

## From maternal instinct to material girl: the doll in postwar Spain (1940s–50s)

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In *The Value of Things*, Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska state that, in a consumer culture, 'it is not objects that people really desire, but their lush coating of images and dreams' (2000: 76). What dreams and images are being desired when the longed for object is a child's plaything, such as a doll? The doll is popularly understood as a tool to aid in the formatting of gender, and, as such, primarily given to female children to awaken their maternal instinct. Miriam Formanek-Brunell notes that the study of dolls as cultural objects is overlooked precisely because 'dolls continue to be typically misunderstood as trivial artefacts of a commercialized girl's culture, static representations of femininity and maternity, generators only of maternal feelings and domestic concerns' (1993: 1). Formanek-Brunell proposes that 'dolls, like any other objects of ordinary life, can be seen as "texts"' (1993: 2). Dolls are cultural texts that, once analysed, can shed light on a variety of aspects of culture. However, apart from Miriam Formanek-Brunell's excellent study, contemporary academia seldom trains its eye on this particular object of children's material culture, and when it does, the focus is invariably on an American plastic icon of femininity, the Barbie doll.<sup>1</sup> What gets overlooked is that Barbie represents neither children nor teenagers, but an idealized adult female, whereby we lose sight of the tradition of so-called 'Bébé' dolls which have idealized children from the middle of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, however much Barbie is an inescapable part of global culture, she is, nevertheless, the product of a single nation – what about the dolls of other national cultures? What dreams and images do they engender in girls or in doll lovers? What values do they embody?

In this article, I will initially examine the emergence of the doll in the form of idealized child in Western culture, and tackle the problems that feminist thought has had, until recently, with understanding the doll as a cultural object. This has led, paradoxically, to a tendency to devalue the importance of dolls, and to neglect their complex meanings, in female childhood culture. However, Cummings and Lewandowska remind us that 'values attributed to objects are not properties of the things themselves, but judgments made through encounters people have with them at specific times and in specific places. To make sense of objects, you must look to a context' (2000: 20). Here, I aim to make sense of the doll in the Spanish context, so I shall proceed to focus on a particular nation and historical period: Spain during the immediate post-Civil-War years, the 1940s and 1950s, when the nation is understood to emerge

from a decade known colloquially as 'the years of hunger' to become the prototype of a consumer society. I will move back and forth through the multiple meanings generated by this artefact identified firstly as signifier of motherhood, secondly as alter ego, and thirdly as valuable object, to tease out a range of cultural responses to the doll. As the main intention of my reading of the doll as a 'text' is to examine her importance as a cultural signifier in Spain, I will alternate between analysing 'real' dolls and dolls in texts: from the appearance on the Spanish market in the 1940s of the highly desirable Mariquita Pérez and Juanín, girl and boy dolls created by Leonor Coello, to narratives about dolls in scripts of femininity – school books and girls' novels – published during the postwar period.

### **Playing with dolls**

The blueprint for a doll is the human body. Whether it be an oversimplified or sketchy rendition, a detailed miniature replica or a caricature, the doll symbolizes a human being. Although dolls have been around for thousands of years, they should not always be considered children's playthings. As any encyclopedia entry on dolls will inform the reader, flat pieces of wood, painted with various designs and with hair made of strings of clay or wooden beads, have been found in ancient Egyptian graves. These 'dolls' should not be considered toys, but ceremonial figures, and the current accepted definition of a doll excludes religious and ceremonial figures, as well as mannequins, puppets, marionettes, and any 'action toys', such as lead or wooden soldiers (Axe 1983: 1). The first dolls to be manufactured, and eventually adopted as toys for children, were made in the shape of grown women, and, whether crafted from wood, clay, rags, or wax, they would be dressed in the height of fashion. In fact, from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century, they doubled as fashion models, being sent from Paris to wealthy women in major metropolitan areas so that their own personal couturiers could copy the latest garments (Rogers 1999: 25) until fashion dolls became obsolete with the development of the process of lithography and the appearance of the fashion print (Ariès 1996: 68). These dolls can be considered the precursors of the Barbie doll. However, dolls manufactured primarily in the form of an idealized child for children to play with only appear in the mid-nineteenth century; Lila Rait notes: 'as a generalization, it is reasonable to say that most dolls manufactured prior to the 1850s [...] were proportioned as adults and most frequently dressed as adults' (Rait 1989: 80). The child dolls appear at a time of flux in the conceptualization of childhood, when children were becoming increasingly idealized and treasured, redefined as belonging to 'a domesticated, nonproductive world of lessons, games and token money' (Zelizer 2001: 58). This period launched the 'commercialization of childhood' wherein children with toys came to symbolize 'the pleasures of consumerism, of the new objects primarily designed for leisure and fantasy' (Rogers 1999: 72).

Whether modelled on babies, toddlers, little girls or boys, these dolls were based on a Romantic vision of childhood, where the child is conceptualized as socially, sexually and psychically innocent. They are beautiful but represent a vacuously pure ideal which, to borrow from Anne Higonnet's reading of John Everett Millais's paintings of children such as 'Bubbles' (1886), can be understood to belong to a middle-class cul-

ture 'that identifies itself discreetly with affluent cleanliness and absence of want' (Higonnet 1998: 24). The finest and most desirable of 'Bébé' dolls were manufactured, in the nineteenth century, in France (Jumeau; Bru; Steiner; and SFBJ) and in Germany (Kestner; Simon and Halbig; Kammer and Rienhart; Armand Marseille; and Heubach), and any collector's encyclopedia, such as Coleman's *The Collector's Encyclopedia of Dolls* (1968, 1986), will be illustrated with photographs of extremely well dressed child dolls with real hair attached to delicate bisque heads, sleeping eyelid mechanisms that flutter over bright wide-eyed gazes, blushed cheeks, and full lips parted slightly over white teeth. Ann Higonnet argues that 'nothing could make us understand the concept of an innocent child body better than pictures or sculptures' (Higonnet 1998: 27), or, I might add, dolls. These dolls were generally fashioned in the form of feminine children, as girl dolls were manufactured in far greater quantities than boy dolls (M.B.G 1969: 2). If representations have real effects – 'images have always had a special power to represent the body, that is to present the body according to concepts by which we understand our physical selves' (Higonnet 1998: 27) – what are the material consequences of these fantasies of childhood?

A fascinating interpretation of the potential effects that a doll manufactured in the form of a female child could have on the girl is given by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). Beauvoir argues that the girl child's plaything, a doll, is her alter ego. Whereas the boy's alter ego is an extension of himself, the penis, 'the little girl cannot incarnate herself in any part of herself. To compensate for this and to serve as her alter ego, she is given a foreign object: the doll' (Beauvoir 1993: 293). Once Beauvoir has set up this comparison, she argues that the doll, unlike the penis, represents the whole human body, and, again, unlike the penis, is a passive object. So the male ego can construct himself as a projection of his penis, 'a symbol of autonomy, of transcendence, of power' (Beauvoir 1993: 292), whereas the little girl 'is from the start much more opaque to her own eyes' (Beauvoir 1993: 292) and by being given a doll to play with and identify with, 'the little girl will be led to identify her whole person and to regard this as an inert given object' (Beauvoir 1993: 293). The process of identification with the doll leads to narcissism, objectification and 'the passivity that is the essential characteristic of the "feminine" woman' (Beauvoir 1993: 294). The meaning of the doll in culture is exposed in *The Second Sex* as being far more complex than acting as a mere instrument of apprenticeship in the art of mother-craft. Simone de Beauvoir, by creating the dichotomy penis/male and doll/female, opens up a psychoanalytical and feminist reading of the doll as the girl's alter ego and double, pointing to the problems of self-perception that can arise from such a close identification with a cultural artefact. In *The Second Sex*, the doll becomes an instrument of apprenticeship in the art of feminine beauty: to dress, to undress, to groom, to keep clean... The girl uses the doll as a mirror in order to become woman, a becoming which is posited as negative by the author, on the one hand, because Beauvoir accepts the psychoanalytical argument of lacking (a penis), and, on the other, because, in her analysis, devoting time to the pursuit of beauty is interpreted as an act of patriarchal oppression.

However powerful, Beauvoir's interpretation raises some problems. It is certainly obvious that her analysis enables one to begin to understand how dolls that are not

manufactured in the shape of a baby but are, instead, copies of the human form as idealized child – or fantastic adult in the case of the Barbie doll – can create negative narratives in feminist discourse (because the ‘Bébé’ doll is woefully neglected in feminist studies, I must continue this discussion, for the time being, by referring to the ubiquitous Barbie). Given that feminist critics have bewailed the fact that, in their eyes, dolls are ‘hindrances to the development of girls as individuals’ (Formanek-Brunell 1993: 1), it is ironic that, until very recently, feminist narratives on the doll attributed to girls minimal agency. Following in Beauvoir’s footsteps, feminist thinking has interpreted the boundaries between the girl and the doll as dangerously fragile and detrimental, not to the inanimate object, the doll, but to the girl (see Urla and Swedland 1995). It is as if the inanimate object engenders a fear of mimesis. If the doll did not generate such strong feelings, why would so many feminists be upset about the Barbie doll in particular and believe in her apparent power to inspire girls to have poor body imagery? Some actually assert that Barbie’s impossible statistics, which Dea Birkett calculates would be in real life ‘39–18–33’ (1998: 15), can drive a girl towards anorexia and plastic surgery. Because of the overemphasis on reading the Barbie doll as a problem, it is often overlooked that she ‘exists in a cultural context where exaggerated, unrealistic images of girls and women predominate and that flesh-and-blood women, especially models and entertainers, probably have more influence on young girls’ (Rogers 1999: 18). Quite apart from consolidating in the feminist imagination that the Barbie doll – an adult female doll – is the only type of doll worth analysing in relation to girlhood culture, by granting such power to the doll, by presenting the perceived blurring of the boundaries between the doll and the girl in feminist culture as negative, feminist discourse runs the risk of prolonging the myth that the girl is a passive consumer of dolls and, to repeat a quote, their ‘lush coating of images and dreams’ (Cummings and Lewandowska 2000: 76).<sup>2</sup>

However, feminism has, quite rightly, reacted against the cultural imposition of doll play as gender-correct play for girls. It is not novel to declare that women and girls have had to forge their identities within the boundaries of gender roles defined by the ideological framework of separate spheres, but, by revisiting the over-familiar constructions of maternity, it is possible to see where the maternal role is illustrated in other ways in different contexts. Although, in this article, I do bear in mind Miriam Formanek-Brunell’s re-assessment of the doll in commercialized girlhood culture, accepting her challenge to see beyond the representation of dolls as ‘static representations of femininity and maternity’ and ‘generators only of maternal feelings and domestic concerns’, I first must cover ground that some will find is well-worn. It may initially appear that Spanish domestic ideology in the 1940s and 1950s was relentless in its repetition of gendering motifs: smiling women are represented with the feminine accessories of babies, clothes pegs, flowers, pots and pans and sewing needles, as, indeed, are little girls, but it is precisely the very ‘ordinariness’ of these accessories which means that it is easy to overlook what is in fact ‘extra-ordinary’ about their representation.

### Doll as signifier of motherhood

The main theme of this paper is the cult of the doll in girlhood culture during General Francisco Franco Bahamonde's authoritarian regime in Spain (1939–75), focusing particularly on the first two decades, the 1940s and 1950s, which are the years of national reconstruction after the Civil War (1936–39). Carmen Martín Gaité notes that 'el cultivo de la muñeca, [era] realmente obsesivo en la época' (1994: 121) [the cult of the doll, (was) truly obsessive during the period]. It is undeniable, as we shall discuss, that doll play was popularly seen as a generator of maternal feelings, as in the concluding chapter to Purificación Hernández's catechism *Esperando a Jesús* (1946): '¿No juegas también a la mamá? ¡Eres también como una mamita pequeña!' (1946: 42) [do you not also play 'mummies'? You are like a little mother!]. All constructions are socially and historically contingent, and the constant visual and textual reference to the doll in postwar Spain can be interpreted as a demand on girls to conform to the domestic model.

In the Francoist regime's vision of a new Spain, women were almost exclusively addressed as wives and mothers, and the discourses of domesticity, unsurprisingly, had an impact on girlhood culture during this period. The most visible of girlhood representations during the 1940s and 1950s was that of the domestic girl, and across a broad range of texts, although only pint-sized, she is illustrated and described performing many domestic functions: mending clothes, embroidering, laying the table, cooking, feeding younger siblings, dusting, among other household chores. Invariably, to emphasize the girl's precocious fluency in household management, she is illustrated as smaller than the broom she sweeps the floor with, standing on books to reach the windows that need cleaning, or with her feet barely reaching the floor when seated on a chair sewing. These texts and images aimed to instil in the girl, whether she was at school, reading from a set book, or at home, leafing through a comic, a familiarity with her future role as housewife and mother, whilst also instructing her on how to behave like a 'correctly' gendered being. As women's place was in the home, domestic training was defined as the point of departure for female identity formation. Therefore, co-education was summarily banned, and whereas boys' schools had to resemble military camps or seminaries, in girls' schools domestic femininity had to be the guiding principle. Alicia Alted quotes a memo from the *Jefatura del Servicio Nacional de Primera Enseñanza* [National Service Headquarters for Primary Education], dated 5 March 1938, which reveals the extent of the Nationalists' preoccupation with forming the domestic girl within the classroom: 'en las escuelas de niñas brillará la feminidad más rotunda, procurando las maestras, con labores y enseñanzas apropiadas al hogar, dar carácter a sus escuelas' (Alted 1984: 187) [femininity will shine in girls' schools, as teachers endeavour, with activities and lessons that are appropriately domestic, to give character to their schools]. But it was not only education that aimed to gender the girl as feminine, the myths that underpinned the discourse of domestic femininity were manifest not only in the classroom but permeated everyday life in the accumulation of cultural artefacts, such as comics and toys.

A typical illustration of a girl in Spanish children's culture of the Francoist period depicts her in her relationship with a younger child, usually a baby brother, or a doll

to underline her nurturing qualities and 'natural' tendency towards motherhood. The dominant representation of a girl in the maternal role in Spain is with an infant boy, or multiple young boy siblings, a relationship which begins to explain the ideal of Spanish motherhood. It is interesting also that the boy doll and the boy child are interchangeable in the cultural imagination. Let us take *Mari-Luz* by Josefina Álvarez de Cánovas as an example. This is a didactic novel written by Álvarez de Cánovas, a school inspector, to be read in the classroom about a girl who takes on the role of carer of a multitude of younger siblings after the death of her mother: 'no ha habido niña en el mundo que haya sido tan feliz vistiendo a sus muñecas como lo ha sido ella vistiendo y lavando de veras a sus hermanitos, muñequillos vivos que la Virgen puso en sus manos' (Álvarez de Cánovas 1944a: 9) [there has never been in the entire world a girl that has been so happy dressing her dolls as she has been dressing and washing her little brothers, the real, live little dolls that the Blessed Virgin has placed in her care]. Adela Turin, an Italian feminist, in her article on the paucity of models of girlhood to be found in Spanish children's literature entitled 'Hermosas, cariñosas y pacientes' [Beautiful, loving and patient], identifies this curious development in stories for girls: 'hemos leído cientos de narraciones de finales de siglo y de principios del nuestro en las que la madre muere joven: de fiebre puerperal, de tuberculosis, de exceso de trabajo, de pronto, si es pobre, y de tristeza y de males misteriosos, si no lo es' (1989: 26) [we have read hundreds of turn-of-the-century narrations and ones from this (twentieth) century in which the mother dies young: of puerperal fever, tuberculosis, an excess of hard work, suddenly, if she is poor, and of sadness and mysterious illnesses, if she is not]. The family structure does not collapse because 'las hijas estan dispuestas para el relevo' (Turin 1989: 26) [daughters are ready to take over].

However, when describing the representation of the nuclear family in Spain, Turin makes an interesting mistake. In basing her analysis of the sexist message encoded in pictorial illustrations of the girl's position in the family on American research, she writes: 'Los niños son, casi siempre, dos: el varón es más alto; la niña, graciosa, es pequeña' [there are almost always two children: the boy is the tallest; the cute girl is small] from which she concludes that 'Varón y hembra reproducen el esquema fuerza y debilidad' (Turin 1989: 25) [male and female reproduce the scheme of strength and fragility]. This distorts the actual representation of the girl's position within Spanish familial ideology of the early Franco period, for she is not illustrated as the fragile creature that needs to be protected by male potency, but as a mother substitute, and the male-female relationship is actually depicted in reverse: the boy is helpless, an infant, and the girl is the larger of the two figures. It should be emphasized that the Spanish maternal figure is not characterized by weakness, it is only that she possesses a different type of strength to the male of the species. At school, every boy who was taught 'formación político-social' [social-political formation] using M. Antonio Arias's *Mis segundos pasos* [My second steps] would learn that a good mother 'se quitaría el pan de la boca para que nosotros no pasásemos hambre' (Arias 1951: 186) [would take the bread from her mouth so that we should not feel hungry]. In writing about 'la psicología de los sexos' [the psychology of the sexes], Josefina Álvarez de Cánovas usefully illustrates the concept of female strength: 'se dice de la mujer que es sexo débil

para el hacer, no para el padecer; en el padecer, en el sacrificio, en la abnegación no es sexo débil, es campeón de fortaleza' (Álvarez de Cánovas 1941: 343–4) [it is said that a woman is the weakest sex in her actions, not in her feelings; in feeling, in suffering, in sacrifice she is not the weakest sex, but the champion of strength]. In 'La buena hija' [The good daughter], a short didactic tale found in J. M. Pla-Dalmau's schoolbook for children aged seven to eight years of age, *El nuevo camarada: segunda parte* [The new comrade: second part], a mother is on her deathbed and her son is crying out 'dame pan' [give me bread]. This story is accompanied by a drawing in which the girl towers over her young brother who merely stares up at her helplessly and sobs. The girl then picks up her doll and runs into the street: 'Momentos después, sollozando, decía a una señora: Tome mi muñeca, señora; déme para pan' (Pla-Dalmau 1950: n.p.) [Moments later, crying, she told a woman: Take my doll, ma'am; give me (money) for bread]. The doll is then exchanged for food, the woman becoming the poor family's benefactress thanks to the daughter's sacrificial act.

This cultural representation of larger girl and smaller boy is repeated in doll culture, for Leonor Coello who created Mariquita Pérez – whom I will discuss shortly – did not create *baby* Mariquita dolls, she only created *baby boy* dolls. Although Mariquita was manufactured 'equal' in age to the girl who would own her – a little girl aged roughly between six and ten years of age – making it possible to interpret her in the light of Simone de Beauvoir's interpretation of doll as alter ego and mirror, her brother Juanín was made available in three versions: a small baby 'para las niñas con instinto maternal más desarrollado' (Yubero and Conde 1996: 88) [for the girl with a more developed maternal instinct], an eight-month old version with hair, and eyes that could open and close, and a boy child of the same age as Mariquita. Contemporary Spanish feminists, in *Españolas en la transición: de excluidas a protagonistas (1973–1982)* [Spanish women during the transition: from marginalized to protagonists (1973–1982)], when seeking to explain the model of womanhood that was imperative during the regime, focus on Mariquita Pérez: 'El siguiente anuncio se zambulle de lleno en la mujer modelo-franquismo: "Mariquita Pérez / para las mujeres / desde que son niñas / retoño de hogar", porque hay que empezar pronto a enseñar el sagrado valor de la maternidad a las mujeres y las muñequitas son lo mejor' (Salas *et al.* 1999: 409) [The following advertisement goes straight to the core of the concept of the ideal Francoist woman: 'Mariquita Pérez / for women / who from girlhood / belong to the home'. Because one has to make an early start in teaching the sacred value of maternity to women and little dolls are ideal]. However, as Salas *et al.* point out, the project of using the doll to instil desires of motherhood in Spanish girls could only fail because 'el problema en el que no pensaron los anunciantes es que Mariquita y su hermano Juanín no eran asequibles para casi ninguna niña española por su precio' (Salas *et al.* 1999: 409) [the problem which the promoters did not think about was that Mariquita and her brother Juanín were beyond the reach of almost all Spanish girls because of their price].

### The doll as luxury object

Mariquita Pérez – who, as the publicity proclaimed, was ‘la muñeca que se viste como una niña’ (Yubero and Conde 1996: 82) [the doll that dresses like a little girl] – is a direct descendant of the nineteenth-century ‘Bébé’ dolls. She was designed by Leonor de Coello and manufactured initially in Onil (Alicante), one of the most important doll-manufacturing towns in Spain, by the doll artisan Bernabé Molina.<sup>3</sup> Although the appearance of Mariquita Pérez changed slightly over the years – she was in production from 1940 to the early 1970s – she was created to look like a healthy and well-loved little girl: soft dark curls framing a chubby face, wide blue eyes, a healthy skin colouring ranging from sun-kissed to tanned, and chunky arms and legs. It must be borne in mind that the marketing of this luxury doll was performed on a unique stage, that of a war-ravaged and fragile nation-state; as Helen Graham has written: ‘culture, for the urban poor especially, came to revolve around the procuring of food and warmth: basic necessities’ (1995: 188). In a poem on the absurdities and injustices of postwar Spain, published originally in 1954, working-class poet Gloria Fuertes wrote:

y qué me dices  
de Mariquita Pérez  
que la compran abrigos de seiscientas pesetas  
habiendo tanta niña sin muñeca ni ropa. (Fuertes 1994: 56–7).

[and what do you think  
of Mariquita Pérez  
that they buy her coats costing six hundred pesetas  
when there are so many girls without a doll or clothes?]

Mariquita Pérez sold for around 100 pesetas making this particular doll an inaccessible item to most Spanish girls at a time when the price of a dozen eggs was thirty pesetas – half the weekly salary of someone working in the textile industry (Yubero and Conde 1996: 142). Far more affordable during the postwar years was a cheaply moulded and garishly coloured *papier mâché* doll known generically as ‘Pepona’ for sale in ‘el barato’ [street market]. Carmen Gabriel Galán, in the children’s book *Las travesuras de Trastita* [Trastita’s antics], has her protagonist describe a Pepona: ‘Tengo una muñeca, vestida... ¡De verde sí, hijitas, de verde rabioso! Con un lazo encarnado, unos zapatos de charol y unas ondas preciosas en el pelo rubio’ (1957: 65) [I have a doll dressed... in green, yes my little ones, a bilious green! With a red ribbon, patent leather shoes and pretty waved blonde hair].

Mariquita Pérez, like the Pepona, was made of a variation of *papier mâché*, ‘cartón-piedra’, making both types of dolls more attractive than the nineteenth-century bisque dolls, which were far too fragile to play with. However, one of the reasons that Mariquita Pérez was so expensive is related to the complexity of the manufacturing process. A jointed doll, each section of the body was moulded separately, covered with many coats of paint, and the face – the body part which requires the most attention – had to be worked on manually to insert the glass eyes in their sockets, as well as open the mouth to insert the tongue and teeth. This face then had to be ‘made-up’ by



hand-painting the eyebrows, eyelashes, lips and cheeks, before attaching the wig.<sup>4</sup> Her price was also exorbitant because it was not merely a case of purchasing the doll, it was also necessary for this doll to have a huge wardrobe and many accessories, such as glasses, handbags, a rosary, and a poodle, to name some of the most exquisite accessories in the catalogues of the period.

Commercial dolls are a valuable source of information on the style of looking and acting feminine, or masculine, that is widely expected and enforced in a given society. So it is not surprising that, in a society which segregated boys' and girls' culture to the point of banning co-education – proposed by the Nationalists in September 1936 but not enforced by law until 1945 (Gallego Méndez 1983: 154) – and creating a masculine and feminine curriculum and culture, Mariquita's and Juanín's wardrobe reflect a rigid demarcation of gender roles. In keeping with Francoist ideology, which regulated women's presence in the workplace and curtailed her professional choices (Folguera Crespo 1997: 540–3), the wardrobe of Mariquita Pérez did not contain a single item that represented any profession. On the other hand, Juanín could be dressed as a bullfighter in an elaborate 'traje de luces' [bullfighter's costume] with 'capote bordado y montera' [hand-embroidered cape and headpiece], a football player, or a sailor, among other career-related costumes. These items were initially made in Coello's workshop which employed skilled seamstresses to make the elaborate costumes to order. Later, as demand increased, as Consuelo Yubero and Javier Conde reveal in *La España de Mariquita Pérez* [Mariquita Pérez's Spain] (1996), the work would be farmed out to convents and women's prisons. Penal labour formed the backbone of the industrial boom in the postwar period, not only were prisoners used as free labour by the state and the army, they were also hired out to private capital (Graham and Labanyi 1995: 177). Quite apart from the issue of free labour, it could be argued that there is an added moral dimension to the manufacture of dolls by female prisoners, wherein the doll is instrumental in social reform. Although an under-researched area, there is one important historical precedent of dolls being made by women or girls who were classed as deviants, such as prostitutes, or were destitute: the so-called 'Door of Hope' dolls made in Shanghai between 1901 and 1949 under the auspices of The Door of Hope Missions (Heyerdahl 1982). By engaging in the manufacture of dolls, girls and women were not only learning an 'honest' trade, and being re-incorporated into society, but absorbing and reproducing idealized concepts about the human body, posture, and clothing – in the case of Mariquita Pérez, luxury clothing.

Carmen Martín Gaité points out that the cult of Mariquita Pérez had little to do with 'la mirada azul e inexpresiva de la pepona de sus sueños' [the blue and inexpressive gaze of the doll of her dreams] and that every girl's desire centred on 'los primorosos modelos de vestidos, abrigos, camisones, braguitas, diademas, turbantes, artículos de tocador, zapatitos y trajes de primera comunión o de fallera valenciana' (1994: 121) [the neat dresses, coats, nightdresses, underwear, alice bands, turbans, dressing table items, little shoes and first communion dresses or folkloric costume].<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the doll-owner could be dressed in identical fashion to her doll, and these clothes were made by the same seamstresses who made up the doll's costumes:

'Desde que dejan la cuna hasta que son mujeres/ las niñas del mundo entero visten en Mariquita Pérez' (Yubero and Conde 1996: 91) [from the moment they leave the cradle until they reach womanhood / girls the world over dress in Mariquita Pérez], wrote the doll's creator Leonor Coello. Here the doll represents the Spanish girl, motivating her to appreciate herself as an object on display, with a fine array of costumes and hair-styles to choose from. Beauvoir's interpretation of the function of the doll as a teaching aid not in the art of mother-craft but in femininity can be applied to Mariquita Pérez who, because of her huge wardrobe, is an instrument of apprenticeship in the art of feminine beauty and fashion when Spanish society was beginning to desire both social improvement and economic stability in the aftermath of war. What is interesting is that her appearance in the market in the early 1940s, which Martín Gaité pinpoints as a pivotal moment in Spanish culture, the dawning of a consumer era: 'se atisban ahora, al cabo de los años, los incipientes fulgores de la sociedad de consumo' (1994: 122) [now, after the passage of time, the dawning of a consumer society can be perceived], complicates the usual periodization. It can be argued that the Mariquita Pérez phenomenon invited consumerism prior to the 'economic miracle' of the 1960s.

Mariquita Pérez appeared on the market when few could afford to buy her, for many she remained an impossible and unattainable object of desire: 'Eran un símbolo de "status", eran muñecos para niños ricos' (Martín Gaité 1994: 122) [they were a status symbol, dolls for rich children]. But consumption is essentially about longing and yearning, and this doll captured the cultural imagination precisely because, with her chubby physical proportions and polished skin surface, Mariquita Pérez was the embodiment of desired health and wealth. She is one of the first Spanish dolls to valorize shopping, wardrobes and appearances. It is interesting that Mariquita Pérez's reign as the ultimate 'material girl' is eclipsed in the 1960s, a decade which marks the start of Spain's economic recovery and the development of a consumer culture. The shops are flooded by plastic dolls like Dulcito and Dulcita, Romeo and Julieta (despite the romantic name, these red-haired and freckled dolls were advertised as siblings), Tracy Maniqui (whose hair could be any desired length by winding it into the doll's head, or pulling it out to its full length) and, later on, Nancy and the American import Barbie.<sup>6</sup> With the advent of plastic, as the amount and variety of dolls increased, so did their accessibility to people who did not belong to the wealthy upper classes, previously the only sector that had been able to afford to purchase one of Leonor Coello's dolls and accumulate their large numbers of material possessions. As Helen Graham notes, in the 1940s, the so-called 'years of hunger': 'people dreamed, but very often of "material myths"' (1995: 242), from the most basic – food and shelter – to the luxury of clothing and accessories.

### **The doll as a sign of feminine virtue**

That the market value of the bisque or porcelain doll, as well as the handcrafted 'cartón-piedra' doll like Mariquita Pérez, was high in postwar Spain is reflected in girlhood culture of the period. Its luxury status, however, makes the use of the doll in didactic literature complex. The act of playing with dolls is made difficult in narra-

tives that aim to teach girls the value of feminine virtue and good behaviour. Didactic literature for girls is propelled by the ideological urge to compare the bad girl with the good girl, to punish the bad girl and reward the good one, and – if it is not too late – to transform the bad one into a good girl. Antonio J. Onieva, in *Niñas y flores: lecturas escolares para niñas* [Girls and flowers: school reader for girls], uses the doll to instil the virtue of humility and to teach self-control. In his tale ‘Las dos muñecas’ [The two dolls], Onieva contrasts the luxury artefact, the porcelain doll, with a humble rag doll – a type of doll that can easily be made at home with remnants. Marujita and Enriqueta, the owner of the porcelain doll, are arguing about which one is more beautiful, when Enriqueta declares ‘Fíjate en la mía’ [look at mine] adding ‘tiene la cara tan fina que parece de cera’ (1946: 13) [her face is so fine that it looks like wax], whereupon she drops it and ‘la cara de la muñeca estaba rota en cuatro pedazos’ (13) [the doll’s face was broken into four bits]. The rich girl is the bad girl because she is vain, proud and careless with her belongings, and her desire to show off her social position and wealth is punished when the doll is dropped and shattered. This tale ends with a series of morals, such as ‘los juguetes finos no se han hecho para las niñas atolondradas’ (Onieva 1946: 14) [fine toys have not been made for silly girls], wherein it is suggested that the porcelain doll can only rightfully belong to ‘good’ girls, because ‘cada niña debe tener el juguete que se merece’ (14) [each girl should have the doll she deserves]. The relationship between feminine conduct and feminine value is revealed in this tale, as Onieva declares that only good girls deserve to handle objects of extreme value and fragility – such as a porcelain doll – because they have conquered and channelled the negative aspects of their nature – characterized by desire, anger, ignorance, and aggression – into valuable feminine conduct. Furthermore, if a girl is good to her doll, as opposed to ‘torpe, ruda y desmanotada’ [clumsy, brusque and ham-fisted] she will take good care of her younger siblings: ‘las niñas que tratan bien a sus muñecos, tratan bien a sus hermanos pequeños’ (Onieva 1946: 14) [girls who look after their dolls, take good care of their younger siblings]. The doll is not the good girl’s alter ego in this particular narrative, but the prelude to child care. Not only is self-control rewarded first by being allowed to handle precious dolls, but the careful handling of these fragile objects indicates that good girls take excellent care of children. Valuable dolls should not be kept out of the hands of children, wrapped up, like the best china, in tissue or placed behind glass to be admired. Playing with items that could be irreparably damaged if handled carelessly can teach a valuable lesson, because babies, like bisque dolls, are precious too.

The concept that virtuous girls, not bad girls, are the ideal recipients of dolls, appears also in *Maribel: la niña de suburbios* [Maribel: the girl from the slums] (1944b), written by Josefina Álvarez de Cánovas to be read and discussed in the female classroom. In this novel the doll is a reward for fulfilling the rigorous demands of the feminizing process. *Maribel* is about the trajectory from vice to virtue of a girl from ‘Tetúan de las Victorias’, an area close to Madrid that became a satellite shantytown, through the influx of labourers and families to the capital in the early part of the twentieth century. *Maribel* is a ‘huérfana absoluta’ [total orphan], for her mother died a long time ago and her father is a violent alcoholic. However, all is not lost, as

Maribel is rescued by the love and devotion of a school teacher, the symbolically named Blanca Castilla. Here, Álvarez de Cánovas expresses quite accurately in the figure of Blanca Castilla the role of the Catholic educator as conceived after the Civil War, in that a teacher's vocation 'le imponía como al sacerdote y al militar, entregar su vida entera a la escuela' (Alted 1995: 180) [demanded, as in the case of priest or soldier, to dedicate one's whole life to the school]. The teacher-student relationship as saviour and saved can be read, in this case, as a narrative of conquest, for it can be no coincidence that the educator's surname is a reference to the central region of Spain, Castile, depicted in textbooks of the period as the cradle of Spanish civilization, and that her first name is a reference to the colour white, which can be read as a symbol of spiritual purity. By contrast, Maribel is classified as 'other' because her place of birth, 'Tetuán de las Victorias', although a real location, lends itself to a symbolic reading in its allusion to a Spanish colony. Jo Labanyi, when discussing war and missionary films from the 1940s and early 1950s, notes the parallel between colonial locations and Madrid's shanty-towns in the cultural imagination: 'the mise-en-scène constructs the jungle or shanty-town locations as a "heart of darkness"' (Labanyi 2000: 173). Maribel is characterized in the narrative as a 'savage' and 'exotic' girl who is successfully incorporated into society by the Catholic educator Blanca Castilla. The point in the narrative at which it is clear that Maribel has been transformed from bad girl – one who was violent, greedy, rude, loud, dirty, exhibitionist, and ignorant – to good girl is marked by the gift of a doll.

Maribel wakes up on the morning of Epiphany and, as befits the virtuous girl she has become, expects no presents at all: 'no pensaba en los Reyes que habían de ponerle; pensaba en ofrecerse a sí misma' (Álvarez de Cánovas 1944b: 91) [she did not think of what the Three Kings would give her; she thought only of offering herself (to God)]. It is the day of her First Communion (it must be noted that this ritual is preceded by an intense period of instruction when children are taught sacred history, some theological principles, and the concepts of sin and virtue – or, in other words, rules of conduct in a sacred context). While she is dressing for church, there is a knock on the door; 'un pimpante "botones"' [a splendid 'Buttons'] has brought her 'una muñeca lindísima, toda vestida de fino fieltro rosa, con sombrero rosa, zapatitos rosa, todo rosa' (Álvarez de Cánovas 1944b: 91) [a beautiful doll, completely dressed in fine pink felt, with a pink hat, pink shoes, pink all over]. She later finds out that the present came from a local benefactress, Doña Lolita, who has been impressed with the girl's efforts at self-improvement; the doll is a reward for fulfilling the demands of the feminizing process. By behaving according to a certain set of norms, the girl becomes valuable as a member of an 'ideologically' superior class who will recreate those values in subsequent generations. The novel concludes by placing the adult Maribel as a missionary in charge of converting children to Catholicism in foreign lands – the colonized shanty-town girl becomes a colonizer of other 'savage' children in turn.

This chapter ends, as all of the chapters in this novel do, with a series of demands on her girl readers. Here, Álvarez de Cánovas exhorts her readers to be generous: 'Nena, ¿has tenido tú muchas muñecas? ¿has pensado en que, tal vez, en tu misma casa habrá niñas que no habrán tenido jamás una muñeca en sus brazos? Si tienes

muchas, da una, por lo menos, a una niña pobre' [little girl, have you had lots of dolls? Have you thought that, perhaps, in your own home there may be girls who have never held a doll in their arms? If you have many, give one, at least, to a deprived girl], adding sententiously, 'y ésta que des que no sea la que ya no te sirve o la que ya no te ilusiona' (Álvarez de Cánovas 1944b: 94) [and the one that you give away must not be one that is no longer any good or that you don't like any more]. The act of sacrifice would not be complete without feeling a sense of loss. Josefina Álvarez de Cánovas does not, obviously, expect there to be a 'poor' girl reading this novel – hence the reference to the existence of deprived girls within the household, presumably the daughters of domestic servants or the 'portera' [doorkeeper]. The ideal reader is positioned as wealthy, owning a superabundance of dolls, and is, therefore, in need of training in acts of charity and beneficence if she is to become a valuable member of her class. It is clear that the sacrifice of a material object, like the doll, will teach the well-to-do girl something useful, because charity giving is part of the domestic role of wealthy women. But what function is the doll that leaves this girl's toy cupboard to perform? What is the 'poor' girl expected to derive from handling such an object?

It could be that the doll is meant to generate maternal feelings, although, as I have shown, the doll is not only a useful tool in training a girl in the art of mother-craft, it is also a marker of the feminine self – whether virtuous girl or consumer-oriented girl. Femininity is a formative fiction, by which I mean that it is a narrative that aims to pattern girls' behaviour and aspirations. Whatever the doll is meant to teach the deprived, it is clear that Josefina Álvarez de Cánovas proposes that the doll is an agent of transformation, because she, in common with many others, assumes that the doll has a 'real' effect upon the girl who holds her. If that is the case, dolls, as representations, can give us a clue to the system of ideas against which girls had in the past, and have in the present, to measure their behaviour. As Miriam Formanek-Brunell (1993) states, a doll is not a trivial artefact.

Working with Formanek-Brunell's statement that dolls are misunderstood as 'static representations of femininity and maternity' (1993: 1), throughout this article I have shown how dolls – whether real dolls like Mariquita Pérez or the wide range of 'paper' dolls that appear in girlhood literature – convey meanings and values that are not static or fixed. To make sense of the meanings and values generated by the doll, one must examine the context in which this object appears. Furthermore, Formanek-Brunell makes an obvious point, but one that is frequently overlooked, by demonstrating that the design and manufacture of dolls is not unchanging. When analysing dolls, and their representations in culture, it is essential to take into account the material aspects of production: Is it expensive or affordable? Is the doll made primarily in the form of a woman, a child or a baby? Is it made out of life-like wax, breakable porcelain, floppy felt, or tactile plastic? It becomes essential to understand how dolls are made at any one time and in any one culture to map out how that culture imagines the human body and, furthermore, to understand the impact that these representations of the human body – and all related material, from accessories to lifestyles – can have on those who consume them.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, Rogers (1999); DuCille (1994); Hanquez-Maincent (1988). The history of Barbie criticism is a large field, written mostly from an American feminist viewpoint, a field which continues to grow in the direction of race and queer studies. However, very little in this area of feminist and cultural studies concerns the matter of Barbie in the world. Hanquez-Maincent's study is interesting because she examines the ways in which French culture has absorbed the American import.
- 2 By refocusing her attention on the doll as an object with which children engage imaginatively, thereby appreciating girls' agency, Miriam Formanek-Brunell notes that children in nineteenth-century America showed their resistance to the parental/adult ideology by enacting 'funeral doll play' (1993: 8). This enables us to reinterpret, for example, the act of playing with dolls in the bath. The girl may not be washing the doll in a mimetic act of maternal care, in the case of a baby doll, or beautification, in the case of a child or adult doll but, perhaps, drowning the doll. Doubtless the study of games and/or signs of manipulation, aggression and rejection towards dolls would highlight issues of girls' agency and imagination in relation to their toys and their environment.
- 3 This information was taken from Mariquita Pérez's homepage on the internet: <http://www.mariquitaperez.com/pages/marperez.htm> (accessed 10 March 2001). Mariquita Pérez is being manufactured once again and is available in toy shops throughout Spain. The meanings she generates in today's market, though, are different. She is redolent of nostalgic associations. Her re-appearance in the market is a manifestation of Spain's current fascination with retro-cultural objects, like the plethora of facsimiles of Francoist childhood publications available in the bookshops (Harvey 2001). Susan Stewart points out in her book *On Longing* (1993) that the miniature is intimately linked to the structure of memory, of childhood, and nostalgic longing. It is interesting, therefore, that Mariquita Pérez is currently available in 'original' size, and in a miniature version that stands only nineteen centimetres tall. In fact, Editorial Altaya began to publish a part-work collection entitled *El mundo de Mariquita Pérez* in September 2001, comprising forty issues with this miniature doll given away free with the first number and an item of clothing with each subsequent part.
- 4 Insights into the complex manufacturing process of Mariquita Pérez were, once again, taken from her present manufacturer's website, which is cited in the note above.
- 5 A catalogue of the period announces the possibility of acquiring any number of regional costumes for Mariquita: 'Gitana Andaluza' [Andalusian gypsy] for 145 ptas or 'Gallega (con zuecos de madera)' [Galician (with wooden clogs)] for 250 ptas. These regional types are based on the lower classes, idealized cosily via folklore.
- 6 I would like to thank Celia Martín for recalling the names of these dolls.

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