

“Why Couldn’t the Wind Blow Backwards?” Woody Guthrie’s Songs for Children

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*Any fool can make something complicated. It takes a genius to make it simple.*¹

This essay examines the songs that Woody Guthrie recorded for children and investigates the widely perceived notion that they are simple and particularly childlike. Biographer Joe Klein describes them as “utterly artless ... truly children’s songs ... written as children might write them.”² Journalist Steven Stolder finds the songs “as spontaneous and nonsensical as baby babble and almost as delightful,”³ while recording artist Elizabeth Mitchell describes them as “simple yet profound ... easy to learn and easy to sing ... and just so darned cute.”⁴ To Mitchell, Guthrie has an “uncanny ability to inhabit both the perspective of a loving, protective parent and the voice of a freewheeling child.”⁵ His songs, it seems, comprise “seemingly freely-associated words ... natural and effortless melodies ... fragments of sweetness and mystery” and are “completely unique in their ability to straddle the worlds and views of both caregiver and child.”⁶ However, rather than simplicity, musical and lyrical analysis of Guthrie’s records for children reveals a relative complexity when compared to the children’s songs of Pete Seeger, Elizabeth Mitchell, Raffi, and other folk artists. In contrast to songs for children that perpetuate Romantic ideas of innocence and simplicity, Guthrie seems to have captured on record some of the unstructured, unresolved, unselfconscious exuberance of real children. Notably, Guthrie’s songs were assisted in a substantial way by his three-year-old daughter Cathy Ann,⁷ who was not only an inspiration, but also a co-writer, lyricist, collaborator, and muse. Her contributions to the thirty-four songs on *Songs to Grow on for Mother and Child*⁸ and *Nursery Days*⁹ offer a fascinating insight into the creative partnership of father and daughter and raise important issues about the categorization of children’s music as well as the cultural construction of dominant discourses of childhood.

Furthermore, through an examination of Guthrie’s records for children, I critique and ultimately reject provocative claims made by Jacqueline Rose about the inherent impossibility of children’s music as a practice and as a marketing category.¹⁰ Rather than impossible compositions devoid of real children, or nostalgic recreations of a mythologized lost childhood in which adults project ideologies of innocence, vulnerability, and protection, Guthrie’s songs for children are resonant with the voices, rhythms, and experiences of living, breathing children.

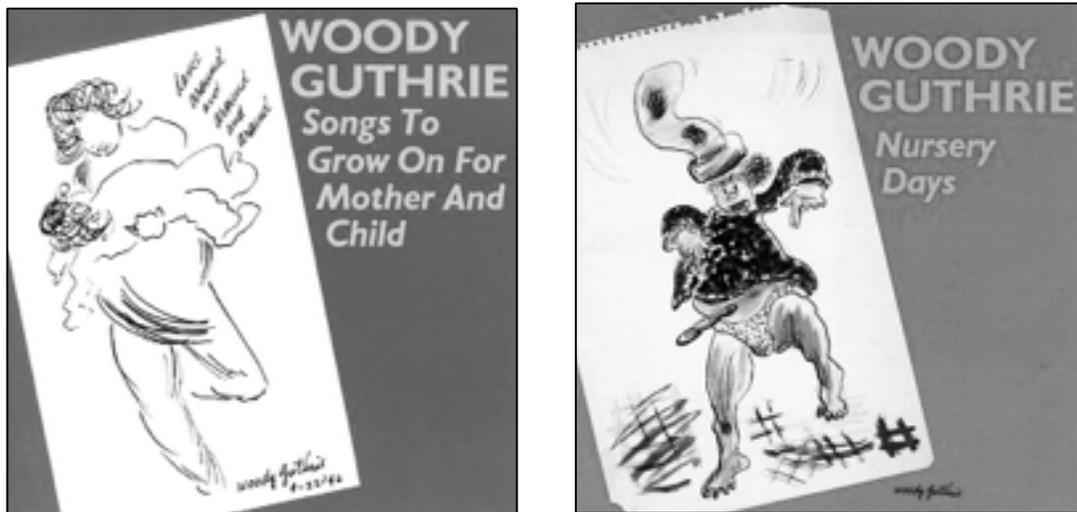


Fig. 1: Guthrie's cover art for *Songs to Grow on for Mother and Child* and *Nursery Days*

The distribution of records for public consumption evokes contested issues of media reception and implied readership. Such concepts raise questions about children's (and adults') abilities to interpret meaning in music, lyrics, and performance while attributing them with the agency to engage with, resist, and potentially subvert the artist's intentions. In contrast to the unbridgeable distance between author and listener implied by Rose, Guthrie's songs for children reveal something about the richness, routines, and reality of children's lives. As opposed to the ideologically charged and phantasmagorical Romantic childhood, Guthrie's songs revel in the complexity, spontaneity, and uniqueness of specific children.

I employ Perry Nodelman's concept of "the hidden adult,"¹¹ whereby authors disguise their adulthood when creating cultural products for children, to discuss the problems raised by the categorization of music by the age of the listener.¹² I argue that Guthrie's records for children subvert established definitions of children's music by blurring the constructed boundaries that relate to the intended age of the listener framed by the text. I briefly examine the enduring link between folk music and the Romantic childhood before analysing how Guthrie's use of nonsense language and his adoption of children as narrators communicate his particular ideology of childhood. I examine the process by which two of Guthrie's best-known children's songs, "Put Your Finger in the Air" and "Riding in My Car (Car Song)," have been transformed and simplified by subsequent artists, a process which I argue increases their childness (Peter Hollindale's term to describe their "childlikeness"¹³) while ensuring their popularity and longevity. Finally, I assess Guthrie's own childness during the period he was writing and recording his songs for children, expressed

through his behavior, language, and prolific creative outpourings. Guthrie's ability to create such endearing and childlike songs was, I argue, influenced by very specific biographical circumstances.

Guthrie was a prolific songwriter¹⁴ as well as a published novelist, radio presenter, composer of lengthy letters, extensive journal writer, accomplished illustrator, and visual artist. His best-known work documents the experiences of disenfranchised people from the South and Midwest during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, and highlights the devastating social consequences of the Great Depression and World War II. His songs about greedy bankers, crooked landlords, poverty, unemployment, migrants, and refugees have taken on an increased relevance in the twenty-first century. Guthrie's uncompromising stance in addressing such issues has iconized him as a working-class hero and a radical rebel. However, the songs he wrote for children¹⁵ continue to be popular with young audiences, teachers, adult performers, and record buyers the world over. Despite being excluded from many overviews of his career, consideration of Guthrie's children's songs is essential to a full understanding of him as an artist, parent, and human being. The songs reveal much about his ethos of childhood, his views on fatherhood, and his attitude to his burgeoning iconic status. As such they provide a valuable insight into his craft and his creativity, and in many ways, strengthen his rebellious working-class credentials.

Authenticating “the folk” and “childhood”

From the earliest days of recording, folk music has been one of the two most popular genres of children's music (music hall being the other¹⁶) and continues to provide a popular soundtrack for the entertainment, education, and edification of children. The songs of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Lead Belly, Tom Paxton, Malvina Reynolds, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Donovan, Raffi, Ewan McColl, and others are staples of singing sessions in schools, summer camps, and community organizations around the world. This section seeks to explain the enduring link between folk music and childhood by drawing on the concepts of innocence and simplicity embedded in Romantic discourses.

The historic subordination of the disparate individuals and diverse communities that comprise “childhood” and “the folk” have relied on specious notions of authenticity and the controlling process of definition and categorization.¹⁷ The enduring and symbiotic relationship between “the folk” and “childhood” in children's music is a result of similarly ideological constructions of both groups. Concepts of innocence and simplicity projected through aural and lyrical signifiers of benign nature in folk have created one of childhood's most durable soundtracks. Post-Enlightenment philosophers (most notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau), Romantic poets such

as William Blake and William Wordsworth, and liberal New Testament Christian scholars have all associated children with a bucolic view of nature. Fifteenth-century Renaissance Italian painters depicted the holiness and innocence of Christ using symbols such as the lamb¹⁸ and the apple.¹⁹ Portraits of children in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently used “natural” settings such as fields, parks, and gardens, whilst young animals often accompanied the children in the portraits. The pastoral, rural idyll framed in the Romantic discourse persisted into the Golden Age of children’s literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Stories such as *Swallows and Amazons*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and *The Secret Garden* feature rural settings and secret worlds in which the ideas of separation and innocence are explored. Thus, through a complex discursive process involving religious teaching, philosophical writing, art, and literature, a still-resonant ideology of childhood associates children with nature. Power relationships have naturalized these ideologies, imbuing them with authenticity. Similarly, folk culture evokes conceptions of tightly knit communities, the importance of tradition, and rural imagery. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, folk as an oral culture was perceived to be disappearing due to rapid industrialization and a corresponding growth in urban living. As a result, folk songs and dances were transcribed, performed, and recorded by concerned individuals, collectors, archivists, academics, and specialist societies. The majority of these collectors were educated, urban, and middle class. As such, their categorizing, archiving, and authentication involved judgments of value. John Storey suggests that “the intellectual cult of the rural folk was a nostalgic fantasy of a time when working people recognized their inferiority and acknowledged due deference to their social superiors.”²⁰ Before their culture was “discovered” by collectors, “the folk” did not consider themselves nor their songs and dances worthy of academic study. As a result, they began to become aware of what it meant to be a member of this subordinate group. This “consciousness of status” is inherent in the construction of childhood. Adult ideologies inform real children’s understanding of what it means to be a child in particular socio-historical moments.

In 1932, archivists John A. Lomax and his son Alan began collecting songs that would lay the foundations of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress. Seeking to uncover an American folk tradition differentiated from imported British ballads, they used portable equipment to record mainly African American music from the rural Southern states. It is important to note that the Lomaxes collected recordings rather than manuscripts. John Lomax was told that “what the Library wants is the machine’s record of Negro singing, and not some musician’s interpretation of it.”²¹ The work of the Lomaxes greatly influenced the resurgence of interest in folk music in the mid-twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, the

Lomaxes' views and practices altered the music made by the performers they had "discovered."²² Purity and simplicity became prized attributes. Their promotion of Lead Belly in particular focussed on exploiting his supposed otherness, presenting him with savage or primitive overtones. Elusive evocations of authenticity stemmed from how well the singer could mirror the Lomaxes' strict codes.

Other ethnomusicologists saw the political power of folk music. Charles Seeger collected folk songs while teaching music at Berkeley, the Julliard School, and UCLA.²³ A classically-trained composer, Seeger was part of the Composers' Collective, a subset of the progressive left-thinking Workers Music League active through the early 1930s. Rather than promoting traditional folk songs which were seen as "politically unaware" and "musically simple minded," the Collective composed their own with the intention of inspiring the working classes into revolutionary activity.²⁴ Meetings with actual folk singers such as Aunt Molly Jackson prompted incomprehension on both sides. Later, changes in Communist Party doctrine brought renewed interest in the songs of "the people"; simplicity and directness were fostered to encourage mass participation.²⁵

Guthrie's "simple" songs

*I've been making up songs ... for twenty years, and Cathy at nearly four years can out rhyme, out play me, out sing me, any old day.*²⁶

*His music is deceptively simple.*²⁷



Fig. 2: Woody Guthrie plays music for children in New York, 1943. Photograph by Eric Shaal, TIMEPIX

Superficially, Guthrie's children's songs have a simplicity and a "childlikeness" that has allowed their successful transmission across cultures and decades. The term "childlike" generally refers to adults who display stereotypical qualities associated with children. A more useful term when considering the properties of cultural products is "childness," which I adopt from Peter Hollindale's analysis of children's literature. To Hollindale, childness is an identifiable attribute of items of children's culture and describes not only "the distinguishing feature of a text" but also "the property that the child brings to the reading of the text" in a "reading event."²⁸ For the child, childness is their "developing sense of self in interaction with ... images of childhood." For the adult, childness is comprised of their memories of childhood, reflections on what current society deems suitable for children, and their personal hopes and aspirations for children.²⁹

Despite being a competent musician and multi-instrumentalist,³⁰ Guthrie rarely used more than three chords (generally the I, IV, and V major chords). Guthrie's songs generally have short overall melodic vocal ranges of around a fifth or a sixth (sometimes less) and simple structures (such as AB or AA). Vocal melodies are well defined, uncluttered, and are clearly audible in the recordings while the lyrics focus on the everyday activities of children.

However, a closer analysis of the recordings reveals a complexity that challenges the perceptions of simplicity quoted above. Jacqueline Rose,³¹ Susan Honeyman,³² Perry Nodelman,³³ and others have discussed the difficulties of addressing real children through children's culture and the constant presence (however well hidden) of the adult author. These problems arise from "childhood," the ever-shifting adult construction that living, breathing children have to inhabit and "deal with" in their relationships with grown-ups, other children, and the wider world. Rose describes "the impossible relation between the adult and the child" that arises from an insurmountable "rupture between writer and addressee."³⁴ Such a view is informed by mythologized Romantic ideals of children's innocence and their separation both physically and culturally from the world of adults. However, I would argue that Guthrie's songs for children make Rose's "impossible" relationship possible by capturing the complexity of real children integrated in the intergenerational setting of the family.

Guthrie's nonsense

The lyrics of Guthrie's children's songs make frequent use of nonsense, a device common to nursery rhymes. Nonsense rhymes have been identified in ethnographic studies as common attributes of children's folk music³⁵ and playground songs.³⁶ The general purpose of nonsense is to invert meaning,³⁷

deconstruct normative discourses, and “muddle things up.”³⁸ Children’s books of the Romantic era were largely absent of nonsense, satire, and other subversive devices; innocence and sincerity dominated.³⁹ Nonsense tends towards one of two forms: “high-brow” literary manipulations, as exemplified by “Golden Age” children’s authors,⁴⁰ and nursery rhyme-style gobbledegook. The former is characterised by deliberately highlighting formal features of language (lineation, meter, homophones); the latter by high degrees of syllabic repetition, prolific use of alliteration and assonance, and the use of invented words that are, at times, onomatopoeic. Both rely on the author’s skills with formal rules of grammar and the reader’s competence in registering when and how these rules have been broken. Successful nonsense must balance the “contradiction between over-structuring and de-structuring” and “subversion and support.”⁴¹ “Even ... the wildest flights of nonsense” require a “strict use of already patterned material.”⁴² Guthrie’s use of nursery rhyme-style nonsense is extensive.⁴³ This, I suggest, is because his ability to manipulate words was exemplary, as evidenced by his considerable extra-musical literary activity. Examples of Guthrie’s nonsense in his children’s songs include:

Jiggy, jiggy bum bum and hey piggy run run.⁴⁴

Blubber and a blubber and I bubble my gum.
A bleeber and a blabber and I bubble my gum.⁴⁵

Birdy, bird bird. Fly, fly, fly.
Nesty, nest nest. High high high.⁴⁶

Guthrie’s brand of nonsense is similar in tone to “baby talk,” “motherese,” or infant-directed (ID) speech. The verses of “Don’t You Push Me Down,” for example, feature two five-syllable lines followed by two of six syllables:

You can play with me.
You can hold my hand.
We can skip together,
Down to the pretzel man.⁴⁷

Each syllable of this verse falls on regular quaver beats with a sufficient pause of three quavers to clearly differentiate each phrase. “Sleep Eye” contains even shorter phrases, this time of three syllables (“Go to sleep”), each repeated three times separated by a crotchet, followed by a five-syllable phrase:

Go to sleep. Go to sleep.
 Go to sleep-y little sleep eye.
 Close the eye. Close the eye.
 Close-y eye my little sugar.⁴⁸

Guthrie's clear differentiation of the phrases and his use of tropes of ID speech such as the crotchet gaps between each phrase and the simplicity of the grammar contrasts with a song such as "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,"⁴⁹ in which he delivers a slew of nonsense syllables and stream-of-consciousness images at high tempo. The only brief pauses for breath occur on the occasional quaver rests between pairs of lines:

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,
 A, B, C, D, E, F, G.
 Hoodoo, voodoo, seven, twenty-one, two,
 Haystack, hoe-stack, hey do the hoe-ta,
 High boga, low joker, ninety-nine, a zero,
 Sidewalk, streetcar, dance a goofy dance.
 Blackbird, blue jay, one, two, three, four,
 Trash-stack, jump back, E, F, G.
 Big man, little man, fat man, skinny man,
 Grasshopper, green snake, hold my hand.⁵⁰

Ease of remembrance and vocal participation are important factors to consider when writing anthemic songs.⁵¹ The closer a song resembles ID speech, the more likely it seems to remain in the public consciousness and transcend cultures, especially those relying predominantly on oral transmission, such as that of young children. The popularity of Guthrie's songs has benefitted from a good deal of oral transmission. Artists such as Pete Seeger, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, and Bob Dylan learned them from the man himself. Guthrie sold few records in his lifetime,⁵² so instant impact and ease of remembrance were key to their transmission and proliferation in folk circles and beyond. As seen below, the fallibility of oral transmission may account for some of the lyrical and musical differences in subsequent recorded versions of Guthrie's children's songs. I suggest that Guthrie's best known songs for children, "Put Your Finger in the Air" and "Riding in My Car (Car Song)" have been manipulated by other artists to make them resemble more closely ID speech patterns.

Memorable, anthemic songs are comprised of simple melodies and short melodic phrases, and have a slow-to-medium pace with short melodic intervals. They employ occasional long notes of one to two beats, enabling most people to participate vocally while their hymnal nature encourages communal singing.⁵³ ID speech, with its short simplified phrasing and use

of words of just one or two syllables, has many similar features. Songs with high levels of “ease of remembrance” often feature the predominant use of the major key, a moderate tempo, a symmetrical form, and lyrics in the first person that make frequent use of rhyme and assonance.⁵⁴ Many of Guthrie’s children’s songs feature high levels of repetition of both individual syllables and consecutive words. “Yellow Crayon” is an example:

Yellow, yellow, yellow, my yellow crayon,
 Yellow, yellow, yellow, my yellow crayon,
 Yellow, yellow, yellow, my yellow crayon,
 Yellow, yellow, yellow, my yellow crayon.⁵⁵

“My Little Seed” combines nonsense language, perfect rhyme and high degrees of alliteration with repetition:

Tooky, tooky, tooky, tooky, tidalo,
 Tooky, tooky, tooky, tooky, tidalo,
 Tooky, tooky, tooky, tooky, tidalo,
 We’ll all dance around and see my little seed grow.⁵⁶

Some of Guthrie’s songs, such as “My Dolly,” are strophic in their design, using repetition of key phrases with additive difference:

I put my dolly’s dress on,
 I put my dolly’s pants on,
 I put my dolly’s hat on,
 And she looks like this.

My dolly talks for me, me
 My dolly walks for me, me
 When dolly walks and talks, oh well
 She looks like this.

My dolly she can sing, sing.
 My dolly she can dance, dance.
 When dolly sings and dances.
 Well, she looks like this.⁵⁷

As a skilled songwriter, Guthrie understood that ease of remembrance is greatly aided by a familiar melody and he frequently borrowed from songs with which many of his audience would have been familiar. “This Land Is Your Land” uses a melody from a Carter Family song,⁵⁸ while many of his children’s songs use melodies found in his adult repertoire.⁵⁹ His

crafted use of nonsense produces an “open” text resistant to “top-down” attribution of meaning. His use of ID speech patterns aid memorability, a quality essential in a largely oral tradition, while his use of the child as narrator, discussed below, is a strong signifier of Guthrie’s intentions to create music with children as an intended audience.

The child narrator and the hidden adult

*I don't want the kids to be grownup. I want to see the grown folks be kids.*⁶⁰

The narrative mode of children’s songs raises issues about the representation of children and reveals much about the adult behind the text. The majority of Guthrie’s songs for children have child narrators and are delivered in the first person. They focus on the themes of childhood (bathing, feeding, rattling, dollies, crayons, bubble gum) from a child’s perspective. Conversely, a smaller number of the songs are written explicitly from an adult perspective containing instructions directed at children. This issue of focalization has significant influence on how a text is received. Readers positioned “inside the text” (Barthes’s “readerly text”) are vulnerable to manipulation and may find it difficult to adopt more than one point of view.⁶¹ An all-knowing “adult” narrator may exert maximum control over the reader,⁶² while a narrative delivered in the first person, either by a child or an adult, may evoke the sympathy of the reader, depending on a host of extraneous factors such as the reader’s competence, the social context of the reading, and the relation of the text to other texts.

During his periods of leave from the merchant marine,⁶³ Guthrie was a doting father actively involved in the day-to-day upbringing of his daughter. He kept copious notes and diary entries that documented the activities and routine rituals of Cathy Ann (and later his son Arlo).⁶⁴ He collected and catalogued her drawings and rhymes, transcribing many of her conversations verbatim,⁶⁵ which served as inspiration for the lyrics of his songs. In most songs, Guthrie sings to and about Cathy, her world and her friends, vocalizing words that were either created or directly inspired by her. However, while the child in this case is not constructed but real, closer analysis begins to reveal the adult sensibilities behind the construction. Mealtimes, bath times, bedroom routines, and the everydayness of life with young children are typical topics for Guthrie. He seems acutely aware of his domestic situation and of his new role as an active participant in these chores.

Mamma, o, mamma, come wash my face.
Wash my face, come wash my face.
Mamma, o, mamma, come wash my face.

And make me nice and clean-o.⁶⁶

The child narrators of Guthrie's songs frequently request the routine activities that adults would consider good for them. The protagonists extol the importance of waking up, getting dressed, exercising, getting and keeping clean, interacting with adults, and playing with animals and other children before going to sleep with the help of a loving adult. The baby/child narrator of "I Want My Milk (I Want It Now)"⁶⁷ makes repeated requests to suck on bottles and nipples ("I want them now!") and seems to understand the positive benefits of bath time, cod liver oil, and vitamin drops. In the insistence on routine, healthy eating, cleanliness, and an early night, the hidden adult emerges from the shadows. The child narrator possesses an adult sensibility and understands the benefits of a healthy, sociable life full of loving adults and eager playmates. The child listener detects that life is comprised of routine activities and that the adults in their lives desire such customs.

"My Dolly" is perhaps the best example of this projection of adult sentiment. The child-dolly interaction serves as a metaphor for the adult-child relationship. The child leads the dolly through the daytime routine of getting dressed, playing with toys, being sociable, and loving her elders before going to sleep ("Dolly says I'm getting tired now. Dolly says I want to lay down"). The merging of the artist's persona, biography, and the characters they employ as the narrators is a key signifier of folk and later rock music. Folk audiences demand high levels of authenticity from their artists; any rupture between the person, the persona, and the narrative mode raises questions of legitimacy. Perhaps it was the use of the first person narrative mode in Guthrie's children's songs that caused consternation in some of his peers, particularly during the onset period of his Huntington's disease. Those who felt he was losing his sanity or simply wasting his talent on these songs may have felt more comfortable if the lyrics were in the second person —

You put your dolly's dress on. You put your dolly's pants on...

— or the third person:

She puts her dolly's dress on. She put her dolly's pants on ...

Guthrie is perhaps least hidden as an adult writer in the song "One Day Old," in which the narrator is a baby. In each verse, the infant describes him/herself as a human or as an animal (butterfly, kitty cat, chipmunk, doodle-bug) or a variety of endearing terms that adults would use for young children (sugar plum, little angel, sweet thing, cutie pie), as well as

explaining their ever-changing age (anything from “no days old” to “twenty days old”).⁶⁸

“Why, Oh Why?” is a dialogue song in which Guthrie pitches questions before giving less-than-authoritative responses, thus resisting authorial control and subverting clarity, reason, surety and other signifiers of adulthood:

Why don't you answer my questions? Why, oh why, oh why?
‘Cause I don't know the answers. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

What makes the landlord take money? Why, oh why, oh why?
I don't know that one myself. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

Why ain't my grandpa my grandma? Why, oh why, oh why?
Same reason your dad's not your mommy. Goodbye goodbye
goodbye.⁶⁹

Guthrie's use of the child protagonist in the majority of his songs for children is a key trope of children's music and perhaps its only exclusive trait.⁷⁰ Other tropes such as “shorter,” “use active rather than passive voices,” “have a clear-cut moral code,” and “are optimistic rather than pessimistic” may equally be found in texts consumed by adults.⁷¹

The concept of competence suggests that readers of any age may engage with the text in a multitude of ways, depending on their proficiency with literary (or in this case musical and aural) codes. A listener with such critical skills is able to identify the rupture between real life and the depiction of that life in song. They may also have the competence to critique that rupture and draw out some of the ideological consequences of such representations in a way that Rose, Nodelman, Honeyman, Hollindale, and others have done. Some of those critiques inevitably concern the text's appropriateness for its intended audience. As such, it is a competent reader who questions how a “no day old” baby could be singing a song (or have written one in the first place) or how the baby's age changes every few seconds, something that the baby is able to articulate accurately. Previously-used melodies and contentious “adult” themes contribute to the intergenerational appeal of many of Guthrie's children's songs. I suggest that the references to breasts and “big nipples, little nipples, middle-sized nipples, all kind of nipples” in the song “I Want My Milk (I Want It Now)” or the references to starving children, killing hogs with guns, slitting their bellies, or making love to “my wife” in “Roll On”⁷² and “Jiggy Jiggy Bum” frame children within a world of adults and help them begin to understand something of that world in a supportive and creative way. Such songs deny

the age-exclusivity of music for children and reveal a shared cultural and social space enjoyed by both adults and children.⁷³

As discussed, Guthrie's songs for children have a spontaneous nursery rhyme quality, full of nonsense and references to specific children and their everyday activities. However, their outward charm masks a rhythmic and musical complexity that is rarely, if ever, replicated in the versions of Guthrie's songs recorded by other artists. Indeed, it seems that the more commercial the intentions, the less similar to Guthrie's original version a song becomes.

Tidying up: Simplifying Guthrie's simple songs

*If I want to take a breath between verses, I play a few extra chords. And if I forget the lines and want to remember them, I play a few extra chords.*⁷⁴

Many of Guthrie's fifty or so recordings for children have been covered by other artists and continue to appear on albums, television shows, and websites across the world. Two songs in particular have proved extremely popular. My analysis suggests that these songs have achieved such popularity because they exemplify attributes associated with the Romantic discourse of childhood. However, the simplicity of the songs (and hence their levels of childness) has increased through reiteration by other artists, changes that, I argue, have allowed them to survive and thrive on the journey through decades, continents, and cultures. Ironically, it is the exuberance and spontaneity of the original recordings that Guthrie made with producer Moe Asch in the mid 1940s that many people find endearing. The simpler, tidied up versions by other artists suggest that, in some ways, the unadulterated creativity of adults with high levels of childness, like Guthrie, and of real children, like Cathy Ann, is too messy and problematic for the children's music industry. Ultimately, this process reveals much about how adults discipline and control children via the messages they send through children's culture, messages that contribute to the cultural construction of childhood. Musical analysis of Guthrie's original recordings exposes a complexity that is rarely, if ever, replicated in the cover versions.

“Riding in My Car (Car Song)”

An iTunes search (2015) reveals around forty-five different versions of “Riding in My Car (Car Song).”⁷⁵ Spotify hosts a similar number. There are hundreds more versions that have not made it to digital downloading or streaming. The thirteen versions of “Riding in My Car” analysed here span the seventy or so years since Guthrie recorded it in 1946 (see Table 1). Guthrie's recording has the second highest tempo at 130 beats per minute

(bpm). He delivers the verses at breakneck speed in an attempt to squeeze the eight syllables into each line. At times, words collide as he races through lines full of vocal sound effects (car horns, engines) and quickly-repeated phrases. He often extends the bar length after the third line, just as the song moves to the IV chord, adding two, three, or four beats as he needs them. The average tempo of the non-Guthrie versions is much lower at only 111 bpm, the lowest being Steve Waring's at 90 bpm. Vocal clarity is a characteristic attribute of children's music.⁷⁶ Interestingly, studies of young children have shown that they associate tempo with mood rather than the tonality of major/minor scales and harmonies.⁷⁷ Four- to five-year-olds rated fast songs as significantly happier than slow songs. Guthrie's original version has thirteen verses, the most in the sample. The average of the others is nine-and-a-half, with the lowest being just six. Guthrie's original also has the most different verses. For example, Guthrie makes only one pass through the title verse that starts "Take me riding in the car, car" and makes no attempt to construct a chorus or refrain through repeating a verse.

Title and year	Artist	Tempo (bpm)	Length	No. of verses	Key	Comments
Riding in My Car (Car Song). 1946	Woody Guthrie	130	1:52	13	E	Starts with child as first person ("Take me riding ..."), then to adult as first person. "I'm gonna let you" Many vocal sound effects. Speeds up in last two verses. Extends the meter on some of the IV chords.
Riding in My Car. 1961	Bob Dylan and Dave Van Ronk	117	2:31	13	G	Live version. Harmonised vocals. Extends the meter on some of the IV chords.
Car Song.	Ramblin' Jack Elliott	120	1:55	12	F	Larger vocal range and more developed melodies than Guthrie.
Riding in My Car. 1962	Pete Seeger (Concert version)	115	1:00	6	E	"Let's go" Only two different verses used.
Car Song. 1962	Melvyn T. Reiter	142	1:19	9	C	"Now we're going home again" – resolution. Many dramatic vocal sound effects. "Brrrr" used as a chorus
Riding in the Car. 1964	Wally Wyton	112	0:50	6	F#	Skiffle band with drums and instrumental sound effects
Car Car (Riding in My Car). 1965	Donovan	106	1:33	8	G	The title verse is only heard once. "Brrrr" appears also only once. Creates his own verse "Tell you what I'll do"
Riding in My Car. 1972	Pete Seeger (Sesame Street version)	120	1:30	8	F#	Apart from "Brrrr" there are only two different verses. Guthrie's first verse is used as a chorus.

Riding in My Car. 1996	Bruce Springsteen	103	1:20	7	F	Concert version. The chord changes are not well defined. Sound effects from hitting the guitar.
Car Car (Riding in My Car). 1992	Kidsongs	106	1:38	8	C	Half time drums. Female vocals. "Lock your door and buckle up." Synthesised backing. No "Brrrr."
Riding in My Car. 2009	Steve Waring	90	2:26	11	D	Adult-centred vocal intro. Notably slow version. Much "Brrrr." "Trees and houses go the other way." Other invented lyrics.
Riding in My Car. 2009	The Singing Kettle	106	3:09	14	G	Jazzy version with extra chords. Vocal instructions for actions throughout. Windscreen wipers, indicators. "Going for a ride" Many lyrical variations such as "driving in my car." Mix of male and female vocals.
Riding in My Car. 2010	Sugar Kane Music (<i>50 Timeless Toddler Tunes</i>)	100	2:01	10	C	Recorded/sampled sound effects. Female vocals. Vocal sound effect verse after each descriptive verse ("Beep, beep, beep, beep"), etc.
Riding in My Car. 2012	Elizabeth Mitchell	111	2:46	12	Bb	Relaxed female vocals with child singer. Studio sound effects.
Average tempo of non-Guthrie versions = 111.4 bpm						
Average number of verses of non-Guthrie versions = 9.5						

Table 1: Comparison of selected versions of Woody Guthrie's "Riding in My Car (Car Song)"

Most of the other versions at least start and finish with the title verse; some use it three, four, or even five times. By the early 1960s, Guthrie's peers such as Pete Seeger and Ramblin' Jack Elliott had constructed a chorus from the wordless verse of engine noises ("brrr brrr brrrr"). Later versions such as the one by Sugar Kane Music feature "real" sampled sound effects and foreground the noises produced by parts of the car. The songs' narrators and protagonists tend to be adults addressing a second person ("I'll take *you* riding in my *car*"; "I'm going to let *you* blow the horn"). Guthrie begins his version in the first person with a child saying "Take *me* riding the car," a stance subsequently adopted by Bob Dylan and Dave Van Ronk as well as Elizabeth Mitchell. Donovan highlights the age differential among the passengers by suggesting the "boys and girls, sing a little song," while Pete Seeger diplomatically states, "Let's [let us] go riding in the car." The Singing Kettle instruct their imagined audience to participate vocally or physically before every verse making their version similar in this sense to other actions songs such as "The Wheels on the Bus" or "Wind the Bobbin Up." The safety-conscious Kidsongs repeatedly tell

their listeners to “lock your door and buckle up.” Steve Waring is the only artist to include a line that appears on Guthrie’s original lyric sheet but that never made it to his Folkways recording. By telling the children “if you promise to be real good and not kick all my paint off,” it is clear that adults are in charge.

On its historical and cultural journey, “Riding in My Car (Car Song)” has generally become slower with fewer verses and more repetition. The bar lengths have become regular and recorded sound effects have often replaced vocal ones. The songs are tidier and “simpler” than Guthrie’s originals. They include more vocal encouragements to participate, and favour recorded sound effects over vocal approximations.

Many children’s recordings of the twenty-first century are “kiddified” in the extreme; clarity and regularity rule. This impossible quest for perfection is a modern music industry trope exemplified by vocal auto-tuning and the quantizing (the automatic snapping of notes and beats to a rhythmic grid) of music recorded on, and made with, computers. Rough edges are smoothed and “mistakes” automatically rectified in a quest for sonic perfection. On reception, the young implied reader of this aural airbrushing internalizes this perfection as part of their schema of listening. These cosmetically-enhanced recordings contribute to children’s perceptions of the perfect childhood, one which can never be matched by the messiness and unpredictability of real life, nor indeed Guthrie’s original recordings.

“Put Your Finger in the Air”

The thirty-plus versions of “Put Your Finger in the Air” on *iTunes* (2015) highlight many of the same changes as “Riding in My Car” in terms of standardizing the tempo, bar lengths, rhythms, and melodies. Guthrie’s original version⁹¹ averages 120 bpm, although he speeds up noticeably throughout the song. The bar lengths between his verses vary considerably and unpredictably, first two beats, then seven, six, and two. All of the other versions have regular bar lengths between the verses, usually of four or eight beats. However, there is one major harmonic change in subsequent versions which fundamentally alters the impact of the song and adds to its childness. Guthrie stays on the tonic chord of E until the end of the second line when he changes to the dominant V chord, in this case a B:

E
Put your finger in the air, in the air.
E B
Put your finger in the air, in the air.
E A
Put your finger in the air and hold it up right there.
E B E
Put your finger in the air, in the air.

Pete Seeger, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and subsequent artists rise to the V chord at the end of the first line:

E B
Put your finger in the air, in the air.
B7 E
Put your finger in the air, in the air.

This harmonic change affects the vocal melody considerably; the overall melodic range shrinks from fourteen semitones in Guthrie's version to just ten in subsequent versions, making it easier for children (and others) to sing. The tonic-dominant (I to V) harmonic relationship is hard-wired into Western diatonic music, forming a staple of nursery rhymes and children's songs. In simple terms, more dominant chords followed by root chords provides more pleasurable musical moments for young listeners.⁹² The subsequent harmonically-altered versions have more of such moments than Guthrie's original.

Guthrie's other children's songs have not fared so well, having not been covered, interpreted, or passed along into the twenty-first century to the same extent. His less-frequently covered songs were also not in the recorded repertoire of one key artist, Pete Seeger, who did much to popularize his friend's songs. The changes Seeger made to "Riding in My Car (Car Song)" and "Put Your Finger in the Air" are significant; he tidied the songs, making them clearer, simpler, and more palatable for artists and industry and ensuring their endurance in the children's music canon. School songbooks containing Guthrie's children's songs use notation to communicate the melodies and harmonies. However, such visual representation captures nothing of the animated vocal and wilful instrumental delivery evident on Guthrie's recordings. As with the manipulation of the folk collectors, Guthrie's songs have been "corrected" and simplified during transcription. This taming process has contributed to their successful circulation as acceptable and manageable cultural items and, as such, has been necessary for their widespread appeal. Exposure to simplified and standardized music contributes to children's sense of their

own status and, ultimately, to their separateness from the complexity, unpredictability, and unresolved narratives of adulthood.

Guthrie's childness

The progressive neurological illness, Huntington's disease, which Guthrie developed around the time of recording his children's albums, may have contributed to the childness of his songs. To Logan English, Guthrie was a man who "remained child-like and forgot about being childish."⁹³ Klein notes Guthrie's unpredictable, irrational, and often uncontrollable behavior, describing him as a professional innocent with a childlike quality that was more than just a pose,⁹⁴ an "adult child" who "saw life with a child's clarity and innocence and sometimes behaved like a child."⁹⁵ Guthrie was small of stature (around 5' 6") with a noted affinity for children⁹⁶ and an aversion to growing up.⁹⁷ In the presence of Cathy,⁹⁸ Guthrie was more like a playmate than a parent, as Klein observes:

His innocence, the childlike quality that all his friends ... had noticed immediately and loved, was more than just a pose – he actually seemed to shed thirty years of experience and see the world as Cathy did; to really understand the danger and exhilaration of making new discoveries ... the all-encompassing joy of being cuddled and loved ... and, most of all, the bouncy, open rhyminess of being a kid.⁹⁹

As well as choosing a narrative mode of lyrical delivery, children's performers, like any other performers, develop a persona through which to work.¹⁰⁰ While many of Guthrie's friends and associates saw him as naturally childlike, I would argue that he was a master manipulator of his performance persona and a skilled, well-practiced communicator in writing, speech, visual art, and music. Much of his perceived naivety was a crafted construct developed through years of performing. The neurological illness that Guthrie developed in the 1940s added to this perception. Discourses of childhood draw on children's perceived irrationality, unschooledness, pre-sexuality,¹⁰¹ and their associations with animals.¹⁰² The construction of Guthrie's childness requires his animalistic, unpredictable, irrational urges, and naïf-like qualities to take priority over adult mores such as his education (formal or otherwise), hard drinking, and often rampant sexuality. Klein mentions how Guthrie's woolly hair breaks combs; he describes Guthrie's unwashed and unkempt appearance, his wild, uncontrollable behavior,¹⁰³ and his tendency for sleeping on floors rather than in beds. The association of both children and folk music with nature evokes not only the domesticated passivity of the rural idyll, but also the destructive power of

mysterious and untameable forces. The specters of the noble savage and primitivism lurk in the shadowy constructions of the authenticity of folk singers and in the animalization of Woody Guthrie.

Rebelling against rebellion

*Woody is just Woody ... there is nothing sweet about Woody, and there is nothing sweet about the songs he sings.*¹⁰⁴

By all accounts, Guthrie was a rebel. He railed against authority and convention, and found it difficult to fully commit to group projects such as the Almanac Singers, preferring to ramble and busk an idiosyncratic and creative path through life. In his younger days, he was notoriously freewheeling, traveling from homes, wives, and children seemingly on a whim. He loved women and “walked around perpetually in heat.”¹⁰⁵ Alan Lomax describes Guthrie’s “enormous insatiable sexuality ... heavy drinking and smoking and fornicating.”¹⁰⁶ Guthrie’s folk peers and the wider folk audience loved his music and were attracted by his rebellious stance, yet he could be difficult to work with and was disliked by some.¹⁰⁷ Wayne Hampton refers to Guthrie as a “guerrilla minstrel,” placing him alongside other musical rebels as John Lennon, Joe Hill, and Bob Dylan.¹⁰⁸ Will Kaufman portrays him as an “American radical.”¹⁰⁹ Such mediatization has contributed to the construction of the Romantic myth of Guthrie as a true folk artist, a prolific solitary genius, creative and spontaneous, anti-establishment in his sentiments and actions.

Yet how much, if at all, did Guthrie have to adapt his performance style to deliver songs for children? And how does his “children’s entertainer” persona fit with the constructions of him as a politicized people’s poet and a rambling rebel? John Alberti¹¹⁰ describes the “faux naïf,” a persona that, through the performance of naivety, ignorance, and innocence, can explore and subvert hegemonic ideologies.¹¹¹ Guthrie displayed his ability to adopt such a persona whilst writing his regular “Woody Sez” column in *People’s World*. His deliberate use of bad grammar, misspelled words, and “cornball” humor allowed him to address serious political issues in an exaggerated vernacular style. This was also in evidence at the performances and speeches he gave at functions for the Communist Party in New York. I suggest that, like many other writers and performers for children, Guthrie used his well-practiced faux naïf persona in the recording and performance of his children’s songs, a device that endeared him to the local children to whom he would perform on the step of the family home in Coney Island, and to those who continue to consume and perform his songs. Far from the animalistic ingénue, Guthrie was “an exceptionally thoughtful, considered songwriter”¹¹² writing “simple” songs

while employing a crafted performance style that appealed to children (and adults with high degrees of childness).

I would suggest that Guthrie's decision to make music for children was influenced partly by his rebellion against being portrayed as a rebel and his burgeoning messianic status.¹¹³ Guthrie's musical progeny Bob Dylan experienced a similar beatification and self-enforced exile in the second half of the 1960s, as did John Lennon in the 1970s. Perhaps Guthrie attempted to deflate his own emerging myth by writing songs for children, a move which caused some of his peers to question his motives and indeed his sanity. Why would such an incisive social commentator waste his time on such trivial material? At the very moment when (thanks to Guthrie) the politicized working-class acoustic guitar-playing folk singer was becoming an iconic aspiration for hordes of young people, Guthrie turned to children's music as "an island of innocence and calm in a world that seemed to be growing increasingly hostile toward him."¹¹⁴ Rather than the unpredictable and sometimes uncontrollable grown man who could express complex situations and emotions with directness and clarity in his work, Guthrie is frequently infantilized as a naïf. Naturalizing his talents in this way downplays his keen intellect, his strong tendency for auto-didacticism and other well-crafted "adult" skills. It also portrays him as an unknowable Romantic genius rather than a caring father and husband and a well-practiced, focussed songwriter. Guthrie's employment of a naïf persona appears to be, in part, a conscious rebellion against rebellion. Children's music promotes "the ingenuous over the cynical" and "the playful over the defiant."¹¹⁵ Guthrie's natural inclination in his adult songs is not towards cynicism.¹¹⁶ It is the directness and simplicity of his vocabulary (both lyrical and musical) that render his songs so powerful. It is his plain-speaking, hillbilly Socratic irony and willingness to engage with political and social concerns head on that makes the best of his work so affecting. Rather than the products of a naïve ingénue, I would argue that Guthrie's childness has its roots in real life. He was a skilled songwriter and a master manipulator of words revelling in the joy of new fatherhood. His spontaneity and simplicity of expression are products of years of practice as a songwriter and author as well as voracious book reading.¹¹⁷ Through well-honed performance skills, Guthrie was able to employ a feigned ignorance and adopt a childlike performance persona that allowed him to communicate not only to children, but to a wider intergenerational audience. Ironically, in the mid to late 1940s, this persona was becoming less controllable:

... an odd thing was happening ... with his writing. It was beginning to bulge and warp crazily, like images in a fun-house mirror. In some ways, it seemed a natural progression – or,

perhaps, disintegration – from his army letters to his children's songs.¹¹⁸

Klein had early access to Guthrie's original letters and journals, noting his "madder, freer style" during this period, which included "increased rhythminess" and "prolixity." By 1951, Guthrie's prose had become "swirling and vertiginous, a joyous spew of words that strained against all conventions and was, at once, brilliant and quite mad."¹¹⁹ It is probable that at least some of Guthrie's childness stems from the onset of Huntington's disease. The manic creativity, the breakneck and varying tempos, the slurred speech and missed beats are all symptomatic of the neurological condition with which he was officially diagnosed in 1952.

Conclusion

Rather than there being "no child behind the category,"¹²⁰ Guthrie's songs for children dissolve some of the power relationships inherent in the substantiation of childhood as a discourse and span Rose's unbridgeable gulf through the involvement of real, identifiable children. My conversations with Cathy's posthumous sister Nora¹²¹ highlighted the role the songs played in the daily lives of the children that they often featured. Rather than documenting innocent, asexual perma-children "fixed" by the desire of adults¹²² in a lost "Neverland" of childhood, Guthrie's songs for children simmer with a worldliness that frames both him, Cathy, and other "real-life" children in the chaotic, messy, sexualized, age-shared experiences of everyday life.

However, the childness of Guthrie's compositions, and hence the childness of the listening experience, were affected by the author's condition which, I would argue, increased his levels of childness. A number of textual and contextual factors combined to produce songs that reflect the richness and complexity of children's real life experiences in a verbal and musical language that is accessible and engaging. Through the convergence of the specificity of his subject matter, his meaningful collaborations with his daughter, his well-developed skills as a songwriter and performer, his reflections on his own childhood (far from Rousseau-like), his rebellious personality, and his rapidly developing illness, Guthrie created songs that, while easily recognizable as children's songs, demythologize childhood in their depiction of routine domesticity. By modern day standards, Guthrie's children's recordings are rough and ready; yet they remain potent, breathing with the messiness of actual children, the exuberance of a busy household, and the dynamics of real life.

Cathy Ann died at four years old in the house in which she and her family lived.¹²³ Yet her words and spirit are alive through the continued popularity of her father's music and the songs she helped him to write.¹²⁴



Fig. 3: Cathy Ann and Woody Guthrie on the beach in Coney Island, N.Y. Photograph by Marjorie Guthrie (Woody Guthrie Archives).

NOTES

¹ Woody Guthrie, liner notes to *Songs to Grow on for Mother and Child* (Smithsonian Folkways, 1991).

² Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 312.

³ Steven Stolder, "Editorial Review of Woody Guthrie's *Songs to Grow on for Mother and Child*," accessed July 18, 2012: <http://www.amazon.com/Songs-Mother-Child-Woody-Guthrie/dp/B000001DNY>.

⁴ Elizabeth Mitchell, liner notes to *Little Seed: Songs for Children by Woody Guthrie* (Smithsonian Folkways, 2012), p. 21.

⁵ Mitchell, p. 21.

⁶ Mitchell, p. 4.

⁷ Cathy Ann was born in 1943, the fourth of Guthrie's eight children.

⁸ Woody Guthrie, *Songs to Grow on for Mother and Child* (Smithsonian Folkways, 1991). Recorded in 1947. Tracks 1 to 13 originally released on Folkways in 1953.

⁹ Woody Guthrie, *Nursery Days* (Smithsonian Folkways, 1992). Recorded in 1947. Tracks 1 to 12 originally released on Folkways in 1950 as *Songs to Grow on. Volume One: Nursery Days*.

¹⁰ Jacqueline S. Rose, "The Case of Peter Pan: The Impossibility of Children's Fiction," in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 58-66.

¹¹ Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2008).

¹² Many folk songs not primarily intended for audiences of children have made their way into school song books since their publication. Examples include Ed McCurdy's anti-war anthem "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream" (Ed McCurdy, *Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream*, Bear Family Records, 1976, Side 1, Track 1),

Malvina Reynolds's critique of American suburbia, "Little Boxes" (Malvina Reynolds, *Malvina*, Cassandra Records, 1972, Side 1, Track 1) and Pete Seeger's Civil Rights song, "If I Had a Hammer" (Pete Seeger, *If I Had a Hammer: Songs of Hope and Struggle*, Smithsonian Folkways, 1998, Track 26).

¹³ Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Stroud: Thimble Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Guthrie is documented as having written 2998 songs (Woody Guthrie Lyrics Collection, accessed September 24, 2016, <http://woodyguthriecenter.org/archives/collection/lyrics>).

¹⁵ Apart from the thirty-four songs for children on *Nursery Days* and *Songs to Grow on*, Guthrie recorded others including "Ship in the Sky" (*Hard Travelin': The Asch Recordings*, Vol. 3, Smithsonian Folkways, 1998, Track 4), "My Little Seed" (*Woody at 100: The Woody Guthrie Centennial Collection*, Smithsonian Folkways, 2012, Disc 3, Track 11), "All Work Together" (*Woody at 100: The Woody Guthrie Centennial Collection*, Disc 3, Track 10), and "Rubber Dolly" (*Muleskinner Blues: The Asch Recordings*, Vol. 2, Smithsonian Folkways, 1997, Track 7). "Mail Myself to You" was performed, but not recorded by Guthrie. Other songs such as "Dry Bed" have been set to music by later artists from Guthrie's original lyric sheets (such as on Billy Bragg, *Must I Paint You a Picture? The Essential Billy Bragg*, Cooking Vinyl, 2003, Disc 3, Track 8).

¹⁶ Tylor Bickford, "The New 'Tween' Music Industry: The Disney Channel, Kidz Bop and an Emerging Childhood Counterpublic," *Popular Music* 31:3 (2012), pp. 417-418.

¹⁷ Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, quoted in Diana Gittins, "The Historical Construction of Childhood," in *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, ed. Mary Jane Kehily (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004) pp. 35-49 (p. 36).

¹⁸ The lamb is a Christian symbol of innocence, purity and goodness. Christ was "the lamb of God."

¹⁹ Although the fruit itself is not explicitly stated in the Bible, the apple has come to represent the "forbidden fruit" in the Garden of Eden.

²⁰ John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 14.

²¹ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 56.

²² Filene, p. 5.

²³ David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep from Singing: The Ballad of Pete Seeger*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 28.

²⁴ Filene, p. 69.

²⁵ Filene, p. 70.

²⁶ Guthrie, Liner notes *Nursery Days*, p. 3.

²⁷ Pete Seeger, 1967, in Nora Guthrie, *My Name Is New York: Ramblin' around Woody Guthrie's Town* (Brooklyn, NY: powerHouse Books, 2012), p. 80.

²⁸ Hollindale, pp. 45-47.

²⁹ Hollindale, p. 49.

³⁰ Scott Linford, review of Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie: American Radical*, *Ethnomusicology Review* 16 (2011): p. 16. <http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/journal/volume/16/piece/467>.

³¹ Rose, *passim*.

³² Susan Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Children's Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005).

³³ Nodelman, *passim*.

³⁴ Rose, pp. 58-59.

³⁵ Patricia K. Shehan, "Finding a National Music Style: Listen to the Children," *Music Educators Journal* 73:9 (1987): pp. 38-43.

³⁶ John Barton Hopkin, "Jamaican Children's Songs," *Ethnomusicology* 28:1 (1984), pp. 1-36.

³⁷ Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Metamagical Themas: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Patterns* (Middlesex: Viking, 1985), p. 222.

³⁸ Wim Tigges, ed., *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), p. 148.

³⁹ Alan Richardson, "Nineteenth-Century Children's Satire and the Ambivalent Reader," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 15:3 (1990), pp. 122-126 (p. 124).

⁴⁰ Hofstadter, p. 214.

⁴¹ Jean-Jacque Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 3.

⁴² Benjamin Wharf, 1956, in Tigges.

⁴³ Guthrie also included a good deal of nonsense in his many long letters. After his first glimpse through the hospital room window, Woody wrote a seventy-page letter to daughter Cathy Ann that included: "I WANTED TO LISTEN TO YOU GUGGLE AND GOOGLE AND GURGLE AND GEEGLE AND SQUEAK AND SPEAK AND TALK

AND SAY ALL KINDS OF GROWED UP WORDS IN YOUR BABY LANGUAGE” (emphasis in the original). In Klein, p. 254.

⁴⁴ Guthrie, “Jiggy Jiggy Bum,” *Nursery Days*, Track 15.

⁴⁵ Guthrie, “Bubble Gum,” *Nursery Days*, Track 16.

⁴⁶ Guthrie, “Grassy Grass Grass (Grow Grow Grow),” *Songs to Grow on*, Track 1.

⁴⁷ Guthrie, “Don’t You Push Me Down,” *Nursery Days*, Track 5.

⁴⁸ Guthrie, “Sleep Eye,” *Nursery Days*, Track 12.

⁴⁹ Guthrie, “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,” *Songs to Grow on*, Track 6.

⁵⁰ The transcription of these lyrics proved difficult for children’s performer Elizabeth Mitchell, who claims to have spent days deciphering them (liner notes, p. 9). Jeff Place’s single omission to his transcribed lyrics for Guthrie’s *Songs to Grow on* is “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,” presumably for the same reasons (Mitchell, liner notes, p. 3).

⁵¹ Ruth Dockray, “Deconstructing the Rock Anthem: Textual Form, Participation and Collectivity” (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, U.K. 2005).

⁵² Jeff Place points out that it would have taken a few years to sell a thousand copies of one of Guthrie’s albums, and that few, if any, of his other titles would have reached that figure during the 1940s and 1950s. Sales of Guthrie’s two children’s CDs through the Smithsonian Folkways website now total 60,000, with very few of Guthrie’s or any other Folkways artists’ albums selling more than 10,000 copies. Children’s recordings were Folkways’ best selling discs and Moe Asch was always keen to curate, rerelease, and promote them. (Jeff Place, email to author, January 31, 2012).

⁵³ Dockray, *passim*.

⁵⁴ Daniel P. Hyde, “The Search for the Magic Formula: The Success of Stock/Aitken/Waterman” (Undergraduate thesis, University of Birmingham, U.K. 1999).

⁵⁵ Guthrie, “Yellow Crayon,” *Nursery Days*, Track 13.

⁵⁶ Woody Guthrie, “My Little Seed,” *Woody at 100: The Woody Guthrie Centennial Collection*, Disc 3, Track 11.

⁵⁷ Guthrie, “My Dolly,” *Nursery Days*, Track 6.

⁵⁸ Guthrie’s best known song, “This Land Is Your Land” (*Woody at 100*, Disc 1, Track 1), resembles ID speech with regular lines of five syllables clearly separated by a crotchet beat, the strong crotchet and quaver meter being repeated throughout the song. The song is an adaptation of the Carter Family’s “When the World’s on Fire” (Bluebird, 1933), which in turn was based on the Baptist hymn, “Oh, My Loving Brother.” When Moe Asch recorded “This Land Is Your Land” in 1944, he saw its potential as a children’s song and included it on the 1951 album *Songs to Grow on*, Vol. 3: *American Work Songs* (Various artists, Smithsonian Folkways), the first time it was ever released as a recording (Mitchell, liner notes, p. 13).

⁵⁹ The verses of “Bubble Gum” and “Jiggy Jiggy Bum,” for example, have the same music as “This Land Is Your Land,” while “Why, Oh Why?” shares the same tune as Guthrie’s “adult” “More Pretty Girls than One” (Woody Guthrie, *Archive of Folk and Jazz Music*, 1965, Track 2).

⁶⁰ Guthrie, liner notes to *Nursery Days*.

⁶¹ John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992), p. 4.

⁶² Stephens, p. 56.

⁶³ Guthrie joined the merchant marine in 1943, the year that Cathy Ann was born.

⁶⁴ As early as 1942, Guthrie proposed to write songs for children and spent some time notating the speech of the children he met on the street (Klein, p. 249).

⁶⁵ Klein, pp. 311, 332.

⁶⁶ Guthrie, “Clean-o,” *Nursery Days*, Track 2.

⁶⁷ Guthrie, “I Want My Milk (I Want It Now),” *Songs to Grow on*, Track 5.

⁶⁸ Guthrie, “One Day Old,” *Songs to Grow on*, Track 7.

⁶⁹ Guthrie, “Why, Oh Why?” *Songs to Grow on*, Track 13.

⁷⁰ Hollindale, p. 39.

⁷¹ Hollindale, p. 39.

⁷² Guthrie, “Roll On,” *Nursery Days*, Track 14.

⁷³ Ironically, when Guthrie made his only appearance on the BBC’s *Children’s Hour* in July 1944, the songs he performed were all “adult” songs: “Wabash Cannonball,” “900 Miles,” “Stagger Lee,” and “Pretty Boy Floyd.” *Woody at 100*, Disc 3, Track 16

⁷⁴ Woody Guthrie quoted in Nora Guthrie, *My Name Is New York*, p. 100.

⁷⁵ Guthrie, “Riding in My Car (Car Song),” *Nursery Days*, Track 4.

⁷⁶ Liz Giuffre, “Top of the Tots: The Wiggles as Australia’s Most Successful (and Underacknowledged) Sound Media Export,” *Media International Australia* 148 (2013), pp. 145-54.

⁷⁷ Jasmine Mote, “The Effects of Tempo and Familiarity on Children’s Affective Interpretation of Music,” *Emotion* 11:3 (2011), pp. 618-622.

- ⁷⁸ Bob Dylan and Dave Van Ronk, "Riding in My Car." Live at the Gaslight, September 6, 1961: <http://www.daysofthecrazy-wild.com/listen-bob-dylan-and-dave-van-ronk-perform-car-car-riding-in-my-car/>, accessed October 2, 2016.
- ⁷⁹ Ramblin' Jack Elliott, "Car Song," *Jack Elliott Sings the Songs of Woody Guthrie* (Prestige International, 1960), Side 2, Track 5.
- ⁸⁰ Pete Seeger, "Riding in My Car," *Children's Concert at Town Hall* (Columbia, 1962), Side 1, Track 2.
- ⁸¹ Melvyn T. Reiter, "Car Song" on various artists, *Music of Washington Square* (Folkways Records, 1962).
- ⁸² Wally Wyton, "Riding in the Car," *Growing up with Wally Wyton* (Pickwick, 1964), Side 2, Track 6.
- ⁸³ Donovan, "Car Car (Riding in My Car)," *Catch the Wind* (Hickory, 1965), Side 1, Track 5.
- ⁸⁴ Pete Seeger and Brother Kirk, "Riding in My Car," *Visit Sesame Street* (Children's Television Workshop, 1972), Side 2, Track 1.
- ⁸⁵ Bruce Springsteen, "Riding in My car," on various artists, *'Til We Outnumber 'Em (The Songs Of Woody Guthrie)* (Righteous Babe, 1996), Track 6.
- ⁸⁶ Kidsongs, "Car Car (Riding in My Car)," *Cars, Boats, Trains, Planes* (Together Again Productions, 1992), Track 1.
- ⁸⁷ Steve Waring, "Riding in My cCr," *Les vacances de Woody* (Victorie Music, 2009), Track 11.
- ⁸⁸ The Singing Kettle, "Riding in My Car," *The Singing Kettle Greatest Hits*, Vol. 1 (Gordon Duncan, 1999), Track 13.
- ⁸⁹ Sugar Kane Music, "Riding in My Car," *50 Timeless Toddler Tunes* (Universal Digital Music Service, 2010), Track 45.
- ⁹⁰ Elizabeth Mitchell, "Riding in My Car," *Little Seed: Songs for Children by Woody Guthrie* (Smithsonian Folkways, 2012), Track 13.
- ⁹¹ Guthrie, "Put Your Finger in the Air," *Nursery Days*, Track 7.
- ⁹² Daniel Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music* (New York: Dutton Penguin, 2012), p. 125.
- ⁹³ Logan English, liner notes to *Woody Guthrie's Children's Songs Sung by Logan English*, 1974, accessed June 12 2013: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/logan-english/woody-guthries-childrens-songs-sung-by-logan-english/music/album/smithsonian>.
- ⁹⁴ Klein, p. 133.
- ⁹⁵ Klein, p. 93.
- ⁹⁶ "I always get along best with young kids. They're more my age." Guthrie, 1942, in Klein, pp. 245-6.
- ⁹⁷ Guthrie suggested to his wife Marjorie, "I will never grow up" (letter dated 1954, in Klein, p. 273).
- ⁹⁸ Guthrie's nicknames for daughter Cathy included Stacky, Stackybones, Stackaroony.
- ⁹⁹ Klein, p. 311.
- ¹⁰⁰ Philip Auslander, "I Wanna Be Your Man: Suzi Quatro's Musical Androgyny," *Popular Music* 23:1 (2004), p. 6.
- ¹⁰¹ Honeyman, p. 3.
- ¹⁰² Nodelman, p. 19.
- ¹⁰³ Such as overturning a table of food and drinks at a communist party/society meeting (in Klein, *Woody Guthrie*).
- ¹⁰⁴ John Steinbeck in Klein, p. 160.
- ¹⁰⁵ Dunaway, p. 65.
- ¹⁰⁶ Klein, p. 417.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Woody Guthrie*, Arena Documentary, BBC Two Television, January 8, 1988.
- ¹⁰⁸ Wayne Hampton, *Guerrilla Minstrels: John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986).
- ¹⁰⁹ Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, Reprint edition, 2015).
- ¹¹⁰ John Alberti, "'I Have Come Out to Play': Jonathan Richman and the Politics of the Faux Naïf", in *Reading Rock and Roll*, eds. Kevin Dettmar and William Richey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 173-189.
- ¹¹¹ Alberti, *passim*.
- ¹¹² Linford.
- ¹¹³ In 1940, while working on his Bonneville Power Administration commission in Oregon, Guthrie visited the tents and shacks of the displaced Oklahoma farmers. In a letter to his fellow Almanac Singers in New York, he notes that "On more than one night, on more than one day, I've heard my Oakie friends ask me, say mister, you don't happen to be Mister Jesus do you?" (Klein, p. 197).
- ¹¹⁴ Klein, p. 315.
- ¹¹⁵ Alberti, p. 175.
- ¹¹⁶ Eric Swedlund, *This Machine Kills Cynicism*, accessed April 2, 2012, <http://souciant.com/2012/03/this-machine-kills-cynicism>.
- ¹¹⁷ Kaufman, in Linford.

¹¹⁸ Klein, pp. 361-2.

¹¹⁹ Klein, p. 362.

¹²⁰ Rose, p. 65.

¹²¹ Nora Guthrie, conversation with author, September 9, 2012.

¹²² Rose, p. 60.

¹²³ Cathy's dress was set alight by the faulty wiring of a radio in the Guthrie house.

¹²⁴ Guthrie's children's albums outsold his adult recordings in the 1940s and 1950s (Klein, p. 312) and continue to do so in the CD and download age (Jeff Place, email to author, January 31, 2012).