother and cousin were so interested in the story of Mary, Queen of Scots that they pretended her doll was the Queen and ‘solemnly cut off her head’.⁴ Although the dolls’ tragedies were not necessarily a true reflection of the limited life experience of the dolls’ house players, identifying with their dolls’ misfortunes gave children a kind of play therapy which enabled them to act out their fantasies and childish anxieties.

More commonly, when playing with dolls’ houses, children recreated and reproduced the domestic space they were familiar with. The charm of dolls’ house play did not end when the dolls’ house was fully furnished. By way of role-playing, there were opportunities for players to remodel, rearrange and to take an active role in re-defining aspects of family life. This could involve imaginative play such as ‘keep-house’, in which the dolls’ house served only as a backdrop, so that children at play could avoid disturbing the perfectly arranged domestic tableau. Alternatively, they could use dolls as characters, the house itself as the stage, and the many interior utensils as ready stage props. Sometimes this could be destructive. When the Brobdingnagian hands of the dolls’ house player entered the miniature house in order to manipulate the dolls, she could tumble over a table or break tiny china crockery.

The dolls’ house, when used as a child’s plaything, was considered to be ephemeral rather than permanent, as it often brought about heedless destruction. This might be caused by the unwelcome hand of a girl’s male sibling, as recollected by many woman writers in their memoirs. Sometimes an adult who meant well could unwittingly destroy objects belonging to the dolls’ house. Charles Dickens confessed that he had swallowed a little teaspoon while he was having miniature tea at a dolls’ house he ‘visited’.⁵ It is also noteworthy that animals, and specifically mice or rats,

⁴ Alice Pollock, *Portrait of My Victorian Youth* (London: Johnson, 1971), 65.

⁵ Charles Dickens, ‘A Christmas Tree’, *Household Words*, 21 December 1850, 290.

were often described as ominous intruders that threatened the state of harmony inside a dolls' house.⁶ Before Beatrix Potter depicted such an intrusion in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (1904), Gertrude Huntington had written about how a dolls' house was ravaged by a troop of rats: 'The furniture was tossed about and destroyed; the walls were knocked down, and the poor dolls dragged here and there, or torn asunder by their merciless captors, the rats'.⁷

A dolls' house thus was seen as an intrinsically fragile and transient object, and dolls' house play involved staging representations of the everyday, of the stuff of daily life which passed away with time. Generations of designers and manufacturers of dolls' houses—from specially commissioned and handcrafted houses to mass-produced wooden or tin-plate ones—have always attempted to replicate ordinary daily life in miniature. This miniaturised reproduction, whether it took the form of a luxurious, primarily ornamental house or a children's toy, could give pleasure and satisfaction to a wide range of collectors and consumers. Both children and adults were able to visualise and recreate ordinary daily life on a minute scale to show off their knowledge of household management and domestic routine. Quotidian domestic activities, such as cooking, cleaning, ironing, and hosting tea parties, were important to all kinds of dolls' houses.

More often, adult women's memoirs show that their dolls' houses replicated their real homes in miniature and reflected the taste and style of their families. In addition, the domestic tableau created a particular relationship with the everyday. But what exactly did children do with their dolls' houses? Drawing on the objects they owned and used, the games they played, and on the everyday events of their lives,

⁶ Later writers, however, created many other good-intentioned mice which befriend the dolls' house inhabitants and even move in to live with the dolls. See, for example, Rose Fyleman, *The Dolls' House, etc.* (London: Methuen, 1930); Enid Blyton, *Mary Mouse and the Dolls' House* (Leicester: Brockhampton, 1942).

⁷ Gertrude Huntington, 'A Tragedy in the Garret', *St. Nicholas*, April 1882, 467.

they could recreate in dolls' house play the regular daily activities they had been observing and practising. Practices of everyday living, from washing, cleaning, to cooking, were accurately imitated in dolls' house play. These seemingly mundane daily events, such as dressing and undressing dolls, sending child dolls to their morning lessons, or tucking them into bed, reflect the repetitive nature of everyday domesticity. To adults observing the games, these activities might appear to be uninteresting, but to the little players the repetitive nature of dolls' house play was crucially important. These predictable routines became something of a ritual that provided assurance and comfort. The author of a nineteenth-century magazine article testified that playing with the dolls' house as a girl gave her great delight as she wrote, 'It is a busy life keeping dolls' houses in order, but it is a very happy one'.⁸ More importantly, children invested these activities with meanings and emotions. Rather than describing how they manipulated the dolls to imitate the practices of everyday life, some girls tended to picture how the dolls pass their time in the miniature house, as if the doll residents were their real family and friends they lived with. When assigning her dolls different roles and tasks, a girl at play might identify with the mother doll for the domestic duties that she would one day cope with, or with a child doll that she could use to express her worries and sentiments.⁹ Interestingly some girls chose to play the adopted female roles mainly because of the power and authority they could have. For example, some girls confessed that when playing the mother doll they enjoyed the right of rebuking bad servants or the cook.¹⁰

As the home was the initial space where a child encountered everyday life and observed various tasks belonging to specific social gender roles, the reproduction of

⁸ Lilla H. Shadfalt, 'A Day in My Doll's House', *Hearth and Home*, 23 April 1896, 938.

⁹ Armstrong, 36.

¹⁰ *Minnie's Doll's-House. A True Story* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1865), 16; Netta Syrett, 'The Fascination of the Dolls' House', *Temple Bar*, February 1906, 111.

a domestic setting in the dolls' house and the re-enactment of the domestic routines of different people in the home reflect a temporal and spatial (re)organisation of the child's typical daily life. In dolls' house play, as Armstrong asserts, a girl 'could be viewing the trivialities of daily routine from a distanced, perhaps even satirical, angle'.¹¹ Seeing one's real life again in miniature therefore went beyond the obsession with small things. In addition to their preoccupation with smallness and trivialities, girls drew from their daily experience to compose their play theme. When they reshaped and repositioned the everyday scenes using miniature objects and figures, they transformed and re-defined domestic space. Researchers of children's play behaviour have pointed out that toys are a means of communication through which children can represent and exchange their ideas, attitudes and values. Toys are used to 'convene social occasions in which their meaningful cultural objects can be discussed, arranged, and manipulated'.¹² In this light, dolls' house play provided an interesting setting for children to work out the link between the things that made up their daily habits and the things they played with. When children interacted with one another through object manipulation and engaged in conversation that described the acts of the dolls, they were able to define the meaning of everyday life and at times even to parody all the regular daily events through the manoeuvring of objects and dolls.

Matilda Mackarness, a nineteenth-century children's writer, described at great length in an advice manual for girls what she observed from children's dolls' house play and suggested what her readers could do with their dolls to reflect domestic everyday life:

¹¹ Armstrong, 36.

¹² Stephen Kline, 'The Promotion and Marketing of Toys: Time to Rethink the Paradox?', in *The Future of Play Theory: A Multidisciplinary Inquiry into the Contributions of Brian Sutton-Smith*, ed. by Anthony D. Pellegrini (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 180-81.

The ordinary routine of the house was most regular. They were always put to bed; therefore they had to be got up and dressed. The breakfast was then laid, and the dolls sat down. Immediately after, the mamma went into the kitchen to order the dinner, &c., as soon as she had performed these household duties, she went into the dining-room, where the children were seated up ready for lessons.¹³

Eliza Tabor (born in 1835) was also keen to ensure that her dolls were attentive to their lessons, even though she herself might not be as hard-working. Tabor remembered that she had turned a drawer into a schoolroom and made her many penny dolls the pupils:

every morning, when I had time, before I went to my own lessons, I used to put them on little benches made of long pieces of wood, and they had books cut out of writing-paper on their knees, and the governess sat at the table with a cane before her to rap their knuckles if they made too much noise. Sometimes when my own lessons were over and [my friend] Puff came to ask me to play with her, I used to forget my little boys and girls, and they had to keep on being at school all day long, which must have been very tedious; but they never made any complaint about being treated in that way, and when I came to attend to them, I always found them studying as diligently as ever.¹⁴

Of course the dolls would not make a fuss about sitting in a class all day long as a real girl would. Yet, as the passage suggests, the delight of setting up the schoolroom scene every morning involved highlighting the similarity between the dolls and the girl, who shared a common schedule and went through all the tedious routines as well as the highs and lows in the girl's own life. Tabor also recollected other things she did with her dolls: she bathed them every night 'with the real soap-tray and

¹³ Matilda Anne Mackarness [Matilda Anne Planché], ed., *The Young Lady's Book. A Manual of Amusements, Exercises, Studies and Pursuits* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), 328-29.

¹⁴ Eliza Tabor, *When I Was a Little Girl: Stories for Children* (London: Macmillan, 1871), 46-47. The idea of teaching dolls lessons was not a Victorian invention. In the early nineteenth century, the English publisher John Marshall created a series of 'miniature libraries' under toy-like titles such as *The Doll's Library* (c. 1800) and *The Doll's Casket* (c. 1819). The fronts of the bookcases were decorated with engravings picturing children instructing their dolls with tiny books and cards in the 'miniature libraries'. Brian Alderson comments that 'one can find nothing but admiration for his idea of teaching the child by getting the child to teach the dolls'. Brian Alderson, 'Miniature Libraries for the Young', *The Private Library*, 6.1(1983), 36. It is even more interesting that Marshall also produced books for baby-houses (dolls' houses) as he stated, 'Sometime ago I made [...] a little library called the *Infant's Library* [...] I also made a pretty book-case for their dolls which I supposed many of them have placed in the Babyhouse.' Emma Laws, 'Books for Baby-Houses', *Children's Books History Society Newsletter*, November 2002, 17.

towels' and 'cut scratches on their arms to make believe they had fallen down and hurt themselves'. Sometimes she painted their faces red to '[pretend] they had taken scarlatina [scarlet fever]'. She also had her dolls punished and sent them to bed in disgrace for their mischief, 'just as [she] had been sent' when she misbehaved. Tabor concluded that the dolls were not 'lifeless blocks' but 'real little boys and girls' to her, for they went through all the experiences which she herself went through.¹⁵

At first glance this heartfelt statement could be read as an adult's nostalgia for her childhood playing experience. But this passage does more than celebrate innocent childhood. It reveals how dolls' house play helped to express children's imagination of domesticity as they were able to re-enact the drama of domestic everyday life. However, the inspiration for their play themes did not only originate from ordinary daily events. Some adult women's autobiographical reminiscence of dolls' house play recorded special occasions or odd events they created for the dolls' house residents, such as balls, parties, weddings, or a doll's funeral. Others alluded to fairy tales or Bible stories, using dolls' house dolls to perform some of the classic scenes in these stories. Children's author Allison Uttley (born in 1884) wrote in her 1937 memoir that as a little girl she 'invented a thousand games, all based on [her] life, on Bible stories, and on nursery rhymes and fairy tales, and the ten penny dolls were the characters'.¹⁶

However, it is significant that what these authors remembered more vividly and what they did with their dolls' houses more frequently were still the arranging and re-arranging of the interior settings and the acting out of the predictable, the regular things of their everyday life experience. Journalist and writer Lady Barker (born in 1831), well-known for her writings about colonial experiences in New Zealand and

¹⁵ Tabor, 36-37.

¹⁶ Alison Uttley, *Ambush of Young Days* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 92.

her children's books, wrote about how she and her sister used to arrange their dolls' house furniture 'a hundred times' before they dressed their wooden doll family (there were fifty of them). When all this was complete, they 'began a sort of life drama which lasted for several months'. She and her sister 'acted as chorus, and made all the explanations'. What they enjoyed the most among all sorts of activities was the christening, which especially appealed to her sister's tastes:

The hosts of babies which we accumulated in that house! They swarmed everywhere, and the real cook often rebelled against the constant demand for a christening cake, which had to be baked in a thimble, and properly iced and decorated with wee sugar-plums.¹⁷

Indeed the christening cake baked in a thimble involved fantasy and indulgence. Yet Lady Barker's anecdote also describes typical middle-class childhood routines and the idea of the everyday at the background of this colourful story. For the cook, the little mistresses' incessant requests for miniature cake were demanding, but it was precisely the diminutive size of the cake that brought excitement to their dolls' house play. While doing daily chores itself might be a source of boredom and annoyance, likening a monotonous task to a game or going through regular things by way of role-playing or manipulating the actions of miniature figures could be extremely delightful. For example, numerous dolls' house texts illustrate how children had more fun engaging with dolls' tea parties using dolls' tea sets rather than normal-sized ones.¹⁸

Through role-playing and using dolls as characters to act out their imagination and sentiments, dolls' house players defined and demonstrated their identities and

¹⁷ Lady Barker [Mary Anne Barker], 'About Toys and Games', *Good Words for the Young*, 1 January 1871, 140.

¹⁸ See, for example, *Little Polly's Doll's House* (London: George Routledge and Co., c.1856); Elizabeth Prentiss, *Little Susy's Six Birthdays* (1859; London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, c.1919); *Dolly's New House* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., c. 1905); in which all heroines have make-believe tea parties with their mothers, younger brothers and dolls.

tastes and expressed what everyday life meant to them. Meanwhile, as children sometimes drew from lines and plots from familiar fairy tales or nursery rhymes to speak for the dolls, they cleverly brought together the elements of ordinary everyday life with the world of the imagination in their improvised theatrical play. As they set up their own domestic theatre, they had to take multiple roles. Lady Barker called herself the ‘chorus’ for her dolls, and one of the child protagonists in a short story was viewed by his siblings as ‘the stage-manager’ who constantly thought of stories for them to act for their dolls.¹⁹ Both instances suggest that dolls’ house players could take the role of the scriptwriter, the producer, the director and the stage designer.

The desire to furnish and decorate the domestic space and to see one’s own life re-enacted in dolls’ house play bestowed on children the role of stage manager and connected role-playing and everyday life. This kind of longing effectively helped them to transform mundane activities and ordinary things into something playful and emotionally satisfying. Nineteenth-century children’s literature also acknowledges the connections between one’s real life and dolls’ house play. Louisa May Alcott in her bestseller *Little Women* (1868) likens the new house of Meg and John after they get married to a ‘baby house’, which has ‘a little garden behind and a lawn about as big as a pocket handkerchief in the front’.²⁰ Besides, Meg takes pride in ‘her well-stored linen closet’ as the room she likes most of all, which cunningly suggests the size of other rooms and how perfectly suitable the joke of a baby house is. Later on we are told that in this tiny house with its delightful honeymoon atmosphere, the newly-wed couple ‘played keep-house, and frolicked over it like children’.²¹ Elizabeth Keyser argues that the baby house metaphor betrays ‘Meg’s failure to

¹⁹ Barker, 140; Syrett, 116.

²⁰ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 232.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

move beyond girlhood' and reads this passage as showing that a married woman's powers may be 'diminished and belittled'.²² Even though marriage might be confining for women, Meg's playful attitude towards the impending challenges of keeping a house could also be read as prolonging her girlhood. As the young couple's play reveals that the monotonous daily tasks of house-keeping could be dealt with as a game, Meg is actually showing how she is able to maintain the spirit of play and keeps alive the pleasure of role-playing the March sisters have been enjoying since girlhood. The engagement in imaginative play is her way of positively coping with the restriction of married life and the confinement of domestic space.

Like her sister Meg, Jo loves turning domestic duties into something enjoyable in every possible way. In *Little Men* (1871), a sequel to the March family saga, in which Jo runs a school for boys and girls, she persuades the younger generation that role-playing is a good thing, particularly when it is combined with domestic duties. Although not a professional chef or even a fan of cooking, Aunt Jo—the fictional alter ego of Alcott—has a capital time in the 'cooking class' with Daisy, the little girl to whom she gives the most splendid and fully equipped toy kitchen a child could ever dream of playing with. The toy kitchen had a real iron cooking-stove, 'big enough to cook for a large family of very hungry dolls'. There was also a

real fire [...], real steam [coming] out of the nose of the little tea-kettle, and the lid of the little boiler actually danced a jig, the water inside bubbled so hard [...] and real smoke went sailing away outside so naturally, that it did one's heart good to see it.²³

Under Aunt Jo's supervision, together with other adults' joyful participation, Daisy eventually makes a proper dinner (in dolls' measurements) for her dolls and others.

The episode is not merely about playing with a vast array of kitchen utensils; rather,

²² Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, *Little Women: A Family Romance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 71.

²³ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Men* (London: Sampson Low, 1871), 63-64.

the splendid new play, as Jo concludes, proves to be ‘fun, and useful, too’, for Daisy is able to address the significance of managing a house and the worth of learning domestic skills early in life in the most cheerful way. This scene further suggests that dolls’ house play, or more specifically, girls’ playing with toy kitchens, were used by adults to help prepare girls for everyday household duties.

A pamphlet advertisement accompanying an early-seventeenth century Nuremberg baby house demonstrates this:

Therefore dear children, look you well at everything, how well it is arranged; it shall be a good lesson to you. So when in time to come you have your own home and God willing your own hearth you will for all your life put things nicely and properly, as they should be, in your own households. For as you now find well, as our dear old ones used to say: Where disorder reigns in the home, there it is soon over; disorder is a poor ornament. So look you then at this Baby House, ye babes, inside and out. Look at it and learn well ahead how you shall live in days to come. See how all is arranged, in kitchen, parlour and chamber, and yet is also well adorned.²⁴

As this pamphlet solemnly pronounced, every miniature item was to be arranged in a proper way; hence dolls’ house play was designated to be instructive. For generations, unlike those dolls’ houses that were exquisite works of art used to display status and wealth of the elite collectors, dolls’ houses to be played with by girls were also viewed as a serious educational tool, a visual aid to train the future housewives. Playing with a miniature house in childhood prepared a girl for her future role as the mistress of the house, and by furnishing a dolls’ house the girl could learn how to furnish her own house.

The heroine in a nineteenth-century dolls’ house story testifies to this: ‘Mamma said that in furnishing my Doll’s House, I should learn how to furnish my own house by-and-by’.²⁵ Similarly, Sylvia Maccurdy (born in 1876) confirmed that the

²⁴ The pamphlet of Anna Köferlin’s House (1631); reproduced and translated in Leonie von Wilckens, *Dolls’ House: an Illustrated History* (London: Bell & Hyman, 1980), 15.

²⁵ Laura Jewry Valentine, *Aunt Louisa’s London Gift Book. Edith and Milly’s Housekeeping—Milly’s*

Christmas presents her parents gave were meant to be more educative than entertaining. She wrote, 'I remember two of these: a cooking stove, heated by methylated spirit and big enough to cook a real meal, and a printing press. I am afraid we—certainly the boys—looked on this as another method of instruction'.²⁶ Maccurdy's statement here interestingly shows the potential difference between children's thinking and that of adults. For the purpose of instruction, parents might feel obliged to provide their children with toys that they might not necessarily favour or even need.²⁷ Likewise, schoolteachers sometimes also emphasised the value of educational toys and encouraged children to 'play house'. Isabel Halley wrote in 1912 that dolls' house play could be used as the foundation of many other games, in which 'Many of the well-known characters found in everyday life should be represented', and each child could play the role of various characters they were familiar with. She affirmed that 'the child's innate desire to play "house" may form a useful step in the educational ladder, if the games are played under proper supervision, and discretion is exercised as to the length of the game'.²⁸

Echoing what parents and educationalists saw as the benefits for children of educational toys and games, Victorian and Edwardian dolls' house stories, together with girls' advice manuals, endeavoured to inculcate domestic ideals and housewifery lessons packaged in plots and narratives related to dolls' house furnishing and decorating. The belief in the positive value of dolls' house play was made explicit in titles such as *Edith and Milly's Housekeeping* (1866), *Dolls Housekeeping* (1884), and *The Mary Frances Housekeeper* (1914). Certainly these

Doll's House (London: Warne, 1866), n. pag.

²⁶ Sylvia Maccurdy, *Sylvia: a Victorian Childhood* (Lavenham: Eastland, 1972), 27.

²⁷ In terms of childhood objects, Sharon Brookshaw also suggests that it is arguable that 'some items considered to be integral to childhood are instead the material culture of parenthood'. Sharon Brookshaw, 'The Material Culture of Children and Childhood: Understanding Childhood Objects in the Museum Context', *Journal of Material Culture*, 14.3(2009), 368.

²⁸ Isabel M. Halley, *Play-Work for the Little Ones* (Leeds: E. J. Arnold & Son, c. 1912), 112.

books showed to the readers that to ‘play house’ was a key to learning how to ‘keep house’.²⁹

These children’s books were designed to teach all aspects of domestic duties and to tell child readers what the home was through their interactive reading and playing experience. It was believed essential that children learn to retain the spirit of play even in handling mundane household chores, as a review of *The Mary Frances Housekeeper* implies: ‘Most little girls are enthusiastic about house-keeping on a miniature scale, and the adventures of the doll family will show the way to a useful and methodical manner of “playing house”’.³⁰ The elements of playfulness are particularly ubiquitous in *The Mary Frances Housekeeper*. This book is a child’s fantasy about interacting with a paper doll family and making a house for them. Moreover, it is also about how to make and furnish a home and make it pleasant for its inhabitants in the most pleasurable way. The author’s hand-written inscription on the frontispiece makes it clear that it is meant to be ‘A book for all girls (and boys) who love to “play house”’. In other words, the book seeks not only to be read but also to be played with, just as a girl would be enticed to play with a dolls’ house. Tips about furnishing, decorating, and cleaning are closely intertwined with the plots; hence by going through the course of the story readers were able to finish a comprehensive dolls’ house project step by step in a ‘methodical manner’. More amusingly, there are nursery rhymes composed and inserted into the main story line, which would have brought extra fun to readers who were simultaneously learning skills about table-setting, dish-washing, furniture-caring, and clothes-ironing. The book proved to be a spontaneous success and there was continuous demand from the

²⁹ Valentine, *Edith and Milly’s Housekeeping*; Juliana Horatia Ewing, *Dolls Housekeeping* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1884); Jane Eayre Fryer, *The Mary Frances Housekeeper; or, Adventures among the Doll People* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1914; London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1915).

³⁰ ‘For the Nursery’, *The Athenaeum*, 27 November 1915, 403.

public for new editions.³¹ It helped turn monotonous daily life into a miniature domestic theatre and instil the idea that tedious household chores could be carried out in a variety of games and handicrafts that were both useful and entertaining. Furthermore, through story-telling, role-playing, and games of make-believe, readers (who were dolls' house players at the same time) were able to explore the values and meanings with which they imbued home and everyday life.³²

'Play-Reading'

While children demonstrated how they perceived everyday life and their domestic roles in their dolls' house play, they were at the same time exploring ideas about work and domestic values they learned from their conventional and instructive reading. Children's reading materials and reading practices in the long nineteenth century were tightly interwoven with domestic life and the discourse of education and child-rearing. I have discussed in the previous chapter ways in which children interacted with books as toys and examined how reading and learning could be connected with playing games, even though these games might be conducted in the form of structured and supervised play, as in the case of kindergarten activities. Meanwhile, reading was also largely carried out in the family time of reading together, which provided training for intellectual improvement and communication skills. Reading aloud was a common practice in domestic everyday life, particularly in upper- and middle-class families. Lilian M. Faithfull (born in 1865), who grew up in an upper-middle class family in Hertfordshire, remembered that 'reading aloud was part of routine of the evening', and long descriptive passages, when being read

³¹ See the advertisement of *The Mary Frances Series* in *The Publisher's Circular*, 12 May 1923, 497.

³² For further discussion of Mary Frances's adventures with the family of paper dolls and the use of make-believe in dolls' house texts, see Chapter Seven and Eight of this thesis respectively.

out loud, were to the children ‘a pleasant enough accompaniment to sewing, knitting or drawing’.³³ Winifred Peck (born in 1882), growing up in an evangelical family, learned about the past from the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which her parents read aloud to the children after tea.³⁴

Early in 1826, Maria Budden had promoted the advantages of the practice of reading-out-loud in her advice manual for domestic education. She advised that ‘a well-informed parent’ should be present when the child was reading and that the parent should explain difficult passages, comment on the events, and lead the child reader to reflect on what was read.³⁵ Learning to read and being read to in a conversational way therefore were used as a method of instruction and a guide to literary appreciation.

As Matthew Grenby suggests, while the supervising adults were scrutinising and superintending children’s reading, they acted as a crucial mediator between the text and the child, and became ‘co-creator’ of the text.³⁶ The nineteenth-century economist Mary Marshall (born in 1850) remembered clearly the evening time when her father read aloud to the children, which solidified her knowledge of literature. Marshall’s father took them ‘through *The Arabian Nights*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, translations of the Greek dramatists, Shakespeare’s plays and, most beloved of all, Scott’s novels’.³⁷ The father of the novelist Mary Cholmondeley (born in 1859) also brought his children into the fictional world of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Miss Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Stevenson by reading to them in the

³³ Lilian M. Faithfull, *In the House of My Pilgrimage* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1924), 33.

³⁴ Winifred Frances Peck, *A Little Learning, or a Victorian Childhood* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 21.

³⁵ Maria Elizabeth Budden, *Thoughts on Domestic Education; the Result of Experience* (London: Charles Knight, 1826), 42.

³⁶ M. O. Grenby, *The Child Reader, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 252.

³⁷ Mary Paley Marshall, *What I Remember, etc.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 7.

evening.³⁸ Moreover, reading aloud also functioned as a form of parental control and censorship. When being read to, children normally were not able to choose what they would like to hear; sometimes parents even had to bowdlerise certain passages which they considered inappropriate. Alison Uttley recalled that she began to hear Dickens's novels read aloud by her mother when she was eight. Yet she complained that once her mother 'missed out much of the terror, skipping a page here and there' and had to frown at her father 'as if to explain that it was not for children's ears'.³⁹

Reading aloud in the presence of adults was often part of a child's growing up, and was associated with a cosy hearth scene, such as the family reading together after dinner. By contrast, the period when children were able to freely read by themselves was not necessarily as domestic or part of the child's disciplining. In general, depictions of middle-class children's reading in memoirs and children's fiction confirm that when they were not supervised reading aloud, or being read to by adults, children acted as imaginative and autonomous readers. Their reading took other forms as well and inspired other activities: a great deal of their reading was incorporated into imaginative play that was full of literary allusions. A large number of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century English children's authors depicted scenes in which children interact with literary texts and combine reading and playing. These children could be acting out stories read and heard, or making allusions to fairy tales, Bible stories, children's fiction, or even quite advanced books in their imaginative play.

The protagonists in *Dora's Dolls' House* (1890) know the Brothers Grimm so well by heart that they decide to 'have a puppet-show and act the play of "The Sleeping Beauty" in the dolls' house' and 'dress up the dolls for the different

³⁸ Mary Cholmondeley, *Under One Roof: a Family Record* (London: John Murray, 1918), 30.

³⁹ Uttley, 206-07.

characters' and 'speak for the different dolls'.⁴⁰ Edith Nesbit's first novel, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), introduces a group of children engaging in activities stimulated by their extensive reading. In this story, the Bastable children constantly invent games inspired by the books they read. One of them urges the other children: 'Let's read all the books again. We shall get lots of ideas out of them'.⁴¹ They show themselves as erudite readers and the games they play are full of literary allusions. They also take interest in the practice of a professional literary career as on one occasion they play the game of 'being editors' and make their own newspaper, a game similar to Alcott's March sisters who publish their own 'Pickwick Portfolio' after Dickens's novel. Clearly for the Bastable children those who are well-read know more about how to play—the books they have read serve as the inspiration for their imaginative play. After reading the *Jungle Book*, they are inspired to dig for treasures in their backyard. When the boy next door sees that and finds it ridiculous, the Bastable children's defence is that 'He cannot play properly at all [...] You see, Albert-next-door doesn't care for reading, and he has not read nearly so many books as we have'.⁴² As Nesbit's protagonists invent new games based on the books they have read, they use these primary texts as play-scripts to act out their desires and imagination. In this novel Nesbit vividly shows how children's imagination can turn the initial solitary reading into an interactive reading and playing experience.

The child readers' predilection for books and the intention of creating games based on their reading is also apparent in L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), a Canadian girl's *Bildungsroman* familiar to English readers. The eponymous heroine Anne Shirley, bookish and full of fancy ideas, directs her friends to act out Tennyson's poem, 'Lancelot and Elaine', as she, dressed as the lily maid, floats down

⁴⁰ Louisa Lillas Greene, *Dora's Dolls' House. A Story for the Young* (London: Nelson, 1890), 142-43.

⁴¹ E[dith] Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 20.

the river in a boat.⁴³ Similarly, Sara Crewe in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905) is famous for her ability to pretend things based on her knowledge of stories she has read. When consigned to the attic after her father was reported dead in India and left her no fortune, it gives Sara much comfort to think of 'the Count of Monte Cristo in the dungeons of the Château d'If' and of 'the people in the Bastille'. To Sara it is also natural to think of the head mistress Miss Minchin as the jailer and the servant girl Becky in the adjacent room as 'the prisoner in the next cell'.⁴⁴ Fiction works for Sara as the story world does not fail to sustain and strengthen her. She is assured by the power of imagination she gains from her reading and feels able to live through every unpleasant situation. Her declaration near the end of the novel summarises what she has learnt from her previous fictional encounters: 'The one thing I always wanted was to see a fairy story come true. I am *living* in a fairy story. I feel as if I might be a fairy myself, and able to turn things into anything else'.⁴⁵ As these heroes and heroines call upon the prior knowledge of their reading and afterwards reuse and readjust these texts in their own pretend play or make-believe world, they not only expand 'the scope for imagination', borrowing Anne Shirley's catch phrase, but also adapt themselves to new surroundings and challenges. By retelling stories in their own words and relating their personal experience to the stories they read, they feel they are able to experience what other protagonists also experience in the story world and thus they create new meanings for these texts and gain a strong sense of connection with and mastery over their reading. And this is also common in accounts of children's dolls' house play experience: dolls' house players borrowed new play ideas from their readings and re-enacted their familiar story plots in the miniature world with doll figures.

⁴³ L. M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908; London: Puffin, 2009), 270-74.

⁴⁴ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1905), 122-23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 252; italic in its original.

Indeed, in addition to the description of children's imaginative play inspired by their reading as seen in children's fiction, child readers in real life also enjoyed turning their reading into play. In 1896, Mary Marks informed the readers of *Little Folks* magazine that she and her brothers were enthusiastic about acting and that they used to have a homemade drama to celebrate Christmas, for which they performed a story 'out of Grimm's "Fairy Tales"'.⁴⁶ Margaret Elizabeth Leigh (born in 1849), who later became the countess of Jersey, enjoyed domestic dramas based on the Brothers Grimms' fairy tales and particularly relished performing the role of Fatima in 'Bluebeard' with her family.⁴⁷ Different from those who pretended to be female fictional characters, Emily Lutyens (born in 1874), a British diplomat's daughter in Paris, was more keen on playing male roles. She recalled, 'I longed to be a boy, and in my games I was always a hero of some kind. Never have I known happier moments than when, sallying forth into the Park, armed with bow and arrows, I pretended to be Robin Hood, Ivanhoe, or Richard Coeur de Lion'.⁴⁸ As Robert Louis Stevenson pointed out: 'In the child's world of dim sensation, play is all in all. "Making believe" is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character'.⁴⁹ Lutyens made further reference to this kind of imaginative play in her memoir:

The happiest moments of my childhood were spent in an imaginary world which I created for myself. There I pretended to be whatever was my favourite character at the moment. I was a voracious reader, and never so happy as when, curled up in an armchair, I was devouring a favourite book, or, perched on the top of a ladder in my father's library, could browse among the books there.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Mary A. M. Marks, 'Our Dolls' House', *Little Folks*, April 1896, 267.

⁴⁷ M. E. Child-Villiers [Countess of Jersey], *Fifty-one Years of Victorian Life* (London: John Murray, 1922), 21.

⁴⁸ Emily Lutyens, *A Blessed Girl. Memoirs of a Victorian Girlhood Chronicled in an Exchange of Letters, 1887-1896* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), 10.

⁴⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Child's Play', in *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* (London: Kegan and Paul, 1881), 251-52.

⁵⁰ Lutyens, 9.

Similarly, the essayist Mary Carbery (born in 1867) depicted the wonder of her make-believe world in her childhood play experience:

for every half-hour of looking at picture-books, we spend hours, indoors and out, playing games and acting nursery rhymes with cheerful noise and all our hearts. We make a noise to save ourselves from bursting like air-balloons, for in real life we are quiet-moving, gentle-voiced, well-behaved children who must sometimes escape into the world of Make-Believe.⁵¹

However, Carbery also sighed that her father did not let the children read freely in his library and only provided them with ‘the cheap edition which [he] bought on purpose’. Her father used to teach her to handle a book with care, and ‘how to turn the pages slowly and with respect’.⁵² With limited freedom to choose what to read and to play with, Alice Pollock lamented in a similar manner that she was not allowed to play with a lovely doll given to her on a Christmas Day, ‘except on special occasions and for some unknown reason it was always kept in the cupboard in the pantry’. Once she was given a copy of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a present from her mother, although it gave her ‘no pleasure at all’ and she had ‘never yet managed to read more than the first chapter’.⁵³ Carbery and Pollock’s somewhat pitiful tone suggests that upper-class girls living in the vigilant presence of their parents and governesses sometimes experienced little liberty in choosing what and how to read and to play with. In fact, as Ginger Frost suggests, since children from well-off families generally received great attention and close monitoring from both parents, they might have less freedom than their poor counterparts in terms of what to do in their leisure hours.⁵⁴ In this regard, these children’s integrated reading and playing experience without adult supervision and intervention became the most precious and liberating moment when they themselves were in control.

⁵¹ Mary Carbery, *Happy World: The Story of a Victorian Childhood* (London: Longmans, 1941), 87.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵³ Pollock, 65; 67-68.

⁵⁴ Ginger Suzanne Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2009), 23.

The books which children read voluntarily and independently encompassed a wide range of genres. While reading autonomously, they devoured an enormous variety of literary material. Reading lists often contained *The History of Sandford and Merton* (1783-89), *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818-47), *Holiday House* (1839), *Jessica's First Prayer* (1867), as well as works by Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Yonge, and Mrs. Ewing, all of which were familiar to nineteenth-century child readers and were considered suitable for their age. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Aesop's Fables* also attracted devoted young readers. American works such as *The Wide Wide World* (1850), *Little Women* (1868), and *What Katy Did* (1872) all found favour in the eyes of young English readers. Those who preferred a religious text turned to Bible stories, hymn books, and even sermons. More sophisticated readers enjoyed reading historical novels and works by Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens.⁵⁵ All these books have different roles and meanings: some didactic and instructive, some secular or sentimental, some portray lively and energetic childhoods, and some possess an overtly preachy voice.

Despite all these differences, they all gave children pleasures of reading. Emily Lutyens, for example, was a fan of religious stories as she proclaimed, 'I can see myself now, seated on the nursery floor, hugging my doll while I read *The Peep of Day*. Religion held no terrors for me'.⁵⁶ Likewise, Mary Marshall used to read and re-read *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Fairchild Family* and knew some children who took all the prayers and hymns at the end of each chapter of *The Fairchild Family* 'at a gulp', in order to 'get them over and then freely enjoyed that

⁵⁵ Carbery, 85; Mary Cowden-Clarke, *My Long Life* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896), 9; Faithfull, 32; Lutyens, 10-11; Marshall, 7; Uttley, 197; Beryl Lee Booker, *Yesterday's Child, 1890-1909* (London: John Long, 1937); E[dith] Nesbit, *Long Ago When I was Young* (London: Whiting & Wheaton, 1966), 120; Mary Elizabeth Braddon's unpublished childhood memoir cited in *Records of Girlhood. Volume Two: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women's Childhoods*, ed. by Valerie Sanders (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 132-33.

⁵⁶ Lutyens, 53.

entertaining book’.⁵⁷ Children’s author Mary Louisa Molesworth (born in 1839) used to do exactly the same. Although she ‘was too conscientious to “skip” the prayers, which were ‘a sore trial’ to her, she made the plan of ‘*reading forward* a certain number of them’, so that she ‘could then go back and enjoy the story straight on without the uncongenial break!’.⁵⁸ The way these child readers intently separated the explicit moralistic messages from the primary narrative demonstrates how children were able to make the book a source of delight and dilute its moral tone despite the didacticism and religiosity it originally conveyed. Indeed these children’s deliberate playfulness in reshaping the text was a clever reading strategy. This kind of subversive reading not only weakened the authoritative voice of the original text but also enabled child readers to wilfully interpret a text for the sake of entertainment and in some cases even to incorporate their reading into games.

I coined the term ‘play-reading’ to refer to children’s playful ways of reading that confirms their status as imaginative and independent readers. Just as to play could mean to pretend and to transform the ordinary use of an object in order to fit the context of the imaginary realm, to ‘play-read’ further denotes the analogous process of employing literary texts to serve the purpose of play. On the surface, to play-read means to play with a literary text and to apprehend it as a play-script which gives readers ideas with which to make their own imaginative play. To well-read children, much of their play consists of acting out the stories they read, identifying themselves as the story characters, and re-enacting what these fictional characters do in the story world, as we see in the Bastable children’s pretend play and the ways in which they tell and retell a story. Similarly, Victorian child readers in their practice of play-reading inextricably intermingled literary texts with their personal life

⁵⁷ Marshall, 7.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Jane Cooper, *Mrs. Molesworth. A Biography* (Crowborough, East Sussex, Pratts Folly, 2002), 48; italics in original.

experience and interpreted these texts in a new light. With all the story elements and story characters at their command, bookish children were able to retell the original texts in their own narrative language and replicate the story world they unreservedly and uninterruptedly indulged in. As children recycled and reused all the ideas they learned from their extensive reading in their own pretend play, they were consciously and unconsciously bestowing new meanings on the books they play-read with. These books would not remain the same to them, for they established a strong emotional connection with these texts that supplied them with all the novel ideas for their imaginative play.

Besides the traceable literary heritage in children's role-playing games, the practice of play-reading allowed child readers to bring inanimate objects or toys to life or personify an animal or plant by using names and stories they came across in their previous reading. They brought life and meanings to immobile objects or other creatures by giving them names and stories in order to play with them. More than manipulating a plaything, the idea of playing with an object associated with particular stories or emotions helped relate play with their former literary experience. Based on their reading, children created their own imaginative play, transformed random objects into playthings, made animals their play companions and perceived dolls as their children or friends. In the process children would dramatically reconfigure time, space and object in their imagination. Among imaginative readers in children's fiction, Anne Shirley in *Anne of Green Gables* has a habit of naming things and crediting feelings and emotions to inanimate or inactive objects in her surroundings. Her wild imagination leads her to give personalities to various plants. She calls the cherry-tree outside her bedroom window 'Snow Queen', alluding to

Andersen's fairy tale.⁵⁹ An equally intriguing fictional character and a voracious reader is Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess*, who calls a rat in the attic, 'Melchisedec', after a Hebrew King in the Old Testament, and treats him as a real person. In this type of play-reading, children endowed random things or other creatures with meanings and personal sentiments, and read these things and figures from a different perspective, sometimes even with the warmest childish sympathy.⁶⁰

The other pattern of the practice of play-reading is to approach a particular book as a material object rather than a textual one, and interact with the design and format of the book, in order to accomplish an assigned project, to create a new look for the text, or to make the text complete. Many of the dolls' house stories or activity books using a dolls' house as background setting, such as *Warne's Picture Puzzle Toy Books* and *The Glue Book* series discussed in the previous chapter, exemplify this kind of interactive reading. When vigorously going through the events of the narrative and treating the book as a toy as instructed, young readers learned to associate reading with playing, identify themselves with or as the fictional characters, and connect their favourite stories to the games they invented. Treating books as material objects and playing with them as toys parallels children's attributing feelings to lifeless or immobile objects with an intention of playing with them. Both acts bestow new meanings on the original objects and both represent a mode of interactive reading.

Just as dolls' house play enabled Victorian children to act out their emotions and imagination based on their everyday life experience and literary encounters, the practice of play-reading empowered child readers because they gained control over literary texts and the things they played with, whereas in real life they were the

⁵⁹ Montgomery, 43.

⁶⁰ In Sara's eyes Melchisedec *is* a real person who 'is married and has children'. It raises interesting questions when Sara pronounces, 'How do we know he doesn't think things, just as we do? His eyes look as if he was a person. That was why I gave him a name.' Burnett, 135-38.

subjects overseen by adults who took charge of them. Using literary references as inspiration and instruction, children made sense of their reading materials and their play objects and at the same time they created a story world. In this story world they were able to retell, re-enact, or even subvert their previous literary encounters, using the book as an object of fun in their games of mischief. Children's fantastic visualisation of inanimate objects or animals into something and someone they could identify and have a conversation with, as James Sully pointed out, 'has a strong, vitalising or personifying element'.⁶¹ Their imaginative play was the way they responded to lifeless objects or other creatures and anthropomorphised them. When they play-read, they activated and communicated with these lifeless or non-human others. Meanwhile, as Marina Warner suggests, children 'read stories off the things they bring into play, while also writing the scripts that unfold the lives and dramas of their imaginary cast'.⁶² Such 'vitalising or personifying element' and 'writing the scripts that unfold the lives and dramas of their imaginary cast' were clearly manifested in children's practices of play-reading. Play-reading as the integrated reading and playing enriched child readers' lives and cultural experiences. Furthermore, the features of story-telling and retelling encapsulated in play-reading were widely used by writers and publishers of children's books in the Victorian and Edwardian times, allowing child readers to take part in the production, completion, promotion, and consumption of their reading materials.

⁶¹ James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (London: Longmans, 1895), 30.

⁶² Marina Warner, 'Out of an Old Toy Chest', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 43.2 (2009), 9.

CHAPTER SIX. FROM CHILD READERS TO CHILD

CONSUMERS

From the middle of the eighteenth century, as the market for children's books began to flourish, the practice of play-reading as discussed in Chapter Five was deployed and promoted by publishers of children's books. These publishers knew how to catch readers' attention by inviting them to participate in the completion of the narratives. Moreover, they treated their publications as merchandise. Pairing books with other goods, especially children's playthings, and packaging them together was but an effective marketing strategy. In 1744, the English publisher John Newbery adopted the idea of additional merchandising or product 'tie-ins', showing that books could be sold together with toys, which turned out to be a useful method to attract children to read. Each copy of Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* was sold for sixpence; for an extra two-penny, purchasers could get a ball or a pincushion to accompany the book (balls for boys, pincushions for girls).¹ Readers were told to use the ball or pincushion to instruct or amuse 'little Master Tommy and pretty Miss Polly' as they went through the story, for the use of the device 'will infallibly make Tommy a good boy, and Polly a good girl'.² This book was widely welcomed and earned Newbery substantial fame. The successful bookselling device reflects the interdependence between children's literature and material culture, and, as Robin Bernstein observes, demonstrates how Newbery 'conceived of children as a market and children's books

¹ William Noblett, 'John Newbery: Publisher Extraordinary', in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, ed. by Sheila Egoff, G. T. Stubbs, and L. F. Ashley, 2nd edn (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1980), 35.

² Quoted from the title page of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy*, 10th edn (1744; London: J. Newbery, 1760).

as a distinct literary category'.³ Although Newbery had been known as the father of children's literature, scholars of the history of children's books in recent years begin to question the originality of Newbery's marketing techniques and regard him as only one among several pioneers of the children's book market in the 1740s. It is fair to state that his achievement was not to start the fashion of juvenile books. Rather, Newbery was able to make children's book publishing a commercial success, and thus he introduced a profit-orientated market for children's books, a distinct branch of the book-trade.⁴

Newbery's salesmanship is sophisticated and has many modern features. One of the most obvious of these is the connection between books and toys. Although it is not clear if it was the authors' original idea or the publisher's strategy, many of the books published by Newbery use the enticing words 'playthings' and 'gifts' in the book titles, showing a close affinity between books and toys, reading and playing.⁵ By doing so, Newbery invented what Lissa Paul describes as 'the holy trinity of children's book advertising: instruction, delight, and toys'.⁶ Newbery presented the activity of reading as an encounter between readers and objects and realised that the practice of reading could extend beyond the boundaries of books. In view of John Locke's pedagogical reforms, which recognised the importance of combining learning and playing, Newbery experimented with his publications to see how

³ Robin Bernstein, 'Children's Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race: or, the Possibility of Children's Literature', *PMLA*, 126.1 (2011), 162.

⁴ In his examination of historical children's books produced in the 1740s which shaped the book trade of children's books and served as a response to the growing middle-class readership, Brian Alderson refers to Newbery's publication as 'only a part of the revolution rather than a prime mover'. Brian Alderson, 'New Playthings and Gigantick Histories: The Nonage of English Children's Books', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 60.2 (1999), 186.

⁵ Gillian Brown, 'The Metamorphic Book: Children's Print Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39.3 (2006), 352. For example, *Nurse Truelove's Christmas Box; or, The Golden Plaything for Little Children* (c. 1750); *A Pretty Play-Thing for Children of All Denominations* (c. 1759); *The Fairing; or, A Golden Toy for Children of All Sizes and Denominations* (c. 1765); *The Valentine's-Gift; or, A Plan to Enable Children of All Denominations to Behave with Honour, Integrity, and Humanity* (c.1766); *The Easter-Gift; or, The Way to be Very Good* (c. 1770).

⁶ Lissa Paul, 'Are Children's Book Publishers Changing the Way Children Read? A Pocket History', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 28.3 (2003), 137.

reading and playing could be aligned with each other. The tactile experience these books provided signifies that reading could be both textual and material. When child readers were play-reading these books they were also learning that pleasure in playing did not have to be at odds with pleasure in reading. Gillian Brown has examined a variety of historical movable books from the perspective of ‘the intimacy between materiality and imagination in books’ and suggests that ‘Newbery’s implementation of Lockean pedagogy does not merely present reading as a form of parallel play, but significantly delineates literary mobility as an immense improvement upon physical mobility’.⁷ It is particularly true that Newbery’s bringing together of objects and texts heightens the significance of the materiality of books and the reader’s role in bringing to life literary objects.⁸ Meanwhile, as child readers learned to associate books with toys in their reading experience, this development of children’s book marketing also helped prepare them to enter a commercial society in which a flourishing toy market played a key part.⁹

From the eighteenth century, when the idea of the modern child emerged and the new world of children opened up, the concept of childhood became increasingly central to culture and economy in Britain.¹⁰ By then, childhood was recognised as a unique stage of life separate from adulthood. Children were no longer treated merely as miniature adults; instead, they were viewed as promising sales targets whose special needs for clothes, nursery furniture, toys, books, and education should be satisfied. Before 1820, the trade in children’s books and toys became a very large

⁷ Brown, 357.

⁸ Ibid., 359.

⁹ Heather Klemann, ‘The Matter of Moral Education: Locke, Newbery, and the Didactic Book-Toy Hybrid’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44.2 (2011), 225.

¹⁰ For thorough discussion about the shaping of the ‘modern child’, and the examination of the role of children as consumers, see Andrew O’Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children’s Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003); John H. Plumb, ‘The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England’, in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and John H. Plumb (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 286-315.

business.¹¹ Children's goods infiltrated many areas; as Ginger Frost describes, 'entire industries for children mushroomed and children's literature abounded'.¹² Toy shops were proliferating in the West End of London by the 1820s and the 1830s. Children from well-to-do families could visit the Lowther Arcade, the Soho Bazaar or various toy shops and department stores such as Cremer's on Regent Street and Bond Street, and Shoolbred on Tottenham Court Road.¹³ A toy book published in the 1840s features a group of children visiting a London toy shop, where they could find popular toys of the time, such as dolls' houses, bows and arrows, kites, rocking-horses, toy carriages, all sorts of toy animals, musical instruments, and building bricks [Fig. 6.1].

The market of children's books and toys also became an arena for adults to manufacture, sell and purchase what they imagined to be most suitable for children. Patricia Crain claims in her review of studies of the commodification of childhood that childhood is a 'spectacle, orchestrated in, by, and for the marketplace'.¹⁴ Manufacturers and publishers of the period started to explore how the close relationship between books and toys could trigger an increase in both the children's book trade and the toy trade. These marketing developments appealed both to the child directly and to adult purchasers, who could be moved by nostalgia for their own childhood. Bernstein also asserts that children's literature as a genre is established on the ground of its connection with children's playthings and it is made distinct from other literature by its alliance with material culture. In other words, the marketing of

¹¹ Plumb, 310.

¹² Ginger Suzanne Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 167.

¹³ Maurice Baring, *The Puppet Show of Memory* (London: William Heinemann, 1922), 5; Beryl Lee Booker, *Yesterday's Child, 1890-1909* (London: John Long, 1937), 248; Kenneth Fawdry et al., *Pollock's History of English Dolls and Toys* (London: Benn, 1979), 102; Pamela Horn, *The Victorian Town Child* (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1997), 162; Sonia Keppel, *Edwardian Daughter* (London: Hamilton, 1958), 30; Anthony Burton, *Children's Pleasures: Books, Toys, and Games from the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood* (London: V&A Publications, 1996), 48-49.

¹⁴ Patricia Crain, 'Childhood as Spectacle', *American Literary History*, 11.3 (1999), 545.

children's books relied heavily on the co-presentation of books and toys.¹⁵ This kind of packaged combination inspired child readers to act out the stories they read using the accessorised toys, as Newbery's early example shows. Besides, this particular merchandising invited readers to be the storytellers and nurtured the desire to invent stories of their own.



Figure 6.1 A London toy shop in *Grandmama Easy's Wonders of A Toy-Shop* (London: Dean and Co., c. 1845), 1; Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, University of Florida's Digital Collections

In his study of the nature of children's literature and of child readers, Peter Hollindale suggests that children's literature 'is a body of texts with certain common features of imaginative interest, which is activated as children's literature by a reading event: that of being read by a child'.¹⁶ In this light, child readers should not

¹⁵ Bernstein, 162.

¹⁶ Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Stroud: Thimble, 1997), 30.

be perceived as complete outsiders in the whole process of production, transaction, and consumption of children's books. And children's literature is not to be categorised as a reactionary genre built on adult nostalgia for an innocent childhood. Besides, not all child readers receive children's books passively. Hollindale's argument is particularly useful on the notion of the child reader and children's reading behaviour. He proposes the idea of 'childness', the quality of being a child, to characterise a successful text for children, and suggests that

childness is the distinguishing property of a text in children's literature [...] and it is also the property that the child brings to the reading of a text. At its best, the encounter is a dynamic one. The childness of the text can change the childness of the child, and vice versa.¹⁷

In other words, children's literature 'is characterized both by textual status and by readership, and its uniqueness is evident at the point where they meet'.¹⁸ Indeed children's reading events are crucial in the construction of children's literature, as Hollindale further declares, 'For the child, childness is composed of the developing sense of self in interaction with the images of childhood encountered in the world [...] the *event* of children's literature lies in the chemistry of a child's encounter with it'.¹⁹ Through their subjective interaction with the text, children create a relationship between the text they read and their active role as readers.

Matthew Grenby in his comprehensive study of the child reader in the long-eighteenth century discusses a variety of active and interactive reading practices which challenge the conventional understanding of solitary reading we thought children in the past generally engaged in.²⁰ Through the practice of play-reading discussed in the previous chapter, or, as Grenby observes, in children's interactive

¹⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹⁹ Ibid., 49; *italic in original*.

²⁰ M. O. Grenby, *The Child Reader, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 226-35.

reading such as making mischievous annotations, children took the initiative to reconstruct, and in some cases even to subvert the stories that they read. An advice manual published in the early 1920s made a similar observation:

Remember that, to an imaginative child, reading is to all intents and purposes *direct experience* [...] not a method of passing the time, or of exercising a scarcely-born critical faculty.

He will actually pass through the adventures related, and it is not fitting that he should do so alone. In reading certain episodes he will need, so to speak, to have his hand held quite as much as if he were traversing a dark forest.²¹

The child reader's playing with literary texts and his invention of new play-scripts based on that reading falls into Bernstein's paradigm of 'the triangulation of play, literature, and material culture', in which children were the readers, storytellers, consumers, and eventually the 'coproducers in the play-book-toy formation from which children's literature is now inextricable'.²²

Both toys and books were meaning-making texts, and the ways in which readers received and responded to these texts were closely linked to the ways publishers and traders promoted their commodities. In order to understand why children's book publishers sought to involve child readers in their salesmanship, we need to examine children's desires to tell their own stories. In the act of play-reading, we see these desires at work. Just as a Peter Rabbit doll is by no means an ordinary stuffed animal wearing a blue coat, Newbery's ball or pincushion was nothing like a random purchase from a street toy hawker: what makes these toys unique is the stories they carry and the further stories they could stimulate. By anthropomorphising the rabbit or turning the narrative device into tangible toys, these children's book publishers effectively transformed the original story into a multifaceted commodity which

²¹ Lady Asquith [Cynthia Mary Evelyn Asquith], *The Child at Home* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1923), 71; italics in original.

²² Bernstein, 167.

impressed readers as well as maximised the visibility and additional revenue for their publications. Hence, the product on sale might not necessarily be the main attraction, yet the stories behind or involving the product, no matter how tenuous the connection, gave life to the original book or toy, and this is what publishers and advertisers endeavoured to emphasise and draw readers' attention to.

Training readers

Along with the growth of purchasing power and the prospering publishing and toy industry, the innovation of franchising toys and books together expanded significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Children's magazines provided a crucial and ebullient site for the commodification of children's books and toys. In the last four decades of Queen Victoria's reign and throughout the Edwardian era, more than five hundred magazines targeted at children and young people were circulated in the literary market. In 1866 alone, three important magazines, *Aunt Judy's Magazine* (1866-85), *Boys of England* (1866-99) and *Chatterbox* (1866-1953), were founded, all aiming to offer both amusement and instruction.²³ In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the market of children's magazines thrived. Publishers of these magazines, including evangelical societies and professional publishing houses, sought to produce less expensive and higher quality periodicals which they believed to be both entertaining and educational. By the end of the century, publishers managed to divide the market into specialised niches. Readers from any age, gender and class could find a magazine that they could identify

²³ For a detailed account of children's magazines in this period, see Diana Dixon, 'Children and the Press, 1866-1914', in *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. by Michael Harris and Alan Lee (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986), 133-48.

themselves with. An urban working-class girl might gain a sense of comradeship in *The Girl's Realm* (1898-1915), whereas a public school boy enjoyed reading colonial adventures in *The Boy's Own Paper* (1879-1967) and a little child from a middle-class family could find pleasure in nursery magazines such as *Little Folks* (1871-1933) or *Tiny Tots* (1894-1940); still other lower-middle class children might be devoted readers of *Chatterbox*. Children's author Allison Uttley prided herself in knowing *Chatterbox* from cover to cover so well as a child that she was able to repeat long portions of the stories in it.²⁴ Some child readers amused themselves by reading both magazines published by religious groups and more secular and non-didactic publications. James Laver, a middle-class Victorian child, testified that his sister, 'although a little worried by the household distinction between "Sunday books" and everyday books', read *The Sunday at Home*, which fell into the first category, and *The Leisure Hour*, which fell into the second.²⁵

The diversification of Victorian and Edwardian children's magazines offers significant insights into a variety of contemporary ideas about the nature of childhood. Combining instruction and delight, these juvenile periodicals played a key role in the informal education of their readers. Materials presented in these magazines encompassed a great diversity of topics. Reading these magazines could give readers access to an enormous range of knowledge. Nursery rhymes, fairy tales, domestic fiction, school stories, boys' adventures, informative articles on natural history, geography, history, and foreign cultures, advice on careers, religion, and housekeeping, tips for making one's own toys, and anecdotes about members of the royal family all made regular appearances in juvenile periodicals. In addition to instilling knowledge—many of these magazines were founded with the objective of

²⁴ Alison Uttley, *Ambush of Young Days* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 197.

²⁵ James Laver, 'My Grandmother's House', in *Little Innocents. Childhood Reminiscences, etc.*, by Ethel Smyth, et al. (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1932), 33.

offering an attractive and yet clean alternative to the then considered socially disturbing penny dreadfuls and sensational literature—Claudia Nelson suggests that their primary goal was ‘social engineering’. In other words, these magazines aimed to provide an instrument for uplifting the moral tone of ‘the rising generation in the upper working class and above’.²⁶

Indeed such editorial policy defined not only the shape of individual magazine but also the composition of readership. Reader participation was one of the governing factors of the popularity of these magazines. The participation of readers could be seen in the correspondence columns and various competitions held by magazine publishers. While correspondence columns served as a forum for exchanges between editors and readers, reader-oriented competitions provided readers a rare chance of seeing their names appear in the magazines and their works seriously appraised by an esteemed group of adults.

Nineteenth-century literary critic Edward Salmon also gave credit to magazine-organised competitions’ positive influence on child readers and declared that the best attraction of the *Girl’s Own Paper* (1880-1956; hereafter *Girl’s Own*) was its prize competitions.²⁷ These competitions were extremely popular and all-encompassing. Consider for example a competition held by *Girl’s Own* in 1885, which featured the ‘Biographical Table’ of famous women and received nearly five thousand entries—the editor reported that it took five postmen to carry a sack crammed full of the 4,956 participating articles.²⁸ Insofar as these competitions reflect a remarkable degree of enthusiasm for the pursuit of ingenuity, taste, and accomplishment, they also demonstrate utilitarian and charitable goals. Readers of

²⁶ Claudia Nelson, ‘Growing Up: Childhood’, in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 77.

²⁷ Edward G. Salmon, ‘What Girls Read’, *The Nineteenth Century*, October 1886, 520-21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 521.

Little Folks, for example, were told by one of the judges after the result of the competitions in 1889 was announced:

We [the adjudicators] should be sorry to think that anyone worked *only* for the reward of a book or a medal. When you have made anything for a little sufferer who is poor and ill, whether you have made a toy [...] or a warm shawl or a dress, you have already done something so sweet, beautiful, and kind, that beside the value of your loving deed, our prizes and honour are simply nothing. Perhaps those who did not win gave their gifts with the most kindness and after the most patient work, still more, perhaps the work you are inclined to think of as a failure is this day and hour giving pleasure to a child who had very few pleasures in a sad little life. So, as all the work has been distributed among children in the hospitals, every one of you—prize winners and not—has succeeded.²⁹

Hence the readers were taught that prizes and rewards were not nearly as important as their good deeds: their attention was drawn to the value of philanthropy. What might have appealed to the readers more, as some of the letters addressing the editor reveal, was the sense of belonging to a community in which they shared a common belief in the importance of making other people happy through the works of their own hands. In addition to giving the list of prize winners by competition categories and age divisions and comments from the judges, the editor of *Little Folks* also compiled a full list of hospitals and kindred institutions throughout Britain where the works of participating readers were distributed when the competitions were over.

Sometimes publishers organised exhibitions to display the works sent to the competitions. For instance, *Little Folks* held ‘The Little Folks Exhibition of Dolls in Costume, Dolls’ Houses, Rag Dolls and Animals, Scrap Books and Illuminated Texts’ at the Alexandra Palace in Muswell Hill, London, from 21st December 1878 to 11th January 1879.³⁰ Readers felt flattered by these reports and events and were thus enticed to come back for the following issues to find out the result of the

²⁹ ‘How Our 1889 Special Competitions Were Won’, *Little Folks*, February 1890, 135; italic in original.

³⁰ ‘The Editor’s Pocket Book’, *Little Folks*, January 1879, 52; Vale, ‘A Peep at the Dolls’, *Little Folks*, February 1879, 174-76.

competitions and to discover another opportunity to make a contribution. In her analysis of child readers and their reading practices in relation to the construction of the ‘magazine world’, Gretchen Galbraith suggests that *Little Folks* ‘was using competition results to gauge its readership’s composition, and to secure the greatest possible number of participants’.³¹ Readers enjoyed various relationships with their magazines: they could be faithful subscribers, participants and even winners in competitions, or members of a community of juvenile philanthropists. These roles enabled the construction of a collective identity and an imagined community of like-minded readers who perceived themselves as part of a chivalrous mission.³² Editors used these competitions to encourage readers to participate in the production of their magazines. Therefore, being a loyal reader of *Little Folks* or *Girl’s Own* and earning a medal or a brooch in the magazine competitions did not simply represent an honour but also a gesture showing their dedication to and identification with the moral values and the central messages of these publications. Furthermore, the prize medal or brooch, as Beth Rodgers points out, denotes ‘access to a communal peer identity’ and reader participation could be read as ‘the formation of a reading community within the magazine and the construction of modern childhood’.³³

In this regard, the relationship between readers and editors was more like comradeship than that between manufacturer and purchaser; readers within the same reading community were even viewed as ‘sisters’. The editor of *Girl’s Own* declared in its thousandth issue that the magazine’s primary accomplishment worth

³¹ Gretchen R. Galbraith, *Reading Lives: Reconstructing Childhood, Books, and Schools in Britain, 1870-1920* (New York: St. Martins, 1997), 61.

³² For reader participation and contribution in terms of the construction of ‘imagined community’ (using Benedict Anderson’s phrase), see Kristine Moruzi, *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850-1915* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 7-14.

³³ Beth Rodgers, ‘Competing Girlhoods: Competition, Community, and Reader Contribution in *The Girl’s Own Paper* and *The Girl’s Realm*’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 45.3 (2012), 280.

celebrating was that it had managed to satisfy the need of ‘a paper which girls could truly call *their own*’:

a paper which would be to the whole sisterhood a sensible, interesting and good-humoured companion, counsellor and friend, advocating their best interests, taking part in everything affecting them, giving them the best advice, conveying to them the best information, supplying them with the most readable fiction, and trying to exercise over them a refining and elevating influence.³⁴

The editor’s positioning himself as the readers’ confidant suggests an intimate and familial relationship. More importantly, this kind of companionship also involved reciprocity.³⁵ As readers consistently received messages from the magazine editors through ‘Editor’s Pocket Book’, ‘Answers to Correspondents’ or ‘Chat with the Girl of the Period’, they also made their voice heard and showed their insights and skills through their letters and handicrafts.³⁶ Rather than being passive recipients they were the co-producers of these magazines. By way of contributing to the magazines their works, stories, and concerns, each reader could proudly claim that the magazines were not merely her own, but *their own*. Their reading experience was thus a process of sharing stories with other members of the imagined community and of turning the magazines from a top-down, authoritative text into a product conveying readers’ collective stories, interests, values, identity, memory, and aspirations.

These reader-oriented columns and competitions demonstrate the characteristics of reader participation, story-telling and sharing, and the reciprocal relationship between readers and editors. All of these characteristics indicate the construction of a group of loyal readers who shared an identical longing for a magazine that could best represent and embody their desires. Through correspondence columns and

³⁴ ‘Our 1000th Number’, *The Girl’s Own Paper*, 25 February 1899, 345; italics in original.

³⁵ Galbraith, 54.

³⁶ These are names of correspondence columns of *Little Folks*, *The Girl’s Own Paper* and *The Girl’s Realm* respectively.

competitions readers were trained to express their ideas as well as to view the magazine editors as their guides leading them to the recognition of the magazines as a commodity showcasing shared stories and satisfying shared desires.

Marketing to readers

Juvenile magazines also provided an important forum for the proliferation of children's books and toys. A cornucopia of articles on toys and advertisements featuring toys appeared frequently in these periodicals. These advertisements and featured articles shared a common characteristic of story-telling. In the Christmas season of 1888, *Funny Folks* (1874-94) had an advertisement for 'Hinde's Popular Shilling Toys for Christmas', showing a new patent dolls' house, known as 'Dimple Villa' [Fig. 6.2].³⁷

³⁷ 'Hinde's Popular Shilling Toys', *Funny Folks*, 13 October 1888, 327. For historical development of how publishers cultivated Christmas trade in a systematic fashion which boosted what we understand as modern industry of children's books and toys, see Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 140-55.

Together with the advertisement for the dolls' house, the same page also produced other products, 'Miss Dollie Daisie Dimple' and 'A Sailor Boy Doll' to accompany Dollie Daisie Dimple, which cunningly delivered the message that the sales would be the prospective inhabitants of 'Dimple Villa' and therefore convinced

the magazine readers to purchase all three of the toys. The advertisement for Hinde's Dolls' House was also present in *Girls' Own* that December, which boasted that this toy 'is sure to be a favourite and all old friends of "Dollie Daisie Dimple"', emphasising the connection between the doll and the house.³⁸ Whereas most advertisements in these magazines simply listed the characteristics and price of a product as it was and read like a bland catalogue, 'Hinde's Popular Shilling Toys' created what we perceive today as a toy character with a story created around it that the magazine readers could easily identify with. Readers were expected to recognise that the commodity had its story to tell, and they could then use the story to come up with new ideas for their own activities of play-reading.

The Ladies' Home Journal adopted a similar enchanting language for 'Lettie Lane's Doll House' in 1912 and 1913, the gift the magazine sent out to their new yearly subscribers. The advertisement read, 'It is Ready for Doll Housekeeping. Its Little Mistress Welcomes You' [Fig. 6.3]. The same advertisement could be found in another issue of the magazine, using an equally welcoming tone: 'Every Room Is for Doll Housekeeping. Its Mistress Bids You Welcome.' It also gave the reader more detailed information about 'Lettie Lane' and her house. The reader could find out that the doll comes from Germany. The reader was also told: 'Pretty as she is, her dainty dress and braided straw hat add to her attractiveness. Moreover she just fits the house and harmonizes with every feature of it'.³⁹ Furthermore, the dolls' house itself was an incomparable work by the artists commissioned by the magazine: 'To tell the truth another doll bungalow decorated and furnished in such perfect taste does not exist in all Dollitown'.⁴⁰ The promotion scheme worked in conjunction with the marketing

³⁸ 'Hinde's Popular Shilling Toys', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 1 December 1888, n.pag.

³⁹ Advertisement of 'Lettie Lane's Doll House' reproduced and cited in Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Dolls' Houses* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 254-55.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of Lettie Lane, a paper doll (together with a massive stock of clothes and accessories and numerous paper doll family members and friends) that appeared regularly on the coloured pages of the magazine from 1908 to 1915 for young readers to cut out and play with. Again, the advertisement presented at full length the story of a particular commodity which should be purchased, so that the child reader could cherish and befriend it. We see here the construction of the child as consumer, even if the parents might, under pressure, be the purchasers. In the same way, the magazine strived to gain loyalty and identification from its readers. In addition to recruiting regular subscribers, through the complimentary dolls' house the magazine publisher wished to be regarded as a friend with whom readers could play and share intimate stories.

Instead of providing just facts and figures, both the advertisements for 'Hinde's Popular Shilling Toys' and 'Lettie Lane's Doll House' chose to tell the stories behind their targeted product in order to encourage consumerism and teach children to engage with the advertisement as a more sophisticated text which incorporated triggers for buying, playing, reading, and story-telling. In this way, readers were fascinated to discover that aside from the stories they encountered in the regular literary matters in the magazines, there were also stories out there embedded in the blurbs of advertisement pages. What the advertisers intended to do was not different from what the magazine publishers attempted. Both the advertisers and the publishers hoped to address the magazine readers directly at a personal level and to make friends with them. They did so to arouse readers' curiosity about the stories of the particular advertised product so that they might relate the commodity to the stories they read in the magazines before, and thus become the potential long-term subscribers and purchasers.

It is Ready for Doll
Housekeeping

Its Little Mistress
Welcomes You



How to Obtain the House

ANY little girl may own house, doll and furniture if she will do this: Send us **THREE** new yearly subscriptions for **THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL**, accompanied by the regular subscription price (\$4.50 for the three; in Canada each subscription is \$2), requesting Little Lane's Doll House, whereupon the house, furniture and doll will be sent, all shipped free. There must be **four** things: 1st, these must be 3 yearly subscriptions; 2d, they must all be sent at the same time, and must be accompanied by \$4.50 remittance; 3d, they must all be **NEW** subscriptions (renewals of subscriptions already on the list, or transfers from one member to another, do not count); 4th, the name of the girl, the house must be asked for when the order is sent.

One good way to secure the three orders is to suggest to Mother or Father that some of this year's Christmas presents to friends consist of subscriptions to THE JOURNAL. If the orders are for that purpose mention that fact and we will mail the first copies so as to be received on Christmas Day along with handsome gift cards giving the names of the donors. The house, of course, will be sent at once. Above all, be very sure that the name and address to which the house is to be sent are written very clearly, and not confused with the names of the new subscribers. Address:

THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA



The Kitchen Floor is an imitation of Cook.



Just This Daily Chalk-Like Living-Process Attraction

It is impossible to convey on this page any accurate idea of the beauty and size of this wonderful doll house, as far as its color and the effect of its interior decorations are concerned. The result is as it is to make clear in a picture the charm of its little mistress who goes with each house in the line. The doll house is a limited house doll and is in the same proportion to the house that little girls' fathers and mothers are to the houses in which they live. Indeed the doll house itself is two inches wider than this page is long. The doll house is 17 inches high, stands 17 inches high when folded and posted according to the exactly folded directions. The company is the same.

The furniture for this doll house, which is also in folded and posted, is reasonable as the will of the owner of the doll house. The doll house is the same as the others on the terrace through every one of the appropriately and variously decorated rooms in the doll house ready for the housekeeping.



Dining Room in Turi, White and Mahogany



Light Blue is the Color Scheme of This Bedroom



This is How the House Looks When Open and With All the Furniture in Place for a Doll Party.

Learn the
Truth About
Furs Before
You Buy.

Your Copy Of

Albrecht's Fur Facts and Fashions

imparts valuable information that even many dealers are unfamiliar with,—facts that enable you to make judicious selections, and to be absolutely certain of the genuineness and the worth of your purchase.

The latest approved styles are vividly portrayed—a variety so large that any woman can select the one that best suits her personality and pocketbook. Contains illustrations from actual photographs in natural colors. Tells how furs are made. Gives complete description, prices, grading, wearing properties, usual trade names and corresponding common English names of all furs. You are entitled to know what you get for what you pay. What is the common sense, honesty to give this information at no advantage that Albrecht patrons heavy agents enjoyed.

Why risk buying furs without this guide? Send \$4 in stamps for Albrecht's Fur Facts and Fashions No. 19 now, before the edition is exhausted. It will insure you against disappointment in your fur purchases, and, whether you buy from us or elsewhere, will be worth many dollars to you.



Albrecht Model 691 and Temperature Wand is Made. This model is designed with 70 watts to heat wires to 2000°. This unit stands in business from only \$79.99 up.

You can secure Allbrecht Furs from dealers in various places, or we will ship to you direct and prepay charges on cash orders. You take no risk. If Allbrecht Furs are not satisfactory or as represented,

Good Taste in Furs

is immediately recognized in the woman who wears Albrecht's. Those studs of satisfied patrons look for the Albrecht Trade Mark when they buy furs, knowing from experience that it is their assurance of genuineness and utmost value. Nearly fifty-seven years in the fur business is in itself an

It is true that Albarecht Furs, though of the choicest obtainable, must not be mistaken for the ordinary kind. The fact that we buy skins direct from the trappers in large quantities and make them up in our own clean, sanitary workrooms enables us to do this.

Remember, in buying "Albarecht Furs" you are relieved of all doubt as to their genuineness.

E. ALBRECHT & SON
Founded 1882
South and Westmontery Sts., Station A, St. Paul, Minn.

E. ALBRECHT & SON
Founded 1883
 Sixth and Minnesota Sts., Station 3, St. Paul, W.

At times, products other than children's books and toys still used toys for sales promotion. Manufacturers of household goods, for instance, were notable for using paper toys to promote their products. Colour lithography facilitated this early effort of product promotion as entrepreneurs were able to offer a variety of brilliantly

coloured paper toys such as dolls in elaborately illustrated costumes to attract their customers. In 1895, William Barbour & Sons distributed a set of twelve paper dolls for three penny stamps as a way to draw readers' attention to linen thread, the company's main product [Fig. 6.4 & Fig. 6.5]. Similarly, Lovelace Soap in the same year gave out a miniature art nouveau screen that could be used in a dolls' house.⁴¹ Another soap company, Sunlight, advertised in 1896 a wide range of paper toys for customers who sent in the required number of wrappers from Sunlight or Lifebuoy Soap. These included a set of dolls each possessing a unique name, dolls' furniture, a Punch and Judy Show, and a model of a village fair [Fig. 6.6].

Giving out toys as advertising gimmicks was a clever, effective, and somewhat insidious strategy. Even though adult readers of these magazines might not be interested in collecting these complimentary toys, they would be willing to do so for their children. On the other hand, the child readers who came across these advertisements, although they did not have real purchasing power and were not even the target customers of linen thread or soaps, would be keen on making certain their mothers buy these products, lest their collection of paper toys and dolls would not be complete. Their longing for possessing a complete collection—an ongoing desire to keep on buying and collecting—was stirred up, as in the case of toy books advertising discussed in Chapter Four.

⁴¹ Pauline Flick, *Old Toys* (Aylesbury: Shire, 1985), 19-20.

Barbour's Dolls.



IRELAND.

**A SET OF TWELVE
DOLLS FOR
THREE PENNY
STAMPS.**

The complete Set consists of Twelve Dolls, one of them illustrated herewith (5 inches high), each lithographed in beautiful colours and representing different characters as follows :

**America,
Ireland,
Japan, China,
Flower Girl,
Orange
Blossoms,
Grapes, Little
Buttercup,
Boy 15th
Century,
18th Century,
Boy Sailor,
18th Century.**

They are made of heavy, strong paper that will endure an immense amount of handling. The complete Set will be sent to any address on receipt of **Three Penny Stamps.** Mailed from

**WM.
BARBOUR & SONS,
LIMITED,
Linen Thread
Manufacturers,
HILDEN, LISBURN,
IRELAND.**

**Always Use
BARBOUR'S Irish
Flax Threads.**



**See that all your Linen Thread
carries this Trade-Mark.**

Figure 6.4 'Barbour's Dolls', *The Illustrated London News*,
7 December 1895, 720



Figure 6. 5 One of the original paper dolls (Ireland) given by William Barbour & Sons; John Johnson Collection; © Bodleian Library, University of Oxford



Figure 6.6 'Sunlight Paper Toys', *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion*, 1 March 1896, v

Such incessant desire generated by advertisements supports Raymond Williams's description of advertising as a 'magic system'. According to Williams, advertising is a form of social narrative that tells fictional tales about social identities and relations and inscribes goods with a 'narrative capacity'. Its primary message is that only through the purchasing and possessing of the advertised commodity, which is inscribed with a story, will the story's promise be fulfilled and thus the social identities and relations be validated.⁴² Developing Williams's ideas, Stephen Kline notes in his study of the role of marketing in children's popular culture that the most crucial aspect of modern marketing techniques is advertising, through which advertising marketers 'bring objects to life by filling in the product's "story"'.⁴³ In this light, a significant characteristic of advertising is to address its readers' desires,

⁴² Raymond Williams, 'Advertising: The Magic System', in *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London: New Left, 2005), 170-95.

⁴³ Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London: Verso, 1993), 42.

to verbalise and visualise such desires in the form of stories. Moreover, a successful advertisement can be read as a fictional narrative about everyday life experiences of its readers as the potential consumers, whose desires and fancies, more often than the product itself, are the focus of the advertisement.

Publishers of Victorian and Edwardian children's magazines knew that they had to direct their readers to look at advertisements in order to achieve their commercial aims. As magazines became more dependent on advertising for their survival than on sales and subscriptions, editors, publishers, advertisers and entrepreneurs had to work hand in hand to link the circulation of magazines to the distribution or sale of selected commodities, through which the identification with and loyalty to the specific publication and merchandise were established and commercial profits of all parties were ensured.

In her study of readers' interactions with advertising and the construction of consumers in the mass-produced commodity culture at the turn of the century, Ellen Garvey explores diverse ways that enabled child readers to become participants in the formation of magazine culture.⁴⁴ In addition to the traditional means of correspondence columns and special prize competitions that trained readers' awareness of being part of a reading community and established the brand identity of certain magazines, Garvey observes that 'advertising contests' were the key to making readers more alert about the format and content of advertisements. From the 1890s, there were magazines which organised contests inviting both adult and child readers to play with the advertising. Readers were asked to act as aesthetic critics of advertisements and to contribute their ideas about how advertising should look to be attractive to them. In some contests they were asked to make comical collages of

⁴⁴ Ellen Gruber Garvey, 'Training the Reader's Attention: Advertising Contests', in *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 51-79.

different pieces of advertisements as a way of showing their familiarity with the proper form of advertisements and playfully create a new form. Advertising was then constructed as ‘arenas of pleasure and free play’, and readers learned how to ‘read advertising and to think and fantasize within its terms’.⁴⁵

If readers’ participation in the magazine world could be viewed as a marker of peer identity, the ways in which they responded to advertisements in magazines could be considered the construction of brand identity—both of the specific magazines and of the advertised commodities. As we see in reader-oriented competitions and correspondence columns, readers were encouraged to see themselves as part of an imagined reading community and to enjoy sharing the same feelings and desires of other members. By entering a competition or sending a letter to the editor, a reader would feel assured that she had a space in the reading community and other readers in the same community were within reach. To readers reading the same magazine and sharing the same stories and desires, possessing a product the magazine recommended, and which they imagined other readers of the magazine also possessed, enabled them to shape and express a group identity built with reference to the magazine advertisement. It also exemplified how brand recognition inspired a reader to be more enthusiastic about possessing a specific commodity in order to affirm that she was truly a girl of *Girl’s Own* or a friend of *Little Folks*. Hence, the following marketing equations were also established: those who played with Dollie Daisy Dimple also enjoyed reading *Girl’s Own*; those who possessed Lettie Lane’s dolls’ house were surely the supporters of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and those who befriended Dollie Bell, Annie Laurie and Katie O’Connor—the names given to the dolls distributed by Sunlight Soap—were

⁴⁵ Ibid., 54; 73.

undoubtedly the users of their hygienic products. The dynamics of readers, magazines, and advertisements were altogether about story-telling, brand name construction and recognition, which eventually created a comprehensive industry of childhood commodities and solidified the interdependence between children's literature and material culture.

Coda: afterlife of children's literature

Aside from the literary texts and advertising that preserve and celebrate the pleasure of childhood reading, playing, and consumption, a variety of spin-offs—the paraphernalia associated with famous children's books—have brought extra delights for child and adult readers of children's literature. The wide selection of merchandise derived from classic children's literature is not only about consumerism; it also involves child readers retelling and re-imagining familiar stories, going back to re-read much loved tales and books, and responding to the products that infiltrate diverse aspects of their everyday life. Jack Zipes suggests that the incessant desire of reading one's own lives into familiar fairy tales fosters the commodification of the culture of childhood, a process that is particularly visible in Disney's fairy tale films and their range of spin-off merchandise.⁴⁶

Before Disney used media including print, television and cinema to appeal to a global audience, which, as Henry Giroux describes, 'monopolize[s] the media and saturate[s] everyday life with its ideologies', children's book authors and publishers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries already exploited the modern

⁴⁶ Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children and the Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

application of synergistic marketing strategies using branded products.⁴⁷ The most noticeable synergistic marketing is surely character merchandise, presenting familiar faces from famous children's books. One of the earliest examples of character merchandise was 'The Wonderland Postage Stamp Case' invented by Lewis Carroll in 1890 based on his *Alice* books. The Postage Case contains twelve stamp holders with a chromolithographic printed cover, showing images taken from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.⁴⁸ This was followed by Fredrick Warne, the publisher of *Peter Rabbit* books, who produced the first Peter Rabbit doll licensed by Beatrix Potter in 1903. Potter herself created Peter Rabbit wallpaper and a Peter Rabbit race game.⁴⁹ The board game Potter designed features her original book illustrations and the rules closely follow the plot in the Peter Rabbit tale.⁵⁰ Wedgwood also began to manufacture Peter Rabbit porcelain in 1949, using Peter Rabbit illustrations to decorate their china nursery ware. The multiple, three-dimensional incarnations of Peter Rabbit and others have made the original two-dimensional text more accessible to all.

Indeed the appearance of patented story characters in an extensive range of childhood commodities suggests that children's experience of knowing a fictional character could not be quite the same as that of the first generation of readers when the book initially came out. Other than reading, through buying and possessing a product associated with classic children's literature, be it a Peter Rabbit tea set or an Alice in Wonderland biscuit tin [Fig. 6.7], children are now able to enter the wide wide world of imagination and fantasy and an unprecedented marketplace of

⁴⁷ Henry A. Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham: Rowman, 1999), 7.

⁴⁸ 'Publishers' Announcements', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 December 1890, n. pag.

⁴⁹ Diane Carver Sekeres, 'The Market Child and Branded Fiction: A Synergism of Children's Literature, Consumer Culture, and New Literacies', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44.4 (2009), 402.

⁵⁰ V&A Search the Collections, 'Peter Rabbit race game', <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1256730/peter-rabbit-race-game-board-game-frederick-warne-co/> [accessed 17 July 2014].

children's literature. The merchandise associated with children's books calls for a more sophisticated way of approaching children's literature and heralds the after-life of popular children's books. In addition, as Sarah Wood suggests, character merchandising has become 'a vital component in the saleability and licensing of a product, and key to a toy company's profit'.⁵¹ The development of three-dimensional merchandise representing characters and settings from popular children's literature succeeds in engaging more 'readers'—those who might not read the original book just as it is but would play with the spin-off toys or live with the spin-off products available in their daily life. As such, these commodified fictional characters help child readers to interact and play with 'brand fiction'—an umbrella term Diane Sekeres uses to refer to books and products sold under the one brand name.⁵²



Figure 6.7 Alice biscuit tin (1892); © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

⁵¹ Sarah Wood, *Museum of Childhood: A Book of Childhood Things* (London: V&A Publishing, 2012), 91.

⁵² Sekeres, 400.

With the aid of advertising and innovative designs of character merchandise, the book sustains its enduring power over decades. Meanwhile, the new generation of readers learn to engage with books in different ways. In addition to knowing the book itself, readers are now consumers and participants in the processes of brand construction and recognition. In other words, they are able to recognise the book as a product among many other spin-offs sharing the same name and story. To child readers, a story character does not exist only within the book but is also embodied in toys and other commodities permeating all aspects of their daily life. Children care for their toys and other related products as a means of showing their commitment to and understanding of the fictional characters they have ‘befriended’. Hence, these commodities have become objects of affection, recalling the theme of toys coming alive explored in many other tales, such as Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘The Steadfast Tin Soldier’ or more recently, the Pixar animation films, *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2*, as well as the belief that every toy has its own story to tell.

From the activities of reading and playing, to those of buying, consuming, and possessing, the child reader fully explores ways of interacting with books. Margaret Mackey suggests in her analysis of the phenomenon of the popularity of Peter Rabbit merchandise that ‘Peter Rabbit is both something to buy (marketing) and something to be (culture) through the buying’.⁵³ Indeed through the buying and possessing of children’s books and their numerous tie-ins or spin-offs which enrich the original stories and bring the literary texts to a mass-market setting, children also define themselves as readers, players, consumers, and creators of popular culture of their time.

⁵³ Margaret Mackey ‘The Mediation and Multiplication of *Peter Rabbit*’, in *Beatrix Potter’s Peter Rabbit: a Children’s Classic at 100*, ed. by Margaret Mackey (Lanham, MD: Children’s Literature Association and the Scarecrow Press, 2002), 178.

PART THREE 'A PARADISE IN MINIATURE'¹:

LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF DOLLS' HOUSES

'From the modest cottage or bijou residence to spacious mansions furnished most sumptuously and oh! Wonder of Wonders! fitted with electric light in every apartment!' The passage quoted is not an estate agent's description of a real home, but an 1893 advertisement from Hamleys, the famous London toy retailer on Regent Street, for a wide range of dolls' houses and accessories available at their shop. The advertisement goes on to read,

Accessories to well-appointed houses to dolls of every degree appear on every side; here are toilet-tables with drawers crammed with toilet-requisites; miniature perfume-bottles etc; a lovely little wardrobe offers five changes of apparel; a linen-chest is stored with dainty linen, and there are fitted kitchens, laundries and shops.²

Three decades later, a magazine article introducing the dolls' house presented to Queen Mary, consort of George V, used the same tone as the Hamleys advertisement:

Even a Lilliputian would blink with amazement at this marvellous palace in miniature, for apart from the charm born of its comparative minuteness, no house, either great or small, has ever been more sumptuously appointed, and none has been capable of producing a more magically fascinating impression on the mind of the beholders.³

¹ Quoted from a stanza from a poem by Samuel Jackson Pratt (1749-1814), entitled, 'To a Lady: Who Converted a Straw Cottage into a Card-Box':

Your Cot—so elegantly neat—
Might be Felicity's retreat;
And Lovers, such as we are told
Dwelt in the Cottage of old,
Where Shepherd-Swain and Shepherdess
Liv'd only to be bless'd and bless,
Might, just on such a spot, secure
A Paradise in Miniature.

Samuel Jackson Pratt, *Harvest-Home* (London: 1805), 53; italics in original.

² Quoted in Constance Eileen King, *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* (London: Hale, 1983), 328-29.

³ Reginald Pound, 'The Queen's Doll's House and Some Others', *Pearson's Magazine*, December

Some key words come into play when the object described is a piece of impeccably-made miniature furniture, made for a dolls' house. Sumptuous, well-appointed, magical, and fascinating, the miniature world not only appeals to the beholder with the dainty duplicates of the interior of a luxurious house, but what strikes the Lilliputians and us the most is the magical world these tiny items create and represent collectively: a world of completeness and perfection.

In many children's stories, dolls' houses, whether they are mass-produced merchandise or presents typical of well-to-do Edwardian parental indulgence (such as Titania's Palace designed by Sir Nevile Wilkinson for his little girl who begged for a mansion to be built for the fairies she saw in their garden), embody a complete world novel to the beholder. The sense of novelty with an air of perfection conjures up an ideal world epitomised in a miniature form. Although not all dolls' houses are built on a grand scale like that of Titania's Palace or Queen Mary's Dolls' House, the aesthetic space they contain promises an extraordinary setting that eyes have never seen. The girl protagonist in *Pearl's Doll's House* (1888), for instance, is given 'the most beautiful and the largest doll's house she had ever seen', and this house is fully-furnished, 'all complete'.⁴ Another fortunate girl is found in *Dora's Dolls' House* (1890), in which Dora receives as a birthday present a dolls' house that none of the dolls' houses 'that had ever been built could have exceeded [...] in the perfection of its outward appearance and the beauty and *completeness* of its interior arrangements'.⁵ Likewise, Edith Nesbit in her children's adventure story, *The Magic*

1923, 527.

⁴ *Pearl's Doll's House: Stories for Little People* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1888), 7; 20.

⁵ Louisa Lilius Greene, *Dora's Dolls' House: A Story for the Young* (London: Nelson & Sons, 1890), 49; emphasis mine.

City (1910), gives a similar description of ‘the finest dolls’ house [one] ever saw’ among some fascinating nursery toys.⁶

Besides being perfect and complete, as the reproduction of the real world in miniature, the dolls’ house and everything inside it need to be true to the original details. As Frances Armstrong describes, in the dolls’ house, ‘every detail of a real house has been replicated in miniature’.⁷ In other words, all the displayed objects must be real, only smaller in size. The term ‘real’ is another favourite descriptor in numerous dolls’ house narratives. The dolls’ house given to Dorothy on her seventh birthday in a short story published in a Victorian children’s periodical has a staircase, ‘most tastefully carpeted with crimson cloth, held in place by real brass rods’.⁸ In *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (1904), one of Beatrix Potter’s best-loved pocket books for little children, a dolls’ house that has ‘real muslin curtains’ is introduced.⁹ Mary Marks, a nineteenth-century children’s author, also recalled in her autobiographical reminiscence that the dolls’ house made by her father was equipped with ‘real’ panels and jambs, a bookcase ‘made exactly to scale’, a sideboard exactly like the one in their home, and above all, a cellaret that ‘really is *too* real’.¹⁰ Three decades after this, Katherine Mansfield created her literary dolls’ house with its ‘real windows’ and a ‘real lamp’ inviting spectators to look closely.¹¹ It is the player’s genuine desire that everything inside the dolls’ house should be true to the original details. The exhaustive use of the term ‘real’ emphasises that the dolls’ house is a superb realisation of craftsmanship and accurate reproduction or simulacrum of domestic

⁶ E[dith] Nesbit, *The Magic City* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 12

⁷ Frances Armstrong, ‘The Dollhouse as Ludic Space, 1690-1920’, *Children’s Literature*, 24 (1996), 35.

⁸ ‘The Doll’s House’, *Little Wide Awake: An Illustrated Magazine for Children*, 4 November 1889, 331.

⁹ Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (London: F. Warne & Co., 1904), 2.

¹⁰ Mary A. M. Marks, ‘Our Dolls’ House’, *Little Folks*, April 1896, 268; italic in original.

¹¹ Katherine Mansfield, ‘The Doll’s House’, in *The Dove’s Nest, and Other Stories* (London: Constable, 1923), 2-3.

interiors. However, it also, paradoxically, draws attention to the concept of realness, as the ‘real’ objects of the dolls’ house are also miniature imitations of a prior life-size ‘reality’. Can the ‘reality’ of the dolls’ house interior ‘really’ match up to the everyday life of actual houses?

Yet regardless of the extent to which a dolls’ house is considered real, it is easier to be perfectly maintained than the houses in real life. In her comprehensive chronological and geographical study of dolls’ houses, Constance Eileen King observes that once a dolls’ house is made and furnished,

order is steadfastly maintained: firegrates [sic] do not need cleaning, floors sweeping or sinks scouring, so that the chatelaine can stand back from her efforts with satisfaction, knowing that every item will remain in its appointed place behind the locked façade until she chooses to re-arrange the dressing-table or sideboard.¹²

She goes on to suggest that

The doll’s house interior is the perfect household in miniature, and for those who find keeping a full-sized home in reasonable order a constant and losing battle, the model house offers the allure of the unattainable. The interior is a delectable mixture of the charms of Lilliput and Utopia, simultaneously an escape from real life and its mirror.¹³

These passages support the notion that the dolls’ house can be viewed as a perfect world. The dolls’ house preserves and condenses a particular moment when all objects inside it are exhibited in an intact condition with no traces of having been tarnished. And the dolls’ house inhabitants, if any, are carefully posed to play their parts in the pageant. That is to say, the dolls’ house world freezes action at a particular time and position, and thus creates a peaceful domestic tableau. A Victorian school girl made a similar statement in a conversation with the school

¹² King, 4-5.

¹³ Ibid., 10.

mistress concerning the challenges awaiting her in the future when she would become a mother and a wife. In contrast to her feelings about the changes to come, she felt that dolls' house play could offer her ease and comfort: the dolls' house for her was a place where things would 'stand still' and were arranged 'in the way [she] liked best, and be quite sure that they would stay so'.¹⁴ In other words, the state of stillness gives the assurance that regardless of the harsh circumstances of the outside world, and despite changing fashions, the dolls' house, with the display of an ideal world formed with familiar objects of a diminutive scale, is a realm in which the residents are exempt from tedious chores and are protected from the changes which take place in the real world.¹⁵

The dolls' house therefore could be understood as a complete world amply supplied with items bearing close resemblance to the original, offering for the beholder an unprecedented aesthetic experience and 'a romantic shelter from the problems of modern society'.¹⁶ Whether it is made primarily for girls' domestic training or a sheer amusement for both children and adults, the dolls' house is a perfect space embodying the designer or collector's imagination and creativity. It is more than a mixture of Lilliput and Utopia, as King maintains. Rather, it is a Utopia in Lilliput, a spectacle in miniature materialising one's fantasies and ideals. In addition to the use value of a dolls' house that is to be played with, it is also a

¹⁴ Sarah Doudney, 'When We Were Girls Together. A Story of A School-Girl Life', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 25 April 1885, 466.

¹⁵ There are, however, records showing that during the Blitz, a number of dolls' house collectors furnished their dolls' houses with air-raid shelter, miniature sandbags, and 'additional supply of buckets and ladders for fire fighting'. Such kind of arrangement shows how dolls' houses could adapt to reflect historical changes and events entwining with the collectors' own lives. See Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Dolls' Houses* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 5. The Hopkinson House held in the V&A Museum of Childhood, for example, is a dolls' house which faithfully reflects war shortages through the display of ration books, torches for blackouts, and utility furniture.

¹⁶ King, 12.

stage-display pageantry set before the public gaze, as Susan Stewart describes, ‘to be consumed with the eye’.¹⁷

Chapters in Part Three will then discuss representations of the dolls’ house in primary texts set inside dolls’ houses, and more broadly, children’s adventures in miniature worlds. Reading representations of miniaturisation in dolls’ house-related literature and viewing the dolls’ house as a magical tiny creation, I will discuss the juxtaposition of big and small, the enchantment of miniaturisation that blurs the boundary between imagination and reality, the action of physically looking at the dolls’ house, and discuss the acts of pretending and making-believe in dolls’ house play. The variety of ways of reading and approaching the dolls’ house demonstrates that the dolls’ house is not just about the reproduction of domestic ideals on a miniature scale or a conforming device training girls to become perfect housewives; rather, it is also a means to express one’s imagination, creativity, and agency.

¹⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 62.

CHAPTER SEVEN. OF BIG AND SMALL

Enlargement and belittlement

When Philip, the hero of Edith Nesbit's *The Magic City* (1910), enters the city he has built with materials he found to hand inside the house, he is amazed that once familiar things have all become enormous:

Philip looked round at the Stonehenge building and saw that it was indeed built of enormous oak bricks.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘only I’ve grown smaller.’

‘Or they’ve grown bigger,’ said Mr. Perrin; ‘it’s the same thing. You see it’s like this. All the cities and things you ever built is in this country. I don’t know how it’s managed, no more’n what you do. But so it is. And as you made’em, you’ve the right to come to them—if you can get there. And you have got there. It isn’t every one has the luck, I’m told. Well, then, you made the cities, but you made’em out of what other folks had made, things like bricks and chessmen and books and candlesticks and dominoes and brass basins and every sort of kind of thing. An’ all the people who helped to make all them things you used to build with, they’re all here too. D’you see? Making’s the thing. If it was no more than the lad that turned the handle of the grindstone to sharp the knife that carved a bit of a cabinet or what not, or a child that picked a teazle to finish a bit of the cloth that’s glued on to the bottom of a chessman—they’re all here. They’re what’s called the population of your cities.’

‘I see. They’ve got small, like I have,’ said Philip.¹

A similar visual impact is made on Gulliver in his voyage to Brobdingnag. In the realm of Brobdingnag mice and insects not only are a source of annoyance but also produce a fatal threat to the relatively small Gulliver. Following Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), others have playfully experimented with the literary device of juxtaposing the gigantic and the miniature. Novels such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Walter de la Mare's *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921),

¹ E[dith] Nesbit, *The Magic City* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 105-06.

T. H. White's *Mistress Masham's Repose* (1946), and Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* (1952), all reveal a stark contrast between big and small. The unexpected change of size and scale of everyday objects and ordinary living creatures initiates a sense of unfamiliarity and uneasiness for the viewer and is definitely not quite 'the same thing' as Nesbit's Mr. Perrin declares. Such confounding of proportion not only creates comical absurdity in terms of visual effect but also deranges the order of the universe one is accustomed to.

In his examination of the fascination of the miniature, Steven Millhauser argues that the fundamental difference between the gigantic and the miniature lies in the fact that the former produces a sensation of discomfort and danger whereas the latter is without dread and 'invites possession'.² Gaston Bachelard's notion of the relation of man and space goes even further, suggesting that one is able to possess the world by miniaturising it.³ Unlike the gigantic which arouses bewilderment and threat, the miniature creates a different perspective which gives the viewer a feeling of control. Millhauser proposes that the miniature is 'an attempt to reproduce the universe in graspable form. It represents a desire to possess the world more completely, to banish the unknown and the unseen [...] and under the enchantment of the miniature we are invited to become God'.⁴ Evidently the miniature entitles the viewer to grasp, to manipulate, and to play with something in a tangible and comprehensible form. In other words, the miniaturisation of the original provides not only a new perspective from which one observes the world, but a trigger for one to remodel the order of things. Furthermore, diminishing the original object enables one to play God in a microcosm that is one's own personal possession. When playing with a miniature object, one can believe oneself to be in charge of a well-ordered world, and, as

² Steven Millhauser, 'The Fascination of the Miniature', *Grand Street*, 2.4 (1983), 129-30.

³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (1958; Boston: Beacon, 1994), 150.

⁴ Millhauser, 135.

Constance Eileen King suggests, these miniature worlds create a steadfastly-maintained order. Once the miniature world is established, all articles in it adhere to the player's design and the state of harmony remains, unless the player chooses to make a rearrangement.⁵

A number of autobiographical accounts of dolls' house play show that the players were in control of keeping things in order in the miniature world and enjoyed restoration and furnishing according to their tastes and preference. However, there were times when the need for rearrangement was caused by an unwelcome hand. In her reminiscence of Victorian childhood, Katharine Pyle complained that boys were 'not so careful and orderly in their ways as little girls'; even though her toys were 'neatly arranged' at the outset, her brother stored his odds and ends inside her dolls' house little by little.⁶ Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the power to disarrange is also an attraction of dolls' house play. In some cases, the little players used dolls' house play as a legitimate space to get into mischief and subvert the usual order of things. As Frances Hodgson Burnett described, they were even able to 'turn things upside down, putting the footman into bed with measles in the nursery, and giving balls in the kitchen at which the grandpapa seems to dance with the cook'.⁷

Therefore, it is fair to assume that the fascination of dolls' house play is associated with size discrepancies which enable the player to take full control over the miniature version of a large object. Indeed the reduction in scale of everyday objects satisfies the player's desire to manipulate things in a familiar setting and may develop the player's tastes and skills in performing domestic duties. In this light, the significance of playing with the dolls' house, a self-contained and self-enclosed

⁵ Constance Eileen King, *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* (London: Hale, 1983), 10.

⁶ Katharine Pyle, 'The Story of a Doll-House', *St. Nicholas*, April 1889, 448.

⁷ Frances Hodgson Burnett, 'My Toy Cupboard', *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1915, 11.

world encapsulated in miniature, goes beyond preparing girls for their possible future roles as mothers and wives. In a broader cultural and intellectual context, the dolls' house makes the player aware of a range of concepts, including measurement, size, scale, proportionality, and the ways things relate to her surroundings. When telling the young readers about the toys she used to play with in her girlhood, a contributor to a nineteenth-century children's magazine recalled how disappointed she and her sister were, due to the insufficient supply of correctly sized furniture to be placed in her dolls' house: 'my great grief was *the want of proportion* in our goods and chattels. For instance, we were given a beautiful clock for the drawing-room, but it was so big that no table would hold it, and at last it had to be placed on the floor, which distressed us dreadfully'.⁸ Similarly, Mary MacCarthy admitted that her dolls' house was out of her favour as the 'wrong proportions of everything inside the dolls' house' gave her 'an aching feeling of helplessness; the heavy gold tea-set goes over at a touch, and sends all the chairs falling about, and knocks down the dolls'.⁹ The want of proportion these authors complained about clearly shows how accuracy of dimensions was perhaps the very feature a fastidious player most desired.

Just as dolls' house players were concerned about the importance of correct size-ratios, scholars of Victorian girls' culture have shown an increasing interest in the notion of size and scale, in the belief that 'small is beautiful', and in the representation of miniature characters or adventures in miniature worlds. Critics have recognised in various literary and cultural settings the leitmotif of the figurative diminution of female characters and the littleness and vulnerability of girls.¹⁰ From

⁸ Lady Barker [Mary Anne Barker], 'About Toys and Games', *Good Words for the Young*, 1 January 1871, 140; all italics mine.

⁹ Mary Josefa MacCarthy, *A Nineteenth-Century Childhood* (London: William Heinemann, 1924), 9.

¹⁰ See, for example, Frances Armstrong, 'Gender and Miniaturization: Games of Littleness in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *English Studies in Canada*, 16 (1990), 403-16; Frances Armstrong, "'Here Little, and Hereafter Bliss': *Little Women* and the Deferral of Greatness', *American Literature*,

juvenile fiction to advice manuals, there were a multitude of titles addressing ‘little girls’ in the nineteenth century. Books such as *Aunt Mary’s Tales for the Entertainment and Improvement of Little Girls* (1813), *Amusement for Little Girls’ Leisure Hours* (1831), *The Little Girl’s Keepsake* (1840), *The Little Girls’ Housekeeping* (1849), and *Cousin Lively’s Picture Book of Nice Little Games for Nice Little Girls* (1859), all imply a close connection between girl readers and the idea of littleness.¹¹ Girls were considered ‘little’ not merely because they were ‘small in size’ or ‘short in stature’ but the state of being ‘little’ or ‘small’ is also defined as ‘being of comparatively restricted dimensions’.¹² The latter definition could suggest how ‘little girls’ in the nineteenth century were viewed as beings of confined stature placed in a designated, restricted sphere. Little girls were expected to mature into ‘little women’. Although their bodies would grow, their inner pluck and audacity might diminish. In other words, when little girls grew up to be little women, they were recognised as those whose feminine virtues and attributes outshone any other non-feminine traits they might possess. Such cultural restraints are suggested in *Little Women* (1868), Louisa May Alcott’s classic *Bildungsroman* for girls, which ironically depicts the taming of tomboyish Jo.

In her reading of Dickens’s novels, Frances Armstrong suggests that the Victorian ideology of littleness is shown in the portrayal of many Dickensian female

64.3 (1992), 453-74; Susan Hancock, *The Child that Haunts Us: Symbols and Images in Fairytale and Miniature Literature* (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹¹ Mary Robson [Mary Hughes], *Aunt Mary’s Tales, for the Entertainment and Improvement of Little Girls* (London: Darton, Harvey, & Darton, c. 1813); Mary Elliott, *Amusement for Little Girls’ Leisure Hours* (London: William Darton & Son, c. 1831); Louisa Stanley, *The Little Girl’s Keepsake; or, Pleasing Stories for the Home Fire Side, etc.* (London: Edward Lacey, c.1840); Mrs. Mitford, *The Little Girls’ Housekeeping* (London: Darton and Co., c. 1849); *Cousin Lively’s Picture Book of Nice Little Games for Nice Little Girls* (London: Dean & Son, c. 1859).

¹² Def. of ‘little, adj., n., and adv.’. *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/109250?rskey=hTsb6V&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 24 July 2014]; ‘small, adj. and n.2’. *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/182404?rskey=p55GSi&result=2&isAdvanced=false>> [accessed 24 July 2014].

characters, who are deliberately given the sobriquet 'little', such as 'Little Nell', 'Little Em'ly', and 'Little Dorrit'.¹³ Another example like this can be found in *Bleak House* (1853), in which Mr. Jarndyce constantly calls Esther his 'little woman'. The nicknaming of these female characters foists littleness upon women and also, as Armstrong contends, suggests that Dickens's women are like dolls or children restricted to their own little sphere. In addition, the character's smallness and fragility make her 'someone else's miniaturized object of desire' who is 'seen as one who can be possessed completely'.¹⁴ The smallness and vulnerability suggest a Thumbelina-like creature, a miniature object under man's protection and possession. In these male narratives woman is regarded as a minor, trivial object of small account, lacking truly independent existence. Thus, the equation of 'smallness=miniature=object=someone else's possession', and the contrasts of big and small, subject and object, possessor and possession are also established.

Despite the fact that woman is viewed as man's 'miniaturized object of desire', in her interrogation about the metaphorical diminishment of women and the connection between gender and size, Armstrong provides a positive perspective that this sort of belittling of women could in fact be balanced by 'the implications of condensation'. That is to say, 'to be little is not to lack something, but rather to possess in oneself the power to surprise with unexpected richness'.¹⁵ Armstrong's statement opens up an approach to understanding the practice of dolls' house play, for a dolls' house itself is a miniaturised object creating a condensed space and enriched visual experience and reflecting the player's and the maker's preoccupation with tiny details. Similarly, Arthur Benson also reflects on how the project of designing and furnishing Queen Mary's dolls' house is a pleasure to the eye:

¹³ Armstrong, 'Gender and Miniaturization', 403.

¹⁴ Ibid., 404-05.

¹⁵ Ibid., 'Gender and Miniaturization', 405.

There is a great beauty in *smallness*. One gets all the charm of design and colour and effect, as, for instance, in miniature painting, because one can see so much more in combination and juxtaposition. And then, too, the blemishes and small deformities which are so inseparable from seeing things life-size all disappear; the result is a closeness and fineness of texture which pleases both eye and mind. One realizes in reading the travels of Gulliver how dainty and beautiful the folk and buildings of Lilliput were, and on the other hand, how coarse and hideous the magnifying effect of Brobdingnag was.¹⁶

This praise of the beauty of smallness suggests that the beauty and delight do not simply come from the shift in size and scale. More importantly, miniaturisation allows one to indulge in ‘a closeness and fineness’ which could not be achieved otherwise. As Millhauser also suggests, one is attracted by a miniature object because of its thoroughness of execution and richness of detail.¹⁷ The values of closeness, fineness, thoroughness, and richness parallel what Armstrong calls the effect of ‘condensation’. In this regard, the dolls’ house represents a condensation of time, space, and action. While Benson perceives the miniature house as the embodiment of perfection, not only are his pleasure and satisfaction intensified, but also, according to Bachelard, through the diminution of size and inversion of the perspective of size, ‘values become condensed and enriched in miniature’.¹⁸ The reduction in size does not transform the nature of the original object. Instead, the creation of the miniature intensifies the original, for the miniature version creates an interior of great beauty, intensity and richness.

Bachelard has argued that in order to see the interior beauty one has to be inside the interior of the miniature house.¹⁹ What Bachelard means to be inside the interior could be understood as entering the interior, which refers not only to an outward change of gesture and perspective but also to an act of compression and condensation

¹⁶ Arthur Christopher Benson, ‘Introduction’, in *Book of the Queen’s Doll’s House*, ed. by Benson and Weaver, 4; italic in original.

¹⁷ Millhauser, 131.

¹⁸ Bachelard, 150.

¹⁹ Ibid., 149.

that enables dolls' house players and viewers to miniaturise themselves in their imagination. By means of entering the interior in one's imagination, one can fully concentrate on what Susan Stewart describes as 'an infinitely profound interiority' and thus be drawn and 'immersed' in an enclosure of perfection and enchantment.²⁰ For the sense of immersion, here I borrow Beverly Gordon's studies of paper dolls' houses in the nineteenth century and her argument about how the paper dolls' house could be seen as 'the saturated world' in which girl producers felt intense pleasure and satisfaction. Gordon uses the image of saturation to refer to the dreamlike state and fairyland ideal prevalent in children's books and domestic amusements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For her, the metaphor of saturation captures girls' sentimental indulgence in the perfect vignettes they created in scrapbooks, a process she describes as 'an intensely saturated experience'.²¹

This imaginative act of entering in and being immersed is an aesthetic response to the attraction of beautiful tiny objects. At the same time, it is also an imaginative visualisation of transformation in sizes and an inversion of perspectives. For example, in the transformation scene in the *Nutcracker* ballet based on E. T. A. Hoffmann's original story, when the Christmas tree and nursery toys spectacularly enlarge, what the audience perceive on the stage is a diminished Clara entering the toy land with the Nutcracker to fight against the troops of life-sized mice. Technically Clara remains the same size but in her imagination as well as in the audience's eyes, we are all small enough to enter the miniature world together.²²

²⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 61.

²¹ Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 37-61.

²² Act 1 Scene 1 of *The Nutcracker* ballet based on E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (1816). Choreographed by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov in 1892.

To illustrate my use of the terms, *entering* and *being immersed*, and to further explore the dynamics of size differences as well as the reality portrayed in dolls' house world, I will turn to *My Dolly's Home*, a cleverly-designed commercial paper dolls' house book published in England in 1921.²³ The main volume consists of twenty-six brightly coloured water-colour pictures of interior and exterior scenes, each representing different rooms and outdoor areas of the 'dolly's home' and allowing the reader to re-enact the story using the pictures as background setting. To accompany the wordless picture book, there is an envelope attached to the front cover of the main volume, enclosing a tiny booklet of the storyline, alternatively entitled, *Biddie's Adventure: The Story of My Dolly's Home*, and a sheet of paper on which are illustrated characters in the dolly family to be cut out [Fig. 7.1]. *My Dolly's Home* draws from a tradition of movable books specifically aimed at children, in which flaps and movable parts could be moved or cut out according to the demands of the narrative. It shares similar characteristics of early examples, such as *The History of Little Fanny* (1810) published by S & J. Fuller, the first of their series of paper doll books featuring cut-out doll figures for readers to re-enact the progress of the story based on the rhymed text provided.²⁴

All of the scenes in the main picture book have movable parts allowing the reader to engage with the book as an interactive text. Among the movable miscellany are some openable doors of pieces of furniture such as wardrobes, cupboards, and cabinets, enticing the doll characters as well as the reader to peep at the contents inside. In each of the interior scenes there are doors leading to the adjacent rooms inside the house, and in several exterior scenes there are swinging gates revealing

²³ Doris Davey [After Helen Waite], *My Dolly's Home* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. for the Arts and General Publisher, 1921).

²⁴ *The History of Little Fanny: Exemplified in a Series of Figures* (London: S. and J. Fuller, 1810).

another side of the setting. The fact that the two parts in the set are named differently makes the reading experience more intriguing. Firstly, they could be read respectively as a collection of paintings of domestic scenes and as a girl's adventure story in the land of dolls. Alternatively, the story booklet could be read as a script for readers to make up their own family theatre with the doll characters presented on a separate sheet of paper.



Figure 7.1 *Biddie's Adventure: The Story of My Dolly's Home*; the synopsis of *My Doll's Home* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. for the Arts and General Publisher, 1921); British Library Shelfmark: 1873.e.21.

Initially I approached the texts separately, playing with all the movable pieces inside the picture book and checking all the items behind every single half-open door. Then I attempted to 'read' the picture book with the assistance of the story booklet and the illustrations of each character. Surprisingly neither Biddie, the dolls' house player in the real world, nor Priscilla, the dolls' house doll belonging to Biddie, is pictured. On the sheet of paper provided by the author we can see Priscilla's parents, her little brother, her best friend, their servants, and even the family pets, yet the doll heroine who guides Biddie and the reader through the rooms of her home could not be found. Later on I tried to locate Priscilla and Biddie in various settings inside the

picture book, assuming that they might be hidden from view as the author's trick to invite the reader to participate in the progress of the story.²⁵ I was still unable to spot the two protagonists. From the moment when Biddie follows Priscilla to take the 'sky driver' that carries them to the dolly's home, we come across an ongoing conversation between the two, vividly describing the layout of each room. While their conversation is full of vigour, the illustrations of the girl and her doll remain absent throughout the entire story.²⁶

Although the lack of actual depiction of Biddie and Priscilla is perplexing, at the same time I found it makes the dolly's home a more magical and dreamlike space, 'just like fairyland', as Biddie pronounces when she wakes up from her nap and realises that the adventure is but a dream.²⁷ Rather than depriving the narrative of credibility, the fact that the real dolls' house player and the main dolls' house doll are invisible makes the story-telling even more alluring, lending magic to it. The magic lies not only in the sky-scooter clouds that take them to the doll world or the fountain in the garden where the doll family keep their own rainbows, but also in the way that Biddie becomes small enough to enter the miniature world. As the reader turns over each double-page spread, she could re-enact the adventure of Biddie and Priscilla, experiencing the same magical quality of miniaturisation. More intriguingly, the lack of the portraits of the protagonists could be read as the effect of immersion mentioned previously: while the magical power of miniaturisation enables the girl to enter the dolls' house, she is spontaneously entranced by the same spell that operates

²⁵ When alluding to the author here, I am not entirely certain if Doris Davey should be considered the originator of the book, for on the book cover there is a puzzling phrase, 'After Helen Waite'. Gordon suspects that Ms. Waite might have made a scrapbook house that inspired Davey to publish the book. Gordon, 220. The illustrator however, is Margarethe Stannard.

²⁶ The copy I consulted at the British Library has a rather simple cover design showing only the book title and the author's name. I have also found a copy available on an antique bookseller's website, featuring a coloured wrapper of the illustration of both Biddie and Priscilla together with the doll nurse [Fig. 7.2].

²⁷ Davey, 8.

in the doll world. Beverly Gordon uses the term ‘trancelike’ to describe such engaging playing experience that ‘expands people beyond their usual boundaries by allowing them to lose themselves in a different identity’.²⁸ In other words, Biddie’s entry into the doll world is her being miniaturised in her imagination. As soon as she enters, she is immersed in ‘the saturated world’, fully enclosed, merged, and incorporated in it so that she cannot be seen. Likewise, her doll also disappears from view and readers could only hear their conversation but are not able to see them.

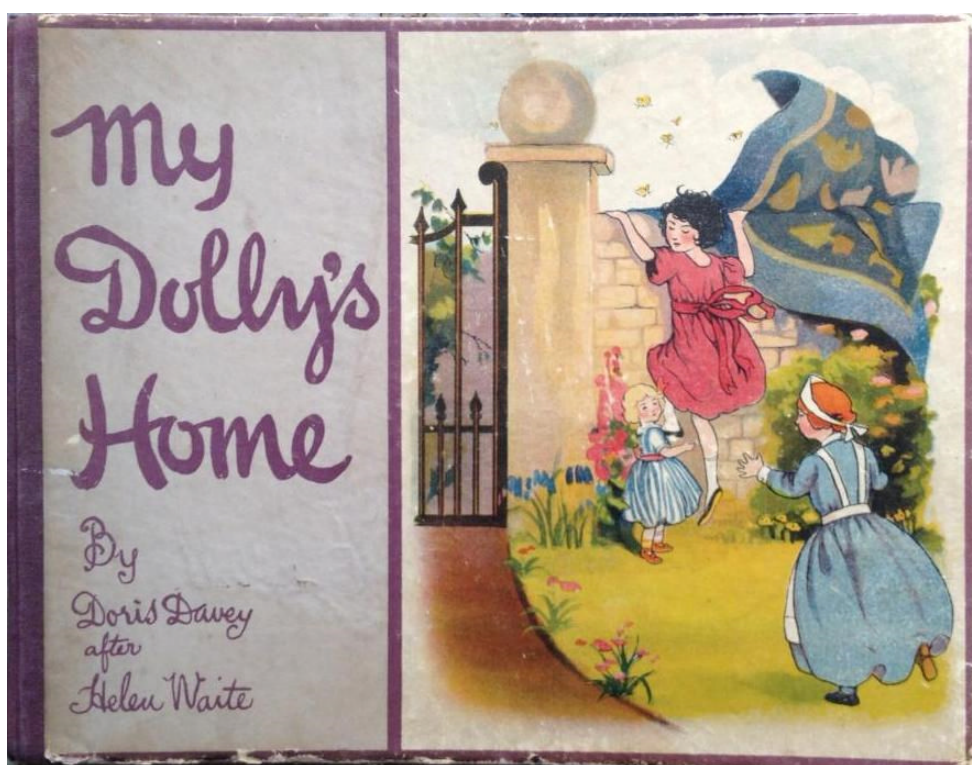


Figure 7.2 Book cover of *My Dolly's Home* <<http://www.colonnelibri.it/home>> [accessed 30 September 2014]

Through the conversation between Biddie and the doll people, readers may observe that the boundary between reality and imagination is blurred. When Biddie is introduced to the day nursery, she is tempted to peep into the cupboard, trying to look for more interesting toys inside. The doll nurse reluctantly gives her approval, on the

²⁸ Gordon, 24-25.

condition that she does not ‘take any more toys out’ because ‘There’s enough littered about already’.²⁹ The nurse’s severe comment makes Biddie’s interaction with her unintelligible, for the nurse herself is one among the many toys that have been taken out. As the joke derives from the fact that the nurse is supposed to be physically bigger and more powerful than her charges, the original size discrepancy between the girl and the nurse doll raises issues of authenticity and authority that continue to be important in the doll world.

There are still other unaccountable moments like this: on the nursery ground we see ‘a baby doll [sit] piling up some bricks, while another one, tired out with the morning’s fun, [is] romping with the little teddy bear’ and in ‘a toy cage on a table swung a *life-sized* green tin parrot in a ring’ [Fig. 7.3].³⁰ Outside in the orchard there are also ‘a dolly’s dolly’ and a golliwog swinging in a ‘toy hammock’.³¹ The reference to a ‘life-sized’ parrot in the toy world could—for a moment—make the reader uneasy and unsure of perspective. The text itself is a challenge to our conception of what is real and what is not, and of the extent to which toys can be or should be real—a recurring question that incorporates human anxiety about dealing with inanimate objects and the temptation of playing God, or even, competing with the divine creativity and bringing toys ‘alive’.³² The passages also point out the fundamental question of the relationship between the original and the imitation: based on what scale and proportion is the ‘life-sized’ parrot produced? If it is after

²⁹ Davey, 3.

³⁰ Ibid.; all italics mine.

³¹ Ibid., 5.

³² For a useful consideration of animate toys in literature, see Lois R. Kuznets, *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Kuznets recognises from her reading of toy narratives that toys coming alive embody human anxieties about what it means to be ‘real’. According to Kuznets, to be real is to be a self-defining subject rather than an object being gazed at by a more powerfully real being. Moreover, human-created toys that are brought to life denote man’s aspiration to replicate the divine creation.

the size of a real world parrot, would it not be an object of absurdity, or even some source of horror in a cosy children's room in the dolls' house?



Figure 7.3 The day nursery in *My Dolly's Home*; British Library Shelfmark: 1873.e.21.

All of the juxtapositions of the real and the surreal together with the multiple possessives (the dolly's dolly, the toys' toys, and so on) make the book a sophisticated and ambiguous text, possessing the 'profound interiority' identified by Stewart. Inside the miniature world, there are endless layers of meanings and possibilities, bewitching the reader to enter a parallel universe, in which the original is interwoven with the duplicate and the line between the real and the imagined blurred. The device of confusing reality and imagination in the story culminates in Biddie and Priscilla's game of 'hide and guess'. In this game, they each take turns to hide all the doll's family members in different rooms and the other player has to guess where they are placed one by one:

'I'll tell you,' said Priscilla. 'I have to stay here in the hall while you go with the rest through the house. You hide each of them, Mummie, Daddy, my best friend, Bobbie, Nurse, Cook, and Alice and Binkie and Sweep, too, in the cupboard or the stable or garage, or anywhere you like. Then you come back and make me guess one by one where you have put them. Each time I guess we go together to see if I am right. After I have had one guess for each of them they all come back to the hall and we count up how many I have got right.'

[...]

The whole family went off with Biddie, who screamed with joy as she *put* them into their hiding places.³³

The dialogue reminds the reader of all the characters as well as the layout of the settings and instructs the reader how to approach the book. However, when Biddie ‘puts’ everyone in their hiding places, different interpretations are possible, as the action of putting can either refer to physically moving something into a particular place or position, or causing somebody or something to go to a particular place or situation in a figurative sense. Therefore, Biddie’s interaction with the doll family can be read either as a manual placement or a verbal command. Again this raises the question of size and the shift from big to small and back. In the first case, Biddie has to be bigger than the doll characters, so that she is able to ‘put them into their hiding places’, or the dolls have to become smaller again to be hidden by a little girl at play. In the latter case, however, all characters in the story are presumably of the same scale, possessing the same perspective. Thus, Biddie’s original status as their possessor—an outsider from the real world—does not seem to grant her more power over her dolls, the very objects in her domain.

An earlier conversation taking place in the sewing room, where Biddie sobs over Priscilla’s beautiful performance at the piano, revealingly illustrates the power relations carried out in the doll world that produce equivocal effects:

She wiped Biddie’s tears with the tiniest dolly handkerchief.

‘You’ve all been so sweet to me,’ sobbed Biddie, ‘and I’m so afraid you’ll think me rude to make a fuss.’

‘Don’t be a baby,’ said Priscilla. ‘We shall love you dearly always.’

‘And you will come home with me when I go, won’t you?’ asked Biddie wistfully.

‘Of course,’ replied Priscilla. ‘And now we shall both have two homes—yours and mine.’³⁴

³³ Davey, 7; italic mine.

This conversation reiterates the theme of the profound interiority, the house-within-the-house, the interior-within-interior motif and shows that both Biddie and Priscilla are conscious of the fact they are from two different homes, two distinct origins. More importantly, the fact that Priscilla the doll calls Biddie the doll player a ‘baby’ and wipes her tears with the ‘dolly handkerchief’ produces another ambiguous moment of power relativity. When Priscilla uses ‘the tiniest dolly handkerchief’, is she referring to something of her own or rather something belonging to her doll?

The deliberate playing with size discrepancy and the sense of bewilderment it arouses permeates the entire text so that even to the very end of the story this dreamlike state and oneiric language still exist. After Biddie wakes up from her dream, she is excited to find her doll on the rug beside her and declares, ‘Oh, here’s Priscilla. I’m glad she is *real*. Oh, Nannie, I’ve had such an adventure’.³⁵ Again, Biddie’s statement here plays around the meaning of what being real is. A ‘real doll’ as a toy is surely not ‘real’ in the sense of a ‘real lamp’ or ‘real windows’, which are the small-sized duplicates of real world objects of practical use. The bewildering conversation further functions as a device of metafiction, featuring a reader reading a book that gives the outside reader an incentive to interact with the book.

Later Biddie’s mother shows her the birthday present from her uncle, which is the very story book we are reading and the exact record of her dream:

‘Why, it’s my birthday dream come true,’ cried Biddie, glancing wide-eyed through the pages of a beautiful book. ‘Look at these pretty rooms and these cupboards and the lovely gardens! I will show you all through them, Mummie darling. *I’ve seen them all.*’

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 8; *italic mine*.

Biddie then carries on describing to her mother the ‘hide and guess’ game they play in the doll world:

You must first *go through the book with me*, and I will show you all the hiding places. Then you must look away and I will hide all the dolly folks we have cut out, and Sweep and Binkie, in the book, and you must guess one by one where I have put them. Then you shall hide and I will guess. Oh! We shall have such worlds of fun. I do love Uncle Dick for sending me such a wonderful present.³⁶

The strong sense of déjà vu suggests that the child has already ‘lived’ the book. The attribution to ‘Uncle Dick’ makes Biddie’s remark not only a personal recollection but more like an advertising slogan or a passage that might be used in the publisher’s blurb. Like the conversation between Biddie and Priscilla in the doll world, this account can also serve as a guide for readers’ interaction with this intricate text. By ‘going through the book’, it points out the way in which readers might enjoy the pleasure of reading, losing themselves in the book. The book becomes what Seth Lerer calls a ‘place of absorption’ in his examination of the ways in which some girls’ fiction enables girls to develop their imagination and their creativity. Lerer observes that female characters often find pleasure in places of absorption such as gardens, books, or any other space where they can exercise their imagination, losing themselves in reading, in writing, or in reminiscence. The reader of such fiction, like the character she reads about, is fully saturated and immersed in the world of fantasy.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid.; all italics mine.

³⁷ Seth Lerer, *Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 251.

Déjà vu? The boundary between imagination and reality

The motifs of illusory familiarity, size discrepancy, and girls entering a doll world with a group of dolls coming alive are also explored in Josephine Gates's *The Live Dolls' House Party* (1906), in which a group of girls travel to 'Dollville' where their dolls dwell. Yet unlike Biddie, whose presence in the dolly's home remains obscure, the girls who visit Dollville with the Queen from the doll world are made visible by the illustrator. From the illustrations we see clearly that the girls who are taken to Dollville in 'a miniature train which is built for dolls but is large enough and strong enough to hold little girls' do not transform in size.³⁸ Instead of turning into miniature form, throughout the story the girls do not change size. Here the book differs from other contemporary children's stories in which dolls come to life or children travel into a miniature world by being reduced in size. Most of these works portray the little adventurers themselves becoming miniature figures in order to fit into the world of animated dolls and to allow the magic to work.³⁹ However, Gates's heroines are depicted as alienated outsiders, constantly questioned and provoked by the inhabitants of Dollville, just as Gulliver is in Lilliput or Alice is in Wonderland. When the girls are introduced to an old lady-doll, the dramatic effect reaches a climax:

'What a lot of bright faces, and how very large you are! Come in. I'm used to dolls, but I haven't seen children except in pictures'—and she examined them carefully, one after another, squeezing their arms, touching their faces and hair until they became embarrassed and longed for their mothers' aprons to hide behind.

³⁸ Josephine Scribner Gates, *The Live Dolls' House Party* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1906), 8.

³⁹ See, for example, 'In Dolly-Land, or Tidy's Dream', *Little Folks*, January 1872, 242-44; Henry Mayer, *A Trip to Toyland* (London: Richards, 1900); E[dith] Nesbit, 'The Town in the Library in the Town in the Library', in *Nine Unlikely Tales for Children* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), 243-66; Nesbit, *The Magic City*.

‘How curious!’ she said to the Queen. ‘They are just like us, only of larger growth. Their parents must be enormous! My! It makes me feel queer to see so many freaks all at once.’⁴⁰

A contemporary young reader might not be able to recognise the analogy here with empire fiction about the colonial other which proliferated at that period. This dramatic scene for her might be simply entertaining and nothing more than a political satire about the conflicts between different civilisations and the reflection of being outsiders in another society. It is however noticeable that the ‘freaks’, the little visitors who retain their original size, make themselves a magnificent sight in Dollville and their presence is constantly dramatised by the way they engage with the doll residents and the way they learn how to amuse themselves as well as to survive in the doll world. In some ways they resemble at this point the heroes of R. M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island* (1858) or H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885). Just as in various situations the heroes as outsiders in these adventure stories might have a fragility of their own and find themselves trapped in an awkward position, the girl adventurers, being relatively large in stature, on many occasions are only allowed to peep into the inside of the doll buildings from the outside. They manage to observe the dolls either by standing upright to look at them from above or by stooping down on the ground, just like Alice does in Wonderland, trying to inspect everything taking place in various odd positions. And like the uncomfortable and odd position of Alice, *The Live Dolls’ House Party* also plays around the same anxiety about being the Other, the ultimate outsider that does not fit in.

⁴⁰ Gates, 54.

The girls' various postures remind us that these tourists from the real world, regardless how much effort they make or how well they bend, will never belong to Dollville. In fact, they are very aware of their queer position, physically and figuratively. One day when they visit a school, they realise that

as they could not possibly get into the tiny building they asked permission to look through the window. *It was well they were on the outside*, for frequent giggles burst forth in spite of efforts to suppress them. Seeing dolls seated at desks studying, writing at the blackboard and reciting in class to a doll teacher, was almost too much for our little group.⁴¹

The realisation that they could only look in from without and the fact that they are satisfied with the situation of being 'on the outside' indicate a complicated state of incongruity and an awareness of not-belonging. While the girls are inside the doll world, the interior of a self-contained enclosure, at the same time they are positioned as outsiders from another realm who can only interact with the doll people on the outside; in other words, they are both within and without, interior and exterior.

Approximately a decade before the publication of *The Magic City*, Nesbit wrote a short story about two children having adventures in a town built out of their books and picture blocks and toy bricks, a theme that was developed into her later novel. The tension between inner and outer spheres and the entanglement of interiority with exteriority is cleverly explored in Nesbit's 'The Town in the Library in the Town in the Library', an imaginative story about a magical world that repeats itself into infinity, as the title suggests. Just as the girls who travel to Dollville find themselves not quite in proportion to the miniature world but remain outsiders, on the edge of the interior, which makes them awkward in the eyes of the inhabitants of Dollville, Fabian and Rosamund, the hero and heroine in Nesbit's short story, are troubled by

⁴¹ Ibid., 33; italics mine.

the same anxiety that leads them to be trapped in a zone that is neither interior nor exterior:

So now they were in a town built in a library in a house in a town built in a library in a house in a town called London [...] They walked about this town and found their own house, just as before, and went in, and there was the toy town on the floor; and you will see that they might have walked into that town also, but they saw that it was no good, and that they couldn't get out that way, but would only get deeper and deeper into a nest of town in libraries in houses in towns in libraries in houses in towns [...] and so on for always—something like Chinese puzzle-boxes multiplied by millions and millions for ever and ever.⁴²

This passage expresses the kind of paradox found in Jorge Luis Borges's novels that centre on the nature of infinity and the labyrinth. Such fantastic language and tedious familiarity denote a labyrinth-like dilemma commonly seen in his novels. As Nesbit's protagonists manage to go deeper and deeper into the nucleus of the miniature world, they are actually getting more and more confused—this is definitely not a delightful dream from which one can wake up and cheerfully declare, 'I've seen them all'. On the contrary, it is an endless journey of repetition which not only keeps one further and further from home but also causes panic and ennui. Surely the children who get stuck in this monotonous infinity would have headaches.⁴³ Their uncertainty is about the never-ending journey pointing to an inconceivable immensity—literally the middle of nowhere. They are positioned in a predicament that has no way out: they do not know how to make the choice of going inside or outside, for they are simultaneously at the exterior and the interior, somewhere in between both sides.

Bachelard is helpful in understanding the passage about the dialectic of outside and inside. According to Bachelard, inside and outside form a dialectic division and he groups the former with 'this side' and the latter with 'beyond'; in other words,

⁴² Nesbit, 'The Town in the Library', 261-62.

⁴³ Ibid., 262.

being inside is being ‘here’ while being outside means being ‘there’. However, he goes on to argue that ‘Outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility’. And ‘If there exists a border-line surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides’.⁴⁴ It seems fair to say that there is no need to draw a clear boundary between inside and outside, since the exterior of an interior can be the interior of a vastness beyond. Likewise, the interior we see can be the exterior of a minuscule enclosure, as experienced by and in one’s imagination. It is difficult to draw clear lines of demarcation between inside and outside as the lines are constantly reversible. One can be both here and there, interior and exterior, on this side and on that side, and it is by no means contradictory in the imaginary realm where the most creative ideas take place. As Terry Eagleton also suggests, ‘To be inside and outside a position at the same time—to occupy a territory while loitering sceptically on the boundary—is often where the most intensely creative ideas stem from. It is a resourceful place to be, if not always a painless one’.⁴⁵

Both Bachelard and Eagleton’s statements resonate with the nature of dolls’ house play explored here: playing with a dolls’ house, an imaginary world encapsulated and condensed in miniature, is an act of exploring and appreciating a profound interiority. In addition, the player is constantly crossing the invisible threshold of the miniature world. The dolls’ house player, though originally a spectator at the exterior, is in her imagination small enough to enter the miniature world, to be entirely immersed and absorbed in the beauty of the interior and to live the experience. The imaginative capacity of viewing oneself as a diminutive figure in order to enter the miniature world, as Vivien Greene vividly remarks, is like ‘the old

⁴⁴ Bachelard, 211-12; 217-18.

⁴⁵ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 40.

human dream of *being small enough*, Thumbelina on the lily leaf, Alice outside the passage that led to the garden'.⁴⁶

Similarly, Nesbit confessed in *Wings and the Child* (1913), a behind-the-scenes story originated from the great popularity of *The Magic City*, that when she had finished the project of building her own magic city, she could not help 'mak[ing] up stories about it'. She asked her readers to 'imagine how splendid it would be if you were small enough to walk through the arches of your city gates, to run along the little corridors of your city palaces'.⁴⁷ By means of gazing at the dolls' house outwardly and *going into it* through the inward visualisation of oneself as a miniature figure, the dolls' house player can be both an external viewer and a visitor in the interior, moving between different spaces and crossing the boundary between reality and fantasy.

The magic of imagination defines the controlling power in the 'Magic City', 'Dolly's Home', Dollville, and the 'Town in the Library' and explains why in many cases dolls' house players can enjoy tea time with their dolls by using tiny doll-size tea sets and make-believe plaster food, thus creating the illusory atmosphere indispensable in dolls' house play.⁴⁸ Indeed the creative imagination of childhood is significant to these Edwardian children's authors who wrote about the fascination for toys and adventures in enchanted worlds. The power of imagination and story-telling demonstrated in their works reveals that the dolls' house, instead of being a space of restriction and conformation or a tool to convey didactic messages about domesticity,

⁴⁶ Vivien Greene, *English Dolls' Houses of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Batsford, 1955), 23; italics in original.

⁴⁷ E[dith] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child: or, the Building of Magic Cities* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), 126. This collection of essays is also an appraisal of contemporary childrearing methods and advice on pedagogies for parents and educators.

⁴⁸ Taking *Little Polly's Doll's House* and *Dolly's New House* for example, both of their narratives and illustrations show the dolls' house owners being seated with their dolls in a real world setting yet the crockery and 'food' they are served are seemingly make-believe, though delicately made. *Little Polly's Doll's House* (London: George Routledge and Co., 1856), 8; *Dolly's New House* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1905), n. pag.

is a space for creativity and imagination. In the realm of the imagination the boundary between reality and illusion is erased and the enchantment of dolls' house play takes place.

Peeping, gazing, and being looked at

In *The Doll's Play-House* (1914), the girls who play with a paper dolls' house, while cutting out, folding, and pasting the doll furniture and dolls' house residents, proclaim that they will 'pretend' they have just rented their apartment and are 'moving in'—both a slip-of-tongue and a deliberate and playful blurring of the distinction between inside and outside as well as of differences in sizes.⁴⁹ Not only does this narrative play with a floating boundary between reality and fiction like that found in other dolls' house stories, its cover design expresses the witty blurring of this boundary. The cover picture shows two girls sitting at a table playing with the paper dolls' house made from the materials provided in the book we are reading [Fig. 7.4]. However, the two external readers and players only serve as a background here: on the same table there are some cut-out pieces of paper furniture as well as two paper dolls sitting at their miniature dining table—with the book pages open behind them, showing readers that the book is supposed to be used as a backdrop to form the domestic setting 'for [their] paper dolls to live in'. This dazzling and enchanting scene of play shows how this book uses the narrative structure of the story within a story: being the real readers in the outside world we are reading a pre-printed commercial paper dolls' house book about two girls reading a book given to them to make their own dolls' house and to play with the paper dolls cut from 'the book'. It is

⁴⁹ Clara Andrews Williams [Illustrated by George Alfred Williams], *The Doll's Play-House* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1914), n. pag.

understandable why the paper dolls and the players have identical names, for this is indeed a story within a story, deliberately enabling the characters from the outer frame to enter, even to be absorbed in the inner layer of the story, one of the characteristics of dolls' house narratives discussed previously.

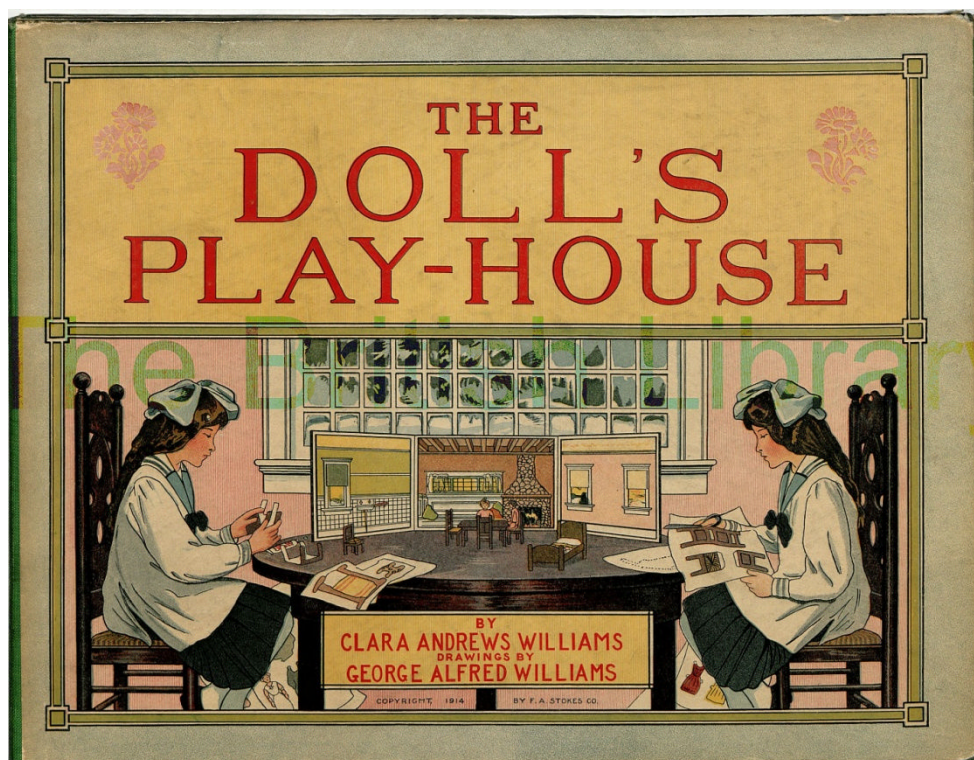


Figure 7.4 Cover design of Clara Andrews Williams, *The Doll's Play House* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1914); British Library Shelfmark: 1876.h.6.

While the paper dolls are sitting at the dining table, they are unaware that they are in fact being played with and looked at by the 'real', the more powerful being in the outside world. Likewise, the two girls in the main narrative are ignorant about the external readers who are looking at them as they appear on the book cover. It is bewildering enough to figure out who is playing with whom and who is viewed by whom. It is even more amusing that this illustration reflects a hierarchical relation of gazing and being gazed at. This section will then look further into the notion of

viewing, particularly the action of peeping—the seeing through a crevice apparent in dolls’ house play.

The Mary Frances Housekeeper (1914), in which the eponymous heroine interacts with a paper doll family, shows how the action of peeping delineates the narrative and humorously creates a sense of fantasy.⁵⁰ More than a simple dolls’ house story, this book can be read as an illustrated advice manual for girls. Unlike typical advice manuals teaching etiquette and domestic duties often in a straightforward and rather dull way that only bores readers, this book is a delight to read. All the housewifery lessons a middle-class girl is expected to know are presented in the form of an imaginative narrative. Nearly all aspects of housekeeping are included: from cleaning and making beds to the duties of a hostess. And all tips are charmingly inserted into the plot without giving any hints of preaching.

Mary Frances, the little girl who makes a dolls’ house for the paper doll family she possesses, and who interacts with the doll people as the story develops, perfectly falls into what I described as an exterior viewer who actively engages with the miniature figures as if she is one like them. However, unlike the other stories discussed above, it is not in Mary Frances’s dream that the paper dolls come to life, nor are they nocturnal adventurers coming alive only when the human beings in the real world fall asleep. Mary Frances remains awake throughout the entire story and the paper dolls are aware that they are being looked at all the time. Instead of physically becoming miniaturised and walking into the doll world as other heroines

⁵⁰ Jane Eayre Fryer, *The Mary Frances Housekeeper; or, Adventures among the Doll People* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1915). *The Mary Frances Housekeeper series* were first published in the U.S. by John C. Winston from 1912 to 1921. Other titles in this series include: *The Mary Frances Cook Book; or, Adventures among the Kitchen People* (1912); *The Mary Frances Sewing Book; or, Adventures among the Thimble People* (1913); *The Mary Frances Garden Book; or, Adventures among the Garden People* (1916); *The Mary Frances First Aid Book* (1916); *The Mary Frances Knitting and Crocheting Book; or, Adventures among the Knitting People* (1918); *The Mary Frances Story; or, Adventures among the Story People* (1921). All but the *Adventures among the Story People* centre on the theme of housekeeping and are written in the form of part lesson, part story.

do in their dreams and imagination, Mary Frances uses a perspective that approaches the paper dolls from above and zooms in on their activities. Her daily entertainment comes from ‘peeping in the playroom door’ to hear ‘what the cunning little things are saying’.⁵¹ She listens to their conversation and is the only one in her family who can hear what the tiny people say. Serving as the mediator, she reports to her mother what the dolls need and the two then make a specific piece of furniture based on the dolls’ demand. Mary Frances then observes the dolls’ reaction to the gift.

However, despite this relationship based on giving and her good intentions, Mary Frances’s continual peeping and eavesdropping, and her mother’s final participation in observing the doll family, eventually frighten them, so that they stop talking before the little girl. She confesses that their looking in might be a kind of ‘interruption’. In fact when she sees the doll people ‘spy’ the furniture, she herself is more like the real spy behind the door, sneaking in and looking down with a bird’s-eye view.⁵² Indeed it is unconventional that the physical position of the dolls’ house player literally affects the development of the storyline. Also, it is noteworthy how the posture and vantage point with which the dolls’ house player views the house are captured in dolls’ house literature.

In a biography of Frances Hodgson Burnett, Vivian Burnett remembers clearly the way his mother amused her guests with her dolls’ house:

Nothing delighted her so much as kneeling down upon cushions with her little visitors before this cupboard so that she herself could explain all the marvels, and see the wonder and delight grow in their faces [...] she was told that she had the doll house quite as much for herself as for the youngsters.⁵³

⁵¹ *The Mary Frances Housekeeper*, 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 208; 152.

⁵³ Quoted in Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Dolls’ Houses* (New York: Scribner, 1965), 330.

Burnett might have found it a comfortable pose to kneel down on her cushion in order to gaze at her dolls' house more clearly. Similarly, in *Dora's Dolls' House* (1890), the little girl Dora also finds it convenient to do so in order to see the lower rooms of her dolls' house. Furthermore, Dora's parents have a strong bench to support and raise the dolls' house up above the carpet, so that Dora can 'play with it when standing up'.⁵⁴ Many of the splendidly-designed dolls' houses in the nineteenth century were about the height of their possessors; it was common to play with them standing up, as the upper rooms were 'just nicely on the level of [their] eyes'.⁵⁵ Likewise, with the assistance of stepladders in front of the large size dolls' houses provided by the museums, visitors—both children and adults—are invited to peek inside the perfect domestic world and to visualise themselves touring in different compartments in the miniature houses.⁵⁶

Whether an upright posture of standing up or a bending position of stooping down, or even as Gulliver's great labour of lying down upon his side, all poses imply a further action of peeping in and the discovery of a fascinating view. To see more clearly the inner court of the Lilliputian emperor's palace, Gulliver had to '[lie] down upon [his] side' and 'appl[y] [his] face to the windows of the middle stories, which were left open on purpose'; eventually he 'discovered the most splendid apartments that can be imagined'.⁵⁷ The poses dolls' house players or viewers adopt enable them to examine the happenings of the miniature world in the tiniest detail, something they cannot do in real life, in which things are on a larger scale. As the

⁵⁴ Louisa Lilius Greene, *Dora's Dolls' House: A Story for the Young* (London: Nelson & Sons, 1890), 49.

⁵⁵ Eleanor Acland, *Good-bye for the Present: The Story of Two Childhoods* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 61.

⁵⁶ All Dutch museums holding historical cabinet houses (the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, and the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague) provide such a thoughtful device to engage with the visitors, thereby allowing them to have a close look at the interior spaces.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41.

spectator is looking in or down, so too the miniature world is being peeped into or gazed upon. Psychoanalytic theories of the gaze associate such looking with a voyeuristic pleasure; the viewed objects, whether things or people, are not given the power of returning the gaze. Hence the viewer (usually male) achieves his desire and mastery over the objects of desire.

Although in most cases dolls' house play is not a male visual activity, it still makes visible the dynamics of the gaze and the relationship between the viewer and the viewed object. Despite the different posture and the proximity of the player to the object she interacts with, all the actions involved in dolls' house play—furnishing, decorating, peeping in, and so forth—illustrate a kind of power relation. In such a relation the object is fully under control of the player and is without the independent power of looking back, especially if the player shuts the door and looks through the windows.⁵⁸ Standing outside and peeping in from without seems to be the only possible way to approach a dolls' house according to Stewart, who argues that one can 'only stand outside, looking in, experiencing a type of tragic distance'.⁵⁹ In other words, the bird's-eye view of the player helps her to catch the beauty of the miniature object; however, the fact that her hands and body are disproportionate to the miniature objects at the same time creates a distance between the spectator and the spectacle.

⁵⁸ In an essay appraising the toy theatre, G. K. Chesterton emphasises how crucial it is to look at the miniature object through a chink, which brings more pleasure to the visual experience: 'But the advantage of the small theatre exactly is that you are looking through a small window. Has not every one noticed how sweet and startling any landscape looks when seen through an arch? This strong, square shape, this shutting off of everything else is not only an assistance to beauty; it is the essential of beauty'. G. K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (1909; Mineola, NY: Dover, 2007), 121-22.

⁵⁹ Stewart, 70-71. It is of course arguable that Stewart's statement here is somewhat partial and neglects the power of imagination represented in numerous dolls' house narratives. We may as well pay attention to the fact that in addition to interacting with the miniature aloofly from the outside, dolls' house play satisfies the player's desire of becoming small enough to enter the miniature world.

In addition, the act of peeping in makes the dolls' house player become God in her own microcosm and the miniature objects her creatures. The classic example of the transcendent viewpoint of looking at a doll's house can be drawn from Katherine Mansfield's heartfelt short story, 'The Doll's House'. Although not a children's story, it uses a group of children as main characters and their interaction with one another reflects a strong class consciousness and socioeconomic distinction. In her depiction of the dolls' house belonging to the Burnell children, Mansfield describes,

The hook at the side was stuck fast. Pat pried it open with his pen-knife, and the whole house-front swung back, and—there you were, gazing at one and the same moment into the drawing-room and dining-room, the kitchen and two bedrooms. That is the way for a house to open! Why don't all houses open like that? How much more exciting than peering through the slit of a door into a mean little hall with a hat-stand and two umbrellas! That is—isn't it?—what you long to know about a house when you put your hand on the knocker. Perhaps it is the way God opens houses at dead of night when He is taking a quiet turn with an angel.⁶⁰

This passage is probably the most impressive in dolls' house literature. The analogy Mansfield uses vividly conveys how one can play God in the personal universe, the essential delight in dolls' house play. It suggests how the Burnell children can approach the dolls' house by opening the façade of the house just as God pays visits to human beings. It also reveals how Mansfield articulates the omniscient and empathetic perspective on herself as the author, which Lois Kuznets calls a 'god-like position'.⁶¹ The god-like position of the author, being invisible, suggests that when the children are looking at their dolls' house, they are at the same time being looked at and played with by someone more powerful higher above and far beyond their perception, just like the hierarchical position of viewing illustrated in the cover of *The Doll's Play-House*.

⁶⁰ Katherine Mansfield, 'The Doll's House', in *The Dove's Nest, and Other Stories* (London: Constable, 1923), 2.

⁶¹ Kuznets, 'Taking Over the Doll House', 143.

The structure of looking and being looked at in the narrative highlights the intensity of the effect of distance between the viewer and the viewed object. Meanwhile, it demonstrates that the pose of the viewer is not merely about physical position but also about psychological and emotional point of view. In this short story which portrays the social demarcations taking place in a British colony, Mansfield's god-like position provides a balance to the tension between the upper middle-class children and those who come from a working-class family, and the embarrassments that arise when the children come into contact with each other. The story's portrayal of social dynamics in New Zealand is highly specific. Using Kezia Burnell's sense of shame and her willingness to share the pleasure of seeing the dolls' house with the despised Kelvev children, Mansfield is able to picture Kezia as a 'precocious traitor to her class' and an embodiment of her own childhood experience and character.⁶² Unlike other children who are taken by objects that give an immediate reference to domestic comfort and luxurious bourgeois living—chairs, tables, the sensational red carpet covering all the floors, the beds with real bedclothes, and the stove with an oven door—Kezia is the only one who appreciates the beauty in 'the teeny little lamp' which could not be lit up.⁶³

The selection of the lamp as a sacred object is meaningful. In Kezia's eyes, the lamp is perfect, and more real than any other exquisite features of the house. Whereas other miniature objects in the house represent the material comforts of bourgeois domesticity, the lamp further symbolises 'the qualities of warmth, brightness and security that make a house into a home'.⁶⁴ Contrary to her sister Isabel's rather unimaginative description of the lamp, the excitement in Kezia's voice

⁶² Paul Delany, 'Short and Simple Annals of the Poor: Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House"', *Mosaic*, 10.1 (1976), 9.

⁶³ Mansfield, 7; 2.

⁶⁴ Delany, 12.

when she mentions it to the school children affirms that she is the one who sees the essential beauty in ordinary things. Although all of the miniature objects in the dolls' house are given the tag of being 'real', the realness of the lamp is made distinct from the material reality represented by the other items. Indeed the lamp is not just about a sumptuous and cosy way of living idealised by a miniature house; much more, as Pamela Dunbar reads it, the lamp is 'a symbol for artistic illumination'.⁶⁵ When Mansfield portrays how the lamp casts its spell on Kezia: 'It seemed to smile to Kezia, to say, "I live here." The lamp was real'—she is using the term real in its idealistic sense that is 'in direct opposition to the reality of the miniature beds with the "real" bedclothes' that Isabel appraises.⁶⁶

At first, the lamp is an object of beauty without practical use: 'of course, you couldn't light it'.⁶⁷ It is only made 'real' when the viewer is able to see it with an enlightened and inspired heart—a response caused by the symbolic meaning of the lamp as a luminary. On the one hand, Kezia's ability to see what other children neglect—an artistic sensibility and imaginative sympathy—explains why she is willing to invite the outcast Kelveys to view the house at the risk of upsetting her family. On the other hand, it draws the link between Kezia and Mansfield, as both of them possess a delicate and tender heart towards aesthetic objects and the capability to see ordinary everyday things in ways which transcend the limitations of domestic life.⁶⁸ More significantly, at the end of the story, our Else, the younger of the Kelveys, declares that she 'seen the little lamp'.⁶⁹ The fact that our Else captures the glimpse of the lamp despite the verbal violence directed towards them suggests

⁶⁵ Pamela Dunbar, *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1997), 174.

⁶⁶ Mansfield, 3; Dunbar, 175.

⁶⁷ Mansfield, 2.

⁶⁸ For further analysis of Mansfield's endearing projection of herself in Kezia in 'The Doll's House' and her other short stories, see J. Lawrence Mitchell, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Aesthetic Object', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 22 (2004), 31-54.

⁶⁹ Mansfield, 13.

that she is able to perceive the spiritual radiance of the lamp, which in turn binds Kezia and our Else together with an intimate sympathy and intricate understanding shared by the two girls. As Kezia and our Else stand outside the dolls' house to observe the interior scene and are captivated by the glow of the lamp, they are sharing the moment of revelation and epiphany: although the light does not really light up, both of them 'seen' it with an inner light of understanding. Glowing with the god-like power that comes from inspecting a dolls' house, Kezia and our Else's peeping-in goes beyond the mere examination of domestic beauty from an external perspective. Indeed their vision of the lamp testifies that they become like God, able to perceive what is invisible to others and to grasp the true meaning of what being real is.

CHAPTER EIGHT. PRETENDING AND

MAKING-BELIEVE IN *THE TALE OF TWO BAD MICE*

In an autobiographical reminiscence of her late-Victorian childhood, Alison Uttley, author of the *Sam Pig* books and *Little Grey Rabbit* books, recalled how her dolls' house was vandalised by a family of mice: 'My doll's house was finally discarded through the attention of the mice which lived in the pantry. They thought it was their house, too, and they nibbled the chestnut chairs, ate the lace, and left their traces everywhere. Nothing would stop them'.¹ Uttley's description of the unwelcome visitors may not surprise readers who are familiar with one of the most famous burglary scenes depicted by another children's author renowned for her animal tales. Beatrix Potter portrays in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (1904) how an elaborate dolls' house is invaded by an anthropomorphic mouse couple, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca. Unlike Uttley's dolls' house, which was made out of a sugar case and inhabited by a family of penny china dolls, Potter's is 'a very beautiful doll's-house; it was red brick with white windows, and it had real muslin curtains and a front door and a chimney'.² In his analysis of the subversiveness of Potter's tales of anthropomorphic animals, Humphrey Carpenter argues that *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* 'mocks the mores of a consumer society where the rich live amid entirely useless objects'.³ Similarly, Suzanne Rahn adopts political and biographical approaches to read Potter's tales. She points out that this story in particular reveals

¹ Alison Uttley, *Ambush of Young Days* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 92.

² Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (London: F. Warne & Co., 1904), 9.

³ Humphrey Carpenter, 'Excessively Impertinent Bunnies: The Subversive Element in Beatrix Potter', in *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, ed. by Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 289.

Potter's upper middle-class anxiety about the growing power and influence of the lower class, her inner rebellion against her parents' stultifying manner of life, and her hope for a happy future. (This book is a product of her collaboration with her editor and fiancé, Norman Warne, son of the famous publisher Frederick Warne.⁴) Further to the hidden tension of rebellion and insurrection created by Potter in this tale, M. Daphne Kutzer maintains that *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* is 'an allegory of [Potter's] desire for a home of her own, and her fears and frustrations about domesticity'.⁵

Indeed, the notion that Potter disguised her rebellion against the constrictions of Victorian society and her anxieties about domesticity and class conflicts in tales of humanised animals in a pastoral setting is a persuasive one. Potter is commonly positioned in the long-established tradition of animal fables such as those of Aesop and La Fontaine. However, it should also be acknowledged that her tales involve something more than a satire on human society or a working-out of her resolution to modify her personal circumstances. Being a miniaturist herself, Potter was keen on observing and painting fungi, insects and animals. She developed considerable skills in painting common objects and small creatures (alive or dead) in everyday life with precise details. As Anne Hobbs puts it in her introduction to Potter's works: 'From ordinary, everyday objects she created a microcosm of the world'.⁶ Aside from implicitly making a declaration of independence from the constraints of domestic authority in her upper middle-class Victorian family, in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* Potter also plays with what she learnt from her sketches of the 'elegant trivia of everyday life'.⁷ Her profession as a miniaturist means that she specialised in recording the minute details of the quotidian and portraying what she believed to be

⁴ Suzanne Rahn, 'Tailpiece: *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*', *Children's Literature*, 12 (1984), 9.

⁵ M. Daphne Kutzer, *Beatrix Potter: Writing in Code* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 65.

⁶ Anne Stevenson Hobbs, *Beatrix Potter's Art* (London: Penguin, 1989), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

real. Based on her observation of the everyday world, Potter produces in her animal tales a true reproduction of common daily life, just as a dolls' house involves the display and duplication of everyday life on a smaller scale. Whereas dolls' house play seeks to epitomise reality yet requires the player's imagination to make the constructed reality more vivid and convincing, Potter portrays in this tale the absurdity of domestic life and reveals the moment at which reality gets on one's nerves. It cleverly expresses Potter's idea of what being real means and blurs the line between reality and imagination.

The Tale of Two Bad Mice is about a middle-class dolls' house being mischievously invaded by a mouse couple who live in the nursery where the very dolls' house is placed. The discovery of the dolls' house, though full of tempting food and desirable items, is not exactly a pleasant experience, as the mice later find out all the food is made of plaster which fails to meet their needs. From the outset, the story presents the juxtaposition of the human world, the dolls' house world, and the world of animals. The design of these different settings is a complex one, one that Kutzer describes as 'a kind of Russian-nesting-doll scenario'.⁸ In her examination of the tension between exteriority and interiority, Susan Stewart also uses the dolls' house as an example to illustrate the situation of a space 'occupying a space within an enclosed space'.⁹ The presence of a dolls' house inside a human scale house, according to Stewart, creates the poetic image of 'center within center, within within within'.¹⁰ Indeed Potter's illustrations effectively display this kind of co-existence of worlds of different scales that reflects the Russian-doll model. The skipping rope and badminton rackets by the dolls' house in the initial illustration suggest the existence

⁸ Kutzer, *Beatrix Potter*, 66.

⁹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

of the dolls' house proprietor off-stage, though she never appears in any of the illustrations [Fig. 8.1].



Figure 8.1 The dolls' house, in Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (London: F. Warne & Co., 1904), 8

As the story progresses, readers are led further and deeper down from the nursery of the human world to the miniature world, zooming in on the interior of the dolls' house. Finally, we are able to enter the abode of the mice, which is proven to be livelier and more active than the outer world that encapsulates it. These multiple layers point to the anxiety about authenticity and agency that permeates the entire story. When the miniature house, which is fully equipped with sham food and inhabited by human-like figures, is burgled by real-life animals, not only has the paradigm of order and stability been challenged, but there also arises an uneasiness about what being real means and who the actual agent in the story is. Moreover, as the story begins with the description that the dolls' house has everything 'real', albeit

only in appearance, Potter sets the tone for her dolls' house story that corresponds to the strategies of pretending and making-believe in children's imaginative play. Ironically, the tale at the same time dispels the myth of these two key elements which constitute dolls' house play. In this light, *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* is not a celebration of happy domestic life as the extravagant dolls' house seems to represent. Rather, this is a text which mocks pretension and provokes further thought about the idea of reality.

On the one hand, the reflection on reality and the celebration of the natural suggest that animals might be more fun to play with than dolls and that it is more beneficial that children play in the fresh air rather than spend time indoors among needlessly elaborate toys. On the other hand, Potter's tale leads to a deeper and broader concern about the faith in rural England reflected in other children's books, such as Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), which was published in an age of radical political and economical change and expresses a wariness of corrupting urban society. These concerns re-emerge in a later text, Margery Williams's *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922), in which children's interaction with toys and real life animals is constantly questioned through a stuffed rabbit's longing to become real. *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* deals with ideas of pretending and making-believe, just as Potter's use of illustrations and narrative blurs the boundary between reality and imagination. Meanwhile, her portrayals of the interaction between live animals and inanimate toy characters and the power relations between the mice, the dolls, and the owner of the dolls' house allow the reader to ponder on the core of all such dynamics: the anxiety about what is being real and what is not. Furthermore, as Edwardian children's literature often plays with similar motifs of anthropomorphised animals or inanimate toys coming alive, it is worth exploring the

recurrent impulse to destabilise children's (and nostalgic adults') ideas of authenticity, together with the message lying behind these stories of living toys and speaking animals.

Theories of make-believe in children's play

Theories of make-believe usefully draw attention to some of the complexities and quests at work in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* as an animal story set in a dolls' house. To begin with, dolls' house play, a form of children's imaginative play, is carried out with the aid of make-believe. Contemporary dolls' house stories and adult women's autobiographical records of dolls' house play in their childhood often emphasise that making-believe is an essential trick in children's play. For example, in *Dolly's New House* (1905), an illustrated nursery rhyme book published by Frederick Warne just one year later than *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, the protagonist clearly explains to her little brother how to properly approach a dolls' house interior:

This is the dining-room, Reggie dear,
And there is the table spread,
A duck, green peas, and potatoes,
With special sauce and bread.
I have quite a *real* sweetie on a pretty plate for you.
But the ducks and things are *make believe*,
The tea is, Reggie, too.¹¹ [Fig. 8.2]

¹¹ *Dolly's New House* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., c.1905), n. pag.; all italics mine.



Figure 8.2 Dolly introducing her dolls' house to her little brother, in *Dolly's New House* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., c.1905), n.pag.; British Library Shelfmark: YK.2001.b.69

Surely the children would not, and are not meant to be, fooled by the fake food spread on the table. Instead, they are perfectly aware of the fact that none of the victuals are real. This, however, does not prevent them from enjoying themselves with the game of making-believe. An earlier example in which the dolls' house was entirely furnished with make-believe objects can be found in Eliza Tabor's memoir of her Victorian childhood. Tabor recalled that furnishing her dolls' house with odds and ends gave her more amusement than ready-made toys could offer:

I wonder if they know how good crumbs of bread taste when you *make believe* they are pieces of roast beef, or how much superior liquorice soup is made, as Lucy and I always made ours, with a bit of Spanish juice as big as the end of your finger, shaken up in a bottle of water, to the most elaborate ox-tail or vermicelli which has been cooked in the ordinary way over a real kitchen fire. *There isn't half the enjoyment in having things made for you, than there is in making them for yourselves.* I am sure Lucy Walters and I got a great deal more

satisfaction, real, lasting, solid satisfaction, out of our four-story [sic] chest of drawers with papa's old cigar-boxes for beds and acorn-cups for toilet-services and half a dozen empty pill-boxes for stools and square pieces of wood supported on cotton reels for tables, and little round bits of cardboard for plates and dishes, than children get now from their toy-shop dining-rooms and drawing-rooms and bed-rooms, with real furniture and sets of proper crockery, and things that are always getting broken and spoilt.¹²

The benefits of making one's own toys out of miscellaneous articles are also described by Edith Nesbit in *Wings and the Child* (1913). She told parents that a child at play amuses himself with unexpected items because he is able to transform random objects into playthings and perceive them differently:

He will make as well as create, if you let him, but always he will create: he will use the whole force of dream and fancy to create something out of nothing—over and beyond what he will make out of such materials as he has to hand. The five-year-old will lay a dozen wooden bricks and four cotton reels together, set a broken cup on the top of them, and tell you it is a steam-engine. And it is. He has created the engine which he sees, and you don't see, and the pile of bricks and cotton reels is the symbol of his creation [...] And you shall observe that the toys which the child loves best are always those toys which lend themselves to such symbolic use.¹³

Nesbit's theory is substantiated in the second part of the book in which she taught her young readers how to build their own magic city with handy materials at home and visualise ordinary things as something extraordinary. Nesbit wrote that 'it is then that you will wander about the house seeking eagerly for things that are like other things'.¹⁴ Likewise, Uttley was also keen on transforming ordinary objects for versatile purposes. A walnut shell gave her the childish delight of 'a carriage drawn by a mouse in a fairy tale'; it could also be a pincushion for Christmas, or a cradle for

¹² Eliza Tabor, *When I Was a Little Girl: Stories for Children* (London: Macmillan, 1871), 45-46; all italics mine.

¹³ E[dith] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child: or, the Building of Magic Cities* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), 17-18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

a miniature doll. A foxglove not only intrigued her by its name but also made perfect dresses for her penny dolls.¹⁵

From the early twentieth century, psychologists of child development and scholars of play theory have observed that pretend play (variously labelled as make-believe play or symbolic play) in early childhood provides children with opportunities of manipulating objects and symbols and thus paves the way for them to develop their mentality as a ‘continuing exploration of the new physical and mental structure created by the game itself’.¹⁶ Pretend play, identified by the Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, has been widely considered a significant phase that allows mature thoughts to emerge. For Piaget, pretend play is an assimilation process which represents children’s attempt to subordinate the outside world to their inner ‘schema’.¹⁷ For example, a child may see a doll and act in ways to make the doll part of his or her own imaginative world by referring to the doll as ‘My baby’.¹⁸ Charlotte Yonge was once such a little girl who played at being the mother of a family of dolls as she remembered: ‘My great world was indoors with my dolls, who were my children and my sisters; out of doors with an imaginary family of ten boys and eleven girls who lived in an arbour’.¹⁹

Indeed when children engage in pretend play they put their imagination actively at work. And as Dorothy and Jerome Singer propose, they ‘confront the human need for narrative, to organise the seemingly random events or social interactions that occur in [their] milieu or that recur in [their] memories and dreams into story

¹⁵ Uttley, 93.

¹⁶ Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, *The House of Make-Believe: Children’s Play and the Developing Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 122.

¹⁷ Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*; trans. by C. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); Jerome L. Singer, *The Child’s World of Make-Believe: Experimental Studies of Imaginative Play* (New York: Academic, 1973), 13-14;

¹⁸ Anthony D. Pellegrini, *The Role of Play in Human Development* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 155.

¹⁹ Quoted from Valerie Sanders, ed., *Records of Girlhood: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Childhoods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 201.

sequences'.²⁰ The ability of imposing fantasies on real objects is an important cognitive skill children learn through pretend play. According to Singer and Singer, in such symbolic games children must 'form event schemas and scripts about what one does or expects of others in a variety of situations' and acquire 'the ability to produce varied and flexible associations'.²¹ In other words, through the creative process of pretend play, children become storytellers and acquire strategies for problem solving. Pretend play is not just relevant to the establishment of one's subjectivity and cognition of reality but also enables the child to 'characterize and manipulate one's own and other's cognitive relations to information'.²²

D. W. Winnicott also summarises the process of how a child explores the relationship between individual self and the outside world through playing:

Into this play area the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality. Without hallucinating the child puts out a sample of dream potential and lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragment from external reality.²³

Through pretend play, children create imaginary identities for inanimate objects and learn to liken something to something else and thus to perceive an object differently. Susanna Millar suggests that 'the pretense of make-believe is not a cloak for something else, or behavior intended to mislead, but thinking (re-coding and rehearsal) in action with real objects as props'.²⁴ Children's symbolic use of objects as their playthings helps them distinguish between what is real and what is not, and develop the concepts of self and other, subject and object. It is also through pretend play that children act out their perceived reality and differentiate between the primary

²⁰ Singer and Singer, 127.

²¹ Ibid., 129.

²² Alan M. Leslie, 'Pretense and Representation: The Origins of "Theory of Mind"', *Psychological Review*, 94.4 (1987), 422.

²³ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971), 51.

²⁴ Susanna Millar, *The Psychology of Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 256.

and symbolic meaning of an object. Alan Leslie uses the model of ‘metarepresentations’ to further explain why children are able to ‘decouple’ the direct representations of objects and situations to form a new set of symbolic meanings of the same objects and treat them accordingly. As Leslie contends, the capacity of creating metarepresentational contexts is to ‘[decouple] the primary expression from its normal input-output relations’, to make inferences from pretend representations (such as seeing an empty cup as containing tea). In this way, children can disregard the semantic relations of objects and manipulate, modify, and transform the original representational system without distorting or undermining reality.²⁵

From a psychological perspective, therefore, dolls’ house players, whether in real life or in dolls’ house stories, are capable of distinguishing between the original and the pretence. In order to gain control over such objects and empower themselves, they acknowledge that the things inside dolls’ houses are merely there for make-believe. They are not disappointed in finding out that the food is in fact inedible or that their dolls are made out of scraps and sticks. Frances Hodgson Burnett affirmed in her own recollection of childhood, *The One I Knew the Best of All* (1893), that with the assistance of imagination, dolls are not ‘only things stuffed with sawdust [which make] no special expression’; instead, they all have a personality of their own.²⁶ The inanimate toys arouse a narrative impulse that propels children to create stories for them. Autobiographical accounts of Victorian childhood have numerous examples of girls using dolls to act out their inner feelings and stories of their own life. In some cases, based on Bible stories, nursery rhymes and fairy tales they had encountered, they were able to invent thousands of games and retell the stories in a personalised way, using dolls as their actors. Using dolls’

²⁵ Leslie, 417-18.

²⁶ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The One I Knew the Best of All* (London: F. Warne & Co., 1893), 39.

houses to dramatise stories read and heard helps develop children's agency. This imaginative reworking of literature and culture is liberating, pleasurable, and creative and builds up the link between children's books and toys.

Questioning the value of make-believe

As discussed in Chapter Four of the thesis, late-Victorian and Edwardian toy books and advice manuals used metafictional techniques, such as interacting with the reader or featuring a reader reading a book, to allow the child reader not only to participate in the completion of the narratives inspired by the text, but also to interact with the text as a material object, and hence bring her own creative work to the text's 'completion': also an act of re-creating the text. Different children might 'complete' the text in a range of ways. Such texts were often beautifully designed, providing ready plots and settings that gave readers an incentive and inspiration for their own pretend play. By contrast, in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, Potter does something quite different. Rather than advocating the pleasure of 'let's pretend that something is real' or 'let's have tea with the dolls'—as usually proclaimed in other children's books—Potter satirises the futility of realism and challenges the concepts of reality and authenticity. Through the invasion of the mice, Potter questions the oxymoron of disguised reality. Her narrative and illustrations work together throughout the story to tell us that the house and all its belongings are ostentatious rather than functional; they are only surface but have no substance.²⁷ What causes the mice to enter into an enormous rage after their housebreaking is exactly the discovery that the 'extremely beautiful' food served on the dining-room table—which refuses to 'come off the

²⁷ Rahn, 86

plates’—was ‘made of nothing but plaster’.²⁸ The narrator’s blunt voice reveals that the mice perceive things realistically. They respond to the bewildering scene of artificial domesticity simply by pointing out that the emperor has no clothes. Tom Thumb remarks that the ham ‘is not boiled enough; it is hard’, or as Hunca Munca complains, ‘It’s as hard as the hams at the cheesemonger’s’.²⁹ The joke here is that the mice’s comprehension is still in the physical realm; their life is governed by the principle that everything must be useful and functional. While the mice are not deceived by the make-believe food, they would rather have the real thing. In this way the tension between reality and imagination is heightened and such tension creates an alternative perspective on children’s games of make-believe.

Although Victorian girls acted as imaginative storytellers when they played with dolls and dolls’ houses, effortlessly appropriating random objects for various uses, they were also in thrall to commercially ready-made objects of desire. Simply by accepting the logic of make-believe, they were capable of regarding imitation objects as real and suspending disbelief in dolls’ house play. The protagonists in Potter’s tale, on the contrary, find it odd to trick themselves with things that appeal only to the eye yet fail to prove their usefulness. Unlike unrealistic girls who played with dolls’ houses or the inanimate dolls’ house inhabitants in Potter’s tale who did not have to (or who could!) live on plaster food or rice and sago made out of beads, the mice have to fight for their survival. Hence, they can only choose to be practical, or even frugal, as Potter describes Hunca Munca.

The magic of make-believe does not work for the mice because their concern is more with their practical needs than with pleasure; after all, they are not dolls’ house players but opportunists seeking to take advantage of their plunder. What matters for

²⁸ Potter, *Two Bad Mice*, 15; 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 28; 33.

them is not an object's attraction but its use values, because they see and interpret things in a matter-of-fact way. No matter how delicate the fake food appears to be, as long as it is not edible, it is of no use to the mice. Though of course a real world mouse depends on smell rather than vision, and would never confuse a fake ham with a real ham, the fictional mouse couple perceives these make-believe objects as real. They consider, then, that the objects they see must be real in terms of practical worth; if the objects have no use, they may as well be destroyed. This is why all the plates of plaster food are smashed, while the dolls' cradle and bolster survive the mice's brutal attack, for frugal Hunca Munca can utilise these objects in the mouse hole, as some of the last illustrations show.

With each hit of the tong and the shovel, the outrageous mouse couple break the plaster pudding, lobsters, pears and oranges into pieces. Here Potter seems to unmask how fragile the make-believe objects are. The ridiculing of such fanciful imagining reaches its climax when Tom Thumb tosses the fish into 'the red-hot crinkly paper fire in the kitchen' which 'would not burn either'.³⁰ Later on Tom Thumb climbs up the kitchen chimney and finds there is no soot there. Even in a catastrophic scene like this, Potter's voice remains ironic and sarcastic, mocking the ineffective simulacrum of middle-class domesticity. Her sympathy is with the mice, and her satire mocks the class to which she herself belonged.

However, although Potter attacks the vanity and inauthenticity of the middle-class way of life, she still gives credit to some of its values. Kutzer has noted that 'Potter suggests that it is not the goods themselves that are at fault, but rather the uses to which they are, or are not put'.³¹ Indeed when Hunca Munca uses the stolen bolster and cradle to decorate the nursery for her baby mouse, the dolls' house

³⁰ Ibid., 40.

³¹ Kutzer, *Beatrix Potter*, 72.

utensils have gone from useless to useful. Rather than remaining a show in the dolls' house, these utensils serve a purpose in the mouse hole. The items the mice take from the dolls' house provide a solid foundation for their own growing family, as Kutzer points out elsewhere: 'What is interesting in this work is that what begins as destructive ravaging of domestic space turns into productive pillaging for the mice's own uses'.³² Instead of rebuking the mouse criminals, the authorial voice and the illustrations pay them a compliment for managing to 'create their own brand of domesticity'.³³ With their real home, real food and real children, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca eventually become the story's heroes. By way of destruction and reconstruction, the mice remodel and rearrange the displaced domesticity, which corresponds to what Winnicott has defined as 'the positive value of destructiveness' in his discussion of the use of an object in children's play behaviour.³⁴ The mice interact and relate with the objects in a sophisticated way, and despite some differences, these interactions echo the relationships children set up with objects. Hence the mice's destruction as well as their creativity are of interest to the child reader.

With the two mice as the real heroes of the story, Potter's treatment of the dolls, however, is not as lenient. The power relation between the mice and the inanimate toy characters creates more farcical elements in the tale. At the end of the story, a doll dressed as a policeman is set up to guard the dolls' house against the mice's further intrusions, and is confronted by Hunca Munca holding up her baby mouse [Fig.8.3]. Here, Potter portrays the contrast between the active, fertile, live animals

³² M. Daphne Kutzer, 'A Wilderness Inside: Domestic Space in the Work of Beatrix Potter', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 21.2 (1997), 209.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Winnicott, 94.

and the futile gestures of the dolls to which she is reluctant to grant life. As Lois Kuznets describes,

Potter is willing to dress her natural creatures in human clothes, but she refuses to bring the dolls to life. The gift of speech enhances the vitality of the mice; nothing, Potter suggests, is real about human-made toys [...] So children are encouraged here to identify with the hearty, if naughty, animals, not with the overcivilized toys.³⁵

In fact, the badness of the mice does not reduce them to mere criminals; the burglary itself is not considered to be a crime at all.



Figure 8.3 Hunca Munca proudly showing her baby to the policeman, in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, 68

Throughout the entire story, the narrator's voice remains on the side of the mice. Whereas Potter claims at the tale's conclusion that the mice 'were not so very very naughty after all', the two human-like dolls' house occupants are not given any

³⁵ Lois R. Kuznets, *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 121.

positive commentary except as regard for their appearance.³⁶ The presence of the dolls' house inhabitants is merely a show: Lucinda, the mistress of the dolls' house, 'never ordered meals', while Jane the Cook 'never did any cooking, because the dinner had been bought ready-made, in a box full of shavings'.³⁷ The dolls never take the initiative of managing their house; they are only put into action by an outside agent, the real owner of the dolls' house. Potter brings the reader to the realisation that the dolls' house dolls are not self-propelled after all. When Lucinda and Jane are brought back from their morning drive and find all the overturned utensils in the cluttered kitchen, all that they can do is to '[lean] against the kitchen dresser and [smile]—but neither of them [make] any remark'.³⁸ The illustration on the facing page shows that the two wooden dolls remain in a stiff and static posture, which captures the dramatic moment of astonishment in an ironic way and at the same time betrays the dolls' vulnerability and helplessness [Fig. 8.4]. Just as the plaster food fails to meet the needs of the mice, the dolls' futile gesture here shows their inability to defend themselves against burglars. The impotent dolls and the absent dolls' house proprietor are unable to compete with the lively mice. The illustrations show the human attempt to resist the mice as futile. The realistic defence—the setting of the mousetrap—and the imaginative defence—the dressing up of the doll as a police officer—are easily sidestepped by the creative and resourceful mice.

³⁶ Potter, *Two Bad Mice*, 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.



Figure 8.4 Lucinda and Jane, in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, 65

Hunca Munca surely has no reason to fear the policeman, who also appears in *The Tale of Ginger and Pickles* (1909) and is referred to as ‘only a German doll’, hence a lifeless, harmless wooden doll.³⁹ More importantly, the mice do not belong to the system of social authority represented by the doll’s uniform. Hunca Munca’s stance in front of the police doll is a provocative one. It is also a public display of the ultimate triumph: the mice are the final winners of the battle between nature and the man-made objects. Nature wins out against human defences, as in the moral tale of King Canute the Great, in which the king’s wisdom and might could not stop the tide.

As Potter declines to empower the dolls, and in one of the last illustrations she portrays Lucinda and Jane lying in the same bed, she once again unveils the futility and vanity of upper middle-class pretension [Fig. 8.5].⁴⁰ It is ironic that neither the

³⁹ Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Ginger and Pickles* (London: F. Warne & Co., 1909), 42.

⁴⁰ Rahn, 80.

policeman nor the mousetrap can deter the mice from breaking-in. The dolls' stiff posture and lack of emotion only imply their inability to fight back. It is even more ironic that the mistress of a swanky dolls' house has to share her bed with the cook, which reflects the feebleness and inadequacy of social demarcations and the ineffectiveness of upper middle-class domesticity, from which Potter herself sought to escape.



Figure 8.5 Lucinda and Jane in bed while the mouse couple offer a coin as compensation, in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, 81

Potter extends the joke of the hypocrisy of ‘the overcivilized toys’ and the haughtiness of the class these dolls represent by the mouse couple’s paying them a ‘crooked sixpence’ in recompense for loss of property.⁴¹ The act of returning the money is even more striking than Hunca Munca’s confrontation with the police, as Kutzer indicates: ‘The mice, in fact, are making a show of being respectful and of paying for what they have taken, but in fact the show covers up their continuing rebellion against middle-class authority, a rebellion that will continue into the next

⁴¹ Potter, *Two Bad Mice*, 80.

(larger) generation of mice children'.⁴² In other words, the active power the mice have over the stiff, immobile dolls makes this show of payment like an act of overt pretentiousness, underscoring the dolls' artificiality and undermining middle-class authority.

If the dynamics of live animals and inactive toys bring to the surface the issue of authenticity and the fear of an excessive development of civilisation, it may in part be explained by Potter's own experience of becoming a farmer in her later life and her long-lasting passion for nature. The celebration of nature is not an uncommon theme in contemporary children's books. Other writers also exploit the genre of rural idyll either in the form of anthropomorphic animal narrative, such as *The Wind in the Willows*, or in stories like Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), in which the child who befriends animals is the true hero. The emptiness of an over-industrialised modern society was profoundly disturbing to this generation of writers. Their scepticism about the over-consumption of the bourgeoisie and the overweening gesture of the upper and middle classes forced them and their fictional characters to retreat to the countryside—if not to an Arcadian world, at the least a space where children could play with real, fluffy bunnies, free from the social demands and pretension of genteel domesticity.

⁴² Kutzer, *Beatrix Potter*, 76.

CHAPTER NINE. THE MORALS OF HOME:

AESTHETICS AND LIFE IN THE DOLLS' HOUSE

When writing about the ideal contents of the nursery in her housekeeping manual, *Nooks and Corners* (1889), Jane Panton, the Mrs. Beeton of interior design, told her Victorian readers that an ideal nursery should have a dolls' house. Panton asserted that her 'first love of decoration and adornment of the house' was fostered by the strong attachment she felt for her dolls' house.¹ It was not uncommon for a well-equipped nursery in an upper or middle-class Victorian house to have a space dedicated to the dolls' house. In his consideration of English childhood, Anthony Fletcher contends that the highlight of a well-furnished Victorian nursery was the dolls' house.² Osborne House, Queen Victoria's holiday house on the Isle of Wight, for example, has a dolls' house (which belonged to the Queen when she was young) in the Nursery Bedroom.³ The trend of having a dolls' house in the nursery continued well into the early twentieth century. Victorian and Edwardian children's books that featured nursery rhymes or taught children about life inside the home often had an illustration of the dolls' house in view in the nursery [Fig. 9.1 & Fig. 9.2].

¹ Jane Ellen Panton, *Nooks and Corners* (London: Ward & Downey, 1889), 106.

² Anthony Fletcher, *Growing up in England: the Experience of Childhood, 1600-1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), xix.

³ See image of the interior of the Royal Nursery on the English Heritage website <<http://www.englishheritageprints.com/nursery-bedroom-osborne-house-j070025/print/5565641.html>> [accessed 20 July 2014]; Flora Gill Jacobs, *A History of Doll's Houses: Four Centuries of the Domestic World in Miniature* (London: Cassell, 1954), 67-68.



Figure 9.1 Frontispiece of Walter Crane, *Baby's Bouquet* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1877); engraving in pen and watercolour



Figure 9.2 'The Nursery', in *The Toy Primer. Routledge's Shilling Toy Books* (London: George Routledge and Sons, c. 1873), n. pag.; Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, University of Florida Digital Collections, University of Florida Digital Collections

The presence of the dolls' house in a nursery is also mentioned in H. G. Wells's semi-autobiographical novel, *Tono-Bungay* (1908). Wells's fictional dolls' house is based on the dolls' house at Uppark House in West Sussex, where the novelist's mother used to be the housekeeper. Wells depicted a boy playing discreetly in the nursery with an opulent dolls' house 'that the Prince Regent had given Sir Harry Drew's first-born' which 'contained eighty-five dolls and had cost hundreds of

pounds'.⁴ While the boy 'played under imperious direction with that toy of glory', 'dreaming of beautiful things' and 'made a great story out of the doll's house', the dolls' house takes on a sacred status. Wells's description interestingly corresponds with Panton's portrayal of the nursery, which she described as 'the very heart of the household', 'as sacred as a shrine', where all the sentiment of the home could be found.⁵

Although not necessarily at the centre of the nursery, the dolls' house together with the nursery made an impressive image representing family prosperity and symbolising a sumptuous domestic household. After all, only middle-and upper-class families could afford to have a separate space in the home designated for the well-being of their young, which, in turn, kept the parents away from the domestic trifles caused by the children and enabled them to enjoy their privacy.⁶ In like manner, the dolls' house as a luxurious toy was only available to children from well-off families. Interestingly, in Queen Victoria's lonely childhood days, she possessed a dolls' house for her consolation which was described as 'a very homely affair compared to the luxurious palaces in which latter-day children keep their "babies" [dolls]'.⁷ Even though children from different social classes did make their own dolls' houses with all sorts of materials, and not all upper-class children owned extravagant models, possessing the factory-manufactured or specially-commissioned dolls' houses was surely a privilege of the wealthy and a proof of parental indulgence. Such possession could be regarded as a form of conspicuous consumption. On the contrary, children from lower classes needed to learn to be content with what they

⁴ H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1908; London: Penguin, 2005), 34.

⁵ Wells, 34; Panton, *Nooks and Corners*, 107-08; 112.

⁶ For the Victorian perspective on the significance of including a nursery in the house, see Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House* (London: John Murray, 1864), 160-62; Jane Ellen Panton, *From Kitchen to Garret: Hints for Young Householders* (London: Ward & Downey, 1888), 160-80.

⁷ One of Her Majesty's Servants, *The Private Life of the Queen* (London: C. A. Pearson, 1897), 22.

had. A Victorian farm girl and her playmates used to play with ‘a doll house [...] made out of an orange box with two compartments upstairs and downstairs and had lace curtains and toy furniture’.⁸ Lady Barker also wrote sarcastically that she was taught to appreciate all the ‘wretched little things called dolls’ houses’ given to her when she was a child. Instead of having a commercial dolls’ house from the toy shop, she could only beg for an empty packing-case to make her own.⁹

In addition, the nursery as the shrine holding the niche of the dolls’ house as a sacred symbol of the house establishes a fascinating link. This link between the dolls’ house and the nursery is made even stronger in dolls’ houses built to celebrate the value of domestic ideals for posterity. Both Titania’s Palace and Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House have a dolls’ house inside the nursery, which creates the effect of the house within the house and marks the extreme fineness of craftsmanship and the desire to preserve the perfect household in a diminutive form.

Art in the dolls’ house

As the visual focus of the nursery, the dolls’ house received considerable attention in a variety of children’s fiction and magazine articles exploring ideas about perfect domestic interiors and the development of aesthetic expressions at the turn of the century. In the context of art education, the dolls’ house served not merely as a children’s toy but a space for both children and adults to play with ideas promoted in the latest aesthetic movements and changes in trends, fashions, and tastes. Reflecting

⁸ From Sarah Sutcliffe’s (née Dyson) unpublished journal (as of 1895?), in *The Voices of Children, 1700-1914*, ed. by Irina Stickland (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 194.

⁹ Lady Barker [Mary Anne Barker], ‘About Toys and Games’, *Good Words for the Young*, 1 January 1871, 139.

the influences of the Arts and Crafts Movement, dolls' house furnishing provided a fresh perspective to consider the notion of beauty and utility.

The Arts and Crafts Movement was influential from the 1860s until the early twentieth century, although it only took this name in 1887, with the foundation of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London. Its theory was enunciated in the writings of the two most influential figures of the movement, John Ruskin and William Morris. Resisting the slogan of 'art for art's sake' that was so influential in British Aestheticism, Ruskin considered the impressions of beauty were more essentially of moral or social rather than of aesthetic sense. He associated art with its social usefulness. To Ruskin, a work of art should exhibit the virtues of the natural materials it is made of.¹⁰ He told his students that 'the main business of art was its service in the actual uses of daily life, and that the beginning of art was in getting the country clean and the people beautiful'.¹¹ Ruskin examined the relationship between art, labour, and society and recognised the value of labour, affirming that the importance of the role of craftsmen should be appreciated, particularly because traditional craft skills were destroyed by the machinery of the Industrial Revolution.

As an artist, craftsman, and social reformer, William Morris developed Ruskin's theory further and pushed the movement forward by making its philosophy and crafts more accessible to a wider public.¹² Like Ruskin, Morris's focus was on the joy of workmanship and the intrinsic beauty of natural materials. He regarded handwork as a valuable form of labour, placed great value on work, and felt that the social system was at fault in reducing work to mere painful toil. Because Morris desired the reorganisation of society, he associated the movement's aesthetic expression with a

¹⁰ Oscar Lovell Triggs, *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Chicago: Bohemia Guild of the Industrial Art League, 1902), 35-36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹² See 'Morris and His Plea for an Industrial Commonwealth', in Triggs, 59-142.

social foundation.¹³ At the heart of the social reform he envisaged was the idea that art must be incorporated into the daily lives of ordinary people, a belief based on ‘an implicit socialism [...] always abiding at the heart of his life’.¹⁴ To make an art that is truly by the people and for the people, Morris suggested two necessary virtues: honesty and simplicity, as opposed to injustice and luxury. Both virtues appealed to him as they usefully summarise his ideas about social reform and his annoyance at excessive consumption and unnecessary possessions.¹⁵ As Morris wrote that ‘the democracy of art, the ennobling of daily and common work [...] will one day put hope and pleasure in the place of fear and pain, as the forces which move men to labour and keep the world a-going’, he strove to bring together his passion for beauty, his love of a simple life, and the significance of labour that has a beneficial effect on everyone, in order to promote the movement’s belief in the ethical value of art and craftsmanship that can help shape a new and better society.¹⁶

Among many other dolls’ house narratives which emphasise ideas about reality and different sizes, as discussed in previous chapters, *Two Dolls’-Houses* (1895) by Alice Mitchell exemplifies another kind of dolls’ house story which reveals that the aesthetics of the dolls’ house is closely related to the development of nineteenth-century aesthetic movements. It does not follow traditional dolls’ house story themes of imagination and metamorphosis, such as adventures of children in the doll world or the dolls’ house residents coming alive. Rather, this story uses the dolls’ house as a backdrop to articulate artistic ideals in the field of interior design. Using the dolls’ house as a background, the author showed how the practice of dolls’ house furnishing and decorating could reflect ideas about the relation between beauty

¹³ Ibid., 122.

¹⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹⁵ Ibid., 115-18.

¹⁶ Ibid., 118.

and morals and the significance of the practical everyday use of an artwork situated in the home as highlighted in the Arts and Crafts Movement. When the story's heroine Daisy is confined at home during her convalescence, a family friend and a father figure, Mr. Clieve, comes regularly to visit. Mr. Clieve furnishes Daisy's dolls' house together with her. The day after Mr. Clieve is shown to Daisy's dolls' house, he comes back with various materials and tool boxes to help decorate and refurbish the very dolls' house.

When it comes to the selection of wallpaper, the dialogue between the two shows the relationship of an art master and his inquisitive disciple:

‘Now for the walls; this crimson paper is frightful.’

‘Would blue do there?’

‘Blue wouldn’t be so bad there, but we are going to have something else there. Now, what is the most cheerful thing in the world?’

‘The sun,’ said Daisy, ‘the sunlight.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Clieve, ‘I think we’d better have something as near the sunlight as we can.’¹⁷

As Mr. Clieve goes on to teach Daisy principles of colour combination, he teaches her his aesthetic tastes. He stresses the significance of gentle behaviour when they finally come to the conclusion that a pale colour would do to suggest the sunlight, for ‘suggestions are gentle things always, and gentle words and ways are best’.¹⁸ Moreover, he also inspires her to have a greater interest in fine arts—at the end of the day, Daisy declares that she will ask her father to take her to the Royal Academy to see more paintings.¹⁹

Just as Mr. Clieve insists on having the right colour for the dolls' house, the art in the dolls' house was a concern for some serious dolls' house enthusiasts and adults

¹⁷ Alice M. Mitchell, *Two Dolls'-Houses* (London: S. P. C. K., 1895), 74-76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

who were interested in artistic training. Writing under the pseudonym ‘Little Queenie’ the Victorian journalist and humorist R. C. Lehmann sermonised at a great length about ‘The Art in the Dolls’ House’ in a 1901 issue of *Punch*. Lehmann deliberately used phonetic spellings of children’s lispings common in contemporary children’s books to disguise himself as a haughty, pompous little girl who had sufficient knowledge to write for the magazine. Mimicking the format of a reader’s letter to the magazine’s correspondence column, ‘Little Queenie’ criticised the typical flaws in mass-manufactured dolls’ houses of the period in respect of their ‘decoration’, papering, ‘fernishing’, ‘orniments’, and so forth. She complained that these poorly-designed dolls’ houses had no style of their own as they did not possess what the Victorian children had in their actual homes:

Is it not a shame that Dolls should be so behind the time, and that, while us children have the advantiges of easthetic wallpapers and freezes and overmantles and Art roking-horses and chintses and things, and our Mamas sit in rooms abounding with Maurice curtains and Chipindale sofas and Libaty cosy corners and potery on brakets and comic china pussies and every other luxury, our dolls should still be compelled to reside in houses which are too Erly Victorian for words?²⁰

The ridiculing of artistic furniture and ornaments filling up the Victorian domestic interior, from Morris curtains to Chippendale sofas, in contrast to the more austere furnishing of the dolls’ house, was not just meant to be sarcastic. On the one hand, this passage could be read as the reflection of the gradual shift in the fin de siècle ethos such as the Arts and Crafts Movement which celebrated the beauty of materials and quality of craftsmanship and preferred utility and simplicity to opulence.²¹ The Arts and Crafts aesthetics sought to move away from the impersonal mass-produced

²⁰ ‘Little Queenie’ [R. C. Lehmann], ‘Art in the Dolls’ House’, *Punch*, 3 April 1901, 250; all misspellings in original.

²¹ For further accounts of dolls’ house furnishing between 1880 and 1914, which intertwined with the development of major aesthetic movements in the period, see Olivia Bristol and Leslie Geddes-Brown, *Dolls’ Houses: Domestic Life and Architectural Styles in Miniatures from the Seventeenth-Century to the Present Day* (London: Beazley, 1997), 109-10.

products associated with the Industrial Revolution, and Lehmann's contempt for the vulgarity of these ready-made dolls' houses therefore echoed the movement's focus on the value of the work of individual craftsmen and its rejection of machine production, which damaged traditional craft techniques and standards of design. On the other hand, this exaggeration could also be understood as the author's mocking of excessive purchasing power at the turn of the century and the social ethos that encouraged conspicuous consumption—the pursuit for luxuries and goods did not necessarily reflect the purchaser's deeper artistic appreciation.

Besides, dolls' house furnishing did not merely represent its owner or player's wealth and taste. According to Lehmann, it was also a matter of what the Victorians believed to be the proper artistic values to share with their children, as 'Little Queenie' cried out:

All grown-up and thoughtfull persons will tell you how esenshil it is if we are to mold the charicters of the young and instill them with noble and lofty asperations that they should be surrounded from infancy with butiful objicts. Then they grow up to be faltless judges and have such exquisite taste [...] But if we go on alowing our dolls to dwell in Filstine surroundings, how can we be surprized if they do not look more inteligent or if they are deficient in jeneral culcher?²²

Based on that criterion, the mass-produced dolls' houses of the period were far from being satisfactory, as they were usually

devided into four compartments, like a rabbit hutch [...] There is no trace of any hall, or even passidge. There are no doors, so if a droin-room doll should find herself in the kitchen or nursery by any chance, there she has got to remane until some cumpationat hand releases her to her propper sphere!²³

Inasmuch as 'Little Queenie' exaggerated the insipid layout in ready-made dolls' houses and suggested that the dolls' house should be arranged like an actual house

²² 'Art in the Dolls' House', *Punch*, 3 April 1901, 250; all misspellings in original.

²³ Ibid., 10 April 1901, 268; all misspellings in original.

with proper doors and real stairways leading to the upper rooms, this description here made the readers pause to consider the decoration of their dolls' houses in relation to real houses. Viewing the dolls' house as the exact model of an actual house, 'Little Queenie' was surely fastidious and demanding about the presentation of the dolls' house. Her (or rather Lehmann's) lamentation reveals contemporary concern about the degree to which dolls' houses could be used to inculcate ideas about beauty and tastes. Such concern had been articulated earlier in a children's magazine when the editor, Matilda Mumps, sarcastically talked about the 'Utter Absurdity of the Modern Doll's House':

Apparently Dolls' Houses are lamentably behind the times, with their mock doors and dummy windows. Nor is this all. No ordinary Toy Villa is supplied with a staircase, and the dolls who wish to go to the upper rooms have to clamber up in a most undignified fashion. More could be said of the want of such things as a coal cellar, a sanitary dust-bin, and a water supply, but I think my remarks will suffice to show that the builders of these houses have a lot to learn, and that their productions are ridiculous, in these days of civilization, hygiene, and the laws of sanitary science.²⁴

Here Mumps playfully treated the dolls' house residents as human beings with real desires and needs. But she was also seriously asking questions about ideals of taste, aesthetics, and domestic management, ideals she saw lacking in the dolls' houses children played with.

Although the dolls' house in nineteenth-century England functioned primarily as a children's toy rather than a piece of virtuoso artwork for adult collections, many Victorian authors believed it crucial to teach children to make their dolls' houses as beautiful as possible. *Beeton's Book of Needlework* (1875) instructed readers that when furnishing a dolls' house, 'though it is only nominally for the *amusement* of the children, there is no reason why it should not have care and attention bestowed upon

²⁴ Matilda Mumps, 'Our Children's Corner: On the Utter Absurdity of the Modern Doll's House', *Funny Folks*, 14 October 1893, 250.

it when it may'. The author went on to suggest that even if the dolls' house was meant to be played with, the attitude that 'anything will do' was seriously flawed. Children should be taught that everything about the dolls' house must be neat and precise. Moreover, the author believed that being precise and having good taste in early years would bear fruit in one's later life.²⁵

This viewpoint was endorsed by other writers of advice manuals and toy-making guides, as well as newspaper and magazine articles promoting the advantages of dolls' house play. It almost became a truism that like furnishing the real house, dolls' house furnishing was a way to cultivate in children proper taste, the ability to differentiate between beauty and ugliness. More importantly, when the time came for them to set up houses of their own, they should be able to make their own houses pretty and pleasant, just as they did with their dolls' houses. An 1875 report in the *Daily Telegraph* about a dolls' house exhibition taking place in Alexandra Palace spoke critically about a dolls' house on display, and argued that children should learn 'good taste', a sense of 'real beauty', and associated ideals of 'practical utility' when arranging the dolls' house:

This is by no means the kind of mansion which the friends of art-manufacture would care to see. Something like good taste, something verging upon real beauty in its sense of fitness and symmetry, and tending towards practical utility in teaching children the rudiments of household economy may be instilled into the arrangements of a doll's house.²⁶

It was not coincidental that authors of these texts paid more attention to the practical arrangement of the dolls' house interior than to the imaginative activities initiated by dolls' house play. With the flourishing of campaigns for the reform of art and interior design, such as the Aesthetic Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement, many of

²⁵ *Beeton's Book of Needlework* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1875), 6-7; italic in original.

²⁶ Cited in Jacobs, 71.

the period's publications discussed fashions and styles in the home, and this emphasis was also found in discussions of dolls' houses.

The London publisher, Macmillan, for instance, inaugurated the 'Art at Home' series in the late 1870s. This series contained works by a cohort of specialists including an antiquarian, an architect, a composer, and a journalist on aspects of decoration and crafts, such as furnishing, decorating, needlework, art work collecting, and most tellingly, the importance of taste.²⁷ In 1881, the Victorian architect Robert William Edis published a collection of his talks delivered to the Society of Arts on the topic of home decoration and furnishing as a response to the growing awareness of the need for aesthetic education, a concern held by many middle-class readers. Edis's objective was to 'lead the public to think more about the artistic furnishing of their houses, to show that good art could be combined with comfort and moderate expense, and that the better and more artistic decoration and furniture of modern houses could be combined with fitness, comfort, and common-sense'.²⁸

Edis's preface here shows how the period's profusion of domestic guides to interior design and furnishing reflected changes in fashion and artistic styles. Moreover, it demonstrated a growing interest in better design at every level of production promoted by the Arts and Crafts Movement.²⁹ As these housekeeping guides reached out to a wide public, more middle-class readers were inspired to invest money and time in house decoration.³⁰ The ideal of making the home beautiful was felt deeply by many Victorians. As W. J. Loftie announced in *A Plea*

²⁷ According to the advertisement in the back of *A Plea for Art in the House* (1876) by W. J. Loftie, other titles in the 'Art at Home' series are *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork, and Furniture* by Rhoda and Agnes Garrett; *Music in the House* by John Hullah; *The Drawing-Room: Its Decorations and Furniture*, by Mrs. Orrinsmith; *The Dining-Room* by Mrs. Loftie; *The Bedroom and Boudoir* by Lady Barker; *Dress* by Mrs. Oliphant; *Domestic Architecture* by J. J. Stevenson; *Drawing and Painting* by H. Stacy Marks.

²⁸ Robert William Edis, *Decoration and Furniture of Town Houses* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), viii.

²⁹ Wendy Hitchmough, *The Arts and Crafts Home* (London: Pavilion, 2000), 13.

³⁰ Kathryn Ferry, *The Victorian Home* (Oxford: Shire, 2012), 91-92.

for *Art in the House* (1876), 'To make home what it should be, a cheerful, happy habitation [...] [one] must have it not only clean, for cleanliness is next to godliness, and wholesome, which is another way of saying holy, but also beautiful'.³¹ Likewise, when writing about furnishing the nursery, Panton urged parents to keep the nursery beautiful, bright, and tidy, and to spend their money on showing children good pictures and beautiful scenery, to make sure they grow up in charming surroundings. She also emphasised elsewhere that bad art should never be allowed in the nursery.³² To some adults, bad and ugly objects could even be demoralising and a serious matter that threatened to contaminate children's imagination.³³

This craze for having only beautiful things in the house was an answer to William Morris's famous exhortation to '*Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful*'.³⁴ Morris's plea summed up the Arts and Crafts Movement's desire to turn the house into a work of art and the Arts and Crafts architects' commitment to prescribe every detail of the interior.³⁵ In addition, as the architectural historian Kathryn Ferry points out, the enthusiasm for beauty in the home made art-manufactured products such as 'art furniture', 'art wallpaper', 'art fabrics', and 'art pottery' more desirable to fashion-conscious consumers.³⁶ Morris-designed curtains and nursery wallpaper designed by famous children's book illustrators such as Walter Crane and Kate Greenaway all made their way into middle-class homes.³⁷ The doll children in Miss Miles's House, now in the V&A Museum of Childhood, for example, were fortunate enough to enjoy a

³¹ W. J. Loftie, *A Plea for Art in the House, with Special Reference to the Economy of Collecting Works of Art, and the Importance of Taste in Education and Morals* (London: Macmillan, 1876), 90,

³² Panton, *From Kitchen to Garret*, 180; *Nooks and Corners*, 106.

³³ 'Art in the Dolls' House', 17 April 1901, 286; E[dith] Nesbit, *Wings and the Child; or, the Building of Magic Cities* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913), 19.

³⁴ William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art* (London: Ellis & White, 1882), 108; italics in original.

³⁵ Hitchmough, 'Putting the Arts and Crafts Home Together', in *The Arts and Crafts Home*, 7-31.

³⁶ Ferry, 92.

³⁷ Edis, 228.

well-equipped nursery decorated with a scaled-down version of the original frieze designed by the renowned artist and children's book illustrator Cecil Aldin (1870-1935) [Fig. 9.3], whose design was also adopted in the princesses' bedroom in Titania's Palace and John Hassall's illustration of the Darling children's bedroom for a poster accompanying the stage production of *Peter Pan* in 1907 [Fig. 9.4].³⁸

The idea of beauty in home decoration was widely discussed. The period's domestic guides were full of detailed room-by-room instructions on how to make the domestic interior beautiful. Loftie claimed that 'a little taste' rather than money was needed to make a house beautiful.³⁹ Edis also supported the idea that artistic decoration did not necessarily demand expensive products. He aimed rather to encourage in readers

a better taste and a more truthful treatment in the art-work of our homes, to avoid shams and pretentious conceits, seeking rather for things substantial, useful, and refined, than for those splendid and luxurious; and for simplicity, comfort, and suitability, rather than pretentiousness, show, and elaboration in everything about us; so that with better and more educated taste, combined with truth and beauty of design and construction of the work we have around us, we may live in a more healthy atmosphere of art in domestic life.⁴⁰

Whereas making the home look beautiful was usually associated with the arrangement of furniture and ornaments for home decoration, the selection of these objects became really important. The beauty of the home, according to these art critics, was not just the outward attraction of extravagant items; rather, it implied a refined and trained appreciation of things that best represent the owner's

³⁸ Halina Pasierbska, *Dolls' Houses from the V&A Museum of Childhood* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 84-85; Francesca Berry, 'Bedrooms: Corporeality and Subjectivity', in *Domestic Interiors: Representing Homes from the Victorians to the Moderns*, ed. by Georgina Downey (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 140-41.

³⁹ Loftie, 90-91.

⁴⁰ Edis, 285.

understanding of the need for a healthy domestic life. Inside the middle-class Victorian house, as Ferry suggests, ‘the thorny issue of taste really came into play’.⁴¹



Figure 9.3 The Nursery in Miss Miles's House (1890);
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

⁴¹ Ferry, 9.

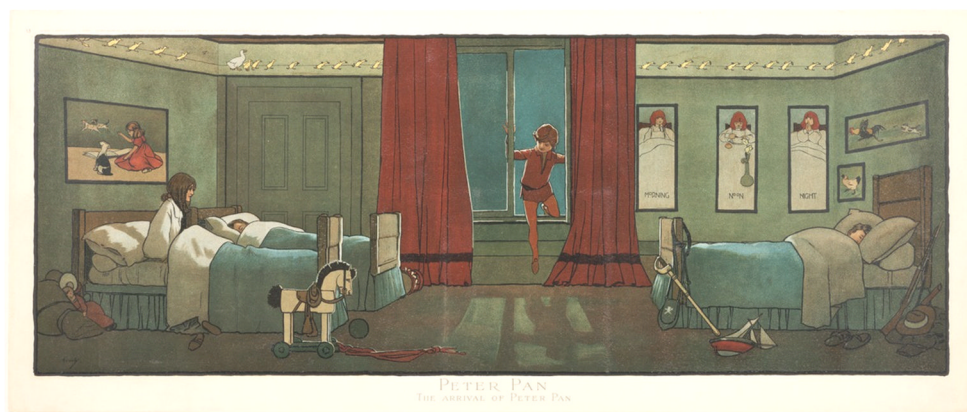


Figure 9.4 'The Arrival of Peter Pan' by John Hassall (c. 1907);
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

It is worth noticing that although the beauty of the house was viewed as desirable, 'better and more educated taste' was of greater concern. In other words, the pursuit for art in the home was frequently connected with character development. Edith Wharton and the architect Ogden Codman in *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) associated children's arrangement of their own rooms and the selection of pictures to be hung on the walls as an 'expression of individual taste' and claimed that such responsibility gave them the opportunity to 'develop the incipient faculties of observation and comparison'. To them, the child's visible surroundings were not only significant for aesthetic cultivation. They made the wider claim that 'the development of any artistic taste, if the child's general training is of the right sort, indirectly broadens the whole view of life'.⁴²

The phrases 'good taste', 'refined taste', or 'artistic taste' did not only appear in guides to home decoration specifically targeted at adult readers. A lot of nineteenth-century advice manuals for girls were devoted to the development of tastes in young readers who would one day keep and furnish their own houses. In the constantly reprinted girls' advice manual, *The Girl's Own Book*, Lydia Child

⁴² Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman Jr., *The Decoration of Houses* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897; London: B. T. Batsford, 1898), 182-83.

encouraged her readers to pursue ‘*elegant accomplishments, refined taste, and gracefulness of manner*’.⁴³ Similarly, the authors of *The Girl’s Own Toy-maker* (1860) declared it pleasing to see girls learn to embellish their homes ‘neatly and tastefully’ with their handiworks.⁴⁴ Such concepts were still promoted in the early twentieth century. A later account of the educational value of the dolls’ house claimed that dolls’ house play is crucial in cultivating a girl’s ‘love of true beauty and art’, and ‘worthy of every mother’s consideration’.⁴⁵ Another article on the importance of taste in the *Girl’s Own Annual* suggested that the element of taste should be cultivated in children in their early years, ‘when the opening mind is ready to take in the aesthetic impressions offered to it’. The author of the article believed that teaching children to distinguish between what is ugly and what is beautiful, both in action and in ornament, would help them form a sense of taste and artistic appreciation that would be valuable in adult life.⁴⁶

Furthermore, as Victoria Rosner observes in her examination of social aspects of the Victorian domestic interior, the period’s household manuals, focusing on the significance of taste and self-expression, not only formulated rules regarding the appropriate ways to organise and decorate a home, but also upheld values such as respectability, status, social hierarchy, and etiquette.⁴⁷ In other words, knowing how to properly arrange domestic space artistically was only the initial lesson, leading to a much wider acquisition of Victorian domestic and moral values. The teaching that women should possess morals and domestic qualities such as repose and comeliness

⁴³ Lydia Maria Child, *The Girl’s Own Book*, 13th edn (1833; London: Thomas Tegg, 1844), vi; italics in original.

⁴⁴ Ebenezer Landells and Alice Landells, *The Girl’s Own Toy-maker, and Book of Recreation* (London: Griffith, 1860), vi.

⁴⁵ ‘Period Furniture in Miniature’, *The Girl’s Own Annual*, October 1920–September 1921, 355.

⁴⁶ Mrs. Lovat, ‘Training the Child’s Taste’, *The Girl’s Own Annual*, October 1921–September 1922, 359.

⁴⁷ Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 46–47.

was popular in nineteenth-century domestic guides. Wendy Hitchmough points out that these domestic reference books about home decoration were complemented by volumes of housekeeping manuals (the herald of which was Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management* published in 1861) and etiquette guides, which presented detailed accounts of how life should be managed in middle-class homes in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, novels, biographies, popular magazines, household manuals and guides to proper demeanour in this period, as Hitchmough suggests, 'corroborate each other to a remarkable extent'.⁴⁸ These texts worked together to demonstrate how decorating and furnishing the domestic interior could be a way of expressing middle-class identity and displaying one's position, economic status, and moral values.

Just as the literature pitched at adults linked together artistic tastes, domestic management, etiquette, and moral correctness, girl readers were instructed in taste and ethics by dolls' house furnishing guides, dolls' house stories, and advice manuals targeted at them. The language of many of these books consistently emphasised the importance of moral virtues acquired and expressed through the process of furnishing and decorating. Children's author 'Aunt Louisa' advised her readers that their dolls' houses should be kept clean, just as 'a lady must look after her kitchen and see that it is nice, or the house will not be comfortable'.⁴⁹ When writing about room decoration, Lady Barker also suggested that girls could help

make and collect tasteful little odds and ends of ornamental work for their own rooms, and show the difference between what is and is not artistically and intrinsically valuable, either for form or colour. It is also an excellent rule to establish that girls should keep their rooms neat and clean [...] Such habits are valuable in any condition of life.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Hitchmough, 25-26.

⁴⁹ 'Aunt Louisa' [Laura Jewry Valentine], *Aunt Louisa's London Gift Book. Edith and Milly's Housekeeping—Milly's Doll's House* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1866), n. pag.

⁵⁰ Lady Barker [Mary Anne Barker], *The Bedroom and Boudoir* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878),

In the same manner, the London toy merchant William Cremer described keeping the dolls' house kitchen neat and clean as an expression of a girl's 'domestic as well as her social virtues'.⁵¹

The inculcation of moral order was explicitly associated with proper arrangement of material objects in the home. Authors of domestic manuals about actual houses and dolls' house furnishing guides were concerned about the same thing: the tasteful lifestyle of 'the housekeeper'—whether in the realm of the actual house or the miniature one—should be expressed through the meticulous arrangement of the domestic interior. Furthermore, it was to be understood that the art in the house and the art in the dolls' house were not only measured in terms of beautiful presentation, but also according to the reflection of the female householder's refined and educated taste. The bourgeois domestic interior gradually became primarily a female space, the domain for women to create for men what John Ruskin described as 'the place of Peace' away from 'the anxieties of the outer life'.⁵² Moreover, the home was also the space to display women's aesthetic refinement alongside their housekeeping skills. In line with Ruskin's social criticism that linked moral and social health with qualities in domestic arrangement, the concept that the middle-class home was a female sphere in which the wife showed a cosy domesticity in order to express the success of her husband and to reflect the woman's moral influence in the home won much appeal. In late nineteenth-century Britain, as

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⁵¹ William Henry Cremer, *The Toys of the Little Folks of All Ages and Countries; or, the Toy Kingdom* (London: Cremer, 1873), 49.

⁵² John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1865), 148.

Deborah Cohen suggests, the house became increasingly a feminine territory and ‘a reflection of a woman’s individuality’.⁵³

The woman as the angel in the house was not just the guardian angel of the hearth who ensured that the household was managed smoothly. As Beverly Gordon also writes in her discussion of the connection between women and their houses in middle-class culture in Europe and North America, woman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was popularly regarded as the embodiment of the home, just as the home was considered in relation to the female body, as ‘an extension of both her corporeal and spiritual self’.⁵⁴ Ideas about the arrangement of domestic interiors, about fashion and the decorative art, and about women’s gender roles all fed into the period’s construction of the ideas of the bourgeois woman’s running of her household.⁵⁵ Whether the woman was to reflect or even to become part of the interior, the bourgeois woman was expected to show the beauty of the domestic interior as well as to behave nobly in the domestic sphere. Her moral virtues should be expressed visually in beautifully decorated rooms.

Gordon ponders on the metaphorical connection between the female body and domestic interiors and suggests that the presentation of self and the presentation of home together formed ‘the *front* that projected the desired image to the world at large’.⁵⁶ Therefore, art at home was not merely decorative: it was also an expression of the woman who gave the space a personal touch. Both the home and its female manager were on display—the home for its beauty, the woman not only for her beauty, but also for her dignity, moral virtues and refined taste. Similarly, the image

⁵³ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 111.

⁵⁴ Beverly Gordon, ‘Woman’s Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 31.4 (1996), 282.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 281-82.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 283; italic in original.

of the ‘front’ also applies to girls and their dolls’ houses. Like furnishing a real house, dolls’ house furnishing, as shown in all the advice manuals examined, was never just for amusement. As Judith Rowbotham suggests, a girl’s task in the Victorian period was first and foremost to learn the art of becoming a *Household Fairy* or *Home Goddess* and to be trained in the skills involved in running a household.⁵⁷ When girls followed advice on how to decorate their dolls’ houses tastefully and neatly, they not only acquired housewifery skills but also created ‘the front’ that Gordon describes. In a literal sense, the front could refer to the façade of the dolls’ house, as dolls’ houses almost always open in the front and invite further inspection of the contents inside. The front is for show and display. As girls playing with dolls’ houses learned to arrange things properly by consulting domestic guides, they could create a visible image of the domestic virtues they wished to show to others.

From the styling of the home to the choice of papers, fabrics, and furniture recommended in these lengthy housekeeping manuals—often in several thick volumes—through the fastidious planning and decorating process, both the mistress of the house and the proprietor of the dolls’ house learned to arrange art in their domestic sphere. The house and the dolls’ house had contradictory meanings. On the one hand the arts of household management can be confining, aiming at regulating and producing female identities tied to the domestic sphere. On the other hand, women and girls were given agency in the sophisticated roles of what Ruskin called ‘sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision’.⁵⁸ Their spatial arrangements demonstrated the art of housekeeping, and more importantly, taste, status, etiquette, and dignity; all of these values were acclaimed in the Victorian domestic interior.

⁵⁷ Judith Rowbotham, ‘Education for Model Maidens’, in *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fictions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 124; italics in original. Both *Household Fairy* and *Home Goddess* are titles of nineteenth-century domestic magazines.

⁵⁸ Ruskin, 147.

Dolls in the dolls' house

The bourgeois domestic space could be both confining and liberating—as the mistress of the house was given the opportunities to make decisions, even though that might be limited to ordering dinner or choosing wallpaper. Like their mothers who were intimately involved with domestic management, whereas their fathers had ultimate control of the household finances, girls engaging in dolls' house play might find that the pleasure of arranging and decorating the domestic interior could be complex and problematic. On the one hand, girls playing with dolls' houses were in charge of everything without male supervision, although they were constantly reminded of their expected roles and duties by contemporary advice literature. Cohen points out that woman readers who sought advice for home decoration in this period often referred to their husbands' preferences and demands rather than their own. The decoration and furnishing of the home were not solely the responsibility of women. Husbands and wives might work together to make decorating decisions, and more often it was the husbands' tastes that determined the arrangement of the home.⁵⁹ By contrast, dolls' houses were dedicated to girls' own pleasure, a showplace for their imagination and desires. Dolls' house play as a form of imaginative play could be viewed as a positive strategy through which children, and girls in particular, negotiated social restrictions and could actively plan and create their own spaces. As Jane Hamlett suggests in her exploration of nurseries in the upper-and middle-class homes in Victorian and Edwardian England, children managed to break the boundaries of domestic confinement and transform the ordinary interior through their imagination and play.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Cohen, 95-98.

⁶⁰ Jane Hamlett, ““White-Painted Fortresses”?: English Upper-and Middle-Class Nurseries,

In her analysis of the ideas of ‘littleness’ of female characters in Victorian novels, Frances Armstrong suggests that as the metaphor of women being dolls in the dolls’ house dominated in the nineteenth century, more than a girls’ game of playing house, dolls’ house play actually involved two distinct meanings. She argues that on the one hand the dolls’ house proved to be ‘a miniature female utopia’, a site for creativity, and yet at the same time it was ‘a tedious foreshadowing of future housewifery, existing only to be tidied and dusted’.⁶¹ On the positive side, it was in the miniature world that girls gained agency and pleasure through practices of role-playing. They created a new world order through the remodelling of conventional domestic space and through the restructuring of daily routines, using both narratives and accessories to improvise as they played.⁶² However, it was undeniable that the Victorian ideology of ideal women—the lessons of becoming good wives and good mothers with all the imposed domestic duties as well as the concerns about the wellbeing of the master of the house—were inculcated through the arrangement of dolls’ house interiors.

Hence it is difficult to assess whether the dolls’ house was conforming or empowering. Dolls’ house play was both a means to produce socially-acceptable gender patterns and a way to explore creative and subversive possibilities. For girls who did not passively and unconditionally accept their assigned gender roles, they could use the dolls’ house to show their creativity and agency in their control of space and their ideas about social responsibilities substantiated by dolls in the dolls’ house. On the other hand, girls learned to truthfully replicate the everyday life of ordinary people that they observed in the home by allocating each doll to his or her

1850-1910, *Home Cultures*, 10.3(2013), 258-60.

⁶¹ Frances Armstrong, ‘Gender and Miniaturization: Games of Littleness in Nineteenth-Century Fiction’, *English Studies in Canada*, 16 (1990), 409.

⁶² Frances Armstrong, ‘The Dollhouse as Ludic Space, 1690-1920’, *Children’s Literature*, 24 (1996), 24.

designated compartment, which was normally divided by gender, by class, and by function. In the idealised dolls' house, 'Cook is ever so busy in the kitchen preparing breakfast, while the housemaid sweeps the stairs and dusts the sitting-rooms; master and mistress are dressing'.⁶³ Householders and servants all have their proper place, as illustrated in a fictional dolls' house where 'In the parlour, in a nice chair, sat Miss Ellen, Susy's best doll reading a book; and down in the kitchen there was black Dinah frying pancakes'.⁶⁴ A domestic guide published in 1901 made a blunt statement that the dolls' house should be crammed with residents, as it suggested the reader that

As to dolls, the more the merrier. They are so cheap and can be dressed so easily that it seems a great pity not to have a large family and a larger circle of friends who will occasionally visit them. There must be a father and a mother, a baby and some children, servants (in stiff print dresses with caps and aprons), and certainly a bride.⁶⁵

Dolls house dolls were respectively placed in a specific place according to their social roles and costumes and there they performed particular tasks reflecting their positions in the social hierarchy. Moreover, because wood was commonly used to make these dolls, to many dolls' house owners' disappointment, their dolls inevitably had to remain in a stiff posture. Frances Hodgson Burnett described with a bitter-sweet voice the pageant-like display of dolls in her dolls' house:

In the dining-room various members of the family are always dining, the footman is always serving them from the sideboard, a parlor maid in a white cap and apron, is perpetually handing things to someone who won't take them, the collie dog stands waiting to be fed by the grandpa, who never feeds him.⁶⁶

The immobility of these wooden dolls reveals a comical vulnerability arising from their physical limitations that is also present in Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Two Bad*

⁶³ Lilla H. Shadfalt, 'A Day in My Doll's House', *Hearth and Home*, 23 April 1896, 938.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Prentiss, *Little Susy's Six Birthdays* (1859; London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, c.1919), 36.

⁶⁵ Edward Verrall Lucas [E. V. Lucas] and Elizabeth Lucas, *What Shall We Do Now? A Book of Suggestions for Children's Games and Employments* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), 181.

⁶⁶ Frances Hodgson Burnett, 'My Toy Cupboard', *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1915, 11.

Mice (1904). Burnett's comical depiction captures mundane moments in time that are eternally present and unchanging, and continuous actions that never come to an end. Furthermore, the stiffness of the dolls' gestures and the passiveness of their movements—determined and carried out only by the hands of an outside agent—create a poignant analogy with plight of women, who, like these doll figures placed in their assigned position, were given little mobility and were often trapped in an unchanging, stifling domestic role.

Adults' novels in the nineteenth century often depicted the conventional image of women as doll-like characters encaged in their assigned domestic sphere. Before Ibsen's Nora shuts the door and walks out from the 'dolls' house' that suffocates her, images of the dolls' house as a metaphorical place of imprisonment could be found in several of Dickens's novels. The ideal home Mr. Jarndyce prepares for Esther in *Bleak House* (1853), for example, is 'a rustic cottage of doll's rooms; but such a lovely place'. In *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), the newly-wed Bella refers to her home as 'the charm—ingest of dolls' houses, de—lightfully furnished', though she also expresses her desire to be 'something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house'. Another example is found in *David Copperfield* (1850), in which Little Em'ly declines the offer to live in a 'little house [...] furnished right through, as neat and complete as a doll's parlor'.⁶⁷ No doubt Victorian readers were familiar with the treatment of women as dolls and the metaphor of the dolls' house as a restricting place, and by the end of the century even children's periodicals were discussing these questions seriously.

⁶⁷ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853; London: Penguin, 2003), 962; *Our Mutual Friend* (1865; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 678-79; *David Copperfield* (1850; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 428.

Alice Corkran wrote a revealing editorial about modern girls for the *Girl's Realm* in 1899. She observed that unlike girls in previous generations who were raised under the rules of 'don'ts', which resulted in their repressed characters, the modern girl 'is weary of this ideal of ladyhood. She is a creature of the open air; she wants to be stirring' and 'is tired of living in a doll's house'.⁶⁸ Using the metaphor of the dolls' house and the analogy between dolls' house dolls and women's gender roles in the domestic sphere, Corkran showed how girls concerned themselves with their roles in life. Responding to Bella's desire to be something more than a doll's house doll, modern girls were ready to negotiate for a better place in life, as the editorial continued:

married or unmarried, she will never take a back seat. She claims that she has as much right to a good education as have her brothers. She insists that she will be as good a housekeeper, and better, for having her judgment and her taste cultivated; that she will be as good a wife, and better, for being her husband's comrade and chum. That she will be a better mother for understanding the law of health, and having some notions of her own about methods of education. Society has answered in the affirmative, and high schools, art schools, colleges, and conservatories are ready to give her of their best.⁶⁹

The statement affirmed that the modern girl could be a good housekeeper if she chose to, but with opportunities for higher education, the girl of the period wanted knowledge outside the domestic realm—her aspirations were leading her to challenge the traditional definition of good housewives. Furthermore, the modern girl was quick to fight against gender restrictions. 'Breezy, plucky, quick to enjoy, and ready to stand by her sex' were the new feminine ideals the modern girl expressed.⁷⁰

Echoing ideas about the modern girl illustrated in the *Girl's Realm* editorial, it is notable that unlike the dolls' house stories their grandmothers had read, girls in the

⁶⁸ The Editor [Alice Corkran], 'Chat with the Girl of the Period', *The Girl's Realm*, January 1899, 216.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

early twentieth century could read dolls' house stories which did not just represent the constricting or domesticating aspect of the home or preach the importance of performing domestic duties and good conducts. In Edwardian children's literature, life in the dolls' house could be extremely delightful and does not necessarily convey any didactic messages. Frances Hodgson Burnett's dolls' house tale *Racketty-Packetty House* (1906) shows the contrast between the naughty and the haughty in two different dolls' houses. In the 'Racketty-Packetty House', a curiously enchanting dolls' house, all the segregation of gender, class, and even species is discarded. The long neglected Racketty-Packetty House, albeit 'too disgraceful to be kept in any decent nursery' as the owner of the dolls' house pronounces, is full of vibrancy and all the doll residents live a gay and happy life in it despite the house's shabby condition.⁷¹ Burnett created a Utopian-like miniature world inside the Racketty-Packetty House, where all dolls 'could make up stories and pretend things and invent games out of nothing'. They are even content with having shavings from the mouse's nest for supper and enjoy good relationship with real-life animals. Two cock sparrows and a gentleman mouse constantly propose to some of the lady dolls and all three declare that they do not want fashionable wives 'but cheerful dispositions and a happy, home'.⁷²

In addition, being a family heirloom, the Racketty-Packetty House originally belonged to Cynthia's grandmother who had 'kept it very neat because she had been a good housekeeper even when she was seven years old'.⁷³ However, unlike her grandmother, Cynthia chooses to utterly abandon the Racketty-Packetty House rather than refurbish it and gives all her attention to the newly-acquired 'Tidy Castle'

⁷¹ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Racketty-Packetty House* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1906; London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1907), 25; 21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 17; 20.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

(apparently a deliberately chosen name). Yet as there is no mentioning of Cynthia's actual arrangement of the Tidy Castle, the dolls' house is not presented as an educational tool to train the little girl in practices of domesticity in this story. Instead, we read that Cynthia pretends that all the Tidy Castle dolls have scarlet fever, which leaves all of them in delirium. Although Cynthia's failure to tidy the Racketty-Packetty House is compared unfavourably to her grandmother's good housekeeping, at the end of the story Cynthia is not criticised by the narrator. She only feels embarrassed when the Racketty-Packetty House catches the attention of a visiting princess, who receives the dolls' house from Cynthia as a present and renovates it.⁷⁴ Rather than emphasising the importance of domestic duties or of conforming to standards of good behaviour for girls, the story closes with the dolls continuing to live a jolly and comfortable life in the royal nursery.

With an equally joyful tone, Ada Wallas's short story 'Professor Green' (1906) presents a dolls' house family who refuse to be belittled by their size and live a mentally stimulating life.⁷⁵ In this story, the head of the dolls' house family takes on an academic career. The fact that the master of the house is writing a book about the history of the universe cleverly creates an ironic contrast between this grand subject matter and the diminutive size of the doll world. Meanwhile, as the story brings to life the witty conversation between the dolls' house proprietor and the dolls' house

⁷⁴ Frances Armstrong suspects that the little princess could be an allusion to one of Queen Victoria's granddaughters, as the Racketty-Packetty House reminds the princess of the house her grandmother had as a child. See Armstrong, 'The Dollhouse as Ludic Space', 52. In addition, the Queen's nursery in Kensington Palace was once open for exhibition and Burnett might have visited it herself, which could be a possible source of her inspiration. See, for example, Sybil, 'The Queen's Toys at Kensington Palace', *The Girl's Realm*, November 1899, 24-28. There are numerous magazine articles about the toys of Queen Victoria and her descendants, as well as those of other royal children all over Europe. For further anecdotes about Queen Victoria's dolls and dolls' houses, see also Frances H. Low, *Queen Victoria's Dolls* (London: Newnes, 1894); William G. Fitzgerald, 'Personal Relics of the Queen and Her Children', *The Strand Magazine*, June 1897, 603-40; Elizabeth Finley, 'The Little Princess Victoria and Her Dolls', *St. Nicholas*, April 1901, 529-30.

⁷⁵ Mrs. Graham Wallas [Ada Wallas], 'Professor Green', in *The Land of Play* (London: Arnold, 1906), 121-208.

residents (as well as that among the dolls' house family and their friends), it shows that life inside the dolls' house does not have to be intellectually restricting.⁷⁶

While Professor Green is writing about the vastness of the universe, for 'No smaller subject would have satisfied him; in its largeness he found comfort, and forgot his surroundings and the difficulties of his daily life', Mrs. Green and other ladies address the differences between 'the New and the Old in Doll's House Land'.⁷⁷ The joke is enhanced by the topics these doll ladies discuss: their focus is on the modern conception of nutrition and convenience rather than home decoration. Some of them prefer motor-cars to horse-carriages while some think dummy paper fires are nothing compared to 'the real sparkle and crackle and glow' that they used to have. When speaking of diet, Mrs. Green also finds the old food more satisfying than the new, as

the two purplish fish—mackerel glued to their dish—and the dark-blue bunch of grapes, also immovable, were far more satisfactory, and she believed more nourishing, than the biscuit and sugar and hot messes that it had become of late the fashion among children to supply them with.⁷⁸

Ironically, this viewpoint contradicts the views of the mouse couple in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*. The mice would rather have real food that can feed their babies than sham fish which does not come off the plate and are not deceived by the hypocrisy of bourgeois domesticity. However, apart from showing the dolls' humour that constantly blurs the boundary between reality and imagination and also frees them from being limited by their smallness, the more important message of Wallas's short story is that each doll has his or her individuality.

⁷⁶ Armstrong, 'The Dollhouse as Ludic Space', 49.

⁷⁷ Wallas, 123-24.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 124-25.

Unlike Potter's version of stiff wooden dolls that lack personalities of their own and are used merely as symbols, the Greens are dolls with self-respect and are thoughtful enough to hope that their owner would be able to 'distinguish between doll and doll'.⁷⁹ Diana, the girl who owns the dolls' house, and Professor Green both share the same interest in reading, and the little dolls' house owner defers to Mrs. Green in domestic matters as much as she defers to the Professor in intellectual topics.⁸⁰ Therefore the story provides a new type of dolls' house story that is both entertaining and inspiring. Certainly the story goes against the prevalent notion of the dolls' house as a constricting site, both mentally and physically. It is meaningful that Diana does not find the dolls' house confining. Indeed, it is even a moment of relief and excitement when she secretly discovers that her cousin Richard also likes to play with the dolls' house, as he makes various utensils and furniture for the doll family when Diana is not present. This story, together with other dolls' house stories with a similar approach, as Armstrong points out, 'could be reassuring to girls who might have picked up negative connotations of dollhouse life from adult literature'.⁸¹

Another short story published in the same year went further, suggesting that the dolls' house was not a tool for gender confinement and that boys could equally relish dolls' house play. Furthermore, boys contributed new ideas to dolls' house play and introduced elements that went beyond reproducing quotidian domestic life. In addition to the detailed depiction of a group of children busy playing with their dolls' house, the author of 'Fascination of the Dolls' House' (1906) portrayed the vivid conflict between two boys who disagree with each other on the notion that 'boys don't play with the dolls' house'. As the eldest among his siblings, Dick is looked up to by the younger ones as the dramatist who can think of the best story for them to

⁷⁹ Ibid., 128.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 130-31.

⁸¹ Armstrong, 'The Dollhouse as Ludic Space', 50.

act out. Although Dick hesitates when his sisters ask him to join them for their dolls' house play and decides it is definitely not for him, 'His story burned within him, and he longed to see it acted'. With condescension and 'an indulgent smile', he agrees to direct the movement of the dolls' house dolls before his admiring spectators.⁸²

When Dick and his audience are so absorbed in the play, the boy who shares the same Latin tutor with Dick catches him in the act of playing with the dolls' house:

'My eye!' he exclaimed. 'My eye! Playing with a Dolls' House! A boy playing with a Dolls' House. My'—

Before the boy can make further accusations, Betty defends her older brother, saying that

Dick can write plays and you can't, so there! All *you* can do is to get kept in for your Latin exercises! And you're too stupid to know that people who write splendid plays like Dick *always* play with dolls' houses. It's a way of helping them to do it.

Despite his sister's rage and his shame, Dick manages to recover his coolness and makes his own defence:

I'm playing with this Dolls' House because I *want* to play with it, and for nothing else. And if you don't want to play, too, you can jolly well go. If you like to stay you can just polish up that silver for the banquet. (He pointed in a lordly fashion to a pile of tin plates and dishes.) But that's all you'll do. My sister sees to all the arranging. She's an artist. I s'pose you don't know what that is. But she's it, anyway. So just you shut up, and don't be any more of a fool than you can help. Give him the dishes, Sylvia, and that piece of leather, and if he likes not to be a little idjut [sic], and not interrupt any more, he can stay.⁸³

As powerful as this justification sounds, here Dick not only disputes the claim that the dolls' house is not for boys but also gives credit to girls playing with the dolls' house, recognising that they are true artists. At best, Dick's prompt response could be interpreted as a desperate attempt to turn the other boy's attention from him.

⁸² Netta Syrett, 'The Fascination of the Dolls' House', *Temple Bar*, February 1906, 114.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 115-16; italics in original.

It would be an overgeneralisation to state that dolls' house play was commonly considered gender neutral by the time when the story was written. However, the positive comment he gives to his sister indeed shows that housewifery should be perceived as a profession, even an art not to be underestimated—a perception that recalls the Arts and Crafts aesthetics of treating the home as a piece of artwork. To put it more boldly, when Dick deliberately tells his sister to let the boy polish the dishes, he not only takes his revenge but also acknowledges that, as his sister 'sees all the arranging', she is the commander in chief in the domestic domain. Again, this could be read as another echo to the recognition of the creative autonomy women enjoyed in the design and decoration of their homes underlined by contemporary domestic guides.

In fact, before the existence of literary representations of the dolls' house as something other than a means of training girls to become future mothers and wives, or a place of confinement for women after they got married, there were earlier visual representations of boys taking part in dolls' house play both in realistic paintings and in magazine or book illustrations. The Victorian artist Harry Brooker portrayed a group of children busy playing with the dolls' house in 'Too Old to Play' (1888) [Fig. 9.5], a similar composition also found in his other painting, 'Children at Play' (1888) [Fig. 4.2]. The painting features Brooker's own children and a little girl (probably a friend or a relative). It is fascinating that the child sitting on the floor and the child in a pinafore who implores the older boy to join the play are two of Brooker's sons.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ See introduction to the picture on the Harry Brooker website <<http://www.harrybrooker.org.uk/Too%20Old%20To%20Play/Too%20Old%20To%20Play%20Info.htm>> [accessed 21 July 2014].



Figure 9.5 'Too Old to Play' by Harry Brooker (1888), oil on canvas

The title clearly indicates that rather than the concern about dolls' house play being a girlish thing, it is the age gap the boy feels that prevents him from playing with others. Nevertheless, sitting reading on the window sill, he could still easily observe them and perhaps recall the time when he could freely enjoy the play without feeling embarrassed. Indeed, in some autobiographical accounts we see that girls would kindly allow their little brothers to play with the dolls' house together with them, even though brotherly intrusion at times could cause hazard to the well-arranged dolls' house interior. Alison Uttley spoke of her little brother who 'sat on the floor with [her], putting the dolls in and out [the dolls' house] all day long'.⁸⁵ Another author reminiscing in the *Girl's Own Paper* about playing with dolls' houses as a girl remembered that while she was always making cardboard houses and furniture, her little brother used to build a white cardboard villa with her in their

⁸⁵ Alison Uttley, *Ambush of Young Days* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 91.

garden.⁸⁶ In some other cases, girls appreciated the contribution of their good-natured big brothers who helped with the required carpentry for dolls' house making and furnishing. As an interesting side note, in Brooker's painting the boy on the floor later made a dolls' house for their youngest sister as depicted in another painting by Brooker, 'Making a Dolls' House' (1897) [Fig. 4.1].

In an 1872 *Punch* cartoon, there are boys paying respect to the girl who furnishes the dolls' house [Fig. 9.6]. In this picture, while one of the boys is seriously examining the dolls' house interior, the other virtually bows before the girl, both as a comfortable gesture to view the dolls' house more closely and in admiration of the girl's arrangement; apparently both boys are interested in the dolls' house. Even though the boys' sailor suits separate them from the domestic realm and denote the outdoor activities they might have been more involved in, the boys are certainly attracted by the domestic scene and one of them even wonders whether the figures from his Noah's Ark might become the doll ladies' dancing partners. As the real mistress of the house, the girl sits at ease and seems to be quite pleased with the token of their esteem even though the idea of having Noah's Ark figures in the dolls' house is odd. Sitting confidently by the dolls' house that is open for display, the girl fully controls the windows of femininity and of sociability. In addition, the fact that she chooses to set up a ball scene in the dolls' house instead of re-creating ordinary daily living further reveals that she is more than a housekeeper but closer to what Dick in 'Fascination of the Dolls' House' refers to as 'an artist'—a compliment which does not suggest domesticity.

⁸⁶ 'My Doll's Drawing-Room, And How I Furnished It', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 21 April 1894, 451.



Figure 9.6 'Hobson's Choice', *Punch*, 24 February, 1872, 80

For girls who were familiar with the dolls' house metaphor used in Alice Corkran's *Girl's Realm* editorial, it was reassuring to read stories like 'Professor Green' or *Raketty-Packetty House*, which showed that there were ways to make life in the dolls' house pleasant to the dolls. It was even more releasing to discover that there were boys willing to take part in dolls' house play without criticising their girl companions. The stories and pictures celebrating the happiness of life in the dolls' house and the fun both girls and boys enjoyed in dolls' house play provided an emotional outlet to girls who were tired of living in the dolls' house. To girls of the new century, abandoning the dolls' house might not be the only way to feel liberated. Instead, they could choose to invite boys to join them in the dolls' house. Together they could make dolls' house life comfortable and cheerful to all.

CONCLUSION: A HOUSE OF ONE'S OWN

Among all little things on which I love to dwell do I hold dolls' houses in most especial affection [...] It may be that the liking for dolls' houses, which has ever moved me, is concurrent with a very strong desire to have a house of my own.¹

I am writing now from the V&A Museum of Childhood at Bethnal Green, a huge warehouse of childhood treasures open to the public since 1872 and home to some of the most significant dolls' house collections in the world.² Young visitors today do not seem overly intrigued by the antique baby houses in the showcases, which, although well-preserved, appear to be less attractive than modern commercial dolls' houses provided in a play area for hands-on experience. However, as I imagine how their great-great-grandmothers might have played with some of the Victorian dolls' houses in the gallery when they were little girls, I am also pondering on my own childhood experience of dolls' house play.

The 'tremendous trifle' of the dolls' house has fascinated me with its size and contents since I was little. Even small dolls' houses have a power of suggesting large spaces: on the one hand they are diminutive 'trifles', on the other hand they suggest life in all its grandeur. My first (and only) dolls' house was a Sylvanian Family cottage house purchased from Toys "Я" Us. It arrived in stacks of plastic panels which my father had to assemble and glue for me. I remember vividly how I kept on arranging and rearranging the furniture in my humble dolls' house, even though there was honestly not much to manage as my parents only agreed to buy me a bedroom

¹ George Augustus Sala, 'Letters from Lilliput Being Essays on the Extreme Little', *Belgravia: A London Magazine*, September 1869, 374-75.

² The original Bethnal Green Museum, as a branch of V&A Museum in South Kensington, was opened in 1872. It slowly began to become the Museum of Childhood in the early 1920s and was re-launched in 1974 as the Museum of Childhood, displaying only childhood-related collections.

set initially. But every now and then my mother stitched carpets for the house using her old tights and made new clothes for the bear family (i.e. anthropomorphised animal figures) which I chose as inhabitants of the house. Rags from my grandmother's workshop (she has been a seamstress for more than sixty years) were versatile materials for duvets, table cloths, and shawls for the mother bear. I could spend a whole afternoon hunting for a wide range of items deemed suitable for my house: a tag cut out from an old sweater became the door mat; unwanted toys found inside Kinder Surprise eggs were usually of perfect size for the little bears, and pin cushions that were too tacky to be handed in for my arts-and-crafts class assignment went directly into the living room of the dolls' house. Little by little, the house became a hybrid of commercial toys made precisely to scale and odds and ends from serendipitous discoveries as well as items from my mother's generous contribution. Even more than the pleasure of decorating the house and putting on new outfits for the dolls' house residents, what delighted me was the freedom to fill up the miniature farmhouse with whatever I liked. Just as I would read my favourite story over and over again, the dolls' house tempted me to go back to it repeatedly and provided the opportunity to visualise the dolls' house world as a reflection of the stories I enjoyed.

My childhood passion for dolls' houses, imaginative play, and improvised toys somehow paved the way for my further study of children's books and toys. Upon completing my MA dissertation, which traces the reception of *Little Women* and girls' reading and culture in England at the turn of the century, I was led to consider the issues of children as consumers and the relations between the spin-offs of popular children's books and children's reading behaviour. I am especially interested in how toys brought to life favourite children's books: how, by means of marketing and packaging children's literature in diverse forms, stories were told and introduced to

every aspect of young readers' daily living. Among the wide range of toys and childhood products related to children's stories, I chose to focus on dolls' houses for my doctoral research as a response to my inexhaustible enthusiasm for miniatures and nostalgia for my own childhood.

Certainly this research stems from a rather personal story about my childhood play. But it has also led me to read the personal stories of many individuals in the period when people started to consider children's play and toys in a more serious manner. Many of these individuals relished dolls' house play and enjoyed furnishing their own dolls' houses as a way of celebrating the image of the happy domestic household emphasised in numerous Victorian children's books. Some used the dolls' house as a ready metaphor to comment on the gendered circumscription of the lives of women. Some viewed the dolls' house as a gender-specific toy inculcating ideologies of female sexuality and domesticity, whereas others did not find the dolls' house necessarily conforming and domesticating. And still others believed the possession of a dolls' house gave them creativity, freedom and agency.

When I was about to finish writing up this thesis, a new acquisition of the V&A Museum of Childhood was brought to my attention. 'The Alsager Indenture', an 1837 document recording the agreement between Thomas Massa Alsager, a London journalist living in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, and his twelve-year old daughter Margaret, showed the father's prescription for correct care of her dolls' house.³ The dolls' house, resembling the Alsagers' residence at Queen's Square, was commissioned as a Christmas gift for Margaret. But Thomas Alsager did not see the house merely as a children's toy. Its educational value was highlighted by the contract between father and daughter and the little girl was expected to look after her

³ V&A Search the Collections, 'The Alsager Indenture' <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1265581/indenture-mr-thomas-massa/>> [accessed 26 March 2014].

property with carefulness and dexterity. The playful use of the form of a legal document on the one hand reflects how the girl was treated as a grown-up. On the other hand, it also shows that the girl still had to learn to negotiate for her play space, and her right to play was somewhat limited, as the contract states:

it shall be lawful for the Said Thomas Massa Alsager on giving two days notice in writing to remove the said messuage from The back drawing room into the front drawing room, front parlour, back parlour or music room at any time As to the said Thomas Massa Alsager shall seem fitting. And also that in case of the non payment of The rent hereby reserved or the non-performance of the covenants herein contained it shall be lawful For the said Thomas Massa Alsager to take possession of the said messuage and enter the same (if it be possible for the said Thomas Massa Alsager so to do) and thereof utterly to dispossess the said Margaret Alsager anything contained herein to the contrary notwithstanding⁴

The use of archaic legal language is indeed ironic and it suggests that possessing and managing a dolls' house of one's own was never an easy task. Over the long nineteenth century, concepts about the perfect domestic interior and proper household management changed. With the emergence of the 'new woman', the conventional metaphor of 'the angel in the house' or the allegorical use of women as dolls' house dolls gradually lost their appeal to girls at the turn of the century.

Although the idea of being dolls' house dolls might not be appealing, having a dolls' house of one's own was still tempting. As girls refused to be dolls in someone else's dolls' house such as the female characters in Dickens's and Ibsen's works, they would rather choose to be the owner of their own dolls' house. Indeed to own a dolls' house and to play with it without adults' supervision and regulation was liberating. This was particularly important to girls when they discovered that the dolls' house could be a space for subversive play and interpretations resisting the conventional order of things. In the imaginary realm the dolls' house was transformed from a

⁴ 'The Alsager Indenture'; capitalisation and (lack of) punctuation as in the original.

constant reminder of girls' future domestic roles and duties to an outlet for emotions and feelings and a space where the power of imagination and the pleasure of story-telling were condensed.

Interestingly, some men also shared the same passion for possessing a dolls' house. The quotation from George Augustus Sala in the epigraph vividly reveals how acquiring a dolls' house and essential dolls' house furniture was fascinating to him. Curiously enough, Sala had already spent money on dolls' clothes, dolls' dressing-tables and chests of drawers, even dolls' tea-kettles, albeit with a sense of uneasiness: 'I have filled my pockets with these trivialities over and over again, fraudulently pretending to the shopkeepers that I was an artist, and collected these tiny objects as models to paint from'.⁵ However, when it came to the acquisition of the dolls' house itself, he confessed that 'here my acquisitiveness stopped. I could never muster up sufficient courage to buy a whole house. I mean, of course, to do so some day, and to become a doll's freeholder; yet for my own peace of mind, perchance it will be better for that day never to come'.⁶ Ownership might bring with it the sad knowledge that 'all is vanity'; just as Solomon, despite his 'hobbies of gold, silver, fame, conquest, women; and having had them all, he was not satisfied'. The real value of the dolls' house for Sala was the way it constituted a dream: 'You will see that my ideas as to the doll's house I mean to have some day—and woe is me if I ever have it!'.⁷

Indeed for generations of players and collectors, the dolls' house caused a kind of problematic pleasure, as discussed in previous chapters. It was simultaneously an object of conspicuous consumption and a promotional tool for middle-class domestic virtues and family values. It was an educational device influencing girls to be perfect

⁵ Sala, 'Letters from Lilliput', 377.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 378.

housewives, yet at the same time it provided a legitimate space for mischief and subversion through children's pretend play. To adult female owners, the dolls' house provided them an escape from their domestic responsibilities into imaginative play, just as much as it reminded them of their household chores. The dolls' house is therefore an object that both inspires and instructs children. Meanwhile, the dolls' house is both confining and liberating; it precisely demonstrates the dialectics of space and place as Yi-Fu Tuan defines in his examination of human experiences in space: 'Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other'.⁸ The many facets of the dolls' house made the playing experiences and the desire to possess one's own dolls' house more complicated and yet alluring.

While girls in the new century were no longer satisfied with the dolls' house merely as an instructive tool inculcating domestic ideologies and sought to explore other ways to approach this gendered space—to experience it not only as a place of security and confinement but also as a space of freedom—children's fiction in the early twentieth century also reflects a change in stories featuring dolls and dolls' houses. As we have seen in the chapters in Part Three, Edwardian children's literature provides a different kind of dolls' house narrative which reveals the longing for other qualities and possibilities the dolls' house can offer beyond a restrictive domesticity. In these stories girls are not confined in the nurseries managing their dolls' houses as a rehearsal for their future domestic roles. Instead, they travel together with their dolls into the enchanted miniature world for fantasies and adventures. There are also dolls' house dolls, despite the spatial restriction and the lack of attention and care from their owners, enjoying a buoyant, unconstrained and adventurous life inside the dolls' house. Alternatively, authors such as Frances

⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.

Hodgson Burnett and Beatrix Potter respectively portrayed in their dolls' house tales a dolls' house owner who is not blamed for her neglect of proper house-keeping and upper middle-class domestic respectability that is under threat. These stories show a yearning to reject the dolls' house as a place of confinement, and an enthusiasm for imagination, freedom and agency that was to be further developed in twentieth-century children's literature.

Having a dolls' house of one's own therefore is not only about the fascination for miniature objects, the essential training for domestic practices, or even the interest in furnishing and decorating the house. Indeed the aspiration to possess a dolls' house is, as Sala claimed, a prefiguring of the desire to have a house of one's own. Consider for instance the case of Vivien Greene (1905-2003), famous as an authoritative dolls' house collector and researcher for more than fifty years. Vivien might have been the abandoned wife by her husband, the novelist Graham Greene, but she was also the mistress of the dolls' house, ruling over the antique dolls' houses in her domain. In her dolls' house world, Vivien Greene could see her life as a fiction as she arranged and rearranged her collections. She could even freely write her own visual novels about the world on a diminutive scale—if the husband wrote with a pen, she did so with her miniature furniture and figures.

Her interest in collecting and refurbishing dolls' houses began in 1942 after their London home was bombed during the Second World War and she 'felt a longing to do domestic chores'.⁹ This hobby sustained her through the evenings of the Blackout as she made carpets and curtains for her dolls' houses. Her deeply-felt passion for dolls' houses was not merely a lamentation for a lost home or an instinct for housekeeping. It was the longing for comfort and assurance, and an ultimate

⁹ Sally Emerson, 'Mrs Greene and the World Inside a Dolls' House', *The Times*, 24 October 1973, 10. Add reference—from the newspaper article.

desire to have a house of her own. By possessing a dolls' house—and ultimately a house of one's own—generations of dolls' house players and collectors can obtain the power of creating and interpreting their own space and the autonomy of telling their own stories.

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