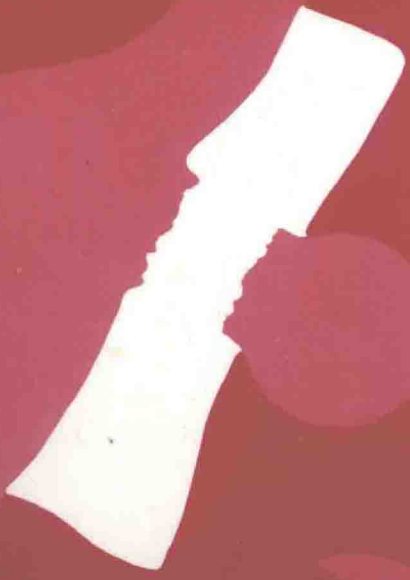
How and Why Children Hate

A Study of Conscious and Unconscious Sources



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Foreword

On any night of the week the television viewer can be guaranteed many vivid, visual reminders of the hatred that fuels 'man's inhumanity to man'. Be it on the news, in a film or documentary, the images of violence, sadism and abuse – the outward and visible signs of hostility, prejudice and rejection come flickering from the TV screens in countless homes. Where does this denial of our common humanity, this gross insensitivity to individual suffering and sensibility have its source, its beginnings? The origins must be powerful as hatred is universal and so pervasive. It manifests itself in child abuse, in class and racial prejudice, in the cruelties of war and religious intolerance. The roots of hatred, sad to say, can often be traced to infancy and childhood. It seems a sacrilege to suggest that the children we love, the children who can be so loving, should have in them the seeds of the indifference, cruelty and violence which are the accompaniments of hatred. I have always found it difficult when looking at a baby – so pure, vulnerable and innocent – to imagine that life and biology have the potentiality to transform this infant into an active participant a future equivalent of today's ethnic cleansing or yesterday's Holocaust.

And yet hatred underlies much of the wanton cruelty, violence and vandalism which seems to be on the increase among children. Bullying, sibling abuse and parent abuse are of increasing concern to professionals. It is critical for society to understand (if it is to mitigate) the psychological and social processes that give rise to such hatred, and the distinguished writers (from several disciplines) who contribute to this book *How and Why Children Hate*, edited by Dr. Ved Varma, make a valuable contribution to this understanding. Their journey of inquiry into the reasons why children hate takes them into the intra-psychic world (e.g. the unconscious) of childhood and the external worlds of influence on their thinking and feeling – the family, parent, the cultural ethos of class and racial prejudice, religion, even nursery rhymes. This is a worthy project indeed; its insights into the human conditions of love and its relative, hate, will be of value to a wide audience.

Dr Martin Herbert

This book is dedicated by the editor, with affection and esteem, to Derek Ganley, Renate Hiller-Grodszinsky and Desmond Davies.

Introduction

As Robin Higgins says elsewhere in this book, 'hate is a complex affect or sentiment involving sadism, rage, anger and envy'. It is therefore very disturbing and destructive. Yet we all hate from time to time. Mrs Barbara Dockar-Drysdale writes (Personal Communication) that Dr D. W. Winnicott says hate is present in normal development; it therefore has a very important part to play in the development of the individual and an inability to hate could be as serious as inability to love. These matters are not sufficiently discussed and the editor feels, thinks and finds that there is too much hatred in the world. And children probably hate more than adults. Paradoxically, children are also more amenable to improvement and treatment.

Hence this book. It discusses how to recognise and handle hatred in a practical, purposeful way. The contributors include three child psychiatrists, five psychologists, two psychotherapists, one sociologist and an educationalist. They are all recognised and experienced experts in their fields. It is therefore an invaluable book for students and practioners in these fields.

Ved Varma
London

Further Reading

Klein, M. (1957) *Envy and Gratitude*. London: Tavistock Publications.
Varma, V. (1992) (ed.) *The Secret Life of Vulnerable Children*. London: Routledge.

CHAPTER 1

Hate in Nursery Rhymes
Captive Audience; Essential Message

Robin Higgins

'What?' cried Job in the middle of his trials. 'What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?' As evil is the shadow of good, chaos the shadow of order, hate is the shadow of love. From our earliest days, we cannot escape the presence of hate. We have to come to terms with it and know it inside and out. Nursery rhymes are one means which assist us to do so.

A note about hate

Hate is a complex affect or sentiment involving sadism, rage, anger and envy (Rycroft 1968, Berke 1985). It is aroused by the experience of frustration, and in its most stark and uncompromising guise by events which are felt to threaten life. Hate, because it arises at those times when life is felt to be threatened, is particularly active in states of vulnerability such as infancy, or for a mother immediately after giving birth when she finds herself landed with a dependent vulnerable creature whom she often both adores and fears.

Again hate, if sustained and unresolved, entails revenge. Unresolved hate, resentment and revenge can in themselves be life-threatening, so it is of particular importance that hate should find some permissible outlet if the natural childhood experience of tit for tat (Jung and Kerenyi 1963) is not to turn into the vicious crippling circle of resentment and revenge.

The period of special vulnerability, along with the time when the vicious spiral can still be averted, coincide with the period we are particularly concerned with in this chapter: the period of the nursing couple and their nursery rhymes.

Hate and the nursing couple

During and immediately after foetal life, the establishment of its own rhythms is of vital significance for the infant. So hate and its behavioural concomitant of rage may explode over (temporary) distortion of rhythms or over faulty rhythmic entrainment. Mother and infant rhythms may become

jarringly out of joint. The infant's hate and rage is a direct attempt to restore the balance.

In this sense, hate is the complement of love a necessary opposite as distinct from indifference, which arises when the complementarity of hate and love has failed. In nursery rhyme lore, indifference goes under the guise of 'don't care' and (*pace* the Miller of Dee) is given short shrift:

> Don't care didn't care
> Don't care was wild
> Don't care stole plum and pear
> Like any beggar's child.
>
> Don't care was made to care
> Don't care was hung:
> Don't care was put in a pot
> And boiled till he was done.

Blake fully appreciated that, in the context of love, hate is an essential ingredient when he wrote:

> My friendship oft has made my heart to ake.
> Do be my Enemy for friendship's sake. (Blake 1978)

For any of us to enjoy a robust and reliable world of our own, we have to endure the repeated experience of hating the person we love and, out of these successive bouts of hate, resurrecting that person inside us in an increasingly complex, less black and white, pattern (May 1985).

For infant and mother, there are two sides to this resurrection: hate and its resolution for the infant; hate and its resolution for the mother.

The love of mother for infant and infant for mother tend to be taken for granted. Why would one go to all the trouble of having an infant if one promptly rejected it as soon as it was born? Why on the infant's part should one hate the owner of the breast (or the bottle) that feeds, the person on whom one is so totally dependent?

Neither of these questions, as it turns out, is as rhetorical as they might seem. The sad fact is that some parents do reject their own child, sometimes precisely because of the trouble its nine months' coming has caused them. Equally there are some infants who hate the breast or hand that feeds, sometimes precisely because of the highly dependent position that they find themselves in.

First, we consider the infant. When in the womb, and immediately after birth, we take the first steps in making some sense of our world, we have to transform chaotic, fragmented and unrelated impressions into images and experiences that are encompassable and that in the course of time we can recognise, remember, and share with others.

This transformation closely involves the person we have for nine months been part of. In these early months, as the small system attached to the

greater, we have been constantly drawing our nourishment from her bloodstream and putting back into it waste-products for detoxification. We continue this two-way traffic in the same way after the umbilical cord is cut, though with psychic rather than somatic events. We hand the chaotic and unencompassable feelings with which we are saddled over to our mother and hope to receive them back from her in a modulated form that begins to have some coherence.

Hate forms an essential ingredient of these unencompassable feelings and, indeed, is one of the reasons for their being unencompassable. Instances abound of the murderous phantasies an infant may harbour towards its parents (see, for example, Klein 1988,1989).

So, the reasons why infants may hate their mothers are because the transformation of hate is an essential path of growing by encompassing the chaotic; because without hate there is no resilience; and because the only person usually available for the infant to hate is the long-suffering mother.

The reasons why mothers may hate their babies have been well rehearsed by Winnicott (1978): from the start, the infant is not her own; it endangers her body, interferes with her private life; it hurts her at times by, for example, biting and chewing on her nipples; it treats her like an unpaid skivvy, showing scant appreciation for anything she does for it; it is small and vulnerable and horribly dependent and if she fails it at the start, the pay back will last for ever. Perhaps the most unarguable reason of all is that the mother realises she's in a trap. For her infants to grow free of her, she has no option but to carry for a while the hatred they dump on her like their stools.

Clearly, then, in the nursing couple, the mother and baby, there is a lot of hate lurking around and a deep need for permissible outlets to modulate, transform, and express it.

How does the mother endure transform and hand back these feelings of hate and rage? The simple answer is in reverie; in tuning into her own and her infant's feelings and living with them, carrying them. A more detailed answer probes into the nature of reverie; its character of being there, a presence when the other feels most alone, a support without intruding. A more detailed answer also examines the different forms reverie may take; the dreaming container, enchantment. The particular form addressed in this chapter is the crooning of nursery rhymes.

The nursery rhyme and reverie

The nursery rhyme has come to be used down the centuries as one means containing the various emotions which occur between infant and parent, especially the mother. The central emotions for containment are love and its inverse: hate. Their mode of being articulated and contained lies both in the singing and the content of what is sung.

When mothers sing to their children, they hold and rock them as part of themselves. For a while, time and outside events become immaterial. Rhymes

and rhythms take over like a mantra. These are moments of enchantment when each is absorbed into the other, united by the power of sound.

A key experience throughout our life, stemming from the first nine months of symbiotic existence, is that of being held. This experience, like any other, has an opposite. Here the opposite is not being held and not being held may mean being allowed to move independently, or being dropped (Higgins 1989).

The child's fear of being let down finds a counterpart in the adult's fear of being tied to the baby. Many young mothers feel quite overwhelmed by the degree to which the infant is dependent upon them. They sometimes experience a great urge to be rid of this beloved burden, an urge which often fills them with anxiety and guilt. They are by no means always relieved of this burden within and without by the many well-meant admonitions from relatives friends and experts.

The first point about dependency on the part of mother and infant, then, is the excitement and fear of being no longer held. Nursery rhymes voice the possibility quite openly:

> Rock-a-bye-baby on the tree top
> When the wind blows the cradle will rock.
> When the bough breaks the cradle will fall
> Down will come baby, cradle and all.

Appropriately, the words are sung to a variant of the rebel tune of Lillibulero. Or again:

> Catch him crow! Carry him kite!
> Take him away till the apples are ripe;
> When they are ripe and ready to fall,
> Here comes baby, apples and all.

Or again:

> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
> Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
> All the king's horses and all the king's men
> Couldn't put Humpty together again.

And here's a riposte for the child (again sung to a much closer version of Lillibulero):

> There was an old woman tossed up in blanket
> Seventeen times as high as the moon.
> Where she was going I couldn't but ask it,
> For in her hand she carried a broom.
> 'Old woman, old woman, old woman', quoth I;
> 'O whither, O whither, O whither so high?'
> 'To sweep the cob-webs from the sky,
> And I'll be with you by and by'.

Sometimes the adult's exasperation becomes more explicit. In the *Naughty Baby's Song*, peace is sought by intimidation, through threats of bogeymen of either English (Oliver Cromwell in the shape of Black Old Knoll) or, as here, European extraction:

Baby, baby, naughty baby,
Hush, you squalling thing, I say.
Peace this moment, peace, or maybe
Bonaparte will pass this way.

Baby, baby, he's a giant,
Tall and black as Rouen steeple,
And he breakfasts, dines, rely on't,
Every day on naughty people.

Baby, baby, if he hears you,
As he gallops past the house,
Limb from limb at once he'll tear you,
Just as pussy tears a mouse.

And he'll beat you, beat you, beat you,
And he'll beat you all to pap,
And he'll eat you, eat you, eat you,
Every morsel, snap, snap, snap.

Here another over-burdened and, in this instance, single parent coasts towards non-accidental injury:

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

Sometimes adult exasperation takes a more ambiguous, envious turn, harking back to memories of one's own idealised infancy when a smug and unassailable dependency was seemingly ours to be enjoyed:

What does the bee do?
Bring home honey.
And what does Father do?
Bring home money.
And what does Mother do?
Lay out the money.
And what does baby do?
Eat up the honey.

Blake was well aware of the ambiguities, not merely in love and hate but in the apparent innocence of dependence:

O the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep.
When thy little heart does wake,
Then the dreadful lightnings break. (Blake 1948)

Or again:

My mother groan'd, my father wept;
Into the dangerous world I leapt,
Helpless, naked, piping loud,
Like a fiend hid in a cloud. (Blake 1948)

Some lullabies broach the breaking of dependence in an apparently gentle, repetitive fashion akin to the game of peep-bo that children often set up for the same purpose. Such lullabies may be full of cornucopial promises, intended to suggest the ever open arms, the ever available breast. Both the next two instances come from America:

Hush you bye, don't you cry,
Go to sleep, little darling.
When you wake, you shall have cake
And drive those six little horses...

And here a more extensive list of replacements is promised should the first gift turn out to be faulty:

Hush little baby don't say a word
Mama's going to buy you a mocking bird.

If that mocking bird don't sing
Mama's going to buy you a wedding ring.

If that wedding ring turns brass
Mama's going to buy you a looking glass.

If that looking glass gets broke
Mama's going to buy you a billy-goat...

And so on. The reiterated images of fragility and breakage are balanced by reiterated assurances of repair, the whole set of stanzaic conditionals being accompanied by a throbbing, dance-demanding pulse. In these reassurance lullabies, the overall aim is to establish a trust which breeds trust and which overcomes fear, anxiety and hate on both sides.

An alternative interpretation would see the reassurance as a mask for hate and the cornucopial promises as a form of bribe.

The lure of the wild

Besides the bald statement of being dropped, besides the intimidation of the bogeyman, besides the ambiguous envy of dependence or the equally am-

biguous assurance of reparation, a further way in which hate is expressed in nursery rhymes may be seen in the theme of *The Flight from Home.*

In one sense, this theme is a sophisticated extension of the bough breaking under the rocking cradle. The purposeful escape involves conscious intention on both sides; hate prompts kicking and being kicked out:

> What makes you leave your house and land?
> What makes you leave your money O?
> What makes you leave your new-wedded lord,
> To go with the wraggle-taggle gypsies O?
>
> What care I for my house and land?
> What care I for my money O?
> What care I for my new-wedded lord?
> I'm off with the wraggle taggle gypsies O!

Or more simply:

> I won't be my father's Jack
> I won't be my mother's Jill,
> I'll be the fiddler's wife
> And have music when I will.
> T'other little tune, t'other little tune,
> Prithee love, play me t'other little tune.

So much for the child's leap to independence. What about the adult's? Sometimes the response is equally straightforward, as in the case of the king who:

> Had three sons of yore
> And kicked them through the door
> Because they wouldn't sing.

But on other occasions, in attempting to deal with their fears about the child's dependence and with the many bonds that they find the child stirs in them, adults may take special pains (and pleasure) in weaving stories to impress on the child the vulnerability which goes with this dependence:

> My dear, do you know
> How a long time ago,
> Two poor little children
> Whose names I don't know,
> Were stolen away
> On a fine summer's day,
> And left in a wood,
> As I've heard say...
>
> And when it was night
> So sad was their plight
> The sun it went down,

And the moon gave no light.
They sobbed and they sighed
And they bitterly cried,
And long before morning
They lay down and died...

The dangers of the passage through the wood are hammered home in stories like *Little Red Riding Hood*, or the *Erl King*. Here's Blake again:

'Father! father! where are you going?
O do not walk so fast.
Speak father, speak to your little boy,
Or else I shall be lost',

The night was dark, no father was there;
The child was wet with dew;
The mire was deep and the child did weep,
And away the vapour flew. (Blake 1948)

So, it is not uncommon for children to be given mixed messages about taking steps towards independence. On the one hand, get off my back and stand on your own bottom (as one mother was once heard instructing her child). On the other hand, the child is warned against trespassing outside the cosy domestic domain, predicted perils being used to consolidate the imposition of parental choice:

My mother said I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood:
If I did, she would say
Naughty little girl to disobey.

Your hair shan't curl and your shoes shan't shine,
You gypsy girl, you shan't be mine.
And my father said that if I did
He'd rap my head with the teapot-lid.

The lure of the wild inside the home

The spirit of hate, rebellion and independence, then, may prompt children to escape from home and a parent to kick them out or give them mixed messages about the dangers of leaving. But there are several routes along which the ambiguous feelings of hate and rebellion pull them back into the home.

One particular route, emphasised by Melanie Klein, is the hate which is stirred up by a sense of exclusion from the so-called primal scene; that painful experience where children encounter the parents making love, and no longer know where and to whom they belong.

Goosey, goosey gander,
Whither shall I wander?
Upstairs and downstairs
And in my lady's chamber.
There I met an old man
Who would not say his prayers.
I took him by the left leg
And threw him down the stairs.

The sense of exclusion not only arises between child and adult but between male and female as partners, and more generally. The hate engendered by the primal scene is a potent source of sexual rivalry and sexual battles. In several nursery rhymes, the focus on gender distinctions prepares for the rivalry, complacency and disdain in nursery warfare and beyond:

What are little boys made of?
Frogs and snails
And puppy dogs' tails
That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice
And all that's nice
That's what little girls are made of.

What are young men made of?
Sighs and leers
And crocodile tears
That's what our young men are made of.

What are young women made of?
Ribbons and laces
And sweet pretty faces
That's what our young women are made of.

Not surprisingly in such ambiguous preparations, the elderly are the last who can expect to be spared:

What are old women made of?
Bushes and thorns
And old cow's horns
That's what old women are made of.

Which prompts an Andy Capp, Alf Garnett type of riposte:

Who are you? A dirty old man.
I've always been so since I began.
Mother and Father were dirty before me
Hot or cold water has never come o'er me.

Peering into the future hazards of the marriage mart, the unromantic ethos of nursery rhymes includes the complaint of the woman who idolizes and is then let down by her man:

There was a lady loved a swine
Honey quoth she
Piggy-hog wilt thou be mine?
Hoogh, said he.

I'll build for thee a silver sty
Honey, quoth she
And in it thou shalt lie
Hoogh said he.

Pinned with a silver pin
Honey quoth she
That thou may go out and in
Hoogh, said he.

(One is reminded of Robert Graves' question: 'Why have such scores of lovely gifted girls married impossible men?' (Graves 1974).)

The same realistic, if sardonic, ethos paints a different marital state, this time the hen-pecked man speaking through the mouth of the woman:

I had a little husband,
No bigger than my thumb;
I put him in a pint-pot
And there I bade him drum.
I bought a little horse,
That galloped up and down;
I bridled him, and saddled him
And sent him out of town.
I gave him some garters
To garter up his hose,
And a little silk handkerchief
To wipe his pretty nose.

In his collection of nursery songs in 1849, Halliwell includes the ballad of Lord Randal who returns to die in his mother's arms after being poisoned by his treacherous sweet-heart (Halliwell 1970). Before he dies, his mother dots the i's and crosses the t's on how he proposes to dispose of his worldly goods. This particular aspect of the sexual battle, which involves the jealousy of two generations (lover and mother), crops up in many different versions, whether 'my boy' is Randal, Billy, Tammy, King Henry, my dear son, or my bonnie wee croodin' doo.

Hate in loss and disaster

Another type of exclusion (and the hate which goes with it) arises from a general and not specifically sexual sense of deprivation and loss. Nursery rhymes could be said to prepare children for some of the shocks they may at any time have to face, either inevitably like illness and death or unpredictably like being caught in a sinking ship (Yule 1991) or having one parent murder the other (Black and Kaplan 1988). Cock Robin is a nursery rhyme figure who endures deprivation and death: on one occasion when the north wind is blowing and he has to hide his head under his wing to keep himself warm, and on another when he's killed and is mourned by all the birds of the air who fall a-sighing and a-sobbing on receiving the news.

Once again, in nursery rhymes, the children are reminded of their vulnerability to loss:

> When I was a little boy I lived by myself,
> And all the bread and cheese I got I laid upon a shelf;
> The rats and the mice they made such a strife
> I had to go to London town to buy me a wife.
> The streets were so broad and the lanes were so narrow
> I was forced to bring my wife home in a wheelbarrow.
> The wheelbarrow broke and my wife had a fall,
> Farewell wheelbarrow, little wife and all.

Loss may take less extreme forms, as with the Three Little Kittens who lost and then found their mittens and so were able to enjoy their pie (withheld by their mother until the mittens were found). It may also carry heavier symbolic overtones which may refer to loss of identity, as in the case of the Old Woman who fell asleep on the king's highway, had her petticoats snipped up to the knee by the Pedlar, and then, when apparently unrecognised by her own dog, suffered serious doubts as whether she be herself or someone else. A somewhat similar situation occurs in the riddle of

> Little Nancy Etticoat
> With a white petticoat
> And a red nose;
> She has no feet or hands
> The longer she stands
> The shorter she grows. (Answer: a lighted candle.)

Or the overtones may hark back to gender differences and castration, as in the case of the Three Blind Mice, who in addition to their sight lost their tails to the knife of the farmer's wife, or Little Bo-Peep whose sheep went tail-less when she fell fast asleep on duty, and who in her efforts to amend her delinquency didn't rest but

> Went over hill and dale-o
> And did what she could