

= Humpty Dumpty =

Humpty Dumpty is a character in an English nursery rhyme , probably originally a riddle and one of the best known in the English @-@ speaking world . He is typically portrayed as an anthropomorphic egg , though he is not explicitly described so . The first recorded versions of the rhyme date from late eighteenth @-@ century England and the tune from 1870 in James William Elliott 's National Nursery Rhymes and Nursery Songs . Its origins are obscure and several theories have been advanced to suggest original meanings .

The character of Humpty Dumpty was popularised in the United States by actor George L. Fox ( 1825 ? 77 ) . As a character and literary allusion , he has appeared or been referred to in a large number of works of literature and popular culture , particularly Lewis Carroll 's Through the Looking @-@ Glass ( 1872 ) . The rhyme is listed in the Roud Folk Song Index as No. 13026 .

= = Lyrics and melody = =

The rhyme is one of the best known and most popular in the English language . The most common modern text is :

It is a single quatrain with external rhymes that follow the pattern of AABB and with a trochaic metre , which is common in nursery rhymes . The melody commonly associated with the rhyme was first recorded by composer and nursery rhyme collector James William Elliott in his National Nursery Rhymes and Nursery Songs ( London , 1870 ) . The Roud Folk Song Index catalogues folk songs and their variations by number , and classifies this song as 13026 .

= = Origins = =

The earliest known version was published in Samuel Arnold 's Juvenile Amusements in 1797 with the lyrics :

A manuscript addition to a copy of Mother Goose 's Melody published in 1803 has the modern version with a different last line : " Could not set Humpty Dumpty up again " . It was published in 1810 in a version of Gammer Gurton 's Garland as :

In 1842 , James Orchard Halliwell published a collected version as :

According to the Oxford English Dictionary , the term " humpty dumpty " referred to a drink of brandy boiled with ale in the seventeenth century . The riddle probably exploited , for misdirection , the fact that " humpty dumpty " was also eighteenth @-@ century reduplicative slang for a short and clumsy person . The riddle may depend upon the assumption that a clumsy person falling off a wall might not be irreparably damaged , whereas an egg would be . The rhyme is no longer posed as a riddle , since the answer is now so well known . Similar riddles have been recorded by folklorists in other languages , such as " Boule Boule " in French , " Lille Trille " in Swedish and Norwegian , and " Runtzelken @-@ Puntzelken " or " Humpelken @-@ Pumpelken " in different parts of Germany ? although none is as widely known as Humpty Dumpty is in English .

= = Meaning = =

The rhyme does not explicitly state that the subject is an egg , possibly because it may have been originally posed as a riddle . There are also various theories of an original " Humpty Dumpty " . One , advanced by Katherine Elwes Thomas in 1930 and adopted by Robert Ripley , posits that Humpty Dumpty is King Richard III of England , depicted as humpbacked in Tudor histories and particularly in Shakespeare 's play , and who was defeated , despite his armies , at Bosworth Field in 1485 .

Professor David Daube suggested in The Oxford Magazine of 16 February 1956 that Humpty Dumpty was a " tortoise " siege engine , an armoured frame , used unsuccessfully to approach the walls of the Parliamentary held city of Gloucester in 1643 during the Siege of Gloucester in the English Civil War . This was on the basis of a contemporary account of the attack , but without evidence that the rhyme was connected . The theory was part of an anonymous series of articles on

the origin of nursery rhymes and was widely acclaimed in academia , but it was derided by others as " ingenuity for ingenuity 's sake " and declared to be a spoof . The link was nevertheless popularised by a children 's opera All the King 's Men by Richard Rodney Bennett , first performed in 1969 .

From 1996 , the website of the Colchester tourist board attributed the origin of the rhyme to a cannon recorded as used from the church of St Mary @-@ at @-@ the @-@ Wall by the Royalist defenders in the siege of 1648 . In 1648 , Colchester was a walled town with a castle and several churches and was protected by the city wall . The story given was that a large cannon , which the website claimed was colloquially called Humpty Dumpty , was strategically placed on the wall . A shot from a Parliamentary cannon succeeded in damaging the wall beneath Humpty Dumpty which caused the cannon to tumble to the ground . The Royalists ( or Cavaliers , " all the King 's men " ) attempted to raise Humpty Dumpty on to another part of the wall , but the cannon was so heavy that " All the King 's horses and all the King 's men couldn 't put Humpty together again " . Author Albert Jack claimed in his 2008 book Pop Goes the Weasel : The Secret Meanings of Nursery Rhymes that there were two other verses supporting this claim . Elsewhere , he claimed to have found them in an " old dusty library , [ in ] an even older book " , but did not state what the book was or where it was found . It has been pointed out that the two additional verses are not in the style of the seventeenth century or of the existing rhyme , and that they do not fit with the earliest printed versions of the rhyme , which do not mention horses and men .

= = In Through the Looking @-@ Glass = =

Humpty appears in Lewis Carroll 's Through the Looking @-@ Glass ( 1872 ) , where he discusses semantics and pragmatics with Alice .

" I don 't know what you mean by ' glory , ' " Alice said .

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously . " Of course you don 't ? till I tell you . I meant ' there 's a nice knock @-@ down argument for you ! ' "

" But ' glory ' doesn 't mean ' a nice knock @-@ down argument ' , " Alice objected .

" When I use a word , " Humpty Dumpty said , in rather a scornful tone , " it means just what I choose it to mean ? neither more nor less . "

" The question is , " said Alice , " whether you can make words mean so many different things . "

" The question is , " said Humpty Dumpty , " which is to be master ? that 's all . "

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything , so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again . " They 've a temper , some of them ? particularly verbs , they 're the proudest ? adjectives you can do anything with , but not verbs ? however , I can manage the whole lot ! Impenetrability ! That 's what I say ! "

This passage was used in Britain by Lord Atkin in his dissenting judgement in the seminal case *Liversidge v. Anderson* ( 1942 ) , where he protested about the distortion of a statute by the majority of the House of Lords . It also became a popular citation in United States legal opinions , appearing in 250 judicial decisions in the Westlaw database as of 19 April 2008 , including two Supreme Court cases ( *TVA v. Hill* and *Zschernig v. Miller* ) .

It has been suggested by A. J. Larner that Carroll 's Humpty Dumpty had prosopagnosia on the basis of his description of his finding faces hard to recognise .

" The face is what one goes by , generally , " Alice remarked in a thoughtful tone .

" That 's just what I complain of , " said Humpty Dumpty . " Your face is the same as everybody has ? the two eyes , ? " ( marking their places in the air with his thumb ) " nose in the middle , mouth under . It 's always the same . Now if you had the two eyes on the same side of the nose , for instance ? or the mouth at the top ? that would be some help . "

= = In popular culture = =

Humpty Dumpty has become a highly popular nursery rhyme character . American actor George L. Fox ( 1825 ? 77 ) helped to popularise the character in nineteenth @-@ century stage productions of pantomime versions , music , and rhyme . The character is also a common literary allusion ,

particularly to refer to a person in an insecure position , something that would be difficult to reconstruct once broken , or a short and fat person . Humpty Dumpty has been used in a large range of literary works in addition to his appearance as a character in *Through the Looking @-@ Glass* , including L. Frank Baum 's *Mother Goose in Prose* ( 1901 ) , where the rhyming riddle is devised by the daughter of the king , having witnessed Humpty 's " death " and her father 's soldiers ' efforts to save him . In Neil Gaiman 's early short story *The Case of the Four and Twenty Blackbirds* , the Humpty Dumpty story is turned into a film noir @-@ style hardboiled crime story , involving also Cock Robin , the Queen of Hearts , Little Bo Peep , Old Mother Hubbard , and other characters from popular nursery rhymes . Robert Rankin used Humpty Dumpty as one victim of a serial fairy @-@ tale character murderer in *The Hollow Chocolate Bunnies of the Apocalypse* ( 2002 ) . Jasper Fforde included Humpty Dumpty in his novels *The Well of Lost Plots* ( 2003 ) and *The Big Over Easy* ( 2005 ) , which use him respectively as a ringleader of dissatisfied nursery rhyme characters threatening to strike and as the victim of a murder .

The rhyme has also been used as a reference in more serious literary works , including as a recurring motif of the Fall of Man in James Joyce 's 1939 novel *Finnegans Wake* . Robert Penn Warren 's 1946 American novel *All the King 's Men* is the story of populist politician Willie Stark 's rise to the position of governor and eventual fall , based on the career of the corrupt Louisiana Senator Huey Long . It won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize and was twice made into a film *All the King 's Men* in 1949 and 2006 , the former winning the Academy Award for best motion picture . This was echoed in Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward 's book *All the President 's Men* , about the Watergate scandal , referring to the failure of the President 's staff to repair the damage once the scandal had leaked out . It was filmed as *All the President 's Men* in 1976 , starring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman . Similarly , Humpty Dumpty is referred to in Paul Auster 's 1985 novel *City of Glass* , when two characters discuss him as " the purest embodiment of the human condition " and quote extensively from *Through the Looking Glass* .

It has also been used as a common motif in popular music , including Hank Thompson 's " Humpty Dumpty Heart " ( 1948 ) , The Monkees ' " All the King 's Horses " ( 1966 ) , Aretha Franklin 's " All the King 's Horses " ( 1972 ) , Tori Amos 's " Humpty Dumpty " ( 1992 ) , and Travis 's " The Humpty Dumpty Love Song " ( 2001 ) . In jazz , Ornette Coleman and Chick Corea wrote different compositions , both titled *Humpty Dumpty* . ( In Corea 's case , however , it is a part of a concept album inspired by Lewis Carroll called " *The Mad Hatter* " , 1978 ) .

In the Dolly Parton song *Starting Over Again* , it 's all the king 's horses and all the king 's men who can 't put the divorced couple back together again . In an extra verse in one version of ABBA 's *On and On and On* , Humpty Dumpty is mentioned as being afraid of falling off the wall .

= = In science = =

Humpty Dumpty has been used to demonstrate the second law of thermodynamics . The law describes a process known as entropy , a measure of the number of specific ways in which a system may be arranged , often taken to be a measure of " disorder " . The higher the entropy , the higher the disorder . After his fall and subsequent shattering , the inability to put him together again is representative of this principle , as it would be highly unlikely ( though not impossible ) to return him to his earlier state of lower entropy , as the entropy of an isolated system never decreases .

A variation on the poem using near @-@ sounding French nonsense words is often used to illustrate the difficulty of speech recognition in different languages . A common version is as follows :

To a listener expecting a nursery rhyme , it will generally be heard as the English version , while someone expecting French will instead tend to hear nonsense words .