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**Motto:** *Copilul râde*: (“The child laughs:)

“Înțelepciunea și iubirea mea e jocul.

(My wisdom and love is the game!)

(Lucian Blaga, “Trei fețe”, în vol. *Poemele luminii*, 1919)

**Cuvinte cheie:** jocul ca joc, jocuri de inițiere premaritală, ideea de sacrificiu, jocuri de inițiere în moarte, mutații funcționale, sincretism.

### Jocurile de copii. Inițierea premaritală, ideea de sacrificiu și inițierea în moarte

#### Rezumat

Anumite jocuri de copii, îmbinând textul muzical cu cel poetic relevă inițierea premaritală, în vederea căsătoriei sau ideea de sacrificiu ori inițierea în moarte. Și într-un caz și în altul ne oprim asupra unor jocuri-cântec, răspândite și îndrăgite de copii: Sosește-un Prinț călare / De-a fântâna (jocuri de inițiere premaritală), Podul de piatră (ideea de sacrificiu), Baba-Oarbă (joc de inițiere în moarte). În acest caz impresionează corespondența pieselor din repertoriul infantil, cu cele ale repertoriului adulților.

Operând la nivelul textului, cercetarea noastră asupra jocurilor de copii se situează la punctul de convergență a mai multor domenii înrudite: lingvistică generală, etnomuzicologie, stilistică, folcloristică, poetică, estetică.

Jocul ca joc, apanajul ființei umane este o componentă inalienabilă a culturii, o constantă de ordin epistemologic, o activitate esențială și indispensabilă pentru om, asemenea religiei, limbii, filosofiei, artei.

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**Key words:** children's traditional game, the premarital initiation, the idea of sacrifice, the initiation into death, ludic manifestation, functional syncretism, functional mutations.

## **Children's Games. Premarital Initiation, the Idea of Sacrifice and Initiation in Death**

### **Summary**

The children's game which combining the musical text with the poetic text show the premarital initiation, the idea of sacrifice and initiation into death.

The modern era, subjected to continuous changes, making use of very important concepts for the understanding of the folklore (functional syncretism, functional mutations) connects the folkloric text to the context allowing the joining of the verbal to the non-verbal. The affiliation of the performer, of the receptors to the same local, cultural, social group, the knowledge of the linguistic, cultural, behavior code, mark of the group, the categories, the folkloric manifestations determine the survival of the folklore.

Our research, dealing with the children's game tries to show the complexity and the necessity to acknowledge an infant repertory.

## Children's Games. Premarital Initiation, the Idea of Sacrifice and Initiation in Death

The game as a game, the appanage of human being is an inalienable component of culture, a constant of an epistemological type, an essential and indispensable activity for people, such as religion, language, philosophy, art.

Operating on a text level, our research on children's games lies on the convergence point of various related fields: general linguistics, ethnomusicology, stylistics, folkloristics, poetics, and esthetics. Certain children's games, by combining the musical text with the poetic one, reveal the premarital initiation for marriage, the idea of sacrifice or the initiation in death. In all cases however, we rest on games-song, widely spread and loved by children: *Sosește-un prinț călare* (engl. A prince comes riding) / *De-a Fântâna* (engl. The fountain Game (games of premarital initiation), *Podul de Piatră* (engl. The Stone Bridge) (idea of sacrifice), *Baba-Oarbă* (engl. Blind Man's buff) (game of initiation in death). In this case what impresses most is the correspondence of the plays from the infantile repertoire to that of the adults.

a) The game-song "*Sosește-un Prinț călare*" (engl. "A prince comes riding") known by regional names as well (*Sosește-un om din Africa* – engl. A Man from Africa arrives, *Sosește-un domn din București* – engl. A gentleman from Bucharest arrives, *Două doamne din București* – engl. Two ladies from Bucharest, *Adio, adio, da* – engl. Bye, Bye, Yes, *Venea un prinț călare* – engl. A prince came riding) suffers some functional mutations; it is adapted to new realities, takes sequences specific to nuptial ceremony – the gift and emphasizes the premarital initiation for voluntary marriage. By gesture, song or dance, the infantile game restores: the choice, the wooing, the tests, the entrusting and marriage. The background is magical due to the beloved characters taken from fairy tales. The bride symbolizes physical and moral beauty, purity, worthiness, and the gift has to be special: earrings, necklaces or precious diadems. The qualities of the groom: his force, virility, perspicacity stand out while overcoming obstacles, hard ordeals and tests to which he is subject to. The groom's tests appear in orations, ballads and fairy tales. The (re)mentioned game holds reminiscences of some long forgotten sequences, stages which are specific to nuptial ceremony:

VERSION 1	VERSION 2
"I see a prince riding	"A prince comes riding, riding, riding
Bim bam boom	I, ha, io!
What's he doing in the country?	And namely what does he want, what does he want?
He seeks to marry	I, ha, io?
Who is the chosen one?	He wants a lady ...?
This is ...	I, ha, io!
What gift do you offer her?	Her name is X.
A broken head man	And what does he give her?
Sweeping under the bed.	I, ha, io!
Lady does not want	With a doll after the door,
A goldfish	With the head full of ashes!
Lady wants him."	We don't give her away just for that
(Emilia Comișel, p. 257)	I, ha, io!"
	(version from Maramureș)

Not by chance, in the mixed game mentioned, the action “to sweep” is assigned to the wooer (“sweeping under the bed”). The man symbolizes virility, the head of the family who has the right to “sweep with an iron broom” meaning to do a perfect cleaning, to put things right. Other idiomatic expressions as well (“each broom in front of his door”, “new broom sweeps well”) can be related to the broom, symbol of curative function. By moving/throwing hither and thither what is superfluous / unclean the order is restored.

The broom is both an attribute of witches and a magical object chasing the shadows of the dead by sweeping and being an adored instrument because it dispels the clouds of rain, and an element blamed by players since it appears to be chasing luck on the game<sup>2</sup>.

The ambivalence of the broom as a symbol of order and not of disorder acts at the level of the game-song too. In other versions as well, the girl refuses the wooer, for example, the one who wants to give her “a doll after the door / head full of ashes (version from Maramureş) to accept the one who offers her: a goldfish / a gold palace / a gold ring etc. The door being closed / open, accessible / forbidden marks the idea of transcendence; the doll situated after the door anticipates the position as a future mother of the young girl (the doll refers to the future new-born) / a linguistic meaningless reminiscence of the myth of the wonder child, the initiated hero spending his time in ashes as in fairy tales like “Cenuşotcă”.<sup>3</sup>

In the game of premarital initiation Playing the Fountain / the Falling in the fountain – the one falling in the fountain receives the name Sunflower or names of other flowers. A player falls in the fountain and asks for help. At the question “How many cubits does the fountain have?” the answer given will be for example, “Three”. She kisses him three times and the roles change. The game is mixed and has a premarital function (it is also met as a prenuptial game). In order to be protected by any possible evil, the participants receive other names. Flower names (phytomorph code) announce the existence of a reality, a vegetal reality – without Christian connotation. By kiss, by love, the “fallen one” defeats death (magical function). The fountain appears as an intermediary between the two worlds.

Sunflower belongs to the vegetal regnum, it is a phytomorph symbol, and it is anthropomorphized:

*Text: - “Folks, jump, a man has drowned!*

*- Hey, who are you?*

*- X.*

*- Give me your hand to get you out.*

*- I'd gladly give it to you, but the fountain's deep and one can't get. Then, who gets to you?*

*- **Sunflower***

*Sunflower: - How many cubits does the fountain have, you, young man?*

*- Seven cubits and a half.*

*(She kisses his forehead eight times)*

*(T. Pamfile, p. 302)*

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<sup>2</sup> vezi Hans Biedermann, *Dicţionar de simboluri*, vol. I, Bucureşti, Editura Saeculum I. O., 2002, vol. I, p. 254;

<sup>3</sup> v. Ovidiu Bârlea, “Cenuşotcă”, în *Antologie de proză populară epică*, vol. II; Bucureşti, Editura Pentru Literatură, 1966, p. 231-262;



The Sunflower is a real anthroponim and it originates from the plant revolving around the Sun. In some legends, ballads, the Sunflower is identified to the Sister of the Sun / Iana Sânziana, the prototype of the Moon.

b) The poetical-musical text The Stone Bridge, probably created, as Roger Pinon underlines: “Le chant et le jeu seraient donc d’origine londonienne”<sup>4</sup>, under the influence of the English game London Bridge (London Bridge is broken down ... / My fair lady ... / What have this poor prisoner done? ... / Stole my watch and lost my key”)<sup>5</sup>, which according to researcher Ghizela Sulițeanu would be based upon “the motive of the sacrifice of the wall”<sup>6</sup>.

In other foreign versions (Serbian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, Czechoslovakian, English, Swedish) the action of the game is the same, except for the final motive – crossing over the line of the two groups of children disposed in rows.<sup>7</sup>

Robert A. Georges thinks that creating new verses is far more difficult than taking well-known verses from other cultures: “What is suggested by the popularity of <<Sally Waters>> and similar traditional pastimes “London Bridge” ... is that word accompanied by movement accompanied by words may have special appeal to human beings. And since it is always more difficult to make up a new pattern of verse and action that it is to learn one already familiar to other members of one’s culture, this may well be the reason for the dissemination of such pastimes across cultures and through time”<sup>8</sup>.

The text of the game-song does not raise problems of versification: “The stone bridge / Has fallen / The water came and took it away / We’ll build another one down the river / Other more lasting and more beautiful” (wrenched rhyme); knows more versions: Cetatea – engl. The Borough, Halea – Malea, Ora, ora Morilor – engl. The Hour, Hour of the Mills, Portița – engl. The Wicket, Pui, pui, zerda – engl. Chuck, Chuck, zerda (Dobrogea), Troaca, Troaca, Vamă-Cataramă.

1	2	3
<p>“How do you give Vama-Catarama? A dog and a pig And X of a little foot.” (Emilia Comișel, p. 232)</p>	<p>“Halea – Malea Where to?” Open your gates”. (Al. Bogdan, p. 89)</p>	<p>“Hour, Hour of the mills, Open your gates! Whose gates? Cataramă-Vodă’s gates. What do you offer as toll? A dog and a pig. And X of a little foot. (Eugenia Cernea, p. 296)</p>

The versions of the game-song The Stone Bridge mention characters such as: Basarab,

<sup>4</sup> Roger Pinon, “La chanson de jeu et sa relation avec la matière épique”: „Cântecul și jocul vor fi așadar de origine londoneză” p. 38;

<sup>5</sup> Lady B. Gomme, *The traditional Games of England*, New York, vol I, 1964, ”London Bridge e dărâmat / Draga mea doamnă.../ Ce a făcut acest sărman prizonier? / Mi-a furat ceasul și mi-a pierdut cheia.”

<sup>6</sup> Ghizela Sulițeanu, în *Revista de etnografie și folclor*; nr. 2, 1971, p. 97-116;

<sup>7</sup> Eugenia Cernea, ”Contribuții la cercetarea folclorului copiilor”, *Revista de etnografie și folclor*, tom 18, nr. 4, 1973, p. 286;

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Georges, *Recreations and Games, Folklore and Folklore*, The University of Chicago Press, 1972, p 185: „Ceea ce e sugerat de popularitatea cântecului <<Sally Waters>> și altele asemănătoare (Podul Londrei) e că cuvinteleacompaniate de mișcare și mișcarea însoțită de cuvinte pot fi speciale pentru oameni. Și întrucât e întotdeauna mai dificil să compui versuri și o nouă acțiune, decât să o înveți pe cea familiară celorlalți membri ai unei culturi, acesta poate fi motivul răspândirii acestor activități mai multor culturi și secole”.

Halea-Malea, Babă-Cataramă, Vodă-Cataramă.

Eugenia Cernea associates the game Hour, Hour of the Mills with an old version, entitled Hour, Hour of the Dead and specifies that the idea of sacrifice is strongly linked to customs/tolls.<sup>9</sup>

The pair of the game (Sun / Moon, Day and Night), joining hands, raising them up and singing facilitate the crossing over the bridge. The last child in the queue, blocked between the lowered arms, is put to choose with whom he wants to stay. When the queue ends, the leaders of the teams draw a line and helped by players from his group, they drag themselves, binding themselves by their waists and trying to pull the opposing queue on the other side of the line. In foreign versions the pull beyond the line misses but not the ritual sacrifice – last child (in Czechoslovakian



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version, the last arrived is killed with a blow in the head, in Danish/Swedish version the last one is boiled in a pot whereas in the Polish or Bulgarian version, the last one is stopped).<sup>10</sup>

Roger Pinon cites several possible explanations to find the origin of this game (historical, ritualistic, mythological, anthropological, sociological, psychological and literary explanation) and offers a solution: “de grouper toutes les versions d’une même zone linguistique et d’étudier leur filiation mutuelle”.<sup>11</sup>

We also consider, according to specialist Eugenia Cerna, that the game-song comes from the repertoire of the adults or represents just a fragment left from a larger text which lost itself / was lost over time.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> v. Eugenia Cernea, *art. cit.* 1973, p. 296;

<sup>10</sup> *idem*, p. 295;

<sup>11</sup> Roger Pinon, *idem* p. 39: „de a grupa toate variantele în aceeaşi zonă lingvistică şi de a studia filiaţia reciprocă”.

<sup>12</sup> Eugenia Cernea, *idem* p. 297; vezi şi alte exemple care relevă corespondenţa pieselor din repertoriul infantil, cu cele ale repertoriului maturilor în articolul profesoarei Narcisa Ştiucă, *Relaţii între repertoriul folcloric al copiilor şi cel al adulţilor*, în *Studii şi comunicări*, Sibiu, tom VII, 1993, p. 61-84;

The versions underline and prove the fact that in old times, the games revolved around the idea of sacrifice, not necessarily human, but in the form of a toll, of a payment.

c) In Romanian traditional mentality there are the following “Hags” (rom. “Babe”). Blind Man’s Buff (rom. Baba Oarbă), Baba Gaia, Baba-Rădăcină, Baba Ciuma, Baba Cloanța, Baba Dochia. The word “Babă” itself makes us connect with the cult of ancestors. The Blind Man’s Buff game was originally a wake game, a „funeral rite” 12 but it currently became a non-ritual game practised at all times by our children.

Originally being a wake game, practised while the deceased was waked and while mature and young people or children were participating, we see that in order to understand the passage from this world in the afterlife, the initiation was/is indispensable.

Nowadays the game is spread all over the country being known for its simplified versions and by their regional names: Ajumitul, Ajuniță, Albinița, Chimiță, De-a v-ați ascunselea (engl. Hide and Seek), De-a cucul, De-a dubașul, De-a gnița, De-a luțu, De-a mija, De-a orbul, De-a pititea, De-a tupu’, De-a leapșa, Joamnă, Jumetca, Mâța arșă, Mâța oarbă, Mija Patca, Mojoarca, Mijoiu, Mijoiatca, Motroașca, Pitulatu, Orbuțul, Pitulicica Țâța-Mâța, Țutuluşu’.

Regardless of the name, each version aims the same – keeping the same habit (blind folding), the aggregation to a new state (that of the initiated). The chaos during the game becomes order the moment the main player (Baba Oarbă – engl. Blind Man’s Buff) discovers by touching another participant in the game. The initiation and integration functions are vital:

1	2	3	4
“Baba Oarbă What’d you eat last night? Bread with pap Get out of here! But the other night? Bread with olives Follow me!” (G. Dem Teodorescu, p. 196);	“Țâța-Mâța Where’d you stay? In the oven What’d you burn? A waistcoat On what you sit? On thorns and pins ...” (P. Lenghel-Izanu, p. 220);	“Baba Oarbă Come and play Nose out of the waist- coat! Blind Cat, get out and play, Nose out of the waist- coat! (E. Comișel, p. 237)	“On what’d you stay? On a boat What’d you burn? A sleeve of a waist- coat? What’d you find in it? Two pins and a needle. Two pins and a needle? here’s a thread and a belt ... Of an evil cow What’d you eat last night? Milk with rye Whom I’ll catch in the middle Closes eyes”. (Tudor Pamfile, p. 284-285)

Ivan Evseev, in "Dictionary of cultural symbols and archetypes" considers the character Baba Oarbă as being a magical one resembling to Baba-Rădăcina, Puia Gaia, Halea Malea.<sup>13</sup>

Without absolutizing, we consider the Blind Man's Buff game (rom. Baba Oarbă) as an initiation game in death. At a first glance, the main player loses the capacity of communicating with real world – being blindfolded, he cannot see. The protagonist receives a new name, becomes Baba Oarbă. The change of the name is intended to protect him from any possible evil. Baba Oarbă perceives the reality and the participants of the game by metaphysical means, identifies himself with someone from other times and space. Gestures, mimics, pantomime become rules to a new stage, in the liminal situation / of threshold. To get from here to the other side, we need the Other (relationship transmitter-receiver) to determine the initiation. The Blind Man's Buff game is played inside the house or outside, at any time and not on a precise date. Using a metaphor, we can compare "the hand" to "the eye" as "the hand sees". The main player has the sense of vision affected (being blindfolded) but tries to find another player, by touching that person. Expressions such as "to touch" / "to release" have the meaning to start, namely to finish what has been started;<sup>14</sup> hands held out with open fingers like wanting to touch a player signify a lack of unity.<sup>15</sup> When the main player touches a child the cathartic function is fulfilled, the roles are modified and the game restarts.

The German folklorist Samuel Singer considers that the character from Blind Man's Buff game (rom. Baba Oarba) would be the remainder of a demonic cult; Johanna Drost thinks that the one blindfolded reminds of a person who, in primitive times was to be burnt on pyre. The diverse speculations of the specialists are possible due to the universal feature of the game.<sup>16</sup>

The Blind Man's Buff game / De-a Mija game (rom. a miji/ sl. mijati > to close the eyes) can be inserted within the symbolism of death. The player must keep his eyes closed or covered; it is often said about the deceased that he/she "closed eyes" and among the consecrated gestures there comes covering the eyes (face) with a white cloth, hence the expression "he/she was put cloth on the face".<sup>17</sup> The game being an activity performed observing "voluntarily accepted, but absolutely binding rules"<sup>18</sup> receiving features of a ritual.

Nowadays the game undergoes numerous regional names, but it simplified, the dialogue is missing, and the children do not recognize anymore the magical-symbolist functions and significances of the interpreted texts.

The articulated children's games devolve, besides the stylistic or rhetorical figures upon: rhymes, repetitions, a language based upon euphony, eurhythmy, an accessible code to those initiated.

Regardless of the ending (in -a / -ea / -i / -e / -t / -m), rhymes accentuate the aspects of the word. From pair rhymes as a second mark of the end of the verse, "point of reorientation and retrieval"<sup>19</sup> to echo-rhymes, lexical, grammatical or lexico-grammatical rhymes (rom. guriță-portiță,

<sup>13</sup> Ivan Evseev, *Jocurile tradiționale de copii*, Timișoara, Editura Excelsior, 1994, p. 203;

<sup>14</sup> Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *idem*, vol. II, p. 309;

<sup>15</sup> Hans Biedermann, *op. cit.*, p. 256;

<sup>16</sup> v. despre răspândirea jocului Baba Oarba în Africa, America, Asia, Australia, Europa, Oceania; semnificații, supoziții despre jocul enunțat, la Paul G. Brewster, art. "Baba-Oarba și rudele ei din alte părți", în *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor*, București, tom 15, nr. 3, 1970, p. 231-236;

<sup>17</sup> Nicolae Constantinescu, art. "Folclor și literatură: jocurile de copii", în rev. *Limbă și Literatură*, vol. I-II, Societatea de Științe Filologice din România, 2003, p. 92;

<sup>18</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, trad. H. R. Radian, Editura Univers, București, 1977, p. 70;

<sup>19</sup> Gh. Vrabie, apud Nicolae Iorga, *op. cit.*, p. 111;



era-chema, fetiță-garofiță etc.). Besides the exact rhymes, one can usually notice the approximative, inexacte ones as well as the zero rhyme.

I. M. Lotman finds that “rhymes, phonetic repetitions with a large number of common sounds are called rich, and the ones with a small number of such sounds are poor”.<sup>20</sup>

The Professor Nicolae Constantinescu sees that sometimes words-rhymes bear in themselves the entire load of significances (esthetic as well) of the verse; in some other cases they are neutral, with an ornamental function and not a semantic one.<sup>21</sup>

From combining the language focused on eurhythmy, euphony with the cryptic language open to the initiated, from the weaving of musical language with verbal and non-verbal language, it results a genuine language game, truly exuberant, intended to delight anybody at anytime. Premarital initiation games, games disclosing the idea of sacrifice or initiation in death through their functional mutations point out the interrelation between the children’s repertoire and the adults’ repertoire.



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<sup>20</sup> I.M. Lotman, *Lecții de poetică structurală*, Editura Univers, București, 1970, p. 93;

<sup>21</sup> Nicolae Constantinescu, *Rima în poezia populară română*, Editura Minerva, București, 1973, p. 49.

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