

The Doll Dossier

A collection of accumulated images, quotations and made objects relating to dolls

Keywords:

- Dolls
- Transitional Objects
- Gifts
- Women and dolls
- Doll as scapegoat
- Ambivalence
- Female effigies
- Puppets

Additions, suggestions, corrections please contact quietmedusa@gmail.com

CREATION

“Human beings must love something and in the dearth of worthier objects of affection I contrived to find pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. It puzzles me now to remember with what absurd sincerity I doted on this little toy, half fancying it alive and capable of sensation. I would not sleep unless it was folded in my nightgown and when it lay there safe and warm, I was comparatively happy believing it to be happy likewise.”

Jane Eyre
Charlotte Bronte



“... people smiling say,
I've grown too big to care for you.”

BETWEEN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Intersubjectivity/mediating/transactional objects

“It’s also important for mothers and daughters to find or make objects they can exchange between themselves so that they can be defined as female I=you.”

“To speak well of oneself and others it helps to be able to communicate about the realities of the world, to be able to exchange something”

“Between mother and daughter, interpose small handmade objects to make up for losses of spatial identity, for intrusions into personal space”

Unable to create their own words, women remain and move in an immediacy without any transitional, transactional object - without syntax to mediate their subjectivity, “objects, (non)objects and gift space/objects – need to be interposed to compensate for the lack of space of mediation

Je, Tu, Nous, Luce Irigaray
Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women
By Hilary Robinson

FAIRYTALE MEDIATOR

When Vasilisa’s “too good” mother dies she gives her a doll with her blessings.

“Keep her with you wherever you go, show her to nobody. If you are in trouble, feed her, and then ask her advice.”

The doll’s advice is invariably:
“Eat, pray and sleep. Mornings are wiser than evenings” and while Vasilisa sleeps the doll accomplishes the impossible tasks set by the terrifying crone mother – the Baba Yaga

(See also the drops of blood on the hanky given to the heroine by her dying mother in Grimm’s The Goose Girl – this time the maternal talisman is not cared for, with catastrophic results)

POWER & SUBSTITUTION

Lost - dolls and daughters.



Elena Ferrante’s Naples quartet begins and ends with dolls.

“She [Lena’s doll Tina] had a plastic face and plastic hair and plastic eyes. She wore a blue dress that my mother had made for me in a rare moment of happiness and she was beautiful. Lila’s doll [Nu], on the other hand, had a cloth body of a yellowish colour, filled with sawdust and she seemed to me ugly and grimy”

“And so, on the day we exchanged our dolls for the first time – with no discussion, only looks and gestures – as soon as she had Tina, she pushed her through the grate and let her fall into the darkness.”

ARTIST

The artist Leonora Carrington made fabric dolls as well as her better known paintings and sculptures. I can’t find images and the information comes from an article weirdly translated by Google from Spanish from which I glean that:

Making dolls passes time.

Dolls made whilst travelling – creates sense of continuity.

Dolls are portable like the possessions of a nomad.

Dolls are made during pregnancy

Dolls might relate to the idea of a Celtic double or soul – making the doll is seeking the soul?

Dolls are linked to women.

The dolls are never finished



FOUND



Mandrake root.

DISPOSAL

"There was a party given at the Casa Coraggio on New Year's Eve to welcome the coming year. We were requested to bring with us a representation of our besetting sin. With these, and with each other, we were to dance till midnight. Mrs MacDonald received us, carrying a bare mutton shoulder blade, which she said was 'the cold shoulder.' One young woman had a little black doll with green eyes, labeled 'jealousy.' Another had a scarlet tongue pinned to her sleeve, which she called 'hasty speech.' "We danced, with laughter and jokes, until the clock began to strike 12. Then a procession was formed and one by one we each laid the effigies of our failings on the fire and saw them reduced to their native nothingness."

From Wingfold (2009) a journal devoted to the life and work of George MacDonald (1824-1905) - an author, poet and Christian minister.

Found on Facebook.

EMBRACE



Judith Scott with one of her sculptures, photographed by Leon A. Borensztein.

I encountered this as cover image of a book about called Touching Feeling by Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick.

AMBIVALENCE



When a relationship ended I struggled to process the intense feelings of hatred and jealousy towards the interloping and finally victorious other woman. I felt I remembered this feeling of displacement & wondered if it related to sibling rivalry. When my little sister was born I was given a doll to be my baby. As a child I mothered and cared for all "my people" lovingly and equally, "Nicola" alone was abused and punished. I drew appendix operation scars on her cloth body and when I had to start to wear glasses (aged 6) I scribed biro glasses around her eyes too.

I made this reversible, 3 faced "ambivalence" doll in memory of Nicola.

PUNISHMENT

"The Attic was Maggie's favourite retreat [...] and here she kept a Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes. This was the trunk of a large wooden doll which once stared with the roundest of eyes over the reddest of cheeks but which now was defaced by a long career or vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into its head commemorated as many cries in Maggie's nine years of struggle..."

[now she] soothed herself by alternately grinding and beating the wooden head against the rough brick of the chimney"

The Mill on the Floss
George Eliot

A GAME



Christopher Payne

A patient-made game, Cherokee State Hospital, Cherokee, Iowa

Image from a review of Asylum by Christopher Payne (photographs of mental institutions in USA)

This looks like a huge table football prop – swiping away any approach at intimacy?

A MAN DOLL

(image from Hayward Exhibition catalogue given to me in 2007)



Katharina Detzel

Born Gilsdorf, parish of Bettendorf, Luxembourg
Last mentioned Andernach (asylum), 1940
Case no. 217
Occupation: seamstress, later masseuse
Marital status: widow
Diagnosis: manic-depressive insanity; dementia paranoia

Katharina Detzel with a male dummy of her own
Phc
16 x 11 cm, In

MAN DOLL RE-ENCOUNTERED

In Sylvie Franquet's 2016/17 exhibition at the October Gallery in London I came across the man doll again.



According for Franquet's blurb Detzel was incarcerated in the asylum in 1907 after participating in a political protest. While there she wrote a play, tried to establish a home for babies and protested against conditions. She made small doll figures out of chewed bread dough. The large doll was made from mattress ticking and straw from her bed.

Detzel was murdered by the Nazis in 1941.

WRITTEN ON THE BODY

Franquet's "Arusa" dolls in the instillation are hand embroidered with quotations: read, overheard and exchanged via text. Like Carrington above the doll's become portable art work in progress – travelling companions, providing continuity in nomadism.

Arusa means doll and bride in Arabic. They are believed to ward away the evil eye.



A BODY WITHOUT A DOLL?

What is that?' I asked.
 'That's my squeeze machine,' Temple replied. 'Some people call it my hug machine.'
 The device had two heavy, slanting wooden sides, perhaps four by three feet each, pleasantly upholstered with a thick, soft padding. They were joined by hinges to a long, narrow bottom board to create a V-shaped, body-sized trough. There was a complex control box at one end, with heavy-duty tubes leading off to another device, in a closet. Temple showed me this as well. 'It's an industrial compressor,' she said, 'the kind they use for filling tyres.'
 'And what does this do?'
 'It exerts a firm but comfortable pressure on the body, from the shoulders to the knees,' Temple said. 'Either a steady pressure or a variable one or a pulsating one, as you wish.'
 When I asked her why one should seek to submit oneself to such pressure, she told me. When she was hugged, especially by a favourite (but vast) aunt, she felt overwhelmed, overcome by sensation; she had a sense of peacefulness and pleasure, but also of terror and engulfment. She started to have daydreams - she was just five at the time - of a machine that could squeeze her powerfully but gently, in a huglike way, and in a way entirely commanded and controlled by her. [...] Being of a practical turn of mind, she soon made her fantasy come true. The early models were crude, with some snags and glitches, but she eventually evolved a totally comfortable, predictable system, capable of administering a 'hug' with whatever parameters she desired. Her squeeze machine had worked exactly as she hoped, yielding the very sense of calmness and pleasure she had dreamed of since childhood. She could not have gone through the stormy days of college without her squeeze machine, she said. She could not turn to human beings for solace and comfort, but she could always turn to it.

**Oliver Sacks: An Anthropologist on Mars
 Picador, 1995 pp. 250-253**

OBJECT OF AFFECTION

In Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* the little girl Cosette is given a doll which she treasures...

“Cosette names it Catherine but also calls it “the Lady”. She does not treat the doll as an object to cuddle as she had previously cuddled a small sword”

**When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development
 By Lois R. Kuznets**

DANGEROUS DOLL



“She was once more in the presence of the muse, the crucial one, the medusa who had made her understand that if you turn Medusa’s face around, it is you own face. It is yourself who must be conquered” May Sarton
 My large doll – informed by an idea from May Sarton in *Mrs Stevens Hear the Mermaids Singing*. Relates to Jungian shadow projections/psychoanalytical splitting and projecting? Relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Bertha Mason*.



A doll so terrible she is kept in a purpose built padded cell and never finished. The cat on top is not part of the work!

“MY PEOPLE”



C. 1978

A group portrait of special characters.

DOLL'S DRESSMAKER



Jenny Wren.

Mother/Daughter.

Child/Adult

Outsider, witness – she who can identify the true word.

**Our Mutual Friend
 Charles Dickens**

AMBIVALENT GIFT

The main character in Lionel Shriver's novel *“Big Brother”* has established a successful company manufacturing *“Baby Monotonous”* dolls. These are custom made gifts; an effigy of the recipient which not only resembles them but also repeats the habitual phrases which define them for others.

A shaming version of a Chatty Cathy Doll?



DOLLMAKERS



In her book *Big Magic* Elizabeth Gilbert refers to Kurusawa's film *Ikuru* about a middle aged Japanese bureaucrat dying of cancer. He meets a former female employee and is impressed by her joyful vitality. He asks for the secret to her love of life. She says that she does not know, but that she found happiness in her new job making toys, which makes her feel like she is playing with all the children of Japan.

CLOTHING AND COLLABORATION



Dolls have to be kept warm.

My Sindy wardrobe c.1978 –packed with garments. Some were bought and many were made by me and also by my mum and grandmothers. I am moved by the love which brought them to participate in the make believe needs of my dolls. The clothes are a handmade delight – hilarious in their unfashionableness.

ANCIENT ROME – WHEN TO PUT AWAY CHILDISH THINGS



Remnants of cloth dolls, or jointed dolls carved from wood or bone.

Dolls were thought to be an educational toy, helping to teach girls about their duties as a woman in the home. Girls would play with dolls until the time of their marriage. They would dedicate the dolls to Venus or the Lares and Penates (household gods) just before the marriage.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS



I love the little dolls of Louise Bourgeois; their patchwork construction, visible stitching and manipulable scale.

SPEAKING DOLL

Possession by Marionette



Michael Redgrave in Dead of Night

ARTIST'S DOLL COLLECTION



Max Ernst with his collection of Kachina dolls.

Kachinas are ritual dolls of the Hopi Indians. Not toys. The dolls carry objects which signify their character and purpose.

They represent ancestors and natural forces.

They are linked to ritual dances.

ARTIST PUPPET MAKER



Paul Klee with his one of his puppets – made for his son.

ARTIST PUPPET PERFORMER



Abb. 15 Emmy Hennings mit ihren Dada-Puppen, Frühjahr 1917

Emmy Hennings – Dada Artist

ETERNAL LIFE



Grayson Perry - Alan Measles Enshrined

Is best way to ensure that teddy doesn't die to make him a god?

JUNG

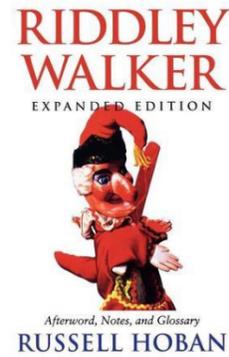


This is one side of a stone monument made by Jung to express the significance of his tower at Bollingen.

"I began to see... in the natural structure of the stone, a small circle, a sort of eye, which looked at me. I chiselled it into the stone and in the centre made a tiny homunculus. This corresponds to the "little doll" (papilla) – yourself – which you see in the pupil of another's eye"

Memories, Dreams, Reflections
C.G. Jung

RIDDLEY WALKER



I love this book: a Punch puppet features as a remnant of past culture in a post-apocalyptic Kent.

PROCESSIONAL DOLLS: SHAME

"Two images on a donkey, back to back, their elbows tied to one another's. She's facing the head, and he's facing the tail"

"Is it meant for anybody particular?"

"Well it may be. The man's got on a blue coat and kerseymere leggings; he has black whiskers, and a reddish face. 'Tis a stuffed figure, with a mask"

"Her neck is uncovered, and her hair in bands, and her back-comb in place; she's got on a puce silk, and white stockings, and coloured shoes"

She's me – she's me – even to my parasol – my green parasol!" cried Lucetta...

She stood motionless for one second - then fell heavily to the floor.

A Skimmity or Skimmington ride is a folk custom where social disapproval is expressed by shaming the offender; making a compromising effigy of them and parading it through the streets. The inhabitants of Casterbridge gleefully organise such a "parade" when they discover that Lucetta has a romantic history with Michael Henchard.

Lucetta feels the humiliation so deeply that it leads to her death.

The Mayor of Casterbridge
Thomas Hardy

PROCESSIONAL DOLLS: RELIGION



The "Ramlila" is the dramatic autumn folk re-enactment of the life of Rama - according to the Hindu epic the Ramayana. After the enactment of the Iwar between Good and Evil, the Ramlila celebrations culminate with the burning of giant effigies of Evil characters - like the demon Ravana.

LAY FIGURE – PACKWOOD HOUSE



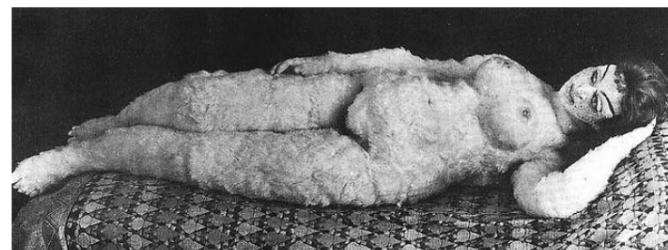
Lay models were popular with Victorian artists; the life-size models were dressed and posed as a stand in for upper class ladies, so they need not sit still for too long, while their portrait was painted.

The amazing construction of the Packwood House mannequin was only discovered when staff removed her clothes to clean her. She has breasts, crocheted nipples and a belly button. A complex structure of metal, screws and wooden ball joints allows subtle manipulation of her body.

SUBSTITUTE

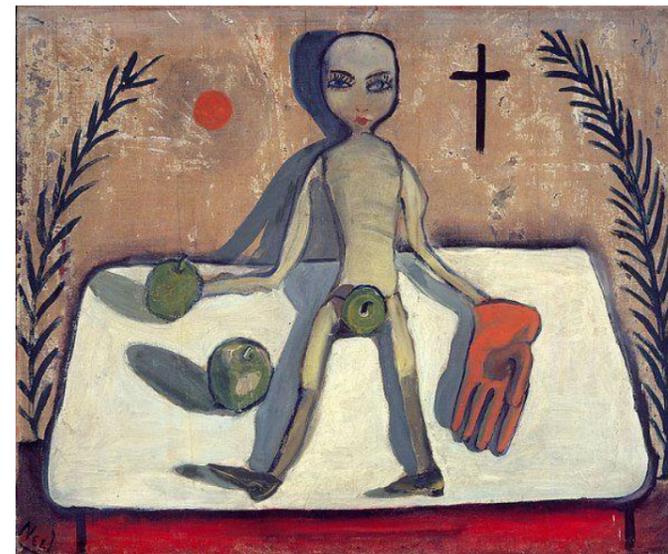
Oskar Kokoschka commissioned a doll in the image of his ex-lover, Alma Mahler. Although Kokoschka professed disappointment in the feather covered doll (too unwieldy to dress), he paraded it in public and painted it many times – before finally beheading it in the garden.

"Yesterday I sent a life-size drawing of my beloved and I ask you to copy this most carefully and to transform it into reality. Pay special attention to the dimensions of the head and neck, to the ribcage, the rump and the limbs. And take to heart the contours of body, e.g., the line of the neck to the back, the curve of the belly. Please permit my sense of touch to take pleasure in those places where layers of fat or muscle suddenly give way to a sinewy covering of skin. For the first layer (inside) please use fine, curly horsehair; you must buy an old sofa or something similar; have the horsehair disinfected. Then, over that, a layer of pouches stuffed with down, cottonwool for the seat and breasts. The point of all this for me is an experience which I must be able to embrace! Can the mouth be opened? Are there teeth and a tongue inside? I hope so!" (Kokoschka – letter to dollmaker Hermine Moos)



Find out more at http://thenonist.com/index.php/thenonist/permalink/oscar_and_the_alma_doll/

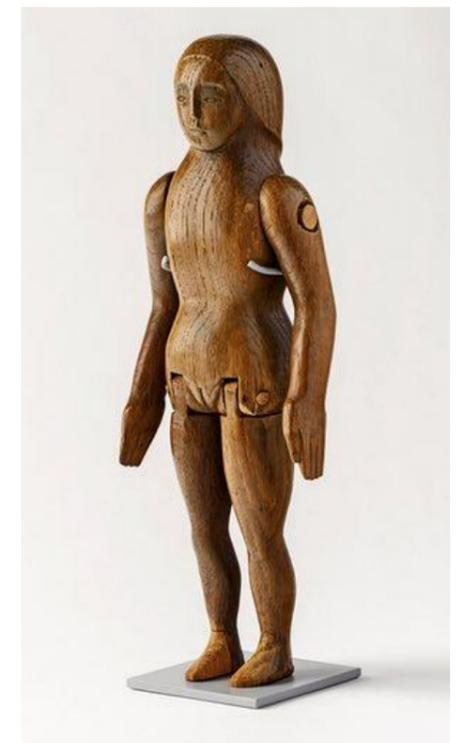
DOLL SHRINE



Symbols (Doll & Apple) c.1933

I have only recently discovered Alice Neel. This picture makes me think of her lost daughter. A little doll on an altar, her modesty covered with an apple, one hand inside a single human sized glove, its partner missing?

TAINTED DOLL



I love the work of Eric Gill but his reputation is tarnished by revelations of incest/sexual abuse. This jointed wooden doll was made by him for his daughter Petra.

INSIDE DOLLS



Amazing anatomical dolls seen in the Flaubert Museum in Rouen. Made by a Madame du Courdray in the 18th c as teaching aids for obstetrics.



DEATH

When the magic of transitional object endowment fails
(Since her mother's death Cassandra has adopted a dressmaker's dummy as a confidante and advisor)

"And then a different voice spoke in my head, a bitter, sarcastic voice - my own at its very nastiest. It said "you've sunk pretty low my girl, claspng a dressmaker's dummy. And aren't you a bit old for this Miss Blossom nonsense?"

Then for the first time in my life I began to wonder how I "did" Miss Blossom (...)

The next second her breast was as hard as a board and smelt of dust and old glue and I knew she was gone forever."

I Capture the Castle
Dodie Smith



PUPPET POISE

"Grace appears most purely in the human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness - that is in the puppet or in the god"

This is from Heinrich Von Kleist's beautiful essay On The Marionette Theatre, which considers how self consciousness impedes "grace", or intuition. Kleist recounts the example of a beautiful youth who suddenly becomes self conscious of a graceful gesture, but in trying to recreate it becomes awkward and affected. It takes a lifetime of conscious work to regain something of what was once effortless. Maybe it is never accomplished.

Or as Von Kleist puts it, once we have eaten of the fruits of knowledge, paradise is locked to us; we have to make a journey around the world to see if there is another entrance at the back.

ENMESHED DOLLS

Autobiographical lace made by Adelaide Hall, a patient in a mental asylum in Washington around 1916

I don't know any more about this but I love the way the dolls are captured in a lace web.



SERVANT



A Shabti is a small statue representing a figure who would perform a given task for the deceased in the afterlife. Wealthy nobles and royalty would have their (symbolic) servants buried with them. The shabti is shown as being mummified like the deceased. Early versions were modelled to represent the task that they would perform and given tiny tools to complete their tasks. Later versions were inscribed with a magical formula which would activate them. The name 'shabti' means 'answerer'.

(also Golem – mud doll brought to life with magic formula)

ARTIST'S DOLL INSTALLATION



"From her wooden sleep"
Ydessa Hendeles exhibition ICA 2015

MURDER

Angela Carter's short story – The Lives and Loves of Lady Purple

A malevolent marionette whore. The wooden heroine of a travelling puppet show comes to life. She can only perform the story of herself that she has imbibed in the nightly performances of her murderous seductions.

"She was the queen of the night. there were glass rubies in her head for eyes and her ferocious teeth, made of mother o'pearl, were always on show, for she had a permanent smile. Face was white as chalk because it was covered with the skin of supplest white leather which also clothed her torso, jointed limbs and complication of extremities. Her beautiful hands seemed more like weapons because her nails were so long, five inches of pointed tin enameled scarlet, and she wore a wig of black hair arranged in a chignon, more heavily elaborate than human hair could have endured. This monumental chevelure was stuck through with many brilliant pins tipped with pieces of broken mirror so that, every time she moved, she case a multitude of scintillating reflections which danced about the theatre like mice of light. Her clothes were all of deep, dark, slumberous colours, profound pinks, crimson and the vibrating purple with which she was synonymous, a purple the colour of blood in a love suicide."

FRIENDSHIP



Whitney Chadwick's book *The Militant Muse* is about the friendships between female "surrealists" which nurtured their identities as artists in their own right, rather than muse and adjunct to a famous man. In the chapter on Frida Kahlo and Jaqueline Lamba I found this 1943 painting by Kahlo: *The Bride Frightened at Seeing Life Opened*. Note the bride doll peeping out top left.

Kahlo purchased two old fashioned dolls in a Paris flea market while she was visiting Lamba in 1939: a blonde bride with blue eyes and another with very black eyes. Chadwick sees the dolls as surrogates for the friendship between the two women.

FERRANTE AGAIN: THE LOST DAUGHTER & THE BEACH AT NIGHT



In *The Lost Daughter* a middle aged woman steals a child's doll. Nina and Elena's relationship revolves around caring for Elena's doll Nani – who is like a second daughter: "the shining testimony of perfect motherhood". When Leda steals the doll she is plunged into memories of her own mother/daughterhood.

In *The Beach at Night* - another doll is lost, left behind on the beach. She is pursued by a sinister beach attendant who wants to extract her language to sell at the doll market. The doll's life is threatened by the inhuman elements of fire and sea, but above all by the male threat of stealing the words which are her identity, her soul.

Read more on my blog

<https://www.quietmedusa.com/single-post/2017/09/24/Dolls-and-Daughters>