

1972

Critical Analysis of Mother Goose

Jeanne Opperman
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1972 Jeanne Opperman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>

Recommended Citation

Opperman, Jeanne, "Critical Analysis of Mother Goose" (1972). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3923.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3923>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Critical Analysis of Mother Goose

Find Additional Related Research in UNI ScholarWorks

To find related research in UNI ScholarWorks, go to the collection of [School Library Studies Graduate Research Papers](#) written by students in the [Division of School Library Studies](#), Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, at the University of Northern Iowa.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MOTHER GOOSE

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Jeanne Opperman
December 13, 1972

Read and Approved by

Mary Lou McGrew

Elizabeth Martin

Accepted by Department
Elizabeth Martin

Date December 27, 1972

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE PROBLEM	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Current Status of the Problem.....	1
Procedures Followed.....	1
II. THE ORIGIN OF MOTHER GOOSE.....	1
Charles Perrault.....	2
R. S. Gent.....	2
William Wheeler.....	3
John Newbery.....	3
Munroe & Francis	4
III. SOURCES OF MOTHER GOOSE RHYMES.....	5
There Was A Man In Our Town.....	7
Old King Cole.....	8
Baa Baa Black Sheep.....	8
Hey Diddle Diddle.....	9
Lucy Locket.....	10
There Was An Old Woman.....	11
Jack and Jill.....	12
IV. STUDY OF SELECTED EDITIONS.....	12
Historical Editions.....	13
The only true Mother Goose melodies.....	13
Mother Goose's melodies.....	13

PAGE

Arthur Rackham.....	14
Willy Pogány.....	14
Songs of the Nursery.....	15
The Original Mother Goose's Melody.....	16
Uncommon Editions.....	16
Mother Goose for Grown Folk.....	16
American Mother Goose.....	17
The Inner City Mother Goose.....	18
Foreign Editions.....	19
French.....	19
Spanish.....	20
V. RELEVANCY OF MOTHER GOOSE TODAY.....	20
Jerome Bruner.....	21
Jerome Kagan.....	21
Bruno Bettelheim.....	23
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	24
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MOTHER GOOSE

Nursery rhymes have been considered trifles until comparatively recent times and consequently were never taken too seriously. It has only been with the increased interest in the science of folk-lore that they have begun to attract attention and their true purpose and meaning discovered.

My curiosity about the origin of Mother Goose rhymes came through a course taken in children's literature. I wrote a paper at that time on some of my findings and observations. This paper is an enlargement and updating of that project including more information from historical sources, a study of selected foreign editions and some remarks on the relevancy of Mother Goose today.

The origin of Mother Goose

The custom of singing songs and lullabies to children is very old. It may be as old as the time of the ancient Druids. Caractatus, King of the Britons, was believed to have been rocked in his cradle on the Isle of Mona and sung to sleep by some of these verses. It is quite possible that the custom of making nonsense verses in our schools was borrowed from the practice of the old British nurses.

There are many theories and legends about the origin of Mother Goose.

It is now conceded that Mother Goose belongs to French folk-lore, not to English tradition. Charles Perrault, Paris, 1628, was the first person to collect and publish in 1697 the Contes de ma mere L'Oye or Tales of Mother Goose, and though he did not originate the name, there is no reason to think that Mother Goose was a term ever used in English literature.¹

The tales of Mere L'Oye are taken from the ancient legends of the "Goose -Footed Bertha" wife of Robert II of France. Queen Bertha is represented in French legends as spinning by the fire and telling stories to children. From this arose the French custom of referring any incredible stories to the time when Good Queen Bertha spun.

The French tales are exclusively prose. There are eight in all. Among the familiar titles are Little Red Riding Hood, The Fairy, Bluebeard, Sleeping Beauty, Puss in Boots, Cinderella, and others.

The prose tales fame apparently spread to England around 1729 under the title, Tales of Passed Times by Mother Goose with morals written in French by M. Perrault, and English by R. S. Gent (Robert Samber). The book contained the English and French versions on opposite pages. This apparently was the first use of that name and it was not

¹Katherine Thomas, The Real Personages of Mother Goose (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1930), p. 28.

taken, as legend has it, from a Boston lady Elizabeth Goose, mother-in-law of the printer Thomas Fleet.

In 1870 William Wheeler edited a book of melodies and claimed to identify Mother Goose with Elizabeth Goose, widow of Isaac Vergoose, and mother-in-law of Thomas Fleet. He came to Boston in 1712, married in 1715, and is said to have printed in 1719 the first collection on Mother Goose's melodies. It is true that Fleet's wife was of the Vergoose family, and the name was often shortened to Goose, but no copy remains of a book being published, nor any trace or reference made to it. If an edition had been printed in 1719, it is safe to assume that Benjamin Franklin would have had a copy of it, yet he makes no reference to it nor any quotation from it. It is highly doubtful that at this time a Boston printer would have been allowed to publish such trivial rhymes. Boston children were fed on gospel food, and it is highly improbable an edition of this type could have been sold.

The idea of editing nursery rhymes presumably originated with John Newbery. He was the first English publisher to prepare little story books for children. In 1765 he published the History of Little Goody Two-Shoes, a story generally ascribed to Oliver Goldsmith. The John Newbery edition of Mother Gooses Melody was published about 1760. So far as we know, no publisher except Newbery was using the title of

Mother Goose from 1760-1780. The English version bore the title Mother Gooses Melodies: or Sonnets for the Cradle and in the introduction Goldsmith clearly indicates that the melodies have long been in use among British nurses.

Newbery and Carnan, his stepson, did not succeed in keeping a monopoly on these rhymes, however.

Her popularity was not without its drawbacks. Other publishers, seeing that she was bringing many a shilling into Newberry's till, cast covetous eyes upon her, and soon John Marshall of Aldemary Churchyard, Bow Lane, London, being seized with a spirit of high handed piracy, appropriated the Melody almost verbatim, making only a few changes in the arrangement of the selections. A copy of the Marshall edition is still extant in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.²

Edmund Monroe and David Francis were also printers and booksellers in Boston. They issued an edition of Mother Goose which is undated, but there is a perfect copy owned by Joseph Robbins of Boston inscribed with the year 1827. It seems certain that the compiler of this book had access to Newbery's original or to a Thomas reprint.

In 1833 Monroe and Thomas issued a new edition for which they secured a copyright. Nearly all the rhymes of the first issue were retained in this one but the order was altered.

Few books in the English language have so great and persistent a circulation as the collection of nursery rhymes known as Mother Goose. Hear what Ma'am Goose says:

²Ibid., p. 14.

My dear little blossoms, there are now in this world and always will be, a great many grannies besides myself, both in petticoats and pantaloons, some a deal younger to be sure; but all monstrous wise, and of my own family name. These old women, who never had chick nor child of their own, but who always know how to bring up other people's children, will tell you with very long faces, that my enchanting, quieting, soothing volume, my all-sufficient anodyne for cross, peevish, won't be comforted little bairns, ought to be laid aside for more learned books, such as they could select and publish. Fudge! I tell you that all their banterings cannot deface my beauties, nor their wise prattlings; and all imitators of my refreshing songs might as well write a new Billy Shakespeare as another Mother Goose: We two great poets were born together, and we shall go out of the world together.

No, no, my melodies will never die,
While nurses sing, or babies cry.³

Sources of Mother Goose Rhymes

The nursery rhymes, largely of Jacobite origin, are political diatribes, religious philippics, and popular street songs, embodying comedies, tragedies, and love episodes of many great historical personages, lavishly interspersed with English and Scotch folklore flung out with dramatic abandon.

Many a laugh and tear will be discerned; much of love's fond calling; much, again, of stormy hates revilings. Truly, of⁴ a such is life's warp and woof, now as in long ago.

It is believed that most of the verses came from England and Scotland. Curiosity about the origin of the rhymes has led to a study of historical sources by scholars in England and America. There is little doubt that many of the nursery

³Monica Kiefer, American Children Through Their Books (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), p. 15.

⁴Thomas, op. cit., p. 17.

favorites were originally political satire written with merciless keenness and directness. In a day when criticism of those in power was treason, men wittily disguised the intent of their remarks under a camouflage of nonsense. Ridicule was veiled with humor. Thus, Mary, Queen of Scots, was "Little Miss Muffett" and old John Knox was the spider. Queen Elizabeth was the lady with "rings on her fingers and bells on her toes." Henry VIII was the king in the parlor counting his money, Catherine of Aragon was eating bread and honey and Ann Boleyn was the maid hanging her fancy clothing in the garden in Sing a Song of Sixpence. The blackbird who snips her nose is actually the executioner beheading pretty Ann.

So, in reality, the lines of Little Bo-Peep and Little Boy Blue, which suggest nothing but the gayest and blue skies, hold grim import. Across these nursery rhymes there falls at times the black shadow of the headsman's block, and, in their seeming lightness are portrayed the tragedies of kings and queens, the corruption of political parties, stories of fanatical religious unrest that have gone on to make world history.

We should consider in connection with the rhymes the periods in which they first became current. There is a passing glance at Henry V, the Black Prince, Richard III, and Henry VII, bringing us to the reign of Henry VIII. From this period they

cover with amazing accuracy the reigns of Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth, Mary, Queen of Scots, The two Jameses, the two Charles, the protectorate, Queen Anne, William III, and George I.

During these eras, everything that afforded material for barbed ridicule was eagerly seized upon by the rhymesters. Jesters were also prominent in the court life of the Elizabethan era. It was customary to dub those in and about the court with ridiculous nicknames, generally of animals, which is evident from the writings of the times even prior to the reign of Henry VIII.

One of the earliest known rhymes is as follows:

There was a man in our town,
And he was wondrous wise.
He Jumped into a bramble bush,
And scratched out both his eyes.

And when he found his eyes were out,
With all his might and main,
He jumped into another bush,
And scratched them in again.

This old Jacobite street song, the outcome of Whig and Tory riots was aimed at Rev. Dr. Henry Sacheverell at St. Saviour's Church at Southwark. He was the man "so wondrous wise" who, in preaching a sermon before the Alderman and Lord Mayor of London against the doctrine of Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance, literally "jumped into the bramble bush and scratched out both his eyes." He was impeached and found

guilty and forbidden to preach for three years. His betrayers accused him of rising above this rebuke by asserting tyranny to be Christianity that to such good purpose did he "jump into another bush and scratch them in again." Shortly after the impeachment he was publically restored to favor and appointed to high honors as Rector of St. Andrews. "How happy it was for the man to scratch his eyes in again when they were scratched out. But he was a blockhead, or he would have kept himself out of the hedge and not been scratched at all."⁵

Old King Cole
 Was a merry old soul,
 And a merry old soul was he;
 He called for his pipe,
 And he called for his bowl,
 And he called for his fiddlers three.

King Cole reigned in Briton during the third century. He was a brave and popular man. In Colchester there is a large earthwork supposed to have been a Roman amphitheatre which goes by the name of King Cole's Kitchen. He seems to have been deemed worthy of record because he was a man of merriment in that time when the favorite and usual sport of kings was war, banditry and murder.

Baa, Baa, Black sheep, have you any wool?
 Yes, sir, yes, sir. Three bags full:

⁵Thomas, op. cit., pp 23.

One for my master, one for my dame,

And one for the little boy that cried in the lane.

Chief among the grievances of the working classes was the great demand for wool, and, because of it, the greater portion of the country was transformed into sheepwalks so there was little call for field labor. "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" arose the people's cry throughout the land. To further add to the discontent in the reign of Edward VI, the low wage was paid out in the base coin issued by the young king's father, Henry VIII, for supplying his individual needs. With the price of food rising the result was a general revolt. "My master and my dame" were the over-rich nobility, with "the little boy that cried in the lane" being the common people whose crying was often ended by the hangman's noose.

Hey diddle, diddle
 The cat and the fiddle,
 The cow jumped over the moon;
 The little dog laughed to see such sport,
 And the dish ran away with the spoon.

Queen Elizabeth dubbed the "cat" from the manner in which she played with her cabinet as if the ministers were so many mice. She was very fond of dancing and she would occupy herself on rainy days dancing to the scraping of a tiny fiddle. The "cow" is her father Henry VIII, dubbed the "dunne cowe" by Cardinal Wolsey. Historical records leave no doubt as to who the "moon" of the jingle is. Elizabeth makes reference to this

in a command to Burleigh and Walsingham when they made a journey to Fotheringay Castle where Mary of Scotland was confined to make inquiry into an alleged plot of Mary against the life of Elizabeth. Elizabeth asks how her "spirit" and her "moon" find themselves after such a wearisome journey. The Earl Of Leicester, the Queen's favorite, was the little dog who laughed. It was during a time of coolness between he and the queen and he wanted to leave the court and be sent to France. Elizabeth refused saying she could not live without seeing him every day. The sports at which the dog laughed were both political and social.

"Dish ran away with the spoon" sheds light into the elaborateness with which Elizabeth liked to have her meals served. The "spoon" being a beautiful young woman of court selected as a taster of royal meals. The "dish" was the formal title of the courtier who carried the dishes into the dining room. The "running away" refers to Edward, Earl of Hertford, eldest son of the Protector Somerset, and Lady Katherine Grey, sister of Lady Jane Grey. They contracted to marry in secret, but as soon as Elizabeth found out, she confined them both to the Tower where two children were born to them in the seven years that remained of their life.

Lucy Locket lost her pocket
Kitty Fisher found it;
But the devil a penny was there in it,
Except the binding round it.

This jingle was written about two women in favor with Charles II, the "pocket." Lucy Locket was replaced in the royal affections, but neither one gained anything in worldly possessions from their royal lover. The king proved but a glittering binding of miserliness.

There was an old woman tossed in a blanket,
Seventeen times as high as the moon;
But where she was going no mortal could tell,
For under her arm she carried a broom.

Old woman, old woman, old woman, said I
Whither, ah whither, ah whither so high?
To sweep the cobwebs from the sky,
And I'll be with you by and by.

When Henry V turned his armies against France, he composed a march to lead his troops to battle, knowing that music often had the power to inspire courage. Some of his enemies took advantage of this and they composed the above verse to the king's own march in order to ridicule him and show the folly of his undertaking. The king is represented as the Old woman pursuing a most absurd action.

The king's answer to his ridiculers was that knaves sometimes put on the clothes of fools to disguise their own evil plans. "The flattery in the last (says he) is more insulting than the impudence of the first, and to weak minds might do more mischief; but we have the old proverb in our favor— if we do not flatter ourselves, the flattery of others will never hurt us."⁶

⁶Isiah Thomas, Mother Goose's Melody, (New York: Joel Munsell, 1889), p. 28.

Jack and Jill went up the hill,
 To fetch a pail of water;
 Jack fell down and broke his crown,
 And Jill came tumbling after.

Cardinal Wolsey was a favorite of many of the jesters. Jack and Jill were typical terms designating ^{sp.} priests, and in this instance, Cardinal Wolsey and Bishop Tarbes. They are represented as going up the hill to "fetch a pail of water" that is going to France to arrange the marriage between Mary Tudor and the French monarch. Had this been successful there might have been no tumbling down the hill and breaking of crowns.

Study of selected editions of Mother Goose

Each decade has produced new editions of Mother Goose rhymes from both known and unknown sources until hundreds of melodies are now in print. Many of the old rhymes are still in vogue, some have been added and some discarded.

Illustrators have also contributed their part. The old woman with the high pointed hat and the magic wand, often depicted in flight upon an enormous goose, has become an inseparable ^{sp.} part of the lore of the nursery rhyme. Changing social and educational attitudes and differing tastes in art can be traced in a study of the many editions of Mother Goose.

Because of the abundance of editions available, I have chosen to discuss some of the more unusual in this paper.

Historical editions. One of the historical editions which I mentioned briefly earlier in this paper is The Only True Mother Goose Melodies published in 1833 by Munroe and Francis. It is an exact reproduction both in text and illustrations of the original edition. It includes a history of the Goose family. In the introduction the Rev. Edward Everett Hale states that from about 1800-1820 the impression of the Mother country was very strong on Boston. Children were still playing games of English origin even though it was 50 years after the Declaration of Independence. Boston was still a port of foreign commerce and the English influence was such that no reference is made to such American things as cent, dime, governor or president.

The major illustrator of this book is thought to be Abel Bowen, one of the first wood engravers in the Boston area. Many of the illustrations have been altered through the years, but one can still detect the detail and the originality of his work. He gave to the children of his day his image of what blackbirds baked in a pie looked like.

Another edition which is a facsimile of the Munroe and Francis 1833 version is Mother Goose's Melodies published by Dover in 1970. It is identical to the above mentioned edition except for the introduction which was written by E.F. Bleiler. He also traces the history of Mother Goose from historical

and biographical sources. He makes the following statement:

It is pointless to dispute which is the first Mother Goose book, since the trail of children's books is so complex and the corpus of nursery verses accreted so gradually over almost a century of publishing in England and America. But if one must select a single Mother Goose book as "original" this Munroe and Francis volume of 1833 is the strongest candidate.⁷

It is a rich modern collection, well conceived and well produced. It was largely responsible for the adoption of Mother Goose in America. Most of the woodcuts fit the verses and were presumably drawn to specification.

The Mother Goose illustrated by Arthur Rackham has a larger format than the Munroe and Francis edition. The print is larger and soft colored illustrations are included among the many black and white detailed sketches. English period costumes are used. Some figures appear distorted and frightening with long boney fingers and pointed noses. The book includes many of the best known rhymes.

Willy Pogány's Mother Goose is very bright and eye catching. It is an attempt to adapt the illustrations to fit a 1928 setting. Although it probably would not appeal to a modern child, some new techniques were used such as verses slanted across the page and lines printed in curved

⁷Mother Goose's Melodies, (New York: Dover Publishers, 1970), p. 10.

fashion.

The basis for Mother Goose's Melodies or Songs of the Nursery is taken from Hallwell's Nursery Rhymes of England. There is a record of a Mother Goose rhyme book for children being printed by Thomas Fleet of Boston in 1719. In it he records the songs sung to his young son by Dame Goose, the child's grandmother. There is no record of this book being in existence today. In 1856 a gentleman in Boston came across a dilapidated copy of it with 12 or 15 pages left. He did not purchase it at that time, and it wasn't until after his death that this fact became known to an editor. A search was made for the book, but it was not found. The editor still wanted to publish an annotated compilation of the traditional nursery melodies with an account of the Dame Goose and Vergoose family. This book is a result of his efforts. The account of the Goose or Vergoose family was prepared from materials collected from a descendant of the family and placed at the disposal of the editor.

The book is not as attractiveⁿ edition as some of the later ones are. There are no colored illustrations, but many full page black and white sketches which are very detailed and typical of Mother Goose's supposed time in history. In many instances the illustrations do not appear with the verses they represent. Some of the rhymes are gruesome tales not



Bobby Shafto

suiting for a young child. This is a good book to use as a comparative study. The illustration of Bobby Shafto is taken from this book.

The Original Mother Goose's Melody by Isiah Thomas is a reproduction of the John Newberry edition. It contains quite a long preface giving a history of the book and a table of contents. It is written in the old English style. There are no illustrations. In the back of the book there is a list of other books sold by Isiah Thomas with the inscription: "Books for the instruction and amusement of children, which will make them wise and happy, printed and sold by I. Thomas, in Worcester, Mass., near the court house."⁸

Near the front of the book in the preface there is the advertisement to purchase his other volume Chimes, Rhymes, and Jingles which contains the rest of the Mother Goose songs, besides some new stories which are listed stating they are illustrated with "new and beautiful pictures." The following page contains an illustration of this book.

Uncommon editions. One of the more interesting editions which I found was Mother Goose for Grown Folk by Mrs. Whitney. Each verse given has a moral to go along with it. The verse may be just four lines, but the moral will be several pages.

⁸Thomas, op. cit., p. 51.

Mother GOOSE's Melody. 37



JACK and Gill
Went up the Hill,
To fetch a Pail of Water ;
Jack fell down
And broke his Crown,
And Gill came tumbling after.

Maxim.

The more you think of dying, the better
you will live.

ARISTOTLE'S

38 Mother GOOSE's Melody.



ARISTOTLE'S STORY.
THERE were two Birds fat on
a Stone,
Fa, la, la, la, la, de ; [one,
One flew away, and then there was
Fa, la, la, la, la, de ;
The other flew after,
And then there was none,
Fa, la, la, la, la, de ;
And so the poor Stone
Was left all alone,
Fa, la, la, la, la, de.

This may serve as a Chapter of Consequence
in the next new Book of Logick.

Mother GOOSE's Melody. 39



HUSH a by Baby
On the Tree Top,
When the Wind blows
The Cradle will rock
When the Bough breaks
The Cradle will fall,
Down tumbles baby,
Cradle and all.

This may serve as a Warning to the Proud
and Ambitious, who climb so high that they
generally fall at last.

Maxim.

Content turns all it touches into Gold.

LITTLE

40 Mother GOOSE's Melody.



LITTLE Jack Horner
Sat in a Corner,
Eating of Christmas Pye ;
He put in his Thumb,
And pull'd out a Plumb,
And what a good Boy was I.

Jack was a Boy of excellent Taste, as should
appear by his pulling out a Plumb ; it is there-
fore supposed that his Father apprenticed him
to a Mince Pye maker, that he might improve
his Taste from Year to Year ; no one standing
in so much Need of good Taste as a Pastry
Cook.

Ben ly on the Sublime and Beautiful.
PEASE

An example of this is as follows in the verse Up A Tree.

Oh dear, what can the matter be?
Two old women got up in an apple-tree:
One came down,
And the other stayed till Saturday.

The moral:

I suppose you should wonder how it should be
That two old ladies got up in a tree:
Did you never chance the exploit to see?

Perhaps you have noticed pussy-cat go,
With a wrathful look, and a way not slow,
And a tail very big, and a back up se^u?

Well, that is the type of the thing I mean;
And the apple-bearer, since the earth was green,
The tree of our trouble has always been.

So when "human various" fails to agree,
There stands the old stem of iniquity,
And one or both will be "up a tree."

Each in her style: some stately and stiff;
Some hiss and spit, and are up in a whiff;
And some hunch along in a moody miff.

It doesn't matter; however it be;
The best of people may get up the tree;
The question is, when they'll come down, you see!

An offenseless one will descend straightway;
One half in the wrong for a while might stay;
Clear curstness will roost till the judgement day.⁹

Another interesting edition^x is the American Mother Goose.

Ray Wood spent his youth in Arkansas and Texas, and this book is a collection of American folk rhymes he remembered as a

⁹Mrs. A.D. Whitney, Mother Goose For Grown Folk,
(New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1882), pp. 170-172.

"up A Tree"



child. Here is an American counterpart of the English Mother Goose rhymes. The origin of many are unknown, some probably came from the "old country" but most seem to be purely American.

Ed Hargis' cartoon type illustrations capture the spirit of the rhymes and produce laughter on their own. Having been born in Texas, many of the scenes were familiar to him. Such rhymes as "How Much Wood Would A Wood-Chuck Chuck," "Star-light, Star-bright," "Hush My Baby Don't Say A Word," are all quaint reminders of days gone by.

The Inner City Mother Goose by Eve Merriam strikes at the heart of many American cities. Nursery rhymes, altered from their classic form, dramatize the desperation of life in the ghetto. It tells it like it is, very cynical, stark truth, depicting injustices and also survival tactics.

A few examples follow:

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the double lock will keep;
May no brick through the window break,
And no one rob me till I wake.

Hicory Dickory Dock,
The crowd ran up the block.
The cop struck one,
A rock got thrown;
Hicory Dickory riot.

Taffy is a storeman,
Taffy is a thief;
Taffy overcharges
For a tough piece of beef.

Taffy's cheese is mouldy,
 His eggs are sold with cracks,
 There are seldom more than five
 In his six-bottle packs.

His sacks of potatoes
 Are sprouting with eyes;
 There's hardly any fruit,
 But many fruit flies.

His frozen food case
 Has a constant leak;
 His floor is never swept,
 His milk is from last week.

Taffy's stock is low,
 Yet somehow Taffy thrives;
 Taffy offers credit
 Till the monthly check arrives.

The following two pages are illustrations taken from this book.

Foreign editions or Mother Goose in translation. We have been discussing Mother Goose rhymes printed in English. I would now like to take a look at two of the translations.

Mother Goose takes on a romantic grace when translated into French and given a Gallic setting. Whether a child is familiar with the language or not, he will delight in saying the French verses and determining their English equivalents. Barbara Cooney gives a detailed view of the French countryside in her illustrations. This is a good example of what a foreign language book should be. It makes sight translation easy since much of the French vocabulary can be figured out from the rhymes.

Mary, Mary

Mary, Mary,
Urban Mary,
How does your sidewalk grow?

With chewing gum wads
And cigarette butts
And popsicle sticks
And potato chip bags
And candy wrappers
And beer cans
And broken bottles
And crusts of pizza
And coffee grounds
And burnt-out light bulbs
And a garbage
strike all in a row.



We'll never forget the spring we wore our Nostalgic Party Dresses from Bonnet's!

**Jack Be Nimble
Jack Be Quick**

Jack be nimble
Jack be quick

Snap the blade

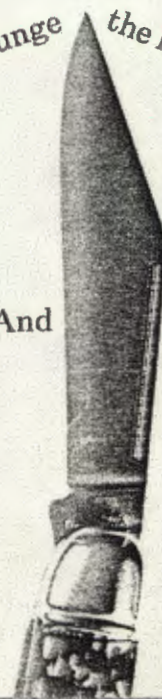
And give it a flick

*Grab the purse
It's easily done
Then just for kicks
Just for fun*



Plunge the knife

And cut



and run...

Mother Goose in Spanish is also very delightful. Again illustrated by Barbara Cooney she captures the detail and charm of the country. Miss Cooney lived in Spain prior to doing the illustrations for the book. Her many happy experiences with the country and its people are reflected in her work.

Relevancy of Mother Goose Today

For many children Mother Goose is their first introduction to the world of literature. Even a one year old child will respond to many of the verses, and they continue to be favorites among the four and five year olds. We, as adults, may wonder why they have survived down through the ages. Much of the language is obsolete. The modern child doesn't know the meaning of the word "curds" much less use it in his vocabulary, yet he delights in Miss Muffett.

When we consider the characteristics of a child in relationship to the rhymes, perhaps we have a partial answer to their popularity. Children learn by varied language patterns which accounts for the great growth in language development between two and six years old. The nursery rhymes have a diverse language pattern. Many are short and easily memorized, some are full of action and some counting, all of which appeals to the short attention span of the young child. Most of the rhymes tell a good story; they are not moralistic, but justice

does seem to prevail. The characters are interesting and likeable, and caught in everyday experience. The verses are full of humor and many are pure nonsense. One of the reasons for their great appeal to children is in the very simplicity and even crudity of their diction. A little child, slowly developing his power of thought, cannot grasp an imitation nor read between the lines. He wants facts plainly stated and these he finds in Mother Goose.

"These are the rhymes," writes Walter de la Mare, "that free the fancy, charm the tongue and ear, delight the inward eye. These are the goals set by pedagogues, psychologists and behavioral scientists."¹⁰

Research projects have been conducted at Harvard to determine why some children learn how to learn and some do not. Jerome Bruner, director of Harvard center for cognitive studies, believes that at the same time a baby learns the ability to use his hands simultaneously he is also learning to speak in orderly fashion. He believes the two skills are closely related. He also points out that only human babies develop either of these accomplishments.

Jerome Kagan, director of Harvard's department of Social Relations, feels that a clue lies in a pattern of expectancy and counter-expectancy or surprise set up between mother and

¹⁰Joan Bodger, "Mother Goose: Is the Old Girl Relevant?" Wilson Library Bulletin, December, 1969, pp. 404.

child. A child of four months smiles when held close and smiled at. Dr. Kagan says, "middle class mothers seem unconsciously to surprise their infants and that's very good...they play peek-a-boo or make unexpected sounds." ¹¹ Surprise and unexpected sounds are more likely to come when there is a built up pattern of expectancy.

Which brings us back to Mother Goose. What better way to make these distinctions than to be held close and read to from lines stuffed with assonance, alliteration and rhyme, all set off with expletives, refrains and rhythm? Most rhymes are accompanied by actions which a child associates with words or objects. If a child is to progress to fluency in the spoken and written word, he must begin by learning a sort of visual vocabulary that is utterly foreign to him, and a good place to learn this is from the pages of an illustrated Mother Goose. Usually a picture goes with every rhyme creating an image in the child's mind, and thus an association; he is able to name the animals and objects. He becomes aware of his own features, nose, toes, chin, eyes, etc.

There is a tendency in some of the modern versions to think of an overall design rather than a particular image. This is worse than no picture at all because it fails to

¹¹ **Ibid.**, p. 404.

categorize what the child perceives and the association is not made specific.

A child also has to label his feelings. In Mother Goose he will find joy, anger, humor, sadness, love and pain. There is a sense of nonsense and always action. Even if they were written long ago, they are the stuff of which life is made.

Mother Goose lives a dangerous life. The triumph of television and other non-literary modes of communication has put the printed word on the defensive. She also must work harder to win over new child audiences whose family culture does not necessarily include respect for formal literature or even education in general. She has been criticized because of violence in her rhymes; beatings, fatal falls, hangings, thefts and murders often occur. But a child's mind is a strange thing. He refuses to be frightened by the things we adults consider frightening.

Bruno Bettelheim states that children want to know about aggression, not just to discharge it.

He strongly advises that those blandly infuriating readers concerned with Pleasant Street in Friendly Town be dumped in favor of the kind of book where a child could learn something of the nature of his own violent feelings. He cautions that in urban settings, where there is so little chance to work off steam harmlessly, we are guilty of adding even more fuel to the fire when we subject children to nice teaching materials that show nothing but nice children living in nice houses--and all the while relegate the would-be reader to a slum. The child becomes so angry he can't read, and a vicious cycle ensues.¹²

¹²Ibid., p. 406.

Bettleheim suggests there may have been a therapeutic release mechanism in early American books in which the bad guy was punished for his sins. The stories may have scared the child, but they also helped vent his hostilities, thus freeing him to learn. "We learn fast and well if through the act of learning, we can also discharge fury, or attack the problem. If this is so, consider the infinite wisdom of Mother Goose."¹³

If any good reason is to be found for preserving the rhymes of early childhood, it is not because they make good birthday presents, or that every child ought to be familiar with them, but because they fill a definite need. They are the literature of the very young, and as such are a child's very first association with the printed page. They make a child aware of the voices that come alive through books. The child does not understand the historical implications, nor does he care who Miss Muffett actually was. All he knows is that he can relate to them, they broaden his small world, and they are an introduction to a lifetime of enjoyment through the world of literature.

Mother Goose is one of the indestructible treasures of the human race.

¹³Ibid., p. 406.

I now leave you with this parting thought:

One parting word and I am gone:
If I've prevailed to make you see
These things as they appear to me,
Then I have proved my goose a swan;
And I, small fledgling of the line,
Yet proud to bear the ancient name,
May, for this ancestress of mine, ¹⁴
Claim place upon the page of fame.

Whitney, op. cit., p. 203.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

Huck, Charlotte S. Children's Literature in the Elementary Schools. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.

Kiefer, Monica. American Children Through Their Books. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948.

Latham, Hugh. Mother Goose in French. New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1964.

Merriam, Eve. The Inner City Mother Goose. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969.

Mother Goose. New York: Century Company, 1913.

Mother Gooses Melodies. New York: Dover Publications, 1970.

The Old Mother Goose. New Jersey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1925.

The Only True Mother Goose's Melodies. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1905.

Pogany, Willy. Mother Goose. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1928.

Reid, Alastair. Mother Goose in Spanish. New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1968.

Thomas, Isiah. Mother Goose's Melody. New York: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1889.

Thomas, Katherine. The Real Personages of Mother Goose. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1930.

Wheeler, William. Mother Goose's Melodies or Songs for the Nursery. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1878.

Whitney, A.D. Mother Goose for Grown Folk. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1882.

Wood, Ray. The American Mother Goose. New York: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1968.

B. PERIODICALS

Alderson, Brian. "What Makes A Book Survive," Wilson Library Bulletin, 47:172-177, October, 1972.

Bodger, Joan. "Mother Goose: Is the Old Girl Relevant?"
Wilson Library Bulletin, 44:402-408, December, 1969.

Jan, Isabelle. "Tradition in a Non-Traditional Age," Wilson Library Bulletin, 47:162-171, October, 1972.

Merla, Patrick. "What Is Real? Asked the Rabbit one Day,"
Saturday Review, 45:43-50, November 4, 1972.

Orvig, Mary. "Children's Books in Translation: Facts and Beliefs,"
School Library Journal, 19:23-27, November, 1972.