

## Notes and Queries

### Kelpie in the Mill

According to *The Concise Scots Dictionary*, the Aberdeenshire and Banffshire noun *chattie* signifies “pig, boar”, and this is supported by *chat*, “a call to a pig” (Robinson, 1985, pp. 92-93). *Chattie* occurs for instance in a tale recorded by the folklorist Walter Gregor (1825-1897), of Pitsligo near Banff, in which a miller troubled by the nocturnal visitations of a kelpie puts a boar, alias male domestic pig, in his mill to deter the intruder. Injured and defeated in the ensuing fight, the kelpie appears the following night at the miller’s window, calling out to him: “Is there a chattie i’ the mill the nicht?” To this the miller responds: “Aye, there is a chattie i’ the mill, an’ will be for ever mair.” The kelpie departs, never to return (Gregor, 1883, p. 293, “Kelpie as Hurtful”).

What we have here is a representative of ATU 1161, “The Bear Trainer and His Bear”, in which a bear trainer with his (polar) bear is put up in a mill haunted by an ogre. When in the night the ogre attacks the lodgers, he is injured and expelled by the bear. Not long after this the ogre appears to the miller, asking whether he still has the big (white) cat. On being told that the cat is not only still there, but has also kittened, the ogre departs for good (Uther, 2004, 2, pp. 54-55).

In the Scottish variant, the ogre is, as we have seen, represented by a kelpie. Given the setting of the story, this is not at all surprising. How, though, are we to explain the metamorphosis from bear to boar? In most variants, whether older or more recent, the punchline is that in which the terrifying ogre, unfamiliar as he is with polar bears, refers to his assailant as a cat or pussy. Thus in the Middle High German version we find: “lebet dîn grôze katze noch?” matched in the Danish by: “Har I endnu den lille kirer?” or the Polish: “Mynara, jest ta jeszcze kocia?” and so on (Röhricht, 1962, pp. 236-237). Only the Scots version presents us, *pace* Agricola, who insists that for the kelpie the miller’s boar is indeed a cat (1967, p. 150 and pp. 281-282, no. 218), with an exception in this respect. The reasons appear to be as follows.

In Scots, *cheet* and *cheetie-pussy* represent calls to a cat, or the animal itself, while another call is *chatty-puss* (Robinson, 1985, pp. 94 and 93). I would suggest that a Scots version of the story once featured a bear and one of these cat-words that was later, whether intentionally or not, reinterpreted as the rather similar-sounding *chattie*, meaning “pig” or “boar” (*ibid.*, p. 93). That being so, the bear trainer and bear of the original could be dispensed with and replaced by a miller and his boar. This makes perfect sense, since, as Gregor tells us, referring no doubt to his part of Scotland, it was common for a miller to keep a good many pigs and a breeding sow or two (1883, p. 293). In that assemblage, an alpha male capable of dealing with a kelpie would be by no means out of place.

Although kelpies were in Scottish lore apparently much associated with mills, I have yet to find stories of the sort mentioned in *OED* under *kelpie*, in which the kelpie was believed to render assistance (!) to millers by keeping the mill going during the night (Simpson and Weiner, 1989, 8, p. 381). I wonder if this was in character.

It would be good to trace other English-language versions of ATU 1161. Rather oddly, in what purports to be a summary of Gregor's above-mentioned version of 1883, Baughman in his *Type and Motif-Index* has a bear and an ogre, rather than the boar and the kelpie one might have expected (1966, p. 27). Note also that in his list of variants of ATU 1161 Uther refers to the fourth edition, dated 1839, of C. Johnson's *The History of the Lives and Actions of the Most Famous Highwaymen*, pp. 295-296 (Uther, 2004, 2, p. 54). On those pages of my own, undated, edition of this, which appeared under a slightly different title, I find a story about a bear-keeper and bear that seems to me to have no more than a superficial resemblance to our story. In compensation, there is a suitably scary illustration of the highwayman Whitney being mauled by the bear (Johnson, n.d., p. 296). For me it is hard or impossible to see Whitney as a counterpart to our kelpie.

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## “Auld Girnigae” and “Little Rede”

In her collection of Herefordshire lore, Ella Mary Leather has a tale that, unusually for her, is set in the far north of Scotland. In it, a young man who is out shooting gets lost in a thick fog and, following a light in the murk, climbs into the branches of an oak tree. Looking down into the strangely lit hollow trunk, he sees what appears to be a funeral, in which deceased and mourners are all cats. When the young man eventually reaches his lodging, and is telling the friend sharing it with him about what has happened, the household cat sits up, apparently listening intently. When the narrator reaches the point in his story at which the deceased is identified as a king, our friends' cat starts up, shrieking, “By Jove! Old Peter's dead! And I'm King o' the Cats”, and rushes up the chimney, never to be seen again (Leather, 1992, p. 167).

Here we have a version of ATU 113A, “Pan Is Dead”, formerly “King of the Cats Is Dead”, which is fairly well documented in England, but in Scotland perhaps less so. In fact the only complete Scottish version known to me is a Gaelic one, translated into English by

Campbell, in which, having killed a wild-cat, a hunter is telling of the experience, when a kitten that is listening utters dire threats against the hunter, and continues with the words, “Tell Streaked Foul-Face that Bladrum is dead”. The kitten then departs, never to return. In an alternative version, Campbell identifies the hunter as Cameron of Doñni or Glenevis, who is not just threatened by the listening cat, but killed, as a result of which the scions of the family would, until quite recent times, not tolerate a cat in their house (Campbell, 1902, pp. 38-39).

We now come to a fragment. In the glossary to his edition of the anonymous *Complaynt of Scotland* of 1548, John Leyden (1776-1811), who hailed from Denholm near Hawick, has the following notes: “The editor recollects to have heard the following rude verse in a witching-story, in which the terms *carle* and *gib*, are exchanged at the pleasure of the reciter. A spirit gives the following injunction to a terrified ghost-seer (1801, p. 318):

Mader Watt, Mader Watt,  
Tell your carle (*alias gib*) cat  
Auld Girnigae o’ Cragend’s dead.”

Here *carle cat* and *gib cat*, the second of which Leyden refers to as “quite common in the south of Scotland”, are roughly synonymous terms for “male cat”, while *Girnigae* conveys the idea of “fretful, bad-tempered person”. What we have here turns out to be a fragmentary version of ATU 113A, “Pan is Dead” (Uther, 2004, 1, p. 84; Lysaght, 2002, 492-497), recognised less than a decade after Leyden’s death as having a fuller counterpart in a Danish tale from the town of Lyng near Soroe, where Leyden’s Mader Watt is matched by a Goodman Platt, and Auld Girnigae by one Knurre-Murre, the report of whose death, conveyed by Goodman Platt, galvanises the Goodman’s tom-cat, which seems, mysteriously, to understand human speech (Cohen, 1819, 97-98). It turns out that Knurre-Murre had in life a young and beautiful wife, and was cuckolded by a young man who for safety became the cat of our story, now only too keen to join Knurre-Murre’s widow (Cohen, 1819, 97-98). Here, then, we have a jocular, if not ribald tale, that contrasts strangely with our non-fragmentary Scottish versions.

On the above-mentioned page of his edition of *The Complaynt of Scotland*, Leyden has a tale which seems to me to lack parallels elsewhere. He writes: “The editor recollects to have heard the following, which he will not attempt to explain:

The mouse and the louse, and little Rede,  
Were a’ to mak a gruel in a lead [vat].”

The first two associates desire little Rede to go to the door and “see what he could see”. He declares that he saw the “gay carlin” (as the phrase is pronounced) coming,

With spade, shool [shovel], and trowel,  
To lick up the gruel.

When the party disperse;

The louse to the claith, and the mouse to the wa',  
Little Rede behind the door, and licked up a'.

According to EDD, *rede*, perhaps related to Icelandic *hreda*, “bugbear, bogle”, is “a name given to a fairy being of some kind” (Wright, 1970, 5, p. 73), while the *gay carlin*, alias *gyre carlin(g)*, is “the mother-witch” (ibid., 2, p. 772), described by Leyden, likewise on p. 318 of *The Complaynt*, as “the Queen of Fairies, the great hag, Hecate, or mother-witch of the peasants” (cf. Smith, 2004, 176-177).

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## New Attire For Eastertide And Yule

In germanophone countries, beliefs about the need for people to wear new clothes in the approach to Easter, and about what will happen if they do not, tend to cluster around Palm Sunday and the *Palmesel*, the ass on which Christ rode into Jerusalem on that day. The live ass ridden by a cleric representing Christ in Palm Sunday processions was at an early date replaced by a wooden representation mounted on rollers or wheels. Long since consigned to museums, where excellent wooden effigies may still be seen, the Palm Sunday ass still ekes out an existence in lore and language (Röhrich, 1991-1992, 2, pp. 1129-1130; Erich, Beitzl, and Beitzl, 1996, p. 630), as in Landshut, but also Trier, in both of which places children lacking a new garment on Palm Sunday were allegedly in danger of being shat upon by the Palm Sunday ass (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli, 1927-1941, 6, p. 1382; Müller, 1944, p. 474).

Analogous beliefs and sayings are well documented for England, Wales and Ireland, where just one of the things that can happen to the sartorially challenged at Easter is that birds will mess upon them (Opie and Tatem, 1989, p. 131; Roud, 2003, p. 100). Relevant terminology is worth exploring. Take for instance the nineteenth-century Northumbrian *Pace-new* alias *pyessy-new*, “new at Easter”, contrasting with *Pace-old* or *pyessy-aad*, “old at Easter”. Associated with these was the belief that on Easter Sunday some new article of clothing must be worn, the punishment for anyone not conforming being a spattering of well-aimed excrement from on high (Wright, 1970, 4, p. 399).

We next move further north. Now restricted to Angus, the Scots noun *Pace-yaud* stands for someone who fails to observe the custom of wearing something new for Pace, alias Easter (Robinson, 1985, p. 467). Compare the lines from the *Rambling Rhymes* of 1834 by the Forfar poet Alexander Smart, who describes as follows a woman lacking the necessary finery (Wright, 1970, 4, p. 430, headword *paseyad*):

Ah! wae’s me for the poor Peace-yaud,  
Wha naething braw to boast o’ had;  
While some frae tap to tae were clad.

What interests us here is *Pace-yaud* in its various manifestations, a superficial look at which might suggest that the second element is somehow the same as that of Northumbrian *pyessy-aad* and the like. Such a conclusion would of course be wrong, not least because the Scots word is a noun, and the Northumbrian one an adjective.

Investigating further, we find that the Banffshire *Yule’s jade*, in which *jade* is the same as the Forfar *yaud*, stood for someone lacking a new article of dress on Christmas morning (Wright, 1970, 6, pp. 593-594). Compare the abusive expression *Yule’s yaud*, current throughout Scotland from the late fifteenth to the early twentieth century, but latterly found chiefly in the north. It is glossed by Robinson as “a person ill-prepared for Yule, e.g. one who leaves work unfinished before Christmas or the New Year, or has nothing new to wear for the festivities” (1985, p. 813). Compare also Ross’s reference to the Shetland Norn *jøl-jager* for “person, particularly boy, who has not had new clothes, or something else new, for Christmas” (1965, p. 162). The sense of this is relevant, though the second element appears not to belong with the above-mentioned Forfar *yaud* etc.

There is a long history to all this. In his Christmas poem “Petition of the Gray Horse”, William Dunbar (1460? to some time between 1513 and 1530) ends each stanza with a request to King James IV for a Christmas present, his wish no doubt being for something to wear:

Schir, lat it never in toune be tald  
That I suld be ane Yuillis yald.

Our authority here continues to be A. S. C. Ross, who in his *Etymology* deals in considerable detail with the words *yad*, *yaud* etc. He claims that *ya(u)d* is of Scandinavian origin, and he draws our attention to the Icelandic “Christmas Cat”, mentioned in a passage

from Jón Árnason's *Íslendzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*, (ii, p. 570). This he translates: "Nevertheless people could not enjoy Christmas festivities altogether without anxiety for ... there was a belief that the monster which was called the 'Christmas Cat' [jólaköttur] was on his wanderings then. He did no harm to those who had some new garment to put on on Christmas Eve, but those who had got no new garment 'all put on [went into] the Christmas Cat'." The words "all put on [went into] the Christmas Cat" apparently contain a pun, since the original expression *fara í*, literally "go into", can mean either "to put on" or "to be eaten by". Ross continues with the information that in Sunnmøre in Norway the "New Year's Goat" (*Nyårsbukken*) is supposed to get those who have not had clothes for the New Year, while in Salten, likewise in Norway, it is the fabled "Yule-Lads" (*Julesvendene*) the shabbily dressed should look out for (Ross, 1965, pp. 159-162; cf. Smith, 2009, 11).

In conclusion, the following will cast a little light on at least some of the above. In Iceland it is imperative to finish processing the autumn wool before the winter solstice sets in. All, including children, are encouraged to join in the arduous task of collecting, washing, carding, spinning, and those who set to with a will are rewarded at the end with a freshly spun garment such as a scarf. Lazy children not only sit around shivering from inactivity; they also have good reason to shiver with fear, for outside the window on Solstice Night there sits the *Jólaköttur* or Yule Cat, watching to see who gets new clothes and tries them on. What happens to those who do not? At his chosen moment the Yule Cat bursts in, pounces upon them, and scratches them to death ([www.scrapbookflair.com](http://www.scrapbookflair.com)).

Here we possibly have a key to beliefs that may seem a little strange to modern readers, who may well claim that the sartorially challenged are, like Smart's "poor Peacey-yaud", to be pitied, rather than threatened with all kinds of fictive punishments. In English-language tradition the mere befouling by birds was by no means the worst that could happen to those lacking a new garment on festive occasions. In Hampshire dogs would spit at them, and in Cork the crows would pick out their eyes (Opie and Tatem, 1989, p. 131). Our Icelandic evidence in the preceding paragraphs reminds us that having nothing new to wear can be seen, not as pitiable, but as stemming from laziness, incompetence, and reluctance to conform. The Christmas or Yule Cat is a Frightening Figure, a means of social control designed to discourage such behaviour. Perhaps the thought of being spat upon by dogs (!), befouled by birds, or having one's eyes pecked out had a similar origin and function.

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