



THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

This issue of the **Newsletter** delves into the past - with memories of Echuca Village in the 1950s and of 'schoolboy rhymes' from 1919. Closer to the minute, December is proving a good month for children's folklore. The Children's Museum of Victoria will follow its highly successful opening exhibition **Everybody** with an exhibition on **Play**; we are pleased to have had a hand in its preparation. December 7th marks the launching by the Victorian Minister for Education, the Hon. Joan Kirner, of June Factor's Bicentennially-funded book on children's folklore, **Captain Cook Chased a Chook**.

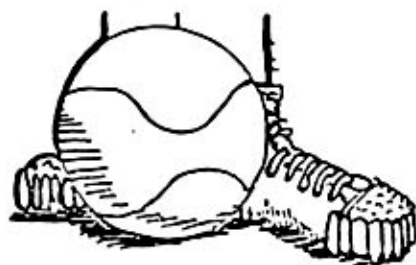
Less pleasing is to learn from Brian Sutton-Smith via the Association for the Study of Play's Newsletter (Summer 1988) that the Scrooges of this world are still hard at work undermining children's traditional play. From about 1970, schools in Loudon County in Northorn Virginia instituted daily physical education classes and in many schools 'recess' disappeared. As the result of a public campaign

initiated by Rosemary Alley (whose daughter had asked 'what's recess?'), each class in Loudon County now has fifteen minutes each day for recess. Brian Sutton-Smith writes 'remember when we had 15 minutes in the morning, a whole lunch hour, 12 to 1, and then could stay after school at three for another hour if we wanted to?'. Luckily most Australian schools still have an afternoon recess as well, but some are still hindering traditional play such as by forbidding chalking of hopscotch patterns on the asphalt. It is worth directing teachers back to Lindsay and Palmer's **Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children** (AGPS 1981). This now classic study by two physical education lecturers clearly indicated the value of traditional play for children's physical and social development. Their list of recommendations begins **Teachers should encourage children to play spontaneous games ...**

June Factor
Gwenda Davey



Rebound



From Erik Kaas Nielsen

Dear Editors,

In your Newsletter (June 1988, No.14) you ask for suggestions for coming issues of your magazine. I think it would be very interesting if it was possible to hear something about the clapping songs of Australian children with special regard to the melodies. The clapping craze started in Denmark about 1975 though some or a few songs were performed with clapping movements already in the 1950's and 60's. But many of the clapping songs of today are also known in Scandinavia, The British Isles, Germany, U.S.A. etc. and perhaps they are also known in Australia.

A unique example of an old clapping song is used at least since the turn of the century, but the texts and the melody is known since the 18th century (1784). It is about a quarrel between a husband and his wife on the question: Who is master of the house? It ends with the husband falling on his knees after he had been thrashed by his wife. He cries and promises to be obedient and do everything his wife orders him to do. However it seems more to be a mother-child-tradition than strictly a part of the child-child-tradition. The song is called Manden og konen satte sig ned.

Manden og konen satte sig ned



From: Feg vil synge en sang.
 (Children's songs and ditties ...
 past and present) by Erik Kaas
 Nielson, Copenhagen, 1986)

Erik Nielson has sent us a number of Danish children's clapping rhymes, for which we are grateful. We will publish an article on Australian children's clapping rhymes in the next issue of the ACFN.



from Edel Wignell

Dear June and Gwenda,

I enjoyed Issue No.14, and wish to contribute to the naming of marbles, as requested in the article "Blood noses, Cat's eyes and Dr Spock", pp. 11, 12.

In 1986 Macmillan of Australia commissioned a book, What's Your Hobby?, for children 8-10 years for the "Southern Cross" Series. I wrote to children in every state, and

received 200 replies. As well, I interviewed children, and read copies of Kids' Times.

Below is a short article which I found in Kids' Times. It adds to your list of names for marbles, but omits their appearance. Perhaps someone can describe them.

MARBLES!!

by Elizabeth Gardner

At school we play marbles. It is a lot of fun. One day we had a marbles competition.

Four people came from every class. They played games and the person who won the most games was the champion of the competition.

This was Nathan Matthews. The marbles are called Kings, Spaceys, Tints, blue Moon, Galaxian, Cocky Cage, Chinas, Tom, Cleary, Normal, Blue Moon Galaxian, Ball Bearing, Pee Wee.

I have got about 20 or more marbles.



Neighbouring schools, different jokes

This small research study was undertaken by JULIE PAUL, a Graduate Diploma student in Child Development at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in 1988. It raises some interesting questions about contemporary children's verbal lore.

Purpose of Study

To collect samples of jokes, rhymes and riddles from primary school children.

Methodology

After having an interview with the Principals and gaining their approval, I visited

two local primary schools to collect samples of jokes, rhymes and riddles.

I visited Year 4 at North Fitzroy Primary School on 25.7.88 and Year 4/5 at North Carlton Primary School on 26.7.88. Both sessions were for 45 minutes, starting with an explanation of who I was and why I was there.

I then talked about various types of jokes, giving samples of parodies of nursery rhymes, riddles and knock-knock jokes. The children were eager to contribute more examples. The children then either wrote down their jokes, told them to me as I wrote them down, or spoke into a tape recorder.

At the end of the session I played back some of the tape for the children to listen to, and will also send them copies of all their contributions for further follow-up work.

Results

I collected approximately 100 samples of jokes, riddles and rhymes from approximately 50 children. I only recorded each joke once within each classroom as there was some duplication within each classroom although there was not one case of duplication across the two settings. I found this surprising as the schools are located in adjacent suburbs. The children from the North Fitzroy school are mainly from upper middle-class professional families, whereas many of the North Carlton children are from the near-by high-rise Housing Commission flats, so maybe differing social class may account for lack of interaction between the two groups.

Some of the jokes and rhymes were original compositions, but the majority were heard from other children, or had been read in Far Out, Brussel Sprout, Unreal, Banana Peel or All Right, Vegemite, as the children were all familiar with these books and had them in their school libraries.

Comments

At North Carlton Primary School, I had been introduced as taking a 'poetry' session, and the children had been encouraged to think of and compose original rhymes and jokes, hence there are a number of original compositions. These are immediately obvious by their lack of rhythm and metre. Some of the rhymes and jokes were of dubious humorous value, but I transcribed them all from the tape or from their writings, as I had undertaken to send each class a copy of their contributions, so I felt obliged to include all the examples that had been contributed.

The sample included knock-knock jokes, 'vulgar rhymes', riddles, jokes and rhymes. Some of the rhymes showed the long history of folklore, as shown by this example:

Tit-a-tat, who is that? Only Gemme the
pussy cat.
What do you want? A bottle of milk.
Where's your money? In my pocket.
Where's your pocket? I forgot it.
Go, you fool, as fast as you can.

(This was spoken into the tape while I was talking with the other children and I did not have a chance to follow this up, but judging by the sing-song voice of the girl, and the last line of the rhyme, I assume this to be a skipping rhyme.) This is a variant of a rhyme which Factor (1980) discusses, linking it to a recent English rhyme which the Opies trace back to a favourite children's song recorded in 1774.

As well as showing continuity, the sample also shows how riddles change to adapt to new circumstances. One riddle collected:

Why did the computer cross the road?
Because it was programmed by a chicken.

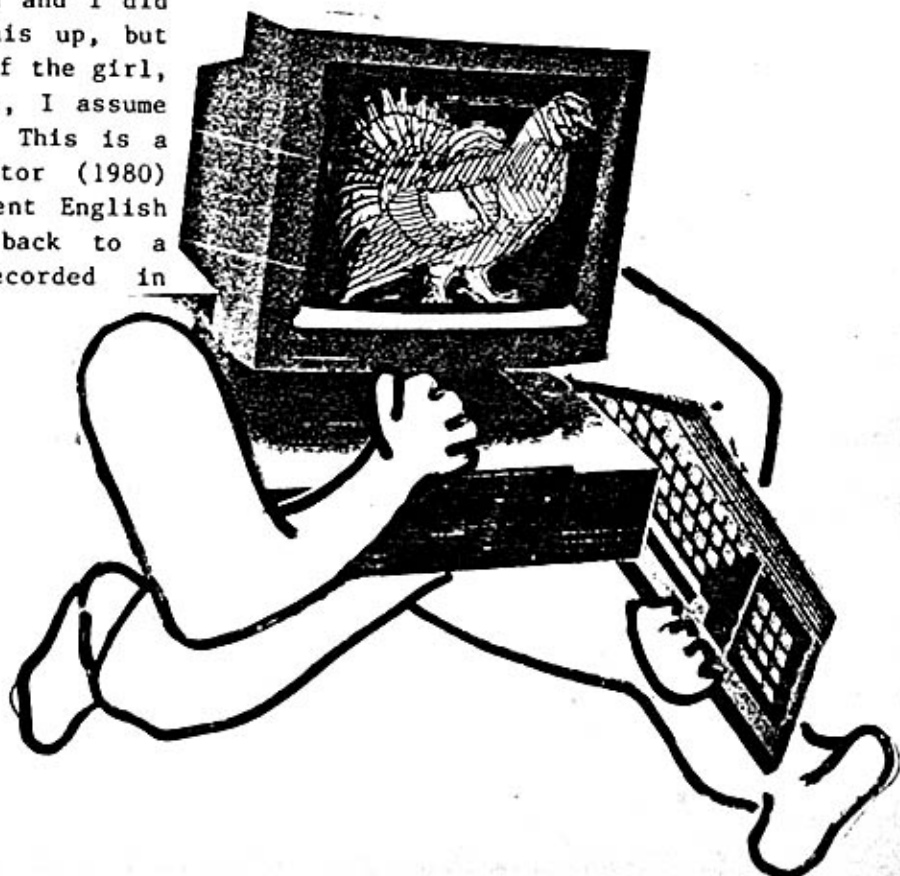
assumes prior knowledge of the well-known

Why did the chicken cross the road?
To get to the other side.

and updates this to suit the fast-moving times of modern-day children.

The vulgar rhymes that were collected on the whole seemed to be used by the children to say words that would not usually be used in conversations with adults (e.g. bum, poo) and were generally a way of children exploring these taboos:

I'm Pop-eye the sailor man,
I live in a caravan,
I sleep on the floor with my bum out
the door.
I'm Pop-eye the sailor man.



The children were very keen to contribute jokes and riddles and eager to hear themselves on tape and to read those of their classmates. I intend sending a copy of ones collected to each class, which I am sure will lead to further sharing and reading together - hence I saw the exercise as useful both for me and for the children.

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☐☐ Julie Paul

Graduate diploma in Australian children's folklore and literature at Melbourne College of Advanced Education

In 1988 the first students have been admitted to a new course at Melbourne College of Advanced Education: the Graduate Diploma in Australian Children's Folklore and Literature. The course is run over a two year period, and for two evenings a week, from 4.30 to 7.30, subjects such as Australian children's folklore, Australian children's literature, Culture and society, Childhood in Australia, Popular culture, and Research methodology are offered by some of Australia's leading authorities in the fields of folklore and literature.

So far there has been most interesting work done by these students. Examples are: an examination of radio for children since World War II, the development of the Victorian school paper, the representation of flora and fauna and the portrayal of family life in children's books in Australia, Australian poetry for children, a survey of children's responses to a prominent Australian author, and a study of games played by children in Melbourne. Many other areas of interest have also been researched.

The course has been approved by the Victorian Ministry of Education for study and upgrading purposes for primary and post-primary teachers. The clientele, however, is not necessarily education based. Community arts and recreation workers, creative arts, media and theatre workers, librarians, music educators and museum specialists would find it a rewarding experience.

A prerequisite to undertaking the course is the completion of a degree or diploma or equivalent.

A new intake of students will occur in 1989. Enquiries should be directed in the first instance to Melbourne CAE's Information Office, Telephone: (03) 341 8624.

☐☐ Stella Lees

The lore of the land

Schoolyard games at Echuca Village school in the 1950s

Brandy: This was played in the area of the schoolyard, between where the old dunnies were and the shelter-shed (since demolished) about the centre of the main playing area as it now exists. Parallel lines were drawn approximately 25 metres apart. The majority of the contestants were in the area between the lines and had to dodge a ball thrown by a child at each line. To be hit meant - OUT. If you caught the ball one gained an extra life. The object being to stay in as long as possible.

Charlie Over the Water: This game had as its basis a rhyme -

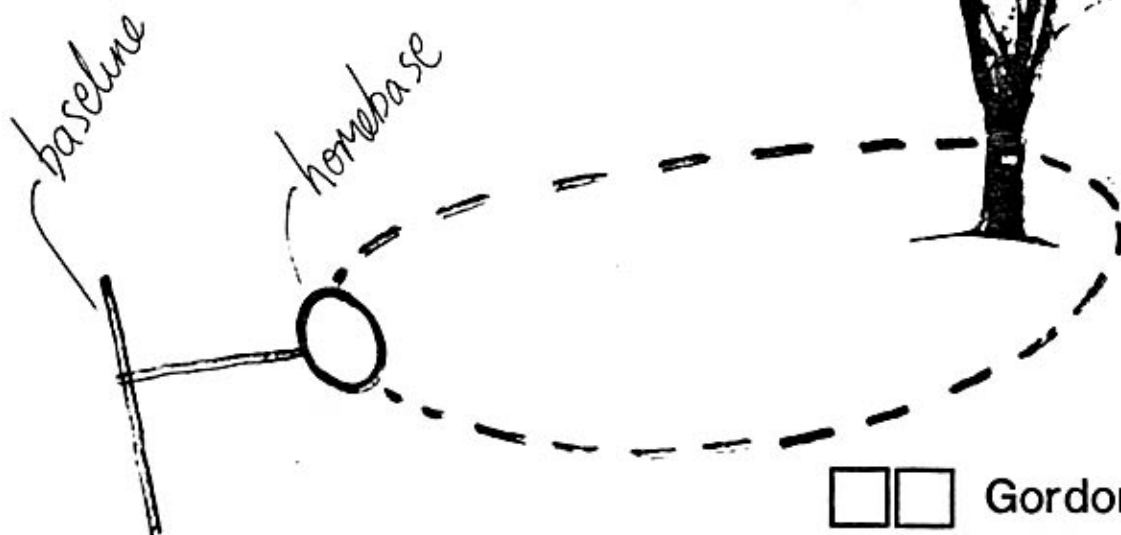
"Charlie over the water,
Charlie over the sea,
Charlie broke the teapot,
And blamed it on to me."

Two teams gathered on opposite ends of the shelter-shed and threw a ball over the building. If the ball was caught, the catcher would call out the rhyme then both teams would run to each other's end of the building. If the ball was thrown and it hit a contestant that person then became part of that team. The team with the largest numbers being the winners.

Film stars: This was a game of two teams who stood behind a baseline which was divided in half and which projected a home base, as per the diagram. A member from one team stood in the home base and said the initials of a prominent and not so prominent film star. If the name was eventually guessed the person in the base took off with the "know-all" in pursuit who in turn could be chased by a member of the opposite team.* The object being to tag the person and then make it safely back to the base. All this chasing took place around the Kurrajong tree which still stands.

There was much scouring of the Women's Weekly and other weekly magazines to find the names of the film stars.

* That member had to repeat the name before he could take off in pursuit.



Schoolboy rhymes of 40 years ago

Reprinted from The Bulletin, June 3 1959.
Readers comments are welcomed.

Although I often overhear the conversations of schoolboys, it seems to me that, possibly driven out by the talkies and the wireless, most of the rhymes and songs that were current in my own schooldays, 40 years ago, have fallen out of knowledge, at least in my own State, if not elsewhere.

Certainly it seems that one rhyme that will not die is the end-of-term doggerel:

Ten more days and we shall be
Out of the gates of misery.
No more Latin, no more French,
No more sitting on a hard, hard bench.

However, the fact that "mensa" is Latin for "table" seems no longer celebrated in that old reflection of struggles with the first declension:

Mensa, mensa, mensam.
A table full of raspberry jam.

And although the old mnemonic rhyme,

Sixteen-hundred and sixty-five,
Half London left alive;
Sixteen-hundred and sixty-six,
All London burnt like sticks.

seems to linger on, possibly kept alive by history-masters, it is a long time since I came across any secondhand school book that had, written on the fly-leaf, the warning

Black is the raven, blacker the rook,
But blackest the crook who pinches
this book.

The failure of that rhyme to hold its popularity shocks me as much as to be told by a junior French-master that no longer do boys who are supposed to say "Four, sir," in French ("Quatre, monsieur") shout "Cat manure!"

The old rhymes of abuse seem to have gone completely. The threat of tale-bearing no longer brings a cry of

Tell 'er, tell 'er.
Buy a new umbrella,
And chuck her down the cellar.

No longer, either, is the tale-bearer treated to the ribald shout that used to begin "Tell tale tit ..." Also, I recently found two 10-year-olds who had never heard a display of ill-temper in a fellow-student greeted by shouts of

Cross-patch,
Lift the latch.
And let your neighbors in.

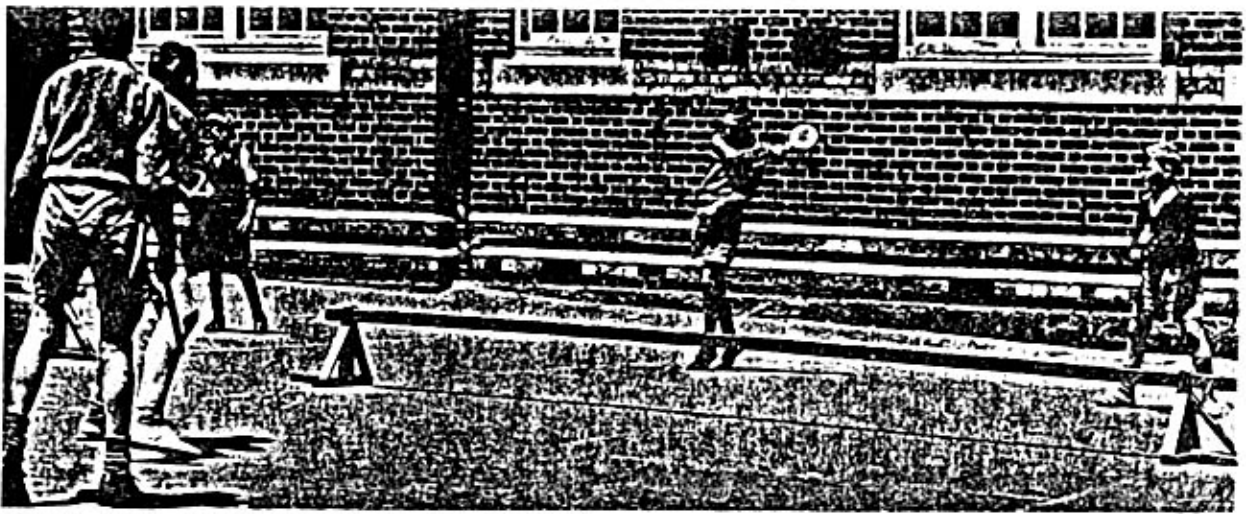
(I can still no more see the sequence of thought in that one than I could when I first heard it, round about 1918.)

There were two cries, only one of which was rhymed, that fell out of use with changing conditions. One was the shout of "Willy, willy, whip behind," given when an unpopular boy was seen to be having a free "willy", unknown to the driver of the back of a cart or a trolley. The other was the race-conscious chant that followed at a safe distance behind the jogging backs of Chinese hawkers:

Ching-chong-Chinaman,
Muchee, muchee sad,
Ching-chong-Chinaman,
Muchee, muchee mad.

And, of course, advertising has made the small boys of today so well informed regarding the intimate garments of girls and women that they would probably think it kids' stuff to chant derisively to a girl whose underwear they had happened to glimpse:

Poppy show, poppy show;
How far up do your bloomers go?



One rhyme that was current in my boyhood reflected 1914-18 sentiment regarding the respective national colors of England and Germany. It was the odd

Red, white and black,
The dirty laughing-jack;
Red, white and blue,
The lovely cockatoo.

The topical nature of that verse made it almost inevitable that it would disappear from use. However, I find it hard to account for the passing of the strange rhymes that gave our youthful hearts the satisfactory sensation of feeling ourselves to be foul-mouthed swearers. There was:

Once upon a time there were three Jews,
Who all went down by train and tram
To live in a place call Amster-
Ssh ... ssh ... ssh ... naughty word.

Also:

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Jews,
Sold his wife for a pair of shoes.
When the shoes began to wear
Nebuchadnezzar began to swear.
When the swear began to stop
Nebuchadnezzar bought a shop.
When the shop began to sell
Nebuchadnezzar went to H-e-l-l-l.

(The fact that Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, not of the Jews, didn't worry me; however, I was puzzled by that final letter in the word "Hell". Apparently there were some things to which I thought poetic licence should not apply.)
And again:

There was an old women, as I've heard
tell,
Who went and died and went to ... well.
It might have been England, it might
have been France,
But it wasn't Heaven by any chance.

(Needless to say, the old woman in the first line of that one often had to give way, the name of an unpopular master being inserted in place of the reference to her.) Allied to this type of rhyme was the "Gutz's Grace", which always made us laugh, no matter how often it was repeated:

Two, four, six, eight,
Tuck in, don't wait.

There was also that parody of a child's bedtime prayer:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John,
Guard the bed that I lie on.
One to watch and one to pray.
And one to keep the fleas away.

What the fourth evangelist was doing at the time I never found out. (A variant of this is still current, the second line reading "Hold the horse while I get on.") Oh, yes, and talking about beds, there was the rhymed saying "Snug as a bug in a rug", which I'm glad to say is still popular.



Some of the repetitive songs were probably composed by adults long before they were adopted by schoolboys - they didn't carry the true schoolboy stamp of youthful exuberance. Among them was "Obadiah":

Said the young Obadiah to the old
Obadiah,
"Obadiah, Obadiah, I'm so dry."
Said the old Obadiah to the young
Obadiah,
"Obadiah, Obadiah, so am I."

That one was often sung, as was the roaring
"Lord Nelson", which went to the tune of
"Auld Lang Syne":

Lord Nelson was
Lord Nelson was
Lord Nelson was
Lord Nelson.
Lord Nelson was
Lord Nelson was
Lord Nelson was
Lord Nelson.

(The last "Nelson" was always cut off very short.)

There was an old woman and she could do ...

Another favorite for singing was:

While the old man was chasing his son
round the room
He was chasing his son round the room.
And while he was chasing his son round
the room
He was chasing his son round the room.

And of course, there was the bawdy

There was an old woman and she could
do,
She could do, she could do.

These two lines were sung over and over until someone asked what the old woman could do, whereupon he would be told, in a line which concluded "... and so can you."

Among the rhymed games that adults expected us to play at parties was "Sheep, sheep, come home." I still occasionally hear the chorus:

Wolf's gone to Devonshire
And won't be home for seven year,
So run, sheep, run.

but rarely since my own boyhood have I heard that other,

Here comes an old woman from Botany
Bay,
And what have you got to give her
today.

(In fact, I've even forgotten how the game was played.)

Grown-ups, needless to say, did not approve of that far more popular party-chant,

Ice-cream and jelly,
Good for the belly.

A popular rhyme that came to us from adults was:

"Mother, may I go to bathe?"
"Yes, my darling daughter;
Hang your clothes on yonder bush,
But don't go near the water."

I don't think it was the manifest ridiculousness of this rhyme that made it such a favorite with us. To us it was not ridiculous; we saw in it a clear demonstration of that tyrannical illogicality of adults which makes so difficult the lives of children. It was probably our unspoiled child's view of the world, too, that made a debased version of "The Great Rock Candy Mountains" popular with us. I think that to us a land in which no one had to change his socks, and where everyone could drink freely at the lemonade-springs, was a true embodiment of everything Heaven should be.

There were a number of counting-rhymes, some of which, I hear, are still in use. Of the respectable ones, I can remember only "Eenie-meenie". This was used when there were, say, too many boys present to share in a distribution of stolen oranges. At each syllable of the rhyme the speaker would point to a different boy:

Eenie-meenie, miney, mo,
Catch a nigger by the toe.
If he hollows let him go,
Eenie-meenie, miney, mo,
And out you go.

Whichever boy was pointed to at the word "go" would be excluded from the distribution of the treasures, and the process would be repeated until the number was reduced to the appropriate point. The counting was supposed to be done in strict rotation, but a skilful and unscrupulous reciter often managed to protect the interests of himself and his mates. There was also the unpleasant

Ink, pink, pen and ink;
I smell a great big stink,
And it comes from Y-O-U.

This was used as a sort of magical method of revealing who had produced a certain kind of unpleasantness which always raises mirth in immature minds.

Nowadays I rarely see the rhymes that we used to scribble on the walls of public lavatories.

Of course, I haven't much chance of discovering if many of the sooty rhymes of my youth are still remembered. However, when I unthinkingly quoted the first line of "Mary and the Magpie" in front of a couple of lads the other day, and their faces showed no flicker of recognition, I assumed that even that old classic has fallen out of use.

I don't know if the poem we used to attribute to Byron is still going. It began:

On Shooter's Hill so high and steep
A fair young maid lay down to sleep,
And as she lay in sweet repose
A playful breeze blew up her clothes.

I suspect that two old favorites, "Can't you see the blisters?" and "When we were boys at school," have dropped from use. However, I gather that many of the old adult limericks still circulate among schoolboys.

They may also still cherish "Our old moke is a funny old bloke."

I feel that "Fisherman, fisherman" was perhaps too long to live on through the years. It had a catchy tune, and opened with two innocuous stanzas:

Fisherman, fisherman, fishing by the
sea,
Have you any fish that you can sell to
me,
With a hi-tiddleley-hi-ti, come along o'
me,
Hi-tiddleley-hi-ti, Johnson.

He bought a fish for which he paid a
cent,
He put it in his pocket, and home he
went,
With a hi-tiddleley-hi-ti, come along o'
me,
Hi-tiddleley-hi-ti, Johnson.

There were several long ones, too, about sailors. There was "The Fair Young Maiden and Bollocky Bill," and one that described the betrayal of another maiden, whose seducer told her that if the incident led to the birth of a son she was to "dress him in bell-bottoms and a little coat of blue."



I imagine that our old secret language, "ichy-way oz-way oken-spay ike-lay iss-thay" (i.e., "which was spoken like this") has gone, and the other day I found a juvenile audience none of whom knew the formula

YYUR
YYUB
ICUR
YY4ME

which is, decoded:

Too wise you are,
Too wise you be,
I see you are
Too wise for me.

However, I hope that some of the old parodies still enliven the after-school hours of lads today. For my money the bobby-dazzler among them all was:

Oh, dear, what can the matter be,
Three old ladies locked in the lavatory
...

Ah, well - who knows - the falling out of use of these childhood rhymes may have a beneficial effect on the adult poetry of the future. At present many poets of what are thought to be mature years compose their poetry using the forms used by the schoolboy lyricists. Juvenile verse of the type we have been discussing, also, can have an effect on adult speech, perhaps even on grown-up thought-processes. About

10 years ago some latter-day lower-school Herrick composed a lyric that went almost like this:

See you later,
Chip potater.
Burn your tail on the radiator,
And freeze your nose in the Kelvinator.

A few years later the press of the world published the thrilling news that the members of an overseas smart-set were demonstrating their sophistication and originality of mind by saying to each other,

See you later,
Alligator.

Gosh, how the kids must have sneered to see a third-form expression of their obsession with rhyme being so debased! And think of the effect of the plagiarism on the juvenile author of the original! Why, it may even have caused some trauma that has stilled forever the jingling voice of one who would otherwise have developed into an A.D. Hope of years to come.

□□ Ian Mudie

The Ormond College Initiation ceremony (a mock Irish wake)

The rituals of childhood sometimes blend into those of adolescence and young adulthood.

At university residential colleges throughout the world, new students are traditionally expected to undergo some form of initiation ritual.

This is an account of such a ritual at Ormond College, the University of

Melbourne, during the late 1940s. We would be interested to hear from other readers of their initiation experiences.

This ceremony was the culmination of the initiation period, during which the Ormond freshman had to learn the history of the College, the Club rules, and details of every resident of the college, who numbered between 150 and 200 in the period I was there.

The final ceremony took place in the evening. The initiates, clad only in loin cloths and daubed with grease paint to resemble barbarians, gathered behind the main party which consisted of the Bishop, usually the tallest initiate, his acolytes and the pall bearers who carried on a bier the corpse of Mickey, usually the smallest freshman.

Carrying lighted candles, the procession made it's way round the top floor of the quadrangular building, down the stairs, round the first floor, down the stairs and round the ground floor, watched by the silent "Gentlemen", the initiated members of the Student Club. As they wended their way they sang the first three verses of The Mickey Song:

THE MICKEY SONG

Did you ever think as the hearse
 rolled by,
It won't be long before you and I
Are going along that same black track,
And won't be thinking of coming back.

Now poor Miss brown passed by last
 week,
The worms are eating her damask cheek,
And where she lifted her dimpled chin
The worms crawl out and the worms
 crawl in.

Now Mickey has gone the same sad way,
The worms are turning him fast to clay,
Though rotten he be with putrid smell,
We surely hope he's not in ----- !

(There was a firm taboo on the initiates voicing the obvious final word of this verse.)

This dirge was repeated as the procession made it's slow way round the College, and then entered the huge common room where the Bishop, acolytes and bearers of the corpse gathered and a mock funeral service in dog Latin was enacted.

The following two verses were then sung by the gathered initiates:

We're sore to lose you Mickey dear,
You sure could flick the trisk,
And now you have gone below,
Well things don't seem so brisk.

We hope to meet you Mickey dear,
Upon the other side,
And if you have a flask my lad,
We won't be sad you died.

After some more of the mock funeral service, the "corpse" rose from the bier and rushed out of the darkened room.

The initiates then sang the final verse:

Now Mickey has come to life again,
To live once more in this world of
 pain,
A touch of the spirit he loved so well
Has brought him back from the gates of

At this point the watching senior initiated members of the College shouted in unison:

"HELL"

This was the end of the ceremony; the lights were turned on and the new initiated members of the students club were congratulated by their fellow Club members and invited to supper.



☐ ☐ Dr David Grounds

Ring-a-Rosy

RING-A-ROSY: Traditional games and rhymes for children in English, Turkish and Vietnamese

This 30-minute video-tape was produced in Melbourne by Gwenda Davey and Heather Russell with financial assistance from the Music Board of the Australia Council. Copies can be purchased for \$15 from:

Australian Children's Folklore Publications
Institute of Early Childhood Development
(Melbourne CAE)
4 Madden Grove
KEW VIC 3101

From The Boy's Week-Day Book published in London by the Religious Tract Society in 1842.

Skipping, and peg-top, and cup and ball, and leap-frog, and prison-base, and flying kites, and marbles, and sliding, and twenty other games, offered excellent pastimes ...

It would be difficult to say which of all boyish games affords the greatest degree of amusement, for whether boys are engaged at hop-step-and-jump, bait the bear, or drawing the oven; whether they are at full speed at hare and hounds, stag-waining, or in running races, they appear equally happy!



This issue of the ACFN was typed by SHARON CHARLTON and designed and illustrated by DON OLIVER.

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