

## OF DECEPTION AND DOGMA: THE DELUSIVE HISTORY BEHIND NURSERY RHYMES

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**ABSTRACT:** *“This self-deceit, this fatal weakness of mankind, is the source of half the disorders of human life.”* (Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments.) Children’s literature is essentially a literature of deception. Just as Aesop’s Fables preach moral truths in the guise of fables, many nursery rhymes born of contemporary socio economic turbulence, bespeaks of trauma, murders, gore, sexuality or death through the apparent lucidity of nursery rhymes. Just as Rossetti’s Ferry Me across the River may be read as a deep philosophical poem on Death and the Final Passage over the river Lethe, her Goblin Market (often read as a children’s rhyme) bespeaks of homosexuality and hides a feminist subtext. From Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, often included in the domain of children’s fiction to Philip Pullman’s Dark Matter Trilogy for children permeates with its re-readings of Anti- Christian ideology, it is hardly surprising that most nursery rhymes have meanings deeper than the reach of their intended audience. So the question arises-

*“How and why do people tell a lie? One useful approach to addressing this question is to elucidate the neural substrates for deception. Recent conceptual and technical advances in functional neuroimaging have enabled exploration of the psychology of deception more precisely in terms of the specific neuroanatomical mechanisms involved. A growing body of evidence suggests that the prefrontal cortex plays a key role in deception, and some researches have recently emphasised the importance of other brain regions, such as those responsible for emotion and reward. However, it is still unclear how these regions play a role in making effective decisions to tell a lie”* (Nobuhito, Abe).

How the Brain Shapes Deception. Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, US) But deception arises with a need for concealment, here, in the case of nursery rhymes, often to hide the more obnoxious dimensions of the truth. An obvious choice is to tell an outright lie, but it is also possible to deceive others by avoiding the truth, obfuscating the truth, exaggerating the truth, or casting doubt on the truth. Just as these processes are useful in deceiving others, they can also be useful in deceiving the self. Why would people deceive themselves? What is the mental architecture that enables the same person to be both deceiver and deceived? How does self-deception manifest itself psychologically? And how far do its roots travel into nursery rhymes are some questions that intend to be addressed in this paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Children’s Literature, Nursery Rhymes, London Fire, Black Death, Slave Trade, Paedophilia, Medieval prostitution, Slave Trade.

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## INTRODUCTION

Metaphors, similes or symbolism is a cornerstone of literature. And nursery rhymes, being an elemental part of literature are no exception of it. And this symptom is evident not just in West, but all over the world. Whether be it the Itsuki Lullaby of Japan, which speaks of Genji-Heike War, or the Bengali rhyme which tells the story of Bargi Raids or the folk tales of Romania and Czechoslovakia and the Baltic Regions like The Azaran Bulbul that bespeaks of the country's rich historical past. Both in Europe and America such trends were streamed through ages until taking the final avatar as we know those of now. From Jack and Jill to London Bridge is Falling Down, almost most of the familiar and popular poems which are sung by innocent children bear toxic scars of history. Mutated and evolved through centuries in orally, they were first began to be recorded in the 16th century, yet they had to wait several centuries more before put into a collection titled Tommy Thumb's Song Book and a sequel, Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book (1744). Yet it took several centuries more before scholars probed into the deeper meaning of the poems, hence discovering the dark realm concealed within the gleaming surface. In modern age, though often laid under the scalpel of 'political correctness' and 'social justice', these rhymes continue to bear the lamentations and wound of the anonymous masses.

As Lina Eckenstein states "*The study of folk-lore has given a new interest to much that seemed insignificant and trivial. Among the unheeded possessions of the past that have gained a fresh value are nursery rhymes. A nursery rhyme I take to be a rhyme that was passed on by word of mouth and taught to children before it was set down in writing and put into print. The use of the term in this application goes back to the early part of the nineteenth century. In 1834 John Gawler, afterwards Bellenden Ker, published the first volume of his Essay on the Archaeology of Popular English Phrases and Nursery Rhymes, a fanciful production. Prior to this time nursery rhymes were usually spoken of as nursery songs. The interest in these "unappreciated trifles of the nursery," as Rimbault called them, was aroused towards the close of the eighteenth century. If we put some prominent and widely popular nursery poems and dissect them thoroughly, we will be able to find such stunning gems and meanings which have remained secret to us even though being under the plain sight.*

The Complete Version of Ye Three Blind Mice is a children's book illustrated by W. Ivimey and published by Frederick Warne & Co. If we examine the lyrics:

*Three blind mice. Three blind mice.  
See how they run. See how they run.  
They all ran after the farmer's wife,  
Who cut off their tails with a carving knife,  
Did you ever see such a sight in your life,  
As three blind mice?*

The tale tells the adventures of three mischievous mice which eventually ends up in tragedy. They are chased by a farmer's wife from the house and into a bramble bush, causing them blindness. Not just that, consequently the 'butcher's wife' cuts off their tails as the complete version incorporates the original verse. However as mentioned, the origin story goes deeper than mere rhyme of animal abuse. According to researchers and critics, the actual rhyme originated from the actual historical event of burning of three Protestants priests, which was

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ordered by the radical Catholic queen Mary I, also known for her atrocities as Bloody Mary. The poem may be summarised as one of those remaining evidence of horrifying catholic-protestant conflict.

However these rhymes are not only structured within the boundaries of religious conflict, but on certain level it also gives us accurate account of socio-economic conditions. 'There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe' is one such example.

Published in 1794, it usually tries to portray the tale of a typical English woman of lower economic class with large families. There was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe is a popular English language nursery rhyme, published in 1794 and whose meaning and origin have largely centered on attempts to match the old woman with historical female figures who have had large families, although the degraded socio economic condition of contemporary London also comes to the forefront.

*There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.  
She had so many children, she didn't know what to do;  
She gave them some broth without any bread;  
Then whipped them all soundly and put them to bed.*

Bullough argues that prostitution in 18th century Britain was a convenience to men of all social statuses, and an economic necessity for many poor women, and was tolerated by society. The presence of prostitution in London during the 17th and 18th centuries is demonstrated by the publication of directories. The Wandering Whore was printed during the Restoration period, and listed streets in which prostitutes might have been found and the locations of brothels. The phrase "who lived in a shoe" depicts the shanty-towns that had sprung up during this period and served as brothels. A Catalogue of Jilts, Cracks & Prostitutes was printed towards the end of the 17th century and catalogued the physical attributes of 21 women who could be found about St Bartholomew's Church during Bartholomew Fair, in Smithfield. Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies was published during the second half of the 18th century as a pocketbook. It described the physical appearance and sexual specialities of about 120–190 prostitutes who worked in and around Covent Garden (then a well-known red-light district) along with their addresses and prices.

The Westminster Review placed the figure between 50,000 and 368,000 making prostitution the fourth-largest female occupation. Public attention was drawn to prostitution in London by William Acton's controversial 1857 book Prostitution, Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects. For several reasons prostitution was predominantly a working class occupation. For many women, their journey into prostitution was one of circumstances, as would be depicted by Daniel Defoe in his celebrated novel Moll Flanders. During the 19th century the public began to concern itself with particular social problems; conversely, a view of the ideal woman began to emerge such as "The Angel in the House". This rise of the middle class domestic morality made it increasingly harder for women to obtain work, causing an increase in such areas as needle-trade, shop girls, agricultural gangs, factory work, and domestic servants, all occupations with long hours and low pay. Low earnings, it is argued, meant that women had to resort to prostitution to be able to provide for themselves and their families, particularly in households where the main breadwinner was no longer around. The excess in the number of children (She had so many children, she didn't know what to do) may

be a reference to the illegitimate children born of spurious affairs. The advanced age of the lady in question in the rhyme (There was an old woman) refers to the deplorable condition, especially when advanced in age and bereft of grace and physical potency when the only means of survival was left through begging.

Victorian morality held that prostitution was a terrible evil, for the young women, for the men and for all of society. The introduction of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 made it an offence for common prostitutes to assemble at any "*place of public resort*" such as a coffee shop. Nevertheless, a ban on brothel-keeping was included in the Disorderly Houses Act 1751 as part of legislation against public nuisance. Towards the end of the century, public opinion began to turn against the sex trade, with reformers petitioning the authorities to take action. The evangelical movement of the 19th century denounced prostitutes and their clients as sinners, and denounced society for tolerating it. The Vagrancy Act 1824 was passed, introducing the term "*common prostitute*" into English Law and criminalizing prostitutes with a punishment of up to one month hard labour. Acton denounced low wages for women as one of the reasons why they would turn to prostitution, in contrast to the dominant perception among members of the middle and upper classes that women decided to become prostitutes because of an innate lustfulness and sinful nature.

Blake's poem London included in the Songs of Experience depicts the pitiable conditions of child labour; restrictive laws of property and prostitution which are all explored. The poem starts with a criticism of laws relating to ownership. The '*chartered Thames*' is a bitter reference to the way in which every aspect of life in London is owned, even the river which is usually a symbol of life, freedom and the power of nature. It ends with a vision of the terrible consequences to be faced as the result of sexually transmitted disease. Blake's The Sick Rose (*O Rose thou art sick. / The invisible worm, / That flies in the night / In the howling storm: / Has found out thy bed / Of crimson joy: / And his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy.*) is an apt commentary of the sordid social realities for Blake's sick rose and the protagonist of the rhyme bears thematic similarity to the same truths.

While Blake's poems centre on the degrading social condition of London, there are often other such poems which deal with the famous historical events. One such instance is London Bridge Is Falling Down (also known as My Fair Lady or London Bridge). It is a typical nursery poem and singing game. The poem dates back to Late Middle Ages and it deals with the much mythical building-disintegration-repairing tales of the famous London bridge. The earliest record dates back to seventeenth century. However sometime in the eighteenth century the lyrics were rewritten in modern forms, while it gained sheer popularity in Britain and then to the rest of the world in the nineteenth century.

The lyric is a traditional English nursery rhyme and singing game, which is found in different versions all over the world. It deals with the depredations of London Bridge and attempts, realistic or fanciful, to repair it. It may date back to bridge rhymes and games of the Late Middle Ages, but the earliest records of the rhyme in English are from the seventeenth century. The lyrics were first printed in close to their modern form in the mid-eighteenth century and became popular, particularly in Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century.

The modern melody was first recorded in the late nineteenth century and the game resembles arch games of the Middle Ages, but seems to have taken its modern form in the late nineteenth

century. The rhyme is one of the most well known in the world and has been referenced in a variety of works of literature and popular culture. The most frequently used first verse is:

*London Bridge is falling down,  
Falling down, falling down.  
London Bridge is falling down,  
My fair lady*

The third edition of Dumpling and Pudding, which contains Henry Carey's satire Namby Pamby (1725), one of the earliest surviving works to refer to the rhyme. Similar rhymes can be found across Europe, pre-dating the records in England. These include Knippelsbro Går Op og Ned from Denmark, Die Magdeburger Brück from Germany, pont chus from sixteenth-century France; and Le porte, from fourteenth-century Italy. It is possible that the rhyme was acquired from one of these sources and then adapted to fit the most famous bridge in England. The earliest printed English version is in the oldest extant collection of nursery rhymes, Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book, printed by John Newbery in London (c. 1744).

Of several theories put forward to define the theory of origin is that the rhyme relates to the supposed destruction of London Bridge by Olaf II of Norway in 1014 (or 1009). The nineteenth-century translation of the Norse saga the Heimskringla, published by Samuel Laing in 1844, included a verse by Óttarrsvarti:

*“London Bridge is broken down. —  
Gold is won, and bright renown.  
Shields resounding,  
War-horns sounding,  
Hild is shouting in the din!  
Arrows singing,  
Mail-coats ringing —  
Odin makes our Olaf win!”*

However, the most gruesome is the theory that the song refers to the burying, perhaps alive, of children in the foundations of the bridge was first advanced by Alice Bertha Gomme (later Lady Gomme) in The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland (1894–1898) and perpetuated by the usually sceptical Iona and Peter Opie. This was based around the idea that a bridge would collapse unless the body of a human sacrifice were buried in its foundations and that the watchman is actually a human sacrifice, who will then watch over the bridge. A member of the Leigh family of Stone Leigh Park, Warwickshire, has a family story that a human sacrifice lies under the building.

Not just in the rhyme of London Bridge is Falling Down, but in many contemporary rhymes human sacrifice was a recurring theme which depicted the morbid psychoanalysis of medieval society. This tales of cold blooded murders can also be seen in the rhyme Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater. It was first published in Infant Institutes: or a Nurserical Essay on the Poetry, Lyric and Allegorical, of the earliest Ages,&c in London around 1797, it also made an appearance in Mother Goose's Quarto: or Melodies Complete, printed in Boston, Massachusetts around 1825. The lyrics taken from a verse originated bin Aberdeen, Scotland and published in 1868, consisted the words:

The first surviving version of the rhyme Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater was published in Infant Institutes: or a Nurserical Essay on the Poetry, Lyric and Allegorical, of the Earliest Ages, &c., in London around 1797. It also appears in Mother Goose's Quarto: or Melodies Complete, printed in Boston, Massachusetts around 1825. A verse collected from Aberdeen, Scotland and published in 1868 had the words:

*Peter, my neeper,  
Had a wife,  
And he couidna' keep her,  
He pat her i' the wa',  
And lat a' the mice eat her.*

The more popular rhyme:

*Peter, Peter pumpkin eater,  
Had a wife but couldn't keep her;  
He put her in a pumpkin shell  
And there he kept her very well.*

Though the surface of the poem provides us the infantile simplicity of a nursery rhyme, however the actual story encoded within the apparently simple lyrics depicts the chilling horrific homicidal act of Peter, who unable to "keep" his wife, murdered, sliced and stuffed her into a pumpkin shell. The children's poem questions the well established morality and sanity of human psychology. At the same time it reminds us of Browning's Porphyrio's Lover which debates to present heinous crime through justifying notions. The poem also deals with taboo themes such as polygamy and prostitution.

However some such older rhymes prove a more complex read than Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater. Some have become obscure throughout the passage of time and ages. One such example is Jack and Jill, also known as Jack and Gill in some earlier versions. This particular rhyme originated back at least to the 18th century, while a quite some numbers of versions have been found with different verses and variations. Also numerous attempts and theories exist to suggest the core meaning of the poem.

The most well kown verse is:

*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.*

Though the poem very often has been depicted and read as a nonsensical creation. However it also bears some historical relations and evidences. A comedy play was performed in Elizabethan Court in 1567-1568, while Shakespeare himself mentioned the names Jack and Jill twice in his works. A Midsummer Night's Dream, consisting the line : "Jack shall have Jill; Naught shall go ill." (III:ii:460-2) and also in Love's Labour's Lost, which contains the quote: "Our wooing doth not end like an old play; Jack hath not Jill" (V:ii:874-5). The lines suggest the romantic bonds shard between a couple, as one similar to the well known proverb "A good Jack makes a good Jill".

Though having roots in antiquity, researchers have found it quite difficult to make a complete analysis of the rhyme. Jack was a very well used name in the nursery rhymes of 18th century for typical Everyman hero. While Jill or Gill used to mean a young or sweet girl at the end of the Middle Ages. The very origin of the poem remains shrouded in mystery till this day and most explanations of the post-date of the first publication bears no cogent evidence. However some of the well fetched theories drawn by the scholars include S. Baring-Gould in the 19th century explained that the story is of the tale told by 13th century prose Edda Gylfaginning written by Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson, who stated that in the moon mythology, Hjúki and Bil, brother and sister (respectively), were taken up from the earth by the Moon (personified as God Máni) as they were fetching water from the well called Byrgit, bearing on their shoulders the Cask called Saegr and the ole Simul. While around 1835 John Bellendon put forward the theory that Jack and Jill were actually two priests. Later this theory was further analysed by Katherine Elwes in 1930 which dictates them as Cardinal of Olsey (c. 1471-1530); and Bishop Turbes, who negotiated the marriage of Mary Tudor to the French King in 1514.

Other theories also points to some significant historical and social events, such as reform taxes on liquid measures by King Charles I or Louis XVI of France and Queen Marie Antoinette who were murdered in 1793. However the prime flaws of these theories are that the earliest printing records of the rhyme pre-dates the French Revolution and fall of Bastille, the succession of the Jacobians and casting away with of Monarchy.

As now it is quite evident is that certain historical events have often affected the course of literature. Just like Jack and Jill, Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary is a famous English nursery rhyme which has its roots embedded deep within historical episodes. The most used version is

*Mary, Mary, quite contrary,  
How does your garden grow?  
With silver bells, and cockle shells,  
And pretty maids all in a row*

Though it might be open to various explanation related to history, however one of the most important interpretation points to religious allegory of Catholicism, with bells representing the Sanctus bells, the cockleshells the badges of the pilgrims to the shrine of Saint James in Spain (Santiago de Compostela) and pretty maids are nuns. However this explanation debates arise, whether it is lament for reinstatement of Catholicism or for its persecution.

Other theories circulating the rhyme indicates to Mary, Queen of Scots. Where "*how does your garden grow*" referring to her reign over realm, "*Silver bells*" referring to the Catholic cathedral bells, "*cockle shells*" points the dishonesty of her husband. "*Pretty maids all in a row*" means her ladies in waiting - "*the four Maries*". While other theories suggest the poem's relation to the reign of Bloody Mary. While according to scholars the beautiful imageries are the ironic embodiment of the incarnated horror, such ad the garden may refer to the increasing graveyard of the Protestants, while the silver bells were thumb screws and cockle shells were the torturing devices, which was used to be attached to the genitalia. And ironically the four maidens refer to the guillotines named as '*maidens*'.

For attentive readers, it becomes an interesting observation about how the acts of horror have made its place into children rhyme with dark humour. Such devices of irony where the nature

of truth and lie, good and evil often becomes obsolete. Another such work which takes its approach to the nature and role of deception is the poem Pop! Goes the Weasel. As stated by the utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham (1789). As utilitarianism dictates, when weighing between lie and truth, one must consider the benefits against harm, and happiness against unhappiness. Like Martin Luther said, *"What harm would it do, if a man told a good strong lie for the sake of the good and for the Christian Church...a lie out of necessity, a useful lie, a helpful lie, such lies would not be against God, he would accept them"*.

Just like the previous poem that focuses on the dark history of monarchism in Britain and exploitations of authorial power, the poem Pop! Goes the Weasel, with the same view of economical exploitation and the brink of industrial evolution may be explored in this context.

*Half a pound of tuppenny rice,  
Half a pound of treacle.  
That's the way the money goes,  
Pop! goes the weasel.  
Every night when I get home  
The monkey's on the table,  
Take a stick and knock it off,  
Pop! goes the weasel.  
Up and down the city road  
In and out the Eagle.  
That's the way the money goes,  
Pop! goes the weasel.*

In textile business, weasel is the term for the machine which wounds the yarn. And in every 1000 yards the machine would make a popping sound, hence *"Pop! Goes the weasel"*

The poem focuses on a crucial point of socio-economic metamorphosis- the death of farm based economy and the rise of industrial evolution, which pushed thousands of working class people to the brink of poverty, despair and hunger. The weasel became metaphor of a winter coat being pawned or 'popped' for quintessential surviving commodity like food. The poem refers to tailoring tools like needle and thread, projecting the image upon the reader's mind the destitution weavers during the industrial uprising. Term '*monkey*' actually means 500 pound of money. Transformation of cottage based building to mechanised, mill based industry affected every aspect of English life.

Peel says of the working class before the repeal of the corn laws, *"Oatcakes was then the 'staff of life' and oatmeal porridge an article of constant and universal consumption once a day at least, often twice, and not infrequently three times. Butcher's meat was a luxury in which they could seldom indulge, and then only to a very limited extent. Manufacturers everywhere were availing themselves of the many wonderful inventions that were being brought out for cheapening labour, as the new machinery threw thousands out of employment when extensively introduced, the poor, misguided wretches, who could not understand how that could be a benefit which deprived them of the means of earning livelihood and reduced them to beggary, met in secret conclaves, and resolved in their ignorance to to destroy them. Had they bee better instructed, they would've known that it was their duty to lie down in the nearest ditch and dire."* In conclusion it can be said that the horrific demise of an era and birth of another one and the



damage it wrecked upon the working class people was subtly presented in the disguise of a nursery poem.

Not just historical catastrophe or socio-economical disasters, but many obsolete forms of entertainment, sexual rituals or taboo culture are also a recurring theme of nursery rhymes.

The rhyme Rub-A-Dub-Dub is an English nursery rhyme printed back in the eighteenth century in Hook's Christmas Box Vol.II under the title Dub a dub dub instead of Rub a dub dub.

*Rub-a-dub-dub,  
Three men in a tub,  
And who do you think they were?  
The butcher, the baker,  
The candlestick-maker,  
They all sailed out to sea,  
'Twas enough to make a man stare.*

The earliest versions of this rhyme published differ significantly in their wording. The first recorded version in Christmas Box, published in London in 1798, has wording similar to that in Mother Goose's Quarto or Melodies Complete, published in Boston, Massachusetts around 1825. The latter ran:

*Hey! rub-a-dub, ho! rub-a-dub, three maids in a tub,  
And who do you think were there?  
The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker,  
And all of them gone to the fair.*

This led Iona and Peter Opie to conclude that they were three respectable townsfolk "*watching a dubious sideshow at a local fair*". In the original version as it appeared both in England and in the USA (Boston) the song was talking about three maids instead of three men. Later research, according to The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes (1951) suggests that the lyrics are illustrating a scene of three reputable men watching on the sly a less decent moment. Peep shows, also known as peep box or raree show ("*rarity show*") can be traced back to early modern times (15th century in Europe, by Leon Battista Alberti) and are known in various cultures and were a popular form of entertainment. Peep shows have been used for the showcasing of erotic and sexually explicit forms of entertainment. It can be associated as a form of voyeurism, the sexual interest in or practice of spying on people engaged in intimate behaviours, such as undressing, sexual activity, or other actions usually considered to be of a private nature. The term comes from the French voir which means "*to see*". A male voyeur is commonly labelled as "*Peeping Tom*" or a "*Jags*", a term which originates from the Lady Godiva legend. The voyeur does not normally interact directly with the subject of his/her interest, who is often unaware of being observed. The essence of voyeurism is the observing but may also involve the making of a secret photograph or video of the subject during an intimate activity.

However, that term is usually applied to a male who observes somebody secretly and, generally, not in a public place. For live peep shows as used by the butcher, baker and candlestick maker, booths surround a stage upon which usually a female performer performed sexually-explicit poses. In Barcelona female performers at times also perform sexual

intercourse with male performers on stage. In some cases, booths include paper towel dispensers, for customers who engage in masturbation. A customer and performer can mutually agree on a fee for a "*private dance*", which can take place in a peep show booth with a clear window and seating space for only one spectator in these peep shows, which were a popular form of entertainment in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century England.

Like the other poems discussed previously, another immensely popular poem which ponders upon the socio-financial crisis of the ages is Baa Baa, Black Sheep. Since its first record back in 1732, the words have changed considerably throughout the ages. It is sung to a variant of the 1761 French melody Ah! Vous Dirai-je Maman. Like other nursery poems, several theories clouds the origin, however most prominent of those are that the poem is actually a protest against the Medieval English taxes on Wool and slave trade.

*Bah, Bah, a black Sheep,  
Have you any Wool?  
Yes merry have I,  
Three Bags full,  
One for my Master,  
One for my Dame,  
One for the Little Boy  
That lives down the lane*

Amidst the strong various existing of the opinions regarding the existence (most of which lack a strong foundation), the strongest theory is suggested by Katherine Elwes Thomas in the Real Personages of Mother Goose (1930) that the rhyme was produced in protesting of the heavy taxation on wool. More references of this can be found to the medieval English "*Great*" or "*Old Custom*" wool tax of 1275, which continued upto the fifteenth century. Recently some researcher scholars have suggested that the poem is actually a document on slave-trade. Which was further provided importance in 1980's during debates of the over political correctness of the nursery poems. However, it does not hold any historical evidence, on the contrary it can be said that the wool of the black sheep does not contain any racist notion, instead it have been prized so dark clothes can be made out of dark wool without any need of dyeing.

However, the allegation of supposed racism doesn't leave the particular poem. In 1986, it was alleged by the popular press. Controversies again emerged in 1999 when a working group on racism in children's resources submitted a reservation about the rhyme to Birmingham City council. However it got never approved. On the other hand, several such similar cases were often observed. In 2006, two private nurseries in Oxfordshire altered the lyrics to "*Baa Baa Rainbow Sheep*", where the black was often replaced by words like "*happy, sad, hopping, and pink*".

Apart from slave trade, racism and sexism, certain poems also deal with the religious genocides and conflict between Government and Religions. One such poem is Goosey Goosey Gender. The modern version of the rhyme is:

*Goosey goosey gander,  
Whither shall I wander?  
Upstairs and downstairs  
And in my lady's chamber.*

*There I met an old man  
Who wouldn't say his prayers,  
So I took him by his left leg  
And threw him down the stairs.*

According to most popular theories, the poem suggests the persecution of Catholic priests under King Henry VIII and later under Oliver Cromwell, as they'd be forcibly captured away from the house ('*thrown down the stairs*'). The poem focuses on the '*priest hole*' - hiding place for itinerant Catholic priests. Amateur historian Chris Roberts states that the rhyme also depicts the propaganda campaign against the Catholic Church during the reign of Henry VII.

Like other nursery poems, this one is also open to several interpretations. Mark Cocker and Richard Mabey points in Birds Britannica that '*greylag goose*' has been associated with fertility for millennia. And also that "*goose*" has a sexual meaning in British Culture, and the nursery rhyme actually consist a latent tone of sexuality ("*In my lady's chamber*").

The entire Catholic Protestants conflict sparked rage when Henry VIII seized his authority over the church and declared himself as only supreme head on earth of the Church in England' in place of the pope. For both Catholic, Protestants and other Christian sects it was a horrible conflict, losing thousands of life. And even the death wasn't so simple to come. The sadist mentality innovated various instruments and design of gruesome tortures. L.A. Parry stated in The History of Torture in England (1933) "*It was during the time of the Tudors that the use of torture reached its height. Under Henry VIII it was frequently employed; it was only used in a small number of cases in the reigns of Edward VI and of Mary. It was whilst Elizabeth sat on the throne that it was made use of more than in any other period of history.*" This particular poem bears record of several such horrid tortures. Nancy Bilyeau elaborates in his English Historical Fiction Authors "*Besides Little Ease, the most-used torture devices were the rack, manacles, and a horrific creation called the Scavenger's Daughter. For many prisoners, solitary confinement, repeated interrogation, and the threat of physical pain were enough to make them tell their tormentors anything they wanted to know.*" In this poem the line "...*threw him down the stairs.*" Might be an indication towards that victims were threw to the torture chamber at the bottom of Wakefield Tower. While the line "*Who wouldn't say his prayers*" meant to mark the Catholics, as they would pray in Latin, unlike the Protestants.

Another such poem with similarity of theme, about the inflictions of various tortures on Catholic priests through the Catholic-Protestant Conflict, is Ladybird Ladybird (often read as Ladybug Ladybug, especially in the U.S). It is an English verse nursery poem refers to the Ladybirds or Ladybugs, a bright coloured insect which is believed to be a token of good omen. The earliest record of this poem dates back to 1744, making an appearance in Tommy Thumb's Pretty Songbook Vol. 2. The most popular verse of the poem is :

*Ladybird, ladybird fly away home,  
Your house is on fire and your children are gone,  
All except one,  
And her name is Ann,  
And she hid under the baking pan.*

A shorter, grimmer version is also widespread:

*Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home,  
Your house is on fire,  
Your children shall burn!*

The poem also makes an entry in chapter 14 of Tom Sawyer, as Mark Twain writes : "A brown spotted lady-bug climbed the dizzy heights of a grass blade, and tom bent down close to it and said: 'Lady-bug, lady-bug, fly away home, Your house is on fire, your children's alone'..." The first line of the rhyme might be significance about the tension between Catholic and Protestants, as the Protestants wanted the Catholic cult to return back "home" to Rome 'from where it had come'.

The rhyme might refer to the recusants or the priests and faithful who were put to tortures and eventual deaths, and it also symbolises the burning down of the spiritual body as well as the temporal body of the Catholic Church. We observe an implied gloat too, of those who were complying with Protestantism to save their skins, and were therefore "gone" from the Catholic faith, 'Except for 'Anne', who hides in secrecy. It makes quite evident that Ladybird was a Catholic priest in 16th century during the protestant era. It might also refer to such atmosphere of oppression Catholics would often hold confidential meets in outdoor locations or fields that maybe equated with the home of these ladybirds. And the fire represents the stakes upon which Catholics were burned mercilessly.

It is quite evident that it was a time of crisis for believes, the civil war amongst Christianity and the political instigation has imbued the time with horrors, which had a deep effect and made itself express through various forms of literature. Sing a song of Sixpence is another English nursery poem which shares the theme of the conflict. Originating sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the modern day verse contains:

*Sing a song of sixpence,  
A pocket full 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 counting house,  
Counting out his money;  
The queen was in the parlour,  
Eating bread and honey.  
The maid was in the garden,  
Hanging out the clothes,  
When down came a blackbird  
And pecked off her nose.*

Despite having a murky origin, we find a remarkable reference of the rhyme in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (1602), (Act II, Scene iii), in which Sir Toby Belchtells a clown says "Come on; there is sixpence for you: let's have a song" and in Beaumont and Fletcher's Bonduca (1614) consists the line "Whoa, here's a stir now! Sing a song o' sixpence!"

The previous theories stated that the origin of the poem related to Geroge Steevens (1736-1800) who used it as a pun at the expense of Poet Laureate Henry James Pye (1745-1813) in 1790. However the first printed record of the poem predates that. As it was first published in Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book around 1744, the verse was:

*Sing a Song of Sixpence,  
A bag full of Rye,  
Four and twenty Naughty Boys,  
Baked in a Pye.*

Another popular interpretation regarding the origin attributes to the magnificent wedding ceremony of Marie de' Medici and Henry IV of France in, "*The first surprise, though came shortly before the starter- when the guest sat down, unfolded their napkins and saw songbirds fly out. The highlight of the meal was sherbets of milk and honey, which were created by Buontalenti.*"

Iona and Peter Opie suggests in Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhyme that the poem shares roots with many historical events and folkloric symbolism, like the Queen symbolizing the Moon, King the Sun, and the Blackbirds are number of hours in a day. Or as the author indicates, the blackbirds is actually an allusion to the monks during the period of Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, in which Catherine of Aragon represents the Queen, and Anna Boleyn the Maid. The blackbirds are manorial deeds baked into a pie during the era when Henry VIII was taking over the property of the Catholic Church. The Abbot of Glastonbury sent his steward to London to appease the King – a pie in which secretly kept the deeds to twelve manorial estates. The Steward, Thomas Horner, opened the pie and extracted one deed, The Manor of Mells, where his descendants still live. This might be another origin of the Jack Horner nursery rhyme.

The rye and the birds might be a token of tribute sent to the King. While according to some other interpretations pocketful of rye is actually a reference to the old method of measurement. Also the number 24 might indicate to the reformation and the printing of English Bible with 24 letters. And from a folkloric perspective, the blackbird taking the maid's nose actually signifies a demon stealing her soul.

Little Miss Muffet is another very popular English poem printed in mid-twentieth century. Just like the previous poem Sing a Song of Sixpence, it is also ornamented with complex metaphors and symbols which baffle scholars till modern age. The modern verse of which is:

*Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on a tuffet,  
Eating her curds and whey;  
Along came a spider  
Who sat down beside her  
And frightened Miss Muffet away*

Appearing into existence sometime in 1805 in a book titled Songs for the Nursery, the poem contain several origin theories. According to some it was authored by Dr. Thomas Muffet (d.1604), an English physician and entomologist, about his stepdaughter Patience. Other argues that it actually refers to Mary, Queen of Scots (1543-87), who was rumoured to be scared of religious reformer John Krox (1510-72). Ultimately John was beheaded in 1852,

when she was accused of being guilty in the conspiracy to assassinate her cousin, Elizabeth the First. While through a different analysis of the verse we might say that the poem very vaguely speaks of child prostitution or paedophilia. The words mentioned in poem such as 'curds', 'whey' or 'spider' certainly contain a deeper meaning. This might also refer to the child prostitution existed in Europe which had always been considered taboo but had a strong demand in underground sex rackets.

Another such apparently children poem with surface innocence, but with darker origin is:

*Here we go round the mulberry bush,  
The mulberry bush,  
The mulberry bush.  
Here we go round the mulberry bush  
So early in the morning.*

Often sung as a part of children's game. Historian R.S. Duncan, a former governor of Wakefield prison, the song originated with that 420 year old institution's female prisoners, who were exercised around a mulberry tree. According to other interpretation that the poem refers to Britain's struggles to produce silk, mulberry trees being a key habitat for the cultivation of silkworms. Bill Bryson states, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tried to Britain attempted to emulate the success of the Chinese in silk production but the initial plan crashed back by intense weather conditions and mulberry trees turned to be quite delicate to survive in the cold. The traditional lyrics '*Here we go round the mulberry bush / On a cold and frosty morning*' may therefore be a joke about the problems faced by the industry.

.Oranges and Lemons is a traditional English Nursery rhyme and singing game which refers to the bells of several churches, all within or close to the City of London.

*Oranges and lemons,  
Say the bells of St. Clement's.  
You owe me five farthings,  
Say the bells of St. Martin's.  
When will you pay me?  
Say the bells of Old Bailey.  
When I grow rich,  
Say the bells of Shoreditch.  
When will that be?  
Say the bells of Stepney.  
I do not know,  
Says the great bell of Bow.  
Here comes a candle to light you to bed,  
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!*

Several theories deal with the origin of the poem, including child sacrifice, public execution and marital problems of King Henry VIII. It is also said that the rhyme is originated from a public dance called '*Oranges and Lemons*' (c. 1860-1865), in which the grizzly end of a child's head being caught between two arms in pretended act of beheading. It projects the rituals of public execution, in which the victim would be informed by candlelight of his imminent execution citing the horrific final line "*And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!*"

According to other interpretation, the '*Great Bells of Bow*' were actually used to time the executions at Newgate prison. The victims would wait for their execution on '*Death Row*' and was informed by the warder, the night before the execution '*here comes the candle to light you to bed*'. The executions would begin when the bells started ringing at nine o'clock in the morning. When the bells stopped chiming then the executions would be finished until the following day.

There was a Crooked Man is another English poem discussing the religio-political aspects of the age, printed in 1842, the modern verse is

*There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile.  
He found a crooked sixpence upon a crooked stile.  
He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse,  
And they all lived together in a little crooked house.*

First recorded by James Orchard Halliwell in 1840s, it gained sheerp popularity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the various origin theories, one is believed that the town of Lavenham has inspired the theme. While according to others, the poem originated from King Charles I of England (1600-1649). The crooked man might be Scottish General Sir Alexander Leslie, who signatored a covenant to secure the religious and political freedom of Scotland. "*The crooked stile*" might represent the border between England and Scotland. While "*They all lived in a little crooked house*" might symbolize the fact that despite having great hostile atmosphere, both parties were able to sign this treaty. Another interpretation of the poem centres around the famous pop culture figure of Slender Man. Though being originated one internet forum in 2009. Jeff Tolbert stated Slender Man as "*reverse ostension*". As Tolbert says, the Slender Man does it by creating a set of folklore-like narratives where none existed before. While Professor Thomas Pettitt of the University of Southern Denmark pointed out the Slender Man as an instance of the modern age's development of the "*Gutenberg Parenthesis*"; when the innovations of the printing press to the spread of the internet in which stories and information were encoded in discrete media, to a return to the ancient figure of storytelling, such oral tradition and campfire tales, in which the same story can be retold, reinterpreted and recast by different tellers, expanding and evolving with time.

Like the previous poem which deals with several aspects of folklore and socio-cultural psychoanalysis, the next poem also signifies in the matter of literary values. Another such important poem is Ding Dong Bell, which has made recurring appearances throughout history. However the earliest record dates back to 1580, by the organist of Winchester Cathedral, John Lant. Back then the verse used was:

*Jacke boy, ho boy newes,  
the cat is in the well,  
let us ring now for her Knell,  
ding dong ding dong Bell.*

It was printed in Thomas Ravenscroft's Pammelia, Musicks Miscellanie in 1609. The most common modern version is:

*Ding, dong, bell,  
Pussy's in the well.  
Who put her in?  
Little Johnny Flynn.*

*Who pulled her out?  
 Little Tommy Stout.  
 What a naughty boy was that,  
 To try to drown poor pussy cat,  
 Who never did him any harm,  
 But killed all the mice in the farmer's barn.*

Like several other poems discussed before, this certain one also made its place into Shakespeare's dramas. However the usual Shakespeare's plays were in Quarto text and the majority were not published until 1623 in the First Folio (seven years after his death). Considering these facts, the following phrases could be the author's instruction for the sound effects, although it is uncertain. The relevant passages are :

The Tempest, Act I, Scene II :  
*"Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:  
 Hark! Now I hear them – Ding dong, bell."*  
The Merchant of Venice, Act II, Scene II :  
*"Let us all ring fancy's knell;  
 I'll begin it – ing, dong, bell."*

The verse published in Mother Goose's Melody (c.1765) resembles that of the modern verse the most. It is considered that some lines were included in order to tone up and make it more acceptable to the children in James Orchard Halliwell's Nursery Rhymes of England, where the cat is pulled out by the "*Dog with long snout*".

The name Johnny Green has often been replaced with other similar names, such as Tommy O' Linne (1797) and Tommy Quin (c. 1840). According to Iona and Peter Opie, the original name might have been Tom a Lin or Tom o' Lin. Who is apparently the protagonist of another nursery rhyme. While this rhyme has often been accused of animal abuse and bestiality.

Not just act of an individual or remote social incidents, there are such poems which originated from massive historical events. Similar to London bridge is Falling Down, there is another very short rhyme, which speaks of similar events of calamities.

The poem depicts the Great Fire of London, the massive inferno which swept through the city, from 2nd September Sunday to 5th September Wednesday in 1666. The fire transformed a massive part of city into mere ashes, consuming 13,200 houses, 87 parish churches, St. Paul's Cathedral, most of the buildings of City Authorities. It mostly perished the medieval city of London inside the Roman City Wall. It is believed that that it destroyed the homes 70,000 out of 80,000 inhabitants. Though it threatened the aristocratic district of Westminster, however ultimately it failed to reach there. However the commoners were merciless victims of the fire. Mostly melted to their bones, thus leaving no remaining. A melted piece of pottery conserved at the Museum of London, which was discovered by archaeologists at the Pudding Lane (where the fire started), scientific investigation of it shows that the temperature reached 1250° C.

This song is sung as a round as when each part starts two bars after the previous one. Though most theories compel to the fact that this song is about the Great Fire of London which took place in 1666. However the first notion of round in this theme dates from 1580. Apart from



that, we find a reference of the lyrics in Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew, Act 4, scene 1, when Gremio asks Curtis to prepare warm fire for the guests.

The horrific reality has often given rise to morbid irony, thus resulting poems such as Scotland's Burning. And another poem which takes place right with it, is Ring a Ring o' Roses or Ring around the Rosie.

It has been used as a nursery rhyme, a folksong and a playground singing game. Though it was published in 1881, but the recorded version which was already being sung dates back to 1790, co-existing with similar rhymes. According to various legends, the rhyme actually speaks of plague. More specifically the Great Plague of London or Black Death. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this poem has always been associated with the Black Death which happened in England in 1665, or earlier outbreaks. As Peter and Iona Opie states, "*The invariable sneezing and falling down in modern English version have given would-be-origin finders the opportunity to say that the rhyme dates back to the Great Plague. A rosy rash, the allege, was a symptom of the plague, and posies of herbs were carried as protection and to ward off the smell of the disease. Sneezing and coughing was a final fatal symptom, and "all fall down" was exactly what happened.*"

In the colonial version of the poem we see a slight different treatment of the interpretation as the line "*Ashes, Ashes*" refers to cremation of the bodies, burning of the victim's house and blackening of their skin. And the theory has been adapted to apply to the various other forms of the poem. The poem has taken a fluid form since its submerging into the popular culture and has been elsewhere to make oblique reference to the plague.

Further closer inspection of the poem reveals a much deeper layer of encryption. For instance, the line and the title Ring-a-ring-a-roses is actually signifying the rosy rings under the eyes and welts under the skin of the plague victims. While "*A pocket full of posies*" meant the strongly aromatic flowers people and plague doctors would carry in order to shut off the overwhelming stench of the victims and decaying bodies. The words mentioned "*Ashes! Ashes!*" is an important one, because at a time of prehistoric medicinal era, fire was considered as a strong remedy to prevent the contagious plague. The victims' bodies were often cremated. The plague doctors used to carry ashes of straws and herbs in their plague mask, as it was widely believed that those prevent the infections. Also the house of the victims were barred from outside and marked. Ashes might also signify the act of mass cremation of the dead bodies to prevent further outbreak of the disease.

Till date, the Black Death is considered one of the most terrible pandemic in the entire human history. The plague roughly devoured the population from 450 millions to 350-375 millions. It took several centuries to recover that number. Born in Central Asia, the plague travelled through the silk road and hit Europe, taking the masses by storm. It is said that the plague was carried to Europe by the black rats that inhabited the merchant ships. The absurdity of the whole consequences, born from a mere flea half a world away; almost threw the whole humankind to the brink of extinction. This very exploration shook the mentality of concerned people. It affected tremendously all the aspects of the society, from religion, war, diplomacy and obviously literature. Hence we can say that the poem is a take on the nightmarish era of history.

Nursery rhyme as a mode of self-deception evolved to facilitate interpersonal deception by allowing people to avoid the cues to conscious deception that might reveal deceptive intent. It

eliminates the cognitive load that is typically associated with deceiving, and can minimize retribution if the deception is discovered. Beyond its role in specific acts of deception, self-deceptive and self-enhancement also allows people to display more confidence than warranted, which has a host of social advantages. The question then arises that how the self can be both deceiver and deceived. We propose that this is achieved through disassociation of mental processes, including conscious versus unconscious memories, conscious versus unconscious attitudes, automatic versus controlled process. Given variety of methods for deceiving others, it should come surprise that self-deception manifests itself in a number of different psychological processes, often through the apparent lucidity of nursery rhymes. Ever since having read the Owl and the Pussy Cat as children, the poetry of Edward Lear has charmed his readers with its wonderful eccentricity. Lear, the inventor of limericks and the absurd poetry, cleverly uses words and ideas counterpoised to achieve the dual goal of entertaining and presenting social truths through his witty metaphors.

The same nature of deceptive truth can be traced in these children's rhymes where the horrors of sins and social injustice presented in the wrap of entertainment.

*Eeny, meeny, miny, moe,  
Catch a tiger by the toe.  
If he hollers, let him go,  
Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.*

There are several debates on the origin of the poem. One suggests that the poem is the evolved form of a Old English or Welsh Counting, similar to the old Shepherd's count Yan Tan Tethera. While according to other critics, the rhyme is actually derived from British Colonials returning from the Indian continent and introduced a doggerel version of Indian children's rhyme used in the game of carom billiards.

*ubi eni mana bou,  
baji neki baji thou,  
elim tilim latim gou.*

However there also a strong opinion exists that a Swahili poem carried by the Africans slave to America: lino ya mmiini maiini mo, in some older versions this rhyme consists the word 'nigger' instead of 'tiger'.

*Eeny, meena, mina, mo,  
Catch a nigger by the toe;  
If he hollers let him go,  
Eena, meena, mina, mo.*

Henry Carrington Bolton stated that this version was similar to the most used version among the American school children in 1888, this was also used in chorus for Bert Fitzgibbon's 196 song Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo.

*Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo,  
Catch a nigger by his toe,  
If he won't work then let him go;  
Skidum, skidee, skidoo.  
But when you get money, your little bride  
Will surely find out where you hide,  
So there's the door and when I count four,  
Then out goes you.*

Apart from these separate versions, the poem was used in Rudyard Kipling's Land and Sea Tales for Scouts and Guides(1935), in the song A Counting-Out Song. And this provided a massive boost in the popularization of the poem throughout the whole United Kingdom, which eventually replaced all the older versions.

Unlike from a Post-Colonial perspective of the modern times, the word “*nigger*” was devoid of the racist connotation of the present. Iona and Peter Opie stated in the Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes that the word *nigger* was pretty usual in American folk-lore; however it was completely alien to English traditional rhyme or proverb. This point along with other evidences from various versions of the rhyme indicates that the rhyme in the British Isles pre-dates this version. Hence it can be said that the rhyme originated in America, however the American word '*holler*' was first recorded in England in fourteenth century. While the word '*nigger*' or '*niger*' was first recorded in England in sixteenth century according to Oxford Dictionary, the current disparaging meaning '*olla*' and '*toe*' are found as nonsense words in some of the nineteenth century versions of the rhyme. And it could possibly be that the original Where do all the Frenchmen Go? (Probably originating during one of the periods of Anglo-French warfare) which was later replaced by the earlier version in the United States, Through the usage of some gibberish words the rhyme implemented a colonial overtone : "*Catch a nigger toe;/ If he hollers let him go*" indicating the slave trade.

With the rise and fall of colonialism, the perception of humans towards world evolved drastically. The birth of America and death of African and Indian glory affected every aspect of literature, from American revolt on taxation to African slave trade. Clare Bradford signifies in Narratives of identity and history in settler colony texts, "*Bishop's The House that Jack Built concerns itself with colonial history...The nursery rhyme that comprises the book's verbal text is, like Jack Bull, of British stock, and is imbued with signifiers(cow, dog,cat,rat,malt, priest, soldier)I which, in the new country, no longer bear stable relations to systems of meaning. Such instability is crucial to Bishop's postcolonial strategy of defamiliarise aspects of European culture by representing them through Maori perspectives, an effective example of which occurs in the double-spread in which a Maori man encounters the 'cow with the crumpled horn', depicted following its act of tossing the dog that worried the cat.*"

Depicted in several nursery rhymes are not only fanaticism, but some poems also depicts the hatred and clash among races and stark racism. Five Little Monkeys and Frank J. Green's 1869 adaptation, Ten Little Niggers and Shoo Fly Don't Bother Me with lyrics such as

*If I sleep in the sun this nigger knows,  
If I sleep in the sun this nigger knows,  
If I sleep in the sun this nigger knows,  
A fly come sting him on the nose.*

Bespeaks of a racial past and imperialism. It is quite well known part of the history that since the imperial, colonial and slave era, legal and social securities were only provided to Caucasians in the West. The racism had a large impact on the socio-economical scenario, from the Atlantic slave trade to American civil war. Slave trade was a pivotal point of European economy.

During the rise of blackface minstrelsy in the 1840's and with the performance of Virginia Minstrels, the song Jimmy Crack Corn gained sheer popularity in America. It again resurfaced as to fame during the revival American folk music in 1940s, and since then several variations of verses has appeared to existence.

*When I was young I us'd to wait  
On Massa and hand him de plate;  
Pass down de bottle when he git dry,  
And bresh away de blue tail fly.  
Jim crack corn I don't care,  
Jim crack corn I don't care,  
Jim crack corn I don't care,  
Ole Massa gone away.*

*Den arter dinner massa sleep,  
He bid dis niggarr vigil keep;  
An' when he gwine to shut his eye,  
He tell me watch de blue tail fly.  
Jim crack corn &c.*

*An' when he ride in de arternoon,  
I foller wid a hickory broom;  
De poney being berry shy  
When bitten by de blue tail fly.  
Jim crack corn &c.*

*One day he rode aroun' de farm,  
De flies so numerous dey did swarm;  
One chance to bite 'im on the thigh,  
De debble take dat blu tail fly.  
Jim crack corn &c.*

*De poney run, he jump an' pitch,  
An' tumble massa in de ditch;  
He died, an' de jury wonder'd why  
De verdic was de blue tail fly.  
Jim crack corn &c.*

*Dey laid 'im under a 'simmon tree,  
His epitaph am dar to see:  
'Beneath this stone I'm forced to lie,  
All by de means ob de blue tail fly.  
Jim crack corn &c.*

*Ole massa gone, now let 'im rest,  
Dey say all tings am for de best;  
I nebber forget till de day I die,  
Ole massa an' dat blue tail fly.  
Jim crack corn &c.*

*De hornet gets in your eyes an nose,  
De skeeter bites y'e through your close,  
De gallinipper sweeten high,*

*But wusser yet de blue tail fly.  
Jim crack corn &c.*

Most versions exist in idiomatic African English, however presently the dominance is that of General American version. But the basic structure and narrative remains the same. The song, on the surface depicts a black slave's lament over the death of his white master, who met a horse riding accident.

The poem depicts a story of a slave in his servitude to provide protection to his master, and also that of the master's horse - from the '*blue-tailed fly*'. The fly might indicate to the blue-bottle fly (*Calliphora vomitoria* or *Protophormia terraenovae*), or mourning housefly (*Tabanus atratus*), a bloodsucking pest of blue-black abdomen found in the South America. The singer elaborates that bow being bitten by the fly the horse loses sanity and master thrown and killed. Eventually through the investigation convened by a coroner's jury the slave was sentenced to death. But owing to the "*blue-tail fly*" he escapes the sentence. The song can also be interpreted as a joyful one in which we see the slave contributed to the master's death through his passive act of negligence.

Human world is a world of perception. The source of human knowledge is also perception. Not just the perception of eyes, but all the senses. The society around us, even the world, the good and evil, the sin and morality, everything is subject to human perception. Human perception shapes the world as we conceive it, not just individual but also as a whole. An individual conceives himself/herself through other people's perception. And hence through out collective perception we establish norms such as 'normal', '*just*' or '*ideal*'. And anything which fails to fit such criteria is marked as absurd, surreal. But humans have always attempted to escape the boundaries. In literature we often see such endeavour, known as absurd literature, surreal literature, literary nonsense. Some such breakthrough works are Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis, Haruki Murakami's Kafka on the Shore, Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventure in the Wonderland, and the lesser known poetic venture of the Indian poet Sukumar Roy.

A plain reading of Sukumar Roy's famous poem Abol Tabol might seem a nonsensical poem, however like other works of this category it is richly imbued with metaphors and symbolism. Just like a Charlie Chaplin film provides different images to a child and an adult, the poems would make a child laugh with nonsensical lyrics, however deeper investigation would prove otherwise. Characters such as Raamgorurer Chhana, Panto Bhuter Jyanto Chhana, Kath Buro weaves a stern link between the perceivable real world and the surreal one.

The first poem of Abol Tabol is Khichuri (The Hotchpotch), in which the duck merges with porcupine and becomes Haansjaru, stork and tortoise merge to become Bokochhop, while Parrot and Lizard in combination becomes Girgitiya. This is actually a take on the social fabric which is though projected solid, but nothing but fluid. And it often changes shape in order to adapt the condition. And it is not just applicable to the society as a whole, but also to the individuals as well. In another poem we see Gannadhar. Who, despite having many physical and behavioural problems and also after being the Matric Examination 19 times is considered a '*Sot Patro*' or perfect groom, solely on the basis of his royal bloodline. We also see musical soirees being preated by people as Bhismlochan Sharma, who does not even know a single note of music. In Katukutu Buro (Tickler Old Man) we see the infamous old man who tickles people to death.

Sukumar Roy has ventured on the journey to perform autopsy over the gleaming hypocrisy of the society, putting an existential question over the so-called human civilization. Through his ironic dig he totally portrays the materialistic aspect of the world, where greed and hunger manipulates all. In his another poem Khuror Kol (Incentive Trap) we see greed is the reason behind all human action, which is also the basic principle of Chandi Khuro's machine which makes miles long path like a few minutes journey. Thus we see how skilfully Roy blurs the fine line between the preconceived logic and absurdities. And through this contrast he makes us to evaluate the 'reality' we consume. In his poem Kimbhut (The Odd), the person Kimbhut finds everything imperfect and thus he lives alone for being too perfect in the world of imperfect. It significantly a question on the pre-established norms of the society to measure everything. The poem Chhyabaji (The Game of Shadows) reflects the shadowy realm of truth, which is more evident in the present era of fluid truth or post-truth. He brings us to "*Bhuler Bhobe*" (The World of Mistakes) in his poem Shibthakurer Apon Deshe (The Land Owned by Shiva). Where the only existing law is 'Ekushe Aain' (The Law of 21), a nonsensical gibberish law. It is perhaps his take on the authoritarian rules and law enforcement. In his poem people conceal their face behind the assuring words of 'Bhoy Peona' (Don't be Scared). His sarcastic take on the rustic infrastructure of education and its impracticality is visible as he laughs on the Bengali alphabets "ka-kha-ga" in the poem Ahladi (The Pampered). In which we see despite all the scribbling of so-called superficial educated people around us, one fails to provide answer to the simple yet practical question, "*Pagla share korle taara kemon kore thekabo taay.*" (How can one stop a wild bull chasing behind?).

In his works, Roy has always tried to break free the shackles of writing rules. He also snatches away the concept of 'illustration' in writing, so in order to enjoy his writing; the reader would have to grasp the illustration as well. Though he perfectly sculpts most of his poems with illustration, yet he leaves enough space for the imagination to grow. So he appears as a knight in shining armour to free the truth and hypocrisy with his weapon of absurdism and literary nonsense. He paints an ideal world where the base foundation of rationality, truth and logic is constantly under attack.

It is the same monotone of deception that underlines most children's rhymes from around the world. The versatile geo-cultural aspects of the vast African continent made it a well flourishing soil for the unique development of tribal-local rhymes. Apart from these, the existence of various clans, languages and the historical implications of slave-trade also instigated the local rhymes to fabricate its own unique essence. Due to the isolated geological attribute and lack of proper procedures to record and publish, very little interest has been projected upon them. Also the lack of a systemic academic body such as school, among the African children provided the verses a different raw aura. Due to these facts most of the children verses exist on form of lullabies or play-songs.

One such well-known lullaby is given below:

*Ha! that mother, who takes her food alone. Ha! that mother, before she has eaten. Ha! that mother she says, 'Lull the children for me'. Ha! that mother when she has finished to eat. Ha! that mother she says 'Give the child to me'.*

Most of the higher class women from prestigious clans such as Ngoni often employed nurse-maid to take care of their babies. The lyrics above shows not the lulling of child, but a passive statement on their position as they were afraid to appeal directly to their masters

The Goblin Market by the prominent Pre-Raphaelite poet Cristina Rossetti is apparently considered as children poem of lyrical beauty. However scholars have often made surgical attempt to decipher its allegorical and metaphorical values. The poem can be interrelated with various themes, the predominant ones are feminism, homosexuality, women empowerment, Christian allegory, capitalistic economical conflicts etc. In Caroline Norton's article which she wrote for Macmillan's Magazine (1862): *"Is it a fable—or a mere fairy story—or an allegory against the pleasures of sinful love—or what is it? Let us not too rigorously inquire, but accept in all its quaint and pleasant mystery, and quick and musical rhythm—a ballad which children welcome with delight. And which riper minds may ponder over, as we do with poems written in a foreign language which we only half understand"*. Despite the fluidity of the subject and core meaning, one thing is certain with the poem that it opens up to multiple readings.

Religious influence was very strong among the Rossettis. The poem can be interpreted as Satan's seduction of Eve, and making Adam and Eve consuming the forbidden fruit, thus dooming them from The Eden. Apart from the Christian interpretation, a Greek pagan elucidation is also possible. Particularly to the myth of Persephone, in which she consumes the pomegranates of Hades' garden, hence forever doomed to stay in the underworld.

Of the sexual element predominating the poem, Anthony H. Harrison states that the poem refers to the common friend of two sisters, Jeanie, who, was similar to Laura and unable to resist the temptation of the goblin men's fruit. Harrison remarks further, *"in cultural context, this poem can be read as a monitory exemplum and thus an extreme instance of Victorian sexual repression."* He also comments, *"It reflects a profound fear of female sexuality and its potential consequences"*. Harrison comments that Rossetti's *"unrelenting attacks upon the indulgence of sexual desire, often trooped as an illness or represented as an addiction that produces malaise, disease, or death for narrators and characters in her poetry,"*

The poem might also refer to the drug addiction, as her brother and sister-in-law both were addicts. Therefore the subject of drug addiction had a key role in her creation. It is more apparent in which manner Lizzie attempts to save her sister is similar to the way that addicts today are rehabilitated through the administering of increasingly smaller quantities of the drug to which they are addicted. The goblin men could be treated as the drug dealers, for they tempt to have *"one taste"* of the fruit being so euphoric.

The Japanese poem Tomino's Hell was published in 1919 collection of poetry by Saijō Yaso titled Sakin or Gold Dust. A rough translation provided by David Bowles is given below :

*Elder sister vomits blood,  
younger sister's breathing fire  
while sweet little Tomino  
just spits up the jewels.*

*All alone does Tomino  
go falling into that hell,  
a hell of utter darkness,  
without even flowers.*

*Into that blackest of hells  
guide him now, I pray—*

*to the golden sheep,  
to the nightingale.*

*Sing, o nightingale,  
in the vast, misty forest—  
he screams he only misses  
his little sister.*

*His wailing desperation  
echoes throughout hell—  
a fox peony  
opens its golden petals.*

*Down past the seven mountains  
and seven rivers of hell—  
the solitary journey  
of sweet little Tomino.*

*If in this hell they be found,  
may they then come to me, please,  
those sharp spikes of punishment  
from Needle Mountain.*

*Not just on some empty whim  
Is flesh pierced with blood-red pins:  
they serve as hellish signposts  
for sweet little Tomino.*

Though the surface lyrics apparently projects a nonsensical but rather grotesque meaning, however the poet was heavily influenced by symbolists like Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, hence a significance influence of which reflects here. Amidst various interpretations, some suggest its relation with core bonds with the Buddhist philosophy and theories of Hell or Jigoku. . The description of Tomino's descending into hell is mere allegorical. Saijō that he wrote this poem upon the death of either his sister or father. It most preferably portrays Saijō's psychological catastrophe contrasted with his survivor's guilt to a venture to the hell.

Humans are oblivious creature. However the impact of certain events engraved profoundly in collective psychology and history of humankind. These embodiment of dark histories in nursery poems seems another attempt to reflect and record the black humour. Just like Samuel Beckett presents the questions of human existential crisis and nihilistic philosophy wrapped in a absurdist play Waiting for Godot. Or C.S Lewis takes an approach to biblical interpretation through the realm of fantasy in The Chronicles of Narnia. In similar manner it can be said that the dark history finds itself amusingly ironic through its projection of nursery rhymes. This might be to teach younglings of the horrid design of reality.

Apart from the ironic treatment of reality, nursery rhymes can also be seen as the instrument of catharsis for children, which suffice the requirement to introduce them to violence in passive



manner. Though in recent dates we have seen many alerted attempts to reform and rewrite the rhyme texts to provide political correctness and anti-racism (such as Baa Baa Black Sheep, Jack and Jill etc.). However psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim has strongly condemned such practice as it blunts the primary function of the poem to introduce passive violence.

Throughout the history, during the times when artistic freedom has often been shackled, or when authors attempted to endeavour in creations which was highly sensitive or could cause stir in contemporary socio-political-religious atmosphere, they have often succoured to metaphors, similies, imageries and irony. These modes of practices are more vividly evident in Jonaththan Swift's Gulliver's Travel and Alexander Pope's Rape of the Lock. The people and authors behind these rhymes have often taken the advantage of the same mechanism as they immersed the grim horror realities into the honey pot of the symbolism. As we see the depiction of Queen Bloody Mary and the tortures on the protestants, or the tales of children being buried alive in the foundation of London Bridge, also that of the Black Death, despite being one of the ignored portion of the literature, and often considered trifling children literature, these poems rightly serves the purpose of carrying the gruesome history which become more apparent through a detailed analysis. As Sandra Simonds states in her Notes on Nursery Rhymes "...what can we learn from all of these nursery rhymes? The first thing is that sound itself intoxicates and that we connect sound, rhythm, and rhyme to form very early on, probably from infancy. The music of language forms our understanding of the world and that is why it seems so fundamental, in poems, to follow the music and sounds over sense, and to trust that your ear will take you where you want to go. We also learn that language is deeply connected to play—riddles, jokes, nonsense, and, for lack of a better word, fun. But it is also wedded to tragic losses, lost time, lost childhood, the loss of the child itself and the body of the child. Even when we survive childhood, some part of us has fallen through the ice never to return. Children are connected to that loss too. They are constantly warned about strangers, about the instability of their surroundings, constantly reminded about how small they are. As poets, we take that smallness with us into adulthood and turn it into poetry." Again Lina Eckenstein remarks on the diverse origin on the poems "The comparison of our short nursery rhymes with those current in other countries, next engages our attention. Halliwell has remarked that some of our rhymes are chanted by the children of Germany and Scandinavia, which to him strikingly exhibited the great antiquity and remote origin of these rhymes. The observation which he made with regard to the countries of Northern Europe, applies to the countries of Central and Southern Europe also. Scholarly collections of rhymes have been published during recent years in Scandinavia, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and referring to special parts of these countries, which give us a fair insight into their nursery lore...At the outset we saw that our nursery collections consist of a variety of pieces of diverse origin. Many rhymes are songs or snatches of songs which have no direct claim on the attention of the student of folk-lore. Other pieces are relatively new, although they contain names that are old."

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