

## Some Traditions from the Odenwald Viewed in a Wider Setting

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Here is a tale from W. Carew Hazlitt's *Shakespeare Jest-Books*. It was originally published in 1567. It bears the title: "Of the servaunt that rymyd with hys mayster", and it runs:

"A gentleman there was dwellynge nygh Kyngston upon Tamys, and rydyng in the contrey with his seruauent which was not the quyckest felowe, but rode always sadly [quietly] by his maysters side and uttered uery fewe wordys. His mayster sayd to him: wherefore rydyst thou so sadly? I wolde have the tell me some tale to beguyle the tyme with. By my trouthe, mayster, quod he, I can tell no tale. Then sayd his mayster: canst thou not synge? No by my trouthe, quod he, I coulde neuer synge in all my lyfe. Quod the mayster: Canst thou ryme? No, by my trouthe, quod he, I can not; but yf ye wyll begyn to ryme, I wyll follow as well as I can. By my trouth, quod the mayster, that is well; therefore I wyll begyn to make a ryme. Let me se how wel thou canst folowe thy mayster meanwhyle; and then [he] began to ryme thus:-

'Many mennys swannys swymme in Temmys,  
And so do myne.'

Then quod the seruauent:

'And many a man lyeth by other mennys wyues,  
And so do I by thyne.'

What dost thou, horeson, quod the mayster? By my trouthe, mayster, no thyng, quod he, but make vp your ryme. But quod the mayster: I charge the tell me why thou sayest so. Forsothe Mayster, quod he, for nothyng in the worlde but to make vp your ryme. Than quod the mayster: yf thou doist for nothyng ellys, I am content. So the mayster forgaue hym hys saynge, all thoughe he sayd trouthe peraduenture." (Hazlitt, no. 45, pp. 68-69)

Another version of what is essentially the same story is attributed, in the second footnote to Canto the Eleventh of Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, to Ben Jonson (1573-1637) and Joshua Sylvester (1563-1618). There we read:

"I doubt if 'Laureate' and 'Iscariot' be good rhymes, but must say, as Ben Jonson did to Sylvester, who challenged him to rhyme with

'I, John [sic] Sylvester,  
Lay with your sister.'

Jonson answered –

‘I, Ben Jonson, lay with your wife.’

Sylvester answered, – ‘That is not rhyme.’ – ‘No,’ said Ben Jonson; ‘but it is *true*.’”  
(Byron, p. 591, Dedication, xi, footnote 2)

My next version of the story crops up in the small town of Mudau in the Odenwald, where I recorded it from an elderly informant about 1974.

“A captain and his batman were sitting in a room by themselves. They were bored. He [the captain] said to the batman: ‘What shall we do, what shall we get up to to make time go by?’ ‘Ha, I know’ said the lad, ‘why don’t you make poems? You make such good poems.’ Well, the captain made a start:

‘Ich bin der Graf Silvester,  
Poussier’ mit deiner Schwester.’

[‘I am Count Silvester, I have it off with your sister.’] The lad said: ‘But sir, that’s no way true. You don’t know my sister. You’ve never even seen her.’ Says the captain: ‘There’s no need for it to be true; they’re only poems. They’ve just got to rhyme. *You* make one if you can do it better.’ Says the lad:

‘I am the batman Hans;  
I have it off with your wife.’

Says the captain: ‘That rhymes not a bit!’ ‘No,’ says the batman. ‘But it’s true!’”  
(Smith, 1986, pp. 149-150).

“A peasant from Steinbach went on a pilgrimage to Walldürn with his wife. And in those days women didn’t have umbrellas when they went out. I can remember that. And as the two of them were coming into Walldürn it started to rain. And the woman pulled up her skirt over her head. And when they’d got part-way through Walldürn, the woman said: ‘Why are all the children standing and staring at me?’ ‘Oh,’ the man said, ‘You’ve pulled up your underskirt as well as your skirt, and what’s underneath is showing.’ And she said: ‘You stupid old donkey, you! Why didn’t you tell me before?’ And he said: ‘Well, I thought you’d made a vow to go like that.’” (Smith, 1975, 58)

We note that in the circumstances it would have been normal for a woman to sally forth not only without an umbrella, but also without the undergarments nowadays considered indispensable.

Another version I recorded centred not on Walldürn, but on the hamlet of Buch, which is on the way from Mudau to the Engelsberg near Miltenberg. A third resort of pilgrims, Amorsbrunn, a holy well near Amorbach with the alleged ability to cure infertility, is the subject of a further tale. The gist of this is that water brought from the well by a woman for her married daughter is accidentally drunk by her unmarried daughter, with undesired consequences (Smith, 1975, pp. 58-59; Smith, 1986, p. 149).

Returning to our previous piece, we find it in the type-index as ATU 1230\*, “The Pilgrimage Vow”, summarised as follows by Uther:

“A woman on a pilgrimage accidentally disarranges her skirt (and shirt), exposing her naked buttocks. Her husband doesn’t say anything to her about this because he thinks it is part of her pilgrimage vow.”

There follows a list of not many more than a dozen variants, none of them from outside of Europe (Uther, 2, p. 82). German-language examples are dealt with by Leopold Schmidt in “The Putative Vow” (“Das vermeintliche Gelübde”), where the tale is traced to the period between 1865 and maybe 1900. His map on pp. 358 and 359 shows a number of the recorded germanophone variants as belonging to the northern Alps, where it takes us westwards from Salzburg in Austria to Einsiedeln in Switzerland, with then a northerly cluster about the northern Rhine. No examples are plotted in the area between Main and Danube or south of the latter (Schmidt, pp. 355-396). Our examples given here, which do belong to the area between Main and Danube, go a small way towards filling a considerable gap.

We next concern ourselves with a version of ATU 1296A, “Fools Go to Buy Good Weather”, in which the simpletons referred to return from a search for good weather with an insect in a sealed box. Before reaching home they out of curiosity open the box, and the good weather flies away. The type is fairly well represented through Europe, with one variant from India (Uther, 2, p. 111). In his rather more recent article of 2014, “Wetter kaufen” (“Buying the Weather”) for *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, 14, pp. 691-693, Jurjen van der Kooi sees the centre of gravity of the tale, for which he provides a good many variants, as northern Germany, where, he says, it shows the greatest stability in content and structure.

Our variant, from the Odenwald, is presented in the dialect of Gauangelloch by the former lord mayor of that community, Alois Lang. “For weeks,” he writes,

“the people had in one year waited for hay-making weather [Heuwetter], and it just rained and rained. Then this farmer says to his lad: ‘You just go down to Leimen, to the pharmacy there, and get “Heuwetter”’. The lad just looks stupid, but he takes himself off through the forest to Leimen. ‘Master would like some Heuwetter,’ he says to the pharmacist. That one looks flummoxed, and scratches his head, but he goes to the back of the shop. After a bit, he comes out with a little box, and he ties it up with string. ‘Here we are then,’ he says, ‘this is Heuwetter, and you must take it to the farmer.’ On his way back through the forest the lad thinks to himself: ‘For goodness’ sake, you need to have a look what’s in that box.’ When he opens it, out there comes buzzing a big bluebottle and makes off. All the lad can do is shout after it: ‘Heuwetter, fly to Gauangelloch!’ ”

Ever since then the inhabitants of Gauangelloch have been called “Heuwetter” (Lehr, 1986a, pp. 59-60).

Other nicknames associated with the story are provided by van der Kooi. In the Oldenburg region it is located in the imaginary township of Kraihwarden. Other places are not imaginary: Rekkem has its *Weermakers* (“Weather-Makers”), Bopfingen its *Hummeler* (“Bumble-Bee Folk”), Mistelgau its *Hummeln* (Bumble-Bees). The Swiss locality of Hornussen is said to be named after the hornets that were supposed to bring good weather (van der Kooi, 14, p. 692).

Much the same story is told of Appetshofen near Möttingen, some 130 kilometres to the east of Stuttgart:

“Worried about the lack of warm dry weather for hay-making, the people of Appetshofen sent one of their own to the pharmacy in Neresheim to get ‘Heuwetter’ (‘hay-making weather’). The pharmacist put a bumble-bee in a little box with instructions not to open the package before reaching home. Not far from the village, our messenger was, however, overcome with curiosity, because there was such a buzzing noise in the box. He opened it, and there was ‘Heuwetter’ flying away over the tops of the fir-trees. All he could do was to shout after it: ‘Heuwetter, fly to Appetshofen!’ Oh, and by the way: when you’re in the area, it’s not a good idea to greet locals with, ‘Fliag Appetshofa zua!’ ”

(dieterriess./de/brauchtum/511385967aOccfc05/index.html)

A dialect poem on the subject, and a stylistically ornate prose version of several thousand words, may be viewed on [www.moettingen.de/geschichtelierheim.htm](http://www.moettingen.de/geschichtelierheim.htm). Both are anonymous. Here now is another variant, to be found at [Appetshofen-online](http://Appetshofen-online) and labelled “Heiwetterer”, which suggests “Heuwetter People”:

“Tradition tells us that many years ago bad weather persisted at hay-making time. In the emergency, on the advice of a ‘clever Dick’, a canny peasant woman consulted a pharmacist in Kösching who was known to be a bit of a joker. Eventually he was so good as to give her ‘genuine Heuwetter’ in a pill-box, to be taken home with the instruction not to open the box till she got there. The woman was tortured with curiosity, and, on reaching the last houses of the hamlet of Stammham, the ‘weather-fetcher’ could not contain herself any longer, and peeped into the box, not least because of the noises issuing from it. But when she opened it, the ‘pharmaceutical Heuwetter’ (the mischievous Stammhammers claimed it was a bumble-bee) flew off into the great unknown. At the top of her voice the woman cried in desperation: ‘Heiwetter, flieg Appertshofa zua.’ ”

([www.appertshofen.de/html/body\\_heiwetterer](http://www.appertshofen.de/html/body_heiwetterer)).

We conclude with two representatives of a widespread tradition according to which on Christmas Eve farm animals are granted the power of speech and of prophecy. Some variants have it that for the power of prophecy to take effect one must sprinkle the animals’ manger with fernseed and then lie on it. Alternatively, one’s shoes must be sprinkled with it (Petzoldt, p. 346). Our Odenwald variant, in the dialect of Neunkirchen, runs as follows: “On Christmas Eve, the cows and the horses talk to each other. Now this farmer wanted to listen in. One horse asks the other: ‘What shall we be doing tomorrow?’ Says the other horse: ‘We shall be carrying

the farmer to the churchyard.’ Thereupon the eavesdropping farmer falls down dead.” (Lehr, 1986b, p. 171)

Here for comparison is a much more detailed but somewhat shortened version, from Bavaria:

“Farmer Wolf was a man who did not hold with the good old ways, but wanted to improve on everything handed down by father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, who were the richest farmers of the region. He read newspapers, argued with the priest, saying that sermon and mass were superfluous, since one could commune with God at home, and he was always up to the hilt with lawsuits ... Now it was Christmas Eve, when at the twelfth hour the cattle talk to one another. But his wilful ways were to be sorely punished. He lay down in the manger, next to where his favourite oxen, Müller and Ruckl, were tied ... At the stroke of twelve, up spoke Ruckl: ‘Listen, Müller. I’m truly sorry for our farmer. A week today, our job will be to take him to the churchyard!’ ‘Yes,’ says Müller, ‘it goes against the grain. He’s always been right with us: he’s never ever struck us, and he’s given us food and rest in plenty.’ ‘Wait, wait! I’ll put a stop to your foolery,’ shouted the farmer, drunk as he was. ‘You’ll not be taking me to the grave.’ And that very same morning he sold the oxen for next to nothing, just to get rid of them. But there came a cattle plague and snatched away all the farmer’s and his neighbours’ cattle, except for the oxen that had predicted the wicked man’s end. Even he, who gave much care to the sick animals, and tried to put a stop to the plague by dint of human ingenuity, was infected and died, exactly as had been predicted. Indeed, for want of other animals to do the job, Ruckl and Müller pulled the hearse to the churchyard, one week after that encounter in the byre.” (Petzoldt, no. 6, pp. 2-3).

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