

were burned. Even the old standby, the stick, which was inducted in 2008, evokes warnings: “Don’t play with that! You’ll hurt yourself.” If playthings like these fade into history, at least this charming yet serious book can keep the memories alive.

—Howard P. Chudacoff, *Brown University, Providence, RI*

Little Big World: Collecting Louis Marx and the American Fifties

Jeffrey Hammond

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010. 118 pp. \$22.95 paper. ISBN: 978158729910

English professor Jeffrey Hammond is a brave man to share with us his reveries on his 1950s childhood memories of playing with play sets made by Louis Marx & Company. He is braver still for revealing his thoughts and feelings about collecting and playing with them again fifty years later. The confessional character of this short book adds a charm and personal meaning to toy play in the cold war era. It also says much about the dynamics of the modern collector and even what it may mean to “return” and transform that play in the fullness of maturity. Hammond has an unusual knack for weaving bits of toy histories, 1950s culture and politics, and the sociology and theory of collecting into a series of imaginative tales about him and his desktop collection of plastic figures. He recognizes the modern quest for arresting time with childhood memories and understands the therapeutics of reviving such memories.

Much of his story is personal. He weaves his recollection of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans with his memory of his father. He recalls his boyhood enchantment with dinosaur figures that compensated for his childish fear of animals. He retells his journey into the admittedly arcane world of eBay when he bid on Marx play sets and figures and tells us what attracted him and what did not. He amuses us by making up stories using disparate Marx figures when he can not sleep at night. And he concludes with a discussion about how this playful interlude in his life as a sixty-year-old scholar has helped him understand and grow emotionally. With neither bravado nor embarrassment, Hammond explains his need to return to his six-year-old self and ultimately his need to transcend the play worlds constructed by Marx’s 1950s vision of the child’s future set in the victory culture of that decade with its themes of the tamed West, of the triumph of American soldiers, and of hero worship of presidents and of famous Roman and medieval figures. Hammond has a gift for describing the look and the feel of toy figures and for personifying them much like that displayed by Disney’s *Toy Story* and other recent animations. Hammond understands the meaning of the miniature for children seeking empowerment, security, and future role models. And he shares insights into the often lonely world of the collector, who looks for order and closure in the completed collection and is driven by the quest for the “missing” piece. He recognizes older people’s need to collect the past as mortality becomes a real consideration for them.

All of this makes *Little Big World* a good read. Yes, Hammond is certainly too gentle with Louis Marx’s promotion

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.
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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