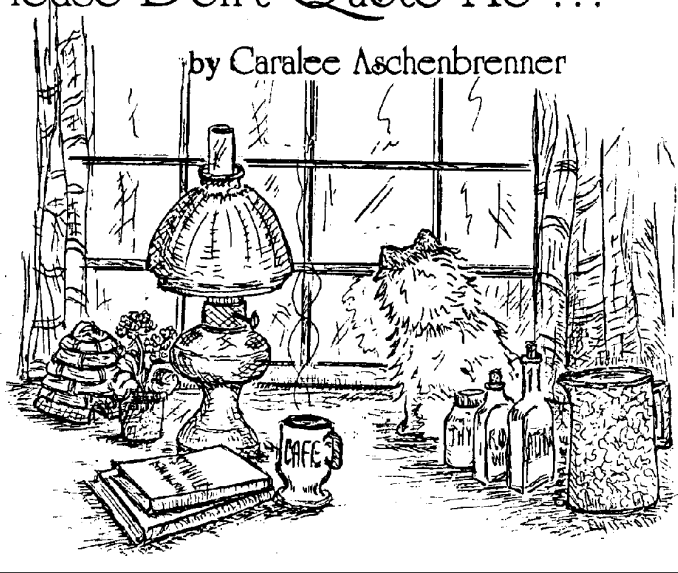


Please Don't Quote Me ...

by Caralee Aschenbrenner



Scoot the dog down to the end of the couch so he doesn't drool on the throw pillow again, please. The cat's on the back of the sofa behind us so she can pat us on the shoulder once in awhile and purr louder to comfort us. Sit here beside me. Auntie Cee is going to tell you a story, or rather stories about nursery rhymes which it is certain most children today are never exposed to what with Dr. Suess, or Sesame Street and the hundreds of "new age" poets filling books and DVDs with words and pictures.

Nursery rhymes are part of the past probably when once they were important in entertaining the "chill-ers" and before that, adults. Lucy Locket, Old King Cole or Taffy, the Welshman are unknown today when literally for centuries they were part of every child's literary encounters. Parents weren't so sensitive to children's psyche once!

In America since an early time, nursery rhymes AND fairy tales have appeared together in books to be called "Mother Goose tales," while in Britain they are always separate.

As early as 1650 a "Mother Goose-like" story was printed while a little later in 1697 Charles Perrault published eight fairy tales including "Sleeping Beauty," "Cinderella," and "Little Red Riding Hood" which means they too are much older than we'd have believed. Mother Goose seems then to be French in origin.

An American book printed in 1719 featured Mother Goose but no copy of it remains. Then in 1766 John Newberry became a persuasive promoter of Mother Goose stories who has evolved into a kindly, elderly lady who rides about on a flying goose to spread sleep-inducing tales among the young ones. How that symbol has developed and why is a question, just good publicity, supposedly. But even bigger is the question of why Mother Goose in the United States, at least, is connected to stories which began as bawdy tales with often lewd political or obscene beginnings, hardly fit for children.

Draw up the ottoman. Put up your feet and settle back while those tales are told of some of the actual, or speculative origins, of nursery rhymes, some of them hundreds of

years old ... Nursery rhymes, not as popular as they once were but relevant to their time:

*Little Jack Horner
Sat in the corner
Eating his Christmas pie.
He stuck in his thumb,
Pulled out a plum
And said "What a good boy am I."*

Purely political, this rhyme was inspired during the reign of King Henry VIII, he of six wives who appealed to the Pope to help him rid or acquire some of them. When the Pope excommunicated Henry in 1538, Hal retaliated by confiscating the many large monasteries and nunneries of the Catholic Church and which by 1540 all 850 of them had been depleted of their assets, their ownership no longer theirs. The Church owned one-fourth of the cultivated land in England and Wales which was half their annual income so Henry not only obtained a huge amount of cash but also deprived the Church of enormous measures of money and property.

The Abbot of Glastonbury at that time, Richard Whiting, hoping to keep his abbey, sent the king a



huge pie into which was baked the title to twelve local manor houses, a kind of bribe, you see. He sent his steward, Thomas (Jack) Horner with the pie and on the way to London, "Jack" Horner accidentally put in his thumb and pulled out the plum of one of the manor houses, Mells Manor, to which he then had claim. It is still in the Horner family to this day.

The Horner's, however, claim that their ancestor **bought** the property, fair and square, they being very reasonable in price at the time of the take-over by the King. The rhyme gives a comical slant to that acquisition nearly five hundred years ago when the ruthless machinations between the political and the papacy were constant.

*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.
Up Jack got and home did trot,
As fast as he could caper.
He went to bed to mend his head,
With vinegar and brown paper.
Then Jill came in and she did grin,
To see Jack's paper plaster.
Her mother whipped her across her knee
For laughing at Jack's disaster.*

This rhyme is a brazen story of the pranks played Jack and Jill, allegedly an analogy for an intimate episode of a little "slap and tickle," so to speak, Jill losing her virginity and she, the girl, receiving the punishment as girls were prone to get. Jack was merely bandaged up with the traditional remedy, the plasters



apparently "badges of honor" to the other guys.

Jack and Jill were names used for centuries the same as we use John Doe and Jane Doe today ... Everybody, anybody, anonymous, so this rhyme was a moralistic tale warning about what happens when a couple "goes up the hill." Don't let the explanation color your enjoyment of the versifying ... Keep it nonsensical with the pleasant cadence. Scandinavian lore gives that the Moon or "Mani" came to Earth and stole a boy and girl, Hjuki and Bil who were taking water from a well. They can be seen yet today when the Moon is full with the bucket hung on a pole from their shoulders. Do you see it? I've never been able to find the **Man in the Moon!** Stretching a point again it was said to have had to do with gathering dew on May Day for beauty treatments. May Day also had to do with fertility rites in many cultures which leads right back to the first explanation!

*Jack Sprat could eat no fat
His wife could eat no lean.
And so betwixt them both,
They licked the platter clean.*

This Jack was thought to have been King Charles I of England who was married to Henrietta Maria who had very extravagant tastes and despised "lean times." Charles, or "Jack," if you will, requested Parliament to finance a war with Spain which they refused meaning he "got no fat." Between his upset with the failure of not going to war to acquire more possessions and pander to Henrietta's desire for luxury, he imposed a stiff war tax, made the commoner house the military and support them, as well as many other creative taxes which stunned the country ... "Licking the

platter clean."

The earliest version of this was found in 1639 which lends credibility to this explanation and in it Jack's wife is called Jill further use of the "anonymous." By using the common names, such as Jack and Jill instead of the royals or elite actual ones prevented many a beheading!

*Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses and all the King's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

Humpty-Dumpty wasn't necessarily a drink made of ale and brandy, nor a clumsy person of either gender. Or, at some ancient time,

Journal of the Times, Boston, in 1768 named "Yankee Doodle" the most popular of the day. A favorite among the British troops stationed throughout America which at that time was totally British, too!!! During the War of Independence, however, it became a "mock appraisal" of the American soldier's inability to dress, march or fight properly. Following the Battle at Bunker Hill, however, it was then adopted by our army who "threw it right back into the Brits faces," to their annoyance, reference states.

By the time we won our Independence many more verses had been created both here and in Britain, here comical and proud, over

there, satirical and put down. A play written in 1787 had the character relate that he knew 180 verses while "Tabitha at home knew the lot," meaning ... Hundreds.

Though written for flute or whistle originally, it became an entertaining game for children, people dancing or soldiers marching,

rhyming for the fun of it. The macaroni and pony, of course, central — pony then meaning the Yankees were too poor for a horse and macaroni, **totally** different.

The British youth movement in the 1770s were well-to-do dandies who took the Grand Tour of Europe and the Far East to gain in culture and education but mostly for its snob appeal. In other eras such swells, those groovy sorts(!) were called 'Beaus' or Fribbles, yes, Fribbles, but because those '70s kind of guys had brought home some exotic food which everyone adored, macaroni, so they called themselves the "Macaronis," **exclusive** sorts. Satirizing the hayseed Colonials then, they pictured them sticking a rooster feather in their cap (instead of a peacock feather) and we with lower standards, called it "macaroni" because we didn't know any better!

With some attention to irony, however, at the Surrender of Yorktown, as the British signed the papers of concession, it was said that Yankee Doodle was played throughout in mockery to its origins.

*Yankee Doodle keep it up,
Yankee Doodle Dandy,
Mind the music and the step
And with the girls be handy.*

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