McGILL UNIVERSITY

SARAH ELIZABETH WARD SULLIVAN SILVER AND OTHER POEMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

A CREATIVE WORK WITH ACCOMPANYING ESSAY
SUBMITTED AS A THESIS TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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BY

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Cette thèse consiste en un volume de soixante-et-un poèmes pour enfants et un essai académique qui situe les dits poèmes dans leur contexte historico-littéraire. Bien qu'écrits pour des enfants, ces poèmes ne se limitent cependant pas à un groupe d'age spécifique.

La plupart des poèmes sont à saveur humoristique, de types variés, allant de la simple narration à la devinette, et incluant des "limericks", des poèmes absurdes, des jeux de sonorité et autres. Ils sont classés, par thèmes, en neuf sections.

L'essai académique traite des antécédents touchant la poésie traditionelle pour enfants, la poésie d'Edward Lear et de Lewis Carroll, ainsi que des oeuvres de Theodore Seuss Geisel, Maurice Sendak et Dennis Lee. Il présente et décrit les techniques et conventions poétiques que l'on peut retrouver à la fois dans les oeuvres sus-mentionnés et les oeuvres qui sont l'objet de cette thèse.

This thesis consists of a volume of sixty-one poems for children, and an academic essay which places the poetry in its literary and historical context. Though written with children in mind, these poems are not intended to be restricted in their appeal to any specific age group.

Most of the poems are humorous and are of a variety of types, including narratives, nonsense verse, limericks, tongue-twisters, a counting rhyme, riddles and others. They are grouped thematically into nine sections.

The academic essay discusses antecedents: traditional nursery rhymes, the poetry of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll and the work of Theodore Seuss Geisel, Maurice Sendak and Dennis Lee. It delineates the poetic techniques and conventions that my own poetry has in common with their work.

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PART ONE

SARAH ELIZABETH WARD SULLIVAN SILVER

AND OTHER POEMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

HERE WE GO

MOVIEHOUSE DISASTER

Here we go
down to tow
the elephant out of the second row.

He got himself stuck
when he leaned down to tuck
his pop-corn under his seat, you know.

HOW TO BAKE BUNS

Here we hop
down to pop
balloons in front of the bakery shop.

The noise will surprise
the buns, so they'll rise
till they bump their heads on the bun-oven top.

A MESSY IDEA

Here we run
to have some fun
with a great big hippo who weighs a ton.

We'll roll in the mud,
till we're covered with crud,
and pretend that the hippo's Attila the Hun.

COLD TOES

Here we sit
down to knit
a pair of socks that we hope will fit.

We'll fill them with holes
and give them to moles,
who don't care if socks are holey, one bit.

DON'T UPSET THE CAMEL!

Here we jump
down to bump
into a camel with one big hump.

But he will get mad
and tell us we had
better go jump in the garbage dump!

OFF TO SEA

Here we skip
down to slip
on to the deck of a clipper ship.

It won't have a sail,
but will be tied to a whale
who will tow us away on a wonderful trip.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A NEW KIND OF TICKET

Put a pancake in your pocket.
Leave it there a year.
Take your pocketful of pancake, -
Pickle it in beer.
Give your pocket pancake pickle
To the engineer.
Then he'll take you on the pancake train,
Far away from here.

TONS OF SOUP

We've got soup, soup,
Tons and tons of soup;
Soup coming out our ears.

We've got soup, soup,
Tons and tons of soup;
Soup to last for years.

We've got soup in the morning
And in the afternoon.
But I can't eat my soup
If you won't give me my spoon.

We've got soup, soup,
Tons and tons of soup;
Soup coming out our ears.

A GOOD RECIPE

Triple scribble!
Silly wiggle!
Jump on top of a runaway giggle.

Take it home.
Bake it in a pie.
Give it to Grandma and make her fly!

I DON'T LIKE EGGS

I don't like eggs that are scrambled;
And I don't like eggs that are fried.
I don't like eggs that are boiled so soft
That they're still all runny inside.

I don't like eggs that are pickled,
And I don't like omelets at all;
And hard-boiled eggs are only good
For throwing against the wall.

I don't like eggs that are poached,
Not even when they're on toast;
And eggs that are raw, and mixed with my milk
Are the eggs that I don't like the most.

So please don't give me eggs to eat.
They're my most unfavourite meal.
If you hated eggs, like I hate eggs,
You'd know just how I feel.

TEA PARTY

Oh mother dear,
I've something to say:
There seemed to be nothing
To do here today.

So I've asked a tiger
Home to tea.
Please serve him cookies,
So he won't eat me.

BEASTS, BUGS & BIRDS

THERE'S A TIGER IN MY BED

There's a tiger in my bed, in my bed.
There's a tiger in my bed, that's what I said.
There's a tiger in my bed,
And he's eating jam and bread,,
And he's dropping all the crumbs on to my head.

Now the tiger's getting fat, getting fat.
Now the tiger's getting fat, imagine that.
Now the tiger's getting fat,
Jam will fatten any cat,
And the bread crumbs on my head look like a hat.

Put the tiger on a diet, on a diet.
Put the tiger on a diet, if he'll try it.
Put the tiger on a diet,
And tell him to be quiet,
'Cause his munching noises sound just like a riot.

Now the tiger's getting thin, getting thin.
Now the tiger's getting thin, just like a pin.
Now the tiger's getting thin,
Soon he'll be just bones and skin,
And he's crying for the bread that's in the bin.

Let the tiger eat some food, eat some food.
Let the tiger eat some food, so he won't brood.
Let the tiger eat some food,
As long as he's not rude.
Jam and bread would put him in a perfect mood.

There's a tiger in my bed, in my bed.
There's a tiger in my bed, that's what I said.
There's a tiger in my bed,
And he's eating jam and bread,
And he's dropping all the crumbs on to my head.

I WISH I WAS A FROG

I wish I was a frog
Sitting on a log,
Sitting on a log like a bump.
I wouldn't do a thing
But croak the day away
And occasionally I might jump.

I wish I was a bear
Hiding in my lair
Out there, in the forest so deep.
I wouldn't do a thing
But growl the day away
But, mostly, I would sleep.

I wish I was a snake
Living by a lake
With a rocky shore and lots of trees.
I wouldn't do a thing
But hiss the day away
Sticking out my tongue to feel the breeze.

I wish I was a giraffe
A giraffe who could laugh,
A giraffe who could laugh right out loud.
I wouldn't do a thing
But laugh the day away
And try and reach my head up to a cloud.

I wish I was an alligator
Living in an elevator,
An elevator somewhere in a swamp.
I wouldn't do a thing
But ride up and down all day
And from time to time I step out for a romp
- in the swamp.

I wish I was a rhinoceros.
Oh no, that's too preposterous.
It's time to bring this wishing to an end.

CHARLIE

There was once an alligator,
Who looked just like a log,
Floating through the swamp,
In the middle of a bog.
His only name was Charlie,
And he lived with his dear mother.
They swam there in the water,
Right next to each other.

And early every morning,
Off to school he went.
In an alligator school-bus,
With his friends, he was sent.
Those little alligators
Sat there, side by side,
While the alligator driver
Took them for a ride.

But Charlie didn't like school,
And one morning, when he woke,
He said, "I'd rather stay at home
With all the swampy folk.
School is such a bore!
And the school-bus makes me sick.
Oh, Mom, don't make me go.
I hate reading 'Jane and Dick'.
Or is it 'Dick and Jane'?
Oh, how I hate that book!
They make us read it every day;
I can hardly stand to look
At the pictures that are in it,
And all those boring words
That I'm supposed to learn to read.
Reading's for the birds!"

Yet, his mother made him take the bus,
Like good alligators do.
But Charlie got so angry
That he ate the driver's shoe!
And then, he ate the shoes
Of everybody there;
And, becoming agitated,
Ate the bus' bottom stair!

.../

Once he'd gotten started,
Charlie couldn't stop;
He made each wheel a meal,
Which made the driver hop!
That bus-driver was angry,
But Charlie's friends were glad.
They started eating all the seats,
Which made the driver mad.

The driver started shouting
At that alligator bunch,
"You mustn't eat the school-bus!
Why can't you wait for lunch?"
By then, the bus was empty
Of seats, and what is more,
Those alligator children
Started eating the bus door!
And then, they ate the windows,
And the floor and ceiling, too.
That driver was upset;
He didn't know what to do.
So, before they'd eat the motor,
He sent them on their way.
For those unruly 'gators,
There was no school that day.

And Charlie was the hero
Of that alligator romp.
They know now school's for people;
Alligators have the swamp.
So Charlie and his friends, these days,
Just swim and eat the frogs.
And float there in the water,
Pretending to be logs.

THE OSTRICH AND YOU

Fleet of foot
But slow of brain,
The Ostrich never
Feels the pain
Of having homework
Left to do.
But the Ostrich
Ain't as smart as you.
So if you don't
Pass your exam,
We'll use YOUR feathers
To make a fan.

I WISH THAT I HAD A PET SNAKE

I wish that I had a pet snake.
Oh, what a pet it would make!
It would slither and crawl
Down the floor in the hall,
And keep my whole family awake
- with fear!

I'm sure it would really be great
Having a pet they would hate.
They'd keep out of my room
For fear of the doom
Of meeting my snake who would wait
- in there!

My mother would be so afraid
To check if my bed had been made.
And I wouldn't care less
If my room was a mess,
As long as my scary snake laid
- on my bed!

And I think that to walk down the street
With my snake on a leash would be neat.
It would be so much fun
To watch everyone run
In terror from what they would meet
- at my feet!

And if I would take it to school
My friends would all think it was cool
To have such a pet
That the teacher would get
So scared that she'd fall off her stool
- with a scream!

So a snake is what I'd like to get
As my dear sweet adorable pet.
It would make me feel grand
To hold in my hand
A pet who'd scare all that it met
- except me, of course!

DO BUGS BUG YOU?

Do bugs bug you? I really want to know.
You may not like them much, but even so,
Did you ever look into a spider's eyes,
And wonder what it is a spider spies?
Or have you heard a praying mantis pray?
Tell me, what exactly did it say?

And what about boll weevils; do they bowl
With tiny bowling balls that they can roll?
Are lady-bugs quite lady-like and neat,
With lady-slippers on their dainty feet?
And who exactly do those beetles beat?
Do they race each other up and down the street?

If bugs are really not your cup of tea,
Let's talk of other things, just you and me.
Like dinosaurs, - are they really sore?
And must a wild boar be a crashing bore?
Have you ever seen the things that pickles pick?
If you would, I'm sure they'd make you sick.

Enough of silly questions asked in rhyme -
I'll bet you knew the answers all the time!

THE OGG

There is a bird that's called an Ogg.
Its life is strange, it's true.
This bird, the Ogg, lives on a log,
To which it's stuck with glue.

An Ogg is strong, but has no ear.
Its life is not complete.
Its lack of ear, means it can't hear,
Thank heaven, it can eat.

The Ogg eats food that's very fine.
Its life is thus made richer.
This food that's fine, comes mixed with wine
Served in the Ogg's own pitcher.

It has a mouth, but not a wing.
Its life is very quiet.
It has no wing, but it can sing
A song about its diet.

And when the Ogg is filled with song,
Its life is one long sigh.
It sings its song, with notes all wrong
To please the lonesome sky.

There is a bird that's called an Ogg.
Its life is strange, it's true.
This bird, the Ogg, lives on a log,
To which it's stuck with glue.

THE SCORAFINX

A Scorafinx is not a Lynx
Nor is it some strange bear.
I've even heard some people say
It isn't really there.

Though it's a bird, it seems absurd
Its face is kind of furry.
And if I met one some dark night,
I'm sure I'd start to worry!

The Scorafinx is not a creature
To be taken lightly.
As anyone can plainly see,
It's really quite unsightly.

But ugliness is not the only
Problem of this bird.
Stupidity would also be
A most descriptive word.

So if you meet a Scorafinx,
Don't start a conversation.
The things a Scorafinx would say
Would bore an entire nation!

THE ZUNX

The Zunx
has got two trunks
Each like an elephant's nose.
What in the world
It needs them for
I really can't suppose.

Deep in the deepest
of jungles,
Is where the Zunx is found.
And each of its trunks
Is three feet in length
And its belly is nine feet around.

The Zunx
can be quite ferocious
Whenever it's angry or scared.
And no one has every yet
Captured a Zunx
Of course, no one's ever yet dared!

THE OWL

The pigeons on the roof had all stopped cooing.
Outside the night was hot, the moon was bright.
The shadow of a tree, as I could plainly see,
Hung darkly on my wall throughout the night.

That tree is overgrown, beside my window.
I can almost reach its branches from my bed.
And on that night, an owl, with his face in a scowl,
Was sitting on a branch quite near my head.

I drew my breath in, sharply, when I saw him.
He stared into my eyes, and then he blinked.
Trying not to seem afraid, as I lay there in the shade,
I fixed him in my gaze, and then I winked.

He seemed to take that wink to be a signal,
And with a gentle hop, he left the tree.
Landing on my window ledge, and sitting there upon its edge,
He shook his head, and then winked back at me.

And when he winked, he really seemed quite friendly.
He opened up his mouth, as if to speak.
And much to my surprise, as he stared into my eyes,
A clear and even voice came from his beak.

That owl said, "Good evening," as I listened.
I pinched myself; I thought it was a dream.
I was awake, alright; I had been awake all night.
He said, "I know how strange this all must seem.

"For it's rare to find a bird that speaks like people.
And rarer still to find one who will try
To open up his heart, to one who lives apart
From the creatures of the forest, sea or sky.

"But I've come to bring a message to you humans
From all the wild creatures of this earth.
And so without delay, this message to relay,
I'll say my piece to you, for what it's worth.

"Once this world belonged to all its wild things
Who lived on land or sea or in the air.
Whether large or small, there was room here for us all,
Till man began to move in, everywhere.

..../

"You humans started tearing down our forests,
And damming up our rivers and our streams,
Pouring filth into the seas, that spreads like a disease,
Choking off our lives to suit your dreams.

"And now, the air we breathe is filled with poison
That your factories and cars spew out each day.
With every passing year, more of us disappear:
You kill us off, because we're in your way.

"No animal can fight against a tractor,
Or ever stand a chance against a gun.
There isn't any doubt that time is running out,
And the dreadful things you do can't be undone."

With those words, the owl flew out my window.
He never stopped to take a backward glance.
I lay there in my bed, thinking back on what he'd said
Of how this was the animals' last chance.

The night was silent, as I lay there thinking.
And the silence helped to make me realize
How painful it would be to never again see
All the creatures of the forests, seas or skies.

The moon went down, as I lay lost in thought.
The sun rose like an eagle on the wing.
The night had passed away, and with the dawning day,
The pigeons on the roof began to sing.

TEN LITTLE LIMERICKS
& OTHER PECULIAR PEOPLE

THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN FROM SPAIN

There was an old woman from Spain
Whose head was in terrible pain.
She went to the doctor
Who dreadfully shocked her
By trying to take out her brain.

THERE ONCE WAS A WOMAN, WHOSE HEAD

There once was a woman, whose head
Fell off the side of her bed;
It dropped to the floor
And then rolled out the door.
"Look! A basketball!" somebody said.

THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN WITH AN EAR

There was a young man with an ear
With hearing unusually clear,
And often he'd wonder
If he'd really heard thunder
Or only a pin dropping near.

THERE ONCE WAS A HUNTER WHO THOUGHT

There once was a hunter who thought
He would shoot something with his next shot.
But the rifle he had
Was so awfully bad
That its barrel was tied in a knot.

THERE WAS AN OLD MAN IN A CHAIR

There was an old man in a chair
Who had such a huge pile of hair
That the hair on his head
Reached the foot of his bed
Which was thirty-eight feet from his chair.

THERE WAS AN OLD MAN WITH A BEARD

There was an old man with a beard
That was quite disturbingly weird.
It grew upside down
From his chin to his crown;
So he needed to have his face sheared.

THERE WAS A YOUNG GIRL FROM QUEBEC

There was a young girl from Quebec
Who had such a very long neck,
That she walked down the street
With her head at her feet,
And her chin was a terrible wreck.

A YOUNG MAN IN OLD MONTREAL

A young man in Old Montreal
Was so indescribably tall
That he could not look down
At the streets in the town,
For fear he'd get dizzy and fall.

THERE ONCE WAS A MAN FROM SAINT JOHN

There once was a man from Saint John
Who had such an awfully loud yawn,
That it would embarrass
The people in Paris
Who heard that loud yawn from Saint John.

AN OLD LADY WHO LIVED IN VANCOUVER

An old lady who lived in Vancouver
Vacuumed her floor with a Hoover.
It sucked her inside,
Where she nearly died,
Till somebody came to remove her.

THE MAN FROM FARBLE

Deep in the heart of the Land of Farble,
Lives a man with feet of marble.
His ears are pink, 'cause his hat's too tight,
And he sleeps out-doors nearly every night.

When he starts to get tired, he heads for the park,
And pretends he's a statue till way past dark.
Then, when nobody's looking, he lies down on a bench,
And unfastens the bolts to his feet with a wrench.

Then he puts them away; "In his pocket," some say.
There are others who say that he hides them till day.
But the truth is, he tucks his feet under his head
To use as a pillow on his park bench bed.

SHELF ELF

On my shelf
There lives an elf,
Who keeps his thoughts in a jar.

Whenever he needs
To think about things,
He studies his jar from afar.

He watches his thoughts
As they bubble and boil;
He tries to tell them apart.

But they're so mixed together, -
He never can tell
The end of a thought from its start.

TEN TINY PEOPLE AND THE TERRIBLE LOUT

Ten tiny people were running about.
They were going to visit the Terrible Lout,
Whose nose was so long, it looked more like a snout,
And who never talked softly, but only could shout.

The Terrible Lout was an unfriendly sort,
And didn't like visitors who were so short.
When they arrived, he barked, with a snort,
And threatened to take those small people to court.

Then one tiny person lifted his head,
And told all the others to pretend they were dead.
But the Lout swore he'd crush them all under his bed
On Friday, which frightened one small one who said,

"If this day is Thursday, we'd all better go.
It won't still be Thursday, tomorrow, you know,
For I never have heard of a week that could grow
To be longer than seven days, all in a row."

But the Lout, with a laugh that was wickedly mean,
Decided to stew them with cabbage and bean.
Then he grabbed, cooked, and ate them with soup that was green,
And those ten tiny people have not since been seen.

A GANDER AT MOTHER GOOSE

HICKORY DICKORY ZICKORY ZAN

Hickory Dickory
Zickory Zan.
My wife ran off
With the baker man.

He baked her a pie.
He baked her a bread.
He whacked her on the bottom
And kicked her into bed.

She slept all day,
She slept all night.
Then she and he
Had a great big fight.

So she came running
Back to me.
With the baker's pie
To eat with our tea.

The baker came
To get his pie.
I opened the door
And looked him in the eye.

Then I threw that pie
At the baker man.
Hickory Dickory
Zickory Zan.

I WAS STANDING ON THE SIDEWALK

I was standing on the sidewalk
As quiet as could be,
When a great big ugly dinosaur
Came up and stepped on me.

That dinosaur, it squished me, -
Till I was flat as flat.
You'd be squashed, too, if it stepped on you, -
That's an awful heavy hat!

ALLONS DANSER / COME ON AND DANCE
(Un reel pour Jean Carignan)

Allons danser, allons danser,
C'est Ti-Jean Carignan.
Je danserais autours du monde
Au son de son violon.

Quand j'essais de voyager
Avec mes trois chevaux,
Si je donne pas de direction
Ils vont à Toronto.

J'ai un cheval qui est aveugle.
Il sait pas où il va.
Puis, les deux autres sont si stupides,
L'aveugle est chef des trois.

Come on and dance, come on and dance,
It's Ti-Jean Carignan.
I'd dance my way around this world
To his fiddle's flying bow.

When I hitch up my three old nags,
And I have somewhere to go,
If I don't clearly point the way
They'd go to Toronto.

One of my horses, he is blind.
You know, he cannot see.
The other two are just so dumb,
The blind one leads all three.

Come on and dance, come on and dance,
Jean Carignan's in town.
Long may the fiddlers play
The whole wide world around!

COUNT ME OUT

(A Counting-Out Formula)

One Two Three
Build a house for me.
Four Five Six
Build it out of bricks.
Seven Eight Nine
Build it tall and fine.
Ten Eleven More
Knock upon my door.
- And I will be
Out!

THE FACE ON THE WALL

(A Riddle)

My face is as round as the moon or the sun;
My hands are like two skinny sticks.
I keep wiping my face, with my hands, all day long;
And my heart doesn't beat, it just ticks.

I haven't got feet, and I haven't got ears.
Can you guess who I am, from this rhyme?
If you haven't yet figured it out, here's a hint:
It's my job to keep track of the time.

Answer: A Clock

THE HEAD IN THE GARDEN

(A Riddle)

I have no body - just a head.
I live my life in a soft black bed.
And when my head grows big and round,
Someone will pick me off the ground.

They'll take me home, to eat at lunch,
Or maybe supper, or even brunch.
My head is clothed in a leafy dress.
What's my name? I'm sure you can guess.

Answer: Lettuce or cabbage

SHIPS HAVE SAILS TO SAIL THE SEAS

(A tongue-twister)

Ships have sails to sail the seas.
Sailors sail these ships with ease.
They cross these seas blown by a breeze
That blows these brave boys where they please.

And if you wish to sail a ship
First find a ship that will not tip.
Then hoist her sails and let 'er rip
Across those seas at a steady clip.

And if the sailors in your crew
Should lose their way, what shall you do?
Keep sailing 'cross the sea so blue
Until the shore comes into view.

LIZARD AND LEOPARD

(A tongue-twister)

A lucky little lizard led a leopard down a lane.
The lizard led the leopard down the lane and back again.
The leopard's lope was lazy; the lizard leapt like rain.
All that leaping left the leopard looking like he was in pain.

The leopard lost the lizard, but he lightly licked his lips.
That lizard left him looking for a lunch of licorice whips.
Lady Luck had left that lucky lizard with his hips;
For leopards like to eat the legs of anyone who trips.

THE WASP AND THE FLY

(A super tongue-twister)

One warm summer's day, a weak little fly
Flew without fear, through the warm, windy sky,
When her ears heard a whirr, and her left eye did spy
A wasp, who was flying up, looking quite sly.

The wasp, on the wing, went whizzing on by,
And winked, with a wicked wasp look in his eye.
Then the wasp started flying straight back to the fly,
While the West Wind did whisper, with the sound of a sigh.

The wasp then said, "Hi!" to the delicate fly
Who watched while the wasp flew up to the sky.
Then the fly flew, and followed the wasp heading high,
And the fly flew so fast that it passed the wasp by.

Said the fly to the wasp, "Oh, fee! and Oh, fie!
I fear I may die, from flying too high!"
Then she winked at the wasp with a wink that was shy,
And starting to cry, said, "I'm too young to die!"

Now I must say, that wasp was not such a good guy.
He intended to fly up and gobble that fly.
So he flapped his wings faster, then, as he did try
To catch up to the fly, who continued to cry.

Then the wasp did reply, "Fear not, feeble fly.
I will fly up and fetch you, dear fly, - do not cry."
And he flew up to fetch that fly down from the sky,
But the fly kept on flying till she was so high

That the wasp wondered where the fly wanted to fly.
And he followed the fly to the top of the sky.
Then the fly turned and said to the wasp, "Well, goodbye.
I fear I must leave you now, up here so high."

Then the fly deftly dived, and the wasp said, "Oh, my!
I have never before flown so high in the sky;
And I do not know how to get down from so high,
Won't you come back and help me, my dear little fly?"

..../

But the fly, looking back, called up to the sky,
"I knew all along you were planning to try
To catch me and eat me, and so, that is why
I tricked you and made you fly up there so high.

For a fly can fly high, but a wasp shouldn't try
To weather the winds at the top of the sky.
Though you call out for help, here's my only reply:
You'll soon be blown away, and this fly says goodbye."

MISS POLLY

Miss Polly's little dolly
Was not happy, happy, happy.
So she sent for the doctor
To come snappy, snappy, snappy.
He came with his cane
And his cappy, cappy, cappy.
And he knocked on the door
With a tappy, tappy, tappy.

He looked at the dolly
And he shook his head.
Then he said, "Miss Polly,
This doll is dead!"
So he threw it in the garbage
And he put the cover on,
And he sent her to the store
To buy another one.

MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleas were black as night.
And Mary's lamb itched all the time
Because those fleas did bite.

But Mary loved her little lamb
And often hugged its neck.
She did not know that darling lamb
Her social life would wreck.

It followed her to school one day -
That lamb, with all its fleas!
It made the children run away -
They thought those fleas were bees.

Soon Mary had no friends at all
Because her lamb had bugs.
So if you have a lamb with fleas,
Don't give it any hugs.

But if you must hug your sweet lamb,
Please follow this one rule:
If your dear lamb has fleas or bugs,
Don't take that lamb to school.

WHITHER THE WEATHER

ON THE OCCASION OF A SNOWSTORM IN APRIL, AFTER A VERY WARM MARCH

Spring had sprung,
The birds had sung;
But God's lost track:
Now winter's back.

APRIL SNOW

On the first day of April, not long ago
The TV weatherman said it would snow.
We thought he was playing the April Fool;
But it snowed so hard that they closed the school.

One thought ran through my head for hours:
"April showers bring May flowers."
At least, that's how the saying goes.
I wonder what you say when it snows!

LET'S WRITE A POEM TOGETHER

Let's write a poem together.
We can write it about the weather.
There are so many things to say
About something that changes each day:

We could talk about rain
On the window-pane;
Or a storm late at night
That's a terrible fright;
Or the snow on the ground
That fell with no sound;
Or the wind in the trees,
Or a soft summer breeze;
Or the sun in the sky
That shines in your eye;
Rain, snow, wind and sun -
Why this poem's almost done!

A poem isn't hard to compose.
It's easier than you suppose.
So let's get our pencils to write,
And finish this poem by tonight.

PERPLEXING PROBLEMS
& WISTFUL WISHES

WHEN I WAS SEVEN I STILL SUCKED MY THUMB

When I was seven, I still sucked my thumb
Whenever I went to bed.
I sucked my thumb most every night
Although my mother said,
"Sucking thumbs is something
Only babies ought to do.
If you keep sucking till you're eight,
What will folks think of you?"

And then I became so ashamed -
I pretended that I had stopped.
But when it was dark, and no one could see,
Into my mouth it hopped.
That thumb of mine had a mind of its own.
No matter how hard I tried
To keep my thumb outside my mouth,
It always snuck inside.

I'd say to myself,"I will not suck!"
As I went to bed each night.
Then I'd go to sleep, until my room
Was filled with the morning light.
But when I'd awaken and look at my thumb,
I'd find it all wrinkled and pink.
I didn't remember sucking it -
I didn't know what to think!

How could that thumb have got in my mouth
If I had not put it in?
It was like a contest between me and it,
And my thumb was starting to win.
I even wrapped it up with tape
And awful-tasting stuff.
But I still sucked it anyway -
My mouth was pretty tough!

I could not even tell my friends
For fear they'd laugh at me.
Yet I was becoming so afraid
That I would never be free
Of the terrible curse of the sneaky thumb
That always had its own way;
Night after night, it crept into my mouth
No matter what I would say.

..../

I tried all kinds of remedies
To stop me from sucking my thumb.
But nothing seemed to work, at all -
Oh what a wreck I'd become!
Till finally, I became tired
Of trying to change my ways.
I just stopped thinking about it
And tried to enjoy my days.

And much to my amazement,
When I'd given up the fight,
Of trying to keep my terrible thumb
Out of my mouth each night,
That crazy thumb of mine -
It stopped fighting, too!
It seems that all that worrying
Was the worst thing I could do.

For when I'd forgotten about it
And stopped thinking about my thumb,
My sucking stopped all by itself!
I guess the time had come
When I had finally outgrown
My baby thumb-sucking days.
And now I feel so proud
Of my grown-up sleeping ways.

BOOTS, BOOTS

Boots, boots,
They are my favourite clothes.
I'd like to wear them all the time;
They give me happy toes,
Their inside part is made of fur,
Their outside's made of leather.
But mother says I only ought
To wear them in bad weather.

Boots, boots,
I love to wear my pair.
But I can't wear them in the house;
It never seems quite fair.
I promised I would wipe my feet
When I come through the door,
But my mother says the leather heels
Put scratches on the floor.

Boots, boots,
I like mine full of feet.
But I'm not allowed to keep them on
When I come in to eat;
And once I tried to wear my boots
When I went to bed.
But mother made me take them off
And wear bare feet, instead.

(She made me expose my toes!)

THE POTATO POEM

Once,
when I was very small,
someone told me
that if you take a potato
and cut it into a pile of pieces
and plant them in the ground,
you'd get
brand new
grade A-1
potatoes.

So,
I took a potato
and I cut it up
into
eight
neat
pieces.

And I went out into the back lane,
where I dug
eight
neat
holes
in the ground.

And I put my eight neat pieces
into my eight neat holes,
and I covered them up
with
eight
neat
handfuls
of dirt.

And then I watered them,
and I waited
patiently
for a week
and a day.

I thought I would see
some great big huge
potato trees, there,
any day.
But nothing happened.

So,
one day I became curious
and I went outside
and I dug up my potato patch.

I was expecting to find
eight neat pieces of potato
in eight neat holes in the ground.

But instead,
what I found was
a whole bunch of tiny specks of potato
being devoured
by a hoard
of hungry
ants.

So,
I gave up
the potato-growing
business.

I GOTTA GET BACK HOME BEFORE DARK

Tadpoles in a puddle:
Wonder how they do grow up,
Lose their tails,
Grow big feet
And little hands.
There's lotsa puddles out today;
It rained all day yesterday;
And I gotta get back home before dark.

Slippin' down the sidewalk:
Wonder how I will get home,
Past the big dog
In the neighbour's
Front yard.
He growled at me yesterday,
And I'm still scared of him today;
And I gotta get back home before dark.

A stripey orange cat:
Went and jumped the neighbour's fence,
And I never
Will ever
Know why.
I don't care, anyway,
Mamma says it's gonna rain again, today;
And I gotta get back home before dark.

PARENT PROBLEMS

Sometimes I avoid my father
Who really can be such a bother
When he tries to tell me what to do.
If I bossed him around, he'd avoid me, too!

Other times I hide from my mother
Who wants me to be like my brother.
Oh, why can't my parents leave me be?
I'd much prefer to be just like me!

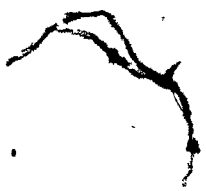
PAST BEDTIME

Not wanting
yet
to go
to bed.

Doing
a dance
of discomfort.

The deception is discovered.

Peepee-faker!



DON'T DO IT!

If you
jump off
the roof of the house,

And land
upon
your head -

Don't
expect
to get up again,

For you
will surely
be dead!

KING OF THE CASTLE

Someday I'll build a great castle
On a mountain-top so high.
I'll build it tall and mighty
So its towers will reach to the sky.

My dog and I will live up there
And hardly ever come down.
I'll call myself "King of the Castle"
And wear a shiny crown.

I'll call my dog "Dirty Rascal".
We'll live in our castle, alone.
As king, I will eat chocolate pudding,
And feed Dirty Rascal a bone.

FLYING SONG

If I had wings
And I could fly
I'd kiss my Mom
And my Dad goodbye.
Fare thee well, I'm flying, fare thee well.

Then I'd head straight up
To that sky of blue
I'd fly up the river
To someplace new.
Fare thee well, I'm flying, fare thee well.

I'd fly to China
Or maybe Spain
I'd fly in the sunshine
And even the rain.
Fare thee well, I'm flying, fare thee well.

I'd wear a coat
Buttoned to my chin
So the cold, cold wind
Won't ever blow in.
Fare thee well, I'm flying, fare thee well.

And when I've seen
This whole world wide,
I'll fly back home
And fly right inside.
Fare thee well, I'm flying, fare thee well.

I'll fly in the window
And straight up the stairs
To my Mom and Dad
Who'll be waiting up there.
Fare thee well, I'm flying, fare thee well.

Then I'll fold my wings
And tuck them away,
Having seen the world,
At home I'll stay.
Fare thee well, I'm flying, fare thee well.

IF I COULD ONLY DISAPPEAR

If I could only disappear,
I'd take my leave away from here.
But then, I don't know what I'd be.
If I would vanish, would I still be me?

Or would I be some other thing -
An invisible turnip or a piece of string;
Or an onion that was growing there
With its head in the ground and its feet in the air?

TWO TALL TALES

SARAH ELIZABETH WARD SULLIVAN SILVER

Her second name was Elizabeth,
But most folks knew her as Lizzy,
And trying to say all her names in a row
Is something that made Lizzy dizzy.
So Lizzy got busy and wrote them all down,
And soon it was known all over town
That her name was
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver.

Elizabeth woke up one morning to find
That the hair on her head was bright red.
She was still a red-head when she climbed back in bed
That night after she had been fed.
As she lay there in bed, all her names filled her head,
So she opened her mouth and she said
That her name was
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver.

At the sound of her voice, something quite strange
Filled up the air in her room.
The moment she spoke, a big cloud of smoke
Appeared there, sooner than soon.
It seemed like a joke, till the smoke cleared away,
And there stood a dragon who leaned down to say
That its name was
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver.

Lizzy was troubled by this twist of fate.
She could see that the dragon was, too.
They both shared one name; they had been named the same,
And neither one knew what to do;
Till the dragon decided to swallow the child.
And it ate up poor Lizzy, and sat there and smiled.
Yes, it ate up
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver.

"This dragon has quite a fine stomach," thought Lizzy,
"But I'd rather not be in it.
So I'll crawl out its mouth, when it has its next meal.
I hope it soon plans to begin it."
But the dragon just stood up, and spread its wings wide,
And then flew out the window with a girl stuck inside.
And her name was
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver.

..../

The dragon flew home to its mountain-top cave,
And lay down to sleep on the floor.
With its stomach filled up with Elizabeth,
That dragon began to snore.
The snoring was boring, and hard on the ear,
But it kept the mouth open, so the girl could appear.
And then out crawled
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver.

The girl, Elizabeth, looked at the dragon
Who bore the same name as she.
Then the dragon awoke! And coughed out some smoke!
So Elizabeth offered it tea.
Then she said to the dragon, "Now, listen, my friend.
There's no reason to eat me, I don't mean to offend.
Can't we both be
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver?"

The dragon reflected, and had to admit
That eating the girl had been hasty.
But hasty or not, the dragon still thought
That the girl it had eaten was tasty.
Still, they ended up friends, so to make its amends,
The dragon flew Lizzy back home in the end.
And they both were
Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver.

RAT-DES-BOIS

A Traditional Folktale from Louisiana
(Retold in verse using a simplified
Cajun dialect.)

Note: - The Cajun people are the transplanted Acadians in Louisiana.

- "Rat-des-bois" is the Cajun word for oppossum.
- A "bayou" is a slow-moving river.
- A "piroge" is a Cajun style of boat.
- "Gumbo" is a word of African origin, used variously as the name of the okra plant and any stew seasoned with okra and filé powder.

Zachary stood on de edge of da bayou
Fishin' for minnows and crawfish to eat.
But 'e didn't ketch nothin' to eat all dat day.
Dat night 'e walked 'ome to da swamp on tired feet.

When 'e walked in 'is cabin way off in da swamplands,
He called to 'is wife, who was named Emily,
An' 'e said to her, "What we got cookin' for dinner?"
She said, "We ain't got nothin' much, Zachary.

"You know we got lef' only one little 'tater,
An' I've tried to make us a gumbo wit' dat.
But you cain't git a meal outta jes' one small 'tater,-
I might as well try an' cook up a straw hat!"

"Well, why you don' kill us a chicken for dinner?"
Zachary said, as 'e sat at 'is place,
"An' make chicken gumbo, you know da's my favourite."
But Emily said, "Dat would be a disgrace!

"We got jes' one chicken out dere in da yard;
An' it lays us an egg, mos' every day.
It would be a great sin to kill sech a chicken,
Wit' no egg for breakfast, now what would you say?"

..../

"Well, I guess you are right," 'e said as 'e sat dere.
"I'll try out dat 'tater, I hope it's alright."
Den 'e lifted 'is fork from 'is plate for a taste
An' could tell right away he'd be hungry all night.

Pushin' dat 'tater aroun' wit' 'is fork,
Zachary shet 'is eyes, tryin' real hard
To pretend dat de gumbo was somethin' délicious,
When jes' den 'e heard a noise out in da yard.

Dat chicken was squawkin', an' makin' a racket!
Zachary ran to da window to look.
An ol' rat-des-bois had grabbed hold of 'is chicken
An' was holdin' dat bird in its teeth, like a hook!

Zachary was real mad, an' 'e grabbed a big stick
An' den ran to da door, an' opened it wide.
But dat ol' rat-des-bois fell down dead at 'is feet
Even before Zachary stepped outside!

So he lifted dat rat-des-bois up by de tail,
"We got meat for dinner, tonight, Emily!"
Zachary said wit' a grin, an' explained,
"Rat-des-bois stew is real good, wait an' see!"

He slapped dat ol' rat-des-bois down on de table,
An' took out 'is knife to cut open de hide.
Den 'e made a long slit in dat rat-des-bois' belly,
An' peeled off de skin to git what was inside.

Den 'e said, "Emily, go an' heat up de oven.
An' maybe you better put on some more wood.
Put some grease in de pan, an' t'row in dat 'tater.
Take my rat-des-bois, den, an' cook it real good!

"Me, I am takin' de skin from dis critter
On down de bayou to Ol' Hébert's store.
Maybe he'll trade me a bottle of wine,
Or if I git lucky, I'll git somethin' more."

So Emily did jes' what Zachary said.
An' 'e got 'is piroge, an' started downstream,
An' arrived at de store in de dark of de night.
Den 'is knockin' woke Hébert right out of a dream.

..../

Ol' Hébert stuck 'is head outta de window,
An' held up a candle, an' said, "Who's dat dere?"
Zachary said, "Why it's me, Zachary!
An' dis rat-des-bois skin I got here's pretty fair!"

Ol' Hébert said, "It's too dark, I cain't see it.
Better bring it inside, into de light."
So he took in dat skin, an' den wit' some nails,
Hung it up on de wall, an' stretched it real tight.

Ol' Hébert, he studied dat rat-des-bois skin,
"You know, Zachary," de ol' man, 'e said,
"Dat's de very best skin dat I've seen in some time.
I can give you a bottle of wine, an' some bread."

An' as 'e went 'ome, Zachary felt so proud
To 'ave gotten a rat-des-bois skin dat's so fine
Dat Ol' Mister Hébert had traded 'im for it
A whole loaf of bread, along wit' de wine.

He was sure feelin' good, when at las' 'e got home
An' 'e put down da wine an' da bread at 'is place.
Den 'e opened da wine, an' it really smelled good.
Zachary, he jes' sat wit' a smile on 'is face.

"Well, Emily," he called out to his wife,
"Is my rat-des-bois cooked? Is it ready to eat?"
She said, "Go an' look in de oven yourself -
Don't be so lazy, go check your own meat."

So Zachary got up an' walked to de oven,
Gettin' down on 'is knees, to open da door.
Da sweet smell from inside, it was makin' 'im hungry,
So he opened de oven, an' sniffed it some more.

But would you believe it? What Zachary saw
Was de rat-des-bois sittin' dere, grinnin' a grin!
It took one look at Zachary, den finished eatin'
Dat one-tater-gumbo, den wiped off its chin.

It licked up all of de grease in da pan;
An' den it jumped over poor Zachary's head!
It knocked over Zachary's bottle of wine,
An' jumped out da window wit' Zachary's bread!

..../

Dat rat-des-bois had de bread under one arm.
It grabbed up de chicken wit' its other hand.
An' off it ran into da dark of da woods,
Zachary was so mad, 'e hardly could stand!

Zachary stood an' looked into de darkness,
An' said, as 'e raised 'is fist over 'is head,
"Some day I will git you for spillin' my wine,
An' stealin' my chicken, an' also my bread!"

But dat rat-des-bois, well, it had de las' laugh.
Later dat night, it sneaked outta de woods.
It slipped through de window of Ol' Hébert's store,
An' quietly crept through de piles of dry goods.

It looked 'round de store, till it found a hammer
An' den found its skin, nailed up on de wall.
Using de hammer, it pulled out de nails.
When de las' one was pulled, de skin, it did fall.

It picked up de skin, an' den carried it over
To where Mister Hébert kept needles and thread.
An' puttin' de skin back on, jes' like a coat,
It sewed itself up, from its toes to its head.

An' quick as a wink, it was gone out de window.
Wit' its skin sewn back on, it was now good as new!
It ran into de woods to eat dat bread an' chicken.
An' Zachary never got rat-des-bois stew!

A FOOT-NOTE

TOES

Everyone knows
That everyone's toes
Are attached to the front of their feet.

For everyone grows
A whole bunch of toes
To help their feet walk down the street.

And these bunches of toes
Are all laid out in rows.
Five toes to a row seems quite neat.

And each row of toes
Very happily goes
Down the street, just ahead of the feet.

PART TWO

ON ASPECTS OF WRITING POETRY FOR CHILDREN

In the past few hundred years since Isaac Watts first wrote his Divine and Moral Songs, a steadily increasing number of writers have turned their hands to producing poetry specifically for children. Much of the early work in this field was designed to edify and educate, and was written, to some extent, in reaction to that rag-tag collection of oral verse that has come to be known as the "Mother Goose" rhymes. Yet, despite all the efforts of Watts and other early children's writers, such as Samuel Griswald Goodridge (a.k.a. Peter Parley), the Taylor Sisters, and their many imitators, to replace these verses with "morally uplifting" and/or useful material, the "idle, wanton, or profane"[1] traditional verses have retained their central position in the nursery library, continuing to be the greatest single body of children's poems in the English language.

In examining my poems included in this thesis, and in comparing them to the works of others who have written for children, I feel that I am able to characterize my work as belonging to an ongoing tradition of poetry whose central thrust is almost directly opposite to that of the early children's poets. That is, my poetry, and that of the poets whose work is discussed below, has been influenced by, and is directly related in form, content and style to, the "Mother Goose" poems. Far from being written in reaction against the traditional nursery rhymes, it is written with the intention of building upon the inherent strengths of "Mother Goose".

---

[1]Isaac Watts, Divine and Moral Songs (London: John Van Voorst, 1848), p. 77.

This notion of writing poetry that is in many ways similar to traditional verse first appears in the nineteenth century, in the works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, and has had a growing number of adherents in the twentieth century (too numerous to catalogue here). In the following essay, I use the "Mother Goose" rhymes as a touchstone in discussing the work of some writers to which I feel my own has an affinity.

The first section of the essay is an examination of the poetic techniques that make these traditional poems so enduring. Though it may be true that form, theme and technique are so interrelated as to make a discussion of any one of these aspects impossible without touching upon the others, for the purposes of this essay, I am chiefly concerned with technical issues. I would like to mention, at this point, that, though the illustrative examples that I have chosen for my discussion of "Mother Goose" are generally of a comic nature, this is not meant to imply that traditional poetry is not also rich in lyricism. My examples have been so chosen because much of my own poetry is likewise humourous.

The second section of my essay deals with the work of Lear and Carroll and demonstrates how their poetry is closely related to traditional verse. Lear, in particular, managed to absorb the influences of "Mother Goose" verse and to brilliantly transform it into his own personal idiom.

Much the same might also be said of the contemporary writer Dr. Seuss (a.k.a. Theodore Geisel) and the third section of my essay deals partly with his work. Still taking a technical point of view, I show how his writing is related to that of both Lear and Carroll, and to traditional versifying, as well.

In the same section, I discuss the work of Maurice Sendak, comparing it to that of Seuss and relating it back to "Mother Goose". The debt that

Sendak's work owes to those ancient rhymes is one that he himself has acknowledged in essays and interviews. This is also true of the Canadian poet, Dennis Lee, whose work is discussed in the fourth section of the essay in this light.

Finally, I deal with my own work that is presented in the body of this thesis, and show how it is directly related, through that of the other poets discussed, to the traditional poetry that stands behind us all.

MOTHER GOOSE

Those of us who write verse for children are fortunate in having a great treasure of orally-preserved songs, stories and poems upon which to draw for inspirational nourishment. Many of the forms of poetry for the young that have been written in the past few centuries have grown out of the body of verse that is known in this part of the world as "Mother Goose" rhymes and in England as "nursery rhymes". The scope of traditional versifying is indeed vast, ranging in kind from magical lyricism to long narratives, from riddles and charms to didacticism and cautionary tales. It includes physical poetry, such as knee-riding verses for infants, skip-rope rhymes and game songs for those who are older, tongue-twisters (the physical poetry of the tongue and the mouth), as well as obliquely intellectual forms of nonsense, humour, and fantasy. Along with this great variety of types, these poems also reveal a thematic richness that allows them to deal with almost any aspect of human experience.

Anyone writing children's verse will find a rich field of study in this fantastic body of nursery rhymes, street songs, game chants, and the whole variety of eccentric childhood odds and ends that exist in the English language; and it is by understanding the mechanisms which continue to make this traditional material an enduring form of literature for children, that we can divine those literary characteristics that reach this audience at its deepest level. Of course, all the poetic elements that go into making verse work for children are also present in almost all poetry. What I am dealing with, here, are those specific devices which are fundamental to verse for the

very young.

Traditional verse is filled with fanciful word play, pronounced and varied rhythms, and playful rhymes,--characteristics which should not be underestimated in their importance as mechanisms by which poetry for children succeeds in reaching its audience. Young children, as a class, are pre-literate or early readers, and because of this, the qualities that relate to and emphasize the oral and aural nature of verse are those that are likely to have the greatest impact. It is also useful to remember that, for the very young, listening to poetry can almost be a physical experience.[2] Children are often capable of appreciating its musical sounds and shapes long before they are able to understand the meaning of the words.

> Even children nine months old can be enthralled by nursery rhymes, songs, or stories although the words are beyond their understanding. ...For several years, in fact, it is the surface of the sound, both of what they hear and what they say, that attracts children. For them language is a sensorimotor delight rather than the route to prosaic meaning that it is to many adults.[3]

> When children learn to use words, the playful use of language continues in combinations of nonsense words and in rhyming games, especially under rhythmical stimulation...[4]

The tendency to delight in the manipulation of language is manifested in children's poetry through such devices as alliteration and exaggeration, colourful diction and imagery, nonsense syllabics and repetition. The "Mother Goose" poems are replete with examples of these poetic techniques, a particularly striking case in point being:

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[2]A. Harris Fairbanks, "Children's Verse: Four Styles", Children's Literature, 4 (1975), p. 169.

[3]Developmental Psychology Today (Del Mar, CA: CRM Books, 1971), pp. 163-164.

[4]Ibid., P. 163.

One-ery, two-ery,
Ziccary zan;
Hollow bone, crack a bone,
Ninery ten:
Spittery spot,
It must be done;
Twiddleum twaddleum
Twenty-ONE.
Hink spink, the puddings stink,
The fat begins to fry,
Nobody at home, but jumping Joan,
Father, mother, and I.
Stick, stock, stone dead,
Blind man can't see,
Every knave will have a slave,
You or I must be HE.[5]

Though it contains evocative and mysterious images, this poem's immediate impact is largely a result of its linguistic intricacies. It is built on a framework of nonsense syllabics, and the surface texture of the word sounds is kept in a constant state of flux by the use of changing patterns of rhythm, alliteration, repetition, and internal rhyme.

Structurally, the poem as a whole consists of an almost strict alternation between a series of disconnected concrete images and seemingly meaningless nonsense lines. Some lines of rhythmic nonsense syllabics are derived from real words, as in "One-ery, two-ery"; others have no apparent meaning, while retaining syntactical value, such as "Ziccary zan", or "Hink, spink".

Various techniques are used to highlight individual lines, such as the alliteration in "Stick, stock, stone dead". The line "Hollow bone, crack a bone", while having a concrete meaning, is here stripped of sense by lacking a logical context. Yet, at the same time, the image, which is striking to

[5]This rhyme is, in fact, two different "counting out" formulae that were strung together as a single poem in Joseph Ritson, ed., Grammer Gurton's Garland: or the Nursery Parnassus; A Choice Collection of Pretty Songs and Verses, for the Amusement of all Good Little Children Who can Neither Read nor Run, enlarged edition (London: R. Triphook, 1810), pp. 40-41.

begin with, is invested with even greater power due to the onomatopoeic nature of the word "crack".

The fact that this poem actually consists of two separate counting-out formulae that have been strung together as one, produces an interesting shift in the rhythmic pattern that in itself is an appealing poetic device. The change from a dimeter pattern in the first section to an alternation of longer tetrameter and trimeter lines in the second part produces a quickening of pace that drives the poem to its conclusion.

It is somewhat unusual for a single "Mother Goose" poem to use so great a variety of poetic devices as does "One-ery, two-ery". Often a poem may be constructed around any one or two of these devices, such as the extreme alliteration which is found in tongue-twisters:

> When a Twister will twist him a twist;
> For the twisting of his twist, he three times doth untwist;
> But if one of the twines of the twist do untwist
> The twine that untwisteth, untwisteth the twist.[6]

Along with alliteration, the tongue-twister above also relies heavily on repetition to achieve its effect. Some poems are based chiefly on repetition for their impact, as in:

> There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile,
> He found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile:
> He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse,
> And they all lived together in a little crooked house.[7]

Other poems may be built around any of a variety of poetic ideas, but whatever specific devices may be used, traditional children's poetry is usually characterized by a lively and inventive use of language and a strong sense of

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[6]Iona Opie and Peter Opie, eds., The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 418.

[7]James Orchard Halliwell, ed., The Nursery Rhymes of England (London: The Bodley Head, 1970), p. 26.

rhythm.

Strongly measured and accented rhythms are an important quality in verse for children. I mentioned above the physical nature of the poetic experience for the very young, and it is to this sensibility that rhythm appeals. A study of speech patterns of various languages suggests the probability that "rhythm is an unconscious language determinant"[8] and that poetic rhythms are a "sensitive and stylized application of rhythmic tendencies that are characteristic of ...daily speech."[9]

There is also an observable natural tendency on the part of young children to lapse into a kind of rhythmic "sing-songy" pattern of vocalization, especially when engaged in solitary play. Perhaps it is by drawing on this already present sense of rhythm that the metrical content of the poetic equation is able to make so strong an impact on children.

In counting-out formulae (like "One-ery, two-ery", above), the rhythm is especially stressed, as each person in the counting circle is pointed to or touched in turn, at the moment of the accented beat. This traditional method of recitation (i.e., heavily-stressed accented beats), while not conveyed on the printed page, might be regarded as a special poetic technique specific to those types of children's verse in which accompanying actions are determined by the rhythm of the poem. These include game chants, knee-riding poems, hand-clapping verses, skip-rope rhymes and fortune-telling rhymes such as this well-known example:

Tinker,
  Tailor,
Soldier,
  Sailor,

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[8]Edward Sapir, Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949), p. 161.

[9]Ibid.

Rich man,
Poor man,
Beggarman,
Thief.[10]

The one-foot lines in the above poem emphasize the importance of its rhythmic content, so that, even if the child reciting it is neither skipping rope nor counting out "cherry stones, waistcoat buttons, daisy petals or the seeds of the Timothy grass"[11] (as is traditional), the structure of the poem imposes a strong and steady beat. Yet even within the context of a series of monometer lines, there is to be found here, as in "One-ery, two-ery", the pleasing subtlety of a metrical shift. The usual trochaic line is replaced in the seventh line with a dactyle and in the eighth line with a single stress and missing syllable.

Along with strong rhythms, almost all traditional children's verse is rhymed. While rhyme may generally be used to create a variety of different poetic effects, in these poems it serves several main purposes. It is, firstly, a form of word play in itself that emphasizes the aural and oral qualities of the poetry, as in:

What is the rhyme for porringer?
What is the rhyme for porringer?
The King he had a daughter fair
And he gave the Prince of Orange her.[12]

A second function of rhyme is its role in creating metrical signposts, marking the ends of lines, and thus strengthening the rhymthmic content. Thirdly, rhyme can serve as a mnemonic device, aiding the mind in the task of casting ahead to remember the next line during recitation of a memorized poem.

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[10] Opie, Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, p. 404.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 354.

As well, the use of forced rhyme sometimes tends to create comical juxtapositions. An unexpected rhyme can create an incongruity that is at once bizarre and humorous, as in the last line of this verse:

> When I was a little boy,
> I wash'd my
> Mother's Dishes.
> I put my finger in my
> Ear, and pulled out
> Little fishes.[13]

Humour itself is often the vehicle by which children are drawn into the world of verse. This is a particular facet of children's verse that deserves special attention, since much of what exists in tradition, as well as that which has been written in the past century or so, might be classified as "light verse". However, light verse is not "slight verse, nor should it be slighted."[14]

> We must also consider that traditional children's verse depends so heavily on wit not because children have low tastes or because they are incapable of serious thought and emotion, but because wit provides a way of charging language with meanings -- of giving the verbal medium that independant interest essential to poetry -- without demanding the extensive vocabulary or awareness of connotative nuance that comes only with age and experience.[15]

The humour in "Mother Goose" can be actualized in a variety of different ways. Surprising incongruity, mentioned above, is probably the most common comic device. As well, the humour can be of a simple straightforward kind, such as the hyperbole of the following verse:

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[13]William S. Baring-Gould and Ceil Baring-Gould, eds., The Annotated Mother Goose (New York: Bramhall House, 1962), p. 29.

[14]Melville Cane, Making a Poem: An Inquiry into the Creative Process (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), p. 65.

[15]Fairbanks, p. 169.

Robin the Bobbin, the big-bellied Ben,
He ate more meat than fourscore men;
He ate a cow, he ate a calf,
He ate a butcher and a half,
He ate a church, he ate a steeple,
He ate the priest and all the people!
A cow and a calf,
An ox and a half,
A church and a steeple,
And all the good people,
And yet he complained that his stomach wasn't full.[16]

Another simple form of humour often found in traditional verse, and much appreciated by both children and adults alike, is the pun. In the following example, in which alternate lines are recited in call-and-response fashion, the pun of the final line also serves as an embarrassing trick played on the person saying the "key" lines:

1. I am a gold lock;
2. I am a gold key.
1. I am a silver lock;
2. I am a silver key.
1. I am a brass lock;
2. I am a brass key.
1. I am a lead lock;
2. I am a lead key.
1. I am a monk lock,
2. I am a monk key![17]

On the other hand, traditional children's verse sometimes employs more sophisticated notions of humour. The following verses (usually sung to the tune of "The Irish Washerwoman") form a delightful complementary pair, the first being a logical paradox, the second, a self-evident proposition:

Yesterday I ran up the stairs,
I met a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today;
Oh how I wish he would go away!

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[16]Halliwell, p. 27.

[17]Ibid., p. 124.

McTavish is dead and McKenzie don't know it.
McKenzie is dead and McTavish don't know it.
They're both of them dead, and they're in the same bed,
And neither one knows that the other is dead![18]

As can be seen in the second stanza above, it is the use of humour, in conjunction with all the above-mentioned poetic devices, that provides traditional children's verse with one of its greatest strengths: the ability to tackle threatening or frightening ideas in a way that defuses the anxiety inherent in the subject matter and allows the child to deal with these themes on his own level.[19]

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[18]These stanzas are quoted from my own knowledge of oral tradition, as I have never seen them in print.

[19]There are many proponents of the psychological theory of children's aggressions and fears vicariously solved and vented through fairy tales and folk tales. See Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Importance and Meaning of Fairy Tales (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976) and Max Luthi, Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales, tras. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottward (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1970).

LEAR AND CARROLL

Prior to the nineteenth century, the "Mother Goose" rhymes were among the most popular literature for children and the best of the Victorian era children's writers, whether consciously or not, often patterned their work on these traditional verses. "After 'Mother Goose', Edward Lear is chronologically the first [major] poet to conjure up laughter,"[20] and, through this laughter, he was frequently able to deal effectively with the frightening side of life, tackling such themes as despair, pain, abandonment, cruelty, murder and disease. Lear, himself, had a childhood filled with insecurity, having been raised by an elder sister while his father was confined to debtor's prison, and his mother had virtually abandoned her twenty-one children. It was perhaps the memories of his own painful early life that provoked in him the desire to make light of what are indeed weighty subjects, such as in the following verse about a threatened infanticide:

> There was a Young Person of Smyrna
> Whose Grandmother threatened to burn her;
> But she seized the Cat,
> And said, 'Granny, burn that,
> You incongruous Old Woman of Smyrna!'[21]

The above verse is, of course, a limerick, a form that was used so extensively by Lear that it is often erroneously thought to have been of his

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[20]May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books, 3rd edition (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), p. 117.

[21]Edward Lear, The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear, with a foreward by H. Jackson, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1976), p. 5.

own invention.[22] Like most of the poetic forms and conventions he used, the limerick is traditional.[23] Lear also wrote a number of narratives, nonsense natural history, geography and botany, along with nonsense alphabets and vocabularies.

The unifying element in Lear's writing is that it is all nonsense. But

> Lear's nonsense is no mere tissue of quips and jokes. It is a thing in itself in a world of its own... a world in which the nature of things has been changed, whilst retaining its own logical and consistent idiom.[24]

While he used readily recognizable traditional forms, he was able to invest his work with a heady dose of absurdity, so that it is, at once, similar to one central drive of the "Mother Goose" rhymes, and, at the same time, extends their nascent sense of surrealism to unparallelled heights. Much the same might also be said of the work of that other major "children's writer" of the Victorian era, the mathematician Rev. Charles Dodgson. While his learned mathematical treatises gather dust on library shelves, the children's books he wrote under the pseudonym Lewis Carrol stand today as monuments to his creative brilliance. These books (particularly the "Alice" books), and the poetry that is scattered throughout them, achieve their powerful effect by being

> works of unsleeping rationality, whose frolics are governed throughout not by a formal theory of any kind, but by close attention to logical principles, and sometimes by a surprising insight into abstract

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[22]Alison White, "With birds in his beard," Only Connect: readings on children's literature, eds. Sheila Egoff, G.T. Stubbs, and L.F. Ashley (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 279.

[23]See Halliwell, Nursery Rhymes, pp. 27, 112, for examples of traditional limericks that pre-date Lear's work. Nursery Rhymes was originally published in 1842; Lear's first work appeared in 1846.

[24]H. Jackson, Foreward to The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear, p. xxiii.

questions of philosophy.[25]

While Lear's subject matter may, at times, be more psychologically profound than that of traditional verse, and while Carroll's poetry (and prose) may display an uncommon interest in philosophical concerns, the poetic techniques and devices both men employed to make their poetry successful for young children are precisely the same as those found in much of "Mother Goose". In keeping with a general sense of humour, their work abounds in playful and inventive use of language, as in Lear's:

> On the top of the Crumpetty Tree
> The Quangle Wangle sat,
> But his face you could not see
> On account of his Beaver Hat.
> For his hat was a hundred and two feet wide,
> With ribbons and bibbons on every side
> And bells, and buttons, and loops and lace,
> So that nobody ever can see the face
> Of the Quangle Wangle Quee.[26]

or in Carroll's "Gardener's Song" from Sylvie and Bruno:

> He thought he saw an Albatross
> That fluttered round the lamp:
> He looked again and found it was
> A Penny-Postage-Stamp.
> 'You'd best be getting home' he said
> 'The nights are very damp!'[27]

These poems, like most of Lear and Carroll's verse, are comical; a comedy based on twists of logic, incongruity and hyperbole. In the above examples, the use of forced or unexpected rhyme simultaneously creates bizarre juxtapositions and lends legitimacy to these absurd statements. Lear

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[25]Peter Heath, ed., The Philosopher's Alice (London: St. Michael's Press), as quoted in Edward F. Guiliano, "Academic Wonderlands," in Children's Literature, 4 (1975), p. 186.

[26]Lear, p. 252.

[27]Lewis Carroll, Sylvie and Bruno, as quoted in The Oxford Book of Children's Verse, ed. Iona and Peter Opie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 250.

and Carroll both frequently used rhyme in this way, to give a semblance of order or logic to otherwise illogical images.

Lear's word play also led him to the invention of countless nonsense words that are liberally sprinkled throughout his poetry, a notable example being that wonderful adjective "runcible", which he used on numerous occasions without ever giving a clue as to its meaning. In addition to single nonsense words, Lear also made occasional use of groups of rhythmic nonsense syllabics, such as:

> Twikky wikky wikky wee,
> Wikky bikky twikky tee,
> Spikky bikky bee,[28]

much the same as "Mother Goose" uses "Hickory, dickory, dock"[29] or "Highty, tighty, paradighty."[30]

Carroll indulged less frequently than Lear in the invention of nonsense words, but when he did, they were conceived with unmatched brilliance:

Jabberwocky

> 'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
> All mimsy were the borogoves,
> And the mome raths outgrabe.[31]

In fact, Carroll's nonsense words have sometimes proved so apt that at least two of them ("galumph" and "chortle") have entered the language and can now be found in the Oxford English Dictionary.[32]

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[28] Lear, p. 81.

[29] Opie, Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, p. 206.

[30] Ibid., p. 208.

[31] Lewis Carroll, "Jabberwocky", as quoted in The Annotated Alice - Lewis Carroll, ed. Martin Gardner (Markham, Ont.: Penguin, 1974), p. 191.

[32] The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 406 and 1110.

Another type of word play often found in traditional verse, that both Carroll and Lear used to advantage, is alliteration. Perhaps because of an oral and aural sensuousness involved in the act of repeating certain sounds, children seem to take delight in alliterative passages. In other words, it is simply fun to say such lines as:

> 'The time has come,' the Walrus said,
> 'To talk of many things:
> Of shoes - and ships - and sealing-wax -
> Of cabbages - and kings - [33]

And these lines are equally fun to hear, flowing into the ear like a smooth stream of words.

It seems to me that this attention to the sensuous quality of the word sounds is one of the most important characteristics of the poetry of Carroll and Lear. Much of their work has a genuine musical quality, like a fanciful dance of syllables. Contributing, as well, to the inner music of their words is a strongly measured and accented rhythm, which carries each poem forward like a relentless heartbeat. It is, for instance, this underlying pulse, as much as the words themselves, that gives Lear's "The Dong With A Luminous Nose" its deep feeling of foreboding and mystery:

> When awful darkness and silence reign
> Over the great Gromboolian plain,
> Through the long, long wintry nights: -
> When the angry breakers roar
> As they beat on the rocky shore; -
> When Storm-clouds brood on the towering heights
> Of the Hills of the Chankly Bore: - [34]

In contrast to the "mock-epic" quality of this poem, it is the rhythm of a sprightly jig that propels "The Owl and the Pussycat" at a rollicking,

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[33] Carroll, as quoted in Gardner, p. 235.

[34] Lear, p. 225.

joyous pace:

> The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
> In a beautiful pea-green boat,
> They took some honey, and plenty of money,
> Wrapped in a five-pound note.
> The Owl looked up at the stars above,
> And sang to a small guitar,
> 'O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love
> What a beautiful Pussy you are
> You are,
> You are!
> What a beautiful Pussy you are![35]

Carroll, in "Jabberwocky", used a verse structure of four short lines, having four/four/four/three metrical feet respectively. The resulting effect of having so many strong beats in such short lines, is that almost every word is stressed, with some words (e.g., borogoves) receiving two stresses. This creates a driving forward movement that may contribute as much to the mood and atmosphere of the poem as does its exotic vocabulary. Comparing this with a stanza from "The Lobster", which also uses tetrameter, the use, here, of anapests rather than iambs creates a leisurely pace that allows for the stressing of important and related elements (which are marked):

> I passed by his garden, and marked, with one eye
> How the Owl and the Oyster were sharing a pie;
> While the Duck and the Dodo, the Lizard and Cat,
> Were swimming in milk round the brim of a hat.[36]

Thus it can be seen that the appeal of Carroll's and Lear's poetry lies not only in its imaginative and original content, but also in its skilful use of the poetic conventions that have long been mainstays of lasting verse for children: colourful language and imagery, comic hyperbole, inventive rhymes and carefully selected rhythmic patterns.

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[35] Ibid., p. 61.

[36] Carroll, as quoted in Opie, Oxford Book of Children's Verse, p. 241. The version of this poem that now appears in Alice in Wonderland is from Carroll's 1886 revision. The version appearing above is the one Carroll supplied for William Boyd's 1870 edition of Songs from Alice in Wonderland.

SEUSS AND SENDAK

In turning the discussion to contemporary writers of children's books working in the tradition delineated above, I would like, first, to look at Theodore Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, whose work has probably had a profound, though largely unconscious, influence on my own writing. As a child, I was intensely devoted to his books, reading and re-reading everything of his that I could find. The rhyme, the rhythm, the wit and the unabashed craziness of his work made most everything else that I encountered (between the ages of four and seven) seem pale and dull in comparison.

Seuss did not start out to be a children's author. He was an advertising copy-writer, and wrote his first book while on vacation. While on a ship crossing the Atlantic, he

> found himself mumbling over and over to the beat of the ship's engines:
> "And that is a story that no one can beat,
> And to think that I saw it on Mulberry Street."
> In order to prevent their lives from being darkened by the continued repetition of this couplet, Mrs. Geisel persuaded him to invent a story in which it might reasonably appear. The result was his first book, And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street,[37]

a raucous and delightful tribute to a child's overactive imagination.

It seems to me that the best verse for young people is often written chiefly for the pleasure it gives to the author and to the children he or she knows. And pleasure, indeed, is the result of encounters with the un-

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[37]Clifton Fadiman, "Professionals and Confessionals: Dr. Seuss and Kenneth Grahame," Only Connect: readings on children's literature, eds., Sheila Egoff, G.T. Stubbs, and L.F. Ashley (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 321.

bridled imaginative force behind such works as Thidwick: The Big-Hearted Moose, On Beyond Zebra or The Cat in the Hat; pleasure in the sensuous and witty manipulation of language, in driving rhythms and in playful rhymes, as much as in wildly unpredictable stories and ideas.

Always impelled by a throbbing rhythm, like that ship's engine that started him writing, Dr. Seuss has a gift for spinning outlandish tales, filled with wild exaggeration, that move forward at an impressively brisk pace. It is this talent that has won him "a firm place beside Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll as one of the inspired creators of nonsense in the English language."[38]

To achieve the rapid pulse that is characteristic of his writing, Seuss uses a rhythm that is almost a steady alternation of stressed and unstressed beats. He uses lines of two or four metrical feet, often moving back and forth between the two types within the same work. The dimeter line creates an insistent forward movement that gives Seuss' writing a zestful spark and sense of high-pitched excitement, as in this passage from The Cat in the Hat:

> So, as fast as I could
> I went after my net.
> And I said, "With my net
> I can get them I bet.
> I bet, with my net,
> I can get those Things yet!"
>
> Then I let down my net.
> It came down with a PLOP!
> And I had them! At last!
> Those two things had to stop.

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[38]Selma G. Lanes, Down the Rabbit Hole: Adventures and Misadventures in the Realm of Children's Literature (New York: Atheneum, 1976), p. 80.

Then I said to the cat,
"Now you do as I say.
You pack up those Things
And you take them away!"[39]

When he uses tetrameter, his writing takes on a more deliberate pace, yet, even so, nothing I have seen of Seuss' ever moves slowly. A case in point is this sequence from Horton Hears A Who, in which the elephant searches through a field of clover, a hundred miles wide, to find a speck of dust inhabited by his friends, the microscopic Whos, that had been dropped there:

"I shall find it!" cried Horton. "I'll find it or bust!
I SHALL find my friends on my small speck of dust!"
And clover, by clover, by clover with care
He picked up and searched them, and called, "Are you there?"
But clover, by clover, by clover he found
That the one that he sought for was just not around.
And by noon, poor old Horton, more dead than alive,
Had picked, searched, and piled up, nine thousand and five.[40]

It should be noted that when Seuss uses tetrameter, he rhymes in couplets, but his dimeter writing is rhymed in quatrains, so that the underlying structure of these two patterns is very similar. In this sense, it might be said that Seuss never really escapes the tyranny of a sameness of rhythm in his work as a whole. Yet he does exert considerable control over pacing by this variation of line type. To this end, he sometimes sets up his verse on the page in an irregular fashion, as in this section of Horton Hatches the Egg:

"H-m-m-m , , ,the first thing to do," murmured Horton,
"Let's see . . .
The first thing to do is to prop up this tree
And make it much stronger. That has to be done
Before I get on it. I must weigh a ton."

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[39]Dr. Seuss, The Cat in the Hat (New York: Random House, 1957), pp. 50-52.

[40]Dr. Seuss, Horton Hears A Who (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 29.

Then carefully,
Tenderly,
Gently he crept
Up the trunk to the nest where the little egg slept.

Then Horton the elephant smiled. "Now that's that ..."

And he sat
and he sat
and he sat
and he sat . . . .

And he sat all that day
And he kept the egg warm . . . .
And he sat all that night
Through a terrible storm.[41]

Probably the most significant factor controlling the pacing in Seuss' nonsense narratives is the varying distribution of lines per page, interspersed with illustrations. Generally using large pages with bold drawings, Seuss breaks up his text into small units of several lines to each page; for instance, the above eighteen lines, with four illustrations, are spread through eight pages. By fluctuating between a high of around a dozen lines to a low of one or two lines, Seuss is able to create an ebb and flow in his stories, with a page of only one or two lines suggesting a kind of natural pause in the reading. In a sense, this can be seen as a special poetic technique specific to picture-books.

All of the verse discussed in this essay was published with illustrations; Lear, Seuss and Sendak having illustrated their own work, while Carroll took a very active part in planning the plates in his books. Leaving aside the larger question of the general relationship between text and illustration, which would be a topic for an essay of its own, let's examine, for a moment, the effect the picture-book has on how a poem unfolds, and the advantages it offers in presenting poetry to the very young.

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[41] Dr. Seuss, Horton Hatches the Egg (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 6-12.

Dennis Lee, who consciously and closely patterns much of his children's poetry on the traditional verses of "Mother Goose", says, in an afterword to his book Alligator Pie, that

> nursery rhymes can't be approached at an adult's reading rate. They unfold much more slowly. In fact, they need to be brought to life almost as tiny plays . . . One of these four-line poems may take a couple of minutes to complete.[42]

A well-conceived picture-book takes this aspect into account and can be a real boon for the parent or teacher who may not be sensitive to a small child's need to digest a poem line by line (in small bites, as it were). The pause to look at the pictures and the time taken to turn the pages can impose a particular pace on the poem. When careful control is exercised by the author and illustrator (or especially by an author-illustrator), the points at which the pages must be turned can be a major determinant to the entire flow of the poem.

A particularly subtle use of this feature of picture-book poetry is characteristic of the work of Maurice Sendak, whose words and paintings work together in an intricately contrapuntal fashion. In Where the Wild Things Are, an evocative piece of free verse, he opens slowly, with the page being turned after every few lines, sometimes after every line: (skipped lines indicate turned pages).

> The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind
>
> and another
>
> his mother called him "WILD THING!"
> and Max said "I'LL EAT YOU UP!"
> so he was sent to bed without eating anything.
>
> That very night in Max's room a forest grew
>
> and grew -

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[42]Dennis Lee, Alligator Pie (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 63.

and grew until his ceiling hung with vines
and the walls became the world all around

and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max
and he sailed off through night and a day

and in and out of weeks
and almost a year
to where the wild things are.[43]

The frequency of the page-turning helps to emphasize the rhythm of the poem, which is strong and sustained throughout. The book, as a whole, is excellently paced, including six wordless pages of illustration at the climax of the story, providing the child listener with a pause for fantasy and reflection, before the final resolution of conflict and the denouement.

In Sendak's In the Night Kitchen the integration of text with pictures is even more intricate, with the words appearing laid-out in a variety of patterns and locations on the page, including the use of comic-strip style speech baloons. The dialogue, though appearing as part of the illustration, is, at the same time, an integral part of the text of this free verse fantasy. The fragmentation of the text into a few lines to a page, and the complexity of the illustrations, strongly influence the pace of the poem, in such a way as to emphasize its inherent drama. Sendak has no need to explain in an afterword, as does Lee, that his poems should be approached at a child's speed; in the context of his picture books, it is almost impossible to read them any other way: (skipped lines indicate turned pages)

And he grabbed the cup as he flew up

and up
and up

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[43] Maurice Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 1-15.

and over the top
of the milky way
in the night kitchen.

Mickey the milkman dived down to the bottom
singing: I'm in God Bless Milk
the milk and
and the milk's God Bless Me![44]
in me.

Not all of Sendak's work is in free verse, nor does it all unfold as slowly as the above examples. In Pierre: A Cautionary Tale, in which Pierre (who only would say, "I don't care!") is swallowed by a lion, the story moves along at a brisk pace, using a Seuss-like two-foot line:

Arriving home
at six o'clock
his parents had
a dreadful shock!
They found the lion
sick in bed
and cried,
"Pierre is surely dead!"

They pulled the lion
by the hair.
They hit him
with the folding chair.
His mother asked,
"Where is Pierre?"
The lion answered,
"I don't care!"
His father said,
"Pierre's in there!"[45]

Pierre is part of The Nutshell Library, which contains four small books, each being a delightful modern example of a time-tested traditional form, namely an alphabet book, a book of months, a counting book and the cautionary tale.

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[44]Maurice Sendak, In the Night Kitchen (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 20-26.

[45]Maurice Sendak, Pierre: A Cautionary Tale, vol. of The Nutshell Library (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 38-40.

It is no accident that Sendak has turned to the "Mother Goose" rhymes to find forms for some of his own work. He knows well, and deeply respects, the traditions from which they spring, and has written,

> Only 'Mother Goose', that doughty old wonder bird, could have survived the assiduous attention of generations . . . More than merely survive, she has positively flourished - younger, fresher and more superbly beautiful than ever . . .[46]

While he may, from time to time, borrow forms from "Mother Goose", Sendak's writing has a flavour of its own: a unique type of fantasy, tempered by a genuine understanding of childhood concerns. Though events in his books may be wildly unrealistic, his children are always compellingly real, the kind of people that his readers can strongly identify with.

The books of Seuss and Sendak may not seem, on the surface, to resemble each other (Sendak's being more refined and sophisticated, Seuss' being more wild and zany), yet there is a common thread that runs through both of their work. Their protagonists are almost always rebellious or at odds with society in some way. The stories deal with the way in which these characters come to grips with this situation. Selma G. Lanes has said of Seuss that he

> has managed . . . to provide a safety valve for the overscheduled, overburdened, and overstimulated child of modern civilization . . . recognizing that children's craving for excitement . . . is often merely a means for releasing pent up anxiety . . . The anxiety in Seuss' books always arises from the flouting of authority, parental or societal.[47]

And Sendak has said of his own writing

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[46]Maurice Sendak, "Mother Goose's Garnishings," Children and Literature: Views and Reviews, ed. Virginia Haviland (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973), p. 188.

[47]Lanes, pp. 79 and 81.

> There have to be elements of anxiety and mystery in truthful children's books, or at least there have to be in mine. - What I don't like are formless floating fantasies. Fantasy makes sense only if it's rooted ten feet deep in reality.[48]

While the underlying truthfulness of the fantasy may be providing outlets for deep feelings, in Seuss' books, it is the nonsense on the surface that produces good-humoured fun. To create this nonsense:-

> The good Doctor's inventiveness of language and zany hyperbole never flags. There are few places where a child can get a better sense of the richness of the language, the infinite possibilities it offers a lively imagination.[49]

Like Lear and Carroll before him, Seuss' world is peopled with all manner of strange creatures bearing exotic names of his own creation. Sometimes Seuss uses existing words, giving them new meanings, as in If I Ran the Zoo, where young McGrew would fill his zoo with such beasts as the scraggle-foot Mulligatawny,

> A high stepping animal fast as the wind
> From the blistering sands of the Desert of Zind.[50]

As well, Seuss often distorts words to create inventive rhyme, such as when McGrew says:

> A zoo should have bugs, so I'll capture a Thwerll
> Whose legs are snarled up in a terrible sneŕl.[51]

And, as if to say that twisting words and creating new ones isn't enough for him, Seuss has devised a whole new alphabet. On Beyond Zebra[52]

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[48]Maurice Sendak, as quoted in Nat Hentoff, "Among the Wild Things," Only Connect: readings on children's literature, ed. Sheila Egoff, G.T. Stubbs, and L.F. Ashley (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 343.

[49]Lanes, p. 88.

[50]Dr. Seuss, If I Ran the Zoo, (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 26.

[51]Ibid., p. 32.

[52]Dr. Seuss, On Beyond Zebra, (New York: Random House, 1955).

is a nonsense alphabet book about this imaginary set of letters (like "Yuzz" and "Um") that come after Z, useful for spelling all kinds of nonsense words.

On the other hand, Sendak's alphabet book, Alligators All Around, from The Nutshell Library, is decidedly more down to earth, consisting, as it does, of real letters. However, each of these letters initials a phrase describing some totally improbable aspect of alligator behavior (like "Wearing Wigs"[53] or "Making Macaroni"[54]) so that the overall effect is an admirable piece of Lear-like nonsense.

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[53]Maurice Sendak, Alligators All Around: An Alphabet, vol. of The Nutshell Library (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 13.

[54]Ibid., p. 23.

LEE . . .

While Seuss and Sendak may, at times, invite comparisons with Carroll and Lear, it is straight back to "Mother Goose" that Dennis Lee looks for inspiration. He applies the traditional nursery rhyme styles and forms to the Canadian landscape, using familiar sights and sounds and many of the odd-sounding names from Canadian history and geography.

> Dennis Lee has studied his 'Mother Goose' well, and it shows as he produces in catchy rhymes the hallucinating effects of caricature, repeatedly revealing the exotic implications of the immediately familiar. [55]

My mother took my hand in hers
And as she did she cried,
"You have my hair and eyebrows
But you have your Father's eyes."

. . .

An aunt from Athabaska
Said proudly at the table,
"She has my ear, the right one
I left it here last April."

Then turning to me sharply
She gave a vicious whack
And roared, "You have your Father's eyes,
For God's sake put them back!" [56]

Sometimes Lee's nursery rhymes resound with multiple meanings, in much the same way as do many of the "Mother Goose" rhymes that were originally

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[55] Leonard Mendelsohn, "The Current State of Children's Literature in Canada," Children's Literature, 4 (1975), p. 145.

[56] Dennis Lee, Nicholas Knock and Other People, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 25.

pieces of social commentary or political satire. A child will appreciate the following for its rhyme and meter, while a parent may inwardly chuckle at the implied political comment:

> William Lyon Mackenzie King
> Sat in the middle and played with string
> And he loved his mother like anything -
> William Lyon Mackenzie King.[57]

Lee is equally adept at creating imaginary beasts, in the pure nonsense tradition of Lear and Carroll:

> If you should meet a grundiboob,
> Comfort him with sugar cubes; [58]

and he borrows and adapts nonsense syllabics straight from "Mother Goose":

> Higgledy piggledy
> Wiggledy wump
> I met a man
> Who caught a mump. [59]

Though the above may be clearly derived from the traditional "Higgelty piggelty"[60], Lee's own contribution to the nonsense syllabic vocabulary, "Willoughby, wallaby, woo" is fast becoming standard fare to pre-school children across the country:

> Willoughby, wallaby, woo
> I don't know what to do.
>
> Willoughby, wallaby, wee
> An elephant sat on me.
>
> Willoughby, wallaby, wash
> I'm feeling kind of squash.
>
> Willoughby, wallaby, woo
> I don't know what to do.[61]

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[57] Lee, Alligator, p. 28.

[58] Ibid., p. 37.

[59] Ibid., p. 38.

[60] Opie, Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, p. 207.

[61] Lee, Alligator, p. 15.

In explaining his motivation behind writing his "Mother-Goose"-like poetry, Lee says:

> When I started reading nursery rhymes to my children . . . all we seemed to read about were jolly millers, little pigs, and queens. The details of 'Mother Goose' . . . had become exotic . . . Not that this was a bad thing. But I started to wonder: shouldn't a child also discover the imagination playing on things she lived with every day? 62

In dealing with the particular concerns of children from a child-like perspective, and in turning his focus to the urban landscape of the contemporary Canadian child, Lee succeeds admirably:

> Sidewalk,
> Hippity hop,
> Step on a crack
> Or you can't come back.
>
> Skippity one
> Skippity two,
> Wait for the mailman
> And kick off your shoe.63

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62 Ibid., p. 63.

63 Ibid., p. 13.

. . . AND ME

It should be clear, in the light of all I have said above, that the notion that contemporary children's verse can be enriched by drawing on tradition, is something that I share with Dennis Lee. Though in general, when I write, I do not attempt to imitate other writers, nor am I consciously aware of their influence at the time of the writing, I do sometimes deliberately seek to work "within the tradition". In this respect, as we are approaching a similar task with a shared point of view, I feel that some of my writing is related to the work Lee has done.

Gathered in the section A Gander at Mother Goose are some of my poems that are most clearly related to the traditional nursery rhymes. The first few poems in the section are in traditional forms, borrowing meter, diction, and even occasional lines from oral verse. These are followed by several "Mother Goose" types: a counting-out formula, riddles and tongue-twisters. The last two poems in the section are parodies of well-known nursery rhymes and retain the titles of the originals.[64] I would point out, in this context, that much of Lewis Carroll's poetry consisted of parody of popular and traditional rhymes.

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[64]One of these, "Miss Polly", may perhaps be unfamiliar to the reader. The original goes: "Miss Polly had a dolly who was sick, sick, sick / So she sent for the doctor to come quick, quick, quick / He came with his hat and his stick, stick, stick / And he knocked on the door with a rat-tat-tat! / He looked at the dolly, and he shook his head / And he said, "Miss Polly, put her straight to bed." / He took out some paper for a pill, pill, pill / "I'll be back in the morning with the bill, bill, bill."

The group of poems entitled Here We Go are also similar to "Mother Goose". They are written to a nursery rhyme formula of my own divising and should unfold slowly, like the "little plays" Dennis Lee speaks of above, leading to a surprising or ridiculous ending.

It is my feeling that when one takes from tradition, there is an obligation to give something back. It is the creation of new poems, songs and stories out of old that nourishes the tradition, and keeps it growing. To this end, I have taken a traditional folktale from Louisiana, and set it down in verse, trying to maintain the natural cadence and accent of the original oral version.[65] I learned this story, "Rat-des-Bois", (upon which my poem, which appears in the section, Two Tall Tales, is based)by having heard it told, and I have never seen it in print. Though, in the course of many tellings, I have added considerable detail to the story as I first heard it, my version may be looked upon as a combined exercise in verse writing and the recording of folklore.

A traditional form, lying outside the province of "Mother Goose", that I use several times, is the dream vision. Poems and stories in which dreamers encounter talking animals can be found in the early annals of literature (for instance, Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls). Lewis Carroll's Alice books are both examples of this genre, written for children.

Despite the nattator's disclaimer that "I had been awake all night", I think my poem "The Owl" (in Beasts, Bugs & Birds) is clearly of the dream

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[65] In seeking to retain as much as possible of the flavour of the original story, I have rendered it in Cajun dialect, taking as my example the work of Joel Chandler Harris, Mark Twain and William Henry Drummond. However, I have found that to reproduce the dialect with complete accuracy in every detail would make it very difficult to read, for someone unfamiliar with the sound of Cajun speech. For this reason, I have simplified the dialect somewhat, by retaining more Standard English than would actually be found in the backwoods of Louisiana.

vision type, as is "Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver"[66] (in Tall Tales). The situation of Lizzy being swallowed and then disgorged is something that ties "Sarah Elizabeth" to the work of Maurice Sendak, as this notion occurs repeatedly in his books (such as Pierre).

A fair amount of Sendak's work consists of dream visions of one sort or another (Where the Wild Things Are, and In the Night Kitchen, among others). More often than not, these dream visions seem to be the product of the author delving deep into himself to reach what he describes as "the child I was as he exists now".[67] He explains his relationship with his own child-self in these terms:

> I don't want to sound coy or schizophrenic, but at least once a day I feel I have to make contact. The pleasures I get as an adult are heightened by the fact that I experience them as a child at the same time.[68]

Though they don't pretend to approach the depth of the powerful explorations of the childhood experience found in Sendak's major works, the poems included in the section Perplexing Problems & Wistful Wishes deal with real childhood concerns in what is, I feel, a related manner. I perceive them to have been written simultaneously by both the adult and child in me, and they draw on memories and personal experiences. Some themes explored in that section are the desire for independence, the helplessness of being very young and the wonder of the world around us.

An important childhood proccupation is the act of eating, and references to eating and food occur in many of my poems. A number of these have been gathered in the section Food for Thought, about food that creates magical transformations, food that brings appeasement, and food for nourishment.

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[66] As a point of interest, Sarah Elizabeth Ward Sullivan Silver is a real girl of the same name.

[67] Sendak, as quoted in Hentoff, p. 329.

[68] Ibid.

I also talk about food-phobias and outlandish things to eat.

Probably the most outlandish eating incident in any of my poems occurs in "Charlie" (in Beasts, Bugs & Birds), which is the most Seuss-like example of my work. Using Seuss' fast-paced two-foot line, it tells a tale of rebellion against authority culminating in glorious chaos. The poem works by challenging the reader's unstated assumption that alligators will act like people, when, in fact, they act like alligators.

Other poems in the Beasts, Bugs & Birds section are also somewhat related to the work of Seuss, and to that of Lear, as well. The word play in "Do Bugs Bug You" is somewhat like that found in their writing, and the nonsense animal poems ("The Ogg", "The Scorafinx", "The Zunx") are reminiscent of poems of theirs. In poems of this type, there is often an integral relationship between the text and an accompanying illustration. Although they are not presented that way here, (it being beyond the scope of this thesis), these poems were conceived with illustrations in mind.

Similarly, in the manner of Lear, I picture the limericks (in Ten Little Limericks & Other Peculiar People) with accompanying graphics. The light-hearted treatment of threat of pain or dismemberment in these ten verses is my salute to Lear; however, like Lee's transformations of "Mother Goose", my limericks are contemporary and Canadian in tone.

From the pronounced and varied rhythms of "Mother Goose", through the fanciful word play and imaginative nonsense of Lear and Carroll, to the unabashed hilarity of Seuss, the profound fantasy of Sendak and the contemporary re-workings of Lee, comes an important body of work that has had a great impact on children's literature in general, and on my own work in particular. Their poetry works, not only because of the devices discussed above, but also because it captures, in one way or another, something of the real essence of

childhood. It is hoped that readers of my work will find that it is successful, in its own way, in reaching out toward this essence.

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