



**Still playing: Australian children's play,
tradition and change in the early 21st century**

**Fun, friends and family:
growing up in Eltham**

**Children's playground songs
and games in the new media age**

**Quake City: contemporary play
and storytelling in Christchurch**

**Following the little red thread:
a fairy tale journey**

Review: Cultures Infantines

Review: Children's Folklore Handbook

Review: Allir í leik II



From the Editors

***Play and Folklore* no. 56**

It seems that almost every week a new national or international conference on childhood or children's play is announced. The growing interest in children's playlore is reflected in this issue of *Play and Folklore*, with the contents encompassing material from Iceland, UK, New Zealand, Germany, USA and France. We thank all our contributors.

There are several book reviews and two reports about major research projects on children's play from Australian writers who took part in the projects.

Play and Folklore has reached its 30th birthday, and both the Melbourne *Age* newspaper and the national journal *Teacher* celebrated the occasion with major articles: both featured the mysterious 'Cat and Mouse' story from the last issue of our publication.

We are also happy to announce the final report for *Childhood, Tradition and Change*. This four-year project, funded by the Australian Research Council and several universities, was a national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian children's playlore. The project's final report can be found on the website: <http://australian-centre.unimelb.edu.au/CTC/>

Gwenda Beed Davey, June Factor and Judy McKinty

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Still playing: Australian children's play, tradition and change in the early 21st century

Kate Darian-Smith

For the past three years, teams of fieldworkers have visiting selected primary schools around Australia for periods of one to two weeks to observe and document the play of children at lunchtime and recess. They have been part of the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* national project funded by the Australian Research Council, with assistance from the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria. A multidisciplinary team of scholars from the University of Melbourne, Deakin University and Curtin University are now analysing the fieldwork data in the first national research project addressing continuity and change in Australian children's playlore in the early 21st century.

Data collected in 2007–2010 will be considered with reference to previous studies, including the first scholarly investigation of children's play in Australia that was undertaken in the 1950s by the American scholar, Dorothy Howard. Along with other Australian research on schoolyard play conducted in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, these prior studies offer fascinating comparisons in the documentation of children's play across time – especially as the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* fieldworkers visited some schools that featured in earlier research.

The fieldworkers have described nearly 400 games, documented through video and sound recordings, photographs and text descriptions. These visual, aural and textual records will make a significant addition to pre-existing collections of children's material, cultural and ephemeral heritage held in the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria – both important collecting institutions of children's culture and enthusiastic partners in the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project.

The Final Report on the project's fieldwork has just been released, and excerpts of this are included here as a 'taster' of the richness and significance of the findings.



CATEGORIES OF PLAY

The research has also been gathered into a database, where children's games and other activities have been organised into 38 categories or 'functional descriptors' of play. Within each of these categories there were many variants recorded. For instance, while Chasey was a universal game in schools, there were many variations in the 'rules' that children ascribed to this game.

- Ball Game
- Board Game
- Bullying
- Card and Board Game
- Chasing Game
- Choosing Game
- Circle Game
- Clapping Game
- Climbing Game
- Collecting Games
- Computer Play
- Construction Game
- Counting Game
- Dance Game
- Dramatic Play
- Elimination Game
- Forbidden Game
- Games with Technology
- Guessing Game
- Hand and Finger Play
- Hiding Game
- Imaginary Play
- Jumping Game
- Language Play
- Miscellaneous Physical Play
- Miscellaneous Play
- Music Play
- Out of School Hours Activity
- Physical Play
- Play with Equipment/Props
- Play with Plants/Garden Materials
- Play with Toys
- Punishment
- Quiet Play
- Running Game
- Shooting Game
- Skipping Game
- Teacher-aided Game

Many games that were observed did not fit neatly into a major category or functional descriptor of play. For instance, 'Apple on a Stick' is both a Clapping Game and a form of Language Play, and the project database allows for much cross-referencing.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE PLAYGROUND

Australia is a culturally diverse nation: almost 400 languages are spoken by various communities within the population and more than 270 ancestries identified (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Yearbook Australia, 2009-10). Since World War II, Australia has been profoundly shaped by successive waves of migration: from the post-war migration of Europeans, to the arrival of South-East Asian refugees from the late 1970s, to the more recent influx of migrants from parts of Africa and the Middle East. In contemporary Australia, almost a quarter of all Australians were born overseas, and just over a quarter of Australian-born people have at least one parent born overseas. Migration has shaped the cultural diversity and social life of the broader Australia community, and by extension, has impacted on practices of play in Australian schools.



A Sudanese game usually played with rocks and pebbles, but played here with Eucalypt seed capsules.



It was observed in school communities with a significant number of children who are recent arrivals to Australia that play becomes an important means by which the immigrant children become socialised and familiarised with their new environment. Boys who have recently arrived in Australia often demonstrate their sporting prowess by playing sports with global appeal, such as Soccer and Basketball (or 'Shooting Hoops'). The newcomers also provide new variants of 'traditional' games. In one example, children were observed using the familiar hand actions for 'Scissors, Paper, Rock' but calling out 'Sim, Sam, Sah'. Girls of Sudanese heritage attending different schools in different states were observed playing a similar sort of game with rocks and pebbles they found lying around the schoolyard.

The project visited one inner urban school with a very high percentage of new arrivals from a variety of different countries, and another school in a non-metropolitan town where significant non-Anglo-Celtic populations had settled. Most other schools had varying degrees of ethnic and cultural diversity, with the non-government schools, especially the 'alternative' non-government schools, perhaps the most culturally homogeneous.

Some of the schools visited were located in areas where there was a statistically significant Indigenous population, although this does not appear to have had any discernable impact upon the games played at these schools.

Recognition of Indigenous cultures was a key feature in several schools, mirroring the changes the reconciliation movement has brought to relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australian society more generally. Two schools (one non-government and one government, both located in inner metropolitan centres) incorporated Aboriginal motifs, such as the Rainbow Serpent, into their playground design. Children also engaged with Indigenous politics in one non-government school, as 'Sorry' graffiti appeared in cubbies built by children along the fence line. This graffiti explicitly engages with broader political debates over reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

IMAGINARY PLAY

Fieldworkers described 75 forms of imaginary play. Many of these games involved props or toys brought from home (dolls, stuffed toys, etc.), or were based on characters that had broad appeal in popular culture such as characters from the films Harry Potter, Star Wars and Indiana Jones.

Some of the games had quite complicated 'plot lines' and used school infrastructure (as opposed to play equipment). At one school, five Grade Three boys played a game based upon the Indiana Jones series of movies about a hero who goes looking for ancient treasures and has adventures along the way. They all had character names and their task was to find the 'Crystal Skull'. They moved across the school oval according to the action of the game.



Imaginary game based around Indiana Jones

The boys used the stormwater drains running under the oval in their game. The drains have open metal grills, and in the game these were 'portals' – 'Portal One', 'Portal Two' and 'Portal Three' – their 'secret way to communicate'. The boys knelt on the covers of the drains and leant over to yell their messages to the others. The person on the middle drain had the job of relaying the message along to the people at the other end. Other, older children witnessed the game and were impressed by its players' inventiveness.

Children would also find interesting items in the playground and improvise. 'Fossilised Egg', for instance, was played by six-year-old boys who found a piece of broken rock which they imagined to be an ancient egg. A teacher confiscated this 'fossilised egg'; however, play continued as several smaller rocks were found in the hollow bricks. 'Fairy gardens' were made out of sticks, leaves, twigs and feathers at schools where there was a significant natural environment included in areas that children could play in.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Certainly much has changed in children's play over the past 50 years. For a start, there have been considerable alterations to school grounds, both in terms of landscaping and the facilities such as play equipment provided, as well as to school regulations determining who plays where and when. Many schoolyards in the 1950s and 1960s were often segregated into boys' and girls' areas, a practice not observed today, and the types and availability of playground equipment and ground care has often changed dramatically. One very recent change in Australian playgrounds is the replacement of grassed areas with astro-turf as a result of many years of drought.

Yet other aspects of children's play that were observed in the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project showed a remarkable continuity with the playgrounds of previous decades. Games such as Hopscotch, Elastics and Marbles are still to be seen, though these are not played as regularly as they were 20 or more years ago. Other games, such as Chasey and ball games, remain popular although

some activities may be restricted by the safety concerns of a school. Clapping, chanting and rhyming games are still enjoyed by children all over Australia, the words and references to popular culture updated by every new generation of Australian children.

Other differences in contemporary children's play reflect broader changes to Australian society and culture. In particular, the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of Australian society has impacted on children's play, and a range of games from other countries and cultures has been absorbed into the playlore of Australian schools. New technologies too have brought considerable changes to play since Dorothy Howard's time. This is especially the case with the rise of computer play, which has often been adapted to fit in with more traditional games and imaginative activities, showing how children can adapt their games to incorporate a range of objects and environments.

The *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project has amassed a significant data set documenting Australian children's play, which will prove a vital resource for researchers into the future. The project reveals the richness of children's games and language, and the diversity and similarity of play across the nation attests to the vibrancy of children's cultures. For the full text of the project's Final Report see the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* website: <http://australian-centre.unimelb.edu.au/CTC/>

Kate Darian-Smith is Professor of Australian Studies and History and Director of the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne. She is a Chief Investigator for the Childhood, Tradition and Change research project.





Fun, friends and family: growing up in Eltham

Tracy Harvey

Tracy Harvey is a comedienne and writer with a rich history in TV, film, radio and theatre. Her writing includes *'Dear Mum, I'm On The Telly!'* published by Penguin Books and *Stop Showing Off*, a weekly column for *The Age Saturday Extra*. Tracy created *'Call Girl the Musical'*, which was nominated for Best Musical Theatre Script in the 2010 Australian Writer's Guild Awards.

In November 1988, Tracy spoke with Gwenda Beed Davey about her childhood in Eltham, 20km north-east of Melbourne. A short extract from the interview was played in the 'Talking Chair' exhibit as part of the Children's Museum's *'You're IT!'* exhibition in the Museum of Victoria. This is an edited extract from the original interview.



Tracy Harvey
Source – Courtesy Tracy Harvey

TH I grew up in Eltham, and let me see – how many years ago was it? I'm 30 now. I spent the good part of my childhood there, went to primary school and then high school, and the thing I could remember most about as a kid was one Christmas. You always spend the whole year thinking what would you want for Christmas, and I decided I wanted Twister – you remember that game I think Sands put out on television. You needed six people to play it, with a large sheet of plastic with about six brightly coloured circles on it and you'd spin the dice and end up in all sorts of contortions, arms and legs, with all your fellow players, so I *hounded* Mum and Dad, and finally Christmas morning I unwrapped the game of Twister.

But the sad thing was, everyone was so busy with the Christmas preparations that day [that] no one would play with me, so there is this pathetic soul out in the back yard with a game of Twister that really needed four to six people to play with. I guess the sort of key to what attracted me about that game in the first place was that there were so many people involved, and it looked like a lot of fun. Now that I have a child of my own, it makes me realise that the most important part of his growing up is playing with him, that playing is so important. You can give your kids lots of toys, fandangle things that you buy at shops, but they want your company, and that's what's so great about kids – it makes you stop what you're doing and forget about the pressures of life and just get on all fours and run around the couch for half an hour, and hide in a cupboard or whatever, but when you asked me to recall my childhood memories, that Twister game was something that sprang to mind.

My father was really into making things with me. He was an art teacher and he used to do wonderful things with his kids at school. He would get them to make wonderful puppets – they were string puppets – and all these boys would get their sisters to make wonderful little skindiver suits and dinner jackets, [and] they'd have musicians. You'd walk into Dad's art room and there'd be about 50 puppets hanging from the ceiling, and they'd make masks and go in street parades. At home, if you were a bit bored or whatever he'd say: 'Oh, well let's make something',

and we made things from a giant plaster horse that stood in our backyard, and oh, our own little television set that was just pictures on a wheel, and it went round and round and round. Dad used to screen-print cards at home in one of the rooms – Christmas cards – and it was very fumey in that room, I remember, from the inks, and he'd have radiators, suspended on pulleys from the ceilings, that would come down and this big wheel that used to turn around in the middle of the room with all the greeting cards, going around and around, and they would dry under these radiators and Dad'd be at his desk with his squeegee and we'd go in and see him screen printing these Christmas cards.

But getting back to games that I used to play, I was a little bit of a loner when I was a child. Mum used to say, when the weekend came around: 'Why don't you ring up so and so, and go out and play with her', and I found that hard. I wasn't very sociable at school, I think because I went to a Catholic primary school and didn't really enjoy the experience very much, and so I used to try and stay away as much as possible. I used to get sick and be Sunday night with a cold, and then therefore miss school on Monday and then Tuesday and Wednesday and whatever.

I used to make up games for myself at home. I used to play spies, hide behind the curtains and talk to an imaginary accomplice, who I would sort of keep in touch with regularly as to what everyone else in the house was doing: 'Yes, well Mr Harvey, my father, is now moving down to the bottom of the garden. I am not quite sure what he's going to do – yes, no, he's coming back up now. Oh, Mrs Harvey is approaching him with a cup of tea, mm, I don't know what she's put in that cup of – oh here comes Georgia...' and just that sort of commentary on everyday things. And I used to have a favourite tree in the garden – I used to go and sit there a lot.

I had a menagerie of animals – rabbits, ducks, chooks, guineapigs, some mice...and [Dad] made a little house for them. We called it 'the mouse station' and it was suspended on wires that hung from the ceiling, and the theory was that they thought that these mice wouldn't jump off, but of course they did! I spent a lot of time with these



animals, playing with them. We used to get a big bale of straw for them, every month or so, from the local grainery and bring it home, and the rabbits would go amok and wild in the straw and occasionally they'd get out into the paddock next door and come back with bloated stomachs full of grass.

But what else did I used to do? I used to play in the attic a lot. I used to love climbing on the roof with my guitar and I'd sing myself songs, had some beaut games with my parents. My mother used to pretend that she was going to eat us – this was when I was *pretty* young – and she'd say: 'Right, I'm feeling very hungry. Go and get the knife and fork, and the salt and pepper.' 'No Mummy, please no, don't, no, no, no!' 'Yes, I'm afraid I'm hungry. It's time to eat you now!' (laughs), so we'd go and get the knife and fork, with salt and pepper, and come back and sit in Mum's lap and she'd put the salt and pepper on our arm, and the knife and fork: 'Ooh no, don't, Mummy!', and she, of course, wouldn't. Oh the scars! I've got the scars too! (laughs) No she wouldn't eat us, but it was, oh, a lovely thing to do with her.

GD When you say: 'Us', did you have any brothers and sisters?

TH I have a sister who's three years older than me, and it's interesting. I think because there was a three-year gap between us, there was just enough, or too much, to really be good. I don't remember a lot of time with my sister in playing games. She was just that bit ahead of me – she was off with the other, bigger kids and I felt a little bit left out. Oh I can remember doing things like collecting. There was a bit of a gang of kids in our area, and my sister was part of that too, and when firecracker time came around you'd go around and collect all the firecrackers that hadn't gone off, and we called them 'fizzers' and we'd split them in the middle and light them with a match and they'd go sss! like that.

Oh, what else? Oh, I used to love collecting frozen ice, over the tops of puddles, because our street was a dead-end and it was a dirt road, and there were lots of paddocks around with cows and that. It was pretty bushy, Eltham, in those years.

And I'd go out in the morning with my gumboots and just lift these beaut bits of ice, about a quarter of an inch thick, off these puddles and they were really big – it was like glass I suppose, and I'd put them all in a bucket and take them all home, and of course they'd [be] melted (laughs).

GD Were you able to roam freely all round the area where you lived – did you do much or did you stay fairly close to home?

TH Oh, as I got older I'd be allowed to roam – as I got into my teens, and therefore more sociable, we used to do a lot of big walks to friends' places – two, three miles – in the middle of the night. Mum and Dad, I think, knew we were pretty safe, and there were fairly large groups of kids then, when I was *littler*, more little, oh *smaller* (laughs). Yes we used to go for walks. We had big pine trees over the road and we used to make pine houses in the build-up of all the pine needles at the bottom of these trees and make cubby huts and, yes, I think we were able to entertain ourselves for a long time during the day, and Mum and Dad could feel confident we were all right.

GD What about at school now, apart from the fact that you didn't like going to school much... you would, I guess, play, at lunchtime, and recess times?

TH Yes.

GD Or perhaps after school. Can you tell me much about the sort of games you used to play at school?

TH Yes, the one game that was a favourite was 'Chinese Skippy', or 'Elastic Skippy'. I found that a very challenging game. I wouldn't mind getting out the odd elastic and having a go at it! But it was quite a complex game that had *definite* steps that got harder and harder, and if you mucked it up on the way up...if you were at number 19 and there were 20 different steps, you had to go right back to the beginning again and wait your turn, so it was quite a skilful game, which required precision and, well, a lot of accuracy with your body, and sort of jumping around this elastic. And you only were ever allowed to touch the parts of it, and that was very complicated.

GD Yes Elastics is a fascinating game for me because we haven't been able to find any evidence of it existing in Australia before the late 50s... Before that we think it possibly came from South-East Asia, because kids there do play it.

TH They do – well I was wondering that, because it is called 'Chinese Skippy', isn't it?

GD Yes a lot of people called it that, but I'm not sure whether it was just because it's sort of 'exotic,' you know?

TH Yes, that's right.

GD But could you actually describe me a little about the steps, can you remember what they were or what you called them?

TH I think I can, and I can't remember what they were called. I remember the first one was very simple – two people stretched the elastic around their knees, and you jumped on the first bit, squashed it down to the ground, then you jumped onto the second piece, squashed it down then jumped off, and then I think you – oh, it's all coming back now! It's hard to describe, but then you jumped up to the first piece, and sort of hooked it over, jumped *over* the second piece, so you sort of made a diamond I think – diamond shape, and I think then you jumped out of it.

Oh yes, and there were things like you had to jump sideways, across it, and also it got higher I think. You put it up to your waist, and if you were really good, the prefects would put it up around their neck!

GD Yes, I've heard some people talk about doing things like 'kneesies' and 'bumsies' and 'waisties', I don't know whether you called them names like that, do you remember?

TH Yes! No, I can't remember those names, but they sound pretty right, yes.

GD What else did you like playing at school?

TH Well, I remember every few months or so there were different fads that would come out on television, and they'd sweep the school. I remember there was one – and I guess this happened in all schools and it still does, there were things like yo-yos of course – but I can remember a ball on the end of a rope, that you would put around your ankle and you'd – I mean easy enough to make but you see it on television and you're: 'I've got to have one, I've got to have one, I've got to have one', and you'd put it around the foot and you have to jump, and the other foot jumps over it, things like that. Hoops, hooplas, oh what else was there? Oh, I'm afraid that's all I can remember at the moment.

GD What about old traditional games, like skipping, for instance, did you skip much?

TH Yes, Skippy! I did skip, yes, and of course there were the – what do you call it – the rhymes that went with them.

GD Can you remember any of the rhymes you used to say?

TH Oh, yes: 'My mother said, if I'm good, play with the Gypsies in the wood, what a naughty girl, I shouldn't' – it must have been: 'I shouldn't play with the Gypsies in the wood, what a naughty girl I would be, if I disobeyed...' (laughs), something to that effect.

That's about all I can remember of that one...

Oh, but I just remembered another saying that my mother used to do, which was *fantastic* and I managed to get it off her one day. She'd say it if we were sort of getting excited about something or in a hurry or whatever, and it was (quickly): 'A-one, a-two, a toodilly ensemble, a hot dog, a sausage roll, and a flicker!' That's terrific, isn't it?

GD Marvellous!

TH Isn't it! And when it's said together, quickly like that, you think: 'What, was that!' but it's: 'A-one, a-two, a toodilly ensemble, a hot dog, a sausage roll and a *flicker*'.



Tracy Harvey as Jean Brown in 'Call Girl the Musical'
Source – Courtesy Tracy Harvey

GD And when would she say that, what sort of occasions?

TH She would say it, oh, I guess maybe if she was about to put you on her knee, or dressing you for school, and you were getting a bit fidgety, and she was just putting the dress over your head, or I suppose anything to sort of make you feel like... she'd be: 'Okay, we're going to hurry up now, and it's all right, just be patient and we'll get this over with', and she'd do that to sort of distract you and make you laugh. Because that's a big part of having kids, isn't it, distracting them when they're in situations that they don't like...

I tell you what, we used to put on concerts for my parents. I used to love doing that with my sister and with friends who were staying, and my big thing was to make up songs on the spot to records of classical music, and my father still reminds me of the concert that we did as a kid. We had a small 78 record of Schubert, and it was a beautiful piece of music, it was: (singing, in waltz time:) 'Dar, dar, dar, dar-de-dar-de-dar-de-dar, de dar, dar-de-dar-de-dar-de-dar-dar' and I made up these words on the spot about our dog Charlie: 'Once there was a dog and his name wa'a'a's Charlie'. I mean it was probably a lot of drivel, but I guess it was the fact that I attempted to, and it was pretty quick, having to think of words on the spot to this song.

GD Can you remember any more of it?

TH Oh they were rubbish words but still, you know, a lovely thing, I think just because the piece of music was so beautiful, and whenever I hear it now I still think back to that time. But those concerts were great, I guess because the best thing about something like that is that it's using your imagination, and they're the best sort of games, aren't they?

GD What else would you do in those concerts?

TH Well, we'd dress up and we'd write a program for our parents, for each item, you know – list the items and give them a name or sometimes I think we'd ask them to judge what we were doing. Oh, we used to sing a lot of songs – I don't think we ever tried to put on little plays, it was more songs, and my sister was doing ballet at the time so she would have done a bit of dancing, and things like that.

I've just thought of something else I used to do. I was keen on chemistry sets until I actually got one for Christmas, then it was a big disappointment because I didn't know what to do with it, but up until that point when I actually got a proper one for Christmas I used to make my own. I can remember one night sitting up in the middle of the night with just a cup of water and a piece of material and something else, and just pretending that I was a scientist and talking to an audience of people as if I was lecturing them, and with the little props, sort of spinning this tale of what it all meant, you know: 'Well actually, if we dip this piece of material into

the cup, then we'll find that the water will turn a blue colour which *means* that...' you know, that sort of stuff. I think I liked making things up like that...

I can remember making fish kites – you see them today in places like David Wang,¹ but we used to make our own and they were huge, and because we grew bamboo at our place and we had our own bamboo poles, we'd paint up these. We'd stick together these big fish kites with the round piece of wire at the end – that would be [where] they'd inhale air, and we'd stick them on the end of the bamboo pole. My sister and I did this, and a few friends in the area who wanted them, so there was a whole gang of us and these fish kites. I remember one day we were flying them at the end of our street and this car drove past and my fish kite *covered* his windscreen and *flew* into it, *all* across the road, and this big, colourful fish was on his windscreen. It must have been a big shock, but there were no repercussions with that, gladly – but things like that were terrific. I think it was great because my dad was a good input to that way, he'd make it possible to make things like that.

GD Yes they both sound as though they were really good fun, weren't they, in opposite, different ways.

TH Yes, they were, Dad was the creative one and Mum was more, I suppose, the *fun* person, in the family.

GD Can you remember actual games that your parents taught you, or played with you, actual games?

TH I do remember Mum and Dad painting our big toes with faces, and we'd lie on the bed and you'd have your big toes up, your feet up the other end and they'd be made with little faces, eyes, and a nose, and lips and that, and I remember doing that. They'd talk, your toes'd sort of talk to each other. I remember lots of fun when we'd get into bed with Mum and Dad. They'd lie back and put their knees up and we'd sit on top of their knees and then they'd collapse them, they'd pull them apart and we'd fall down the middle. That was great. Oh, I can remember when we went swimming, riding on top of their shoulders, things like that which were, really, good...

I remember at Christmas time, my mother made a huge effort for most of the year collecting presents for us, which she used to put in two pillowcases, and she'd keep them on top of her cupboard, and throughout the year you'd see this pillowcase *grow*, and *grow*, with all sorts of shapes inside it, and on Christmas morning my sister and I...we'd wake up really early, like four in the morning or three. It was just too much to try and sleep 'til eight or nine, and you'd stretch your foot out to the bottom of the bed and you'd feel it, and you'd hear the crisp, crinkly sound of paper in this pillowcase and you'd know your presents were there, and you'd just feel fantastic and you'd turn the light on and it would be dark outside, and you'd pick up the first present off the top and you'd unwrap it, and this would last for half an hour. You'd really drag it out, and...I guess it was more the unwrapping than the actual... often the presents themselves were a little bit disappointing, you know? I think that's the way with presents when you're a kid – you never quite get what you want, but the actual unwrapping [is] just so exhilarating...

I've just remembered something completely different, because it wasn't a game, but I do remember going rowing. My father made a boat, because he was actually writing children's books on sports, craft, pets and hobbies, so he had to actually learn a lot of these skills – like chess, and ferreting, and having a microscope, and astronomy – in a simple way, to present in these books for kids. One of them was canoeing and so he built this wonderful little canoe called the 'Water Bird' and I remember one morning Dad and I going down to Sweeney's Lane, which was our local little river that joined onto the Yarra, and the mist was rolling off the river and we put the 'Water Bird' in and went on a lovely sort of boat ride, up and down Sweeney's Lane.

1 Editor's note: At the time of the interview David Wang's was a large, well-known Melbourne emporium, selling cane and bamboo ware, furniture and crafts imported from China and other countries.





Children's playground games and songs in the new media age



Kathryn Marsh

Ever since Iona and Peter Opie embarked on their ground-breaking study of British children's folklore in the mid-20th century, researchers studying the playground activity of children left to their own devices have expressed an interest in the links between play, popular culture and the available audiovisual media through which this is disseminated (Campbell, 2010; Factor, 1988; Marsh, 2008; Opie & Opie, 1985). In the age of new media, in which multiple technologies have created multiple media forms and modes of distribution, a team of researchers in the UK has completed a research project with an exceptionally useful and accessible set of outcomes. The project, conducted from 2009 to 2011 by researchers from the Universities of London, East London and Sheffield, and the British Library, has investigated the connections between the lore of the playground and children's media cultures in the new digital age.

Skiping with a short rope at a UK school
Photographer – Linda Bussey
Source – Courtesy Julia Bishop, University of Sheffield



The project involved observation and recording of children's play in two contrasting playground settings: one in a multiethnic school in inner city London with very limited playground space, and the other in a Sheffield school (northern England) with a large grassy playground area. This material was examined in conjunction with the large collection of sound recordings made by the Opies in the latter years of their research. The Opies' sound recordings have previously been ignored, while their written publications have been the focus of continued attention. An aim of this project was to use new media to enable broad dissemination of these audio recordings, through digitisation and cataloguing of the material. The resulting *Opie Collection of Children's Games and Songs* is now available as streamed audio through an online portal on the British Library website (www.bl.uk/sounds). An additional aim of the project was to map game movements and investigate ways of developing an electronic game interface that would enable children to play games in virtual form.

The project is interdisciplinary, involving a team of researchers with expertise in folklore studies, media studies, cultural studies, musicology, sociolinguistics and sociology. What is particularly impressive is the willingness of the researchers to engage with such a breadth of ideas. It is also rare to find studies of children's musical play based on material collected across both time and place in socially and geographically diverse contexts, and informed by archival data of the breadth and depth of the Opies' sound collection. There have been other large playground game collection projects in recent decades, most notably those of Helmut Segler (a European collection, documented in his book and video *Tänze der Kinder in Europa, [Dances of Children in Europe]* 1992); my own study, recorded in *The Musical Playground: Global Tradition and Change in Children's Songs and Games* (Marsh 2008); and the recent ARC-funded investigation of children's playlore in Australia, *Childhood, Tradition and Change* (2011).

However, what is most striking about the UK project is the involvement of children as co-researchers, collaborators and curators of the products of the research. For ethnographic researchers there are inevitable ethical considerations regarding access, agency, ownership and appropriation. In this project children have been regarded as more equal partners in the examination of their culture. Equality has been enacted through the use of groups of children as consultants and regulators of research activity in both schools, and by facilitating children's recording of the play that they see as meaningful using Flip video cameras, which are simple to operate. This has enabled the project to avoid the pitfalls of the 'ethnographic grasp' discussed by Sutton-Smith (1982: 32), simultaneously evading the adult researchers' possession of children 'through our contemporary and sometimes contemptible obsessions about childhood' (ibid).

The involvement of children in the interpretation of their observed play also assists in making forms of play more visible and comprehensible than they may be when viewed from the uninformed gaze of an adult. To some extent adults' lack of understanding of play is protective, minimising chances of external adult interference and interruption of play sequences, and ensuring that ownership is not wrested from the child creators. Thus the 'triviality barrier' (a term used by Sutton-Smith, 1970, to explain the reason for the lack of adult recognition of seemingly purposeless play) works in the children's favour in enabling them to continue with their play largely unimpeded. Unfortunately it also has the secondary result of giving rise to the continued claims that television, computer games, the internet – insert technology of choice here – have resulted in the death of play, as so many commentators, from the Opies (1985) to Factor (1988), Bishop and Curtis (2001), and the current UK research team have discussed. In nearly every school that I contacted for my own study, I was told that children no longer play their own games. Thanks to this and other current projects, such assertions can continue to be contested on an ongoing basis.



Another issue brought into prominence by the study is that of the multi-modality of children's play. It is only fairly recently that studies of children's folklore have moved away from focussing on the texts of games. The need to capture language, music, gesture and context has been seen as essential to the current study of children's playground games and forms of musical play. The archival sound material from the Opies' collection has revealed entirely different dimensions of children's play from that found in their published material. Similarly, extra levels of meaning have been provided by an examination of gesture in 'traditional' clapping games and imaginative superhero play alike. There are difficulties and decisions regarding the recording and transcription of multi-modal play, and the project team has particularly engaged with developing ways of documenting movement.

One problem with the documentation of a play artefact (for example, a singing game, or pretend play sequence) is that it is a crystalised form of play, forever unchanged, unlike the living tradition from which it has been taken. However, the unique website which is another outcome of the project is particularly effective in solving the dilemma of preserving a living tradition. This *Playtimes* website (www.bl.uk/playtimes) is unique in that most collections or archives of children's games (such as that of the Opies, Segler or my own) are seemingly finite. The child-curated British Library website will enable the display (and use by children) of an ongoing series of songs, games and play sequences. This allows for constant renewal of play examples (by children) and continued mapping and analysis of patterns of continuity and change. The intervention of adults will hopefully be minimised by the partnership with children who will have the ability to post new games, making their own decisions about what is valuable, as they have within the recording process itself.

Counting-out game on fists at a UK school
Source – Courtesy Julia Bishop, University of Sheffield

Each aspect of this project has been tremendously exciting and additional facets of the project are still ongoing, including the cataloguing of the Opies' collection of papers in the Bodleian Library at Oxford; continued work on digital mapping of movement and development of digital games involving movement; and the completion of a documentary film, *Ipi-dipi-dation, My Generation*. An unforeseen outcome is the inclusion of my own digital collection of audio and video field recordings of children's playground games in the British Library sound archives (www.bl.uk/sounds), along with that of the Opies, and the discovery of a number of other UK collections of audio recordings and photographs of play that will be digitised and added to the archival material available to researchers worldwide. From the revelation of the Opie collection in an entirely new format, to the recording and analysis of a broad range of examples of contemporary play, the rewards of this project in terms of knowledge and access to that knowledge are immeasurable.

Further information on the project and its outcomes can be found at:
<http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/playgroundgames/index.php>

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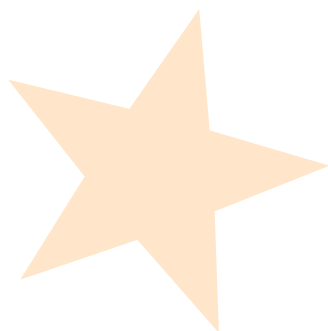
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Quake City: contemporary play and storytelling in Christchurch

Ruby Kathleen Little

Earthquakes have been a common theme in Christchurch after several large quakes hit the region causing death and destruction. Over 7,500 aftershocks, 29 measuring five or over in magnitude¹ in just 10 months have had a lasting impact on children and their leisure activities.

The variety of short- and long-term effects, including repeated sewer and water issues and large-scale broken infrastructure, have influenced children's play and storytelling, as suggested on the *Relationship Services Counselling Education* website: 'Lots of play and storytelling about earthquakes...normal reactions to an abnormal situation...'² This is particularly evident in Christchurch, where earthquakes have arisen as a common theme in play and storytelling among preschool children.

Jan Curtain, Early Childhood Educator of Annabel's Educare, and her colleague Anastasia O'Shea have seen various new games develop since the first large earthquake on 4 September 2010. Anastasia describes children playing the 'turtle' game:

As the children shake the Centre's little play house they declare: 'It's an earthquake!' while the others experience the earthquake from inside the playhouse, declaring excitedly as they crouch down as 'Turtles': 'Quick! Turtle!' This is followed by 'Oh, it's finished', in a softer tone.

The children at Annabel's Educare are practising and role-playing the 'Turtle' earthquake strategy that is now taught in Christchurch preschools.³ Through play they are able to act out and process traumatic events and strategies for survival in a non-threatening and playful atmosphere. The lasting popularity and widespread interest in playing this game indicates the effect the environment has on the development of play activities, as these children were undoubtedly affected by the Christchurch quakes.

Research findings by Barbara Brookes and Paula Siegel Wiley (1996: 28, 75) found a similar development in the play of children affected by the Northridge earthquake, which occurred in the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Resida in January 1994. The children there created 'earthquakes' by building and knocking down blocks (the buildings). These children, like the Christchurch preschoolers were expressing and coping with the impact of the earthquakes through play.

Similar responses have also been observed in older children. Wendy Hutchinson of Queenspark, Christchurch describes how her four school-age children would shake the doll house to create their own 'earthquake' and place a blanket over the dinner table and race for cover under the table during other pretend earthquakes.



LEFT–RIGHT

Properties with large gaps and cracks are constant reminders of the earthquakes

Pavement directly outside the gate of Kaspar and Keanu's home

Cracked paving inside the property. Broken paving gives everyday play activities a new level of danger and difficulty.



The earthquakes' lasting impact on the children of Christchurch is highlighted by the date and location of the photos in this article. They were taken on 30 July 2011, over 10 months after the earthquakes began, inside and just outside the gate of the home of two of the children.

Throughout the many inconveniences caused by the earthquakes, new play activities continue to develop in Christchurch. Jan Curtain observed the children's responses when a structural engineer visited Annabel's, labelling parts of the Centre with red, orange or green stickers according to the level of damage and safety:

After receiving some stickers from the engineer, and with new-found knowledge, the children proceeded to develop a new game, creating their own stickers using red, green and orange chalk. They moved around, labelling the Centre, role-playing the engineer. A four-year-old boy labelled one building with red chalk, saying, 'That's red stickered.' 'No, that's just flooding,' a three-year-old girl replied.

They are processing and exploring aspects of their environment through play. Role play as a form of coping with trauma is evident in the same three-year-old girl's activities at the preschool: 'Don't worry, I'll get you if there's another earthquake,' she says to her teacher, Jan, as she guides a toddler through to the preschool area.

Through play she is able to feel strong and in control as she takes the role of the responsible older person, offering comfort to another child. In this case the preschooler is able to express her worries, such as safety concerns, directly, and to act out solutions.

Children who are feeling confident and connected are either able to play happily, or are able to let us know how they are feeling. They let us know in words, or through the direct release of emotions, or through the themes in their play. (Cohen 2001: 209).

However, children are not always as direct when expressing their feelings. Almost a year after the first major earthquake, Keanu, aged four, began to start the days with the following statement:

'Help me tidy my bed Mum 'cos "The Earthquake" messed my bed up.'



Even though he has slept in his bed and messed it up himself, he wakes up and blames 'The Earthquake'. Keanu's concerns emerge through his storytelling. It is his way of communicating to his mother that he knows the earthquakes are still around, as there are often aftershocks in the middle of the night. According to Cohen, this is a healthy way of dealing with his fears and processing the aftershocks: 'Some children relieve their anxiety by talking about their worries. More commonly, they get their anxieties out by playing.' (Cohen 2001: 222). As he makes his bed with Mum, Keanu is indirectly addressing his anxieties concerning the earthquakes.

Although Keanu was also able to express his concerns directly with questions developing from 'Earthquake broke our house aye mum', to 'Why did Earthquake break our house?' he was not satisfied with the answers given to him so, referring to his little bank of knowledge, Keanu created a story: 'The Earthquake Alien comes down and pushes the button to make the water come.'

Keanu has progressed from asking questions and developed his own idea of what may have caused the earthquakes using imagery from a favourite cartoon, 'Ben 10 Ultimate Alien Force'. Through storytelling, Keanu is making the link between earthquakes and water (liquefaction and burst

water pipes causing flooding). He is processing and making sense of events and the environment he now lives in. Through play Keanu is attempting to regain control over his environment. His story about the 'Earthquake Alien' shows storytelling as a way of coping with trauma and taking back some control. Keanu is becoming '...the master rather than the subject.' (Lieberman 1993: 73).

Keanu soon realised he could make the earthquake situation work for him, turning the various inconveniences into an advantage. After a deliberate spill, he will say, 'The Earthquake did it', or 'It was a little earthquake'.

By blaming 'The Earthquake' Keanu has managed to turn the negative situation into something positive for himself as he realises he, too, can influence the environment; that there is a way of playing up and getting away with it while enjoying the process.

Another example of a young child turning a negative aspect of the external environment into something positive is two-year-old Kaspar's fixation with creating 'treasure' from bits of rock or broken concrete. He treats these rocks like treasure and, after choosing carefully from the selection, he holds onto the same rock for days, even taking his 'treasure' to bed with him.

Instead of seeing the negative aspects of the earthquake devastation, Kaspar is turning broken roads and paving into a source of treasure, providing him with something he can claim as his own plaything.

Contemporary play activities in Christchurch show the clever ways children have of making their own fun during hard and uncertain times. Play and storytelling are particularly important during traumatic and uncertain times as ways of coping with trauma, processing events, expressing concerns and regaining some control over their environment. Through play and storytelling children are able to experience and grasp aspects of their environment on their own terms.

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FOOTNOTES

1 '5.5 aftershock shakes Christchurch', *3News*, www.3news.co.nz/Aftershock_shakes_Christchurch/tabid/423/articleID/213976/Default.aspx, (accessed 6 June 2011)

2 'Supporting Children after the Earthquake', *Relationship Services Counselling and Educating*, <http://www.relate.org.nz/>, (accessed 23 July 2011)

3 The 'turtle' technique is an earthquake strategy shown to children that involves dropping down to their knees and getting into a curled, tight position with their head tucked in and hands covering their head – like a turtle curling into its shell. A DVD with the 'turtle' strategy was allocated to preschools after the February earthquake (the second big quake). Annabel's Educare doesn't play DVDs so they talked with the children about the strategy and demonstrated it.



OPPOSITE (LEFT-RIGHT)

One of Kaspar's 'treasure troves'
Photographer – Ruby Little

Kaspar holding onto his rock collected from
the half-fixed pavement turned 'treasure trove'
Photographer – Ruby Little

ABOVE

Kaspar playing in the liquefaction in his yard
Photographer – Ruby Little



Following the little red thread: a fairy tale journey

Reilly McCarron

During September, and part of October 2010 I travelled with my husband through Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic. Whilst we were mainly there as tourists, we spent our first week along the Fairy Tale Route in Germany and I could not pass up the opportunity to conduct some folklore research. Having made a number of contacts along our set path before we left, and armed with information sheets and consent forms in German (and Czech), I set out to discover what magical transformations had occurred in Grimms' fairy tales since they were published in the early 19th century.

The German Fairy Tale Route officially began in 1975. Its 600 kilometers follow the lives of the famous Brothers Grimm, and take in myriad destinations linked to the more popular tales in their collection, which comprises over 200 stories. Cramming such an adventure into a week was no easy task. The route begins in Hanau, near Frankfurt, and winds its way up to Bremen, taking in many towns, cities and regions on its course. The official website suggests a seven-day itinerary, and offers a package including rail tickets and accommodation, yet the tour is self-guided and flexible: the package can be extended to one month and even this timeframe would be jam-packed with places to see, things to do and learn, and people to meet.

Given time, we could have skirted off the main pathway and made acquaintance with Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, Rumpelstiltskin, Hansel and Gretel and many others. However, as time was limited, I focussed my energies on just one tale – 'Little Red Riding Hood' – and then kept to the recommended seven-day tour, which also encompassed the Pied Piper and Bremen Town Musicians. Our first stop was Hanau, the birthplace

of the famous brothers, where we admired the Brothers Grimm National Monument – a towering bronze statue of the pair of them engaged in a book – after which we met with an English-German storyteller and his wife for a delicious meal in Frankfurt.

This was a fruitful and happy occasion during which our new friends introduced me to the idea that there are two schools of thought surrounding the telling of Brothers Grimm tales in Germany. Apparently, some firmly believe these beloved stories should only be told word for word, as one would a Shakespeare play, and disapprove of those who tell the tales in their own way.¹ As a professional storyteller, I find this a troubling approach. To my mind, stories remain relevant due, at least partly, to their adaptive nature, and storytellers are at their enchanting best when their art is ephemeral, spontaneous and responsive to each unique audience. Besides which, the Brothers Grimm published their collected fairy tales numerous times, sanitising and blending and otherwise altering them with each new edition.

Our next destination was Marburg, a 'university town' where the famous brothers studied. Marburg is an enchanting village on the River Lahn, boasting a 12th century castle, a gothic church and a hilly maze of quaint cobble-stoned lanes lined on either side by half-timbered buildings leaning at odd angles. From Marburg we took day trips to Alsfeld and Ziegenhain. I'd arranged to meet an interpreter for these two days where my folklore research was to be focussed, as these towns are in the Schwalmstadt region, considered the home of Little Red Riding Hood. Our interpreter proved to be not only an excellent translator but also an Alsfeld tour guide and journalist for the local paper. He had written about my research visit, and a colleague from the paper was there to write an article on the project.²

In Germany the tale is known as 'Rotkäppchen', which means 'Little Red Cap' and refers to the small red hat traditionally worn by girls and young unmarried women in the region. The story was told to the brothers by Marie Hassenpflug, a young aristocratic woman with French heritage, and appeared in the first edition of the Grimms' *Nursery and Household Tales* in 1812 (Paradiz 2005: 95-96).³ An earlier version was published by their countryman Ludwig Tieck in 1800, yet it did not receive the same attention as the Grimms' (Zipes 2001: 744). Both versions bore a remarkable resemblance to Charles Perrault's 'Le Petit Chaperon Rouge', penned over a century earlier, except for the ending and the Grimms' additional sequence.

Perrault's story, collected from the 'folk' and adapted for the entertainment of the late 17th century French court, ended with the deaths of grandmother and girl alike, followed by a rhyming moral recommending that little girls keep away from wolves (Orenstein 2002: 23). Tieck, and the Grimms in turn, added a different ending which was itself very similar to that of another tale – 'The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids'. In the substituted ending grandmother and girl are saved from the dark belly of the wolf, who snores loudly whilst being sewn up full of stones instead and then drowns upon waking. One striking difference occurs in the transfer of this ending: the hero (a passing hunter) has swiftly replaced a heroine (the mother).⁴



TOP-BOTTOM

Red Riding Hood and the wolf inside the Ansfeld Fairy Tale House

A scene inside the Ansfeld Fairy Tale House – here Red Riding Hood wears a traditional small hat
Photographer – Reilly McCarron

Other feminist elements appear to have been lost from this tale along its journey of transformation. The Brothers Grimm added a follow-on from the tale in which Grandma and Little Red have learned to be wary of wolves. This little girl stays to the path, and when the wolf jumps onto the roof to wait for her to leave, the older woman devises a clever plan to kill the wolf before he gets his chance to gobble them up (Orenstein 2002: 61). Furthermore, the earliest known version of the story, 'The Grandmother's Tale' – recorded in rural France and thought to be the basis for Perrault's version – illustrates the girl's cleverness in deceiving the wolf without anyone's help (Orenstein 2002: 65-67).

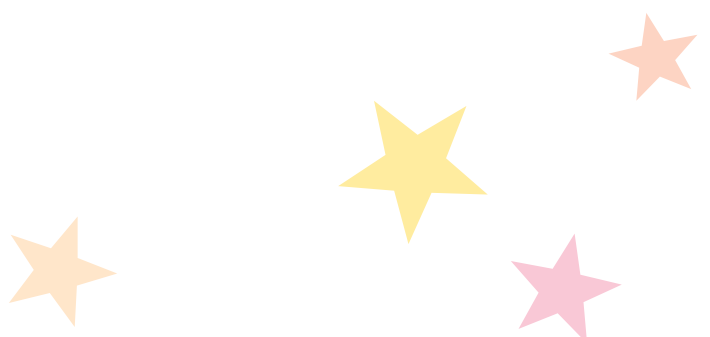
The focus of my fieldwork was based on this research, and my hopes were to find variations in the tale as told by local Schwalmstadt informants. Alsfeld has a proud association with the Grimms' 'Rotkäppchen', and my interviews focussed on an older generation in order to discover whether they were told the tale as children, and whether they had told their own children and grandchildren. Thankfully the rain did not deter everyone from visiting the marketplace on the day, though numbers were limited. I interviewed five people in Alsfeld, one in Ziegenhain and four more in other areas of Germany, including two professional storytellers. While this is a small number of informants, responses were telling.

The Brothers Grimm fairy tales are deeply loved and highly valued along the Fairy Tale Route. However, apart from the storytellers, those I spoke with knew only the standard version of Little Red Riding Hood found in most fairy tale books in the western world. That is, the Grimms' version without the second part. Indeed, none of the locals had heard of the second part, nor were aware of any other version than the Grimms'. Amongst my informants, women had been the only readers and tellers of fairy tales, whether grandmother, mother or aunt. Each interviewee was asked to tell 'Rotkäppchen', and all tellings were greatly abbreviated, the most prominent motifs being the sick grandmother, the little girl carrying wine and cake, the wolf gobbling up the child, the hunter, and the wolf's belly full of stones.

Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm were second-generation Romantics and began their collection of fairy tales in response to the perceived loss of German culture (Paradiz 2005: 19).⁵ Even before Napoleon's occupation, French language and customs had been adopted by the middle and upper classes throughout the divided country (Wilson 1989: 24). The brothers are beloved throughout Germany as national heroes who rescued German-language oral fairy tales from obscurity and published them for posterity. Indeed, they are beloved around the world and a number of their recorded tales are still the best known and most popular today.

The act of printing an oral tale, however, has complex consequences. While on the one hand it allows a broad audience to know that particular version of a story, it also appears to diminish the perceived need to tell other versions of the tale, or even the need to remember it. If the fairy tale is in a book, it need not be in our minds or on our lips. The seventh and final edition of *Nursery and Household Tales*, published in 1857, was markedly changed from the original scholarly two-volume publication of annotated stories. Financial and social pressures forced the brothers to alter the tales, although all of these editions are available to us today.

We enjoyed many enchanting experiences along the Fairy Tale Route, including a private tour of the delightful Fairy Tale House in Alsfeld, a meeting with the illustrator of a Grimm fairy tale book and even a search for wolves in the deep, dark woods. In Bremen we met a professional storyteller who does make a point of telling the second part of 'Rotkäppchen', and shines a considered feminist light on her telling of the Grimms' fairy tales. This allowed me to glimpse another side of their storytelling culture. One week is not long enough to follow the little red thread in Germany. It is, however, long enough to cast an enchantment on a folklore student from the other end of the world.





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FOOTNOTES

- 1 I did not have the opportunity to meet any storytellers from this school of thought, so was unable to enquire further.
- 2 Google provides a somewhat humorous translation of the article: <http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=http://www.oberhessische-zeitung.de/lokales/alsfeld/9369261.htm&ei=YZJITvGTDsLP rQeA1PHeAw&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=9&ved=0CFUQ7gEwCA&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dreilly%2Bmccarron%2Balsfeld%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dsafari%26rls%3Den%26prmd%3Divns>
- 3 French was still spoken in the Hassenpflug home.
- 4 In 'The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids' the mother goat frees her kids from the sleeping wolf's stomach, fills him with stones and sews him up, after which he drowns.
- 5 At the time the Grimm brothers were collecting and publishing their folk and fairy tales there was no German state, but variants of the German language were used across the principalities. Germany was not united into a single nation until 1871.



REVIEW: ANDY ARLEO & JULIE DELALANDE

Cultures enfantines. Universalité et Diversité

Ann Trindade

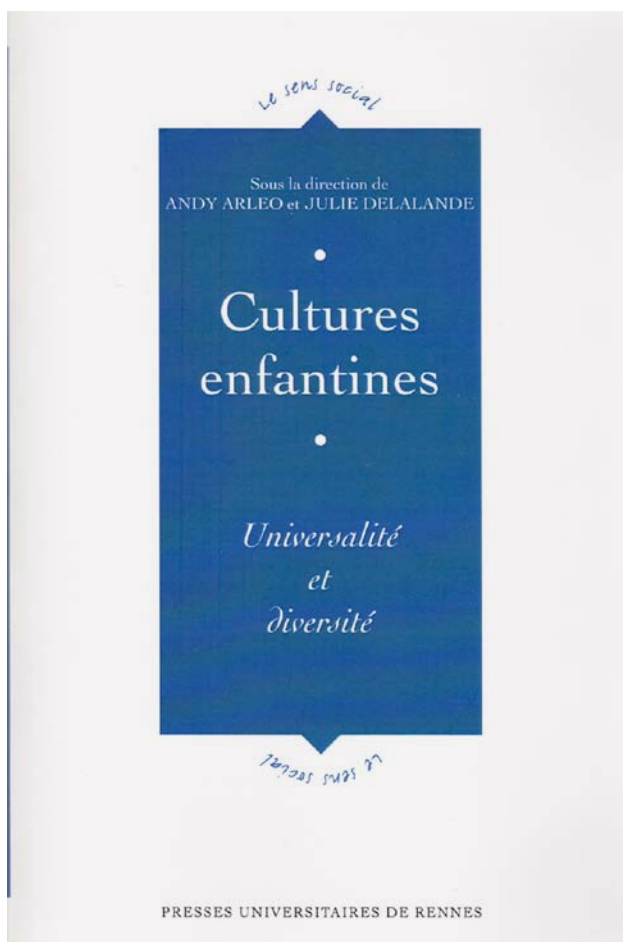
This impressive and highly diverse collection of studies results from a conference held at the University of Nantes in 2007. The participants represent between them a large range of countries, and that diversity is echoed in the organising committee with the inclusion of the Australian scholar, June Factor, a venerable name in the study of children's lore over many years.

I use the term 'lore' for reasons to be explained later. There is also considerable diversity in the professional backgrounds of the contributors but it would be appropriate to say that they range somewhere along a scale from the 'hands-on' practical to the mainly theoretical. This diversity means that there is a degree of overlapping between some of the approaches, and perhaps, inevitably, some gaps. For those coming from a traditional 'folklorist' background, the notion of folklore as 'performance', developed in Anglophone scholarship in the mid 1970s, is not specifically highlighted, though it is implicit in many of the contributions and fundamental to others, for instance those contributions which deal with time and space: playgrounds, dances, languages and games.

As usual, cost probably prevented the inclusion of high quality photographic material, which is a pity, but the article by Carole Chauvin-Payan (*Universaux spatiaux et gestuels dans les jeux de tape-mains*) shows how to encapsulate useful findings in transcriptions and diagrams as well as photographs. Sandy Hobbs, Seonaid Anderson and Jim McKechnie present similar data with illustrations in their paper entitled *Le travail dans la Culture Enfantine*. June Factor's paper includes some charming photographs of her young subjects. Factor has an unerring instinct for what children see as real and relevant despite the strictures of adults: hence the humour and originality portrayed in some of her examples.

The opening chapter is a useful overview, which indicates the wide scope of the collection and justifies the division of the papers into sections. It attempts to clear away some potential problems of terminology, most notably the divergence between English speakers who use the term 'folklore' and others, certainly Francophones, who use 'culture'. The reasons for this are complicated but highly significant and a lot less simple than the brief paragraph on page 14 would seem to suggest. As the authors admit, folklore is an academic discipline in North America, while, they claim, for the French, this term is less used 'for historical reasons': it is seen as archaic, relating to rural practices, the study of which is out of date, lacking in scientific rigour or theory. This probably says more about the French intellectual mentality than the authors intended!

'Culture', on the other hand, is more problematic for English speakers, because until recently it was seen as a product of education, 'high culture', and the ordinary use of the word 'cultured' in English preserves that notion of elitism. Things became more complicated when the academic discipline of 'cultural studies' came into instant vogue in university departments of English, first in the UK and then, inevitably, in Australia. The subject matter of this discipline was avowedly non-elitist; it included such courses as 'the semiotics of shopping malls', the study of soap operas, women's magazines, horror movies and the like, provoking some hand-wringing



in certain quarters. But while titillating titles such as 'Pornography and Blasphemy in Advertising' (or something similar) did wonders to get more Bums on Seats in flagging English departments, very few people realised that much of this material had already been studied for decades as 'urban folklore' by distinguished folklorists such as Alan Dundes. Jokes, urban legends, campus and office folklore were all represented in the literature and studied at Universities in both North American and Australia – Monash University included. But the version presented by many cultural studies practitioners took the 'folk' out of the folklore and what resulted was in many ways an over-theorised, often stultifying output regularly couched in a rebarbative jargon which was more 'elitist' than anything the ivory tower inhabitants of the past could ever have dreamed up! While students could and did participate eagerly in the study of 'folklore', many who enrolled for cultural studies emerged bemused or cowed into silence. The smarter ones soon realised that to pick up and play back the appropriate jargon was the safest way to go.

It is, of course, only relatively recently that the study of children's folklore/lore has been considered appropriate for academic study. In 1994 the *Bibliothèque Nationale* commissioned a fine exhibition on the theme: *L'enfance au moyen âge*, and a book followed, which demonstrated that the widely held view – till then, and in the French context – according to which children had never been seen as anything other than potential adults, was not true, and that medieval art and literature and other cultural representations demonstrated clearly that this had never been the case. It was precisely because English speaking pioneers such as the Opies and, in Australia, Ian Turner and June Factor, went directly to the 'owners' of the tradition, the children, and observed their cultural practices, that others were able to follow suit. The results showed that there were indeed aspects of children's daily lives and interactions with their peers as well as the adult world and the constraints that adults imposed on them – education, 'behaviour' inside and outside the home, taboos of various kinds – which could be compared, and that some of these aspects might be considered 'universals'.

Some of these possible 'universals' are discussed in a number of the papers included in this volume and a possible explanation for their presence sought in the context of what childhood itself is: a space for testing boundaries, sometimes for revolt, for exploration of language, understanding of relationships and so on. The conditions of childhood today – where many children spend time outside the nuclear or extended family, the availability of a vast amount of toys, games, devices, the exposure to media and electronic communication – all affect the development of childhood behaviour and culture. And in an increasingly globalised world, it is possible to see how the local and the universal combine in specific contexts. Berit Overä Johansson, for instance, conducted an interesting experiment with the universally-loved children's toy Lego, to see how six-year-olds in a Norwegian child-care centre developed their imaginative skills and created their own mini-worlds, sometimes strongly reactive to learned social experiences, sometimes purely fantastic. Competition and cooperation were both present. Children negotiated but there were also

those who missed out. Stimulating and richly suggestive material is presented by researchers like Marion Blondel, working with deaf children, and studies like this must surely throw further light on the cultural practice of children who belong to an 'inner circle' with characteristics not shared by others. In another section of the collection, a linguist, working in the context of diglossia, examines how Breton-speaking children use and adapt a particular terminology in handling local traditions in their everyday world. This reviewer observed a markedly similar process, *mutatis mutandis*, in an Indian village some years ago, where the children were using three closely related languages – the national language, the state/province language and the local language – switching from one to the other in certain contexts and then battling with English to communicate with the foreign visitor!

In a collection of this length and diversity it is not possible to do justice to each and every contribution. All can be read with interest and the range of skills called upon by the contributors can only be admired.

In conclusion one might be permitted to return to the old idea of 'active' and 'passive' tradition-bearers, often invoked in studies of oral tradition and its interaction with writing in the European Middle Ages. The renowned Irish folklorist James Delargy (*Seamus Ó Duilearga*) returned time and time again to this in his studies of the (oral) transmission of

folktales in Ireland. While the story tellers dominated the scene with their performance, it was clear from the context that they did not 'own' the stories: the audiences would control the narrative by correcting, supplementing or embellishing the material as well as passing judgement on the performance itself. Children themselves are both active and passive tradition bearers and while adults interfere, either as observers, custodians or controllers (or, unfortunately, manipulators for commercial or ideological purposes), there will always be a distance, like that observed respectfully by the most experienced and skilled professional collectors. Yet there is one crucial difference: adults have all been children themselves. Most have had family contexts in which a close relationship with children has been a feature. The ability to understand and engage with the rich folklore/culture/cultures of children is a welcome characteristic of the papers in this substantial collection of material.

Cultures enfantines. Universalité et Diversité

Andy Arleo and Julie Delalande (editors)

Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010

ISBN 978-2-7535-1249-8

Associate Professor Ann Trindade has taught at both Monash and Melbourne Universities. Her subjects included medieval languages and history, and she initiated the study of folktales at Monash University. She is the author of numerous publications.



Tea party, date unknown
Source – collection of June Factor





REVIEW: ELIZABETH TUCKER Children's Folklore: a Handbook

Gwenda Beed Davey

Elizabeth Tucker's handbook of children's folklore was published in 2008. It aimed to look beyond some major American texts published in 1988 (Simon Bronner's *American Children's Folklore*)¹ and 1995 (Brian Sutton-Smith et al, *Children's Folklore: A Sourcebook*).² Since then, we have had the benefit of at least two major non-American publications in children's folklore scholarship: Kathryn Marsh's prize-winning *Musical Playground* (2008)³ and the final report of the seminal British project *Children's Playground Games and Songs in the New Media Age* (2011).⁴ Though the insights of these latter publications enhance our understanding of children's folklore and play, Elizabeth Tucker's book remains of considerable value.

This is a slim volume (164 pages), as a handbook should be, but its content is substantial. The book has five major sections: Introduction, Definitions and Classifications, Examples and Texts, Scholarship and Approaches, and Contexts. It also contains a Glossary, a Bibliography, Web Resources and an Index. It is an invaluable reference tool for workers in children's folklore.

I am particularly impressed by Elizabeth Tucker's international coverage. Her Index includes many of the names familiar to Australian folklorists: Ackerley (NZ), Arleo (France), Factor and Russell (Australia), Grudgeon and Bishop (UK), Carpenter and Fowke (Canada), Kvideland (Norway) and Virtanen (Finland), as well as internationally renowned researchers from the United Kingdom, United States and elsewhere. In this respect, the *Handbook* is outstanding: the lack of international sources in the 1995 *Sourcebook* was, in my opinion, a serious flaw.

Tucker's book is also ground-breaking in its range of content. On page one of her **Introduction** she writes that 'the present handbook...puts more emphasis on nature lore and imaginative, dangerous, and sexually oriented games than some other surveys have done' (page 1). She discusses older traditions of children's play, from the late 1800s, but the book is set firmly in the present. Her Introduction begins with a depiction of levitation on YouTube in October 2006, and acknowledges internet technology as 'just one of the many expressions of the rich array of games, songs, rhymes, jokes, riddles, tales, legends, pranks, toys and other amusements that comprise children's folklore' (pages 1 and 2).

In the section on **Definitions and Classifications**, Tucker's taxonomy is somewhat confused. The sub-genres from Riddles to Material Culture are clearly sub-sets of both folklore and play, yet they are given equal emphasis with those sub-headings. The separate descriptions of particular genres such as Counting-Out Rhymes, Finger Games, Ball Games, etc. are nevertheless very useful: they are in plain language and would be accessible to a broad range of readers.

The descriptions of Speech Play are especially interesting, and include some of the arcana of writing text messages on mobile phones. In the section on Jokes, it's good to see such an accomplished scholar disagree with some earlier writers such as Sigmund Freud and Gershon Legman concerning the 'hostility' embedded in the telling of dirty jokes. Tucker contends that 'more commonly, children share what they know about sex through telling dirty jokes, enjoying the chance to use taboo words in stories kept secret from parents and teachers' (page 25). Many contemporary researchers would agree.

Chapter Three, **Examples and Texts**, is really an expansion of Chapter Two (**Descriptions and Classifications**), with the exception of Speech Play, 'since Chapter Two includes many examples' (page 49). I find this mode of organization rather awkward, though the material included in Chapter Three is undoubtedly rich.

In Chapter Four, **Scholarship and Approaches**, Elizabeth Tucker discusses 'Founding Scholars' such as W. W. Newell (1883) and Lady Gomme (1894–1898), and notes renewed interest in Alice Gomme's work in recent times. She describes the Opies among 'Playground Pioneers', as well as Brian Sutton-Smith, Dorothy Howard and Nigel Kelsley.

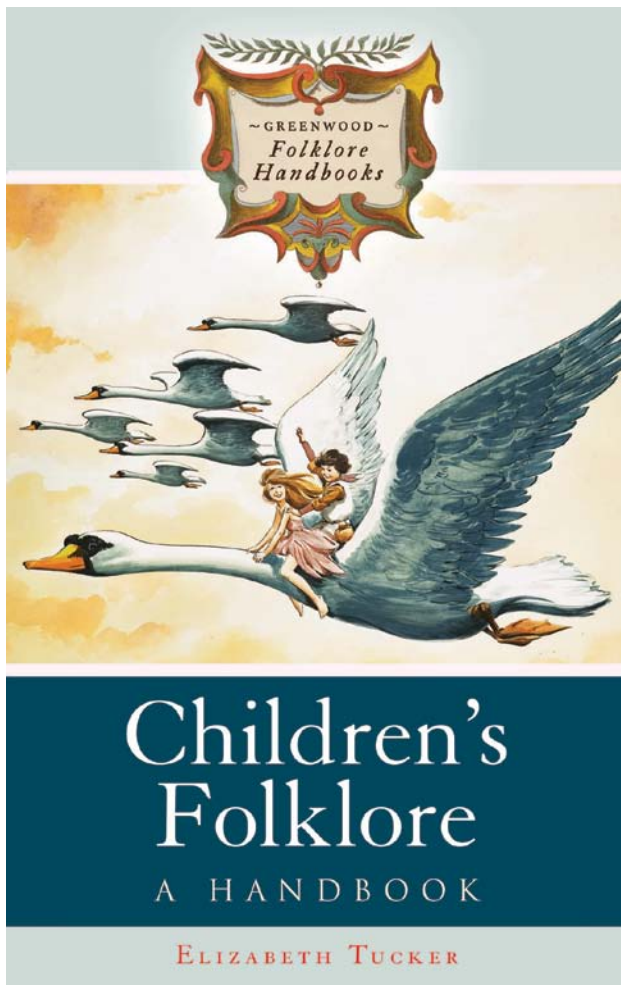
The chapter includes major theoretical approaches, including both performance and psychoanalytic theory, and mentions increasing interest in the study of gender issues in children's folklore since the 1970s. Space and Place is a topic of interest to Australian researchers, and the Australian project *Childhood, Tradition and Change* (2006–2010)⁵ paid considerable attention to this issue. Cross-Cultural Comparison is surprisingly thin, although it is good to see the work of Andy Arleo, Heather Russell and Kathy Marsh featured here.

Aggression and Violence is an important inclusion, and follows Tucker's initial promise to deal with troublesome and taboo topics. The examples given here all relate to human-produced violence; it should be noted that nature-produced violence (such as tsunamis and earthquakes) also affects children's play. The article by Ruby Little in this issue of *Play and Folklore*, entitled 'Quake City: contemporary play and storytelling in Christchurch'⁶ explores a recent example of this phenomenon.

The final chapter in the *Children's Folklore Handbook* is **Contexts**, and includes Autobiography, Children's Literature, Film, Television, Toys and Games, and Dolls. It is a fascinating chapter which presents a number of surprises, such as Hillary Rodham Clinton's two autobiographical books which include interesting descriptions of her childhood play. One seminal book with an enormous publication imprint, and influence, is very briefly mentioned on page 141 and deserves a more detailed discussion: William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.⁷ Its depiction of childhood aggression and violence is challenged by some folklorists aware of the cooperative nature of much children's play and social interaction.

Elizabeth Tucker's *Children's Folklore: a Handbook* is a work of remarkable scholarship. This is a major reference work for scholars of children's folklore, and the photographs are marvellous.





Children's Folklore: a Handbook

Elizabeth Tucker

Greenwood Press, Westport,
Connecticut and London, 2008

ISBN 0313341893

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FOOTNOTES

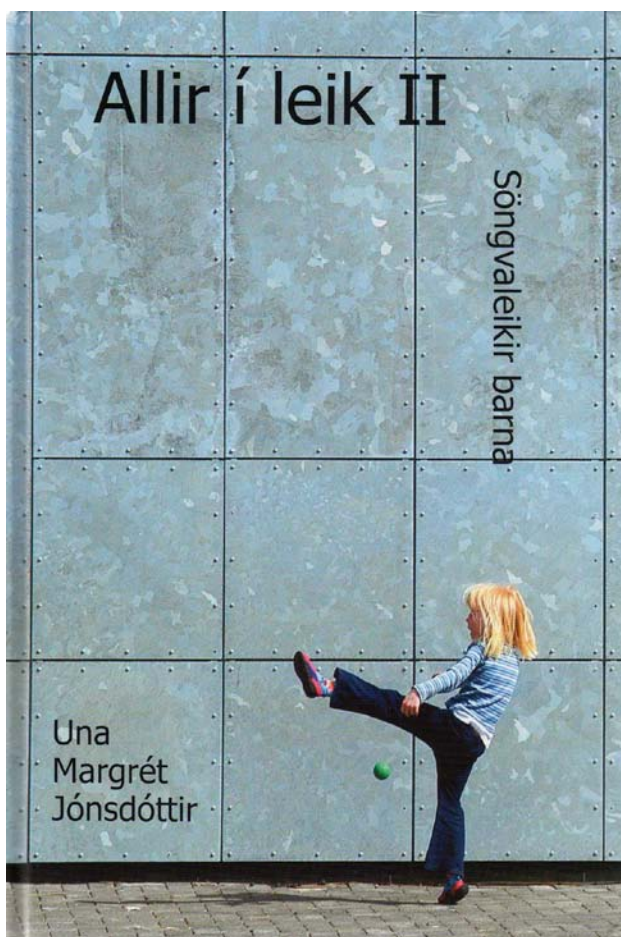
- 1 Simon J. Bronner, *American Children's Folklore* (Little Rock: August 1988).
- 2 Brian Sutton-Smith, Jay Mechling, Thomas W. Johnson, and Felicia R. McMahon (eds), *Children's Folklore: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland, 1995).
- 3 Kathryn Marsh, *The Musical Playground: Global Tradition and Change in Children's Songs and Games* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2008).
- 4 *Children's games and songs in the new media age*
<http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/playgroundgames/index.php>
(accessed 20 June 2011).
- 5 *Childhood, Tradition and Change: a national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian children's playlore.*
ARC Linkage Project LPO663282 <http://www.australian.unimelb.edu.au/CTC>
(accessed 4 August 2011).
- 6 Ruby Little, 'Quake City: contemporary play and storytelling in Christchurch', *Play and Folklore* no. 56, (Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2011).
- 7 William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (Faber and Faber: London, 1954).



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

Judy McKinty

Allir í leik II is the second volume of a two-part publication about Icelandic singing games, based on 10 years of research by the author Una Margrét Jónsdóttir¹ in Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. A review of the first volume was published in *Play and Folklore* no.54, September 2010².



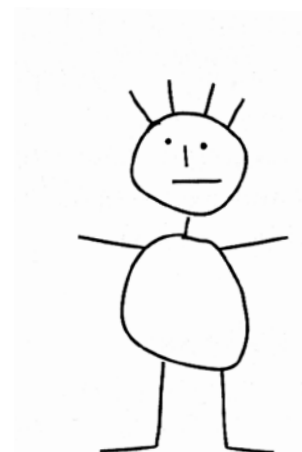
In this second volume, Una Margrét once again describes singing games and games with a rhythmic verbal component. The 17-page English summary, which has thoughtfully been included, and on which this review is based, contains chapters titled Mimic Songs, Rowing Games, Verbal Games with a Toy, Tongue Twisters, Card Games with a Rhythmic Text, Christmas Games, Ash Wednesday Songs, Teasing Songs, Charms and Counting-out Rhymes. Una Margrét emphasises that the English summary cannot include all the material in the Icelandic section, although she has tried to mention the most important examples. She gives descriptions of selected games with some explanatory notes.

Some of the English descriptions are quite short – in some cases a couple of lines only – in contrast to the detailed descriptions and notes given in the first volume. This is disappointing, as there are references to rhymes and games – for instance the counting-out rhyme ‘Mickey Mouse built a house’ which was ‘written by the Icelandic writer and teacher Vilborg Dagbjartsdóttir, probably around 1960 or 1970’ (page 281) – which appear similar to versions known in English-speaking countries. A section on teasing songs, some with rude and scatological themes, has been much abridged because ‘When the rhyme is taken away teasing songs are not very funny anymore so it is really not much good translating them’ (page 277).

Apart from the constraints of the English summary, the work is well-referenced and thoroughly researched. In one section, Una Margrét gives the origins of a song, widely thought to be a traditional Icelandic folk song but found to have been written by a Danish composer in the 19th century. In the Icelandic text there is a list of references after each rhyme/song and there is an index at the back of the book, which is useful for finding references to English songs, rhymes and games. There is also a pictures reference, giving information about each photograph in the book in English.

In reading the English summary, I found it useful to flip backwards and forwards between the English and Icelandic texts, as often there are clues in the music, images or English translations of the songs and rhymes. For instance, in **Mimic Songs**, the first rhyme will be familiar to Australian children and adults: 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes' (sung to the tune of 'There is a tavern in the town'), and the song '*Hvar hvar hvar hvar hvar er litla systa?*' is 'a translation of an American game, "Where oh where is pretty little Susie?" published in Ruth Seeger's book *American Folk Songs for Children* in 1948' (page 269). I remember dancing and singing this song as 'Paw Paw Patch' to almost the same tune with my classmates in a Ballarat primary school in the 1950s. Una Margrét gives an Icelandic phonetic rendering of 'paw paw patch' as '*Pópópax*', which is meaningless but makes the game 'sound quite exotic' (page 269).

Rowing Games were formerly played by two children sitting on the floor or bed, 'facing each other and holding hands with the soles of their feet touching. Then they would rock to and fro imitating the movements of a ship and singing a song about rowing and fishing – a very important kind of work in Iceland' (page 270). Three rowing games are briefly described, with rhymes dating from the 19th century.



7. mynd. „Óli prik.“
Teikning gerð 2010.

Óli prik' (Oli the Stick)
in the 'drawing story'

The chapter on **Verbal Games with a Toy** includes a guessing game with fish bones, a prediction game with buttons – also played as a skipping game – balancing games, an intriguing mention of the toy known as 'Jacob's ladder', and '*Óli prik*', a rhyme recited while drawing a simple picture of a man: 'Dot, dot, comma, line, this is Óli the Stick...' (page 271). Similar examples of songs or stories with progressive drawings from Denmark, Sweden and Papua New Guinea have been described in previous issues of *Play and Folklore*.³

The description of **Tongue Twisters** is understandably very brief in the English summary, as pronunciation is the key to these verbal gymnastics. Una Margrét explains: 'Let us only say that according to an old saying the man who can pronounce rightly '*Hrútshornshagldir á hárræipi*' is fully Icelandic!' (page 271).

The small chapter on **Card Games with a Rhythmic Text** briefly describes a 19th century prediction game with cards, which is identified as the forerunner of the skipping game 'House, cottage, outhouse, palace' (described in detail in the first volume) and the button game described in the chapter on Verbal Games with a Toy.





A fascinating section, in terms of transmission, adaptation and preservation of children's folklore, is the description of a bouncing ball rhyme from Icelanders in America. Una Margrét's American correspondent is a man born in 1930 and raised in Ballard, Seattle. She comments: 'What I found extremely interesting was the fact that even though the children used to speak English together and at home, and hardly ever spoke Icelandic, they knew Icelandic children's rhymes and recited them in their games' (page 272). This is one of the more detailed sections in the English summary, with rhymes translated and information about the cultural backgrounds of the American children who used them in their play.

Christmas Games are a tradition in Iceland, and Una Margrét says that 'It is pretty safe to say that almost all Icelandic children know them' (page 273). Among the games are the familiar 'Here we go round the juniper (mulberry) bush'. This chapter, and the following chapter on **Rare Christmas Games**, give detailed information about some of the Christmas songs and games, including historical and cultural notes.

The chapter on **Ash Wednesday Songs** describes the traditional activities taking place on that day: 'On Ash Wednesday, children dress up in costumes, sing in stores and get candy in return' (page 276). Among the songs is one from around 1930, which Una Margrét says was still being sung in the 1960s but has now disappeared. It was a parody of a hymn, sung by children in Akureyri to mock a merchant who closed his shop when children came begging for candy.

As mentioned earlier, the chapter on **Teasing Songs** gives four examples from what appears to be a rich section in the Icelandic text. Among the chosen examples is '*Iss piss pelamál*' ('Ee pee half a pint'), a rhyme transmitted orally by children since around 1910 because 'very few books will print such nonsense' (page 278):

*Ee pee half a pint
Brown sugar and a crown
When I need to pee
I just pee in my shoes.*

There is also a description of the hand-slapping trick called '*Gimmí fæv*' ('Gimme five!'), which has evolved in Iceland in the last two decades. Apart from differences in terminology, the Icelandic version is similar to the rhyme used in Australia:

*Gimme five!
On the side!
Up high!
Down low (quickly pull hand away)
Too slow!*

One of the descriptions which only appear in the Icelandic text is the well-known rhyme: 'Jean and John up a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G'.

Among the three old Icelandic **Charms** described is one which uses a sheep's knucklebone to answer questions with 'yes' or 'no' according to how it lands on the floor. Knucklebones have been used for divination since ancient times. Una Margrét writes that in Iceland 'the belief probably originated from the fact that the word *Vala* (knucklebone) also means 'fortune teller' (page 279). She also observes: 'Not many children know it nowadays...fewer Icelandic children live in the country now so they do not see knucklebones very often' (page 279).

The last chapter in the English summary is **Counting Out Rhymes**. From this section we learn that children in Iceland usually just point as they count, except for one rhyme, '*Úllen dúllen doff*', when the counting is done on fists. '*Íni míní mæni mó*' is easily recognised as a phonetic rendition of 'Eeny meeny miny mo', perhaps the most widely-known English counting rhyme. 'It seems to have come to Iceland around 1930, but never became popular' (page 280). Most of the Icelandic variants are similar to this version:

*Íni míní mæni mó
katsa nikka þaðé dó
if júr hólling sledingó
íni míní mæni mó.*

The racial references within the rhyme are not explored in the book – perhaps in Iceland it was nothing more than a nonsense rhyme.

The English summary ends with a **Conclusion** and a section on **Changes of Melodies in Iceland**. In her Conclusion Una Margrét explains the origins of foreign-originated singing games in Iceland, discusses similarities between songs and games in Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, and identifies some uniquely Icelandic singing games. She uses descriptions of changing melodies in songs that have come to Iceland from other countries to observe that 'All these changes have one thing in common, they seem to make the tune more joyful...and make the melody sound less monotone' (page 283). She explains this by looking at Iceland's history of hardship from the Middle Ages to the 18th century and to the attitude of priests during those times: '...one of them... even wrote a book in 1757 where he sought to prove that any form of play or entertainment was sinful...' (page 283). She contrasts this with the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th when 'A new century was dawning, a century which raised great hopes' (page 283).

Independence, education, new technology and a renewed environment meant that '...the nation gradually changed from a serious and melancholy people to an optimistic and cheerful people – and this was reflected in the singing games.' This book is a celebration of those changes and of the singing games that belong to 'their rightful owners, the children' (page 284).

Allir í leik II: Söngvaleikir barna

Una Margrét Jónsdóttir
Almenna útgáfan / Bókaútgáfan æskan ehf,
Reykjavík, 2010
ISBN 978-9979-767-85-5

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- 1 The author's name follows the ancient tradition of Icelanders deriving their last name from their father's first name: Jónsdóttir 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.
- 2 Judy McKinty, 'Review: Una Margrét Jónsdóttir: *Allir í leik: Söngvaleikir barna* (*All in the game!*)' in *Play and Folklore* no. 54 (October 2010), 8-9. <http://museumvictoria.com.au/about/books-and-journals/journals/play-and-folklore/2010-2019/>
- 3 Erik Kaas Nielsen, 'Drawing Stories' in *Play and Folklore* no. 38 (July 2000), 6-8 and Judy McKinty, 'Songs with Pictures' in *Play and Folklore* no. 40 (July 2001), 9-10. <http://museumvictoria.com.au/about/books-and-journals/journals/play-and-folklore/2000-2009/>

