

THE HISTORY OF STUDYING PLAY AND POPULAR CULTURE OF CHILDHOOD IN ROMANIAN ETHNOLOGY



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Abstract: *This study aims to join ongoing personal research in the field of popular culture for children, conducted over the years, by making known to readers and, equally, to specialists a category of folklore with genuine longevity and vitality within the perimeter of folkloric manifestations. The investigation of the play elements in children's folklore proves prolific through original, perpetual creation and through the varied expression found in children's games. The work synthesizes a history of these investigations in Romanian ethnology, which, of course, has long borrowed the major influences of research and reflection from various cultural milieus, from Europe and beyond. Play and childhood are notions so closely linked that we cannot think of one without correlating it with the other. Adult life is defined by professional occupations; that of a child is determined by play. Play is an activity whose motivation and fulfillment lie within itself. Unlike work, it does not aim to achieve material or spiritual goods (although it sometimes does), and unlike learning, it does not explicitly seek to acquire new knowledge—though this can also occur in many cases. Play is the defining activity for the child. With somewhat less frequency and somewhat different significance, play is also present in adulthood.*

Key-words: play, popular culture, childhood, Romanian Ethnology.

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When Friedrich Schiller tied the full meaning of the word “man” to the activity of play, he had in view the pure, natural manifestation of the human being in relation to the surrounding environment¹. Johan Huizinga, highlighting the link between play and poetry, shows that play is an action that unfolds within limits of place, time, and meaning, within an orderly framework, according to rules accepted freely and outside the sphere of material necessity. The spirit of play is that of distraction and ecstasy, sacred or merely festive, regardless of whether play is devotion or

¹ Friedrich Schiller : *Briefe über ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen. In Werke, XX, Philosophische Schriften*, Weimer, H. Bohlens, 1982, p.54

amusement. The action is accompanied by tension and elevation and brings with it mirth and relaxation. From this sphere of play are seen to belong all activities of poetic creation: the metrical or rhythmic division of spoken or sung words, the discovery of fitting rhymes or assonances, the concealment of meaning, the artistic construction of the phrase. The correlation between poetry and play does not refer only to the external form of speech; it equally concerns the forms of imagination, its motives, and their cloaking in expression.

For the child, the success of the play it proposes is of utmost importance. Hence the child trains all its physical, intellectual, and affective possibilities within play. Consequently, play has indispensable instructive and educational contributions. It is used as a form of organizing the learning process in kindergarten and even at subsequent levels of education; thus it constitutes an essential component that generates or integrates children's folklore.

The origin and classification of games have concerned many specialists, but a universally accepted classification has not been reached due to the distinctive approaches to this fascinating activity of the child. Depending on the degree of adult intervention in organizing and enhancing the educational influence of play, one can distinguish: spontaneous games, games initiated by children, drill or functional play, symbolic or creative play, rule-based games, construction games, and didactic games.

Closely linked to children's games is the cultural component of these games, and, insofar as this component is popular, we can associate the games with children's folklore. The participants in the games are, par excellence, children. Their play is supported by the text associated with it. If we subject play to a series of transformations to move from surface to depth, we see that it involves profound meanings. We can thus comprehend the mechanism of play and its function in affirming the norms of childhood existence, norms that must be reaffirmed at each significant moment. We can thus understand the true meaning of play.

The first impression that children's folklore generates is tied to its extraordinary purity. The memory of childhood games accompanies a person throughout life. Alexandru Odobescu expressed himself, in this sense, without reservation:

O! old customs and old songs of childhood! what sweet charm you embody in your naive expressions! the mind of man, familiarized with you from infancy, seems to bathe, upon hearing you, in its primitive innocence. You are, for us, gentle memories that revive youth in the hearts! For the people you are the flower of remembrance!²

The repertory of this sector of popular culture is rich and varied, and although we record certain peculiarities connected with the status of different genres or

² Alexandru I. Odobescu : *Prefață* la vol. G. Dem Teodorescu, *Încercări critice asupra unor credințe, datine și moravuri ale poporului român*, Tipografia Petrescu – Conduratu, București, 1874, pp. V - VI

regional variants, it integrates harmoniously into the whole of our popular culture. The unusual elements and the numerous motifs that characterize different creations in children's games best highlight the creative potential of performers within the studied space, marking, on one hand, its conservatism and archaicism, and on the other hand, demonstrating openness to innovation.

Evaluated in close relation to play and spontaneous play creation, children's folklore bears the imprint of age-specific characteristics in the structure and form of oral play creation. As a form of expression generated by the need for activity, play constitutes the principal means by which children approach the surrounding reality. Solidarity with the surrounding space is intense in the child; the sense of belonging to nature represents a certainty. The child has no prejudices, does not trouble the mind with questions, and lives a living reality of the human-nature relationship. Nature reveals itself gradually to the child, who, from the youngest age, establishes a close contact between his existence and the given natural space.

The safeguarding of childhood is not limited to researching and "photographing" the smallest details of children's manifestations in situations created by themselves, but also to promoting freedom of expression of play needs. The necessity of play is the "only modality" of distancing from everything that in current life means fixed place, dependence, regulation... aiming at the imperative of freedom of manifestation.³ This reflex is common to all children; it is a constant of childhood.

Anton Maria del Chiaro, Brâncoveanu's secretary, struck by the resemblance between some pieces of the repertoire of local children and those in Italy, wrote in 1718:

Let it not seem superfluous to the reader that I describe the children's games of the Wallachs, for in them you will see another proof that they are the descendants of the ancient colonists left by Trajan after the conquest of Dacia, and who have transmitted to the generations, until today, the same games such as: the ball, the spinning top, the nuts, 'buzzing', horses, the seesaw, the blindfolded one, and others, all used in their season. The children also have other Turkish games, learned from the children of Turkish merchants settled in Wallachia.⁴

Also in the eighteenth century, Franz Joseph Sulzer, in his work (history contested), leaves several interesting ethnological details useful for future ethnology and folklore research, including references to children's games⁵. The work is regarded by Anca Goția as the most significant achievement in the field of children's

³ Johan Huizinga : *Homo ludens*, Colecția eseuri, Editura Univers, București, 1977, p.7

⁴ Anton Maria Del Chiaro Florentino : *Revoluțiile Valahiei*, Traducere de S. Cris. Cristian, cu o introducere de Nicolae Iorga, Iași, 1928

⁵ Franz Joseph Sulzer : *Geschite des transalpinischenn Daciens, das ist Walachei, Moldau und Bassarabiens, im Zusammenhange mit der Geschite des ubrigen Daciens*, I – III, Wiens, 1781-82, p. 142

folklore, after whose typology the Saxon folklore material from Transylvania will be classified in general⁶.

Moise Fulea, in 1815, in *Bucovinam de normă*, describes several games from the repertoire of Transylvanian children, noting with great care the names of the practiced games and, in a detail to be considered, preserving the local terminology still in use today: *De-a mijotca, De-a mâța oarbă, De-a pușcașu, Iepurii și pușcașii, Nucile*⁷.

In the same period, independently of Moise Fulea's studies, doctor Vasile Popp, in 1817, in his medical doctorate, also accounts for manifestations of children's play, offering a first classification of them. He thus distinguishes a category of "bodily" games and another of "verbal" ones. Here the classification criterion is evidently imperfect in the examples chosen; another criterion highlighted by the author concerns the functionality of the games. He also draws attention to some games that can be "vătămătoare" (harmful)⁸. From the examples selected by the author, we infer that he more often has in mind adult games, practiced, many of them, by children or youths.

A few decades later, in 1851, Teodor Stamati also makes references to children's games, noting a few formulas integrated into them: *Unu-i mara, De-a baba oarba*⁹. Regarding the actual documentation of some songs and children's games, one can speak only starting with the second half of the 19th century. The end of that century marks a real impulse in recording children's verses and in focusing collectors' attention on their songs and games. A sustained interest in children's creations is manifested by Alexandru Lambrior, G. Dem Teodorescu, Petre Ispirescu, Papahagi-Vurdună, and Al. Bogdan. All of them published valuable collections.

Alexandru Lambrior, in 1875, notes a number of games played by children, highlighting their documentary and literary value as well as their global diffusion. These are classified as rural and urban games. The most interesting aspect of Lambrior's brief collection lies in the few "boys' games," presented for the first time in Romanian specialist literature¹⁰.

At the urging of Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu and Vasile Alecsandri, Petre Ispirescu, in the last decades of the century, makes several essential contributions related to children's folklore. His most significant contribution in the field is the 88-

⁶ Anca Goția : *Preliminarii la o cercetare a culturii tradiționale a copiilor în Transilvania*, în *Studii și comunicări*, Sibiu, 1978, p.95

⁷ Moise Fulea : *Bucoavnă de normă*, Sibiu, 1815, pp. VI - XIII

⁸ Vasile Popp : *Dissertatio inauguralis historico-medica de funeribus plebeis daco-romanorum*, Viena, 1817 apud Ion Mușlea – *Viața și opera doctorului Vasile Popp*, în vol. I din *Cercetări etnografice și de folclor*, București, Editura Minerva, 1971, p.55

⁹ Teodor Stamati : *Pepelea sau tradițiunile năciunale românești*, Iași, 1851, pp. 34- 35

¹⁰ Alexandru Lambrior : *Obiceiuri și credințe populare - Jocurile copiilor*, în *Convorbiri literare*, IX, nr.1, aprilie, 1879, p.8

page brochure containing material from the creations of the young: *Jucării și jocuri de copii* (Toys and Children's Games)¹¹. Like the first fairy tales noted from the recollections of his own childhood, the typographer-collector confesses that the “games and toys” described were practiced in his own childhood. He presents 19 children’s games, meticulously described, including testimony to the ancient game of Romanian origin, *Arșicele*. The author explains the game in detail so that it can be easily reconstructed even by the ignorant. The accompanying verses are not missing, and variants from several localities are presented. Petre Ispirescu is the first folklorist in our specialist literature to describe toys, insisting on the terminology and construction variants that vary from one region to another. Ispirescu’s work complements his earlier efforts, begun a few years earlier, when he published in *Familia lui Iosif Vulcan* descriptions of children’s games, among which the pieces in issue 14 of the magazine (the same issue in which Eminescu published *If...*): *De-a lepșa*, *De-a Baba Oarba*, and, especially, *De-a Baba Gaia* — presented in detail and in several variants found in Transylvania, in Wallachia, and beyond Milcov. Another variant of the game described by Lambrior is named by Ispirescu *Ora morilor* — *joc românesc de copii* (Windmills — Romanian children’s game) and described in the same issue of the magazine¹².

In 1885 the valuable collection of Romanian Popular Poems by G. Dem Teodorescu also appears, a vast and remarkable folklo pe collection from Wallachia. After his previous work, *Cercetări asupra proverbelor române*¹³, the author makes some references to children’s folklore; the cited work reserves an entire chapter to “songs and games of children.” The author supports with examples from ancient literature the importance of art productions specific to this age group:

A more in-depth study would reveal surprising things... all from eras very distant, more interesting because they were not transmitted through schools or literary channels for children... but through their simple practice and the successive initiation by previous generations, since they reflect, in a very curious way, the different eras in the history of the Romanians.¹⁴

A separate chapter is devoted to the versified folklore of children, in which, in addition to songs and rhymes for children (Children’s Prayers), there are songs for animals, insects, and plants — accompanied by detailed explanations of the practice of certain formulae — songs. For example, when reproducing the verses of the Song of the Sun, the author also explains the ritual before invocation: drinking water, arranging in a line on the threshold, turning the children’s heads toward the east, etc.

¹¹ Petre Ispirescu : *Jucării și jocuri de copii*, Sibiu, 1885, p. 102

¹² Petre Ispirescu : *Jocuri de copii*, în *Familia*, XIX, nr. 14, 1883, p.159

¹³ G. Dem Teodorescu : *Cercetări asupra proverbelor române*, București, 1877, pp. 96 - 101

¹⁴ Idem : *Poezii populare române*, București, 1885, p. 273

Scientifically meticulous, the author provides explanations concerning the presence of certain words in children's creations. Invoking linguistic arguments, the author demonstrates the replacement of the adjective "bourgeois" with "noble" in the expression "bourgeois horns," due to the disappearance of the wild bull as a species from our mountains. In addition to recitations for the sun, moon, snail, butterfly, hedgehog, bear, and others, the author also describes and reproduces the formulas — songs of some games, noting their respective variants. It is impressive, for example, the large number of variants for the game *De-a ascunselea* (Hide-and-Seek)

From among the other games described by Teodorescu, we mention the following: *De-a armașul*, *De-a crai slujesc*, *De-a lumânărica*, *De-a fetele*, *D-a vrăbiile* and many others¹⁵. In "Analele Academiei Române", in these last years of the 19th century, attention and typographic space begin to be accorded to this folk genre, that of children. In 1893, under the signature of Papahagi-Vurdună, a few "childish games" are published. The diligent professor from Thessaloniki brings the first contribution to the knowledge of the folklore of Aromani children. The work is valuable for the perspective it opens to broad comparative studies on this domain of ethnocultural relationships in Southeast European space. It is also worth mentioning the remarks regarding the mode of manifestation, the organic link between the poetic text and the game, with gesture, with the season, or with the place where it is played. The author always mentions the place and time when the game takes place, confessing that he left aside "some games that girls practice alone, songs for insects, and those that imitate the occupation of parents, in summer and spring."¹⁶

Gheorghe Pitiș, considered by Mușlea as "the best connoisseur of the occupations and folklore of the peasants of southeast Transylvania," refers in two lines to the creation of children or for children. It concerns two articles published in *Convorbiri literare* and *Revista nouă: Jocuri de petrecere* and *Obiceiuri populare la românii din Schei*. As the titles of the two articles show, Pitiș is especially interested in an important aspect of children's folklore, namely "celebrations/games of entertainment" practiced around the mid-19th century. The description of these games collected from "Moș Stan from Schei of old Brașov" will constitute evidence that the origin of many children's games must be sought in adult folklore. Thus, the studied games: *De-a fetele*, *De-a portița*, *De-a burcănelu* and many others belonged to adults, practiced on Sundays and holidays. Only in the second half of the century did they become a proper asset of children¹⁷.

¹⁵ P. N. Papahagi – Vurdună : *Jocuri copilărești culese de la românii din Macedonia*, în *Analele Academiei Române*, seria II, tom XV, București, 1893, pp. 45 - 47

¹⁶ Ion Mușlea : *G.I. Pitiș, folclorist și etnograf*, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1968, p.234

¹⁷ Dem Constantinescu : *Elementul dramatic în jocurile copiilor*, în *Revista Nouă*, anul VII, nr 7, București, 1894, p. 75

Also in *Revista Nouă*, other articles dedicated to children's folklore appear. Noteworthy is Dem Constantinescu's article in issue 7/1894, in which the author divides games into dynamic and static and follows the dramatic element in both divisions. His conclusions are decisive:

The man of nature is a dramatist; from nature he is also a good, just, optimistic imitator. Why are children in their manifestations optimistic? Because children's literature is collective. A drama must be accepted by all. In every child the bad element is individual, but in all children there is an innate tendency toward good. A song, a game submits to the control of all and thus the good comes to light.¹⁸

As much as the reflections of Ion S. Floru on the repertoire of the little ones are unknown, they are remarkable: he intuits that

children's games are the fruit of the mind most unsettled and most capricious, and... it is precisely they that can preserve what monuments in stone or written cannot... and, children's games, so important in the eyes of the philosopher, through the variety of energy they display, gain greater value for the ethnographer through the strange property they have of preserving memories of social states now disappeared or remaining the property of distant tribes. Children like to imitate animal cries, the rasping of a saw, the crack of the whip, the roar of the machine, the beating of the wind, the turning of the mill, because the child does not ask for meaning but for sound.¹⁹

Texts from children's folklore appear inserted through contemporaneous field collections. Among these, a special place is occupied by the work of Grigore Tocilescu and Cristian Țapu, recently re-edited by Iordan Datcu, who, in this new edition, restored the merits of the second author (the 1900 edition had been signed only by Tocilescu). The folklorist materials also include a few child songs collected from Oltenia, but these texts are only the product of occasional collections added to the book, where, otherwise, lullabies, shouts, and incantations predominate. In the diverse group of the Banat folklore volume, Enea Hodoș publishes in 1898 both children's games and the texts of some children's songs, but he is not at all interested in the content of the verses contained in the brochure; rather, he is interested in their linguistic aspect²⁰.

A pioneer systematic study in the field was undertaken by Tudor Pamfile. The results of his investigations in his native locality, Țepu, were published successively in three series in the years 1906, 1907, and 1909. Aware of the importance of his endeavor, Pamfile wrote:

¹⁸ Ion S. Floru : *Supraviețuiri în locuțiuni și jocuri de copii*, în *Convorbiri literare*, nr.27, 1894, p. 39

¹⁹ Grigore Tocilescu, Cristian Țapu : *Materialuri folcloristice*, Ediție critică și studiu introductiv de Iordan Datcu, București, 1980, pp.20 – 21

²⁰ Enea Hodoș : *Cântece bănățene*, apud I. C. Chițimia – *Problematika cântecelor și jocurilor de copii* în vol. *Folclorul românesc în perspectivă comparată*, București, Editura Minerva, 1971, p.286

this droplet is drawn from the variegated manifestation of rural children's life; it opens the way for others, for together they might give a true icon of the life of our nation... the collector's aim was to provide the material necessary for national ethnographic studies to those who will have the heart and the skill to undertake them or to launch them... let this be an exhortation for myself and for others, for the accumulation of our entire popular literature, collected and uncollected, which is today dispersed in the most deplorable manner."²¹ His collection is distinguished by the minuteness of the information. For the first time in our country Pamfile attempts to offer a monographic repertoire of children's games. It seems that, lacking informants, Tudor Pamfile described from memory games practiced by himself in childhood. He first presents 70 genuine children's games, then counting-out rhymes, games of trickery, and a few other games and toys. The second part of his collection comprises songs of mockery, word games, jokes, formulas of taunting, and tongue-twisters²².

At the beginning of the 20th century, Al. Bogdan would compile a collection of "children's songs and games," a work that demonstrates not only the author's interest in this folk-literary genre but also his competence as a specialist. In the opening pages of the book, the author reviews his previous concerns in the field, after in the Preface he confesses: "my particular interest in Romanian metrics, however, led me to focus specifically on these children's songs, so rich in rhythmic forms..."²³ This same interest in Romanian metrics would lead him, in 1909, only four years after the previous collection, to publish in the *Analele Academiei Române* additional "contributions" on the rhythm of children's songs²⁴. His contribution is important also because it draws attention, for the first time, to the folklore of children as comparative material for adult folklore or for various genres and folk-forms. Indeed, his works contain numerous notes addressing parallels with songs of Hungarian and Saxon (Saxon Danubian) children. Adopting an inductive method of work, he will share the view that "in order for such research to be useful to future generations or to studies in comparative metrics, they must be undertaken entirely independently of similar works from abroad."²⁵ The author also makes valuable theoretical considerations about the verses of children, from a metric perspective, distinguishing and analyzing the rhythmic sequences and groups.

Although the early 20th century is still modest in propulsion of research of this kind, the domain of interest expands to include also toys for children. Victor Păcală, in his *Monograph of the village of Rășinari*, alongside several children's songs described within the broad and complex context of the village's characteristic popular

²¹ Tudor Pamfile : *Jocuri de copii*, în *Analele Academiei Române*, seria II, tom XVIII, 1905, p.273

²² idem : *Jocuri de copii*, seria III, București, 1909, p. 22

²³ A. Bogdan Hoya : *Cântece de copii și jocuri*, Brașov, 1905, p. X

²⁴ Al. Bogdan : *Ritmica jocurilor de copii*, în *Analele Academiei Române*, seria II, tom XVIII, 1905, p. 241

²⁵ idem, *ibidem*, p.8

expressions, also describes some toys used at the time²⁶. The author presents 38 games, some of which are quite distinctive: *De-a bolda*, *De-a calul*. The *Groșinăraus* game is also notable; although the author makes no observations about the Saxon term, the game Groschen heraus is recognized, probably played by Saxon children in the area. Păcală also notes several children's verses: counting rhymes, rhymes for fortune, chants for various occasions within group play, as well as rhymes for rain, for days of the week, or for various animals.

After undertaking a succinct but well-documented historical overview of concerns surrounding the collection of children's games, Gh. I. Neagu convincingly shows that "the folklore of children, as part of the general folklore, is also a echo of the past and a mirror of the present."²⁷ In the continuation of his extensive study, Neagu does not seek to exhaust the problems posed by the texts used by children in their games. His aim is limited to highlighting the archaic character of certain folkloric elements, and to underscoring their connection to life by reflecting historical facts and figures, aspects of school life, and the rural milieu in which they appeared and live today. He states at the end of the study: "We have not dealt with the aesthetic and moral element of the texts, nor with their educational value, nor with their syncretism: the literary text, the movement, and a certain melody of the articulation of the text are inseparable in the practice of play. By their similar motives—sometimes even borrowed from the folklore of adults—they prepare the intellectual-moral development of children to understand, assimilate, and carry forward, enriching it, the mature folklore."²⁸

Later widening his scope through contemporary collections, Neagu published in 1983 the volume *Cântece și jocuri de copii* [Songs and Games of Children]. The collection stands out not only for the large number of texts drawn from historical publications or manuscripts (B. P. Hasdeu, N. Densușianu) as well as from his own collection, but also for the manner in which the anthology is organized. The researcher took into account the geographical distribution of folkloric categories, aiming to represent the entire territory inhabited by Romanians. In the introductory study he shows interest in the historical and thematic investigation of games, their functionality, and their relations with other genres and species—especially with traditional customs. He returns to the problem of the child's relation to nature and to living beings, but also to certain linguistic and stylistic aspects, such as the issues of language wrinkle and cumulative verses. Gh. I. Neagu regards children's games as

²⁶ Victor Păcală : *Monografia satului Rășinari*, Sibiu, 1915, pp. 24 - 37

²⁷ Gh. I. Neagu : *Câteva însemnări pe marginea textelor folosite în jocurile de copii*, în *Studii de folclor și literatură*, București, 1967, p.335

²⁸ idem, *ibidem*, p.386

“documents of life and history, constituting evidence of the romanity and continuity of the Romanian people on the old territory of Dacia.”²⁹

Researcher and collector Gh. I. Neagu finds in children’s games new evidence of the unity of feeling and conduct among all Romanians, ranging from the Aromanians in European Turkey to the north of the former Dacia, at Ineu in Bihor. His collection proves to be an anthology of texts from children’s games chosen to represent the entire territory inhabited by Romanians. Some themes have variants, introduced to illustrate their vitality through geographical spread and to contribute to the idea of the spiritual unity of the people, even at the level of childhood. All are gathered and grouped under suggestive chapters: Genuine Counting-Out Rhymes, Parallel Counting-Out Rhymes, Cosmic and Meteorological Elements, Animals of Nature, Humorous, Satirical, and Prohibitive Texts in Games, Beautiful Little Creatures, Cumulative Texts, Historic-Social Segments, Fragments of Language, Games, Deaf-Mute Phrases, and Bird Speech.

Arguing that children’s folklore opens new perspectives in the study of oral creation, I. C. Chițimia senses an essential fact: “Here one can pose the problem of the link between age and the folkloric genre, or between age and the mode of folkloric creation,”³⁰ and offers, as documented as it is, compelling demonstrations within the study’s context, regarding repertoire characteristics by age groups from the youngest to those entering the youth category. The author discusses, besides issues related to the history of research and problems concerning the ages at play, the importance of cultivating this folkloric kind for the education and development of children, questions of rhythm in children’s games, the storage of remnants of old magical formulas, which facilitated the solution of enigmas.

Chițimia states that “The folklore of children has a fairly ancient origin, as does adult folklore. It is recorded by classical authors and by medieval writers.”³¹ Demonstrating that this category of popular creation is not an exclusive prerogative of any single nation, the author shows that children’s games are found in all peoples, and even provides a selective bibliographic list of children’s folklore across different peoples: English, German, Polish, Bulgarian, Russian, Italian, etc. It is evident that, taken as a whole, children’s games and songs are received and developed at the level of play. Children absorb different folkloric elements and transpose them into rhythm and song. The “literary” aspect within the text interests him only to a limited extent, so that at times the text becomes grotesque and incomprehensible, especially at the youngest ages of children. Movement and play use the text as a catapult that hurls and scatters the group of children in all directions. In children’s folklore, I. C. Chițimia

²⁹ idem, *ibidem*, p.291

³⁰ idem : *Cântece și jocuri de copii*, București, Editura Minerva, 1983, p. 65

³¹ idem, *ibidem*, p.287

integrates, first of all, those oral popular productions whose authors are the children themselves, and secondly, everything that enters children's games from adult folklore or from other sources of adaptation.

The researcher does not agree with the differences in the manifestation of games between rural and urban settings; in this sense, the thematic variety of the games varies, with rural children sometimes adapting old ritual practices for play, such as *Caloianul*, *Paparudele*, etc.³²

I. C. Chițimia also brings into discussion the problem of popular narratives, especially those aimed at younger children, who assimilate stories and fairy tales with great ease, retelling them themselves, listening to them, and transmitting them further. He stresses that narrative interest lies not in the content itself but in its presentation, which is mechanical, as in song, with the play itself as the primary object.

A pedagogue by vocation, Chițimia knows how to follow the progression of the game among children, with a great capacity to understand the purposes it presupposes; his commentary is continually colored by a warm and generous parental affection:

Children absorb folklore in the sense of their naive and delicate existence. They play and vibrate to the play. Their folklore is one of leaps, rhythm, and dance. They violently experience it physically, and only later do they reach the psychological and intellectual re-creation of the broader oeuvre, implicitly of popular creation, rising to a higher level of perception.³³

In 1972, folklorist Ion Mușlea published a study on children's games, in which he defines children's folklore as "one of the important branches of folklore."³⁴ Discussing the significance of these games, the folklorist noted, beyond their practical and educational role, their custodianship of an ancient folk treasury. The exegete seeks the origins of children's folklore in Greco-Roman antiquity and among non-European populations, also mentioning songs once sung in the Iliad. He further reveals historical aspects preserved in children's games within Romanian material, especially that which appears in the responses to Hasdeu's Questionnaire. For example, Mușlea mentions remnants of bygone centuries in games, such as ancient weapons like the bow and arrow, the sling, the sawn-off club, and the hunk of meat. Another issue raised is the borrowing of Romanian song-formulas by children who speak minority languages.

On the basis of bibliographic suggestions, Mușlea discerned that :

³² idem, *ibidem*, p.285

³³ idem, *ibidem*, p.287

³⁴ Ion Mușlea: *Problema jocurilor noastre copilărești*, în vol. II de *Cercetări etnografice și de folclor*, București, Editura Minerva, 1972, p.404

the games of the little ones reflect and preserve memories and survivals of customs, rites, beliefs, songs, legends, curses, and dances of the adults, which sometimes live on only in these children's manifestations.³⁵

An extensive survey of the history of research in the domain of children's folklore, with attention to comparative aspects, especially of Romanian–Saxon traditions, was undertaken by Anca Goția. The author justifies her choice:

We limited our inquiry to the intracarpatic space not only because we lack monographic studies of games that could identify ethnofolkloric manifestations of Sălaj or Transylvanian children, but also to discover the particularities that involve the culture of children of different nationalities within a space that is more or less common for the manifestation of play or for participation in the traditional life of a community.³⁶

In 1970, Viorica Goian highlighted certain aspects of the old folklore of children from Caransebeș, a region less known in this field, with the exception of a few lullabies and children's songs noted by Enea Hodoș. Her article also includes the *pițărăilor* recitations collected in several variants, as well as a number of ritualistic recitations—formulations spoken by children on various occasions of life, such as the emergence of the new moon, or recitations spoken by children within certain games.

At the outset of this study, the author also mentions several earlier achievements in collecting the folklore of children from the Caransebeș area, works that have not been preserved over time. These refer to the chapter on Customs and Traditions written by the teacher Elena Biju and included in the Monograph of the city of Caransebeș in 1909, in which several ritual practices involving children during holidays or notable days of the year are described. Also noted are intermittent concerns regarding children's folklore by folklorist Gheorghe Cățană.

The author notes an internally organized traditional culture among the children of Caransebeș, linking their games and toys to the theme of shepherding (one game is even called *Oile la munte*, "The Sheep in the Mountains"). Viorica Goian's most important finding concerns the cognitive role of children's folklore:

In play, the child imitates some aspects of adults' occupations, their activities; in this sense, play is a form of adaptation to reality, to exterior models. But the children's play transforms this reality through a largely purer assimilation to the needs of the self.³⁷

In the twentieth century, alongside the philological and ethnographic perspectives, the increasingly evident efforts of sincretists to investigate this highly

³⁵ *idem*, *ibidem*, p.404

³⁶ Anca Goția : *op. cit.*, p.73

³⁷ Viorica Goian : *Aspecte din folclorul vechi al copiilor din Caransebeș*, în vol.III de *Folclor literar*, Universitatea din Timișoara, Facultatea de Filologie, Timișoara, 1972, p.105-120

complex domain of our popular creation become noticeable. Earlier publications or at least mentions of tunes and children's games had appeared. What is striking regarding the beginnings of these collections is that Bela Bartók, despite his aim of comprehensively knowing Romanian folklore, found almost nothing of children's folklore. The great musicologist stated, "I recall magical songs from certain regions against illness, against drought; then, as a strange negative fact, the complete absence of children's and games' songs."³⁸ It is indeed perplexing how Bartók failed to discover children's folklore in the Romanian regions he studied. Our ethnomusicologists have offered excuses for Bartók: "...they escaped him,"³⁹ although they note that "from the research conducted in the regions from which Bartók gathered material (for example Bihor), the existence of children's songs and games has been established."⁴⁰

George Breazul, through his ideas about children's culture, opposes the universal spirit of Constantin Brăiloiu, showing genuine interest in discovering precisely those traits that give a national specificity to the manifestations of children's folklore in our country. He, in turn, observed how

from early childhood, barely freed from the charm of the lullaby, the Romanian child will exhibit a special attraction and a visibly keen interest in sounds, showing a preference for toys with acoustic properties.⁴¹

Following the psychological function of folk song in children, Breazul noted that almost all children's games are accompanied by rhythmic poetic formulas and enunciated not in the usual spoken form, but sung in a kind of expressive, dramatic recitative, as incantations, exorcisms, etc., are pronounced.⁴²

Emilia Comișel has demonstrated a persistent concern with studying the repertoire of children's songs, which is notably rich. Her contributions are remarkable for the nuanced analysis of the complex purposes fulfilled by children's folklore in the social life of the young. The author gives priority, to the same extent, to the literary and musical aspects of this folkloric category; her work raises new issues, such as sound systems and rhythm, and classifies literary texts into "formulas—songs" for all play activities and the child's relation to the surrounding world (therapeutic formulae—songs for plants, insects, birds, animals, or inanimate things; weather-change formulas; independent formulas for organized play; counting formulae; hand-

³⁸ Bela Bartok: *Muzica populară românească*, în *Însemnări asupra cântecului popular*, București, 1956, p. 87

³⁹ Emilia Comișel: *Pe urmele lui Bela Bartok în Hunedoara*, în *Muzica*, nr.9, București, 1955, p.12

⁴⁰ Tiberiu Alexandru: *Bela Bartok despre folclorul românesc*, București, 1958, p.41

⁴¹ George Breazul, apud Gherorghe Ciobanu: *Aportul lui George Breazul la dezvoltarea folcloristicii muzicale românești*, în *Revista de etnografie și folclor*, București, 11 (1966), nr.5-6, p.519-534

⁴² idem, ibidem, p. 522

clapping games; actual games and games with fixed rules). In her expansive work, Emilia Comișel emphasizes that “children’s folklore constitutes an admirable school of life in which psychological and physical development occurs and in which intelligence and the spirit of observation are formed ... [and she notes that] ...in children’s songs and rhymes, vestiges of an ancient popular culture are preserved—customs and beliefs abandoned by adults—archaic lexical and morphological forms, names of historical figures, etc.”⁴³ Attempting to penetrate the essence of children’s folklore, the author concludes that it confirms one of the truths emerging from studies of the past century, namely “the unwavering fidelity of memory in non-written environments.”⁴⁴ Culture, namely the folklore of children, gains increasing ground in the concerns of specialists, with various issues regarding the study of this domain finding a place in recent research works, such as Brigitta Buda’s study on the children’s games of Strâmtura, Maramureș.⁴⁵

Within the framework of research conducted beyond the Prut, Nicolae Băieșu’s activity stands out. In 1978 he published *Folklore of Children*, a book that perhaps best illustrates Constantin Noica’s observation that in children’s games, rules are continuously renewed. Both the most recent and those pieces collected or discovered centuries ago in the repertoire of children, more than any other form of popular creation, demonstrate, as Huizinga showed, the descent of culture from play; for play signifies aesthetics, rhythm, harmony, freedom, the blending of seriousness with a spirit of competition, the tension with a temporary withdrawal from ordinary life, in a world of all possibilities, of strict rules, of roles played in a sacred spirit. Imagination endows play with a primordial sacred bearing, for the ephemeral world aimed at realizing Absolute Order, to compensate for the imperfection of the world outside it, seems to attempt to repeat the very act of the First Ordering.

Play includes the need to manifest freedom. Huizinga was the first to pose in professional literature the issue of the dignity of play in the world of culture;

even when regulated, play ends up giving us an awareness of the gratuitousness hidden in any engagement and inasmuch as it brings to light the degree of arbitrariness that residually accompanies any human undertaking, denouncing gravity only as one possible face of things—play is the tangible guarantee and constant maintenance of the reflex of freedom, not merely freedom sought, promised, proposed, or life.⁴⁶

⁴³ idem: *Folclorul copiilor*, București, Editura Muzicală, 1982, p. 10

⁴⁴ idem, *ibidem*, p.50

⁴⁵ Brigitta Buda : *Jocuri de copii din Strâmtura – Maramureș*, în vol. V de *Studii și articole*, Societatea de Științe Filologice din România, Filiala Baia Mare, 1989, pp. 65 -73

⁴⁶ idem, *ibidem*, p. 9

And this is because childish experience is... play, and play is the opposite of adaptation. In terms of form, Huizinga regards play as

a free act, conscious of not being unintended and situated outside ordinary life, an act not bound by any direct material interest and not aiming at any benefit, an act that unfolds within the bounds of a specifically determined time, an action that takes place in an order governed by certain laws and that gives rise to communal relations eager to surround themselves with a secret or to emphasize through disguising, as something other than the ordinary world.⁴⁷

Although we live in an evolving world, in which the pace of development accelerates, where school no longer represents the definitive authority of instruction and education, yet the possibilities for participation in culture become increasingly complex, the idea of a reorientation in adults' behavior toward children regarding their cultural habitus is more timely than ever. In this sense, the American researcher Neil Postman⁴⁸ notes with concern the disappearance of traditional games from the repertoire of play, i.e., from socially natural behavior according to children's age. His worry is reinforced by the finding that these games are, at best, replaced by adult games. After a history extending over more than three thousand years, children's games are threatened with disappearance, Postman argues. The American researcher's claim is not entirely exaggerated; it can apply only to regional contexts, specifically to heavily industrialized and highly urbanized countries with a prestigious urban culture, where adults engage through a hyper-technologized educational process, through the toy industry, in the evolution and natural manifestation of children.

Despite this millennium's onset bringing general hyper-technologization, acting as a brake on the natural creativity of the child, studies from our country and abroad impress with the relatively large number of works addressing the complex universe of the child. All of these demand an immediate linking of the concept of children's culture to the term "childhood."⁴⁹ Researchers have expressed their views on trends toward liquidating "childhood," proposing, as a remedy, bringing this natural period of human evolution under judicial control. This implies "guaranteed childhood," secured, without adult interference in its programming. It also implies renouncing the prejudice of viewing childhood as a conglomerate of strictly pedagogical, didactic, psychological, medical problems. In this sense, an effort must be made to restore to childhood its most prominent quality in human development: freedom of expression in this "terra incognita." The study of childhood and the

⁴⁷ Huizinga, op.cit., p.124

⁴⁸ Neil Postman : *The loss of childhood*, New York, 1983, p. 56

⁴⁹ Emilia Comişel : *Folclorul copiilor*, Bucureşti, Editura Muzicală, 1982, p. 23

natural, cultural, and spiritual needs of the child does not exclude collaboration; indeed, it requires cooperation among specialists from diverse fields.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ Idem, ibidem, p. 69

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