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Cheap Toys for All
in Nineteenth-Century Europe

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ABSTRACT

In this article I will attempt to outline this process as it unfolded in some areas of what we can define Western Europe, in particular France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain. In order to do so I will draw a brief sketch of cheap print for children focusing on a subgenre: illustrated broadsides. I will then describe how printers of cheap print, capitalising on the emergence of juvenile audiences, literally flooded the market with cheap do-it-yourself paper toys in the nineteenth century. Finally, I will discuss printers' outputs in relation with the better-known tradition of the so-called Victorian novelties in order to highlight some transnational phenomena that deserve further investigation. This paper presents a work in progress under development in *Children and Transnational Popular Print 1700-1900*, funded by the European Union under the Horizon 2020 (framework programme for research and innovation, grant agreement 838161).

KEYWORDS

Cheap print; illustrated broadsides; penny prints; paper toys

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The price of harlequinades, a form of turn up book that can be considered a starting point in the history of movables for children, was 6 pence uncoloured (Reid-Walsh 2007, 751-752, see also Vagliani 2019, 184). If we look up this price in a historical currency converter, we learn it is comparable to the cost of a simple meal (bread and cheese) or of two pints of beer. Leaving aside the fact that such a calculation should be treated with caution, as relative value is difficult to obtain (Measuring Worth 2021), one realises that, although the commodity was relatively inexpensive, it was not affordable for everyone.

Harlequinades, first published by Robert Sayer around 1767 (Reid-Walsh 2007, 752) were probably accessible to middle-class families, often considered as the lower end of the market when dealing with children's books in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, a broad spectrum of poorer people is often forgotten, especially those living in rural areas, that also engaged with printed artefacts, although less frequently and often less canonically. It is now shared that a wide range of ephemeral cheaply printed products circulated widely both in urban and rural contexts, and in many ways encountered the lives of children, such as, for instance, illustrated broadsides and chapbooks - or their equivalents outside Britain (Carnelos and Marazzi 2021, 210-211). In the nineteenth century, some of these materials, especially prints, evolved through contamination with more refined toy books; this resulted in the distribution of a broad range of ephemeral materials that, if not definable as proper moveable books, offered to children interactive experiences in more affordable printed formats.

1. Cheap print, a working definition

When dealing with printed products from the past, widely circulating in different social context, a necessary reference is to the study of 'popular literature'. This historiographic trend was initiated by French social historians (Mandrou 1964, Bollème 1965) and later taken up by new generation of scholars that challenged the concept of 'popular' as something restricted to lower classes (Chartier 1984). In fact, Peter Burke's scholarship on popular culture had already provided a possible perspective that freed the adjective popular from any judgment of value (Burke 1978). The different approach has partly to do with the adjective being differently nuanced in different languages and relating scholarly cultures. However, more recent scholarship on the circulation of the printed word across the society tends to promote a use of the term popular related to cultural phenomena widely shared by individuals, irrespective of their social status. This concept of popularity has been adopted by scholarship on cheaply printed artifacts, such as chapbooks and their equivalents (*bibliothèques bleue* in France and *pliegos de cordel* in Spain, for instance), and broadsides (either containing primarily texts, as ballads in Britain, or illustrations).

What is important to retain here of decades of scholarship in the field, is that cheaply printed products were not confined to a poorer or less cultivated sections of the society. Conversely, being cheap they could circulate widely, for instance among urban middle classes, but also, although perhaps less frequently, among working classes and peasants. Moreover, they often represented a way, for texts and formats initial-

ly restricted to the élites, to become commonplace for wider audiences (Chartier 1984).

Another important adjective to be briefly discussed is 'cheap'. It is not the norm to know the prices for this kind of printed products: only seldom did cheap booklets carry their price on their covers – what is more, many of these products had no cover at all. It is more often the case that we have access to bulk prices, noted in probate inventories or other archival documents produced by printers, publishers and sellers. However, book historians can recognise cheaply printed materials from a range of features, including their materiality (Carnelos 2021). First of all, as the expense for paper was the variable that influenced more the production costs of books in the early modern period, the use of just one printing sheet is a hint for cheapness (Watt 1991, 1). Illustrations printed through woodblocks are another sign of little cost (although illustrated broadsides printed from plates could in some cases be relatively affordable, as argued by O'Connell 1999, 48). Moreover, in popular printed products illustrations were often uncoloured or roughly dab-coloured by cheap workforce such as women and children. Finally, cheaply printed materials, although available also in bookshops, were usually distributed through itinerant trade.

When we do have a price for these items, or we attempt to calculate it, it is usually less than the six pence at which Sayer's Harlequinades were sold (or comparable currency in other areas). However, this does not automatically imply that many people were willing to renounce to other commodities (food, drinks) in order to buy printed products, even when they cost a penny or less. Nonetheless practices such as collective reading, and street-selling combined with performance, could enlarge the audience of cheap print also to those individuals that did not purchase books and prints (see for instance the depictions included in Milano 2015, 163-164). Even reuse of printed paper for purposes other than reading (for instance wrapping goods) played a relevant role in widening the chances of poor people to engage with printed artifacts.

2. Illustrated broadsides for all

After having set some coordinates for the discussion of cheaply printed materials, in this paragraph I will present a particular typology that could imply a form of interactivity: the illustrated broadside. Different kinds of broadsides circulated in Western Europe before the nineteenth century (Gomis and Salman 2021). A typology that has sometimes been defined an ancestor of comics was widespread in different areas: stories were narrated through sequences of woodcuts, sometimes accompanied by short captions in rhyme. This kind of broadside was particularly widespread in Spain, where it originated in the 17th century (or even earlier) with the name of *auca*, and, later, of *pliego de aleluyas*. *auques* (plural of *auca*), were specifically Catalan and consisted of sheets containing encircled woodcuts without captions. The possible use of these broadsides remains unclear, but they have been associated with astrological prognostications. Due to pressure from the Church of Spain, they progressively evolved in a format perceived as less prophane, that of *aleluyas*: broadsides that contained illustrations of biblical figures and saints arranged in grids, each carrying the word 'aleluya' as a caption. The illustrations, printed through woodblocks, were usually cut out as small cards and thrown in the air during religious processions at Easter (Gomis and Salman 2021, 103). These prints seem to have evolved into another interactive practice, that of *Loterías*: similar sheets that contained usually prophane woodcuts; the latter were now cut out to be put in a bag or box and then drawn lots in order to win pre-arranged prizes (Martínez-González 2013, 387). What is more, these sheets were progressively used as reading materials: from the eighteenth century, woodcuts were increasingly frequently accompanied by rhyming captions that could help the process of communicating concepts and stories through images. In the nineteenth century, woodcuts contained in a *pliego de aleluyas* could depict children reading broadsides (Pelegrín-Sandoval, 1992, 287). It has been argued that in a less literate Spain,

where reading could prove challenging for many people, the prevalence of images in illustrated broadsides was a key for success and that, although cheap print in book format did exist (the so-called *pliegos de cordel*), illustrated broadsides could cater for the needs of less literate audience and children (*ibid.*, 287; Botrel 1995).

Similar sheets are attested to have circulated in astonishing numbers in the Northern and Southern Netherlands from the seventeenth century. Initially printed in Amsterdam, Deventer, Zaltbommel, Den Bosch and Rotterdam, and then in Turnhout in the Southern Netherlands (now Belgium), they survive in private collections later donated to heritage institutions. High survival rates of the Dutch sheets might be due to high print runs achieved: between 12,000 and 25,000 copies of one single title were printed in the 18th century Dutch Republic (today's Netherlands). It has been estimated that one print for every second Dutchman was issued each year between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Gomis and Salman 2021, 98) (**Fig. 1**).

Fig. 1 | *Klaas Kapoen.* Turnhout: Brepols & Dierckx zoon, [1833-1880]. Amsterdam, Koninklijke Bibliotheek.

Many scholars have attempted to classify contents and functions of these sheets; a difficult task, as they covered almost all areas of communication and common knowledge. Not by chance they have been defined as the early modern mass media (ibid; Harms 2015). They often had an encyclopaedic aim, for instance listing animals, birds, plants, historical figures, cities, traditional costumes, types of craftmanship, street sellers, types of popular entertainment, dance, and so forth. But they could also be printed for recreational purposes, proposing illustrated versions of folk tales, fables and fairy tales. More canonical literature was present in some sheets that proposed visual versions of literary works and theatre plays (Gomis and Salman 2021, 105-108). Satirical and humorous prints were also widely circulated.

Trying to infer the possible uses of these prints is even more challenging, as playful and entertaining use was often mixed with didactic and moralising purposes. Prints containing Abcs or other basic notions could be proposed in forms that seem chosen to please the eye, differently from what happened in cheaply printed didactic books, that were often very basic in terms of layout. Similarly, successful themes of cheap print (in all formats) such as, for instance, 'The Land of Cockaigne' or 'The World Upside Down', were retold through images, thus reproposing popular satiric motifs for humorous purposes. However, in the meantime they offered to their readers/observers tried and tested moral lessons by the means of allegory and subversion (Babcock 1978; Mori and Perin 2015).

Broadsides could also have interactive and playful uses: as it happened in Spain with *aleluyas* and *loterias* they were used to play simple games. In England and Scotland, but also in the Netherlands, pictures cut out from broadside known as lotteries or dabbities could be hidden between the pages of a booklet. Children would than slide a pin between the pages: if, by doing so, they found a picture, they won it (O'Connell 1999, 33; Shefrin 2009, 59-60).[1]

All over Europe illustrated broadsides were commonplace and enjoyed by a wide audience in their different functions (religious, entertaining, instructing, informing, playful and so forth), however the format based on a sequence of vignettes with captions became predominant only around the beginning of the 19th century. This was partly due to the effort of German and French printers, that adopted this format and brought it to new levels, especially after adopting lithography (Mainardi 2017, 211-215). These printers were based respectively in Neuruppin (Brandenburg) and in a range of towns in Eastern France (the best-known of which is Épinal, but also Metz, Nancy, Pont-à-Mousson and Wissembourg need to be mentioned).

Considering just the printers that are recognised as the leaders of this golden age of illustrated broadsides, Kühn in Neuruppin, whose production is known as Neuruppiner *Bilderbogen* , and Pellerin in Épinal (although it has been demonstrated that Wentzel in Wissembourg was probably comparably successful - Lerch 1982), it is striking to observe that they both adopted lithography in order to expand their business (in 1825 Kühn and around 1850 Pellerin); moreover, this move was combined with the deliberate choice of addressing children as a specific audience (Mistler et al. 1961, 122; Mainardi 2017, 199; Auringer 2019, 20)

It is widely shared that from the 18th century onwards, mass production of educational aids and books for children became a relevant feature of the book trade (Alderson and de Marez Oyens, 2006; Grenby 2009). This is due to many different factors, from demographic change to improved social mobility, from the increase of literacy rates to the Enlightened view on children and education. What is sure is that the prospect to capitalise on children and young people as a commercial target was not disregarded by publishers across Europe (Dietz 2020) This happened at different paces in different areas, for instance in Spain and Italy we have to wait the late 19th century before the launch of a sustained production of prints and books deliberately designed with children in mind (Carnelos and Marazzi 2021). The debate is still lively about how much confessional reasons influenced literacy rates and with it the growth of the book trade in different areas (Roggero 2018; 2021, 33-44). However, it is along the 19th century, with free mass education enforced across Europe, and consequently increased literacy, that books for children really take off all over the continent. This is also the time when the golden age of illustrated juvenile broadsides can properly take off.

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[1] This use is attested in a painting by Jan Steen, *A School For Boys and Girls*, depicting a classroom in the 1670s Netherlands, preserved at the National Galleries of Scotland https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/5676/school-boys-and-girls. I shall thank Aernout Borms for highlighting this during a private exchange. On (nineteenth-century) dabbities see also a collection at Glasgow University Library https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/feb2002.html. I shall thank Robert MacLean for pointing me to this. All weblinks have been last accessed on 17/08/2021.

As their ancestors circulating among a general audience, broadsides for children contain a wealth of subjects and stories, from didactic prints depicting the alphabet to natural history, from portraits of historical figures to fairy tales, by then definitely perceived as suitable reading material for children (and consequently adapted to the presumed needs of the target audience). Fables and fairy tales from the tradition became the core of these narrative sheets for children; as the printers from France literally inundated the Western market, including the Americas, with their prints, this choice influenced the late nineteenth-century evolution of this printed product. (**Figs. 2, 3**).

Fig. 2 | *Le Chat Botté (Contes de Fées).* Épinal: Pellerin [second half of the nineteenth century]. © Mucem Marseille.

Fig. 3 | *Aschenbrödel, oder der Gläserne Pantoffel.* Neuruppin: Kühn, 19th century. Milan, Civica Raccolta delle Stampe "A. Bertarelli" – Castello Sforzesco.

From stories to toys

What Hannah Field (2019, 21) defines as "cross-pollination between children's books and nineteenth century visual culture" is also true for illustrated broadsides, and in a bi-directional way. Interactive uses of illustrated broadsides had been practised in cheap print from the seventeenth century, as described for *aleluyas* and lottery prints; also boardgames, not explicitly aimed to children, were traditionally printed by the purveyors of illustrated prints (Milano 1993, 75). Moreover, in the Catholic world, broadsides allowing to build do-it-yourself nativity scenes were already successful in the late eighteenth century. Here the principle was to paste a broadside, illustrated with appropriate landscapes and figures, on thick paper

or cardboard; after doing so, location and characters were cut out and, where necessary, folded to build a three-dimensional paper crib.

Broadsides containing small depictions of soldiers were also a successful do-it-yourself paper toy from the late eighteenth century (Ibid., 91). Moreover, cutting out figures from broadsides was already in use for decorating purposes: many printers already sold sheets for lacquering (a renowned example is that of Remondini in Northern Italy – see Milano 1990, 198-213; 234-239). The same principle could be used for any purpose, and so it was. A wider range of paper soldiers, but also of dolls, theatres and construction toys started to appear in the form of illustrated broadsides from the 1850s. Broadsides could be bought as single sheets, or in series that allowed the purchaser to own a complete set of figures to play with. (**Figs. 4,**

Fig. 4 [Soldatini: banda a cavallo]. Bassano: Remondini [1840] – Milan, Civica Raccolta delle Stampe "A. Bertarelli" – Castello Sforzesco.

Fig. 5 *Officiers & soldats turcs & russes*. Épinal: Pellerin, s.d. – © Mucem Marseille.

5) This was of course a profitable form of serialisation, a feature of the nineteenth century printed market that was thus successfully applied to broadsides for children.

If interactivity was something already common in the print trade before the Victorian golden age of novelties, printers of cheap illustrated broadsides started to renovate their stocks when inspired by publishers specialising in books for better-off children. In the second half of the nineteenth century series of broadsides issued by Pellerin, Kühn, and other colleagues increasingly included do-it-yourself paper dolls, paper theatres, peep shows and other toys. Illustrated broadsides thus made available to a wide audience what we can call the 'highlights of the Victorian novelty'. The latter had of course already been copied by continental publishers of books for children and toys for the upper end of the market, so that the production of both refined toy books and broadsides containing paper toys flourished across Europe. This happened through practices that we would nowadays define as piracy; however, copying ideas was quite the norm in the absence of international copyright laws (Marazzi 2018). Reflecting again on publishing strategies, also in this case serialisation was highly exploited: in order to build their theatre, children had to buy more

than one broadside; moreover, a range of different options for the backdrop was also available (**Figs. 6, 7**).

Fig. 6 Devanture de theatre. - Place publique. Épinal: Pellerin, s.d. – © Mucem Marseille.

Fig. 7 *Décors de theatre. - Chambre rustique, coulisses et accessoires.* Épinal: Pellerin, s.d. – © Mucem Marseille.

Shadow-light theatre games were perhaps the most popular type of paper toy that was disseminated through broadsides. Also in this case printers put in place interesting strategies, commercialising a range of products that catered for different levels of the market. Their basic sheets contained black silhouettes to be used to project stories on the wall with the help of a candle or lamp; in parallel they issued series of broadsides apt to construct do-it-yourself paper theatres to stage the silhouettes, and even booklets containing plays to inspire the players. (**Fig. 8**) The offer was nothing compared to the levels of elaboration that shadow-light toys and toy books could reach (see for instance Musli 2019, 43); however, it provided basic paper toys to children from social classes that had not previously been addressed by toy manufacturers. As a corollary, the success of shadow-light theatre games raises further awareness on the necessity to link scholarship on interactive printed artifacts with pre-cinema, insisting on exploring the abovementioned "cross-pollination" between children's books and visual culture. Not by chance already in the late eighteenth century many purveyors of popular broadsides had already specialised in optical views and prints for peep shows, a form of entertainment that attracted children, as attested by many coeval depictions (Milano 1988, 67).

Matthew Grenby has suggested that the evolutions in the trade of cheap print for children could be explained with William St Clair's idea of books moving down the demand curve, becoming cheaper and less refined when they

Fig. 8 *Schattentheater [...]* Ravensburg: Otto Maier, ca. 1900. Turin, Fondazione Tancredi di Barolo.

exhausted the "topmost tranche of the market" (St Clair 2004, 32).[2] This is also applicable to illustrated broadsides. Also in England, the homeland of novelties, cheaper versions of paper toys were available. Henry Mayhew, author of a famous account of street life in London in the nineteenth century, testified that working-class men, in particular mechanics, used to buy engraved sheets "for the amusement of their families for their families" (Mayhew 1861, vol. 1, 287). Titles such as 'Optical and Magical Delusions' and 'Magical Figures' are described by Mayhew as "rude street imitations of D. Paris's ingenious toy, called the 'Thaumascope'" (ibid.). Unfortunately, preservation rates for pictorial broadsides in the English-speaking countries are disappointingly low, which makes it difficult to properly include Britain in a trans-European history of cheap paper toys.

The repositioning of toys along the demand curve was not only made possible by the widening of juvenile audiences, due to the abovementioned demographical and social changes: technical progress also played an important part. After expertise in lithography, invented in the 1790s, became commonplace among printers, it was applied to illustrated broadsides. Containing mainly images, these products were in fact more easily printed with the new technique. At first they were still coloured through stencils, then mechanically coloured and, later in the nineteenth century, chromolithography made it easier and cheaper to print in colour.

Interestingly, in the late nineteenth century lithograph-printed narrative and interactive broadsides became a staple of the children book market also in some areas where the production of printed products for children was still poor – notably Italy. The decay of the Remondini dynasty – one of the most important print sellers in eighteenth century Europe – was probably caused, among many factors, by their inability to understand the excellent prospects offered by lithography. Had they adopted this new technique, perhaps they would have imitated the international colleagues addressing juvenile audiences.

However, another more recent dynasty of print sellers needs to be mentioned when dealing with juvenile printed products in Italy: Vallardi. The family was active in Milan, initially only as booksellers, from the 1750s, whereas Remondini had started their business one century before. Vallardi later specialised in prints for different levels of the market, in parallel with devotional books outsourced to partners, as they were not licensed as book printers. Their activity in the market of broadsides has not been thoroughly researched yet, but their catalogues of prints published in the 1820s are eloquent, showing subjects that range from soldiers to caricatures, from caricatures to historical prints (Catalogo Vallardi 1824). These book- and print sellers in Milan had a more farsighted attitude than Remondini: already in the first half of the nineteenth century they exploited their rolling presses and expertise to issue a (limited) range of educational prints, now included in their traditional catalogue of maps, treatises of visual arts and calligraphy, and art prints. In order to enlarge their business, they adopted lithography, which gave them a head start when, after mass education was enforced in the unified country in 1861, they profitably oriented their business towards didactic materials. Meanwhile, as a license was not needed any longer, they had also opened new printing departments, which allowed them to start a sustained production of textbooks and children's literature. In a couple of decades, they thus became one of the leaders of the Italian educational publishing trade (Marazzi 2014, 83-113).

Interestingly, Vallardi never published – as far as we know – narrative illustrated broadsides like those issued by Pellerin and colleagues. But new actors were then ready to enter a wider market. In particular, a Frenchman based in Italy, Pietro Clerc, who, perhaps through family contacts, in the 1860-70s became the

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[2] This has emerged during Grenby's presentations at the conferences *Books for Children. Transnational Encounters* (Copenhagen 2018 – proceedings forthcoming) and *The European Dimensions of Popular Print Culture* (Utrecht 2018). I am grateful to Matthew Grenby for discussing with me this idea during private exchanges as well.

dealer for Italy of broadsides printed by Charles Pinot in Épinal (Milano 1993, 14). If Clerc only commercialised these prints, usually issued in Épinal in French-Italian bilingual versions, the first Italian-based production of lithographed broadsides on the model of Épinal was started by the firm Lebrun-Boldetti. This was a Franco-Italian couple that, in the period 1872-1880, issued broadsides containing new, original stories in Italian, although visibly modelled on what was by then known as 'Imagerie d'Épinal'. It is not clear whether Mr Lebrun also had contacts or family in Eastern France, however, he surely knew the products of the local presses, and also imitated the choice on focussing on juvenile audiences (Ibid., 15). This led to the publication of new series of construction toys. Some of them were meant to play, once more, with characters and settings from fairy tales: in France as well as in Italy, using the same paste and cut method, children could build, for instance, the Ogre's palace for the story of Little Thumb, or Bluebeard's castle. Other series of construction sheets allowed purchasers to build paper miniatures of newly built monuments, of trains and other means of transport, and even of industrial expositions. Besides being an example of cross-over materials that could attract adults as well – a strategy that might suggest the persisting incertitude of the market in Italy – these construction broadsides are an interesting example, yet to be investigated, of how the material culture of the late nineteenth century could reflect the coeval spirit of confidence in technological progress, disseminated through illustrated broadsides as much as books and periodicals (**Figs. 9, 10**).
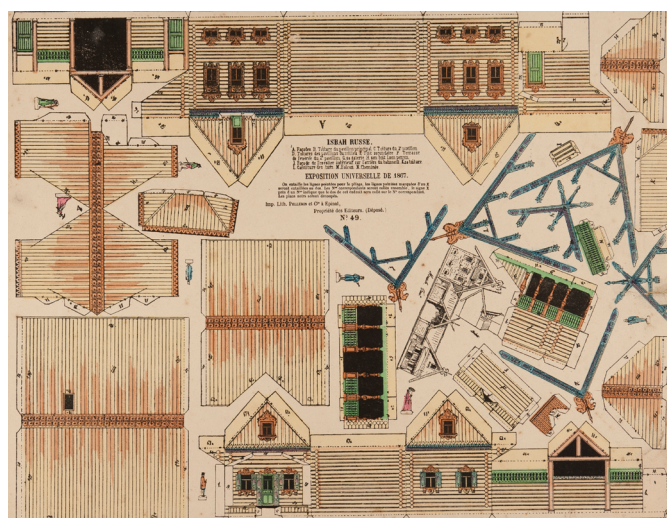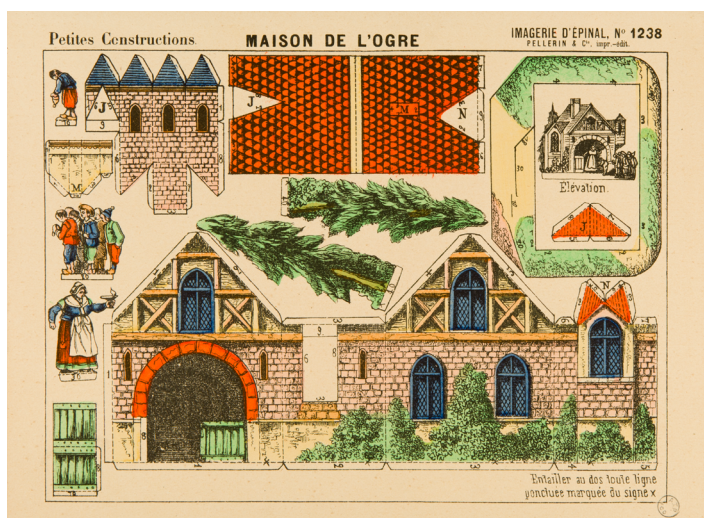

Fig. 9 | *Petites Constructions. Maison de l'ogre.* Épinal: Pellerin, s.d. – © Mucem Marseille.

Fig. 10 | *Isbah russe.* Exposition universelle de 1867. Épinal: Pellerin, s.d. – © Mucem Marseille.

Conclusions

As already stated in the opening lines of this paper, broadsides to be used as do-it-yourself toys cannot be considered proper moveable books. However, the definition of 'moveable books' has been recognised as something pushing bibliographic boundaries to their limits (Field 2019, 7-9). Often confined to a blurred non-book domain, toy books have much in common with *ephemera*, a category to which the paper toys that I have discussed in this essay have been argued to pertain (Shefrin 2009, 49). What is more, if, in the words of Field, "the history of the picture book begins with the harlequinade" (Ibid., 20-21) – a type of publication made, in short, of two sheets (Reid-Walsh 2007, 753) – broadsides giving life to paper toys need, in my view, to be included in a reflection on the description, conservation and enhancement of in-

teractive printed products.

If one of the long-term objectives of the collective reflection on moveable books proposed in this volume is to lay the basis for future preservation and cataloguing policies, illustrated broadsides would highly benefit from the inclusion in the category. The neglect to which these materials have been condemned is bound to their essence: if they were used, they were unlikely to survive. Moreover, these items were usually waived from legal deposit obligations and are therefore only episodically preserved in national libraries. They survive usually for unpredictable reasons, and often due to the dedication of private collectors, that have saved unsold copies otherwise doomed to pulping. Some of these individuals have later made their collections available to the public, a true blessing for historians – and for the society. However, the collectors' different choices have led to a dispersion of these materials across the whole range of cultural heritage institutions: libraries, archives, museums and galleries – especially in the very rare cases of mounted items. In some instances, dedicated institutions were created to preserve the donation of an individual: this is the case of Raccolta Bertarelli in Milan, an actual hub – sadly little known – for the illustrated broadsheets printed across Europe. More recently, something similar has happened in the Netherlands, with the Dutch collection of 'centsprenten' [Dutch illustrated broadsides known in English as (catch)penny prints] donated by Aernout Borms to the National Library of the Netherlands. Another instance is the Spanish collection of *pliegos de aleluyas* owned by Jesús María Martínez González, and studied in cooperation with the late Pedro Cerrillo and the 'Centro de Estudios de Promoción de la Lectura Infantil' at Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.

Besides being scattered in different kind of institutions, objects that, although issued by printers, are not properly books, rather mixed media, "not surprisingly […] represent complex cataloguing problems", this leading to them remaining often uncatalogued. This situation has been denounced by Jill Shefrin (2009, 115) for the Anglo-American context, but is valid also for continental Europe. If we are to establish new, adequate cataloguing standards that can include moveable books, the opportunity to include paper toys printed in broadsides, including mounted or partially used copies, is therefore not to be wasted. Being still uncatalogued, and therefore almost impossible to find, these materials have often been overlooked by both rare book experts and historians of juvenile book and material culture. A regrettable omission, as further research on these cheaper materials is likely to open a wide range of research questions that, if answered, could enable a better understanding of the coeval book trade, and society.

If we decide to include ephemeral paper toys in the future of preservation of moveable books, what can we expect from them? I will attempt to answer this question with the help of what I will call a 'success story': research on cheaply printed products carried out in the last six decades by book and cultural historians. Investigating the lower end of the book market has proven successful in shedding new light on actors and processes earlier unknown, resulting in a more inclusive history of the handpress era. Let us think to the obscure figures of peddlers and hawkers contributing to the distribution of printed products in remote rural areas. It has emerged than disabled people (lame, blind) could be employed in the itinerant book trade, sometimes as a form of charitable concession (Botrel 1973, Carnelos 2016, Salzberg 2021). In the case of nineteenth-century cheap coloured publications, including broadsides giving life to do-it-yourself paper toys, little is known, for instance, of the colouring process, except for – as already mentioned – that it was often a task assigned to women and children. Similarly to what has emerged for peddling networks, further investigation might allow to shed new light on some forms of unqualified employment, leading to learn more on typologies of workers usually underrepresented in historical reconstructions.

Secondly, a transnational approach to book history has lately proven successful in widening our knowledge of the international exchange of materials, techniques, and workforce. As far as cheap print is concerned, much has been discovered, not only about international networks for the distribution of chapbooks and

broadsides, but also a revealing picture has emerged of the cultural contamination that this movement of people and products brought about. When dealing with moveable books – from the upper to the lower end of the market – transnational contaminations are a fairly unexplored field, likely to reveal interesting patterns for the whole spectrum of the market: from how new techniques were differently imported and applied in different areas, to the dissemination of new models and trends. Cheaper interactive materials are undoubtedly to be taken into account, as they have already proven a breeding ground for transcultural contaminations. I have mentioned how much Victorian novelties influenced printers of illustrated broadsides to produce paper toys. In parallel, international commercial partnership could lead to the introduction of new printed products in previously virgin markets.

Thirdly, as far as reception is concerned, recent scholarship has investigated the role played by cheap print in fostering reading practices among the semi-literates. Dealing with illustrated prints, the hybridisation of popular broadsides with didactic tools conceived to be hung on the walls of classrooms is a phenomenon influenced by mass schooling and the related need to teach simultaneously to many children. Not to mention how illustrated broadsides contributed to visual literacy among people that before the nineteenth century were likely to see only one or two illustrated prints in their whole lives (Anderson 1991; Mainardi 2017). The same can be said for broadsides giving life to interactive experiences, that made available to a wider range of people what is commonly known as pre-cinema. Moreover, as we deal with toys, they surely were not available in every family even in the late nineteenth century. There is an interesting prospect here of understanding how much the availability of cheap paper toys influenced play culture in working class and peasant families.

Finally, as much as investigating chapbooks for children has shed new light on the contaminations between children's literature and the coeval popular culture (Grenby 2008) working on juvenile materials different from books is likely to provide fresh information on the shaping of a market for commodities specifically aimed to children. Jill Shefrin (2021, forthcoming) has recently shown evidence that well before the so-called 'birth of children's literature', usually set in England around the 1740's, London print- and map sellers exploited their technical expertise in intaglio printing to design new objects specifically for children, such as hornbooks, battledores, and other educational aids. Sometimes they could be quite expensive, but, in some instances, they consisted of just an illustrated sheet and costed less than six-pence. This pattern can be retraced elsewhere, for instance in Italy a century later, with the already mentioned Vallardi family. In parallel Carmen Bravo-Villasante (1972, 75) has argued that in Spain illustrated broadsides could have represented a form of juvenile reading before books specifically addressed to children were not developed. This is sparse evidence so far, but it surely suggests that we have to look better into non-book materials if we want to enrich our understanding of the market for children's books in early modern Western Europe. This is also true for other commodities such as toys. It would be interesting to understand, for instance, what specificities of the French market led to

Fig. 11 ‖ *Poupees à habiller.* S.d.e. – © Mucem Marseille.

the failure of the first, costly, paper dolls books published in Paris in the early nineteenth century, highly inspired by English toy books. Conversely, a few decades later (from the 1860s) paper dolls became a best-seller when made available through the broadsides printed in Épinal (Renonciat 2019) (**Fig. 11**).

In parallel, if London was undoubtedly one of the centres for the production of high-quality toy books, an assessment of the relevance, for the London book trade, of the little preserved engraved broadsides offering pre-cinema amusements to the working classes, is still to come.

As anticipated, this article cannot provide an answer to the aforementioned questions, as research presented here is still at an early stage. But if librarians and scholars will agree to include the so far neglected do-it-yourself paper toys in future projects on preservation and enhancement of interactive books, this will lay the basis for deeper understanding of a part of our printed heritage that still lies poorly catalogued – and therefore often inaccessible – in a wide range of collections. By doing so, I am confident that scholars of the future will be able to answer at least some of the current research questions.

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