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Children's Games and Children's Literature between the Enlightenment and Romanticism

Abstract: Article is deeply rooted in the history of society, presents the historical and socio-cultural situation of phenomenon of playing, children's games and the role of children's literature between the Enlightenment and Romanticism and shows that especially the middle class does not occupy an outstanding position. On the contrary, the middle class belongs to the most sceptical social forces. The central values of the middle class – especially the puritan, Calvinist und pietistic parts of it – are different: industriousness, diligence, asceticism, the sacrifice of pleasure, efficiency and rationality. In the bourgeois use of time, all idleness basically counts as suspicious, all playing as a useless waste of time. This attitude is reinforced by the polemical delimitation from the noble and courtly lifestyle, in which all kinds of games have a central place and which, for this reason, is viewed as parasitic. Article pays attention also to the German word for play or game (in German, there is just one word for this, “*Spiel*”), which can be used for mental games, word play, but also the performance on stage or in an orchestra. Beyond this, text emphasised how to classify genres based on play with language, with sense and nonsense, as well as literary patterns, and genres such as nonsense poetry and parody, as part of intellectual culture rather than part of *play* culture.

Keywords: Children's Games, Children's Playing, Children's Literature, Socio-cultural context, Enlightenment, Romanticism.

Historically, modern children's literature is a product of the European Enlightenment of the 18th century, in which England and France played a leading role, and with a certain delay, the German-speaking world. In sociological terms, modern children's literature is basically borne by the middle class, even though parts of the aristocracy are amongst its supporters and customers. Even where it turns to children of the lower urban class, such as the children of the peasantry, it remains a phenomenon of bourgeois culture. The development of a middle-class children's *game* culture is tightly interwoven with the development of modern children's *literature*, whereby children's literature represents a central medium with regards to the implementation and distribution of children's game culture.

The fact that a genuine game culture amongst the rising middle class developed at all – amongst children as well as adults – was not a matter of fact. In the history of playing and games, the middle class does not occupy an outstanding position. On the contrary, the middle class belongs to the most sceptical social forces. The central values of the middle class – especially the puritan, Calvinist und pietistic parts of it – are different: industriousness, diligence, asceticism, the sacrifice of pleasure, efficiency and rationality. In the bourgeois use of time, all idleness basically counts as suspicious, all playing as a useless waste of time. This attitude is reinforced by the polemical delimitation from the noble and courtly lifestyle, in which all kinds of games have a central place and which, for this reason, is viewed as parasitic.

However, the grown-up bourgeois citizen can only sustain his or her rigid behaviour as long as compensation is provided. As Dorothea Kühme in her 1997 monograph *Bürger und Spiel* has shown, the middle class finds relaxation in a limited area of free time in which they devote themselves to games. Thereby, they are striving to differentiate clearly between playing and all sorts of work, to clearly mark the borders between the world of games and the reality and seriousness of life. According to Dorothea Kühme, the playing culture of the grown-up citizen, which is already limited to very little free time, sets up an “asylum” for “behaviour, interaction models and thinking patterns, which do not belong to bourgeois virtues”; it represents a “retreat for social creativity, for spontaneity, nonsense and mischief, the bizarre, the immoral and taboos” (Kühme 1997: 15).

I

An asylum, a retreat for the divergent is, in a certain way, presented also by the developing modern children's culture in the course of the 18th century. Under the guidance of their philosophers and pedagogues, the middle class learns to cut back their demands on their children. Children, it was held, could not be reached through philosophical discourse and educational treatises, but through vivid exemplary stories; hence the need for a proper literature for children. A bourgeois children's culture, which only consists of studying, lessons and sitting still on the one hand, and valuable work on the other hand, can only be enforced by pressure; in order to be successful, however, it needs to have a certain attractiveness, which it only gains by including a diverse array of games. (Hauck 1935; Joppien 1981; Werner-Hervieu 1983) Children would not be capable of a completely disciplined lifestyle, which is why the middle class should care about a game culture especially for children.

That the middle class as a social stratum does not, after all, count among the biggest inventors of games cannot be a surprise. It does not feel a need, as it can draw upon an extensive tradition of games. It only needs to review this tradition in terms of its usefulness for the adult's sociable playing or for the new childlike

playing. It also has to be tested for its accordance with one's own moral code. What we have here, again following Dorothea Kühme, is a process of "acquisition and 'bourgeois ification' of a cultural tradition" (Kühme 1997: 15) First and foremost, we would have to mention the game culture of the nobility or the courtly society, which, together with dance, drama and opera, is anything but a peripheral phenomenon. In the aristocracy and at court, one lived for playing, dancing, going to the theatre or opera, and conducting politics alongside if at all. This attitude was classified by the middle class as among the parasitic character traits of the reigning class and counted as disreputable.

In addition, we would have to mention the playing traditions of the peasantry, such as the early bourgeois urban lower classes, as they have been captured in the great painting of 1560 by Pieter Brueghel. Here we see toys such as the gyroscope, the stick horse, dolls, wind mills, or items converted to toys, such as barrels, hoops, pig's bladders and ankles. Functional games, such as walking on stilts and riding stick horses can be identified, as well as games such as tug-of-wars and blindman's buff; lastly even role plays like the bridal procession. (Hills 1957; Durantini 1979; Hoke 2011) Whilst the noble and courtly game culture still is graspable in written records, such as memoirs, courtly novels, but also in playing instructions, the traditional game culture of town and country has only been recorded sporadically. For the latter, we can mainly find only verbally recorded tradition, which seldom came to the attention of academics before the 19th century.

While reading and writing, regular book and journal reading, and not least reading a map had to be taught tediously to children, one did not need to worry about their ability to play. It was enough to send them out on the streets, to the garden, to the meadows and fields, into the forests, to streams and lakes, where they met children of different ages and quickly found games to play. They learned to play on their own, or to be precise, from one another, especially from the older children, and in turn became carriers of oral tradition.

The children's culture newly designed by the enlightened pedagogues did not aim only at learning, lessons, or childhood at school but at the *entire* childhood. For the implementation of new children's cultural behaviour and social manners, times outside the formal education, which was later called 'spare time', was far more important, which is why one had to employ it educationally. For this, the temporal restriction, or even better, the full avoidance of all outdoor games and playing was needed, leading to a middle-class childhood mostly spent indoors. (Zinnecker 1990: 142–162; Calvert 1992) A childhood out in the streets would probably still have been of major appeal for the children of the middle class for a long time; thus, one needed a skilful approach in order to keep one's own children away from that. There is no other way to explain why Enlightenment children's literature reveals such an extensive degree of playful elements and even features countless children's street games – but not without turning them into something useful and reasonable.

There is no anthology, no children's journal, no nonfiction book in the 18th and early 19th century, which does not include a section on games – including drawing games, word puzzles, charades, short scenes and instructions for storytelling, dressing up or role play (Uphaus-Wehmeier 1984). At that time, a genre emerged that continues to exist even today: the so called activity books, whose guessing games, card games, crafts and cut outs are often synchronized with the seasons. With these ideas, playing and free time indoors with the family was supposed to appear even more attractive than playing out in the streets.

Some pedagogues of the enlightenment take this even a step further: following John Locke's "Thoughts concerning education" in 1693, they suggest that the entire instruction should be arranged playfully also. It would be necessary, for example, to turn the learning of reading and writing into a game so that the children would take up this unavoidable obligation with the same enjoyment as they would usually play. As every game tires in the long run, lessons designed as a game should be of limited duration. Thus, the difference between learning and free time would be levelled; children would only engage in playful activities and still acquire skills and knowledge that would turn them into reasonable citizens. Nothing of this should be experienced as tiresome duty, which they only fulfil reluctantly.

Together with the creation of a special children's literature, the enlightened bourgeoisie – against their own values – finds itself constrained to accept a childlike game culture. Here, they make a more or less strict selection from the extensive game and play tradition. Central selection criteria include the benefits of play for physical and intellectual development and the acquisition of essential cultural techniques; for knowledge acquisition or the practice of enlightened social manners, and for the development of a moral sense. Traditional games are therefore judged by their impact on children and young adults and then rejected if they are not of psychological or educational use or if their impact is seen as negative. Games which are not of pedagogical or developmental value appear as a useless waste of time to some pedagogues and should be avoided altogether. Other pedagogues appear more tolerant and support the view of John Locke, who suggested that all play be allowed, even without a recognisable benefit, as long as it is not harmful or condemnable.

II

In the course of the classic-idealistic philosophy that emerged around 1800, there arises in Germany a completely different view of playing. Judging games by their impact and their educational usefulness is considered inappropriate and replaced by a players'-oriented point of view. Playing as a form of expression, as a self-development of the playing subject becomes the focus of attention. It is not supposed to only have an extrinsic purpose, to only promote

the development of specific socially desirable skills. Instead, playing should be about the free and enthusiastic activity and personal experience of the playing subject. The experience of self, which takes place when playing, outdoes all other forms of individual experience insofar as the human being manifests himself, apparently in his entirety, in the totality of his physical, psychological and intellectual faculties. This understanding of playing culminates in Schiller's thesis, according to which people only reveal their true selves when at play. (Kowatzki 1973; Dode 1985; Neuenfeld 2005). Dorothea Kühme speaks here of a "transition to an understanding of play which stresses the ideal, holistic and pure character of playing" (Kühme 1997: 70). Hence, play has not lost its pedagogical importance in the slightest: It provides children, in the frame of an unreal game, with the experience of a personal wholeness, which depicts an ideal that is desirable and realisable in real life, too. Insofar as it presents the educational goal of the multi-faceted development of a personality, play proves to be a welcome element of a holistic human development.

As abstract and withdrawn as this idealistic philosophy of play may be, around 1800 the thought of play as a free and enthusiastic manifestation of the self gains popularity. However, according to the opinion of the contemporaneous Romantic Movement, the recently established play culture of the enlightenment is far removed from that understanding. Accordingly, useful games are devised by adults and are just forced on children; they are not in the least spontaneous or authentic and should not count as free child-appropriate self-expression. Where, then, could *real* childish playing be seen? The answer of the Romantics was short and sweet: out in the streets, outside where children could play unsupervised and uncontrolled without any adult instruction! (Götze 1872: 172–285)¹. The children in the streets, whatever social stratum they may come from, appear to the Romantics as ideal subjects of play, who enthusiastically act out when playing and do not care for what it is good for. Thereby, they will also prove to be real poets, with an extensive treasure of rhymes, nursery rhymes, jokes, satires and obscenities, which would make Romantic poets swoon. Probably the most famous monument to this fascination are the children's songs in the appendix of the third volume of "*Des Kna-*

¹ This abrupt turn continues to reverberate in a text from the second half of the nineteenth century. Regarding the spontaneous games of children, we read: "Play is the life of the child, thus there is also to be found here such an abundance that it is amazing that one could possibly think of inventing artificial games." In this later period, these words are directed against Friedrich Fröbel's pedagogy of play: "There are hundreds of excellent games that are played everywhere and that completely correspond with the nature of the child, but Fröbel's school comes up with new ones, including those that aren't games at all [...] Or it tailors the old games according to its own pattern [...], and why? Not, it seems to me, out of a well-founded and just judgment of those old folk ways." Götze: *Die Volkspoesie und das Kind*. In: *Jahrbuch des Vereins für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, 4. Jg. (1872), pp. 172–285, here pp. 251 und 253. A rivalry between folklorists and pedagogues comes clearly to light here.

ben Wunderhorn”, published in 1806-1808 by the romantic poets Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano.

This famous collection found numerous imitators in the course of the 19th century, who collected traditional children's rhymes and songs and afterwards published them for the middle-class family's use. Together with the collected verses and poems, many street games for children have found their way into the bourgeois familial children's play culture. With this, the criterion according to which games have to have a purpose in order to be acceptable, is increasingly suspended in favour of an understanding of play in which free and enthusiastic activity is central (Retter 2005: 259–271).²

The Romantic rediscovery of children's street game culture in which, up until far into the 20th century, bourgeois children could participate, has also had another consequence: in countless autobiographical accounts the experience of a childhood in the streets was portrayed in the brightest colours. With pride and contentment, but partly also with nostalgia, a childhood was remembered that supposedly was exciting and thrilling and full of adventures. It was popular to adorn oneself with an anti-bourgeois, quasi-proletarian childhood of play, and to regret or discount a protected familial childhood. Here we are facing one of the great embellishments produced by the bourgeois culture of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Romantic idealisation of the traditional children's culture became so dominant that it became difficult to see the reality. Let us not fool ourselves: a childhood on the streets usually implied nastiness, defamation, xenophobia, racism, injuries, violence and abuse of all sorts; it could get out of control for some children or some groups, and it could have traumatising consequences. One could hardly speak of enjoying life freely and enthusiastically when playing out in the streets in the 19th and early 20th century. Bourgeois children would therefore rarely encounter a childhood in the streets in reality, but instead experience it in the white washing medium of children's and young adults' literature. Erich Kästner's "*Emil und die Detektive*", published in 1928, would represent the most famous example.

It is worth briefly noting that the record of traditional children's rhymes and games in family anthologies of the 19th and 20th century is based on rigorous purification, comparable to the well-known bourgeois acquisition of traditional narratives, especially fairy tales. Even in collections that do not close their eyes to the obscene, dirty and filthy parts of children's street culture, we

² Hein Retter speaks in this context of the "process of the subjective historicization where by memory becomes transfigured" and cites as paradigmatic examples Theodor Fontane's and Fritz Reuter's depictions of their childhoods. "The transfiguration of memory of the good old days in which children still, 'really' played has its origin in Romanticism and can be found throughout the 19th century." See Hein Retter: *Spiel und Spielzeug. Pädagogische Abwehrschlachten und neue Sinngebungen in der Mediensozialisation von Kindern*. In: Johannes Bilsteinetal. (eds.): *Anthropologie und Pädagogik des Spiels*. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz 2005, 259–271, here p. 262f.

can still sense a secret admiration. As German examples, one can mention the collections of Peter Rühmkorf (1969) and Ernst Bornemann (1973).

Despite all idealisation, whitewashing and delusions, it remains to the credit of the Romantic movement that, with its understanding of children's play and poetry, as well as its rediscovery of traditional children's play culture, it has significantly contributed to the enrichment of bourgeois children's play culture. It has loosened the ropes of the bourgeois understanding of play in so far as even games without recognisable use for education and learning now count as acceptable, as long as children are enjoying themselves – a view that was already supported by John Locke at the end of the 17th century.

However, the Romantic disparagement of educational and learning games of all sorts that derived from the age of Enlightenment, as unreal, pseudo games could not prevail. Even if the Romantic understanding of play was able to gain the upper hand and increasingly turned into a general understanding of play, the bourgeoisie still quietly continued to employ didactic games. In game and activity books for bourgeois families, as well as in children's journals, they remained an integral part. Many of those educational games have also proven to be durable, such as categorisation games (as the German *Stadt, Land, Fluss*). Guessing games – especially for adults – have also regained popularity and have made it to prime time TV shows. Free play as well as useful play are both restricted to spare time, to children's hours of rest. The popular idea in the late 18th century of the playful arrangement of lessons was easier to implement with private tutors. The idea vanished with the implementation of compulsory education, to return just now and then in pedagogy.

III

In the second part of this article, I move from the historical to a systematic perspective on the relation between children's literature and playing and focus on the different forms this relation can take. In a *first* constellation some single pieces or works from children's literature become part of a game or a playful act in themselves. By analogy with the idea of "setting in life" that is common in folklore research, one could speak of a "setting in game". In some parts of certain games, specific verses need to be spoken: the verses belonging to hide and seek games are the most famous examples. In several movement games, certain verses that support the rhythm and illustrate it are recited as an accompaniment, for example, so-called knee rider games with matching rhymes. Lullabies accompany the rocking of the cradle when the child or the doll is falling asleep. Certain verses and rhymes belong to every game of hopscotch.

Along these lines, consider hiking songs, which were to be sung when hiking, and usually helped to set the pace among larger hiking groups. Literary works can also be included in popular games of forfeits. Usually some of the forfeits are:

Recite a poem! Tell a joke or a fairy tale! The other players then have to decide whether the pledge can be returned or not after the rendered performance. Lastly, quiz games can relate to general as well as to children's literature: Who is the author of...? Who is the hero or the heroine of...?

There is a *second* constellation, in which the children's book itself functions as a toy. Think of the so-called "magic window books", which began to appear from the early 19th century onward, of the picture puzzle books, as well as of the popup picture books of nowadays.

The *third* constellation of children's literature and games consists in modern children's literature functioning right from the beginning as a key medium of the distribution and the deliverance of games. For this purpose, individual book genres have been created. One would have to name, in the first place, a kind of nonfiction book that has already been mentioned above: game and activity books. Here we can find game instructions and rules, a list of needed tools, information on the duration of the game, on the difficulty, number and age of co-players, and so on. Often, sketches and drawings are also included. Instructions of that kind can also be found in booklets that are enclosed with card games or board games.

In the field of game and activity books, we can observe a fluent transition to fictional books on several levels. Quiz books grow into literary anthologies if the individual quizzes are in the form of a poem, a fable or a short narration. Literary anthologies can generally serve as suppliers for forfeits and provide the playing children a quick choice of renditions. Another form of transition between non-fiction and fictional books is given wherever individual games cannot be explained factually in their general regularity, but where an exemplary performance of the game by a concrete group is presented. For this, one draws upon the form of one-acts: a group of children appear and decide to play a game and carry this out until the end of the game. Young readers take part in an imaginary round of the game and vividly experience how the particular game is played and how much joy it brings. An early German example of this are Gottlieb Schummels "*Kinderspiele und Gespräche*" in three volumes from 1776–1778. These dialogues are different from actual children's drama insofar that they do not require to be acted out; they are just meant to be read. I want to suggest that this forms a *fourth* constellation of children's literature and play, which one might term fictional or literary game and activity books.

A *fifth* constellation of the relation between children's literature and game concerns the representation of playing children in poems, narratives or novels, in drama, opera or other stage works. Some of these have a didactic purpose. Hence, the children's play is usually thematically depicted in exemplary stories, which partly want to show ideal playing behaviour, and partly warn against negative excesses. In both cases, they do not focus on playing as such or on the exchange of the games' rules; we are not dealing with game instructions disguised as literature. Instead, the focus is on the general playing behaviour: Does the

play of the depicted children take place in their free time? Does it affect learning or other duties? Is the amount of play moderate? Do they gamble? Are they in danger of addiction? Such texts demonstrate appropriate ways of including play in the everyday life of children, and not least the containment of a possible passion for games, which is considered harmful. What we are dealing with here are almost exclusively works addressed to children.

Another group of literary representations of playing children is free of such educational intentions; it cannot only be found in works addressed to children, but also in adult literature. Playing appears here as an integral part of children's living environment, represented in epic or dramatic form in which their fundamental characteristics and features can be shown particularly well. Not least, the differences to the grownup world, where playing only takes up a rather marginal role, make a striking appearance. Adult readers often feel transported to their own childhood when reading such works and often remember with enthusiasm or nostalgia the games they played themselves.

Some young readers may feel portrayed and acknowledged in such works, while others may look back with yearning to a childhood full of games that might have been denied to them or were out of reach for whatever reason, but which they could at least experience in their imagination. Even though it is not the work's actual intention, numerous young readers feel an urge to imitate the characters and their game and playing behaviour. Many children may have re-enacted the games presented in classics such as "Pippi Longstocking" or "*Die Kinder aus Bullerbü*" and, for example, they might have turned their parents' gardens into a Villa Villekulla. Only too often, children's favourite stories are then used as instructions for play, which was not the original intention.

The playful imitation of the classics of children's literature is not limited to the games represented within them. In many cases, it is also about the childlike heroic figure as such, about their characteristics, and their adventures. With this, a *sixth* constellation of children's literature and games comes into view. Numerous so-called fictional or role plays for children feature characters taken from children's favourite books. The scripts of children's games range from Robinson Crusoe to Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, from Winnetou and Old Shatterhand to Pippi Longstocking and Superman. Indeed, children's literature and other media frequently reflect this possibility, featuring young heroes who, in their games, draw upon literary templates. The *Neverland* from Barrie's "Peter Pan" represents a theme park in which classic children's books are re-enacted.

IV

The role children's literature played in the history of bourgeois children's playing culture cannot be overrated. For the culture of street games, which is in no way extinct and still thriving on schoolyards and playgrounds, it has no fur-

ther significance. Here, we are dealing with traditions of play that are passed down orally and which evade parental control. Only folklorists still stalk them, regularly publishing their findings, a portion of which makes it into children's anthologies. In such cases, children's literature functions as a transmission belt between the streets and the bourgeois family life.

We can assume that there was a tradition of playing in bourgeois families which has also been passed down orally, usually by grandparents. However, the tendency towards an intra-familial tradition of play already began to decline in the late 18th century. With growing interest in a new way of raising children and a more modern way of keeping children busy, one rather drew upon books: The bourgeois children's play culture is the fruit of suggestions taken from game and activity books, as well as fictional books for children and adults. To a large extent, it is conveyed by media, which means that they have been adopted from outside the family. This became a necessity because the bourgeois family, especially the urban family, has become increasingly separated from oral tradition or has consciously distanced itself from it, as they believed it was the centre of pre-modern, irrational, superstitious phantasies. The lack of tradition was hence filled by medial offerings. Consequently, the modern bourgeois children's play culture is unthinkable without a thriving bourgeois children's literature.

V

Finally, one fundamental question needs to be asked. Are producing and reading fictional literature not already to be seen as a game? Is children's reading of children's literature not already to be understood as a children's game? I want to bundle these questions and vote against the notion expressed in the title of a famous monograph of German Literature, Alfred Liedé's "*Dichtungals Spiel*" from 1963. In my opinion, the plain reading of a literary work does not yet represent a game as such –nor does reading it out loud in the form of an oral performance. One can only speak of a game when the reader or the audience starts to imitate the literary heroes and take over their roles for longer or shorter periods of time.³ We are, then, dealing with a fictional or role play. The inner, imaginary realisation of an intra-literary, fictional world is not sufficient to speak of a game. Additionally, acting out of the read text is needed.

³ I am in agreement here with Volker Grassmuck: "A decisive difference between both [i.e., games and media] lies in action. Play is action, whereas distribution media have made us into universal viewers. They give us a global view, but at the price of limiting us to seeing. [...] [Computer] games, however, make us into players in the sphere of the media." See *Der elektronische Salon. Die Geburt des Tele-Sozialen aus dem Geist des Computer-Games*. In: Florian Rötzer (Hrsg.): *Schöne neue Welten? Auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Spielkultur*. München: Boer 1995, p. 43.

Currently, this discrepancy becomes most visible in the genre of fantasy: the plain reading of a fantasy novel is one thing; the widespread phenomenon of fantasy role playing is another. The former belongs to the *literary*, the latter to the current *play* culture.

What can be really confusing here is the varied use of the German word for play or game (in German, there is just one word for this, “*Spiel*”), which can be used for mental games, word play, but also the performance stage or in an orchestra. Beyond this, I decided to classify genres based on play with language, with sense and nonsense, as well as literary patterns, and genres such as nonsense poetry and parody, as part of intellectual culture rather than part of *play* culture. This is why they are omitted from the present discussion even though they exhibit more similarities with play proper than with other literary forms.

When it comes to professional or amateurish theatrical play, the distinction between literature and play fails. Structurally, there are no differences between such play-acting and role playing, for example. Here one must take into consideration the individual institutional conditions. Role playing subsequently may turn into a theatre play, I propose, when it is performed for an audience. Fictional and role plays, on the contrary, are solely played for the players themselves and not for others.

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