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## ***Children and How They Came into Fashion on Printed Textiles between 1770 and 1840***

In the eighteenth century in England, a new technique for printing on fabric was perfected, which made possible the reproduction of large designs by using the principle of engraving. Imported into France in the 1770s, copperplate printing (term used at the time to denote these single-colour prints in red or blue) helped the rapid development of monochrome images on fabrics for interior decoration, with figurative images borrowed from a certain style of painting and prints.

Well before manufacturers invented fabrics for children, the textiles known as *toiles de Jouy* made much use of the child, from new-born to school-age, in its figurative prints. *Putti*, little cherubic babies, were a frequent motif in compositions that included the same decorative procedures as paintings of interiors and decorative arts. But in the late eighteenth century, a genuine vision of childhood appeared in some compositions. These images expressed the influence of the Age of Enlightenment that changed the perception of relationships within the family, notably between the mother and her children. At this time, it was education rather than childhood that became the real challenge for the philosophers. The making of the 'new man' now came by way of childhood, at the time when the child is seen as an entirely separate being and an adult-to-be.

*The feeling of childhood*, to recall the words of Philippe Ariès and, more broadly, the preoccupations which surrounded the young child, are reflected in the printed textile (Ariès 1960). At the end of the eighteenth century, these representations evolved into the placing of the child at the centre of the family,

reflecting the arrival of a middle-class society in which the child's education became a real focus.

Between the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, the presentation of childhood was changing, the fabric makers following the taste and motifs spread by the print process. So how did this transformation come about in printed textiles and what were the sources of imagery for the designers. Starting with the biggest French manufacturers between 1770 and 1840, we will see how the idea of childhood was spread via the fabrics designed to persuade the biggest number of buyers to choose them for their interiors. And we will see how, in the nineteenth century, these designs promoted a real dialogue centred on the child.

The numerous exhibitions devoted to the depiction of childhood in textile production demonstrated that specialised fabrics for children, in both furnishing and clothing, did not exist before the end of the nineteenth century (Exhibition 2011 and 2013). In the eighteenth century, representations of children remain rare and do not form part of a particular genre. From the 1770s onward, single-colour copperplate prints with figurative motifs, designed for interior decoration, helped to introduce images of childhood on textiles. Because they were printed in large quantities, the makers favoured fashionable themes and motifs, often spread by printing. The compositions remain reflections of taste in decorative painting or current literary and artistic trends. The child is thus often confused with the putto, or cherub, a widespread motif in romantic compositions. So before fabrics for children were developed, the childish figure was ever-present in figurative prints, but for decorative reasons, they were children in pastoral scenes or, in the compositions of earlier times, cherubs or putti.

Nevertheless, in certain designs new representations of childhood appeared in textiles, echoing the iconography of genre painting, spread by printing. The design named *Jeux*

*d'Enfants* (Children's Games) (fig. 1) printed at the Jouy factory between 1770 and 1783, bears witness to the interest in the child's life and forms a new decorative theme in furnishing textiles.

The composition is arranged around three scenes of children playing in a park, who become the central figures and subject of the design. This illustration reflects this *feeling of childhood*, as an awareness of its special place among the gentry, who notably passed their time inventing games. Despite the simplicity of the drawing or design, this example reveals the switch in taste to a new image of childhood, as spread by printmaking. At the same time, the use of these cloths flourished in bedrooms and *boudoirs*, the private spaces of the home where women played their role in the bosom of the family. But this composition does not illustrate the emergence of a new genre of motifs in textiles. It appears as a rare example in which the child is presented mimicking adults, as imagined in pictorial tradition since the sixteenth century (Vanden Branden 1980). This composition adapts the fashionable taste for parodies of children in the decorative arts and paintings of the eighteenth century, notably on porcelain and china. In reality, we have to wait for the mid-nineteenth century for the theme of children's games to become a familiar subject on printed textiles.

## **A VISION OF CHILDHOOD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

In France, between 1770 and 1780, among the big manufacturers, the printing of large figurative designs was marked by the taste for genre painting, particularly Flemish painting, the prints of which assured its spread into the affluent classes. The artists seized on these examples of popular family scenes, of peasants breast-feeding or surrounded by children. The representation of children in the first fabrics with figures is

based on these models, which feature village feasts, animal and farm scenes with children.

### **Childhood and family scenes in early printed textiles**

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the child becomes a regular protagonist in the Flemish or pastoral-style scenes which characterise figure paintings. He or she is shown among adults in rural scenes that evoke a nurturing and beneficial lifestyle. The female figure, mother or nursemaid, surrounded by children, from now on plays a part among the figures commonly seen on these cloths. The role attributed to the mother in the education of the young child, notably since the ideas developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his 1762 work *L'Émile ou De l'éducation* surely explains these representations. Rather than the child, it is the education in the countryside and the place accorded the mother, which became a source of motifs for the designers. In Jouy, several compositions juxtapose scenes of dance, of laundresses, fishermen, animals etc. Some images evoke the country life as in this drawing (fig.2), near the end of the 1770s where the childhood presence is limited to a female farm worker accompanied by a baby and a young child.

From 1782, this maker sold a cloth titled *La fête flamande* (The Flemish Party) (fig.3), depicting a string of scenes of feasting and drinking, directly borrowed from the prints of Flemish and Dutch artists. The scene where a mother breastfeeds her child is only a secondary detail in a composition focussed on the party, the wine and the good food, a frequent theme in fabrics with figures of this period.

This composition was such a success that the maker, Oberkampf, commissioned a new design from the painter Jean-Baptiste Huet:

with a placing and arrangement a bit like that of the drawing I sent you in regard to the number, the

proportion and size of the figures but of various subjects, different from those of the stated project.” (Archives of the factory at Jouy, Archives Nationales (AN), Centre des Archives du Monde du Travail à Roubaix (CAMT), 41AQ83.930.).

From 1783, the animal painter Huet, who specialised in pastoral scenes, became the chief designer of figurative compositions for this manufacturer. In creating *La nouvelle fête flamande* (The New Flemish Party) (fig. 4), printed from 1797, he continued in the style inspired by the Flemish painters of the eighteenth century while keeping the flavour of the romantic countryside. Again he takes up the central motif of the drinking trough, giving more importance to the décor and architecture. Above all, he multiplies the motifs in an idyllic vision of country life – scenes of ball games, children playing with a goat, farm activities like butter-making, transporting cows etc. The artist favours these picturesque scenes – but grants a new place to the child. The scene in The Flemish Party with the breast-feeding mother is transformed into a real family tableau.

In the eighteenth century, the representation of childhood and the family in furnishing textiles took on an aspect, above all, of family scenarios, popular in Flemish painting, where the child appears in the world of adults. The taste for this type of scene marked these prints for a long time, since this style was perpetuated and continued to please certain consumers up to the start of the nineteenth century when the arts became definitively stamped by the neo-classical trend. *The New Flemish Party* was marketed between 1799 and 1809, the date on which the printing was stopped due to wear-and-tear of the copper plate – even though the design was still in demand with traders in 1810 (AN, CAMT, 41AQ91.322).

### **The benefits of nature for the child**

In the eighteenth century, the manufacturers’ designers produced more and more scenes of fishing, hunting, harvests and young female farm workers accompanied by children, in an

idealised vision of the countryside and the ways of village life. This taste for nature, seen as beneficial and nurturing, where the figures are scattered in little scenes, contributed to the categorising of these figurative monochrome prints by the manufacturers. At Jouy, the work of Jean-Baptiste Huet was distinguished by pastoral scenes depicting groups of country folk that often included children, enjoying the fruits of the land among the farm animals. In 1784, to celebrate the American War of Independence (fig. 5) the artist adapted the principle of decorative painting in arabesques where real pictures of country life were featured: for instance, a farmworker surrounded by young children who are feeding the barnyard animals. In *La ferme* (The Farm) (fig.6) created around 1795, Jean-Baptiste Huet continued in the landscape tradition where scenes of fishing, feeding animals in the farmyard or milking the cows, a mule accompanying the herd, were again motifs borrowed from Dutch landscapes. The children are from now on ever-present, nourished by the benefits of nature, drinking fresh milk in the dairy in their mothers' arms, playing in the midst of adults.

In the printed textile, the artist went on linking childhood to the countryside with representations of family life, but introducing a new sensitivity influenced by the painting of the French artist, Jean-Baptiste Greuze. The cloths reflect the country way of nurturing and also echo, in a certain way, the philosopher Rousseau's idea of 'natural education' – prescribing country life for the young child where, in contact with nature, he can grow and develop feelings, as well as make simple, spontaneous judgements. The pastoral theme set the scene for childhood – farmer's wife and children or children with a nursemaid, often associated with romantic scenes, fashionable on figured toiles.

In *Le mouton chéri* (The Baby Sheep) (fig. 7) printed by the manufacturer Favre Petitpierre at Nantes around 1785, the

composition is above all devoted to love, with a string of romantic scenes inspired by prints. Children appear in several scenarios, near a couple playing blind man's buff, with farmworkers or nursemaids. The representation of childhood in pastoral and romantic settings lasted until the end of the century, as in *La balançoire* (The Swing) (fig. 8) printed at Jouy in 1797. In this print, Jean-Baptiste Huet continues his agricultural style with amusing scenes where animals are the leading actors: a dog pursuing a cat, a wolf attacking a flock. He updates the pastoral theme by giving importance to the swing scene in the romantic spirit of etchings of see-saw games. In this depiction, at once romantic and charming, the children look at the workings of the farm among the animals or play at riding a dog on a leash. Again, such sketches present an idealized vision of country childhood.

### **The expression of maternal love**

In the eighteenth century, the child became an object for concern and emotional investment, which from now on would be openly shown, as the family became a "necessary place of affection" (Ariès and Duby 1980). This feeling manifested itself in the relationship with the mother, who exuded the tenderness and love needed to make the child bloom. Furnishing fabrics favoured a representation of childhood in nature, echoing ideas promoted by Rousseau. The writings of the philosopher spread the idea that breast-feeding was an act of nature and a demonstration of motherly love that should be favoured. But the scenes of breast-feeding in *The Baby Sheep* (fig. 7), *The Flemish Party* (fig. 3) and *The New Flemish Party* (fig. 4) reflect the interest in village ways rather than in this new practice, widespread in England, which influenced an enlightened few in France (Soupel 1995). These printed scenes allude, above all, to being nurtured in the countryside, a practice which was extended in the second half of the century to the merchant and artisan classes of the towns, preserving an



image of childhood spent in nature (even if the reality was very far from this ideal vision). The mother paying a visit to her child became a subject for paintings, and the idea spread through prints. These representations show the new solicitude for the very young and express maternal love. In *The Swing* (fig. 8) one can distinguish, on one side, a farm worker busy milking goats with a young child. On the other, a better-dressed young woman who accompanies children playing at riding a dog, suggests a nursemaid or indeed a mother and her children.

*L'éducation à la champagne* (Education in the country) (fig. 9), a composition created at Jouy in the 1780s, reflects these practices but also this new attention to childhood where the little one is the object of much attention while learning, in this instance, to walk. The clothing and placing of the figures, the mother sitting beside a young boy who wants to play with a kite, opposite the nursemaid, are again images of a mother admiring her young child, widespread in printmaking.

A project designed at the factory at Jouy again takes up the theme of the stages of childhood (fig. 10). A swirly border frames a scene conceived as an allegory of the evolution from babe-in-arms to young child, as described by Rousseau. The naked baby playing on a rug illustrates the new enthusiasm for bodily freedom:

No sooner has the child left its mother's breast and no sooner does he enjoy the freedom to move and stretch his limbs, than he is given new boundaries. He is swaddled with his head constrained, legs straightened, arms at his sides. He is wrapped in linens and bandages of all kinds, which don't allow him to change position. He is swathed so tightly he can barely breathe and has to be put to bed on his side so that the liquids that pass from his mouth can fall out of their own accord since he would not have the freedom to turn his head sideways to ease the flow!  
(Rousseau 1762)

If the naked baby can be seen as an allegory, the characters play out family scenes of mothers with children, so beloved of genre painting of the eighteenth century (Blumenfeld 2011). These two compositions reflect the interest in images of mothers with their children in well-to-do social circles, evident in the dress of the young women. Their attitudes and gestures illustrate the care and love which is shown for the small child. From now on, childhood is a period of life which calls for games adapted to each age: a rattle for a baby, a hobby horse for a small boy whose clothes reflect the new fashions in children's dress, the boy is dressed in a sailor-suit, an English fashion in the 1780s. The design incorporates the new 'Greek' trend with revellers, nymphs, cherubs riding lions, in a spirit still marked by the romantic, as seen in the pair of doves. The surrounding drawing, with a dash of love and the gods thrown in, forms a decorative frame for a scene expressing motherly love, reflecting the importance given to the child in the bosom of the family. The composition could justly be called *the feeling of childhood*.

### **BUILDING AND EDUCATING THE CHILD, FURNISHING TEXTILES A DÉCOR WITH MESSAGES**

From the end of the eighteenth century, in some compositions the purpose of interior décor changed, the aspect of countryside charm giving way to a vision turned towards family values. The instructive aspect came into favour in scenes that reflected the arrival of a middle-class society. Great literary successes became frequent themes, with furnishing textiles featuring real picture stories. The sudden enthusiasm for literary themes illustrates the evolution of a lifestyle, as if bedroom décor must also take part in a child's education, even if such specialised fabrics did not yet exist. In offering a scenario of childhood, which passed from picturesque scenes to an instructional view of the family, the makers adapted to the buyers' taste and the transformation of the printed textile

market. In the 1830s, the printing of figurative cloths became popular, with affordable products and decorative repeated patterns. Educational motifs were favoured, furnishing fabrics became vehicles for moralising images, often acted out by the family. Around 1840, the motifs continued to promote family life, with the child the subject of the story.

### **The child at the heart of the family**

In the eighteenth century, family representations in painting and prints showed that the “modern family”, for a long time exclusively the nobility, now included the middle class (Kayser, Salmon and Hugues 2003). The style of figurative textiles endured, using this abundant family iconography. At the Favre Petitpierre factory in Nantes between 1795 and 1800 (fig.11), the designer borrowed his scenes from fashionable prints and arranged them in medallions or contained them in frames, like engravings hung on a wall. The central scene shows the child at the heart of the family as copied from the etching of *L'enfant chéri* (The darling child), after Fragonard and Marguerite Gérard (Margerand 2001). But the need to adopt the old-fashioned style justifies the other scenes where relations between the child and the adults are evoked via the theme of Venus and love.

In *La fête aux enfants* (The children's party) printed in a Nantes factory around 1795, we again see romantic scenes in a rural setting where the main scenario is no longer about childhood but about the family (fig.12). The composition transposes representations of well-to-do families whose ideal is from now on personified by a group formed by parents and their children. The spread of *family feeling*, for long the preserve of the elite, becomes a social norm, explaining its place in furnishing. If these designs still kept their picturesque countryside character from the earliest figured fabrics, they heralded the evolution of representations of the family in an uplifting vision in the nineteenth century.

## Representation of the family

In the nineteenth century *family feeling*, which had already taken hold within the middle classes, extended into the countryside. But the concept of family evolved, from now on the iconography celebrates not only the parents with their children but also the image of the patriarchal family, gathering together several generations (Gourdon 2012). The spread of this *family feeling* in society is shown by the modification of the family group that extends beyond parents and children. In the textile industry, the 1820s are marked by an evolution in the style of figured prints, which became more affordable and appreciated by the mass market.

The designers made variations of the same decorative scheme: two scenes in a five-part sequence, framed by garlands of leafy flowering plants, which they adapted to each new composition. The Indian factories in Normandy specialised in this kind of print, which favoured decorative themes for less sophisticated consumers. The fabrics became supports for instructive motifs, romantic subjects giving way to historic accounts, biblical scenes or pictures of family life. The theme of marriage was particularly strong, with numerous versions created of the bourgeois betrothal at a village wedding (Dore 2007).

Childhood does not disappear from furnishing fabrics but its representation is confirmed in family settings. In this *toile* from a Rouen or Bolbec factory around 1830-1840 (fig.13), the designer juxtaposes a village dance, no doubt a wedding, and a family scene in a Normandy peasant home. A new image of the child appears: the dominant figures are no longer the mother with the child, but the patriarch in his armchair who makes the grandson dance to the sound of his violin. In these *toiles* the child becomes one of the figures in a family scene where he appears cosseted in the midst of an extended family, again underlining the theme of the generations.

In the 1830s, these cloths reflected social practices and cultural images. The child's development now progressed via the education he received within the family circle. The benefits of family life replaced those of nature with its scenarios of parties, meals and prayer. *Le goûter et la prière* (The afternoon tea and prayer) (fig.14), a design printed by the Rouen manufacturer Belloncle et Malfeson, reproduces some very well-known prints by Mallet (Dore 2007). The composition juxtaposes two scenes, on one side children with their mother gathered around for tea, a childhood meal; on the other, the saying of grace, the prayer recited by the father before the meal, a family scene. *Les costumes normands* (The costumes of Normandy) (fig.15) a composition which celebrates an idealized life of peasants around family values, also features a scene of a meal begun with the saying of grace. Philippe Ariès analyses the spread of prints showing the saying of grace by the child as the manifestation of the growth of three feelings: "Piety, the feeling of childhood (the smallest child) and the feeling of family (the gathering at the table)" (Ariès 1960).

The appearance of these family meals with the young child saying grace have to be seen in the context of the evolution of the iconography of the furnishing textiles of the nineteenth century which focus on uplifting decoration. The Rouen factory made cloths a real base for didactic and moralising messages.

In Alsace, around 1840, Georges Zipélius (1808-1890), a specialist designer for the printed textile and wallpaper industry, produced a representation of childhood in popular imagery (Francès 1995). The same decorative processes of the Rouen manufacturers were applied to frame two little scenes. The child was above all a participant in amiable family scenes where the individuals in a house play with one another—the grandmother, father and mother. The vision of the family and the home, an inspirational place for the education of children, is transformed—in the personal decorative vocabulary of the

designer—in a charming, almost playful vision where children play among themselves or with the farm animals. His designs sometimes took a more uplifting character as in this composition (fig.17) where the grandmother gives a lesson to a group of children while the grandfather corrects one of them. But, in all, it is not a moralising message—the designer’s images are charming and some a little naïve. In another composition (fig.18), Georges Zipélius uses the scene of a village school for boys and the teaching at home received by the girls. Children’s education began with instruction at the moment when the Guizot law of June 1833 introduced primary teaching for all, each commune having to open a school for boys. But while the subject took on a didactic theme, it was treated in the same style as his other compositions. The teaching of girls was shown as taking place within the family circle at home, while the boys’ class took place in a scene approaching caricature. Rowdy pupils surround the old teacher asleep in his chair, a lone child tries to read his lesson, disturbed by his classmates. The designer prefers the image of a noisy and undisciplined childhood, far from the aims of public teaching, reflecting the reality of schools as “places where children are pushed about, in a mixed, rough-and-tumble crowd, with little desire to learn” (Becchi 1998). We again find this excited atmosphere linked to the theme of children’s games on leaving the class in real disarray (fig.19 detail). The designer looks affectionately on childhood as a moment of carelessness, not presenting the instructional and inspiring aspect of the *toiles* from the manufacturers of Normandy.

### **Children in furnishings**

In the 1840s, the popularisation of these furnishing fabrics contributed in spreading an idealised image of the child, as distinct from adults, where he or she no longer appears at the centre of adult attention but in a state of listening to a lesson from grandmother or the teaching of a schoolmaster. The child

leans towards his or her own world, with its games, independent of adults, an image already spread in painting, clearly visible in the famous picture, *Les enfants de Hülsenbeck* (The children of Hülsenbeck) by Otto Runge (1805, 131x 143 cm, oil on canvas, Kunstalle, Hamburg). This individualisation of the child is reflected in the evolution of practices: the generalisation of primary education, the arrival of the children's bedroom, development of games, which extended progressively from the affluent classes to the masses.

Georges Zipélius, prolific designer for the printed textile makers, presented a vision of childhood which foreshadowed the fabrics for the child at the end of the century. Certain designs on the theme of children's games were printed in the same years by the makers of Bolbec whose workshop had expanded beyond Alsace and proffered a pleasing and rather naïve picture of childhood (Dore 2007). At a time when teaching tracts valued playful activities as a means of educating the young child, the designer employed images of children playing in compositions where certain scenes were repeated: boys dressed as soldiers, the playground, girls dancing in circles (fig.19), borrowed from the popular childhood imagery widespread by printmaking. The numerous versions give witness to the commercial success of these textiles. In some compositions he favours showing children in nature, often alone among animals; little scenes underlining the relations among siblings where the older ones, in the absence of the parents, take care of the youngest (fig.20 and 21). Childhood has become the real theme of these *toiles*, which present an image of the country at the same time instructive and idealised, very different from that of the rural scenes of the eighteenth century. With Zipélius, the vision of childhood is borrowed from popular imagery where the decorative and charming aspect is more important than the instructional, widespread in the printed *toiles* of the nineteenth century.

## CONCLUSION

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, furnishing textiles underwent a considerable aesthetic transformation, going from large countryside designs to formularised compositions based on the same decorative principle. The textile industry did not escape the constraints of industrial production, which had to take into account the taste of consumers and the evolution of the market. From an upmarket clientele who appreciated pastoral scenes, the market widened towards a mass public who sought in these fabrics settings corresponding more to an ideal vision of the *petite bourgeoisie* – the family, learning, games etc. It is certainly this evolution that the motifs reflect, rather than the appearance of the ‘feeling of childhood’, so dear to Philippe Ariès. If one refutes the change in mentality that the historian wanted to see, we can understand with hindsight that the manufacturers had taken into account the evolution in taste of their clientele. In the eighteenth century, the child was above all a motif which added charm to pastoral and romantic scenes. The few compositions which featured relations between mother and child, or parents around their children, remained rare, reflecting the taste for the *scène de genre* and how the designers had adapted this style for interior decoration.

In the eighteenth century, wallpaper manufacturers adapted certain compositions, inspired by family scenes in paintings, to spread this taste into interior decoration by offering wallpapers matching their figured textiles. In the nineteenth century, when the makers freed themselves from the influence of the printed textile, illustrations of childhood disappeared. In the panoramas where numerous figures were featured, the presence of children was rare, whereas the child figure was widespread in the illustrated press and in prints.

Figured textiles offered a standardised vision of childhood at a particular moment when family life and education prepared the



child to become a good adult. This setting of childhood and family is a variation of painting where family representations exult in scenes of daily life and bourgeois hierarchies (Becchi 1998). In the mid-nineteenth century, the printed textile became a base from which to spread a social and educative message via interior décor, using a simplified talking point (the happiness of the home, games, education). These textiles took up themes developed in illustrated journals, fulfilling the expectations of the clientele (Sadoul 1953).

None of these motifs was developed to please children. They were aimed at adults, trying to appeal to them by transposing popular imagery into a decorative language. If the child became the theme of the décor, it was mainly because these little scenes and their humour struck a chord with the consumers.

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