

Further Thoughts on a 1930s Playground Rhyme

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I was interested to read some childhood memories in a recent article¹ by Professor John Ryan (who spent his childhood in New Zealand), particularly a reference to the rhyme given below, which Professor Ryan states does not appear in any published collection in New Zealand:

There's a war in Abyssinia
 Won't yer come?
 All you'll need is ammunition
 And a gun.
 Mussolini will be there,
 Firing peanuts in the air.
 There's a war in Abyssinia
 Won't yer come?

The rhyme seems to be a parody of a rhyme recorded by G. F. Northall in 1892 (collected from Macclesfield, Cheshire in 1882):

Will you come to the wedding, Will you come, Will you come?
 Will you come, etc./
 Bring your own tea and sugar, And your own bread and butter,
 And we'll all go a penny to the rum.²

This rhyme may itself be a parody of a nineteenth century song, "Will you come to my wedding, will you come?" as suggested by the Opies,³ who give an example from their own collecting in the 1960s, used as a counting-out rhyme:

There's a party on the hill, will you come?
 Bring your own cup and saucer and a bun.
 Dipper aside: What's your sweetheart's name?
 Player: Mary.
 Mary will be there with a ribbon in her hair,

¹ J.S. Ryan, 'Some memories and customs of Dunedin, the capital of Scottish Southern New Zealand, 1938 to 1942', *Play and Folklore*, 57 (April 2012), 18-19.

² Northall, G.F., *English Folk-Rhymes: A collection of traditional verses relating to places and persons, customs, superstitions, etc.* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), p. 292.

³ I. Opie, and P. Opie, *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 60.

Will you come to the party will you come?⁴

My own daughter was chanting a similar rhyme in Sheffield, South Yorkshire in the early 1980s.

However, a much closer parallel to Professor Ryan's rhyme appears in a memoir written by Rowland Kellett, a collector from Leeds, West Yorkshire. Mr. Kellett and his friends chanted this rhyme in the 1930s:

Will you come to Abyssinia, will you come,
Bring your own ammunition and your gun.
Mussolini will be there
Shooting peanuts in the air.
Will you come to Abyssinia, will you come?⁵

This version seems to have been fairly widespread, at least in the north Midlands of England.

A contributor to the BBC's interactive project 'WW2 People's War' gave the Abyssinia rhyme, remembered by him from Ellesmere, Shropshire in the mid-1930s. He recalled that it was sung to the tune of 'Roll Along Covered Wagon', written by Jimmy Kennedy in 1934. There is another online reminiscence from Middlesbrough and evidence of further parodying as a football rhyme, 'Will you come to De Ferrari?'⁶

In the 1950s Leslie Daiken, an Irishman working in London, recorded a counting-out rhyme which may be an amalgam of the earliest Northall example and the Abyssinia parody:

Will you come to my wedding
Will you come?
Bring your own bread and butter
And a bun,
My mother will be there
Throwing bullets in the air.
Willya come to me weddin'
Willya come?⁷

The aggression in Abyssinia (as Ethiopia was then known in Europe), initiated in 1935 as part of the expansionist ambitions of Benito Mussolini, would have been significant—and ominous—news. Both Italy and Ethiopia were members of the League of Nations, formed after World War I with the express aim of preventing such a war from

⁴ Opie and Opie, 1969, p. 60.

⁵ Kellett, Rowland, 'Heritage of the Streets: A Collection of Children's Songs, Games and Jingles' (1966, unpublished manuscript held by the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society), p. 21.

⁶ See www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/20/a5876120.shtml (accessed 13 September 2012).

⁷ See www.kmbro.org/Terry_Greenberg_Memoirs_p03.htm (accessed 13 September 2012).

breaking out ever again. Australia and New Zealand, with their own bitter memories of the earlier conflict, were also members. News anxiously discussed among the adults is one thing: but who knows by what processes of diffusion the Abyssinia rhyme swept 1930s playgrounds as far apart as the English Midlands and New Zealand?

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Literature and Affect

Annual conference of the Australasian Association of Literature held in conjunction with the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions University of Melbourne 2-4 July 2014

What is 'the affective turn' and where did it come from? The relationship between literature and affect has long been a fraught one. We invite papers that engage with any aspect of literature and affect; explore the significance for literature of the affective turn that has informed the humanities more broadly; analyse the relationship between affect and the literary aesthetic; engage affect and emotion to explore (or indeed contest) the singularity of literature. We also invite papers that consider literature and affect historically, and that consider affect, literature and the problem of evaluation (aka judgment). Possible topics:

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- New formalisms
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- Literature and public emotions
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- Cognitive literary criticism, psychoanalysis and the neurosciences
- Pain and trauma
- Sensation and corporeality
- Sexuality and eroticism
- Literary and aesthetic judgment
- Aesthetic-affective moods, modes and tones (e.g. sentiment, melodrama, camp)
- Non-human, impersonal and animal affect
- Actors and performance
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