



**Marbles**

**Review – Allir í leik: Söngvaleikir barna**

**Norwegian and Australian Clapping Rhymes**

**The Magic Function Of Play – A Romanian Children's Game**

**Verbal Play – Flexibility, Invention and Experiment**



## From the Editors

### ***Play and Folklore* no. 54**

June Factor and Gwenda Davey are delighted to welcome Judy McKinty as a co-editor of *Play and Folklore*. A long-time contributor to this publication, she is also an experienced play researcher and ethnographer.

This issue publishes material from Iceland, Norway and Romania. The subject of children's verbal play emerges in a number of articles, including an extract from June Factor's award-winning book *Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia*. We welcome further contributions from our readers on this and other aspects of children's play and folklore, whether in Australia or overseas.

The Australian 'Childhood, Tradition and Change' research project, now in its final year, has revealed that some schools have banned the traditional game of Marbles because of 'disputes and fighting'. Horsham Primary School in Victoria has taken a different approach, and we are pleased the school has given us permission to reproduce their enterprising Marbles website in this issue.

June Factor, Gwenda Beed Davey and Judy McKinty

### ***Play and Folklore***

Editors: June Factor, Gwenda Beed Davey and Judy McKinty ISSN (printed) 1329-2463 ISSN (web) 1447-5969  
Editorial address: Dr. June Factor, Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia.  
Phone: +61 3 9499 6151 Email: [j.factor@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:j.factor@unimelb.edu.au)

• • • • •

Two issues per year, published by History & Technology Department, Museum Victoria.  
GPO Box 666, Victoria 3001, Australia. Phone: +61 3 8341 7378. Email: [playandfolklore@museum.vic.gov.au](mailto:playandfolklore@museum.vic.gov.au)  
Available on the web at <http://museumvictoria.com.au/about/books-and-journals/journals/play-and-folklore>  
Design Layout: MV Design Studio

Children in a backyard tree house, Balwyn North, 1966  
Museum Victoria collection, contributed by Rosalie Quaife



## Contents

<b>Marbles at Horsham Primary School</b>	<b>4</b>
Horsham Primary School	
<b>Book review: <i>Allir í leik: Söngvaleikir barna (All in the game!)</i></b>	<b>8</b>
Judy McKinty	
<b>Norwegian and Australian Clapping Rhymes</b>	<b>10</b>
Judy McKinty	
<b>The Magic Function of Play – A Romanian Children’s Game</b>	<b>12</b>
Magdalena Dumitrana	
<b>Verbal Play – Flexibility, Invention and Experiment</b>	<b>15</b>
June Factor	



## Marbles

**Staff and students of Horsham Primary School**

March is Marbles month at Horsham Primary School in western Victoria. The children are passionate about the game and wanted to share it with everyone, so they made a web page about it. It shows the richness and complexity of the game and the lore surrounding it.

### MARCH IS MARBLES MONTH

At Horsham 298 Primary School every March is Marbles Month – when we bring our marbles along and play marbles at school. There are many different sizes, colors and words we use during Marbles Month.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Marbles is basically a game of miniature bowls. Over the years pebbles, nuts or anything small that could be rolled along the ground have been used to play the game. At one time the little balls were made of marble and it's from here that we get the modern game.<sup>1</sup>

### RULES

In one of the principal varieties of the game, a marble called a shooter, or taw, is projected by means of the thumb at marbles in a circle outlined on the ground; those driven out of the circle are won by the shooter.

In another form, players shoot or roll marbles from a suitable distance at a marble considered of unusual value; all the marbles that fail to strike the target become the property of the owner of the target marble. The game is played until either the marbles of the challengers are exhausted or a challenger's marble hits the target. When this hit is made, the challenger wins the target marble and may set it up for others to shoot at.<sup>2</sup>

### HOW MUCH DO THE MARBLES COST?

At the local shops we can buy 101 marbles for \$1. How much do your marbles cost? Check the Currency Converter (on our website) to see how much it is.

### SHOOTING YOUR MARBLE

- Rolling
- Flicking
- Knuckling



<b>SIZES</b> biggest to smallest	<b>COLOURS</b> that we use	<b>TERMS</b> we use in marbles	<b>GAMES</b> we have heard of
Grandpa	Cat's-eye	No nothing	Shooting range
King	Pizza	Interference	Bullseye
Queen	Pearl	Pracs	Bounce Eye
Jack	Moon	Real	Spanners
Sid	Sun	Prac until I hit	Alleys
Tom (Tom Bowler)	Fireball	Anyone puts me off, I get my marble back	Captures
Sem	Toothpaste		Castles
Jumbo	Beachball		Shoot Out
Small (Cat's-eye)	Lightning		Shooting the Ring
Peewee	Galaxy		Fortress
	Cherry		Marble Arches
	Oil		Tracker
	Apple		
	Tigerstripe		
	Spaghetti		
	Turtleshell		
	Bubble		
	Glow in the dark		



## FROM OUR READERS: RAY

### EXPRESSIONS

- **Allies** (possibly alleys - we were never required to spell it - i.e. marbles).
- **Allie bottle**  
Small soft drink bottle using a clear glass marble and red rubber ring inserted into the shaped neck of the bottle as a closure for the aerated contents. These bottles were smashed to obtain the precious marbles. Today an alley bottle would have considerable value at an antique shop. At the time, I was rather fortunate as my Dad worked at a soft drink factory where faulty rubber stoppers and allies were replaced in returned bottles.
- **Allie bag**  
Draw-string bag, usually made by your Mum, in which you carried your allies. Taken into class, in most cases in the right hand pocket of your short pants and sure to earn you from two to four of the best if you jingled them at any time during the lesson.
- **Dribble**  
Underarm projection of your "taw" towards your target area, without being able to take advantage of any positive advantage should your taw contact a target marble.
- **Fudge**  
As I recall to "crib" or creep over the designated spot from where a shot was to be taken. I am not 100 per cent sure of this definition. "Crib" could be the definition of this despicable cheating. However "fudge" is definitely marbles terminology.
- **Funny knuckle**  
The little kids or beginners method of firing a marble.
- **O Ya**  
Terminology used at the end of a session of play if a player had lost all of his own marbles and had borrowed others from a competitor in order to continue playing and was still in debt at the finish of play.
- **Toss**  
Procedure at the start of games of small ring and some other games, where players project their taws (usually by a shot or underarm throw) towards a start line which has been scratched into the ground a short distance away. The proximity of the taws to the start line thus determines the sequence of play.

### GAMES

- Big Ring
- Little Ring
- Poison

'Another reminiscence is that of a peculiar stance adopted by good players of the game. This was done to achieve better results on long range shots. It involved standing on one leg, usually the left leg if the player was right handed. The right foot was then placed on the left knee, the left hand on the left knee and that hand used as a platform to steady the right hand, which was used for firing the taw.

This procedure correctly executed produced a more powerful shot with greater range and undoubtedly much more accuracy than the conventional method of folding the non-firing arm across the waist and using the projecting hand as a rest for the firing hand.'

—Thanks to Ray for this information

### MARBLES SAYINGS

To lose your marbles = to go crazy

## FROM OUR READERS: SCOTT

'I remember the "ring game" (drawn with a stick on the ground) where you would shoot a marble from outside the ring, trying to knock a marble outside the ring; if you did, you got to keep the marble. Of course, you'd always aim for the best-looking marble, usually a cats-eye.

Another game I can't find the name for on the internet is "Folly-on" or "Follow-on" where two players "chased" each other with a single marble and I think you "won" one of the opposition's marbles (from their marble bag) each time you struck their single marble with yours.

I went to school in Sydney in the late 50s, and another marble "phase" we went through was a variation of "Bobs".

Kids (or their dads) would make a small timber structure, say 600mm long by 150mm high, and cut semi-circular holes out (about eight) along one of the edges of the long side. Some of the holes were slightly bigger than a marble, others slightly larger.

The object was for a challenger to roll a marble from a set distance, say two metres, along the ground aiming to get the marble to pass through one of the holes in the board. The more difficult holes (smaller) rewarded the roller with more marbles, say between five to eight marbles, the easier holes offering only two to three; these reward numbers were written above each hole in the board. The ones that missed and struck the wood between the holes were retained by the operator. Some boys began to cheat, by using smaller steel ball bearings, which of course would give the roller more chance.

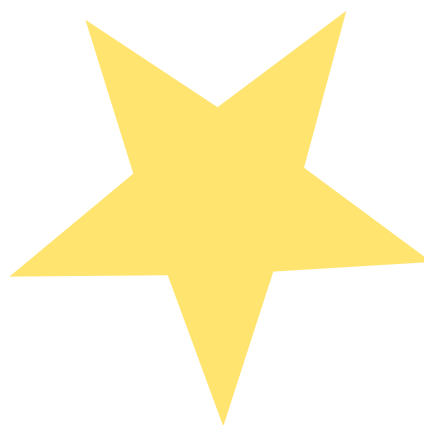
Another expression was fudge (the action of moving your shooting hand closer to the opponents marble) or fudger (as in he's a real 'fudger').

—Thanks to Scott from Sydney for this information

We have kindly been allowed to reproduce the Marbles web page for *Play and Folklore*. If you want to see the 'live' version, the web address is [www.horshamps.vic.edu.au/marbles.htm](http://www.horshamps.vic.edu.au/marbles.htm) but the easiest way is to type 'Horsham Primary School marbles' into your search engine. It's great to see such a strong and vibrant Marbles culture supported by this primary school.

<sup>1</sup> Source: John Dinneen, *Marbles, Hopscotch and Jacks* (North Ryde, N.S.W: Angus and Robertson, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> 'Marbles', (Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2001. © 1993-2000 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved).





## REVIEW: UNA MARGRÉT JÓNSDÓTTIR *Allir í leik: Söngvaleikir barna* (All in the Game!)

Judy McKinty

*Allir í leik* is, at first glance, a welcome publication about Icelandic singing games. A closer look reveals that the definition of 'singing games' has been widened to include variations of spoken or chanted rhymes and of games with rhythmic texts but no tune. The title of the book literally means 'All in the game!' and it is based on 10 years of research by the author, Una Margrét Jónsdóttir\*, involving people of all ages throughout Iceland, with a small amount of comparative material collected in Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

Iceland is a sparsely populated island lying midway between North America and Europe. It covers around 103,000 square kilometres – smaller than the state of Victoria – although much of the island is uninhabitable. Most of its 313,000 people live in coastal areas, with around two-thirds living in and around the capital, Reykjavik. The people enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world, and the second-longest life expectancy.

While much of the country is covered with glaciers, it also has hot springs, geysers and active volcanoes, and the city of Reykjavik is a centre for clean geothermal energy, used to heat the city's homes and outdoor swimming pools. It has 24-hour daylight in the summer and a mild climate due to the influence of the Gulf Stream. This is the context in which the games, songs and rhymes in *Allir í leik* are played, sung, chanted and passed from one generation of children to the next.

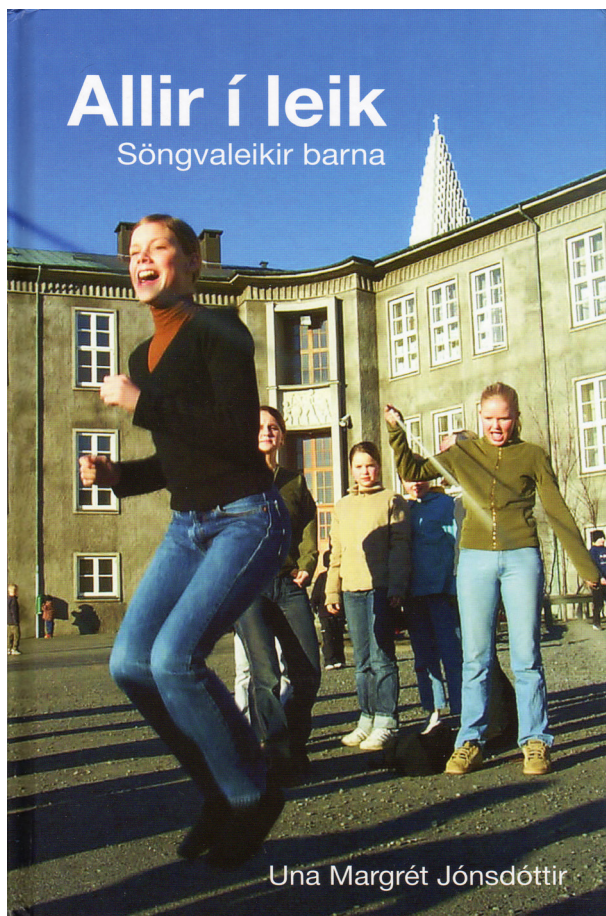
The book itself is a fine hardcover edition with evocative images of children at play – a full colour image on the cover and small black-and-white photos placed throughout the text. Una Margrét writes in her native Icelandic, and she has thoughtfully provided a 28-page English summary on which this review is based, 'so that people from other countries might enjoy it' (page 232).

Although the summary is necessarily short and cannot include all the material in the Icelandic section, it does provide clear descriptions of the games and places them in their historical and cultural contexts.

Throughout the summary Una Margrét addresses the reader in the first person, using a narrative style and plain English free of specialist terminology, which makes the information and ideas immediately accessible to the reader. The English chapter headings are: Round games; Various singing games; Dances; Chasing games; Games with rhythmic text, but no tune; Jumping rope games; Clapping games; and Clapping games in nonsense language and English.

The names of the games are written in both Icelandic and English, enabling the reader to find the music to each of the songs, and often an image of the game, within the Icelandic text. Information about the games includes their origins, where known. Una Margrét comments that in Iceland some of the singing games 'seem to be relatively new' and have not been traced beyond the second half of the 19th century (page 232). Some rhymes and songs have their roots in Old Icelandic and German folk poems; others come from Denmark, the Netherlands and elsewhere; and some have been created by Iceland's children.





The author's detailed notes on variations and adaptations and her occasional personal observations make this a rich and informative text. With such detailed information it is possible to identify elements in the Icelandic games similar to those in Australia and other English-speaking countries. I was pleased to discover Icelandic versions of 'Oranges and Lemons', 'Teddy bear, teddy bear', 'A sailor went to sea, sea, sea', 'When Susie was a baby', 'See see my playmate' and 'My mother'. The most obvious similarities occur in the clapping games, with some rhymes partly in English and others combining English with Icelandic and nonsense words to form a unique local variation.

As someone who has an interest in clapping rhymes and their adaptations, my only disappointment was the number of clapping games not included in the English summary. It would be useful to have access to the detailed information in the Icelandic text, particularly for the rhymes with tantalising references to Pokemon, Mickey Mouse, Charlie Chaplin and other familiar themes.



*Allir í leik* is the first book of a two-part publication. The second will contain Christmas games, Ash Wednesday songs, singing games originating after 1950, teasing songs, charms and counting-out rhymes. If it follows the same format and style as this first book it will be a valuable addition to the list of children's folklore publications. I eagerly await its release, and hope that in the future an English translation of both books might be possible.

\*The author's name follows the ancient tradition of Icelanders deriving their last name from their father's first name; Jonsdottir literally means 'daughter of Jon'. Women do not change their names after marriage, and most people address each other by their first, or given, name. The last name is never used without the given name, and this tradition is followed in this article.

Una Margrét Jónsdóttir  
Allir í leik: Söngvaleikir barna

Reykjavík: published by Almenna útgáfan / Bókaútgáfan æskan ehf, 2009  
ISBN 978-9979-767-78-7

Judy McKinty is a co-editor of *Play and Folklore*. She is an independent cultural heritage interpreter and children's play researcher, based in Melbourne, and is a fieldworker for 'Childhood, Tradition and Change' research project, a national study of Australian children's schoolyard playlore.

## Norwegian and Australian Clapping Rhymes

Judy McKinty

The review of Una Margrét Jónsdóttir's *Allir í leik* in this issue of *Play and Folklore* has prompted me to look again at a DVD of Norwegian clapping games sent to me some time ago by Thor Gunnar Norås, administrator of the Norwegian Documentation Center for Children's Culture in Stavanger.

While watching the children clapping, chanting and singing it was possible to identify similarities between the Norwegian games and clapping rhymes collected at Preston West Primary School, Melbourne in 2005. Here are five rhymes for comparison. Thanks to Thor for providing the words of the Norwegian rhymes.

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA	STAVANGER, NORWAY
<p><b>1</b></p> <p>Si. si, si, Si. si, sowere were, Mini mini ukka, Mini mini were were. Oom-chukka oom-chukka oom-chukka dess</p> <p>Si. si, si, Si. si, sowere were, Mini mini ukka, Mini mini were were, Mini mini ukka, Mini mini were were. Oom-chukka oom-chukka oom-chukka dess</p> <p>This game is played the same way as the Norwegian version</p>	<p>Dam, dam, dea, Dam, dam, weah, weah, Sissy dea, sissy weah, weah, Ini mini yakka, Ini mini weah, weah, Ini mini yakka, Ini mini weah, weah. Kokobass, kokobass, kokobass, kiss!</p> <p>This rhyme is always repeated – a clapping song the first time and a counting-out rhyme second. Two of the lines are repeated in the counting-out rhyme.</p> <p>When the clapping song is finished, one player counts on each hand while saying the rhyme. The last hand touched is put behind the back, and that player must only use one hand to do the clapping rhyme next time. When counting-out, players also count the empty space where their counting-out hand would be.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p>My Auntie Anna plays the pianna, Twenty-four hours a day.....SPLIT!</p> <p>On 'Split!' players jump their feet apart. Rhyme and action are repeated until one player topples over.</p>	<p>My aunt Biano plays the piano Fifty-five and does she say.....STAY!</p> <p>Played the same way.</p>

## MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

3

1, 2, 3, HIT IT!  
That's the way, uh-huh uh-huh  
I like it, uh-huh uh-huh,  
That's the way, uh-huh uh-huh  
I like it, uh-huh uh-huh,  
Truth, love, peace, full stop!

Based on the words of a 1975 pop song:  
'That's the Way I Like It' by KC & The  
Sunshine Band.

4

Under the bambush and under the tree,  
Boom boom boom  
True love to you my darling, true love to me,  
Boom boom boom  
When we get married, we'll start a family  
Boom boom boom  
Under the bambush and under the tree.

This rhyme sometimes concludes after  
'start a family' - 'a boy for you and a girl  
for me, Dah diddley ah dah...sexy!'

5

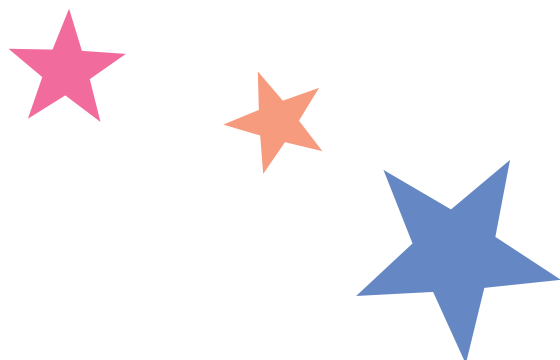
My mummy is a baker,  
Yummy yummy, fat tummy,  
(rub tummy)

My father is a dustbin man,  
Poo-poo-pooey, poo-poo-pooey,  
(hold nose)

My sister is a show-off,  
Sh-sh-show-off, sh-sh-show-off  
(twirling fingers around in hair),

My brother is a cowboy...  
Turn around, touch the ground, FREEZE!  
(do the actions then point fingers like pistols)

The children sing each line once, while the  
Norwegian version is longer and more like  
'When Suzy Was a Baby' in structure.



## STAVANGER, NORWAY

ABC, Honey,  
That's the way, aha, aha  
I like it, aha, aha.  
That's the way, aha, aha  
I like it, aha, aha.  
Scoobi, scoobi,  
Hanna dass.

Anne Liane,  
Anne, my cheese, bom bom bom,  
Anne, I love you darling,  
One for me,  
One for you.  
I love mammy,  
I love daddy,  
Ooh, aah, cha cha cha,  
Anne Liane,  
Kiss me goodbye.

Min far han er en søppelmann,  
En søppelmann, en søppelmann,  
Min far han er en søppelmann,  
Og vet du hva han sa?  
Æsj, æsj.  
(hold nose)

Min mor hun er en baker,  
En baker, en baker,  
Min mor hun er en baker,  
Og vet du hva hun sa?  
Æsj, æsj, nam, nam.  
(hold nose, rub tummy)

Min søster er ei jåle,  
Ei jåle, ei jåle,  
Min søster er ei jåle,  
Og vet du hva hun sa?  
Æsj, æsj, nam, nam, krølle, krølle.  
(hold nose, rub tummy, make 'curling'  
movements with hair)

Min bror han er en cowboy,  
En cowboy, en cowboy,  
Min bror han er en cowboy,  
Og vet du hva han sa?  
Æsj, æsj, nam, nam, krølle, krølle, pang, pang.  
(hold nose, rub tummy, make 'curling'  
movements with hair, make 'shooting'  
movements with fingers)

Men jeg er bare en skrikunge,  
En skrikunge, en skrikunge,  
Men jeg er bare en skrikunge,  
Og vet du hva jeg sa?  
Æsj, æsj, nam, nam, krølle, krølle, pang, pang,  
Ææh!  
(hold nose, rub tummy, make 'curling' movements,  
point fingers like pistols, make a baby crying sound)

## The Magic Function of Play – A Romanian Children's Game

**Magdalena Dumitrana**

The mystery of childhood is already such a common topic for discussion that it could be considered as producing no surprises any more. However, it's the nature of childhood to be surprising. For example, despite an immense amount of research in the field, the way a young child acquires language is not yet fully elucidated. Similarly play, profoundly studied over a long period, always offers new areas of investigation.

Simple descriptions of different games observed by researchers have not solved the problem, and different classifications of games by psychologists remain simply descriptive of what happens during psychological development. The study of folklore by linguistic disciplines seems to offer a wider range of games that draw attention to aspects of children's play that have not yet been satisfactorily approached. It seems at present, however, that children's folklore with its traditional games is the richest documentary domain.

No doubt agreement for a common multidisciplinary study between linguistics, psychology, anthropology and perhaps some other sciences would help to fill the blank spaces in the map of childhood play. The contribution of the linguist Ivan Evseev is valuable through his definition, both scientific and poetic, which calls play a 'universalized form of human action [that] bursts out and tends to remain in the world of freedom that is specific to the imagination, dreams, poetry and art.' (Evseev 1994: 8.8)

Researchers in linguistics, trying to bring order to the extraordinary diversity of games, attempted to classify them according to different criteria. A common factor in the classification of Romanian children's traditional games was the presence of the magic element. Games were identified which had visible roots in the magic activities of ancient communities, as well as games which still retained their magic function.

Why is it that we find these elements in an unexpected domain – in children's play? One explanation might be from the linguist cited above: 'Like his ancestor from the Paleolithic era, today's child still believes in the magic force of the word.' (Evseev op cit, p.18) Children's thinking, as psychologists have demonstrated, is frequently animist – to a child, objects and natural phenomena may be alive, and they are approached as such. However, this characteristic is specific to the young child, and the games we are discussing are played by older children.

Perhaps anthropologists could find a more adequate answer – in early societies, the period of childhood was very short. From a very early age (and according to their gender and capacities), children had to take an active part in tribal activities, and the majority of those were directly or indirectly controlled by a shaman. There is a possibility that these shamanic activities have been conserved as imitations or reminiscences in childhood games. (We are speaking here about magic as a non-mundane field and not as an equivalent of witchcraft.) Another keeper of the magic functions of the world is the traditional fairy tale.



Romanian children have preserved, throughout generations, several games with very distinct magic functions. Among them there is one which fulfils both functions – of play and of magic action. This game is called 'Caloianul'. The name belongs to the doll around which the game develops.

All village children know how to play 'Caloianul', usually as a simple game with only some of its traditional elements. However, in certain periods of the year when drought threatens, the children are assigned to perform 'Caloianul' as a magic ritual for chasing away the drought and bringing rain.

The first official account appears in 1906 in the Annals of the Romanian Academy, literary section. Here the development of this magic game/ritual is explained:

*It is done, especially in a time of drought, by young girls. One gets greasy clay and gives it the face of a man with crossed hands on its chest. Then it is laid down on a small board and the girls weep for him as they would mourn for a dead man. On one side of the little board two wicks of a candle are lit. When the wailing is heard, young girls and boys from that part of the village start to come, each of them with a wick of a candle and a pot. After they adorn the doll with leaves and flowers, the children take it to a well outside of the village. The little board is carried by two boys, and a third boy walks in front of them, holding a stick with a kerchief on its top. On each side of the board there is a mourner-girl.*

*The wailing words are:*

*Ene,*

*Ene,*

*Caloiene,*

*Open your little gates,*

*Let the little rains flow;*

*There was no rain for so long,*

*And the land has dried.*

*Eneeee...*

*Calooooieeneeee...*



Sometimes, after arriving at the well, a bucket full of water is poured over the doll, and then in silence the same children take it into the weeds and lay it down so that nobody will find it again. But usually, after the wails, the children throw it in the well, the wicks of the candles are stacked on the wall of the well and the flowers are also thrown into the water. Then the children get water from the well with the bucket and, filling their pots with water, start to chase and wet each other. Finally, the pots are broken. (Pamfile 1909: 5)

In other regions, children make two dolls. In some places, 'Caloianul' is either buried somewhere towards the outskirts of the village or close to water, or is put in a small coffin improvised from a box, and floated on the water, decorated with flowers and candles. 'Caloianul' must keep floating. If it stops on its way, the ritual does not produce its effect anymore. (Tirc 2010) After the 'funerals' a burial feast takes place, with children collecting food from the village people.

A buried 'Caloianul' is exhumed on the third day, put in the 'coffin' with lighted candles and put on the water. All the phases of 'Caloianul' are accompanied by songs.

The custom of 'Caloianul' belongs to a pre-Christian period. 'Caloianul' was the representation of a spirit of nature, a divinity that had to scarify himself. The doll – the substitute for the deity – was made of rags, straw and especially argyle. In different places the doll was called different names: the Midwife of the Rain, the Mother of the Rain, Mother Caloiana or, simply, the Rain. (Camilar 2006)

The name 'Caloian' is considered to be of Old Church Slavonic origin (kal = argyle and kalen = of argyle [Camilar op. cit.]), or of Greek origin (kalos = beautiful and Iani = the Greek equivalent of John – in Romanian: Ion). In this last case there is perhaps a mixed etymology, a Greek-Latin one: perhaps the name 'Iani' comes from Ianus, a Roman god ('The One with Two Faces'); the name of Ianus comes from 'ianua' (door, gate), therefore he was the god who shut and opened doors/gates – a god of beginnings. He also gives the name to January, the first month of the year. The beginning presupposes, therefore, also a passing, a transformation from one state to another (in our case, from the state of drought to that of rain).

Caloianul, the clay doll – Romanian south area

Source – <http://www.gandul.info/traditii-istorie/ploaia-seceta-caloianul-839621>



Eliminating the pagan god, the Church assimilated him with John the Baptist ('Ion Botez torul' in Romanian) and the date for playing 'Caloianul' was settled close to the summer solstice. The custom was practiced by children on a fixed day (the third Tuesday or the fourth Thursday after Easter) and, later, in any dry period. (Camilar 2010) Other sources place the tradition of 'Caloianul' in the third week after Easter. (Camilar 2006)

A Romanian folk belief, supported by the Romanian Orthodox Church, says that between Easter and Pentecost the heavens are open. The communication is direct – therefore the ritual of 'Caloianul' has a good chance of producing its effect. It is also interesting that in many places 'Caloianul' was played by groups of young girls – all virgins. The migration towards children's play signifies, perhaps, the emphasis put on innocence, on purity.

Why is 'Caloianul' considered a children's game rather than a magic ritual? The answer is both simple and complex. Let's try the simple one. No doubt, in periods of dryness, the adults organize this ritual with the participation of the children (actually, it is a girls' game) – the adults are the ones believing in the beneficial effect of the 'Caloianul'. One can see the representation of the god (the doll) and the imitation of the funeral ritual as practiced in the adult world (the coffin, the 'flag' – a towel in the top of a pole, carried by a man walking in front of the funeral procession – the burial feast and so on), but actually this is not a 'genuine' imitation. The imitation is a funny one, a kind of pretext for a good laugh. The 'dead man' is not treated respectfully – it is not seen as a 'real' symbol/ substitute – the candles are just scraps, the wailings do not correspond with 'real' wailings, the feast after the funerals contains disparate elements of food collected here and there, the children chase each other and laugh, splattering each other with water.

If from the adult's position the entire process of 'Caloianul' is indeed a ritual of bringing rain, and 'Caloianul' itself is a Rainmaker, the children are not aware of the magic sphere within which the ritual evolves. They fulfill it as they have learnt in their village community, but the spirit of this ritual is, simply, for children, one of a game.

Just this ambiguity, this dual and simultaneous presence of a mundane and non-mundane in the magic ritual-children's game 'Caloianul', determines its orphic character and, perhaps, its continuity in time.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. M. Camilar, Din Calendarul Popular. 'Caloianul', [From the Traditional Calendar. 'Caloianul'] ([http://www.crainou.ro/?module=displaystory&story\\_id=7271&edition\\_id=4172&format=html](http://www.crainou.ro/?module=displaystory&story_id=7271&edition_id=4172&format=html), posted 11/ 5/2006, consulted 8/7/2010).
  2. M. Camilar, Dicționar de Termeni Muzicali, [Dictionary of Musical Terms] (Academia Română, Institutul de Istoria Artei 'G. Oprescu', Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2010).
  3. I. Evseev, Jocurile Tradiționale de Copii, [Traditional Children's Games] (Timișoara: Excelsior, 1994).
  4. T. Pamfile, Jocuri de Copii [Children's Games] (Urmare la Memoriile Publicate în Analele Academiei Române, Tom XXVIII și XXIX, Memoriile Secțiunii Literare Academia Română, 1909).
  5. M. Tirc, Ploaia, Seceta și 'Caloianul' [Rain, the Drought and 'Caloianul'] (<http://www.gandul.info/traditii-istorie/ploaia-seceta-caloianul-839621>, posted 28/6/2007, consulted 8/7/2010).
- 'Caloianul', the clay doll – Romanian south area  
Source -<http://www.gandul.info/traditii-istorie/ploaia-seceta-caloianul-839621>

Dr Magdalena Dumitrana is an Associate Professor at the University of Pitești, Romania



## Verbal Play – Flexibility, Invention and Experiment

June Factor

The Russian poet Kornei Chukovsky tells a story about his discovery of why young children love ‘topsy-turvies’ – language play which turns reality upside-down. His 23-month-old daughter approached him one day ‘*looking mischievous and embarrassed at the same time*’, and declared: ‘*Daddy, oggie – meow!*’

Chukovsky comments:

*She burst out into somewhat encouraging, somewhat artificial laughter, inviting me, too, to laugh at this invention.*

*But I was inclined to realism.*

*‘No,’ said I, ‘the doggie bow-wows.’*

*‘Oggie – meow!’ she repeated, laughing ...*

*I decided to join in her game, and said: ‘And the rooster meows!’*

*Thus I sanctioned her intellectual effrontery...*

*She realized that not only was it not dangerous to topsy-turvy the world according to one’s whim, but, on the contrary, it was even amusing to do so, provided that together with a false conception of reality there remained the correct one.<sup>2</sup>*

The wonderful power to turn reality upside-down by declaring that dogs and roosters meow – the power knowingly to turn reality upside-down – develops ‘because the child plays not only with marbles, with blocks, with dolls, but also with ideas’<sup>3</sup>. This linguistic playfulness is evident in all forms of verbal lore, not just the vulgar. It warrants consideration both as a universal developmental strategy for mastering the complexity of language use, and as child-originated folk art.

In the process of verbal play children recognise, learn, repeat and invent language conventions. Even very young children exhibit a pronounced interest in the way language is used. A three-year-old South Australian boy chatting to himself before falling asleep made up the word ‘piggy-nick’ and immediately commented: ‘*Oh, that’s another good word*’.<sup>4</sup> A four-year-old Russian child reacted scornfully to an adult who remarked, ‘*I’m dying to hear that concert!*’ His response: ‘*Then why don’t you die?*’<sup>5</sup> Such consistent interest in the way language works helps to explain the universal patterns of language play which are part of folkloric traditions in all cultures.

By the time children are five or six years old – the age at which they begin primary school in Australia – they have mastered some of the linguistic complexities of figurative and paradoxical language, and take much pleasure in exhibiting their recently-acquired verbal dexterity.

Riddles are popular with all children, but the early primary school child shows a special fascination for tricking rituals, perhaps because they depend on the metalinguistic and performance skills the six-year-old is in the process of perfecting. Inevitably, the beginner riddler doesn't always hit the mark:

- O. Why did the dog bark?  
A. Because he was angry.  
O. Why did the man blush?  
A. Because he sneezed and there was snot running down his nose and he couldn't find his hankie.

These two riddles, told by five-year-olds, are evidence of children's capacity to perform verbal routines before fully understanding their formation; they are 'misfired routines'.<sup>6</sup> The first is as economic as a riddle ought to be, but it makes logical rather than paradoxical sense; it takes the humour that comes from an ambiguous or punning rejoinder. (Why did the window box? Because it saw the garden fence.)

The second riddle is also far too literal in its response, and breaks the general rule that answers must not meander. (What did the mouse say when its tooth broke? Hard cheese.)

The repetition of hundreds of these routines – punning riddles, conundrums, Wellerisms and catch riddles – is a means by which a child explores the rich possibilities of the mother tongue. He demonstrates his grasp of what is true by playfully disorienting the listener. Classroom teaching emphasises what is 'right', but folklore permits the child to test reality, safe in the secure structures provided by an ancient tradition of word play.

Children's verbal lore is endlessly imaginative, juxtaposing the most unlikely elements of sound and sense. But there is also an overriding concern for meaning. The wildest nonsense is never quite non-sense. Even when children are speaking words which have no meaning in their language, as when Australian children determine who is 'he' or 'it' in a game by chanting 'Inky, pinky, isalinky, pompaleery, jig' or 'Eeeny meeny macka racka, Ray ri chickeracka', they sometimes declare that they are speaking a secret or foreign tongue (usually Chinese or double Dutch). Children will also invent their own languages, which to adults' ears sound nonsensical. Yet these made-up languages are by no means arbitrary; they are constructed with careful attention to vocabulary as well as to syntax and pronunciation.

A long-established children's language in this country is *Pig Latin*, where the first sound of a word is put at the end, and then the syllable 'ay' is added. Thus 'Can you come?' becomes 'Ancay ouyay omecay?' Newell (1883) refers to an almost identical American children's game called *Hog Latin*, where 'gery' is added to every word.<sup>7</sup> The Opies record a number of such languages among British children, and suggest that one origin may have been adults, who convoluted their speech when they 'did not want children to know what they were talking about'.<sup>8</sup> However it is just as probable that children and adults both devised these difficult-to-understand speech codes for the same purpose: to bind those who know and exclude those who don't.

The linguist Michael Halliday has described what he calls 'antilanguages', which arise from 'an alternative social structure, with its system of values, of sanctions, of rewards and punishments'. These antilanguages 'are typically used for contest and display'.<sup>9</sup> He was not writing about children's secret languages but about the argot of criminals and vagabonds. Nonetheless his explanation of the origin and operation of an antilanguage can be applied to some kinds of children's verbal lore. Children quite deliberately separate themselves linguistically, inventing codes, nicknames, passwords and other language forms which are not meant to be accessible to adults, or to non-friends. This has for children the most desirable effect of '[reversing] the normal status hierarchy by making children the "in-group" and adults the "out-group"'.<sup>10</sup> The Irish writer Eamonn Mac Thomais remembers nicknames tagged to unfortunate adults during his childhood in Dublin in the 1930s:

*Tiny was a seven foot policeman who stood at Westmoreland Street watching for bikes with no lamps or brakes. Sampson was a small, thin, meek man who worked on the Dublin docks. Show Your Teeth prayed in Whitefriar Street Chapel.*<sup>11</sup>

Australian children are equally fond of such topsyturvy labels. Hal Porter recalls that sometimes the names attached to schoolmates are cruel as well as apt:



*With faultless malice we...nicknamed our classmates and friends Dopey, Skinny, Fattie, Monkey, Shitty, Stinko, Ferret, Pisser and Twitchy.*<sup>12</sup>

Secret languages, passwords, alliterative and onomatopoeic word games are forms of verbal play, variations and adaptations of children's language patterns which have been recorded in many cultures. They are an exercise – willingly, indeed joyously, undertaken – in collective practice of the children's mother tongue. Their formulaic character makes them easy to remember, '[shielding] at least part of the content of memory from the transmuting influence of the immediate pressures of the present'.<sup>13</sup> Their universality suggests that they may function to enhance the children's competence in their own language.

The form of children's verbal lore, whether it be rhyming verse, a question-answer riddle, or a narrative beginning – 'There was this Aussie, this Englishman, and this Scots fella' – is immediately recognisable to the hearer as outside the ordinary informational and referential speech patterns. Just as sitting in a darkened theatre cues adults into a more or less willing suspension of disbelief, an acceptance of the 'pretend' nature of the play they are about to witness, so children in their verbal play participate in a 'pretend' world which overlaps, reflects and deliberately distorts the 'real' world of adult construction. In both instances, the word 'play' suggests a distancing from immediate experience, enabling the participant/watcher to assess and penetrate the 'make-believe' that sharpens our hold on reality.

As one writer has pointed out:

*Children play seriously and energetically: they need to, to develop their power over the experiences of life... The games enact aspects of life, and in doing so enact a criticism of life: in them the child asks, How to Live? ...in the games the disturbing subjects are suspended...in the poetry and ritual, the word-culture, in which they are enacted. ... The songs and rhymes are a kind of liturgy, an attempt to impose ritual patterns on experience... they are...a criticism of life as the child sees it, embryonic drama.*<sup>14</sup>

The 'ritual patterns' allow children a freedom not available in their non-play lives. Just as they can use outrageous words in rhymes and riddles – and defend themselves, if necessary, by saying 'But we were just playing' – so their very movements, as well as words, prefigure emancipation from the restrictions of childhood.

Describing the ring games of Black children in Georgia, American folklorist Bess Lomax Hawes writes:

*The usual family taboos and prohibitions are suspended, Black children are not encouraged in 'real life' to 'put on airs' or to flaunt themselves publicly. In the ring play, they may strut and tease, flirt and wiggle, while everybody claps for them.*<sup>15</sup>

The same freedom from customary propriety is evident in a clapping game performed by Australian girls in playgrounds all over the country:

*When Susy was a baby  
A baby Susy was,  
She went 'Whaa, whaa, whaa whaa wha'.  
When Susy was a schoolgirl  
A schoolgirl Susy was,  
She went, 'Miss, Miss, I can't do this'.  
When Susy was a teenager ...  
She went, 'Ooh, aah, lost my bra,  
Left my knickers in my boyfriend's car'.  
When Susy was a mother ...  
She went, 'Rock, rock, around the clock'.  
When Susy was a grandmother ...  
She went, 'Knit, knit, you're a twit'.  
When Susy was a dead ...  
She went, [silence].  
When Susy was a skeleton ...  
She went, 'Rattle rattle rattle rattle'.  
When Susy was a ghost ...  
She went, 'Sho-oo-oo-oh-oh'.  
When Susy was an angel ...  
She went, 'Flip, flap, flip flap flap'.*

In the most direct and light-hearted fashion, this song-game dramatises the stages of life from birth to death – and after. Each stanza requires the two hand clappers to mime appropriate actions to match the exaggerated mimicry of babies, teenagers, etc. The effect is comic, and sardonic: the baby is miserable, the schoolgirl stupid – she has to count on her fingers, the teenager is provocatively sexy, wiggling her bottom, the mother rocks a child to a rock-and-roll tune, the grandmother knits and points an accusing finger, the dead stand like stiff corpses, the skeleton and ghost are pretend-scary, the angel pretend-holy.

It is all mockery, a child's version of commedia dell'arte, with the raucous energy of the young reconstructing an unsentimental facsimile of adults' division of time. It is this mockery, this subversive laughter, which disturbs some adults as much as the occasional rude word.

The controlling nature of social structures such as schools is nowhere more evident than in their intermittent attempts to ban children's games of this kind, and to punish those who persist in 'unlawful' performance. In 1986 the headmaster of a primary school in Gippsland (Victoria) banned a collection of children's rhymes from the school because it contained the Susy saga. Such attempts at censorship are generally unsuccessful, achieving only the (presumably unintended) result of making the children more cautious when playing near adults. The folklore does not disappear, it simply goes underground.

Authoritarian pedagogues don't recognise the educational value of such play in disturbing conventional patterns and thus encouraging innovation – or perhaps they do, and fear the consequence to their power. Like some adult satire, children's mockery challenges the core of authority by reversing it so easily. There is a sense in which irreverent role-playing undermines the hierarchical structures on which much status and power depend. Perhaps it is true, as one writer suggests, that by 'providing children with an opportunity for commentary or interpretation, play suggests the possibility of reinterpretation, challenge, and even change in relationships'.<sup>16</sup>

Parodic, disrespectful rhymes abound in children's verbal lore. Popular subjects for mockery are teachers, police, politicians, clergymen and other figures of authority. Australian children, once required to sing the British national anthem every Monday morning at school assembly, devised their own version:

*God save our gracious cat  
Feed her on bread and fat,  
God save the cat.  
Keep her from harm and traps,  
Don't give her any raps,  
Long to reign over us,  
God save the cat.*

Pompous public speakers are mocked:

*Ladies and gentlemen,  
Bald-headed children,  
I've come to address you  
And not to undress you...*

Domestic life and adult preoccupations are depicted unromantically:

*Mother's in the kitchen  
Cooking fish and chips,  
Father's in the lavatory  
Bombing battleships.*

*My father lies over the ocean,  
My mother lies over the sea,  
My father lies over my mother,  
And that's how they got little me.*

*Doctor, doctor, please come quickly,  
Mummy's gunna have a new-born baby.  
It isn't a boy, it isn't a girl,  
It's just a new-born baby.  
Wrap it up in tissue paper,  
Send it down the elevator.*

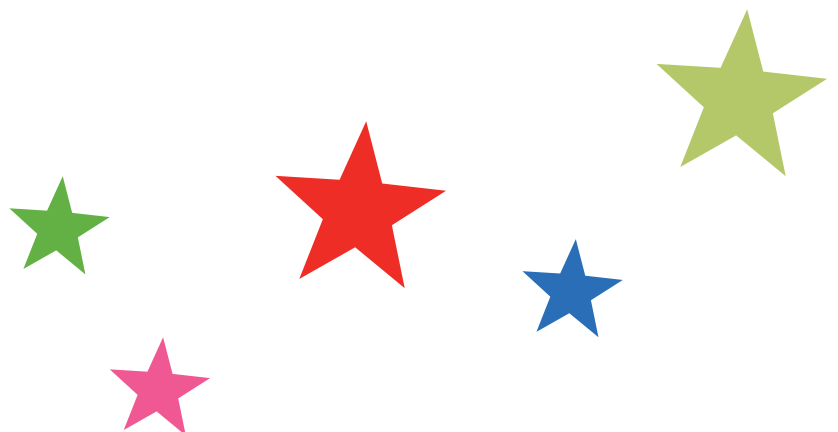
*Rheumatism,  
Rheumatism,  
How it pains,  
How it pains,  
Up and down the system,  
Up and down the system,  
When it rains,  
When it rains.*

Religious teaching also suffers:

*Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
Who eats the fastest eats the most.*

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
Send me down a chocolate frog.*

*While shepherds washed their socks by night  
All seated round the tub,  
The Angel of the Lord came down  
And gave them all a scrub.*





It has been argued by one scholar that 'it is by play that an individual learns that there are sorts and categories of behavior'.<sup>17</sup> This is achieved not through the repetition of what may be regarded by adults as appropriate behavior, but by constant shifts and distortions of the given models, 'the development of flexible competencies in role taking and the development of variable repertoires with respect to these roles'.<sup>18</sup> Children's playful deconstruction of the adult edifice of order and control allows them to experiment with different ways of talking and acting – one minute the sexy teenager, the next the disapproving grandma – which, paradoxically, prepares them for the complexities of adult life.

It seems that, developmentally, humans are disposed towards flexibility before precision, invention and experiment before integration.



## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> This is an extract from June Factor's social, cultural and linguistic history of children's folklore in Australia, *Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia*, first published by Penguin in 1988.
- <sup>2</sup> Kornei Chukovsky, *From Two to Five* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, , 1963 [1925]), 97-8.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid 98.
- <sup>4</sup> Garth Boomer & Dale Spender, *The Spitting Image* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1976), 12.
- <sup>5</sup> Chukovsky, op cit, 11.
- <sup>6</sup> John H. McDowell, *Children's Riddling* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, , 1979), 201.
- <sup>7</sup> W.W. Newell, *Games and Songs of American Children* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963 [1883]), 24-5.
- <sup>8</sup> Iona & Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (St Albans: Paladin, 1977 [1959]), 345.
- <sup>9</sup> M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (Baltimore: University Park Press, , 1978), 168, 180.
- <sup>10</sup> Helen B. Schwartzman, *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play* (New York: Plenum Press, 1978) 292.
- <sup>11</sup> Eamonn Mac Thomais, *Janey Mack Me Shirt is Black* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1982) p.106.
- <sup>12</sup> Hal Porter, *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963) p.72. For a general discussion of nicknames, see Jane Morgan et al, *Nicknames - Their Origin and Social Consequence* ( London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).
- <sup>13</sup> J. Goody & I. Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', (1963), Pier Paulo Giglioli (ed.), *Language and Social Context* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 316.
- <sup>14</sup> David Holbrook, *Children's Games* (London, Gordon Fraser, 1957) 10, 19, 21.
- <sup>15</sup> Bessie Jone & Bess Lomax Hawes, *Step it Down: Games, Play, Songs, and Stories from the Afro-American Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 89.
- <sup>16</sup> Schwartzman, op cit, 245.
- <sup>17</sup> George Batesman, 'The Message "This is Play"', (1956), cited in Schwartzman, op cit, 219.
- <sup>18</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, 'Games of Order and Disorder', *The Dialectics of Play* (Germany: Verlag Hoffman, Schorndorf, 1976), 20.

