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# Turning Round About: The Use of Nursery Rhyme in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*

SHANE NEILSON

Mother was not a trained nurse, but she was a wonderful woman.

— Marlatt (117)

**T**HOUGH THE NOVEL *Ana Historic* is many things, including a *Bildungsroman*, a literary history of Vancouver, a lesbian erotic text, and a quasi-novel-in-verse, it is primarily a feminist critique of the pedagogical methods that mothers use in relation to daughters. The main plot involves the relationship between Annie, the narrator, and Ina, Annie's mother. The plot is unusual — as a main plot, anyway — in that mother and daughter do not interact much in a real time and space; they interact through interior dialogue and memory/daydream. As the helpmeet wife of Richard, a university professor, Annie grows dissatisfied with a subservient role — assisting her husband and his “work” through research — and eventually divorces him so as to claim an identity as a lesbian, all the while refracting this plot point through Annie's recollections of the toxic subservience of her own housewife mother, Ina.

Most of the novel uses the childhood remembrances of Annie to critique the femininity of Ina, and *Ana Historic* marks a turning point in Marlatt's writing in which the relationship between mothers and daughters becomes a central concern (Wurfel). Ina is presented through memory as subject *to* Annie's father and also as a subject *of* prevailing ideas about the roles and responsibilities of women in the post-World War II era. Ina is portrayed as a willingly victimized housewife, responsible for household chores and childcare. Through her own example and through direct verbal instruction to Annie, Ina attempts to instill a traditional notion of femininity in her daughter. But the novel “turns round about” Ina's pedagogy through various means, one of which is the troubling of Ina's nursery rhymes. This essay considers the strategic

use of three nursery rhymes and their function in the novel's feminist narrative, demonstrating how they not only provide dissonance with the novel's dramatization of masculine pedagogies but, as will be shown, also serve to create poetic concordances.

Rishma Dunlop states that the intent of *Ana Historic* is to be "a poetic rewriting and revisioning of the notion of maternity and the suppressed and oppressed stories of maternity" (71). In fact, the criticism the book has received to date has almost exclusively been by feminist critics. *Ana Historic* has been extensively studied as a canonical Canadian entry into *l'écriture féminine* by Dunlop as well as by Celine Chan, Keith Green and Jill LeBihan, Rebecca Waese, Heather Zwicker, and many others. Yet even those critics (such as Dunlop) who have explicitly examined modes of instruction of the "feminine" through mother-daughter lines of transmission have not considered the place and function of nursery rhyme, despite Marlatt's use of it as a repetitive narrative strategy.

First, a brief history of the form: Traditionally occupying the realm of domesticity, nursery rhymes were not considered important for most of their history, becoming a subject of scholarship only in the nineteenth century. A number of collections and academic studies were undertaken at that time, including two important works by Shakespearean scholar James Halliwell-Phillipps: *Nursery Rhymes of England*, published in 1842, and *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales*, published in 1849, which laid the foundation for Iona and Peter Opie's now canonical *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Opie and Opie believe that English nursery rhymes derive from adult primary sources, establishing an important line of mother-daughter cultural transmission. In a passage of great relevance to Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, Opie and Opie write,

It is only when we remember the attitude towards children in Stuart and early Hanoverian days that we see how they came to be familiar with bawdy jokes and drinking songs. We read that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries children were treated as "grown-ups in miniature." In paintings we see them wearing clothes which were replicas of those worn by their elders. The conduct and the power of understanding we find expected of them were those of an adult. Many parents saw nothing unusual in their children hearing strong language or savouring strong drink . . . The Puritans had good cause for some of their objections. (4)

In this context, the dark content of most nursery rhymes is understood in terms of the “parent” source of material; the rhymes had their first life as entertainments for adults and over time became strange sources of instruction for English children. Since mothers were the parents working in the “nursery” of the home, they were the ones who used the pedagogical tool of the nursery rhyme. The moral instruction implicit in many nursery rhymes is understood in terms of the policing desires of the *actual* parent — the mother who speaks “There was an old woman who lived in a shoe,” for example, might be metaphorically instructing her daughter to obey, or else be “whipped soundly” and “put to bed.”

Many nursery rhymes have obscure origins, but some have been traced directly back to real historical figures, including “John Ball Shot Them All” (Bett 67-69) and “Come, Jack, Let’s Drink a Pot of Ale” (Green 185).<sup>1</sup> Nursery rhymes might be ambiguous and sinister (as most of the canonical rhymes are before bowdlerization), or intentionally obvious means of moral instruction (after bowdlerization in the nineteenth century), or a hybrid form in which joyous nonsense has strict sense embedded within (the middle ground). But a preponderance of canonical rhymes remain violent.

The century before the nursery rhyme began to be studied by scholars such as Halliwell-Phillipps has been dubbed the “golden age” of nursery rhyme — the time when most present-day nursery rhymes were composed. Not coincidentally, the eighteenth century was an age in which children were expected to be “grown-up” in appearance and comportment. Children were meant to mimic the ambivalent and contradictory ways of adults, and this mimicry was encouraged through nursery rhymes. Opie and Opie highlight the role of the mother as follows: “The nursery rhyme, which by tacit and universal consent may be either said or sung, is resorted to by the mother for the soothing and amusement of her child without thought of its origin, except in that usually she remembers it from her own childhood” (3). However, *Ana Historic* intentionally reverses, or “turns round about,” the view articulated by Opie and Opie. Marlatt’s female protagonist (Annie) grows from girlhood into womanhood while exposed to the rhymes and pedagogy of her mother (Ina), but Annie eventually assumes feminist and lesbian identities contra Ina’s pedagogy. As will be seen, Marlatt uses rhymes for the purposes of critique.

In keeping with the tradition of rhymes, Marlatt follows the pattern initially by demonstrating that nursery rhyme was passed from mother (Ina) to daughter (Annie). For example, Ina chides Annie with “you’ve forgotten how many stories I used to tell you when you were small”<sup>2</sup> (28). Yet resistance to the tradition — nursery rhyme as pedagogical tool — is mounted by the author through her technique of deployment: Marlatt uses nursery rhymes to demonstrate what is expected of a woman-to-be, yet she complicates the message by using obscure and morally dodgy rhymes. The nursery rhymes this paper will proceed to consider colour the narrative of *Ana Historic* and suggest complex layers of meaning.

The first instance of nursery rhyme occurs when Marlatt uses a line from “Teddy Bears’ Picnic”: “if you go down in the woods today you’d better go in disguise” (19). The rich line, one that suggests both instruction — the ominous imperative of “you’d better” — and also the need to somehow be hidden — the necessity of “disguise” — appears in a section of narrative that is a desired dialogue between protagonist and mother, a remembrance of the protagonist’s childhood seen in contrast to the mother’s supposedly privileged (but, in actual fact, submissive) knowledge. Ina is depicted as a thwarted housewife locked in extreme deference to a threatening patriarchy. This thread is begun through the form of a deliberate address by Annie to Ina:

i want to talk to you. (now? when it’s too late?) i want to say something. tell you something about the bush and what you were afraid of, what I escaped to: anonymous territory where names faded to a tiny hubbub . . . vanished from the world of men . . . (18; second ellipsis in original)

The passage focuses on the mother as lost, as never having been retrieved or known. Annie longs for communication with her mother while suggesting that the communicative urge occurs because the possibility of such conversation is nil (the address is retrospective and one-sided, the mother already dead). The narrative quickly develops dense image patterning involving “woods” and “bears,” pushing the bear image into a symbol of the masculine. The mother character is depicted as instructing the child: “never go into the woods with a man . . . and don’t go into the woods alone” (18). The mother does so because she feels that men will hurt her daughter — a repeated piece of instruction in the novel.

The child asks in turn, “but what would he do?” (19), and the mother responds, “bad things you wouldn’t like” (19). This exchange precedes the aforementioned line of intertext from “Teddy Bears’ Picnic,” inserting an alien line into the text that imbues Marlatt’s prose with the power, both overt and covert, of nursery rhyme. The intertext sings in Ina’s head, just as it encourages the reader to consider who is disguised and what the disguise is. One of the logical conclusions is that nursery rhyme itself is a disguise, a “code” that Marlatt is using as a method of resistance. But how?

In the “overt” sense above, the intertextual line can be taken to mean, on its own, that the daughter must wear a “disguise” in order to be in the world of men and the world of the “woods,” just as her mother says and perhaps as Ina’s mother said when reciting that same rhyme a generation before. The surface meaning here can be interpreted as a gendered message: to be a woman, one must wear the mask of submission to a patriarchal and heteronormative pantomime. But the covert nature of the line is the undercurrent to the prose narrative. First of all, the song contains a reward for obedience in its published lyrics: “Every Teddy Bear who’s been good is sure of a treat today.” Second, the final and sinister stanza of “Teddy Bears’ Picnic,” which Marlatt does not include in the narrative, making it a covert text hinted at beyond *Ana Historic*’s selective “official” quotation, is as follows:

If you go down in the woods today you better not go alone  
It’s lovely down in the woods today but safer to stay at home  
For every bear that ever there was will gather there for certain  
Because today’s the day the Teddy Bears have their picnic.

(Hall and Kennedy)<sup>3</sup>

A few conclusions can be drawn about Marlatt’s use of nursery rhyme from this first instance: One must consider both included and excluded text to glean her full meanings pertaining to the permitted and unpermitted identities of women as well as the allowed and disallowed forms of expression. Second, the nursery rhymes often work in concert with the image patterning of the novel, giving it greater aesthetic coherence. Third, the nursery rhymes are meant to recreate the nursery itself, that of the mother singing to the child as per the Opie’s aforementioned “common consent.” This latter effect is accomplished by deploying *related* nursery rhymes within Marlatt’s text, structuring them

as if they were indeed a kind of extended lesson, or perhaps the dissonant non-synchronicity of the “round” as mentioned earlier in the essay.

Marlatt creates correspondences of image and tone between “Teddy Bears’ Picnic” and the novel’s next nursery rhyme, “Mother May I Go and Bathe”:

Mother may I go and bathe?  
 Yes my darling daughter.  
 Hang your clothes on yonder tree,  
 But don’t go near the water. (Opie and Opie 371)

There is not much written about the provenance of the rhyme; Opie and Opie have little to say about it except that “the rhyme, though not often found in print, seems to be familiar in many households (in America more than England), and may have been the inspiration of the dance song of the 1940s ‘Mother May I Go Out Dancing?’” (371). In contrast, the provenance of the rhyme in *Ana Historic* is quite simple. The sequence containing the rhyme begins with spooky foreshadowing, accomplished by biblical references and nocturnal/death imagery. Annie and her sister discuss the madness of their mother and the possibility that they might be poisoned by the food the mother “so hated to cook” (77). Ina is remembered as fleeing the house, seeking the danger from men she warned her children about, lying in a ditch, then feeding Annie the marital fantasy that all will be well when she grows up, but Annie will not remember the madness of her mother. This is a kind of deception as enacted in the rhyme: you will be well, do not remember me. It is a paradox — permission is given but the action is impossible. Annie clearly could never forget Ina.

“Mother, May I Go and Bathe” appears in *Ana Historic* on page 78 without the third line of the actual canonical rhyme — the line that gives instruction. The rhyme adds meaning to the moments in the book where Ana asks permission from Ina. In the rhyme, the daughter asks permission, but in Marlatt’s text the mother is the weaker character. *Ana Historic*’s narrative is largely conveyed in retrospect through a correspondence between Annie and her mother. Annie thinks of the rhyme in terms of the plural “we,” a collective “we who warn” (78). As it appears in *Ana Historic*, the rhyme constitutes a warning that the “we” of the rhyme is a feminine “we” including all women and that women “had no say in how [the world] was made” (78). Marlatt uses the rhyme

to obliquely and poetically demonstrate the “lure and the trap” (78) of being “daughter and mother, both” (78) in terms of pedagogical method. Parenting is to some degree making the child into one’s own image; nursery rhymes contain a feast of images that assist in the transmission of cultural feelings and beliefs the parent parrots to the child. Yet Marlatt’s message is that if the parent doesn’t believe in herself, and if the parent does not have a “say,” then the message to the daughter is fraught indeed.

Nested within Marlatt’s artfully contradictory text, the contradictory command given in “Mother, May I Go and Bathe” is part of the fabric of nursery rhyme and can be considered to be the nursery rhyme’s standard mode of mixed messaging. “Mother, May I Go and Bathe” reflects the confusion about what is expected of daughters as well as the confusion about how to achieve expectation, an expression of command embedded in a paradox. All these confusions reinforce the power struggle intrinsic to human relationships — or, to use Marlatt’s poetic logic, the “yes and no” of the “lure and the trap.” Permission in the canonical rhyme pertains to the daughter cleaning herself, and permission is seemingly granted immediately in the rhyme. The final line bears the dark magic of nursery rhyme, *turning round about* what is expected. Something dark and sinister occurs: the daughter is permitted to be naked but not allowed to bathe. Finally, one can see the presence of a tree in “Mother, May I Go and Bathe” that mimics the woods of “Teddy Bears’ Picnic.” Furthermore, the command (“don’t go”) of the former has the same intent as that of the latter (“safer to stay at home”). The effect is telescopic: not only are nursery rhymes providing Marlatt’s text with dissonant resonances, but the text is also written in poetic concordance with the nursery rhymes.

The idea of textual deployment is important because Annie is a research assistant, and the subplot of the book involves her research into the life of Mrs. Richards, a nineteenth-century widow who moved to Canada from Britain to teach grade school. The subplot sections function as intertexts, though Marlatt is on record as saying she completely invented the parts that represent Mrs. Richards’s diaries (McGuirk 79). Annie is writing the text *Ana Historic* so as to put her life in perspective; her archival research “discovers” Mrs. Richards, and Marlatt invents most of the details of Mrs. Richards’s story to give the novel greater power by providing further depth of character through time. Though



this essay is not the place for a detailed discussion of the subplot involving Mrs. Richards, it is important to note in this discussion of the impact of nursery rhymes on all three characters that Mrs. Richards, Ina, and Annie represent different instantiations of the feminine — Mrs. Richards as the new immigrant in the proto-feminist world of frontier Vancouver, Ina as a continuation of female submissiveness into the modern context, and Annie as an evolving feminist.

The next nursery rhyme used in *Ana Historic* is “Polly Put the Kettle On,” invoked when Mrs. Richards, who must confront masculine authority at every turn, and who later in the narrative explores her homosexuality, hears a man outside her home shout at pigs, “H’yaa! Sukey shoo” (85). This wakens Mrs. Richards, and through the device of interior thought, Marlatt has her remark “Sukey put the kettle on” (85), in the context of having to start the day in drudgery amid the industrial clamour outside and while enduring the cold temperature inside. In the Opie text the rhyme appears this way:

Polly put the kettle on, X3  
We’ll all have tea.

Sukey take it off again, X3  
They’ve all gone away. (419)

Opie and Opie are silent on why there are two characters in the rhyme, only one being necessary to make and break the tea, although they do provide some background on the “adult” nature of the original rhyme:

Around 1810 the song was clearly the rage in London. It appeared in the songsters as “Molly Put the Kettle On” and had six verses of a rambling and mildly bawdy nature:

Molly put the kettle on, Molly put the kettle on,  
Molly put the kettle on, we’ll all have tea.

Suckey take it off again, Suckey take it off again,  
Suckey take it off again, they’ve run away.

O what did Jenny do, O what did Jenny do,  
O what did Jenny do, for a bawbee,

She turned up her petticoat, her blue fring'd petticoat,  
 She turned up her petticoat, above her knee. (419-20)

Then a sailor returns from sea (paralleling the repetitive and possibly intertextual device in Marlatt's novel of sailing ships racing one another). A dancing party ensues during which Jenny declares, "it is no sin for girls to have a drop of gin" (Opie and Opie 420), and the song ends with "Molly put the kettle on, we shall have a drop of gin" (420). Consider the resonances of dissonance between Marlatt's unincluded and included texts: Mrs. Richards quotes a nursery rhyme that originated as a bawdy song, a song that denigrates female sexuality. An additional layer of meaning develops when one looks at Marlatt's kitty of nursery rhymes that double as songs (equivalents by definition) and which have dark and sexual overtones concerning their own female characters. One sees that *Ana Historic's* nursery rhymes include allusions either to dance ("Polly Put The Kettle On") or to spawned dance songs ("Mother May I Go and Bathe" having morphed/returned back to its adult origins with the dance-hall tune "Mother May I Go Out Dancing").

The context of the rhyme provides the explanation of its appearance. Mrs. Richards appears in this instance as a double for Ina: Mrs. Richards wakes up to hear the sound of a vaguely threatening man outside her home. To reinforce the idea of Marlatt's careful nursery rhyme scene structure, Mrs. Richards leaves the home and walks through the woods in a scene homologous with that of the earlier nursery rhyme scene where Ina stumbles about half-mad. As part of a dreamscape, Mrs. Richards stumbles into "a pool, and found two women sitting there in the leafy water. Wisps of steam, warm, she knew it was warm. They beckoned to her. Rain fell warm around them, the brown water pulled at her skirts — it hadn't mattered, clothes fell away — she was about to change into something magical and sure" (86). This encounter is a link back to the beginning of the section, with Mrs. Richards in bed. On her walk, Mrs. Richards finds wood nymphs of a sort, *turning round about* the narrative's equating of "men" with "woods" and putting a sexual spin on the encounter, returning the *narrative* to the bawdy origin of nursery rhyme.

Examining what is not in *Ana Historic* might be unorthodox, but because the novel is so much about the "hole" of what is not said or done by women, the holes inherent to motherhood/childhood, and the

oppressive black hole of male patriarchy, the book encourages examination of artfully constructed holes. *Ana Historic*'s use of nursery rhyme has a hole: the absence of lullabies. Ironically, the hole is not limited to this book, but extends to the knowledge of scholars. Opie and Opie maintain that "the oldest children's songs of which we have records are lullabies intended to help a child sleep. Lullabies can be found in every human culture" (6). However, the following problem vexes scholarship:

Little has been written about the lullabye, though it is a most natural form of song and has been declared to be the genesis of all song. As Sir Edmund Chambers has said: "It must be remembered that the dance was not the only primitive activity, the rhythm of which evoked that of song. The rocking of the cradle was another." As John de Trevisa put it in 1398, "Nouryces vse lullynges and other cradyl songes to pleyse the wyttes of the chylde." (Opie and Opie 17-18)

It is not surprising, then, that a key refusal in *Ana Historic* is to withhold the lullaby; there is no "cradyl song" on offer, no matter how grotesque, to "pleyse the wyttes of the chylde." The mother figure (Ina) is not interested in the child's "wyttes" as Ina loses her own wits; nor does the child seem interested in being soothed according to patriarchal dictates offered by her mother. A more sinister conclusion one can derive from applying the Opie and Opie passage above to *Ana Historic* is that Annie is neither nurtured nor exposed to the "genesis of all song," a conclusion shifted by the novel's end, where the protagonist *is* exposed and indoctrinated into an anti-cradyl song, that of feminism. To enact this idea of protest and reclamation, the end of the novel has the protagonist thinking/writing about her mother, ranging back and forth in time, stopping at one point to watch the mother sing slave songs while engaging in domestic labour:

you were always home where your place was, with the sawdust furniture, with the wood stove for heat, hanging clothes anywhere you could to dry them. Filling up the silence with songs. Black working songs, slave songs. "Ol' Man River," "Lazy Bones" — always the question: "how you gonna git yo' day's work done?" when it is never done, never over with. (137)

The implication is that Ina was a slave, an implication intensified in

terms of an earlier mention of Annie's relationship with hired help when young — hirelings that would punish her when commanded by her parents. In other words, the slave commands the slaves to punish the child-as-slave. In looking at this section of the novel more closely, the mother as domestic slave (Ina), after hospitalization for insanity, is returned to the family as a broken, shrunken memory of an earlier incarnation of the mother singing slave songs. In this section of the narrative, Marlatt describes in ironic and earnest ways the natural history of extreme subjugation, and in the process complex reversals occur, *turning round about* all sorts of normatives. For example, this point in the novel is a reclamation of Ina through an *understanding* of her by Annie. This time the song sung is relayed to the mother by the daughter as part of an impossible correspondence.

There may be another lullaby-by-other-means in the final section: a participation dance, defined in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* as a "universal form . . . associated with making gestures, actions, and mime while touching parts of the child's body" (Zipes 180). Unstudied by Opie and Opie, the "Hokey Pokey," as Marlatt uses it, is both a savage indictment of the patriarchal institution of marriage and a celebration of freedom. The self-claiming and naming of the parts of the self, as a child is taught to do, reflect that the body need not be claimed by others. The first "Hokey Pokey" intertext appearing in the novel is "*you put your left hand in / you take your left hand out*" (147). This snippet of lyric has power because of the already-described strategies and escalators Marlatt has carefully built into the narrative in terms of nursery rhyme, especially her canny use of context. Marlatt inserts this intertext just after Richard, Annie's history professor husband, half-heartedly caresses Annie with his left hand as he gives his assent to Annie's detaching from his work as research assistant, foreshadowing the end of the marriage: his left hand represents his physical *body*, but his academic *work* will be "handed over" to a graduate student. Richard declares that he can "always train one of my grad students to replace you" (147). There are many implications to this small statement: Annie-as-wife is reduced to the level of the student, is made to be as replaceable as the student; the student requires "training" as did the wife; and the grad student is referred to in terms of the possessive "my." The left hand is the hand that bears the marriage ring, and the left hand, as per the lyric, is taken out by Annie when she leaves Richard.

Shortly after the appearance of the first bit of “Hokey Pokey,” Marlatt engages in some explosive wordplay that might mimic the lexical play of nursery rhymes. A bit of context is required to develop this idea:

struggling at what comes next in the gap thought doesn't leap, I  
look up to find Ange in the door, observing me. What a space case!  
(the beautiful mask of her face made up for the world.) you've got-  
ten as bad as Dad. How come you never have fun anymore?

And I have to say all the limiting things: no later than midnight,  
no going downtown. (148)

Here, the transmission lines reverse. Annie's daughter Ange is *turning round about* the instructional role. Ange asks a question of her mother in a different way, less for permission than as a challenge to her mother, equating her with the patriarchal father in terms of joylessness. The homology with the “Mother, May I Go and Bathe” is obvious. Annie tells Ange about the same “lure and trap” by which Ina tried to contain her daughter. Annie's stated limits are an equivalent of “don't go near the water.”

The next passage works its way from Ange's word “fun” to its etymology in Middle English:

fun? i think, and look it up as if it were a foreign word. having fun.  
doing it for fun. in fun (sometimes). making fun of — here it turns.  
to trick, make fun of. fool someone. from *fon, fonne* (feminine?),  
a fool. (148)

The joylessness of the protagonist's life is examined in a single word as provoked by her daughter's speaking aloud the word “fun.” Marlatt follows the word down a spiral to its root and to its relevance, that of woman; the spiral is callous and mocking, suggesting she has been a fool to accept the lack of “fun,” the lack of “feminine.” After all, isn't the hokey pokey dance *supposed* to be fun for children? The passage continues,

Un-fooling myself then. Turning things around.

you put your whole self in  
you take your whole self out  
you put your whole self in  
*and you shake it all about*

turning yourself around in the pokey, the magic circle we stepped inside of, that hokey pokey, the family that holds together at the expense of one. (148)

The whole self is reclaimed *through* the magic<sup>4</sup> of nursery rhyme, the whole self is “un-fooled” and shaken, the self is made whole, the circle of the family enclosing and containing this explosion until the narrator, in a grim flight of imagination (like that which births nursery rhymes), sees an image of

her daughter drowning, her husband’s body thrown into the sea as the ship of state blows up, as the fire begins and she is swimming, swimming to save herself . . .

Break the parentheses and let it all surface! falling apart. we are, i am. we have fallen apart. the parts don’t fit. not well. never whole. never did. (150)

The parts named in the participation dance “don’t fit” and the final comment of “never did” reaches back to origins that, in the case of the song “Hokey Pokey,” are confused. The origins of Mrs. Richards are also “lost” save for Annie’s efforts to reclaim and know them as a part of her own self and identity.<sup>5</sup>

Within the magic circle, which can typographically be thought of as a closed parenthesis, the parts of the self are exploded within the uncontained and uncontainable circle. In the old patriarchal narrative, Annie’s parts “don’t fit.” Yet the parenthetical change is not a “solution” per se; parts may *remain* parts with the new consciousness when the protagonist writes “never whole.” In the passage quoted above, “never whole” is the fragment that can refer not only to origins but also to the future, a future perhaps alluded to in the book’s lyrical conclusion:

we give place, giving words, giving birth, to  
each other — she and me. you. hot skin writing  
skin . . .

. . . you she breathes, is where we meet . . .  
it isn’t dark but the luxury of being  
has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading  
us into the page ahead. (153)

An interpretation of this partial transcription of the book's final poem is that the end of the novel is a nursery: a place of postpartum skin-skin contact, of unity, and, finally, of the unwritten, the possible, a new lexicon unencumbered by the "strict, strong" rhythm-mnemonics and metrical drums of the patriarchy, the usual method of instruction *turning round about* to that of the mother as mother, not as transition line for patriarchal memes. In this way, as with the use of other nursery rhymes in the book, *Ana Historic* becomes more than an inventory of rhymes but a wielder of them, with Marlatt appropriating a rich history of verse to power her narrative and disempower the patriarchy. If there is wholeness to be had in the participation dance of being, Marlatt suggests that it is contained in the "reach" of "desire" that is "reading us."

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of these two "real life" nursery rhymes in my paper is deliberate for thematic reasons. There are many instructional and cautionary rhymes one could choose. John Ball was a historical figure who preached contrary to the Church of England in the fourteenth century, was excommunicated, arrested, and imprisoned, only to be freed by rebels and later caught and killed. In many ways Ina is an unwitting martyr to her femininity, though Ball was a conscious martyr, imprisoned just as Ina is institutionalized. Ball, too, was possessed of unofficial texts and positions that authority could not countenance. "Come, Jack, let's drink a pot of ale" is believed to be subversively commemorative of the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. The man who calls to "Jack" makes bitter fun of pomp and his own poverty under the rule of the king. Parallels with *Ana Historic* are similarly obvious.

<sup>2</sup> There is no scene in which rhyme is directly passed from Ina to Annie, but this may be an instance of Marlatt's subversiveness. The author may prefer to let the "understood" be understood or recalled. Because Ina is the plausible transmission figure, because there is some indirect textual evidence of this, and because Ina is a tragic transmission figure of the submission role to her daughter, the rhymes recited to the daughter by Ina are part of a structure in which Marlatt anaesthetizes Ina's submission to patriarchal mores.

<sup>3</sup> Jimmie Kennedy is the lyricist for "Teddy Bears' Picnic" and is also believed to be the creator or thief/popularizer (the evidence is conflicting) of the music and lyrics of "Hokey Pokey," the nursery rhyme that forms part of *Ana Historic's* set piece. Curiously, both "Hokey Pokey" and "Teddy Bears' Picnic" double as dances — a series of repetitive gestures that echo the repetitive, expected gestures of traditional femininity.

<sup>4</sup> In England, the “Hokey Pokey” is called “Hokey Cokey.” Following the threads of the *Oxford English Dictionary* is an interesting exercise: “hokey cokey” derives from “hocus pocus,” the traditional magician’s incantation which ridicules the ritual of transubstantiation at Roman Catholic masses that invoke Jesus’s address at the Last Supper: “*hoc est enim corpus meum*.” Still, today, the “Hokey Cokey” can be sung in insult to Catholic fans at English soccer games. This idea is relevant because *Ana Historic* uses biblical text/tropes often.

<sup>5</sup> The song is thought to have coalesced in the 1940s, written either by Al Tabor or Jimmie Kennedy, possibly having a Canadian connection, and containing a drug reference, as some believe the title of the song might refer to cocaine use by Canadian prospectors (Kennedy Jr.). What is not obscure is that such a pedigree fulfills a near-requirement for nursery rhymes to have obscured adult themes.

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