

# Boudoir Dolls, Messengers of the Past

## *The Doll of Choice by Movie Stars and Naughty Girls*

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**B**oudoir dolls played an integral part in the Jazz Age, and are, in essence, messengers from the past; a time capsule. Some have survived well, while others are faded bits of history.

In the 1920s/1930s, women's skirts and hair got shorter, music went from ragtime to jazz and blues, and people went to the cinema for their entertainment. Silent movie actors, Pola Negri, Nazimova, Rudolph Valentino, Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Mary Pickford, Bebe Daniels, Clara Bow, Gloria Swanson, Louise Brooks and many others, were the stars of the silver screen. In addition to these film stars, singers and stage performers such as Josephine Baker, Mistinguett, Maurice Chevalier and Fanny Brice were very popular, and the name Ziegfeld was synonymous with gorgeous chorus girls wearing elaborate costumes.

Boudoir dolls, like the movies, mimic the era from which they were originally created. Therefore, they bear a rather striking resemblance to their Jazz Age counterparts. You can find German-made dolls resembling Pola Negri, Italian Lenci dolls with "Gish" or "Marlene" faces, Blossom Doll Company dolls with likenesses of Greta Garbo, Peggy Hopkins Joyce, Shirley Temple, and others. Companies from France, England, Spain, and South America, to name a few, also made boudoir dolls.

The Italian company Lenci made portrait dolls to represent celebrities such as French performer Mistinguett, and actor Rudolph Valentino. In memory of the mega star, (Valentino died at age 31 in 1926), Lenci created a doll in his image. The doll, made in 1927, is dressed in a costume from Valentino's last film, *Son of the Sheik*. Other Italian doll companies such as La Rosa created a Rudolph Valentino portrait doll dressed as Vladimir Dubrovski from his 1925 film, *The Eagle*, and a doll dressed as Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan from Valentino's 1921 movie, *The Sheik*.



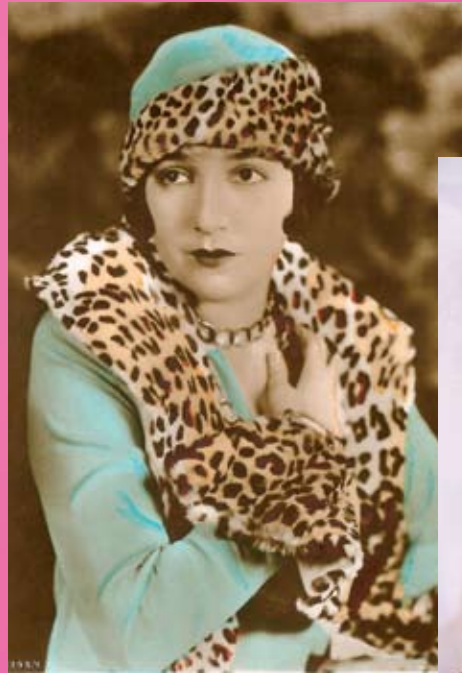
The French performer Mistinguett and Lenci's version of Mistinguett.



Actor Rudolph Valentino in *Son of the Sheik* and Lenci's version of Valentino made in 1927.



Photo courtesy of Jenny Paget



Bébé Daniels



Dean's Rag Book Smart Set doll.



Nazimova

French Rosalinde boudoir doll.



Monsieur Beaucaire



French cloth male boudoir doll.

Not all manufacturers are known. An unknown maker, possibly French, created a doll version of silent film diva, Nazimova, smoking a cigarette. There are a host of other celebrity look-alikes created by various boudoir dollmakers.

If not a celebrity look-alike, these boudoir dolls, at a minimum, were dressed in costumes and fashions seen in films of that era.

Various companies used boudoir dolls as promos and prizes. In 1923, beauty products company Mineralava hired Rudolph Valentino and his wife, Natacha Rambova, to tour the country, promoting its products and host a beauty contest. The Valentinos performed on stage, dancing the tango, and gave out boudoir dolls in their images to beauty contest winners. Some companies gave away dolls with special offer coupons. Other dolls served as souvenirs, some were sold on cruise ships. Photographs, postcards and tobacco cards show movie stars posing with boudoir dolls or their look-alikes.



Mineralava Valentino dolls from an unknown newspaper archive.



Rudolph Valentino and Natacha Rambova promote a Mineralava beauty contest.



An unknown maker created this French Smoker Nazimova doll, right, the real Nazimova and Rudolph Valentino star in *Camille*.



As in film, the seedier part of life, with its street urchins and café tramps, was emulated by these boudoir dolls: French Apache dancers, women smoking cigarettes, androgynous characters, gypsies, and bullies (some even have a black eye). Just about every aspect of life can be found in these unique boudoir dolls—flappers, vamps, ladies, gentlemen, dandies, military, performers, aristocrats, musicians, ethnic and historical characters, and more.

Boudoir dolls were a favorite mascot of the flappers--the modern, newly liberated woman. Boudoir dolls not only were available in the full doll form, in but novelty items such as pillows, handbags, lamps, calendars, lingerie bags, hat stands, etc. They were created for décor and personal use.

Because boudoir dolls were in vogue, you can find them in quite a few 1920s/1930s movies. What I find so interesting is there is one constant message in these movies--only naughty girls owned boudoir dolls.

So, if you decide to start collecting boudoir dolls, you run the risk of being called a flapper, a jazz baby, a vamp, a dame, a naughty girl. After viewing the evidence I put before you in photos, you must ask yourself if collecting boudoir dolls is worth the ruination of your "good girl" image. Take it from me, it is SO WORTH IT!



Raquel Meller



Raquel Meller doll, 28 inches tall.



A little girl holding an Anita boudoir doll.  
Oh, they start way too young, don't they?



Anita boudoir doll.

Photo by Karen Kosies



Joque Catalain



French Apache Smoker doll.

Photo by Sue Uhlherr



Lucienne and Ashour Folies Bergère, 1939



Lenci Apache Smoker marionettes.



Risqué arcade cards of a flapper and an all-composition smoker known by collectors as a Cubeb, but they were sometimes advertised as The Parisienne.



Otto Lednener



French Apache smoker accordion player.



Shirley Temple



Shirley Temple doll from Blossom Doll Company.



Actress Leatrice Joy in *The Dressmaker from Paris* with two large size boudoir dolls. Notice the cigarettes in their hands.



Lenci A Li Tia Guai doll.



Marlene Dietrich with Lenci dolls.

Photo courtesy of Argentine Magazine



Josephine Baker and her portrait doll.



Group of young people. They look harmless, but they must be party animals with that German boudoir doll in their possession.



Sylvia Sidney

## Movies Featuring Boudoir Dolls

These are just a few of the movies featuring boudoir dolls:

**Cytherea**, 1924, Madison Production (Associated First National Pictures). Lewis Stone plays Lee Randon, a married man who seeks an escape from his daily routine. He takes up with a flapper (played by Betty Bouton). Through this affair, he meets the girl's aunt (played by Alma Rubens), a woman he believes is the image of the boudoir doll he talks to that he named Cytherea, Goddess of Love. He has an affair with the aunt. Tragedy follows....

**Waterloo Bridge**, 1931, Universal Pictures Corporation. Mae Clarke plays Myra Deauville, who is a prostitute. She actually wasn't such a bad person. She picked up soldiers to pay for her food and rent. A young soldier who came from a well-to-do family fell in love with her. She tried to hide her feelings for him and the truth about her profession. He thought she was a chorus girl; such a sad ending. Her doll choice was an American Stuffed Novelty/Unique Novelty-type boudoir doll.

**The Redheaded Woman**, 1932 (1933), MGM. Jean Harlow plays Lil "Red" Andrews Legendre, golddigger and home wrecker extraordinaire. She shamelessly and aggressively took rich married men. Her dolls of choice were composition and cloth standards and all cloth Unique Novelty/American Stuffed Novelty-type boudoir dolls. You will notice she isn't domestically inclined to even sew an outfit for the doll.

**Dinner at Eight**, 1933 (1934), MGM. Jean Harlow plays Kitty Packard, a "new rich" floozy, having an affair with her doctor. So blatant, the doctor walked in as her husband walked out. Her dolls of choice were the Parisienne, known by collectors as a Cubeb, which is an all-composition smoker with a French silk face and standards.

**Baby Face**, 1933, Warner Brothers Pictures. Barbara Stanwyck plays Lily Powers, a golddigging, ruthless corporate ladder climber, causing two men to commit suicide and one other—her husband—to attempt it. Her doll choices were standards and what appears to be a Blossom cloth boudoir doll. Interesting side note: once she mar-

ried, the dolls disappeared from her bedroom. As I said, boudoir dolls were for NAUGHTY girls.

**Sadie McKee**, 1934, MGM. Esther Ralston plays Dolly Merick, a singer/performer who steals Sadie McKee Brennan's (Joan Crawford) fiancé hours before the wedding. Her doll choices were a Keeneye and what appears to be either an Anita or a Cubeb.

**Stage Door**, 1937, RKO Radio Pictures. Katharine Hepburn plays Terry Randall (Sims); Ginger Rogers plays Jean Maitland; Lucille Ball plays Judith Canfield—aspiring actresses and some, wannabe casting couch participants. Ginger Rogers' choice was to sleep with a German smoker.

**Bachelor Mother**, 1939, RKO Radio Pictures. Ginger Rogers plays Polly Parrish, a nice girl, but people believe she's been a bad girl. David Merlin (David Niven) believes she had a baby and wanted to leave it on an orphanage doorstep. I truly believe that had she not had boudoir dolls in her apartment, she might have had a better chance at convincing people she really wasn't the baby's mother. ■



Anita smoker doll.



Anita Novelty Company



Boudoir dolls are for naughty boys as well. Check out this private photo. Notice the one smoker doll known by collectors as an Anita.



Actress Yola D'Avril in *So This is Paris*, holding two German smoker dolls.