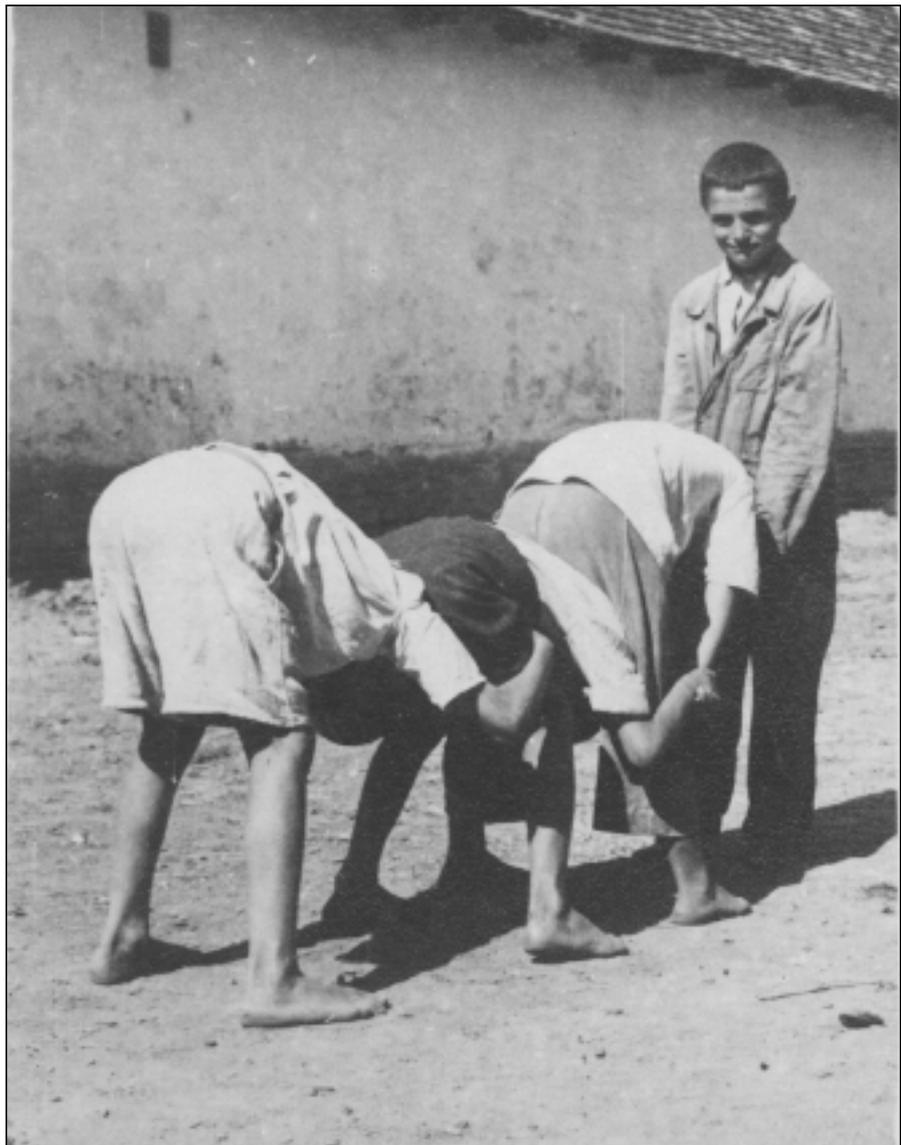


# Children and Games

**B**elieve it or not, in the 19th century children, particularly in the rural areas, did not play the way children do today. There were many reasons for that. As you will see in the other chapters (Children in the Villages and in the Towns, Children and Work), childhood itself was different from yours. First of all, people in the past believed that childhood lasted far shorter than is believed today, and children were compelled to grow up and mature far more quickly. That was firstly due to the fact that children in the villages and poorer children in the towns had to start work at a very early age, and they had so many chores even at pre-school age that they had little free time. That is why children entered the adult world at a very early age, and the non-existence of a clear border between the world of children and the world of adults was also reflected in the games they played. Besides, in large families where several generations sometimes lived together, children's rights were not as respected as they are today, and parents did not consider that children had any particular need to play. On the contrary, they considered it as a waste of time, being of the opinion that it was far more useful for children to perform one of the many household tasks. There are books that tell us that it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that it was considered that children needed to play and that the right to play was a child's basic right.

And here is another surprise! Most children in the past did not have shop-

bought toys. The first toy factories and toyshops appeared, it is true, around the end of the 19th century in Southeast Europe, and dolls, wooden horses, wooden trains and balls could be bought in those shops. But, as the toy industry was not on a large-scale, toys were usually hand-made and, therefore, very expensive and only richer urban families could afford them. Most children made their own toys, mainly from natural materials. They used wood or paper. The first marbles were fashioned from hardened earth, and balls were formed out of discarded articles of clothing (most often socks) or pig bladders blown up and later



*Leapfrog*



*Boys playing in a village in Vojvodina, Yugoslavia*

layered with leather taken from old shoes. Kites were made from parts of maize, and other toys were made from paper pasted together with a mixture of flour and water instead of expensive glue. Large-scale toy production did not begin until between the two world wars, and it was only after the Second World War that more children could acquire bicycles, roller-skates, ice skates, scooters, leather footballs and basketballs, not to mention today's skate boards, computer games, small robots, Barbie dolls or walkmans.

Children's games usually fall into two basic categories. The first category comprises games that imitate the adult world, in which the roles are separated. In this way, children often imitate jobs or professions they come into contact with, such as hairdressers, doctors, salespersons, car mechanics, teachers or they make their own little theatres. Little girls often imitate their mothers, emulating jobs they see done around the home: they cook, change nappies on dolls and feed them, sew, and make or buy toys in the form of furniture, thus

creating the impression that they have their own little home. Boys like to emulate their fathers, doing what are considered men's jobs, but they often play at war too. The enemies have changed during the twentieth century; cowboys and Indians have been replaced with enemies from real 20th century wars. Then, after a decade or two of peace, children return to characters from the novels of Karl May. Since time immemorial such games that imitate the adult world have been preparing children to assume the roles designated to them by their sex.

The second category comprises games of competition. In them children compete either in knowledge or skills taught at school or physically with or without the aid of requisites. Such games were popular in the 19th century, both in the villages and in the towns. They usually comprised running, hiding and testing physical strength. Village children had far more space for such games, and town children were deprived of many games because of the danger of breaking a neighbour's window in a narrow alley, for example. But even town children had far

more space than they do today: let us recall that cars were few and far between up to the 1950s, and children could play happily in most town streets. That was particularly true in winter, when all the steeper streets were turned into perfect toboggan slides, and, with a little extra effort (by treading down the snow and pouring water over it), entire streets were transformed into skating rinks. However, as we said at the beginning, children had little time to play. That is why children in the villages usually played while working in the fields or in the short breaks allowed to them. As children were usually given the task of looking after the livestock, there were a number of games they played while performing that chore. Only the children of richer families, that is to say children that went to school, had a specific time designated for play, usually after having done their homework.

Now we shall tell you of some of the most popular games in the different countries of Southeast Europe, and you will see how similar they are. In Bulgaria, children played crooked wolf, hide and seek, leapfrog. In Slovenia, besides playing with toys, village children evolved a whole range of games that could be played in the long hours looking after livestock at pasture. Those games too involved running, hiding and seeking. The most popular traditional children's game in Romania in the 19th century was oina (a sort of baseball), and attempts were made at the beginning of the 20th century to make it a national sport, and it was taught in schools. Under communist regime, schools would take children from the towns into the villages to teach them seasonal agricultural work. Greek children played the following games: androgyna (a guessing game), tyfolomiga (blind man's buff) and bizz as hot cockles (guessing), gyro-gro oloi (ring a ring o' roses), the flea flies, have you a light, Pou tha pas Kyra Maria (Where are you going Mistress Maria), Sklavi, light my candle. There are also old games that are still played today such as lachnisna, which is a combination of singing, reciting certain words and movements. In Hungary, like in other countries, children in towns jumped rope, and played

hoola-hoop, while in most countries that emerged after the breakup of former Yugoslavia, the favourite games were ~30 murke (hide and seek), izmedju dve ili

30etiri vatre (piggy in the middle), trule kobile (leapfrog), a30kolice (hopscotch)& One of the most popular old games was klis, which was some kind of precursor to today's cricket, the aim of which was to hit a special wooden object as far as possible with a wooden bat.

Although games had different names in different countries, they were similar and their ultimate aim was to demonstrate who was the most skilful, the quickest and the most astute.

## Constitution of a good child.

„(...)

The good child, always occupied with honourable and useful things, plays very little, and only to exercise and train its body. It chooses decent and proper games and players who are decent and honourable teens, and it never plays in streets and public squares. While playing it avoids as far as possible fights, insults and punches.

*(I.Chomatianou, Short First Book for the Youth Studying in Primary School, Greece 1839).*

## The new toys

So, this year's toy of fashion is...the aeroplane. And naturally, what else could it be, after the achievement of Bleurieu, who passed the English Channel!... The childish aeroplanes, single or double, besides of being exactly like the real ones, can be winded up and they fly...in the room. They can also carry passengers...dolls...Another game from Paris, current and mostly wanted, is the „Cook in the North Pole“. This also beautiful. It shows the snow of the Pole, with the sleigh dragged by dogs, with the Eskimos who accompanied Cook, with the tent of the explorer, and of course the explorer himself.

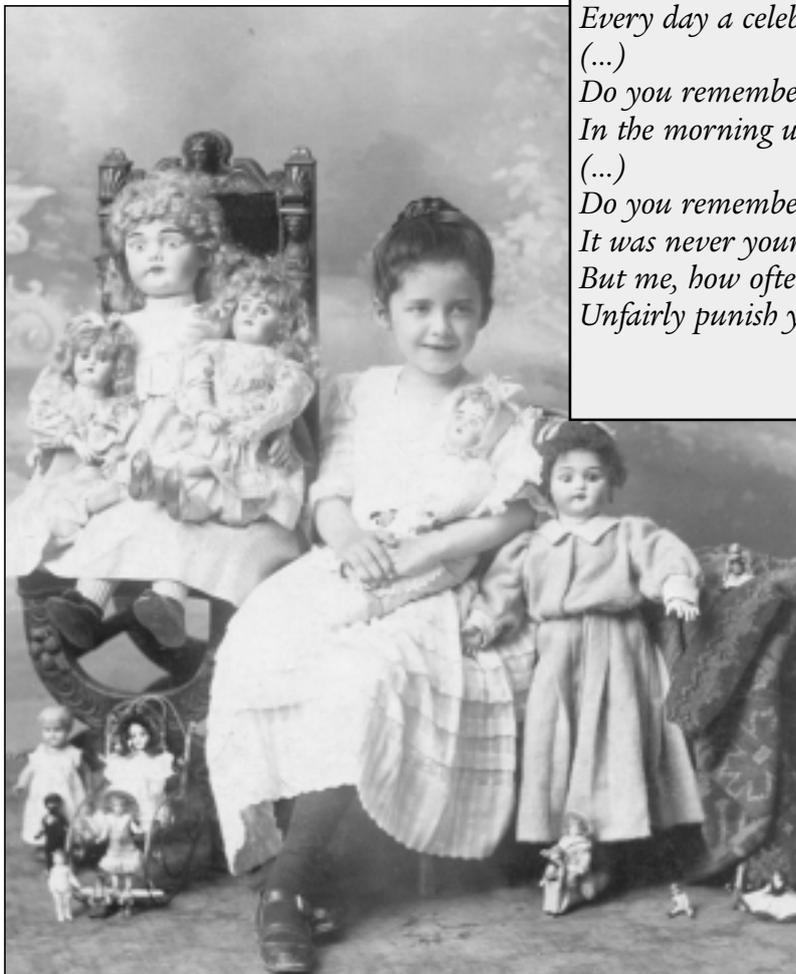
*Magazine „The upbringing of children“, Greece, 1910: 33-34.*

## Playing in the Street

The street led to the eternal stadium, on which took place from all over contests of children's anthill, which contained altogether of children, young girls and infants... from the morning till the evening rolling in the mud and dust of the street, gesticulating, shouting, crying, being at each other's throats and breaking the glasses of near windows...The eagles, the discs, playing catch, the mother's belt, the money, on holidays' eves, this every vulgar and obstinate row of games of the street-fed childish existences developed differently according to the particular impulses of the weather's mood.

„Athanasios Vralamidis“ (1888), *Ta Apanta*,  
Cared by G.Voletas, Vol. A, Athens, 1968

Girl with dolls



## To my Doll

„Come for the last time, my golden doll,  
One more happy hour to spend together;  
Because shortly you will not, my doll, have a mummy,  
Neither will my mouth sing you a song.

*The bitter time to say goodbye has come,  
I have grown up, my doll, and must leave you.*

*Even though my only thought were you and joy,  
It is a shame from now on about you to talk.*

*I have grown up; do you know what this word means?  
Do you know how many tears I have to cry for it?  
It means I have to stop living joyfully as until now,  
And a life more serious from now to start.*

*I will have to keep my mind on my lessons  
The laughter, my singing I have to forget  
To what I loved from now to close the heart,  
To leave my tolls and You to leave!*

*Do you remember our game, tell, the one from last year?  
Every day a celebration, every celebration songs;  
(...)  
Do you remember how I baptized you every Sunday?  
In the morning was the baptism, at midday the wedding.  
(...)  
Do you remember how they put us in the corner?  
It was never your fault, my non-speaking doll;  
But me, how often did I, with so much hardness  
Unfairly punish you, my beloved Lily!*

(„Childish World“, Greece, 31 October 1898 nr.2)

In other times Archonto played in front of him the „Stand up apple, get down citrus“, and he gaped staring, and burnt to catch the orange with his teeth, as it went up the height and down to the small white hand of the playing young girl. And other times again they both played „the pointer“, where there was a simple red thread, which skilfully in the hand of the young girl turned sometimes into a saw, sometimes into a ship,



„Mice“, one of the oldest games (resembling drafts)

sometimes into a table, sometimes into a reel and into a loom.

„Eros-Hero“ (1896) A.Papadiamantis autobiography,  
Cared by P.Moullas, Athens, Hermes 1974

## The Games

„How nice games are! Of course are games nice and the children must play, but they should play good and very tidy games. Some games cause serious injuries to the children, like in war of stones. Good and tidy games are hiding, the rabbit and the bloodhound.

Also good and tidy games are jumping, the stone, the running. These games are very

useful for the body and make it resistant to strain.

Good children should not play all the time, because they have others more useful works to do. They must learn their school stuff and be at school. Education is very useful to manhood. Uneducated persons are similar to blocks of wood. Good children only play when they have made their homework and moreover on holidays. But even on holidays they should not play all day from morning till evening. Good children on holidays go to church and thank God, who protects them from anything evil. Afterwards, when they have done their homework, they take the licence from their parents and play. Everybody approves this kind of children and the Lord and their parents bless them.Ē

(G.Machaira, Greek Reading Book for the 2nd, 1914).

# FIRST WORK AND THEN PLAY

„A person, who is very rich now, was very poor when he was a child. One day he was asked how he earned his fortune and he answered, „My father taught me never to play before having finished my daily works and not to spend money before earning it myself. If one day I had only half an hour work to do, I should finish this first and really in half an hour, and then I was allowed to play. That way I very quickly was in the habit of making everything on time and that, after a while, I did easily. Thus to that habit I owe my happiness today.É.

(Ch.Papamarkou, Greek Reading Book for the 2nd 1901-1906)

## Of the slave

The game is played in two ways.

It is played by many children. With the draw koulbania the last two, who don't get out, are set as guards.

The guards stand where the game starts. Everybody else run to go away to the streets of the neighbourhood. Only one stays at a corner, 10-12 m. away from the guards, and one of the guards asks him:

– Done?

## Questions

- 3.1. Compare the games you played when you were small with the games your parents and grandparents played. In what ways are they alike and in what ways do they differ? Can you find any similarities with the examples given in the book?
- 3.2. Ask older people what kind of toys they had, how they were made and what they were made of.

And he, if his friends have removed far enough, answers:

– Done.

And runs also to go away himself.

Then the two guards hunt the other children in order to hit with their hand as many as they can, to mainaroun them. The ones they mainaroun, are thought slaves, and come

LAJOS PÓSA

## Viki's Joy

*There is no one  
quite as cheerful  
as our Viki dearie.*

*She is happy -  
and no wonder:  
she's given that nice doll yonder.*

*Shiny marbles  
are its two eyes,  
rags are its dress  
ever so nice,*

*Sticks for legs  
and flax for hair  
- what a beauty,  
just look there!*

*Viki's not learnt  
how to talk yet,  
she can only  
cuddle her pet.*

*Babbling to her doll  
happily  
she's waving it about  
merrily.*

*Let the doll fly  
like a fairy,  
let Viki not be  
but merry.*

*Let an angel  
guard your glee,  
may it never  
forsake thee.*

*(in Dalok regék az ifjúság számára, Hungary, p.*



*Toys at the beginning of 20th century, Hungary*

to the place where the game started. There the slaves stand in a line on the wall of a house, with arms open at their sides, so that they are that far away from each other, as much space they need to open their arms. One of the guards stands in front of the slaves in a distance of six feet, turned to them. The other guard continues to chase the others alone. The slaves don't have the right to leave by themselves. To be free, one of the free companions must hit one of the slaves slipping through the attention of the guard, and much easier is of course to hit the one in the end, on the edge of his lying hand.

When the guards have collected all the

children as slaves, the game is over and it starts from the beginning with a new draw. At the new draw the old guards do not take part, so that not the same become guards.

It is played by many children in an open place.

The number of the children must be even. There is a draw, usually with the feet, and the children are divided in two groups.

Two big straight lines are made in a distance of 10-15 m. one to each other (AB and CD; the place between H) on the two opposite sides of where the game is to be played.

The children of one team are put up behind the line AB and the children of the other team behind the line CD. One child of one team comes out and walks in the place H. Another child of the opposite team comes out and chases it. Immediately another child of the first team comes out and chases the second, and that way all the children come out and chase each other not only in the place H, but also in the streets around in the neighbourhood. The aim is who will hit the other, will mainarei him. The

right to hit the other has the one who came out of the line, of the sign, later. That is why the children come back to the sign, either to be saved of the chasing, or to come out of the sign later than the others, to take the sign.

The child hit, is concerned a slave and stands up a step far out of the line of the opposite team, which means in the place H. If another child of the same team becomes a slave, it stands a meter away from the former slave.

To free the slaves, a child of the own team must hit one of them, and easier it is to hit the one at the edge. Then all the slaves are free.

The game is over when all children of one team have become slaves. And then the game is repeated from the start.

*G.A. RIGAS d'Skiathos Folk  
....ĒThessaloniki 1970*

## **Liberty of the child**

The main stress is to be laid on the development of character. Our guiding principles should be more ingenuity and sometimes training the child to independence and to improve his or her real talents. Quite a frequent setback of education is that parents wish to create a mirror-image of themselves in their children and treat them as subjects not as human beings of free will. However, if one wants to bring up a child properly, one is to become a child once more and treat him as an equal, to approach him with the same reserve, delicate feelings and trust as a



*Fixing the toy*

grownup. Obedience is worth while only if its source is love not fear or pressure. Obedience rooted in pressure does not become an integral part of the child's moral personality but it passes away with the fading of fear.

*A magyar család aranykönyve. p. 118*

# Playing

The fact remains that there is a great inclination for play in humans and the younger the child the greater the inclination. The child spends most of his time playing, in the first few years of his life he plays all the while except for sleeping.

*A magyar család aranykönyve., p. 135*

## The Life of the Poor

**Lajos Kiss:**

Vol. 1. pp.50.

Guarding the pigs the swine-herd is mostly on his own. He makes long whips or knife-cases out of bootlegs to kill the time. Around his shabby hat he ties some dock and sticks bright red peanut flowers to match. The swine-herd also makes toys: plaits a hair-ball, carves a tip-cat, forms a bowl or a skittle. When bored he turns cart-wheels both to the left and to the right. Sings and whistles, and his singing is heard in the distance on the morning and evening dew.

## The Life of the Poor

**Lajos Kiss:**

Vol.2. pp.24-25

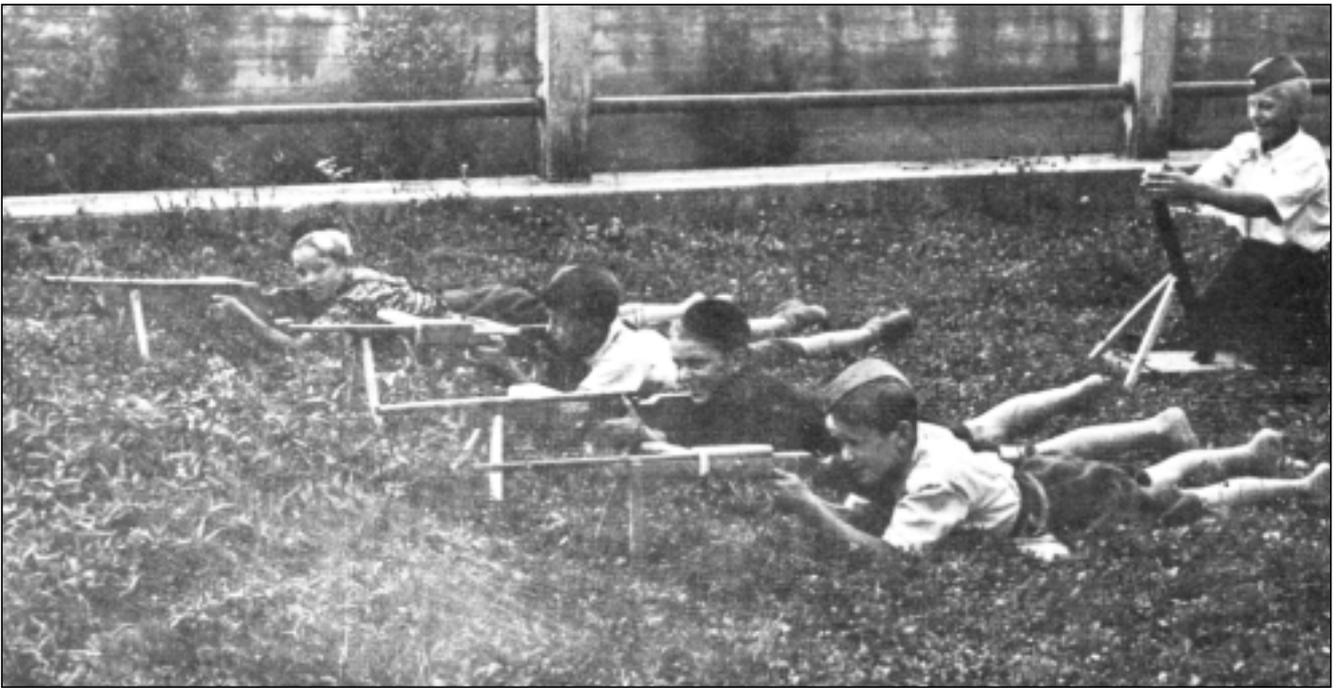
When many of them got together out in the tumble-field, they had the highest of spirit. They sang and danced, sew clothes for

### Recommendation

- Look for descriptions of forgotten children's games in papers and magazines for children printed in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century and discuss them with your pupils in class. They could also learn how to play some of the old games.



dolls and played with hairballs made by the master's wife in spring when the cow and horse had shed their hair. Hot water is poured onto the hair to mat. The less the girl is allowed to play with the ball, the more she longs for it and plays secretly. The most general amusement is admiring Nature either when they're alone or in company. Lying on their back they're watching the blue of the sky until they feel dizzy and almost soaring and they are musing about an other world. Then they stare at the cloud above, how it takes various forms. Once it looks like a lamb, then takes the shape of a sitting or a lying dog. There is an old hag in the dark black cloud far west, and an angel in the bright white one coming from the south. When these two clash, a storm breaks



*Preparing for „man’s job“: playing at war*

out, teaches one little goose girl the other. If that comes true, this is an experience, a belief for life. They see baby-clouds, streams, hail-clouds that are of a dusty-white colour and warns them to head for the farm. They love to watch the mirage that appears about ten in the morning like a stream. At two in the afternoon, when it is the hottest, it is galloping about and verges on purple. It can only be seen in the direction where there are no farms. Rainbows are a majestic sight for the little girls. They call it the national colours, though they can count the seven colours on it. Appearance of the rainbow in the sky indicates that there will be no more rain. They also play teachers or school. Many poor little girls had learnt to read, write and count tending the stock, because they went to school for only half a year, some even less. They scribbled letters, numbers to the dust

with sticks. Guarding the geese they sang psalms and those beautiful old songs. They also learned this verse out in the tumble-field:

*Before me is north  
Behind me is south  
To my left it is sunset  
To my right sunrise.*

Mostly when playing is over does it come to their head: A Good Lord where are the geese? They forget about them and when they remember, there is the damage. Above all when the little girl is on her own and lies down to watch the clouds, she easily falls asleep because of the heat and also because she had to drive the big geese afield at four in the morning. This is why many masters forbid playing.

