

## A story, exemplified in a series of figures: paper doll versus moral tale in the nineteenth century

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# “A Story, Exemplified in a Series of Figures”

## *Paper Doll versus Moral Tale in the Nineteenth Century*

Hannah Field



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### ABSTRACT

Early in the nineteenth century the London publishers and printsellers, S. and J. Fuller, packaged paper dolls and storybooks together in their Temple of Fancy paper doll books. This article examines the tension between the narratives of these works—typically moral tales for children in which a love of clothing is punished—and the accompanying paper dolls, which celebrate costume and dressing up. The textual morals against love of clothing are gendered in problematic ways, with female characters mortified for this flaw more readily than male characters. However, the variety of potential reading experiences offered by the form of the paper doll book, in which picture and word are separate, is viewed as a challenge to the gendered moral content of the stories. Ultimately this article argues that the form of the paper doll book sheds new light on D. F. McKenzie’s (1986) ideas about how readers make meaning from texts.

### KEYWORDS

book history, children’s literature, movable books, nineteenth-century literature, paper dolls

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## Introduction

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Samuel and Joseph Fuller, London publishers and printsellers, produced a number of paper doll books for children. The formal components of these innovative early movable books, sold at the Temple of Fancy, the Fullers’ pleasingly named shop on Rathbone Place, were consistent. Each set, packaged in a small sheath, was comprised of a black-and-white storybook containing the moral history of a young person (often in verse), a number of hand-colored cut-out images printed separately on card, showing costumes, and a single hand-colored cardboard head (see figure 1).<sup>1</sup> In





**Figure 1** • *Ellen, or, The Naughty Girl Reclaimed: A Story, Exemplified in a Series of Figures* (1811). The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (2012), Opie E 34.

most examples separate hats, slit so as to fit onto the head, were also included. While the Temple, which opened in 1809, is best known today as an historical artist supply business, these paper doll books were such a vital part of the store’s trade that promotional material on the sheath to 1814’s paper doll *Cinderella, or, The Little Glass Slipper* describes the Fuller firm as “WHERE ARE ALSO PUBLISHED Those esteemed and much admired JUVENILE BOOKS, with Figures that dress and undress”—the paper doll book becoming a metonym for the business as a whole.

The phrase “Figures that dress and undress,” however neat and appealing as a marketing formula, elides the most noteworthy aspect of the format. The company might more aptly have referred to dresses which are headed and beheaded, since the clothes wear the heads, rather than the other way round: each costume has a small tab at its back, into which the stem of the head can be inserted to produce a complete paper doll figure that acts as a stand-alone illustration to the accompanying story. When I refer to a paper doll throughout this article, I designate the complete figure produced from the insertion of the head into the costumed body. The narratives of the Fuller paper doll books are not insensible to this quirk of the medium: *Ellen, or, The*

*Naughty Girl Reclaimed* (1811) counsels that, “[T]hough her face is fair and mild,” Ellen is an extremely naughty girl (6): the discrepancy between Ellen’s expressionless multi-purpose head, which cannot change between scenes as the costumes do, and the events at hand is registered in a knowing joke about the doll’s form. (See figure 1.) *Ellen’s* full title is *Ellen, or, The Naughty Girl Reclaimed: A Story, Exemplified in a Series of Figures*, with the book introduced via the synergy between Ellen’s story and the “figures” or dolls which straightforwardly exemplify it. However, in the Fuller paper doll books, the pleasures afforded by the paper dolls themselves undercut the didactic narratives or moral tales usually presented in the accompanying storybooks, just as a sly joke about the doll’s format weakens any approbation of Ellen’s naughtiness in the preceding example. This is especially relevant because of what I shall call the gendered morals in these books, which imply that female characters are more in need of particular moral lessons than are male characters.

## Nineteenth-century Doll Culture and the Fuller Paper Doll Books

Historians of the children’s book typically describe the success of the Fuller paper doll books as at once partial and short-lived. D. N. Shury of Berwick Street, Soho, printed the paper doll books for the Fullers, and they were released largely between 1805 and 1815 (Darton 1999), a period spanning the epoch of the Temple of Fancy’s opening. Examples held in the Opie Collection of Children’s Literature at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, which form a representative corpus, show a spike in production in 1811 and 1812, though the Fullers publish at least one title in the years 1810 to 1814. Peter Haining (1979) asserts that by 1817 the format had “fallen from favour in Britain” (15). The Fullers, says Percy Muir (1954), showed “less preoccupation with cost than with elegance of presentation” in their production of the paper doll books, leading to a high price for the works and in turn a rapid decline in popularity; he dubs the whole experiment “a comparative failure” (211–212). Although the format’s hey-day was indeed relatively short, editions of Fuller titles appear until at least 1830, the date of the last example held in the Opie collection, an eleventh edition of Dr. Walcot’s

*The History and Adventures of Little Henry*, a title originally published in 1810. Moreover, only five years earlier (eight years after the supposed discarding of the format, according to Haining) an imitation entitled *Kathleen, the Irish Child* (1825) was self-published by one F. E. A. Staffurth, indicating at least some continued interest in the form. (The only known copy of this work is held in the Opie Collection.)

What place do the Fuller paper doll books have in doll culture of the period? The answer to this question can, in part, be found in wider accounts of the paper doll. Antonia Fraser's (1963) report of the paper doll's genesis forms part of her chronicle of fashion dolls, Pandoras, and pedlar dolls throughout the ages:

It was the English who invented in 1790 a new type of Fashion doll, whose popularity was to last right through the nineteenth century, and is still in demand as a plaything for little girls. This was the flat card or stiffened paper doll figure, onto which could be attached a series of different dresses. At first they were made about eight inches high, and sold around three shillings. (43)

Despite the singular difference in the dolls' format (the full figure Fraser describes versus the tabbed head and slotted costume employed by the Fullers), the editors of this journal explicitly link the Temple of Fancy books to these late eighteenth-century paper dolls (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002: 177). So, too, do Brian Alderson and Felix de Marez Oyens (2006). Fraser's (1966) broader account of the paper doll's purpose is unambiguous: the toy combines "the function of a doll with that of a fashion display in a more mobile and economical way than the earlier life-sized fashion dolls" (92) from which it evolved.

We find paradigmatic trends in children's clothes from the period in the Temple of Fancy paper doll books, suggesting that Fraser's (1966) assessment of the paper doll as "fashion display" (92) does apply here. Take Fanny's first costume from *The History of Little Fanny* (1810). (See figure 2).

Fanny's combination of white dress and colored sash was typical of genteel girls' wear of the early nineteenth century (Buck 1996). The doll Fanny holds both mirrors and inverts her attire, sporting a yellow dress with a blue sash. Fanny's colored (as opposed to black) shoes and white (as opposed to colored) stockings reflect trends in children's fashion that Anne Buck (1996) traces to the first years of the 1800s, while the pantalettes she wears beneath her dress are perhaps more fashion-

forward: Noreen Marshall (2008) isolates the period 1810 to 1850 as the peak of this garment's popularity. Some of the Fuller paper dolls locate each costumed figure in a *mise en scène*, but Fanny's only field of reference when she first appears is the square of red and green carpet, with a flower and trellis pattern, on which she stands. Her habiliments are the exclusive focus of the image; the clothes she wears are spotlighted and showcased.

While late eighteenth-century paper dolls and the Fuller examples share a number of features, the importance of one difference between the two products cannot be overstated—the Fullers' packaging of paper doll and storybook together and hence the paper doll's status as an illustration to a narrative. These books intimate a costume focus parallel to that of the dolls on their very covers: a full title like *Lucinda, the Orphan, or, The Costumes: A Tale: Exhibited in a Series of Dresses* (1812) multiplies subtitles, alternate titles, and colons in a textual equation in which the costumes the protagonist wears are as important as her situation, and the particulars of the story break down into "a series of dresses." Note also *Cinderella* wherein the preservation of Perrault's 1729 alternate title *The Little Glass Slipper* (in the original French "la petite pantoufle de verre") signals the importance of costume before the



**Figure 2** • First costume from *The History of Little Fanny: Exemplified in a Series of Figures* (1810). The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (2012), Opie E 55.

narrative begins. However, the texts of the paper doll books are moral tales that inveigh against just the obsession with clothing that the paper dolls encourage.

## Writing against a Love of Finery and Fashion

The status of the fashion doll, of which the paper doll is one type, as trend-carrier and promotional commodity was not unproblematic for commentators roughly contemporary with the Fullers. The Edgeworths ([1798] 2009), for example, in a famous critique from *Practical Education*, praise the doll as a “means of inspiring girls with a taste for neatness in dress” but caution that “a watchful eye should be kept upon the child, to mark the first symptoms of a love of finery and fashion” (11). Note that the Edgeworths gender their argument: while the common gender noun “child” universalizes this piece of advice, it is really *girls* whose “taste” can be sharpened by dolls and really *girls*, rather than children, who must be watched for these “symptoms.” Historians and critics often read the fashion doll as a toy for girls; as Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2002) summarize, “(affluent) girls have played with fashionably dressed, shapely dolls for a very long time” (173).

Early children’s literature was one place in which girls’ potential “love of finery and fashion” could be checked. For example, it is significant that what is arguably the first novel written expressly for children, Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess; or, The Little Female Academy* (1749), includes just such material. *The Governess* is an example of a moral tale, a children’s literature genre defined by Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard (1984) as “didactic fictions, either short or novel-length, which were first written for children in the mid-18th cent., and which by 1800 were the predominant genre in children’s books in England” (358). “Most moral tales,” continue Carpenter and Prichard, “consisted of little more than the relation of the daily events of a family’s life, emphasizing the children’s sins of omission and commission and their subsequent punishments and repentance” (359). In *The Governess*, this process occurs within the framework of a group of girl students at the “little female academy” of the title. As I have said, the Fuller paper doll books (with the notable exception of the fairy tale *Cinderella* (1814)) are themselves nineteenth-century iterations of the moral tale produced

in a novel format, hence a short exploration of some of the lessons regarding clothing in a work like *The Governess* will clarify my subsequent argument.

In *The Governess* (1749), Sarah Fielding explicitly criticizes feminine love of clothing and associated vanity through the character of Lady Caroline Delun. When she and her sister, Lady Fanny, visit their former friend, the story's heroine, Miss Jenny Peace, Lady Caroline cannot help but fiddle with her extravagant ensemble of "a Pink Robe, embroidered thick with Gold, and adorned with very fine Jewels, and the finest *Mechlin* lace" (accessorized with a heavy diamond cross), and her pride in her costume is obvious to the pupils of the academy despite the fact that she makes efforts to conceal her fixation so "that she might not be observed to think of her own Dress" (110). This passage follows Lady Caroline's departure: "Miss *Jenny Peace* remarked how many Shapes Vanity would turn itself into, and desired them to observe how ridiculously Lady *Caroline Delun* (original emphases) turned her whole Thoughts on her Dress, and Condition of Life" (111): Lady Caroline's obsession with her attire is matched only by her obsession with her newly-acquired title.

Layering the moral regarding clothing, the Lady Caroline episode gives way to a confession from one of Jenny's fellow students. Miss Nanny Spruce admits that she once had "the same Vanity of Dress and Superiority of Station" as the group's noble visitor: "My Delight, said Miss *Nanny Spruce* (original emphasis), ever since I can remember, has been in Dress and Finery" (112). Nanny's fetishistic relay of many specific details of dress, from the "fine Coats, Ribbands, and laced Caps" in which she revels at home (112), to the much-envied "Silver Ribband" and "Red Damask" of her schoolmates (113), offers an imaginative feast to the reader who loves clothes. However, a moral gleaned from Miss Jenny Peace's teachings quickly negates these narrative pleasures: Nanny is content now because she has discovered that "the Road to Happiness is by conquering such foolish Vanities, and the only Way to be pleased is to endeavour to please others" (113).

This episode from *The Governess* (1749) is only one example of an eighteenth-century moral tale writing against "a love of finery and fashion," and there are many more. While I cannot canvas all these stories here, it is noteworthy that another of the most popular texts within this genre, the early Newbery work, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*



first published in 1765,<sup>2</sup> makes an association between moral worth (or the lack thereof) and clothing (or the lack thereof) through its heroine's name alone. Once Margery acquires a pair of shoes instead of the one shoe with which she begins the story, her grateful assertion "*Two Shoes, Mame, see two shoes*" ([1766] 2000: 21) to whomever will listen not only generates a nickname, but also reflects an insensibility to the finer points of dress which bespeaks her suitability as a heroine for the moral tale.

### Gender, the Paper Doll Book, and the Moral Tale

Carpenter and Prichard's (1984) definitions of the moral tale describe the Fullers' *Little Fanny* (1810) well: in this largely naturalistic narrative, a girl's disobedience leads to misfortune, then penitent alteration of conduct. But, while *The Governess* contains injunctions against a wide range of feminine sins, of which vanity and love of clothing are but two, the paper doll books base all their lessons around these flaws. The sartorially-based morals range from self-contained axioms like "VICE in her liveried pomp we often meet, / But humble VIRTUE barefoot in the street," a verse appended to a section of the prose story of *Lucinda* (1812: 4), to the constitutive plotting of all elements of the story around clothing. *Little Fanny* evidences such a strikingly clothing-centered plot. Fanny's initial fall from grace, for instance, involves a passionate squabble with her mother who refuses to let her wear recently bought finery in inclement weather. Directly after this, Fanny's costume switches (rather, we switch Fanny's head to another costume), and, through this change of clothes, we learn of a change of fortunes: a beggar, attracted by Fanny's fine apparel, has snatched the girl and forced her to "roam" the streets "[t]atter'd and torn" (1810: 8), on one occasion wearing a basket of fish on her head. Fanny is not the only paper doll to undergo such trials: the eponymous heroine of *Ellen* (1811) has her outfit grossly muddied when she falls into a ditch in the course of boisterous play, is bedecked with a dunce's cap, then loses her clothes to gypsies and is forced to adopt their garb.

*Little Fanny* (1810) and *Ellen* (1811) check the sartorial preoccupations of female characters (and readers) by substituting them for more fitting pursuits. As such, the stories are just the sort of "watchful eye"

that the Edgeworths (2009: 11) recommend. While Fanny's mother reproaches her for narcissistically wanting to show off her new clothes at the beginning of her tale, the story's ending opposes such costume-proud behavior to learnedness as symbolized by the book. Fanny's restoration to the domestic bosom has her "modestly dressed in a coloured frock" (1810: 15), now holding not the emblem of selfish and childish pleasure which appeared in the first illustration—a doll—but, instead, clutching a book. Similarly at the end of *Ellen* (1811) the sartorial sinner "makes a more pleasing Appearance, in a neat Stuff Gown, with a Book under her Arm" (15), her redemption figured in the literal stuff of her garment as well as in her choice of childhood talisman: Ellen initially appeared "*with a Book at her Feet*" (original emphasis) (3).

While *The Governess* (1749), not to mention the paper doll *per se*, clearly addresses girls, the audience for the paper doll books is more ambiguous. Although *Fanny* (1810) and *Ellen* (1811) are two of the six Fuller children's paper doll books in the Bodleian to have female protagonists, the remaining five have male heroes.<sup>3</sup> We have no way of determining whether, irrespective of the sex of the protagonist, paper doll books were most read or owned by girls in the nineteenth century, and although the sole example of a male-focused text with an inscription that I have located belonged to one, Charlotte Morris, a manuscript edition of *Little Fanny* (1810) in the Victoria and Albert Museum's Renier Collection bears the message "Mast<sup>r</sup> Rob<sup>t</sup> Browning as a reward for his Meritorious Behaviour at School"—the future poet apparently received this (female-oriented) paper doll book when he was two or three years of age.<sup>4</sup>

What, then, of the remainder of these Fuller titles that have male heroes? The title of the 1816 work *Frederick, or, The Effects of Disobedience* suggests a didactic tone to rival, if not eclipse, that of *Fanny* (1810) or *Ellen* (1811), and an early description of the fourteen-year-old Frederick as a boy "endowed with every good quality except perseverance" (5) does not dispel this impression. However, comedy tempers the moralizing here: Frederick's adventures see him not once but twice adopting female attire. Any reader who removes and examines the figures before beginning the story (a reading habit that I will discuss in greater detail below) might puzzle over a sequence of events in which Frederick appears as a schoolboy at his desk, a sailor, an exotic so-called Moor, a soldier, and a runaway with his kit slung across his shoulder,

but also an old woman stoking a fire and a pretty girl with roses tucked into her corset. The text enhances the burlesque of it all, humorously impugning the beauty of French maidens: “Frederick Melvin appeared as pretty a little French girl as had been seen a long time at Nantz” (24). The shortness of the cross-dressing episode (half a page, when other parts of Frederick’s journey take six or more pages) further indicates its status as a light-hearted *divertissement* that does not aim to inculcate any particular moral, sartorial or otherwise. While we cannot define the paper doll book as a feminized cultural product by virtue of its subject matter (boys appear almost as often as girls) or its readership (which is unverifiable), the division between *Fanny* or *Ellen* and *Frederick* suggests marked differences in the morals attached to male and female obsession with appearance and clothing in these texts.

## Paper Dolls on Stage

*Little Fanny* (1810) and *Ellen* (1811), and, to a lesser extent, even the miniature, comical *Bildungsroman* of *Frederick* (1816), represent attempts to adjust an existing narrative genre (the moral tale) according to a gimmick of format (the paper doll). In another familiar plot device, and one which further illuminates the gendering of morals in the paper doll book, changes of costume incarnate either broadly or specifically ideas of staging and exhibitionism. For the children’s literature historian Seth Lerer (2008), “a tension between staging one’s behavior for the delectation of others and finding inner virtue in devotion to the family or learning” characterizes nineteenth-century fiction for girls (229). Lerer’s rubric of staged behavior versus inner virtue is most useful with regard to the paper doll books in which we find the “staging [of] one’s behavior” in abundance: a more apt formula for the books’ subtitles would be “Exhibitionists in a Series of Dresses,” so focused are they on girlish displays of clothing. In *Lucinda* (1812) for example, the orphan of the title, fortuitously adopted by a wealthy noblewoman, visits a nunnery and idly expresses a wish to join the order. A nun’s habit is then produced, and the narrator remarks, “How much she eclipsed the sisters of the veil need not be told” (27). *Lucinda*’s hazy admiration for religious belief (a namecheck of Lerer’s (2008) “inner virtue” (229)) is less significant than her pleasing appearance in the garments

of a nun, the exterior staging of her behavior. We also have “inner virtue,” though, as the moral trajectories of stories like *Fanny* and *Ellen* prize interiority over an exteriority represented as the “love of finery and fashion” (Edgeworth and Edgeworth 2009: 11).

A number of Temple of Fancy protagonists take to the stage outright, and the treatment of this literalized form of staging is indicative. In *Lauretta, the Little Savoyard* (1813), the title character trades her employment as a goatherd for the theatre late in her story, while in *Frank Feignwell's Attempts to Amuse His Friends on Twelfth-Night* (1811), our hero, whose name deftly combines honesty with artifice, resolves to “rouse [his] powers of mimic art” (4) by performing various characters. The spectacular example *Young Albert, the Roscius* (1811) is likewise based exclusively around costumed figures as characters in a performance. This theatrical device lends the whole assembly a degree of self-consciousness, of entertaining play with the sartorial preoccupations of the format which encourages rather than rebukes pleasure in costume. *Young Albert* (1811) demonstrates this. The nineteenth-century child prodigy William Henry West Betty, the real-life “Young Roscius” whose acting career began at twelve and whose on-stage appearances in London and elsewhere generated a wave of Bettymania in the theatre-going public (see Playfair 1967), is the model for Young Albert, as Albert’s “Roscius” moniker evinces. Master Betty played a number of the precocious roles which Albert adopts in the Fuller book, including Norval from John Home’s *Douglas* (1756), Selim from John Brown’s *Barbarossa* (1774), Richard III, and Hamlet. But Albert trumps even Master Betty with the audacity of his dramatic choices: he plays Othello and Falstaff. These unlikely roles infect the paper dolls. *Young Albert* is remarkable for coming with two heads, one white and one black (see figure 3).

Albert’s two-facedness places format over content and context, for although the black Othello head, with its crescent moon-adorned turban, is compatible only with one costumed figure, the Fullers persist in separating head from body to preserve the prescribed formula. In further ludic (mis)matching, Albert’s boyish, rosy-cheeked head is affixed in his last role to Falstaff’s grotesquely large body (see figure 3). Cutting a distinctly different silhouette to the six svelte figures that precede him, this final character hammers home pleasure in costume for costume’s sake.



**Figure 3** • Falstaff and Othello figures from the second edition of *Young Albert, the Roscius, Exhibited in a Series of Characters from Shakspeare and Other Authors* (1811). The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (2012), Arch. AA f. 77.

Such delight in costume seems antithetical to the morals offered in Fanny or Ellen’s narrative, and, indeed, to some of the implied values in the text of *Young Albert* (1811). The opening précis of Albert’s character encompasses his antipathy to frivolous play, his refined yet energetic intellect, and his love of Truth-with-a-capital-T; he is “[s]o meek, so mild, so modest” (3). By comparison, Albert in the verse that follows,

Enamour’d now of SHAKSPEARE’s page,  
Ambition prompts to tread the stage;  
Of ROSCIUS now he feels the inspiring flame;  
He gets the tragedy by heart,  
Enters the spirit of each part,  
And struts, a little candidate for fame. (5)

The budding thespian’s strutting pursuit of fame in this verse is irreconcilable with the character sketch we read only a page or two earlier. The point, though, is that Albert will assume a series of dramatic personae regardless of his supposedly upstanding and modest character, and he

will do this so that the format of the paper doll book can be best exploited. The physically and morally odd characters played by Albert, like Falstaff and Othello, signal that it is more important for the book to offer the most outlandish head-and-body combinations imaginable, rather than convey a particular set of values to the reader.

There is no sense in *Young Albert* (1811) that this aspiring player should be rebuked for his pursuit of fame or associated pleasure in costume, a fact that illustrates the contradictory fates of male and female protagonists who choose to exhibit themselves. The performances of Young Albert and Frank Feignwell, amusing friends or a wider populace, are positively lauded; Fanny and Ellen's domestic displays of their finery are punished. The only actress amongst the paper dolls, Lauretta, from *Lauretta, the Little Savoyard* (1813), rapidly gives acting up for a more suitable vocation: marriage to a wealthy benefactor. In line with the trend that Lerer (2008) identifies, female characters in the paper doll books must learn to become less vain, less oriented around exteriority, and more dedicated to learning and their families (which are conflated by the return to home as a return to the bookshelf at the endings of *Little Fanny* (1810) and *Ellen* (1811)).

## Making Meaning and the Form of the Paper Doll Book

The narrative content of the paper doll book can be read as promoting a worryingly gendered moral message that girls must learn the error of their exhibitionist vanity and love of finery, while boys need no such rebuke. However, the physical form of the paper doll book undercuts this content. D. F. McKenzie's (1986) celebrated battle cry of book history is that "forms effect<sup>5</sup> meaning" (4), a statement which is apposite to the paper doll book. This pertains in part to the requirement that the paper doll gimmick imposes on the storybook: the story must be devised so as to include as many costume changes as possible. Indeed, this formal demand is so pressing that the stories often overbalance beneath the load. When Alderson describes "hand-coloured figures who could be arranged in different costumes to meet the requirements of the (usually preposterous) narrative" (Alderson and Moon 1994: 88), his reference to narrative necessity and concomitant absurdity signals the problem. Muir (1954) goes one step further in his assertion that text and illustra-

tion were not created equal, lauding the “ingenuity,” tastefulness, and attractiveness of the figures before complaining that “the accompanying verses were often deplorable” (212). The unusual form of the paper doll book affects narrative meaning too forcefully by necessitating a story with an implausible number of costume changes. The costume changes become the only appeal of the paper doll book, its (moral) narrative shoddily constructed, “preposterous” (Alderson and Moon 1994: 88) or “deplorable” (Muir 1954: 212).

The paper doll book’s mixture of material components offers a variety of different ways of reading or “making meaning.” I refer once more to McKenzie with this phrase, this time recalling the two types of text he posited in the inaugural Panizzi Lectures at the British Library in 1985. The first of these types is “the text as authorially sanctioned, contained, and historically definable”—the classical textual ideal sought by bibliographers. A second conception privileges by contrast the reader’s role in “making meaning”; it conceives of “the text as always incomplete, and therefore open, unstable, subject to a perpetual re-making by its readers, performers, or audience” (1986: 45). Questions of just how the reader “makes meaning” of the paper doll book will be my focus for the remainder of this article, and will provide an additional dimension to my preceding argument concerning the paper doll book’s gendered plotting of costume and moral.

The paper doll book is, of course, a subset of the children’s picture book, a form in which the visual and the verbal work in tandem. As Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2001) note in the first sentence of their monograph on the picture book,

[t]he function of pictures, iconic signs, is to describe or represent. The function of words, conventional signs is primarily to narrate. Conventional signs are often linear, while iconic signs are nonlinear and do not give us direct instruction about how to read them. (1–2)

Nikolajeva and Scott’s references to representation, narration, linearity, and nonlinearity highlight some of the key issues faced in the negotiation of the picture book. Moreover, the movable book *sui generis* entails yet more layers, what Eric Faden (2007) calls the “balance between the narrative’s linear storytelling and the visual’s interactive and spectacular tendencies” (74). Gillian Brown (2006) even analyses the reader’s “tactile” interaction with the movable (here, switching a head) as fore-

grounding “the reader’s part in the making of the meaning of the book” (358), her terms directly echoing those of McKenzie.

The specific visual, verbal, and material dynamic of the paper doll book is remarkable. While these works originally came with the costumes interleaved between the storybook’s pages at appropriate moments (Rickards and Twyman 2000), the utter physical separateness of picture and word (which are self-contained) means that, once read for the first time, constituent elements can become divorced from one another and the word/picture order jumbled. The format of these books works against a stable narrative configuration of words and pictures since the images that should sequentially accompany each development in the story are readily visible (and physically manipulable) at any time. As a result, the reader has a number of choices of how to make meaning, all of which influence the space and time of the reading experience. One could preserve the figures interleaved. However, in order to insert head into costume they must be removed at least once during each reading. Alternatively one could remove and lay out every figure upon beginning the story; at the first reading, this should produce a clear sequence of illustrations, but upon subsequent re-readings (and the children’s book is a site *par excellence* of re-reading) determining the order of the figures would prove more difficult. The reader must take care to replace the figures at their corresponding page-openings after each use, or else look closely at each example to determine the order. Violating narrative space and time yet more radically, one could absent the dolls entirely from their own storybook, using them either to illustrate another text or as toys unconnected to a pre-existing story. The Opie Collection provides evidence of such play in one item, shelfmark Opie E 32, a set of ten paper doll heads devoid of costumes and stories. The Fullers may even have encouraged this practice: according to Herbert Hosmer, “The heads may ... have been interchangeable from book to book since various copies of a single title often have different heads” (quoted in Piehl 1987: 79).

Of course, there are various strategies visible in these books to mitigate the formal separation between word and paper doll. Some of these are typographic. Many texts, like *Ellen* (1811), provide italicized notes at the top of each section to describe the accompanying figure: “*Ellen appears in a deplorable Condition, her Frock and Spencer splashed with Mud*” (9). These sartorially-induced italics are taken one step further



in *St. Julien the Emigrant, or, Europe Depicted* (1812), a rare example—along with *Kathleen, the Irish Child* (1825)—of a nineteenth-century English paper doll book not produced by Fuller. St. Julien, an aristocrat who flees revolutionary France, dresses as an Italian, a Turk, a German, a Russian, a Swede, and a Spanish peasant in the course of his travels, and there is a text break each time a new costume appears, the excitement of the garment/figure registered in page layout and type. Others, *Little Fanny* (1810) included, incorporate detailed descriptions of clothing into the text proper as well as captions: “See Fanny here, in frock as white as snow, / A sash of pink, with long and flowing bow” (3).

However, these aides to sequentiality do not work flawlessly. Cinderella’s succession of ball gowns, such a key feature of the fairy tale, poses difficulties for the paper doll format in the Fullers’ adaptation. Textual descriptions of two figures refer to “*Cinderella elegantly dress’d at the Prince’s Ball*” (1814: 12) and then “*Cinderella’s second Ball Dress*” (18) without further specifics. Active attention is required: the viewer must match the purple fabric, white lace collar, and red necklace of one outfit to the head and shoulders which peep from a cut-out window in the figure depicting her coach, captioned “*Cinderella going to the Prince’s Ball*” (11) and appearing directly before her first appearance at the festivities. Hence the reader deduces the order of the illustrations through textile detective work, growing yet more entwined in the minutiae of clothing in the process.

From a theoretical standpoint, textual attempts to minimize the rupture between word and picture can undermine rather than promote narrative cohesion. Tzvetan Todorov’s (1987) distinction between the narrative of contiguity and the narrative of substitutions is useful here. The narratologist designates “what happens next?” as the signal question that excites reader interest before postulating “two kinds of narrative. One unfolds on a horizontal line: we want to know what each event provokes, what it *does*. The other represents a series of variations which stack up along a vertical line: what we look for in each event is what it *is*” (135). One might argue that the primarily vertical orientation of the images—each literally substituted for the next, as Fanny or Frederick or Cinderella’s head is moved from costume to costume—transfers to the purportedly more horizontal movement of the written narrative. The text must duplicate information already given by the illustrations in order to minimize the problematic of the format; text (body-text and

caption) and image substitute one for the other in a movement that does little to advance the story, but once again promotes a sustained, involved focus on clothing from the reader.

The form of the paper doll book contradicts the narrative opposition between interiority and exteriority, between book and costume. The paper doll book retains a focus on clothing (the external, the exterior), amusing the reader with illustrations of costume, descriptions of costume, and costume-based plot devices, while self-correcting this focus through the degradation of girl-characters thus engaged. This is moral sleight of hand: two products gendered culturally feminine (clothes and dolls) are condemned while the very form of the book encourages sustained attention to said products. However, in this section, I have used some ideas from book history and narrative theory to suggest different ways of making meaning of the paper doll book. In short, paying attention to the paper dolls and their glorious costumes (a reading encouraged by the format of the paper doll book) means paying less attention to the moral texts.

## Conclusion

The formal configuration of the Fuller paper doll book is unwieldy: there is the potential for Ellen to remain forever with a book at her feet should the sequence of costumes be disturbed, and for paper doll heads to be orphaned in an envelope at the Bodleian, simply because of the separation of doll and storybook. However, there is a liberating side effect to such material disorder. The text may present values of obedience, respect for elders, modesty, cleanliness, intellectual pursuit—in other words, the characteristic stultifying (and gendered, in the case of the mortification of the love of clothing and the interiority/exteriority dialectic) substance of the nineteenth-century children's moral fable—to a reader, specifically, a child reader, but this textual emphasis can be ignored. As the paper doll disturbs narrative sense and moral message, “forms effect meaning” (McKenzie 1986: 4). Margaret Higonnet (1987) argues that children's book formats which manipulate narrative sequence “offer points of entry for the child, who can play with the creation of her own absurdity” (40). The paper doll book is just such a format: the separate visual and verbal texts allow readers to decide

what is important in the paper doll book, to reorder a narrative should the prescribed construction not suit, and to experiment with different formations of play with the book, not to mention the doll. Indeed, the paper dolls themselves bear witness to such play. Heads, worn from use, are much grubbier than costumes, while the books are often comparatively unscathed, evoking children who privileged dolls over text.



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## Notes

1. See Alderson and Oyens 2006: 131; Carpenter and Prichard 1984: 193; Fraser 1966: 92; Immel 2009: 746; Muir 1954: 212; Rickards and Twyman 2000: 220; Whitton 1986: 97, for other accounts of the form.

2. While *Goody Two-Shoes* was first published by Newbery in 1765, I quote from the third edition of 1766, digitized as part of Gale's Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO).

3. I have excluded the Fuller paper doll books the *Lecture on Heads* (circa 1809) and *The Protean Figure and Metamorphic Costumes* (1811) from this count as it does not seem that these works were intended for children.

4. A copy of the paper doll book *Frank Feignwell's Attempts to Amuse His Friends on Twelfth-Night* (1811) held in the Hockliffe Collection, Polhill Library, University of Bedfordshire, is marked "Charlotte Morris Feb.y 8th 1811." For Robert Browning's copy of *Little Fanny*, see Renier 1974: 49.

5. McKenzie deliberately uses the verb "effect" in opposition to "affect" at this point to stress the causal, as opposed to incidental, impact of the book's form on meaning.

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