The Hidden Agenda of Mother Goose

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It was the Muffin Man who first aroused my suspicions. For months I had been reading nursery rhymes to my 2-year-old son. Little did I suspect that Mother Goose might be sowing seeds of dissolution in his innocent mind. "Little Jack Horner" and "Hickory, Dickory, Dock" seemed far removed from ribald rap songs and controversial textbooks.

But I was jarred from my complacency by recent cases in Florida, where the children's classic My Friend Flicka was banned from a 5th grade reading list because it contains two curse words, and Georgia, where the state Board of Education rejected a children's literature-based reading series. Critics said the reading series contained references to witches, ghouls, and "New Age" ideas.

A review of Mother Goose seemed in order.

I began with the "Muffin Man" because my son had been obsessed with it for months. I realize now that this hypnotic hold should have been a danger sign.

The rhyme goes like this: "Oh do you know the Muffin Man, the Muffin Man, oh do you know the Muffin Man who lives on Drury Lane?"

At first, it seemed harmless enough. I found no subliminal messages (although my son had been eating more bread recently); read backward, it revealed no hidden exhortations to suicide or spitting up.

Then I realized I knew nothing about this character who exerted such power over my child's imagination. What is the Muffin Man's belief system? What are his values? How does he support himself? Obviously, "Muffin Man" is a nickname, like "Scarface" or "Three Fingers," and is uncomfortably close to "Candy Man," once a widely used code for drug dealers.

Note the rhyme's subtly taunting tone, which suggests that if we do know the Muffin Man, we are accomplices in something sordid; if we don't know him, we are hopelessly square. Clearly, this is not suitable material for an impressionable toddler, or perhaps even a preteen.

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

Initially, this, too, seemed harmless. But a more careful reading reveals that Humpty Dumpty is a melancholy morality tale about someone who rises to a high position only to suffer a horrible fall from grace. It is a brooding meditation on the futility of life and the awful finality of death.

"Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candlestick.

Candles often appear in seances and other occult proceedings. What other explanation is there for Jack to be jumping over a candlestick? Obviously, he is engaged in some sort of satanic ritual.

"Twinkle, twinkle little star, How I wonder what you are."

My son is too young to be burdened with perplexing questions about the universe. If I let him question the composition of stars, next he'll want to know about the Big Bang Theory and other secular-humanist mumbo-jumbo.

"Mary had a little lamb whose fleece was white as snow, and everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go."

Here lies the root cause of the discipline problems plaguing our schools. If children learn at an early age that they can take lambs to school without any apparent punishment, is it any wonder that, years later, they take guns, knives, and baseball bats? Also, notice that Mary assumes no blame here. The lamb followed her—as if it were all the lamb's fault. This does not set a good example for those of us who want children to take responsibility for their actions.

"Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn, the sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn."

How many fragile egos have been undermined by these simple lines? Given the task of tending a sheep and a cow, Little Boy Blue nods off on the job. This implies that children can't be entrusted with simple duties, especially where animal husbandry is involved. Is it any surprise that entire generations of youngsters have forsaken the farm for the city life?

In other rhymes, adults do not fare very well, either. For instance, our terrible dietary habits can be traced to Jack Sprat and Mrs. Sprat, who show total disregard for their nutritional...
needs, as well as having barbaric table manners. They probably don’t floss, either, although we are not told this directly.

And then there’s Old Mother Hubbard, who can’t find a bone for her dog. Not only is she forcing the poor animal to subsist on bones; she is so senile, she can’t remember where she put them. Rather than run out for a can of Alpo, as any sensible pet owner would do, she lets the poor animal starve. No wonder children have nightmares about neglect and abandonment.

Some of you who are locked into spongy-headed liberalism will argue that I’m taking passages out of context, distorting meanings, and perhaps even projecting my own hangups onto these rhymes.

My son doesn’t understand, either. He still cries for his Mother Goose and his “Care Bear” books. I had to burn those, too, because they distort reality and promote a pantheistic view of the universe. Bears don’t talk, and children shouldn’t be taught to play with large, carnivorous animals.

The only thing I read to him now is the list of ingredients on his baby food jars. Of course, I always skip over anything artificial.

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