

doubtedly wholesome and often amusing though it is, *Quincy Rumpel* is not a comfortable read. But its virtues suggest that Waterton is a writer worth watching.

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MOTHER (CANADIAN) GOOSE

Hickory dickory duck, Pat Patterson & Joe Weissmann. Greedy de Pencier Books, 1981. 29 pp. \$8.95 cloth. ISBN 0-919872-72-7; *Jelly belly*, Dennis Lee. Illus. Juan Wijngaard. Macmillan of Canada. 64 pp. \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7715-9776-2; *Mother Goose*, Sharon, Lois & Bram. Illus. Maryann Kovalski. Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. 96 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88894-487-X.

In that indispensable volume, *The Oxford book of nursery rhymes*, Iona and Peter Opie theorize about the effect on babies and children of the very first verses we present to them: the dandling rhymes, the tickle rhymes, the counting chants, the taunts, the nonsense sing-songs. All these Mother Goose rhymes lift the child into an awareness of his own body, and into the delight of rhythm and rhyme sound. These rhymes also have a second function — they preserve cultural continuity. They begin the fitting of the child into the tradition, the history, the value system of his social world.

Canadian babies join an English-speaking world when they bounce to the rhythm of "Ride a cock horse" or giggle at the differentiations of "This little piggy goes to market." But Canadian parents have sometimes felt nonplussed by the inappropriateness, the inaccessibility, of some of the traditional verses. For a high-rise child who has never seen, and will never see, a stile or a castle, or for the supermarket kid who will not be served pease porridge or a Christmas pie, the old rhymes baffle as well as they tickle.

There are three ways out of this dilemma. First, replace the old verses with cognate new ones, in the way of Dennis Lee's *Jelly belly*, with for instance that marvellous here-and-now substitute for the "little piggy" tickle: "Pizza, pickle, pumpernickel/ My little guy deserves a tickle;/ One for his toes, one for his nose/ And one for his tummy where the hot-dog goes!" Or, second, make Canadian versions of the old rhymes, with additions and spoofs of the older verses: this is the path taken in *Hickory dickory duck*. (Old King Cole's fiddlers are augmented when "a tot with a tuba gave two toots/ as he squeezed through a crack in the floor".) Then there is the third way — offer a blend. Sharon, Lois and Bram, who are known across the country for their rollicking concert performances where children in the audience are drawn into the fun of the

verses, have published their own *Mother Goose*. Here, unchanged, unadapted, are the old verses, the link with tradition and mysterious continuity. And here too are the nursery rhymes that the ebullient trio have concocted: “One elephant went out to play . . .” (with its French version as a first induction into immersion), “Skinnamarink,” and a host of other “new traditional” rhymes.

All three of these Canadian versions of *Mother Goose* are best used in the way the Opies recommended, by parents or babysitters who know the rhymes by heart and can carry them directly to the little listener, with gestures, and bouncings, and tickles. But all three can also be used by the more timid as a reading experience. Then the reading is of course enhanced for the pre-reader by the illustrations. Here the three books would be ranked differently: *Jelly belly*, charming to the observant adult, with its subtle recurrent motifs in wallpaper, landscape, and animals, strikes a slightly foreign note for Canadian children, in its tidiness of hedged gardens, its trimness and detail that seem slightly old-world (fig. 1). The Sharon Lois and Bram book has energetic, whimsical pictures, but again there are odd notes — a little boy in a sailor suit, bigger boys with braces (fig. 2). (It also of course has valuable song-lines and musical accompaniment). The pictures in *Hickory dickory duck* have an overcrowded vigour, and here the overcrowding acts to stimulate the child who has to look for answers to puzzles in the rhymes (fig.3).

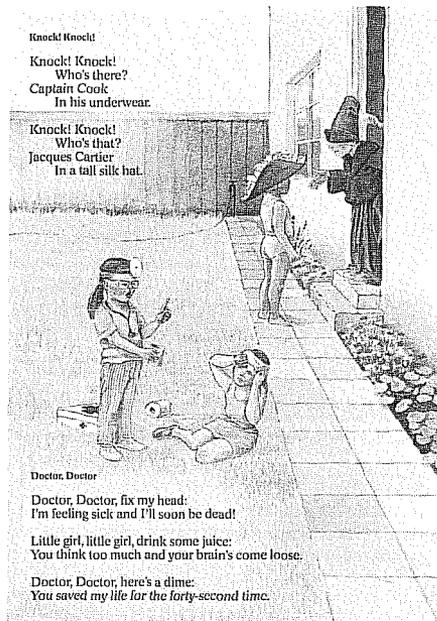


Fig. 1

