

of an additive culture of play. The author too quickly passes over Marx's willing reinforcement of racial stereotypes. He does not do justice to Marx's 1950s political and cultural platitudes, which trained a generation to believe in the invincibility of white America. He fails to put the world of Marx into the context of what happened after (with Star Wars and other fantasy play sets). And he ignores what the contrast between toys from the 1950s and 1980s tells us. In short, he might have done much more by putting Marx's play sets into the context of the TV and movie world of the 1950s and what these toys said about parents as well as kids. The sheer subjectivity of his account and reverence for his toys at times might make some readers wince. But I left this book liking Jeffrey Hammond and feeling that his obsession with his desktop of toys was not a reflection of his longing for escape into immaturity but of an encounter with memory that might well have led him to a new stage of maturity.

—Gary Cross, *Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

Toying with God: The World of Religious Games and Dolls

Nikki Bado-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris

Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010.
Bibliography, notes, images, photographs, index. 232 pp. \$24.95 paper.
ISBN: 9781602581814

In this engaging, interesting, and lively text, the authors introduce readers to a world of toys and games that include

Monopoly imitators (Mormonopoly, Catholicopoly, etc.) as well as Christian games with unsettling colonialist overtones (Missionary Conquest, Settlers of Canaan), and games representing Judaism, Islam, and Eastern religions (Race to the Kabah, Mecca to Medina, Exodus, Kosherland, Karma Chakra, BuddhaWheel, and Mahabharata Game). As these examples show, the work cites wide-ranging examples of toys from African religions to syncretic Brazilian women's Catholicism to Wicca. It notes sports from Aztec ball to the Greek olympics to Native American lacrosse, each with its associated religious roots. It surveys various religious products including Hindu finger puppets; bobble-headed Jesus, pope and Buddha dolls; punching rabbi dolls; Nunzillas wind-up toys; Easter-lily hand and body cream; and Last Supper lunch boxes, card games, and testaments. The book focuses chiefly on the "shifting boundaries and restructured relationships among religion, play, work, commerce, toys, and ritual" (p. xv).

The book presents a good general overview of an array of religious games, establishing the field of inquiry within the context of relevant debates about religion's place in contemporary culture from Indiana to Iran. What emerges is a broad discussion useful to students of religious or cultural studies. Like F. R. B. Whitehouse's study of Victorian board and table games or J. A. Mangan's work on the ideology of athletic games, this is a niche study. It participates in the social history of play begun by Roger Caillois, Johann Huizinga, H. J. R. Murray, and R. C. Bell. It might, however, have paid more attention to the field of children's literature and culture, where some fine work has been done on dolls by Miriam Formanek-Brunell and on

toys by the contributors to Beverly Lyon Clark and Margaret R. Higonnet's *Girls, Boys, Books, Toys*.

Bado-Fralick and Norris employ a horizontal approach by introducing concepts like fun, play, commerce, or rituals and looking at a range of games, toys, dolls, or cards across various cultures and periods which define or challenge those concepts. This may not please those scholars looking for a deep cultural context and speculation about its significance or for extended close readings of particular toys. But given the breadth of material Bado-Fralick and Norris cover, it seems a practical approach.

The authors patiently lay out the case for religious games as learning tools that "enculturate children into a religion's values" (p. 7), and they acknowledge the argument about trivializing the sacred. Games can illustrate dogma. In the Hindu and Buddhist versions of Snakes and Ladders, players learn to attain enlightenment. The Hologame teaches about Jewish holidays. Players of Karma Chakra go through five cycles of rebirth. And Missionary Conquest players raise money for Christian missions.

Toying with God also confronts the deeper discomfort over religions in the marketplace. Such unease, the authors speculate, may arise from the American political insistence on a separation of church and state. Yet, they also note that "promoting Christ is big business" (p. 73) for megachurches and religious theme parks. Religions are not immune from market forces or pop culture, and the authors demonstrate how "religiotaainment" participates in mass media. Toys present "belief bites" pulled from their richer, fuller context and "watered down for mass consumption and reduced to an

afternoon of easy and carefully regulated fun" (p. 117). Such games reflect the current notion that fun cannot simply be enjoyed for its own sake, but instead must be safe, productive, and educational. It must, that is, result in ameliorated behavior, improved socialization skills, or increased religious knowledge.

The book also views games as examples of a lived cultural experience of religion, pointing out how in the divide between high and low cultures a text-based religious knowledge is privileged over daily practices in the home. Calling toys artifacts of "vernacular religion" (p. 14), Bado-Fralick and Norris explore how games transmit ideology. As they see it, there is more at stake in games than crossing the finish line. The battle of the toy box is one of religion, culture, politics, and social norms.

In their fascinating discussion of dolls, Bado-Fralick and Norris question how these playthings transmit not only religious information and moral guidance but preserve and promote cultural values. The book probes whether dolls are empty vessels or objects freighted with meaning. For instance, Barbie was touted by her creator as a blank canvas for young girls to project their hopes for womanhood, but the doll's unrealistic proportions and her infamous declaration that "Math class is tough!" have alarmed Western feminists.

Though secular, Barbie has sparked an ongoing cultural-religious dialogue. In the face of her "pernicious" influence, toy makers, devout believers, and even government agencies have created alternatives: the Jewish Gali Girls, the Christian Virgin Mary and Biblical Esther, and Muslim dolls including Iranian Sara and Dara, Muslim-American Razanne, and

Syrian Fulla. All purport to offer examples of wholesome, faithful, modest womanhood. Though Fulla is meant as an alternative to Barbie, the two dolls have more in common than you might think. Both are manufactured in the same Chinese factory, of the same materials, with the same high-heeled feet and height, and Fulla, too, has a line of accessories ranging from prayer rugs to bling. Fulla has also caused controversy; her *hijab* led to her removal from Tunisian shelves over fears that she was promoting too radical a brand of Islam.

This book fills an important gap and suggests a new area of study. Bado-Fralick and Norris mention using the games with their students, perhaps the fodder for the question: what happens when children go off script and subvert the play narratives that religious toys encourage? In terms of field research and a pedagogy of active learning, this certainly suggests a promising area for the authors' next book.

—Megan A. Norcia, *SUNY Brockport, Brockport, NY*