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NURSERY RHYMES

There are lots of fluent foreign speakers of English who are totally unaware of multiple cultural connotations and associations a word or a phrase may carry for the native speaker. It appears that English as an international language, as a lingua franca in many walks of life, may be mastered to an enviously high level without paying attention to subtler features of its cultural setting. However, in the situation when a group of native speakers carry on a relaxed conversation, that type of the fluent foreign speaker will be either totally lost or considerably bored. The native speakers will appear to talk a code, a »shorthand«, using familiar words in strange contexts and making the conversation hard to follow let alone enjoy. Needless to say that the same experience repeats to that fluent speaker in reading literature, magazines, newspapers etc.

If one would like to help the learner to break the native's code one must find the access to certain of the admittedly countless sources of word or phrase connotations since it is these »additions« which contribute to the incomprehensibility of relaxed native speaker's exchanges. Connotations will vary with the social class or education of the native speakers and so will their sources, but there appear to be some sources which are common to all native speakers of English regardless of their social, educational and regional background. Among them — easily accessible — are the traditional nursery rhymes also known as Mother Goose Rhymes.

They are simple, sometimes meaningless, verse, sometimes mere rhythmic play with invented words (Hi diddle, diddle; A dillar, a dollar;), occasionally rhyming anecdotes (Jack and Jill), some apparently describing authentic events (Mary had a little lamb) and others talking about fairs, occupations, courting, weddings, death. The heroes are children, grown-ups and animals. Their authors are more often than not unknown and the dates of the verse vary. »While some were already ancient lore when Shakespeare was a boy, others are but second and third hand memories of songs first heard in Victorian music halls« (Opie p. 8)

From early childhood when they first hear them at home and at school, lines, phrases, words and characters seem to stick in English native speakers' minds ready for use and for reference. They are living folklore in the English language which links generations. Becoming familiar with these rhymes means coming a little closer to a full understanding of natural English.

It is the teacher's task to find the best way of presenting the rhymes. They may be used as pronunciation exercises or as a relaxation after a hard lesson. For one approach see Forum XV, Number 4, October 1977 pp 21 ff. There are literally hundreds of collections of nursery rhymes in print. The selection below follows the one in Forum XV, Number 4, October 1977, pp 35—38. Very useful to the teacher may prove the collection »The Puffin Book of Nursery Rhymes« by Iona and Peter Opie.

LITTLE BO-PEEP

Little Bo-peep has lost her sheep
And can't tell where to find them.
Leave them alone, and they
will¹ come home
Bringing their tails behind them.

LITTLE BOY BLUE

Little Boy Blue,
Come blow your horn;
The sheep's in the meadow,
The cow's in the corn.
Where's the little boy
That looks after the sheep?
He's under the haystack,
Fast asleep.

LADYBIRD, LADYBIRD

Ladybird, Ladybird,
Fly away home.
Your house is on fire,
Your children will burn.
Fly to the east,
Fly to the west,
Fly to the one you love the best.

A DILLAR, A DOLLAR

A dillar, a dollar,²
A ten o'clock scholar.
What makes you come so soon?
You used to come at ten o'clock,
But now you come at noon.

JACK AND JILL

Jack and Jill
Went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water.

Jack fell down
And broke his crown,³
And Jill came tumbling after.

LITTLE POLLY FLINDERS

Little Polly Flinders
Sat among the cinders,
Warming her pretty little toes.
Her mother came and caught her
And spanked her little daughter
For spoiling her nice new clothes.

LITTLE TOMMY TUCKER

Little Tommy Tucker
Sings for his supper.
What shall he eat?
White bread and butter.

How shall he cut it
Without any knife?
How shall he marry
Without any wife?

THE OLD WOMAN IN THE SHOE

There was an old woman
Who lived in a shoe.
She had so many children
She didn't know what to do.

She fed them some broth
Without any bread,
Then spanked them all soundly
And sent them to bed.

MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow;
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.

It followed her to school one day,
Which was against the rule;

1. *They will* may be contracted to *they'll*.
2. The reader should not try to find meaning in this line: it simply provides a sound and rhythm pattern. As far as we know, there is no real word *dillar*.

3. Here *crown* means "the topmost part of the head."

It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school.

HI, DIDDLE, DIDDLE

Hi, diddle, diddle,⁴
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 he spoon.

SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE

Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocketful of rye,
Four-and-twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened,
The birds began to sing;
Wasn't that a dainty dish
To set before the King!

The King was in his countinghouse,
Counting out his money;
The Queen was in the parlor,
Eating bread and honey;
The maid was in the garden,
Hanging out the clothes;
Along came a blackbird
And snipped off her nose!

MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY

Mary, Mary,
Quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells,
And cockleshells,
And pretty maids all in a row.

A TISKET, A TASKET

A tisket, a tasket,⁵
A green and yellow basket,

4. Like *A dillar, a dollar*, this line serves to introduce the rhythm and rhyme pattern.

5. Like *A dillar, a dollar* and *Hi, diddle, diddle*, this line simply introduces the rhythm and rhyme pattern. This verse forms the basis of a children's game: The children form a circle, facing inward; one of the children (said to be "it") skips around outside of the circle with a handkerchief in hand, as the verse is sung. He quietly drops the handkerchief behind one of the children, who then becomes "it" and must pick up the handkerchief and try to catch him before he is able to run the rest of the way around the circle and slip into the place vacated by the child behind whom he dropped the handkerchief.

I wrote a letter to my love
And on the way I dropped it.
I dropped it, I dropped it,
And on the way I dropped it.

THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

This is the house that Jack built.
This is the malt⁶
that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the rat
that ate the malt
that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the cat
that killed the rat
that ate the malt
that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the dog
that worried the cat
that killed the rat
that ate the malt
that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the cow with the crumpled horn
that tossed the dog
that worried the cat
that killed the rat
that ate the malt
that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the maiden all forlorn
that milked the cow with the crumpled horn
that tossed the dog
that worried the cat
that killed the rat
that ate the malt
that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the man all tattered and torn
that kissed the maiden all forlorn
that milked the cow with the crumpled horn
that tossed the dog
that worried the cat
that killed the rat
that ate the malt
that lay in the house that Jack built.

6. Notice how, in each verse, the noun and verb that represent new elements are emphatically stressed; *malt, lay; rat, ate; cat, killed; dog, worried; cow, tossed; etc.*

This is the priest all shaven and shorn
 that married the man all tattered and
 torn
 that kissed the maiden all forlorn
 that milked the cow with the crum-
 pled horn
 that tossed the dog
 that worried the cat
 that killed the rat
 that ate the malt
 that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the cock that crowed in the morn
 that waked the priest all shaven and
 shorn
 that married the man all tattered and
 torn
 that kissed the maiden all forlorn
 that milked the cow with the crum-
 pled horn
 that tossed the dog

that worried the cat
 that killed the rat
 that ate the malt
 that lay in the house that Jack built.

This is the farmer sowing his corn
 that kept he cock that crowed in the
 morn
 that waked the priest all shaven and
 shorn
 that married the man all tattered and
 torn
 that kissed the maiden all forlorn
 that milked the cow with the crum-
 pled horn
 that tossed the dog
 that worried the cat
 that killed the rat
 that ate the malt
 that lay in the house that Jack built.

Željka Horvat

CHANSONS FRANÇAISES ET RÉCITATIONS

Voilà quelques chansons françaises et récitations pour les enfants. Les plus nombreuses sont les comptines. Les autres chansons et récitations se prêtent aussi bien au jeu (Le furet, Un éléphant se balançait). On peut les mimer (Savez-vous planter les choux, Alouette, Frère Jacques, Meunier). On peut danser en les chantant (Sur le pont d'Avignon, La queue de mon chat) et on peut même faire de l'exercice rythmique en les récitant (Raton, raton, Une poule sur un mur).

Les chansons peuvent très bien servir à apprendre aux enfants les nombres (les comptines), les parties du corps (Alouette, Savez-vous planter les choux), les jours de la semaine (Bonjour, Madame Lundi), et les mois de l'an (Les mois).

LES CHANSONS

Monter sur un éléphant
 C'est haut, c'est haut.
 Monter sur un éléphant
 C'est haut, c'est effrayant.
 Monther sur deux éléphants... etc.
 Monter sur trois éléphants... etc.

Le Coucou

Dans la forêt profonde, on entend le
 coucou.
 Du haut de son grand chêne, il répond
 au hibou.
 Coucou! Coucou! Coucou! Hibou! Cou-
 cou! (bis)