

# Play and Folklore

**Music for Children in the Torres Strait - the Recordings of Karl Neuenfeldt**

**Kids can Squawl: Politics and Poetics of Woody Guthrie's Children Songs**

**Tradition, Change and Globalisation in Moroccan Children's Toy and Play Culture**

**The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes**

**Sydney High School Playground Games and Pranks**

**A Cross-cultural Study: Gender Differences in Children's Play**

## From the Editors

Play and Folklore no. 52 has been an unusual challenge, with articles from Beijing, Rome and France dealing with aspects of children's play in China, the Netherlands, America and Morocco. The issue also includes articles from Perth and Sydney, and the historical perspective runs from the 12th century to the present day.

As the year 2009 is ending, the project 'Childhood, Tradition and Change' is entering its fourth, and final, year. This national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian children's playlore has been funded by the Australian Research Council together with Melbourne, Deakin and Curtin Universities and the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria. In 2010 the research team will be carrying out its final fieldwork in primary school playgrounds, beginning the analysis of the rich body of data already obtained, and preparing the book which is the project's final outcome.

We are pleased to include Graham Seal's review of the analytic essays of Alan Dundes, as edited by Simon Bronner. Both the book itself and Seal's review pay tribute to the seminal work of one of the world's most distinguished folklorists.

Gwenda Beed Davey and June Factor



Pictures: Karl Neuenfeldt

## Play and Folklore

Editors: June Factor and Gwenda Beed Davey 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: Veronika Caspers



Schoolboys playing Cock Fighting or Hoppon Bumpo, Melbourne, 1954.  
Source - Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria

## Contents

### From the editors

Gwenda Beed Davey and June Factor 2

### Tradition, Change and Globalisation in Moroccan Children's Toy and Play Culture

Jean Pierre Rossie 4

### Music for Children in the Torres Strait — the Recordings of Karl Neuenfeldt

Gwenda Beed Davey, Jeffrey Waia and Karl Neuenfeldt 8

### A Cross-cultural Study: Gender Differences in Children's Play, Presented in the Paintings of the Song Dynasty and Pieter Brueghel

Wang Yi 12

### Review: Simon J Bronner (ed), *The Meaning of Folklore:*

*The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*  
Reviewed by Graham Seal 18

### Kids Can Squawl: Politics and Poetics of Woody Guthrie's Children's Songs

Alessandro Portelli 20

### Sydney High School Playground Games and Pranks

Warren Fahey 24





## TRADITION, CHANGE AND GLOBALISATION IN MOROCCAN CHILDREN'S TOY AND PLAY CULTURE

Jean-Pierre Rossie

When studying children's play and toys, one should take account of continuity as well as change. This certainly is necessary in my research on Moroccan children's toys and games covering a period from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. The information on these children's games and toys can be found on the website [www.sanatomyplay.org](http://www.sanatomyplay.org) and in the series *Saharan and North African children's Toy and Play Cultures*.

Generally, in villages and popular quarters of towns, Moroccan children's play and toy-making activities are up to now more or less linked to tradition (see *Play and Folklore*, no. 43, July 2003, 'Children's creativity through toys and play in Morocco and the Tunisian Sahara'). Sometimes this link is based on the techniques used to make toys, sometimes on the games' topics. When village girls make traditional dolls and use them for pretend play related to weddings both aspects are exemplified (fig. 1). However, an imported plastic doll regularly replaces the self-made doll. This plastic doll is nevertheless often adapted to local ways by giving it a self-made

dress. Another example combining tradition and change is found when boys make vehicles as before but the play activity refers to actual transport situations. More examples are making a dollhouse with a cardboard box instead of outlining with stones a miniature house on the ground, or when replacing the water-throwing reed toy used during the Ashura feast at the beginning of the Islamic year with a plastic water-pistol that is used for the same purpose (see *Play and Folklore* no. 47, January 2006, 'Feasts and rituals in Moroccan children's games and toys').

These examples illustrate a specific characteristic of the relationship between continuity and change in children's play in these regions — a characteristic that can be described as partial change, whereby some aspects of the play activity or play material are modernized and other aspects remain traditional. A partial continuity of tradition can also occur when playing with a toy made by the toy industry. This happens when the axle of a boy's toy truck is broken and he uses the skills learned when making toys himself to replace the broken iron axle with an adequate stick. Something similar happens when village girls use a piece of reed to replace the lost arms or legs of a plastic doll.

In 1995 I observed how toys change in response to new experiences. Up to then, boys from a village near Midelt in Central Morocco made a truck with an oil can, four wheels cut out of a tyre, a steering wheel of wire and so on. As they observed during the reconstruction of the irrigation system how a concrete mixer was filled with a lifting tray attached to the mixer, they invented a way to attach a lifting tray to their toy truck using a small tin can as tray and a long wire attached to the steering wheel. When the wire is pulled, the sand or stones accumulated in the tray are thrown into the truck (fig. 2).

Change in toys can occur in two contrasting ways: by using local material and techniques to create toys based on items new in the community, such as making a toy mobile phone in clay or a tractor of cactus pieces (fig. 3); and by using new material and techniques to produce toys referring to local themes, such as using a piece of polystyrene to give a head to an otherwise traditional doll (fig. 4), or candy and gift wrappings to create dresses.

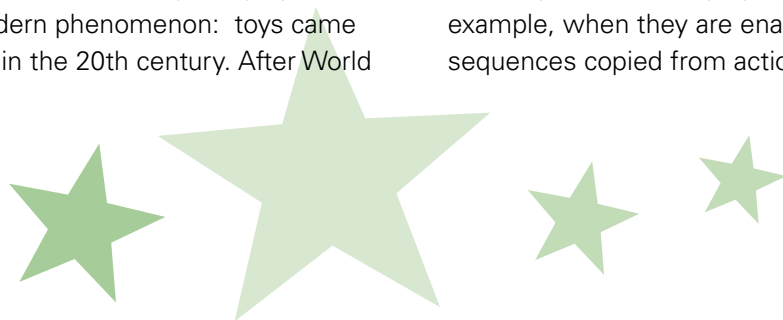
Change in Moroccan children's toy and play culture is not a purely modern phenomenon: toys came from Europe early in the 20th century. After World

War II the speed of change increased. Urbanization, schooling, means of communication, tourism, emigration and the consumer society all brought change.

In Morocco the galloping urbanization and the consequent desertion of villages modifies children's living space. This strongly affects their opportunity to explore nature and to use natural materials. Crowded streets replace open air unstructured play areas. The roles of adults also change and consequently the ways in which children interpret these roles in pretend play.

The school influences children's play, especially by limiting the time to play and creating new play content. The building of play groups changes as pupils have the possibility to engage in friendships with children outside their family and immediate environment. The Arabisation of the Moroccan Amazigh or Berber population has been strongly fostered by the primary school, as Arabic is the language of teaching. This influences children's culture in Amazigh-speaking areas by stimulating a drastic change in the communication between parents or other adults and children. It is not at all uncommon to find during the last decades families in which the parents speak an Amazigh language with their own parents and their brothers and sisters, but in which all these adults use Moroccan Arabic when talking to the children. The transmission of child lore and of linguistic and other games from the adults to the children is reduced.

There is no doubt that recent means of communication have an influence on the play culture of Moroccan children. The influence of these agents, dominated by Western viewpoints and attitudes, is clearly found in the play activities of boys — for example, when they are enacting aggressive play sequences copied from action films. A girls' game





and a boys' game in Sidi Ifni show the influence of television programs and especially the news programs. In both cases it is the Palestine war that infiltrates pretend play. Boys also play the role of television technician or become Moroccan television crew. Girls equip their dolls' house with a pretend television set and satellite antenna, or use a self-made digital photo camera. The mobile phone entered the life of Moroccan adults from about 2000, and children integrate this new item of high tech in their play activities (fig. 5).

Another evolution is directly related to the development of tourism. Today in the east of Morocco, where tourists come to admire the sand dunes of Merzouga, some young girls make their traditional dolls with a frame of reed not so much any longer to play with them, although they still use them for their doll play, but for selling to tourists. In the

process, these dolls change from children's toys to tourist objects. The same evolution happened somewhat earlier with the toy animals made from palm leaves by the boys from the oasis of Meski or the gorges of Tinerhir, two popular tourist places in central Morocco. A similar shift in the purpose for making toy cars can be observed in other African tourist places such as Kenya, Tanzania, Mali and Senegal, possibly changing child's play into child labour.

Influences promoting globalisation not only come from the international toy industry but also through media and migrants. A not insignificant role in changing Moroccan children's play habits and toys is played by family members living in Europe. When these emigrants return to visit their family they bring with them not only useful presents but also prestige presents including dolls, toy animals, teddies and toy weapons. In this way new and fantastic figures are entering the children's toy world, figures which were absent before.



fig 1. (left, top) Traditional bride and bridegroom doll used for pretend play related to weddings, village Imjad, Anti-Atlas Mountains, 2006, made by a seven-year-old girl. Photo taken by the author.

fig 2. (right, bottom) When pulling the wire, the stones accumulated in the tray are thrown into the truck. Village Ksar Assaka, Central Morocco, 1995, made by a ten-year-old boy. Photo taken by the author.

fig 3. (bottom) Tractor made with pieces of cactus by an eight-year-old boy, Ignern, High Atlas Mountains, 1996. Photo taken by the author.

fig 4. (right, top) Doll with a head cut out of a piece of polystyrene, Douar Ouaraben, Tiznit, 2007, made by a ten-year-old girl. Photo taken by the author.

fig 5. (left, bottom) Mobile phone made with clay by a seven-year-old girl, village Lahfart, Anti-Atlas Mountains, 2005. Photo taken by the author.



Photographer:  
Jean-Pierre Rossie.  
Photographs used  
with permission  
Jean-Pierre Rossie



Today the media promotes, especially through educational radio and television programs in French and similar ones in Arabic, different attitudes towards playful adult-child relations than is common in Moroccan villages and popular quarters of towns. In *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures: Domestic Life in Play, Games and Toys* (2008) I wrote: 'Among the rural and popular Moroccan population of today I noticed a certain indifference for children's play on the part of adults. A lack of interest based on the point of view that play and toymaking activities are something that is proper to children. Adults should only interfere in case of real danger, of risk of causing damage and discomfort or when rules and values are clearly transgressed' (p. 352). This attitude contrasts with the one described by David Lancy as prevalent in the West: 'Even a cursory review of websites and parent-oriented trade publications will yield the inescapable conclusion that good, effective parents play with their offspring from birth and continue, through adolescence, to take an interest in and manage the child's toy inventory, game and sports schedule, and choice of play — or teammates' (p. 273).

A recent publication of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, *A Case for Early Childhood Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pertinently advocates taking into account the diversity of childhood instead of promoting the singular image of the 'global child': 'The Western World's construction of Motherhood (and the roles of children, fathers and families that accompany it) is but one example of numerous constructs formed in the Minority World that are increasingly visible and influential in the Majority World' (p. 2). Imposing a Western world's view of child development in general and of children's play in particular on the rest of the world is, according to David Lancy (pp 279-280), 'tantamount to a condemnation of the child-rearing beliefs and behaviors of three-fourths of the world's parents and is completely unjustified by either the experimental literature in child development or, especially, the ethnographic literature. There are plentiful examples throughout the ethnographic record in which

mother-child play is not valued, and these should not be viewed as signs of deficiency or neglect... As a final caution, we must be wary that efforts to promote parent-child play are not driven by the desire to use play to "civilize the irrational natives".'

Although imported toys have been coming in to Morocco for a long time, the influence of the toy industry becomes more and more important. This is easy to observe during the annual fairs held in Moroccan towns and villages. In markets and in small shops one sees now a great number of toys made in China but many second-hand toys are also available. Among popular urban families and in rural areas it is the cheap range of industrially-produced toys and the second-hand toys that are bought. The sophisticated female and male dolls with all their attributes, the Tamagochis and other electronic toys, have up to now only infiltrated the world of upper-class children for the evident reason of the greater financial means of their parents.

As the evolution towards a consumer society is slowly but surely progressing in Morocco, those children whose parents cannot afford to buy good quality toys not only feel frustrated but also become less motivated to themselves make the devaluated toys they usually play with. This situation has resulted more than once in adults buying toys of rather bad quality or even toys that are dangerous for children, as a regular system for checking toy safety regulations is lacking in the region.

This commercialisation of toys also stimulates the attitude of looking at toys as a gift from adults to children, an attitude that until recently was almost non-existent in Moroccan every-day families.

In general, it seems that the self-made toys are quite quickly declining in towns, apart from toy cars or toy weapons made by boys. Moreover, the traditional self-made doll seems almost forgotten in these towns. Nevertheless, a lot of children, largely but not exclusively in rural areas, still have much fun in creating their own toys.

## Tradition, Change and Globalisation in Moroccan Children's Toy and Play Culture

It is clear that the play activities of the girls remain longer within the sphere of tradition than those of the boys who willingly find inspiration in technological innovations and socio-cultural changes. But how to foresee the short-term and long-term influence on the girls of schooling and television that nowadays have found their way into isolated areas?

Today both tradition and globalisation are important factors in the toy and play culture of Moroccan children from rural areas and urban quarters of towns. However, the balance between both forces leans towards the dominance of the toy industry. It seems as if the diversity of self-made toys is being supplanted by the greater uniformity of industrially-made toys, and children's creativity by designs from the global toy industry. ★

*Dr Jean-Pierre Rossie is a sociocultural anthropologist researching North African and Saharan children's play and toys, and an associated researcher of the Musée du Jouet in Moirans-en-Montagne, France ([www.musee-du-jouet.fr](http://www.musee-du-jouet.fr)). More information and photographs can be found on his website [www.sanatoyplay.org](http://www.sanatoyplay.org), e-mail: [sanatoyplay@gmail.com](mailto:sanatoyplay@gmail.com)*

### References

- David F. Lancy, 'Accounting for Variability in Mother-Child Play', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 109, no. 2 (2007): 273–284. Available on the internet: [www.usu.edu/anthro/davidlancyspages/PDFs/Sample%20Publications/Mother%20Child%20Play.pdf](http://www.usu.edu/anthro/davidlancyspages/PDFs/Sample%20Publications/Mother%20Child%20Play.pdf) (accessed 7 June 2009).
- Alan Pence and Bame Nsamenang, *A case for early childhood development in sub-Saharan Africa* (The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2008), VII + 55 p. This publication can be obtained free of charge by writing to [registry@bvleerf.nl](mailto:registry@bvleerf.nl), [www.bernardvan-leer.org](http://www.bernardvan-leer.org)
- Jean-Pierre Rossie, 'Children's creativity through toys and play in Morocco and the Tunisian Sahara', *Play and Folklore* no. 43 (July 2003): 6–10.
- Jean-Pierre Rossie, 'Feasts and rituals in Moroccan children's games and toys', *Play and Folklore*, no. 47 (January 2006): 3–8.
- Jean-Pierre Rossie, *Toys, Play, Culture and Society: An Anthropological Approach with Reference to North Africa and the Sahara* (Stockholm: International Toy Research Centre, Royal Institute of Technology, 2005). Information on this book and the following books is found on the homepage of [www.sanatoyplay.org](http://www.sanatoyplay.org)
- Jean-Pierre Rossie, *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures: Children's dolls and Doll Play* (Stockholm: International Toy Research Centre, Royal Institute of Technology, 2005). Published on the CD included in *Toys, Play, Culture and Society*.
- Jean-Pierre Rossie, *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures: The Animal World in Play, Games and Toys* (Stockholm: International Toy Research Centre, Royal Institute of Technology, 2005). Published on the CD included in *Toys, Play, Culture and Society*.
- Jean-Pierre Rossie, *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures: Domestic Life in Play, Games and Toys* (Stockholm: International Toy Research Centre, Royal Institute of Technology, 2008). Published on CD.







Mabuyag Island - children's dances

## MUSIC FOR CHILDREN IN THE TORRES STRAIT — THE RECORDINGS OF KARL NEUENFELDT

This article has been compiled by Gwenda Beed Davey using information provided by Dr Karl Neuenfeldt and Jeffrey Waia, and material from the Torres Strait Regional Authority website. Karl Neuenfeldt is an Associate Professor at Central Queensland University at the Bundaberg campus.

Since 1999, Karl Neuenfeldt has collaborated with producer/audio engineer Nigel Pegrum to record traditional and contemporary music, including children's music, in a number of islands in the Torres Strait. The recordings are collaborative projects to document and maintain cultural practices such as music and dance, and have been funded variously from Central Queensland University, the National Library of Australia, the National Museum, the Torres Strait Regional Authority, Arts Queensland and the Australia Council.

Karl Neuenfeldt describes the region as 'the place in tropical far north-eastern Australia where the waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans meet. It is also the place where the peoples of Melanesia, Polynesia, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas came together to work and live, and make music. They

brought with them their distinct musical cultures and the end result was the great mixing of styles still heard in the music of Torres Strait and seen in its dances and art work.'

Liner notes to CD *Strike 'Em! Contemporary Voices from the Torres Strait* (2000).

Although each island community claims to have distinct musical characteristics, there are some general similarities, in particular in communities speaking the two traditional languages of the Torres Strait region: Kala Lagaw Ya (and its dialects) in the western and central islands 'clusters' and Meriam Mir in the eastern islands 'cluster'. The two main styles are sacred and secular music. The former has been influenced by Christian missionaries from Europe, Australia and Polynesia. The latter



## Music for Children in the Torres Strait - the Recordings of Karl Neuenfeldt

has been influenced by music brought to the Torres Strait region by the numerous migrants from Asia, Europe and North America when maritime industries were booming in the last decades of the 19th century up till World War II. A unique hybrid style, 'ailan' music, has evolved and can be heard in the music of recording artists such as the Mills Sisters, Seaman Dan, Christine Anu and Cygnet Repu.

The Torres Strait Islands are part of the Australian state of Queensland. The region consists of 18 island and two Northern Peninsula Area communities (see map). The islands are scattered over a geographic area of 48,000 square kilometres, from the tip of Cape York, north towards the borders of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. There are five traditional island clusters in the Torres Strait:

- > **Top Western Islands:** Boigu, Dauan, Saibai
- > **Western Islands:** Badu, Mabuaig, Moa – Kubin and St Pauls communities
- > **Central Islands:** Iama (Yam Island), Masig (Yorke Island), Poruma (Coconut Island), Warraber (Sue Island)
- > **Eastern Islands:** Mer (Murray Island), Ugar (Stephen Island), Erub (Darnley Island)
- > **Inner Islands:** Hammond Island, Muralug (Prince of Wales Island), Ngurupai (Horn Island), Thursday Island – TRAWQ and Port Kennedy

The two Torres Strait Islander communities on the Northern Peninsula Area are Bamaga and Seisia. Thursday Island is the main administrative and business centre of the Torres Strait.

The Neuenfeldt/Pegrum recordings include seven which have some material sung by children. Three CDs were produced between 2000 and 2004, and four CD/DVD recordings were produced in 2008.

1. *Strike 'Em! Contemporary Voices from the Torres Strait* (2000). Most of the recording for this CD was done during the 2000 Torres Strait Cultural Festival on Thursday Island (T.I.). Items include the Saibai Island Primary School Singers, who come from one of the most northern Torres Strait Islander communities, near the Papua New Guinea border. The children sing contemporary

songs written by Saibai songwriter Jeffrey Waia: 'Ina Kasa Wara Goiga' and 'Vailia Wara'. 'Ina Kasa' means 'This is another day, Rain is everywhere, Day and Night'. Jeffrey Waia wrote 'Vailia Wara' for his little niece named Vailia:

*Vailia Wara is a princess  
She flies with the butterflies  
Her wings have beautiful colours  
Vilia Wara this is your marigold  
All colours of the rainbow are your flowers.*

2. *St Pauls: A Centenary Tribute*. Music from St Pauls Community, Moa Island (2004). Two recordings of St Pauls State School children are 'Ari Ya Tharayaike' and 'When the Shadows Fall'. Both are Western Island language songs. Sleeve notes for 'Ari Ya Tharayaike' say 'Elder Dora Uid-uldarn says this is a Rain Dance Song. 'When the Shadows Fall' is translated as follows:

*When the shadows fall the stars begin to peep  
When the little birds and flowers fall asleep  
Memories bring back a picture complete  
Dear little girl of mine...*

3. *Saltwater Songs: Indigenous Maritime Music from Tropical Australia* (2004). These are 'saltwater songs' from 'saltwater people' living in communities as geographically dispersed as Rockhampton, Cairns, Yarrabah, Wujul Wujul and Hopevale in eastern Queensland; Badu, Moa and Thursday Islands in the Torres Strait; and Yirrkala and Maningrida in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. The CD includes 'Jinawunya', from the Maningrida Secondary College Senior Boys Band. This song is about the singer's tribal country on the coast of Northern Arnhem Land, between the Blyth and Liverpool Rivers about two hours drive east of Maningrida. The song is used by permission of the family of the deceased songwriter C.J. Maxwell. It also includes 'Ya Yawarriny' from the Yirrkala Community Education Centre Band, which features a full horn and brass section mixed with didgeridu and clapsticks. The song is about the importance for youth of fishing as a provisioning and a social activity.





Mabuiag Island - Aaron Whap teaching

4. *Warraber Au Bunyg Wakai*: Traditional and Contemporary Music and Dance of Warraber/Sue Island, Torres Strait (2008). This CD contains six children's songs, performed by prep-year 3 children, staff and community members of Tagai College, Warraber/Sue Island Campus:

*Beautiful Warraber*  
*Monkey and the Turtle*  
*Dinghy Bolo Mepla*  
*Ai Ri Ro*  
*Serrar E*  
*My Home Sue*

Monkey and the Turtle is by an unknown composer, but its text arises from a story from Phillipines Readers that was included in a 1928 teaching syllabus in Torres Strait. It is in a very different mode from Ari Ya Tharayaike from St Pauls:

*Monkey and the turtle them two go*  
*Them two find a one banana*  
*Monkey speak for turtle you stop here*  
*I go knock e banana for yumi e*  
*The boss he come and chooti them two*  
*Them two fall down belly-up e*  
*You sabe slop tin*  
*Sabe dampa*  
*Muta buli fly fly buli e.*

5. *Iama Wakai Tusi/Voices of Iama*: Traditional and Contemporary Music and Dance of Iama/Yam Island, Torres Strait (2008). On this CD, three items are performed by students and staff of Tagai College Iama/Yam Island Campus:

*Heads Shoulders Knees and Toes*  
*Bidda Gor Carreh Wata (Bidda went with her*  
*bucket to carry water from the well)*  
*Down by the Sea*



## Music for Children in the Torres Strait - the Recordings of Karl Neuenfeldt

*Down by the sea  
Where the watermelon grows  
Back to my home  
Where I was born  
So if I do  
My mother will say  
Have you ever seen a fish do a hula in a dish  
Down where the watermelon grows.*

- unknown author/composer

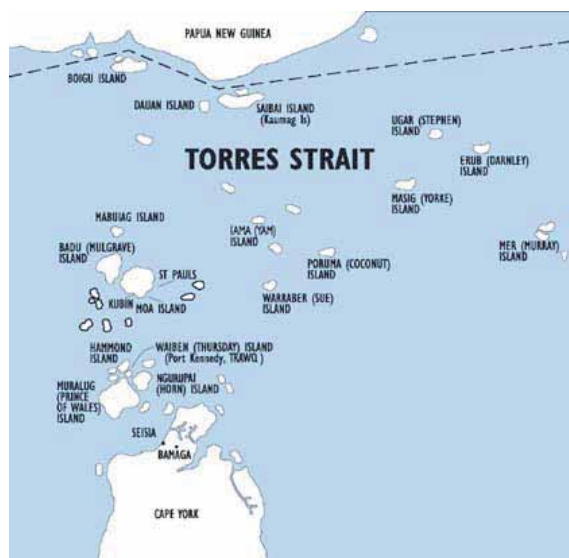
6. *Badu Nawul*: Traditional and Contemporary Music and Dance from Badu Island, Torres Strait (2008). Only one children's item in this collection, a 'Song and Sit Down Dance', is recorded on the DVD. It is performed by Denna Nona and students at Tagai College, Badu Island Campus.
7. *Mabuygiw Awgadhaw Nawul*: Traditional and Contemporary Music and Dance of Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait (2008). The DVD includes a dance and song 'Saiye Bangara O' performed by students at Tagai College, Mabuiag Island Campus.



Recordings 1, 2 and 3 can be obtained by contacting Karl Neuenfeldt, Central Queensland University, Locked Bag 3333, Bundaberg 4670, Australia; 07 4150 7019; or k.neuenfeldt@cqu.edu.au.

Recordings 4, 5, 6 and 7 can be obtained by contacting the Torres Strait Regional Authority's Gab Titui Cultural Centre, 07 4090 2130, c/o Georgina Dann or Robyn Fernandez.

Photographer for all images: Karl Neuenfeldt Photographs used with the kind Permission of Tagai College, Mabuiag Campus – Ken Treasure, Principal



Source: 2007 Torres Strait Regional Authority



Mabuyag Community musicians at school





## A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CHILDREN'S PLAY PRESENTED IN THE PAINTINGS OF THE SONG DYNASTY AND BRUEGHEL'S 'CHILDREN'S GAMES'

Wang Yi

### ABSTRACT

This pilot study is an attempt to analyse children's gendered behaviour through the portrayals of their play and games in selected paintings from the early modern eras in China and Europe. The information and data is derived from a collection of drawings (18 pieces) in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) of China and Pieter Breughel's painting 'Kinderspiele' ('Children's Games') in 1560. The images depicting the different aspects of children at play in the Song Dynasty's 'One Hundred Children Playing' or Baizhichi were initially included within the text. However, these images are under copyright, so readers are directed to the Wikipedia website listed in the bibliography, where they can see a number of images of children at play in the Song dynasty.

### INTRODUCTION

The topic of children's play and games has attracted academic research from many disciplines over the past century. Studies from a variety of different theoretical schools, from Freud and Piaget to the class, gender and ethnic perspectives, have emphasized the significance of play in children's development. From this wide-ranging work we have come to understand that play and games are important to children's development. In play, children acquire identities, abilities and skills, they learn about their world, how to do things, to solve problems, to deal with feelings, face anxieties, act out forbidden behaviours in relative safety, develop physically and cognitively and learn social skills. They learn how to get on with, have power over, negotiate with, com-

pete with or cooperate with others. Many of these studies focus on cross-cultural, or class, gender or ethnic differences in the relationship between play and learning. Haight et al (1999), in their comparison of the games played by Irish-American and Taiwanese children, suggest that there are both universal, and culturally different, links between play and development. The universals in their study are relevant to 'the use of objects' and 'the social nature of pretend play', whilst there were marked cultural differences in 'the way that objects were used', 'the participation of specific actors' and 'the centrality of specific themes' within each culture. This distinction from Haigh et al's study of Western and Chinese children's games at the end of the 20th century has relevance to the portrayals of children's games in China and the West in the early modern period — that is, between the Song Dynasty portrayals of 'One Hundred Children Playing' (960–1279) and Pieter Brueghel's 1560 painting 'Kinderspiele' ('Children's Games').

I am particularly interested in the gender differences in the portrayals of children's play in these two 'early modern' societies in China and Europe. Modern theories of children's play recognize the constructiveness of play as a process in which gender identities are formed or reinforced. However it is useful, too, to be guided by Haigh et al's argument that there are both universal and cultural factors in the way that games are played, and to use this insight in investigating the ways in which boys and girls acquire their gendered identities through play.

## **THE SETTINGS: EARLY MODERNISM IN CHINA AND EUROPE**

The early modern age in Europe is usually characterized as occurring somewhere around 1500. This is some 200–300 years after the flowering of early modernism in the Southern Song Dynasty of 13th century China (Goldstone 1998: 261). In both eras there was an increase in urban living, a development of increasingly scientific–technical forms of production, and in art, a shift from an iconic, two-dimensional style of imagery towards a more 'natural' humanistic form of representation (Vardi 1996:1365–1366). In both art forms the move to naturalism and a more humanistic representation

meant that the portrayal of children was moving towards more 'realistic' presentations of children in everyday life.

In both eras this more natural and realistic portrayal of childhood introduced children's games or yingxi as significant subjects of art.

## **'CHILDREN AT PLAY' PAINTINGS IN THE SONG DYNASTY**

In China, children and children's play had been a specific subject of figure paintings since the Tang Dynasty. According to XuanHe HuaPu (Catalog of Paintings in the XuanHe Collection, or Catalog of Paintings of the XuanHe Emperor), however, even the most famous painter at that time, Zhang Xuan, is said to have failed to depict any particular vitality in children in his representations of elite children as 'miniature adults'. However, by the 12th century, in the more humanist art form of the late northern Song era, the new realism inspired the artists to depict not only children of the elite, but also children from lower-class peasant families, in their natural settings.

The work of three leading Song artists in my study are the paintings by Su Hanchen (active in the 12th century), Li Song (1190–1265) and Su Zhuo (the south Song), son of Su Hanchen.

Imitation and repetition of the themes, styles and techniques of eminent artists is highly valued in all fields of art in China, including this 'children playing' genre. So the subject was taken up by later scholar artists as well as court artists. As most of these later painters were anonymous, several delicate Song paintings that have no accurate record of the artist are also selected as data for this study.

## **THE PORTRAYAL OF CHILDREN'S GAMES IN THE ART OF PIETER BRUEGHEL THE ELDER**

Three and four hundred years later, the 16th and 17th centuries comprised an important historic period for the image of childhood in a Western art. In the historical move to early modernity, Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1525–1569) depicts religion and myth as they impact on ordinary people's lives,

including agriculture, hunts, meals, festivals, dances and games, always foregrounding the ordinariness and the humanity of his subjects. This is true too of his 'Children's Games', depicting more than 70 groups of children playing various types of games in an outdoor environment.

### CONTRASTING THE ART OF THE TWO 'EARLY MODERN' ERAS

The main primary research method employed here is content analysis. The sampling units were taken from 18 paintings which were used to represent the Song era's 'children playing' genre. These include 14 pieces from the book *Children's Play in the Autumn Garden* (Qiu Ting Ying Xi) published by Shanghai Painting & Calligraphy Press in 2004. The other four paintings are downloaded from a website specializing in feminine lives in the Song period. Among the 18 pictures, three were painted by Li Song, two by Su Hanchen, one by Su Zhuo, and 12 by anonymous artists. These 18 paintings provided 23 different groups of both single and multiple children play. These 23 groups became the sample representing children's games in the Song period.



This image is reproduced from *Chinese New Year Festivals: A Picturesque Monograph of the Rites, Ceremonies and Observances Thereto*, by Juliet Bredon. Shanghai, Kelly and Walsh, 1930. It is published in *Play and Folklore* with permission from the National Library of Australia.

In contrast to the popularity of imitation in Chinese art, Western artists tend to favour innovative work. So Pieter Brueghel's portrayal of groups of children at play, 'Children's Games', is the only representation of early modern Western material chosen for this study. Although more than 70 groups of playing children can be seen in the Brueghel painting, only 45 groups were selected because, in the copy of the portrait I was able to access, 25 of the groups were insufficiently clear for a valid level of identification of either the children's gender or of the games they played. In summary, my sample comprises 68 different portrayals of children at play, some playing singly and others in groups. This total of 68 comprises 23 portrayals from the Song Dynasty era and 45 from Brueghel's 'Children's Games'.

### CONTENT ANALYSIS: COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS OF THE SONG PAINTINGS AND 'CHILDREN'S GAMES'

The quantitative content analysis of the Song paintings and Brueghel's 'Children's Games' provides an elementary insight into children's playing groups in terms of gender. Table 1 summarizes the analysis results of the two streams of paintings.

This general quantitative data indicates that in both the Song paintings and in Brueghel's 'Children's Games', there are far more boys than girls playing either in groups or singly. However, by using a more detailed description of the groups we can see that there are significant differences between the ways that the Song artists and Brueghel portrayed the differences between girls and boys in this 'children at Play' genre.

	Solitary Boy	Solitary Girl	Male Group	Female Group	Mixed Sex Group	Total
Song Paintings	9%	0%	52%	0%	39%	100%
'Children's Games'	11%	7%	44%	11%	27%	100%

Table 1 - Comparison of children's groups in the Song Dynasty and Bruegel paintings by gender



## **FURTHER ASPECTS OF THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO ERAS: 'CHILDREN PLAYING' IN THE SONG DYNASTY SAMPLE**

Gender: The most significant aspect of all these portrayals is that boys were always the protagonists of all the paintings. In comparison, girls were seldom 'in the picture', and if they were, they would be featured in care-taking roles. For example, the title for many of the paintings which depict a great number of children is 'One Hundred Children' or 'Baizitu', and Baizitu paintings include only boys. Moreover, of the mixed sex groups in the Song paintings, it is only the boys who are actively engaged in playing games, whilst the girls, or young women, act only as caretakers

The use of objects: In classical Chinese, few words referred to children's games and toys. However, in the Song and, the later, Ming Dynasty art, the variety and playfulness of children's play and games were presented through the children's life-like expressions, gestures and clothes, as well as the several objects they used at play. Some of the playthings portrayed in these paintings were just picked up from the natural surroundings, such as twigs and flowers. Insects and little animals like katydids, butterflies, frogs and cats could also be children's toys. In one painting two boys are portrayed teasing another with a live frog.

On the other hand, exquisite and sophisticated toys were amply depicted by artists, especially in the two clothes embroidered with Baiziyi portrayals, excavated from the tomb of the Ming Emperor Wanli. In the Song pictures there are kites, rattle-drums (bolanggu), peacock feathers, coloured banners, balance toys made from jujube cores, puppets, bamboo horses and fireworks, ball games, spinning tops and special small play tables for children. Some dozens of examples of these toys are found in the Ming embroidered clothes.

Since girls were seldom presented in these paintings, all of the games and toys mentioned above were used by boys. However we cannot say whether it was the situation in real life that girls had much less chance than boys to participate in

outdoor play and games in Song Dynasty China or whether these artistic products misinform us. In the earliest portrayals of the game of football, it is the women of the court who are the exponents of the game.

## **GENDER AND CLASS IN CHILDREN'S GAMES IN EARLY MODERN CHINA**

Private tutors were employed by royalty and the wealthy to teach several children who were from the same kin or household. In the paintings, children in silken embroidered clothes, sometimes wearing elaborate role-playing costumes, play with sophisticated toys.

In one early 12th century painting by Su Hanchen they are clambering over heavy playground equipment, wearing imitation soldiers' outfits whilst riding wooden horses, and playing board games. In contrast, children from ordinary peasant families spent most of their time playing and helping with work in the field. Nevertheless as they are depicted in the Song Dynasty pedlar paintings even the children of peasants could eagerly anticipate that their mothers would indulge them by buying some of the cruder toys depicted in detail in these vigorous portrayals of the life of ordinary folk in the Song dynasty.

However apart from two young mothers who look remarkably cheerful whilst their baby children cling to them as their older brothers clamber over the peddler's wares, only one girl is portrayed. As in the portrayal of the girls of the elite families, she is the calm caretaker of one more eager and active little boy.

## **ASPECTS OF BREUGHEL'S 'CHILDREN'S GAMES'**

Gender: Girls, although in the minority, are represented in a variety of games being played in the Breughel painting. Girls are playing games with objects that extend their physical abilities, with skipping ropes, five stones and on swings. In addition, whilst none of the Chinese girls are engaged in any role other than as an actual non-playing caretaker, the girls in Breugel's picture are involved in a number of role-playing games: 'Wedding Proces-



sion', Mother, Mother Where's your Child?', 'Baptismal Procession' and 'Hoodman Blind', in both central and supportive roles. These games are early anticipations of the importance of family rituals in the wider and adult society. Two girls are engaged in one of the more aggressively competitive physical games where they are joining the boys playing 'Running the Gauntlet'; nevertheless, it is 'boys only' groups which are engaged in 'Planing', 'Horsey, Horsey', 'Throwing Knives', 'Pulling Hair', 'Plumsack' and 'Tug of War'.

### Objects, gender and class in Brueghel's paintings:

Class and gender differences are far less obvious in the use of objects for play in Breughel's work than in the art of the Song dynasty. The toys are much cruder and clumsier than the delicate toys of the sons of the Chinese elite. The craftsmanship in the hoops, fivestones, stilts, tops, balloons and play-jousting sticks are generally rough-and-ready modifications of natural objects — sticks, stones, animal bones and intestines — whilst the role-playing costumes are usually merely a rearrangement of the ordinary everyday clothes the children wear in the streets. Brueghel's art continually focused on scenes from the everyday lives of the peasants and the townspeople even when he was using them to convey moral allusions from the bible, from fairy tales or philosophy. His work is much closer to that of Li Song the creator of 'The Knick Knack Pedlar', with its detailed imagery of the cheap household implements and caged birds — the commodities of the peasants which then served as their children's toys in early modern China.

### DISCUSSION

This comparison of the art of the Song dynasty and Breughel's portrayal of children at play demonstrates that there are both universal and culturally-different aspects of gender differences in these two examples of early modern art. In both the Song Dynasty art and in the painting by Breughel, the wider societies' gendered culture is reflected and reinforced in the children's play. Boys are more likely to engage in physically aggressive competitive games such as fighting and racing, which require bravery and physical strength. Girls in both societies are portrayed as being focused on the caring roles of family life.

There is evidence here for a historically universalistic argument about the gendered and gendering nature of play. Contemporary research demonstrates that boys, especially bigger boys, occupy more space in the playground and prefer to take up the central place, while girls prefer 'rhythmic games' and small group activities. Boys' sociality is characterized more by competition and girls' more by cooperation. However, this study also confirms that the ways in which social life is gendered through games has its specifically-cultural dimensions. It would be interesting to develop a further research project comparing the play and games of children in China and the West in our contemporary era of late modernism.

### LIMITATION OF THE PILOT STUDY

Although the sampling pictures selected are produced by the most famous Chinese and Western artists in the area, and they are representative in painting style and the specific subject of children's play, the quantity of the paintings is too limited to present a sufficient variety of children in pre-modern China or in early modern Europe hundreds years ago. This defect is partly caused by problems in availability of the preserved paintings, and also because of the time limit in material collection. Another limitation lies in the characteristics of artistic products. Although the sample pictures are from the early modern, realistic, genre of art, it is hard to tell whether they are 'real' or accurate depictions of the gendered nature of play in the two societies or reflections of the artists' 'ways of seeing' their world. ★

*Wang Yi studied for her Master's Degree at the English Department of the Beijing Foreign Studies University in 2008.*

---

NOTE: The illustration that accompanies this article is not from the period of the Song Dynasty. Copyright restrictions have prevented publication of Song Dynasty paintings.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Reference books

Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987)

Iona & Peter Opie, *Children's Games with Things* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1997)

James E. Johnson, James F. Christie & Thomas D. Yawkey, *Play and Early Childhood Development*, 2nd ed. (The United States: Longman, 1999).

J.A. Goldstone, 'The Problem of the "Early Modern" World' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 41, no. 3 (1998): 261

Judith Bessant & Rob Watts, *Sociology Australia*, 3rd ed. (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007).

Lynn Hartle & James E. Johnson, 'Historical and Contemporary Influences of Outdoor Play Environments', in Hart, Craig H. (ed.), *Children on Playgrounds* (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993).

Mary Jo Deegan, (ed.), *Play, School and Society* (New York: Pater Lang Publishing 1999).

Mary Jo Deegan, (ed.), *Essays in Social Psychology* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Random House, Inc., 1962)

Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Press (ed.), *Children's Play in the Autumn Garden* (Shanghai: Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Press, 2004)

W. Haighetal, 'Universal, developmental and variable aspects of young children's play: a cross-cultural comparison of pretending at home', *Child Development* vol. 70, no. 6 (November/December 1999): 1477-1488.

Lian Hai Wang, 'The Historical Toys Depicted in "One Hundred Children at Play"', *Art and Literature Research*, vol 1 (2004), 107-117

Xiao Ying Wang, *The Significance of Children's Games* (Changhun: DongBei Teachers University Press, 2006)

Virginia Morrow, 'Understanding Gender Differences in Context: Implications for Young Children's Everyday Lives', *Children & Society* 20, no. 2 (2006): 92-104, <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journal.asp?ref=0951-0605> (accessed 04/06/2007)

Edward Snow, "'Meaning" in Children's Games: On the Limitations of the Iconographic Approach to Bruegel', *Representations* 2, no. 1 (April 1983): 26-60, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0734-6018%28198321%290%3A2%3C26%3A%22ICGOT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1> (accessed 07/07/2007)

Liana Vardi, 'Imagining the Harvest in Early Modern Europe', *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 5 (December. 1996): 1357-1397 (American Historical Association)

### Further on-line materials

[http://caea.uchicago.edu/events\\_publications/symposia/110306/abstracts/foong.shtml](http://caea.uchicago.edu/events_publications/symposia/110306/abstracts/foong.shtml) (accessed 07/07/2007)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter\\_Brueghel\\_the\\_Elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter_Brueghel_the_Elder) (accessed 03/07/2007)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song\\_Dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_Dynasty) (accessed 07/07/2007)

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0422/is\\_4\\_84/ai\\_95679860/pg\\_26](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0422/is_4_84/ai_95679860/pg_26) (accessed 07/07/2007)

<http://libweb.zju.edu.cn:8080/renwen/Site/women/birth/index.html> (accessed 10/05/2007)

<http://teachhealthk-12.uthscsa.edu/curriculum/bones/bone01e-knucklebone.htm> (accessed 07/07/2007)

[http://www.artchive.com/artchive/b/bruegel/bruegel\\_games.jpg](http://www.artchive.com/artchive/b/bruegel/bruegel_games.jpg) (accessed 10/06/2007)

<http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-99084/Xuanhe-huapu> (accessed 07/07/2007)

<http://www.gamesmuseum.uwaterloo.ca/VirtualExhibits/Brueghel/tipcat.html> (accessed 07/07/2007)

[http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/explore/highlights/high-light\\_objects/gr/t/terracotta\\_group\\_of\\_knucklebon.aspx](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/explore/highlights/high-light_objects/gr/t/terracotta_group_of_knucklebon.aspx) (accessed 07/07/2007)

<http://www2.hust.edu.cn/xuebao/query.asp?id=1050> (accessed 07/07/2007)

### Research works

Limin Bai, 'A Childhood Beyond the Confucian Shadow' <http://xhs.sagepub.com> (accessed 10/05/2007)

Cora Burnett, 'Paradigms of Children's Play Behaviour and the Study of Games', 2003, <http://www.uj.ac.za/sport/index.asp?page=detail&id=4587> (accessed 10/05/2007)



## REVIEW OF SIMON J. BRONNER (ED), THE MEANING OF FOLKLORE: THE ANALYTICAL ESSAYS OF ALAN DUNDES

**Graham Seal**

This collection of a number of Alan Dundes' celebrated essays is organised around 'meaning'. Editor Simon Bronner writes that:

Meaning for Dundes was often hidden, frequently elusive, but uncoverable through folkloristic analysis. He saw meaning as the thinking underlying, and explaining, puzzling images, fantasies, and actions that pervade cultural life, often outside the awareness of the participants in it. Rather than being random creations, the expressive texts of folklore — brought together in aggregate, traced historically and socially, identified and compared textually, understood in their cultural context, appreciated for their texture or performance, and mined for structure, belief and symbol — showed patterns that the folklorist was trained to discern, and indeed *analyze*. [original emphasis]

As well as describing Dundes' philosophy of folklore, this summation is a nutshell description of the aspirations of modern folklore studies or, as Dundes preferred, 'folkloristics'.

Alan Dundes was certainly the titan of his generation of folklorists, if a frequently provocative and controversial deity. His teaching, prodigious publishing and advocacy for the field are widely acknowledged. His deep intellect and voracious reading (in several languages) are properly admired. Not everyone — including this reviewer — has been comfortable with his determined Freudian interpretations. One problem with this was Dundes' affection for

overly clever titles such as 'Gallus as Phallus: a Psychoanalytic Cross-Cultural Study of the Cockfight as Fowl Play'. His psychoanalytic approach also led him to conclude that the German love of order was derived, he argued, from that nation's love of ordure, or shit. Regardless of how learned and cleverly argued such contributions might have been, they tended to confirm the suspicions of non-folklorists that the enterprise was probably as dodgy as — outside the USA at least — it is often considered to be.

Nor were Dundes' conceptions and theories universally accepted by his peers. In the 1980s, for example, Eliot Oring convincingly demolished Dundes' uncharacteristically simplistic position on folk groups. However, as the editor of this volume points out, Dundes deployed a variety of other analytical approaches, including structuralism, cross-cultural comparisons, historical methods and linguistics. These approaches are all on dazzling display in this hefty volume.

Organised into three sections 'Structure and Analysis', 'Worldview and Identity' and 'Symbol and Mind', the reader is treated to the Dundes 'Top Twenty', as assembled by Bronner, an outstanding folklorist himself. In 'Structure and Analysis' are included Dundes' engagements with questions of structure, form, folklore as a cultural reflection and such notions as the devolutionary premise. This section also includes one of his most important contributions in this area, 'From Etic to Emic Units in the Structural Study of Folktales'.

## The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes

Part II concentrates on 'Worldview and Identity', including some entertaining as well as enlightening writing on folk speech and occupational folklore. Prominent in this section are Dundes' notion of the importance of 'Worldview' in folklore and some analytic studies of occupational folklore.

Part III on 'Symbol and Mind' includes another important contribution on allomorphs in folktales as well as a lot of Dundes' psychoanalytic analyses, most usefully (I thought, probably because it relates to my own research interests) in 'The Ritual Murder of Blood Libel Legend: a Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion'. This is also an exercise in, potentially at least, applied folklore. Dundes believed that folklore had an important contribution to make towards the alleviation, even the eradication, of prejudice and bigotry. As usual, no one was listening and folklorists remain off the list of who to call when anyone wants to solve a socio-cultural problem such as racism. The final item of this section and so of the book is required reading for all folklorists: 'On the Psychology of Collecting Folklore' (which also includes an interesting post-script on chain letters).

I was surprised not to see one of Dundes' early studies on narrative pattern included. 'The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus' has been relatively recently reprinted at least once in relation to studies of mythic heroes, suggesting it is still relevant to current scholarship in this field. To my mind, this study well displays Dundes' focus on structure and attendant meaning/s as neatly outlined in the quotation from Bronner's Introduction.

Childlore and culture have occasionally been addressed directly in Dundes' work, at least on the evidence of this selection. In accordance with his Freudian interests, references tend to relate to toilet training, punishment and the bogie man, as well as an article on adolescent male cockfighting (which might or might not be considered 'children's' folklore). He occasionally refers to nursery rhymes and also deals with 'fairy' or magic tales, though again the emphasis is either Freudian or structuralist, after Propp. The main contribution in this volume is 'On Game Morphology: A Study of the Structure

of Non-Verbal Folklore', in which Dundes argues that non-verbal folklore forms such as children's games are structurally similar to folktales. This important contribution, however, is essentially a theoretical analysis rather than an engagement with children and their culture.

*The Meaning of Folklore* has a useful index, is well-produced and includes a number of photographs of its subject. Simon Bronner's Introduction is an important work of intellectual biography in itself and will provide material for thought and discussion about Dundes for years to come. Following in the master's footsteps, Bronner also provides invaluable introductions and notes to the selected essays, just as Dundes did in his *The Study of Folklore* and *Folklore Matters*. This is an extremely valuable, though increasingly neglected, editing and teaching practice that we should see more of in academic anthologies as they are helpful both for students and their teachers. It reminds us that Dundes was known as a 'master teacher' as well as a great scholar.

Whatever theoretical perspective/s we might espouse, and whatever misgivings we might have about one or more of Dundes' approaches and interpretations, this book clearly confirms and defines his pre-eminent place in folkloristics. So great was the man's published output that it would require a number of volumes at least the size of this one to include them all, even leaving aside his many books. His intellectual legacy will long loom large over folkloristics, folklore studies, folklife and ethnology, as well as several other fields. ★

*Dr Graham Seal AM is Professor of Folklore at Curtin University of Technology, Perth WA. He is the Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Australia, Asia and the Pacific in Humanities at Curtin.*

---

Simon J. Bronner (ed),  
*The Meaning of Folklore:  
The analytical essays of Alan Dundes*  
(Utah State University Press, 2007)





## KIDS CAN SQUAWL: POLITICS AND POETICS OF WOODY GUTHRIE'S CHILDREN SONGS

Alessandro Portelli

I'd like to start with a story. Many years ago, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, someone gave my seven-year old son a bound book with blank sheets. He immediately decided he was going to write a novel on it. The novel's hero's name was Otto, meaning eight: a grown-up version of himself. In the opening scene, Otto is frying a couple of eggs in a pan. Suddenly, the eggs start screaming: We don't wanna be eaten, we don't wanna be eaten... So Otto puts out the fire and puts away the pan.

After reading the manuscript, I interviewed the author. I asked, So, what does Otto do after he's put the eggs away? Well, the author said, he gets other eggs and fries them. And did those eggs like to be eaten? No, he said; but they didn't say anything.

The story immediately reminded me of the stories and songs in which Woody Guthrie taught the same moral, starting from the voice of children — from the unforgettable passage in which he describes his little daughter as a full-fledged 'citizen' to the poems and rhymes in which children protest and get grown ups to give them what they want:

*Kids can squawl  
And kids can bawl  
As long as the ants pack hayseeds  
I like a kid that bawls real loud  
And grows up a big loud lung  
To walk up some pizzeldsyast Washington  
Office  
And yell out so loud  
Up and down them crackly halls  
That they pass five or six laws that minute  
By gollies  
To give my kids whatever the heck he's yelling  
for.*

(Born to Win, 1949)

We want our freedom, and we want it now, sang the American civil rights movement. The voice of children raised in insistent demand is to Woody Guthrie the matrix of political protest and action: we want our rights, and we want them now.

*I want my milk and I want it now  
I want my milk and I want it now  
My breast and, well, I want my bottle, both  
And I want my milk and I want it now*

*I want my bath and I want it now  
I want my bath and I want it now  
Let it rain, let it pour, let me swim, let me float  
I want my bath and I want it now...*

The original flag of the American revolution was a coiled snake bearing the words 'Don't tread on me'. At the origins of rock and roll stands Carl Perkins' and Elvis Presley's militant anthem, 'Don't step on my blue suede shoes'. And at the origins of Woody Guthrie's education and teaching stands a little song called 'Don't you push me down':

*Well, you can play with me  
You can hold my hand  
We can skip together  
Down to the pretzel man*

*You can wear my mammy's shoes  
 Put on my Daddy's hat  
 You can even laugh at me  
 But don't you push me down.  
 Don't you push me, push me, push me  
 Don't you push me down  
 Don't you push me, push me, push me  
 Don't you push me down.  
 You can play with me  
 We can play all day  
 You can use my dishes  
 If you'll put them away  
 You can feed me apples  
 And oranges and plums  
 You can even wash my face  
 But don't you push me down.  
 Don't you push me, push me, push me...  
 You can play with me  
 We can build a house  
 You can take my ball  
 And bounce it all around  
 You can take my skates  
 And ride them all around  
 You can even get mad at me  
 But don't you push me down.  
 Don't you push me, push me, push me...*

Don't you push me down, because dust can't kill me, and I ain't gonna be treated this-a way. We are familiar with Woody Guthrie as the singer of uprooted farm workers and Dust Bowl migrants, the voice that tells from the inside and less rhetorically the story of the grapes of wrath — and we are familiar with Woody Guthrie as the singer of the beauty of his land and the anger against those who steal it and possess it. We think of Woody Guthrie as the singer of the American working class and its history, from Mother Bloor to Sacco and Vanzetti, from Ludlow to Calumet. Yet, his children's songs are no less political and no less full of meaning and beauty than his ballads on the Dust Bowl or on Sacco and Vanzetti.

Woody Guthrie often puts on a child's persona, as if to get back to basics, get rid of all unnecessary

detours and complications, speak clear truths to power in the plain, common language of the West. There is a clarity of vision in this mask, an awareness that the roots of rebellion go back to a space before politics and ideology, but grow from a sense of the meaning of one's presence in the world, from the awareness and affirmation of the self as a person with needs, wants and rights — and with a voice to claim them.

On the other hand, the individual pride and dignity of these songs are the source for a sense of communal solidarity. Woody Guthrie's concept of a participatory democracy and of a labor commonwealth to come begins at home:

*My daddy said  
 And my grandpa too  
 There's work, work, work  
 For me to do.  
 I can paint my fence  
 Mow my lawn  
 But if we all work together  
 Well, it shouldn't take long.*



In children, Woody Guthrie recognizes the multiple meanings of the word play — as music, as games, and as theater — and the connection between play, rhythm and work. In one of his poems, he explains that the difference between himself and the poets of literature is his relation with time: unlike them, he cannot take time to look for the ideal word, to revise and hone every line. In the guise of an oral poet, Woody Guthrie's way is 'composition in performance', or improvisation — and, again, he learns from children. Children, after all, are the ultimate bulwark of oral culture, all their performances are improvised and invented on the spot.

Like children, Woody Guthrie is intent on discovering language, like them he loves to play with the sheer sound and shape of words. Children are indeed discovering language, and to them language is a thing

in itself. The use of repetition folds the words onto themselves, as if their most important meaning was the simple fact that they exist as sound. Words are words, the adjective confirms the noun as if seeking for the essential quality of the thing: 'grassy grass grass', 'swimmy swim swim', 'wash-y wash wash'. And, of course, 'dusty old dust.' Like a child, Woody Guthrie handles words, rolls them on his tongue, on his typewriter and his pencil, examines them as if they had just been invented, as if language were just emerging from the 'semiotic' chaos of origins:

*Howdy doozle doodle doozie Howji hijie heejie  
hojie,  
Howji hojie heejie hijie, Howjido, howjido, how-  
jido, sir,  
Doodle doosie, howjido.*

Yet, he doesn't miss the opportunity of including a message, of peace and brotherhood, even in this small nonsense song: a welcome to every one, good or bad, friend or foe. Long as they're human.

*I stick out my little hand  
To ev'ry woman, kid and man  
And I shake it up and down, howjido, howjido  
Yes, I shake it up and down, howjido*

Just as all fieldworkers and oral historians do, Woody Guthrie does not 'give voice to the voiceless': children, as he knows very well, are endowed with what Grace Paley called once 'the loudest voice', and they can squawl and bawl real loud. So, rather than 'giving' them a voice they already have, Woody Guthrie learns his own voice from listening to the voices around him. In one of his most eloquent essays, Woody Guthrie describes himself as a watcher and listener to the 'people I owe': 'I remember your face as it was when I saw you. I hear your voice in its own loose words like it spoke when I heard it... I have heard a storm of words in me, enough to write several hundred songs and that many books. I know these words I hear are not my private property. I borrowed them from you, the same as I walked through the high winds and borrowed enough air to keep me moving.' In the same

fashion, he watches and listens to children, learns from them, sets himself as a conduit, a mediator through which their words and songs are amplified, organized and returned to them. Much in the fashion of what Gianni Bosio described as the 'upside down intellectual', bent not on teaching the masses but learning from them, and arming them with their own strength.

As he listens and learns from children, he also deconstructs the hierarchic relationship of adult and child. On the one hand, he is fascinated by how their absurd questions — 'Why can't a mouse eat a streetcar?' — suddenly turn into stringent denunciations of other absurdities: 'What makes the landlord take money?'. And his answer, I don't know that one myself, places the all-knowing adult on the same level as the wondering child: why don't you answer my questions? Because I don't know the answers.

Rather than the nostalgia of a lost golden age, Woody Guthrie envisions a future utopia to struggle for. We are not old people with a past to regret; rather, we are all children with a future ahead of us. And if we bawl and stamp our feet loud and hard enough, perhaps we won't be fried and eaten for breakfast.



*Alessandro Portelli is Professor of American Literature at the University of Rome 'La Sapienza', and is the author of a number of influential studies in oral history and popular memory including The Order Has Already Been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome and The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Form and Meaning in Oral History. From 2002 to 2008, he served as advisor to the Mayor of Rome for the preservation and promotion of the city's historical memory, and is currently co-manager of Rome's House of History and Memory.*

*This article contains extracts, with permission, from Alessandro Portelli's blog of 26 May 2008. It was first presented as a paper at the conference 'Woody Guthrie and the Dignity of Man' in Bologna 20–22 May 2008.*



## SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL PLAYGROUND GAMES AND PRANKS

**Warren Fahey**

My old high school, Marist Brothers Kogarah, is celebrating its centenary this year (2009), and along with their usual celebrations they arranged to video the memories of some of their 'old boys', including mine. Memory is a strange beast, and although I was at the school in the 1950s and early 60s, apart from nearly blowing up the science laboratory my clearest memories are of the playground games we played.

The school had a large play area including gravel, bitumen and grass. There were also hideaways spots — under stairs, behind buildings — plus some designated as 'out of bounds'. I always preferred those spots. Play took place before the morning roll call, at playlunch (the mid morning break where we consumed our compulsory quarter-pint bottles of often-warm milk), lunch and after school, although the latter was usually fooling around as we dawdled home via parks and roadways. Like many of the boys, I had a Malvern Star bike complete with a 'motor' which consisted of a plastic playing card that stuck through the rear wheel spokes, held on with a plastic clothes peg. At least it sounded like a motorbike.

Games, like schoolyard rhymes, came in waves, often revived from the dead or instigated by some commercial interest.

I think I was on the last wave of Marbles. The game involved two or more competitors, armed with a bag of 'ammunition' — mysteriously-named round balls that were flicked (often with great dexterity) inside a designated ring (usually drawn on sand but later on the bitumen with chalk). There were stringent rules to the game. The marbles were called various names, usually related to their colour, size or purpose. A typical 'marble bag' had 'Chinas', 'crystals', 'agates', 'alleys', 'bombies', 'bamboozler', 'Kong' and 'King Kongs' (for the very large marbles), 'commies' 'opals', 'glimmers', 'bloods', 'rubies' 'pawees' and a lucky marble for the very important shots — this was the 'taw' or 'shooter'. We played several

different Marble games including 'nucks', 'keepsies', 'knuckledown' and 'blaster'.

Marbles eventually gave way to 'Knuckles', a game played with real knucklebones scored from the local butcher. They were small sheep joint-connector bones and once they had been boiled, or left out for the ants to clean, they were polished. You needed five or six to play 'Jacks'. The game involved throwing the knuckles on the ground and then trying to pick them up, one at a time, while you threw the one you had already collected up in the air. It was difficult, but like all games certain kids became champion picker-uppers. The game became so popular that a company started manufacturing bone-coloured and black plastic knucklebones.

There was another game of Knuckles which involved real knuckles: your own and an opponent's. The rules were that both right hands were lined up, each hand in a ball with the knuckles in line. At the count of three you tried to come down hard on the other boy's knuckles. It was a game of speed and reflexes: three strikes and you're out!

We also played more strenuous 'catch me if you can' games like 'Cockylora', 'What's the time Mister Wolf' and 'British Bulldog'. 'Bottle Tops' were also popular at Kogarah. This involved, as the name implies, soft drink bottle tops, which were slid along the ground, with a chalk barrier from where you sent the top towards a wall. It was similar to lawn bowls, with the bottle tops closest to the wall winning. There was another game, also called 'Bottle



Tops', which involved balancing a bottle top on the end of your elbow and then shooting your arm down to catch the same top in your hand, then two bottle tops, etc. The boy who balanced and caught most tops was the winner.

Talking about tops reminds me of the free milk program again. Many of us collected the aluminum tops from the milk bottles. Aluminum was quite a new invention and we would press the tops out flat and 'shine' them. To our amazement, one day we found tops that had been printed with the Union Jack to celebrate Empire Day. These were a real collector's item.

In 1957 Hula Hoops became a craze. We spun them around our waists, arms, legs and neck. What a sight to see hundreds of kids twirling around like Dervishes. Coles had introduced a plastic hula-hoop and it was affordable and preferable to the old bamboo ones which split.

Then, in 1962, as I was headed to my final years, came the biggest craze of all – the yo-yo. We flipped, spun, double-whammed, crawled, and went 'around the world' and back. I bought mine at the showbag pavilion of the Royal Easter Show. It was the first and only time I ever purchased anything from Coca Cola.

Most Australian boys carried a penknife in those days. Not for any malicious reason — but we needed them for whittling, peeling fruit, fixing our bikes and carving our initials into anything suitable. Some brave souls also used them for a dangerous game called 'Dagger'. This essentially was a game of stupid bravado where two people faced each other and each took turns throwing the knife blade between their opponent's spread legs. The 'game' was to see how close they could get without injury.

Being a Catholic boys' college there were other acts of bravado, but none could outdo the one our class devised to taunt our headmaster, Brother Frederick, who also happened to be our maths teacher. He was regarded as a mean man and had a habit of saying 'Now look now' almost every time he started a sentence. We kept score cards: every time he uttered those immortal words we would dive for our pencils until someone reached the magic 'bingo' of 100. We never got caught but we had some close calls for he knew something was happening but could never discover why the class would erupt into hysterical laughter.

Another of our 'games' concerned stink insects. These are the small black and orange insects that are found in citrus trees. We collected them in matchboxes and, at the appropriate time, usually doing the recital of the daily rosary, we let the bugs escape. Mayhem.

Talking about naughty boy antics, nothing could match the near disaster that took place one day. I was of the generation that saw the change from pen and ink to biros. Our desks still had inkwells that had been scrubbed clean. They were useless until some bright spark invented a new use. They became barbeque pits! Filled with methylated spirits they could be lit without smoke or flame. Jaffas, a popular round chocolate ball with a hard coating, were the favourite 'barbecue' item; stink beetles came second. One simply unfolded a paperclip and inserted one end into the jaffa and toasted away. Unfortunately one of my neighbouring students tried this one day during the rosary and the inkwell had a leak that found the bottle of metho. Poof! Up it went in glorious flames!

Oh yes, the school war cry. Like many school war cries ours contained some Maori-sounding words. It was chanted at every sport's carnival. In all the years at the school I never quite understood what the actual words were but they sounded like this:

*Kiora Kiora Kianni Kat Tee*  
*Kiora Kiora Kianni Ka Tee!*  
*K-O-G-A-R-A-H*  
*Kogarah!*

I have often been asked where my interest in music stemmed from but now I can see it clearly. I had forgotten about my debut on stage. It was the Kogarah Mecca and a school production of that perennial favourite, 'Oklahoma'. I was a waving wheat in the third row!



*Warren Fahey is a folklore collector, author and performer. His Australian Folklore Unit website is [www.warrenfahey.com](http://www.warrenfahey.com)*

## This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

