Notes and Comments

'The King's Questions' (AT 922) in Scotland

ALAN BRUFORD

This note is the result of class-work with students in Oral Literature and Popular Tradition I during the sessions 1971–2 and 1972–3, and I am grateful to those who filled in questionnaires. The late Professor Walter Anderson's classic study of AT 922, *Kaiser und Abt* (Anderson 1923) is an obvious example of the best work of the 'Finnish school' on the folktale to use in such a course, and we applied his methods to available versions printed in English from Scotland, England and America. It soon emerged that there were definite Scots and Gaelic oecotypes or redactions of the story, and subsequent work on versions only available in Scottish and Irish Gaelic confirms this. Anderson's study included only one Scots version of the story and the two from Gaelic given by Campbell of Islay (CS 1 and 2 below),[1] so it seems worth while to add the results of our investigation on fifteen more versions, together with some English, Irish and American parallels collected since Anderson's time.

The story is best known in English through the ballad of *King John and the Bishop* (Child 45), whose popularity in broadsides is no doubt the reason for a dearth of independent versions in England. In the ballad the king is jealous of the (Arch)bishop (or Abbot) of Canterbury for 'keeping a better house than he', and sets him three questions to be answered, on pain of death, in some days' time: 'What am I worth?' 'How soon may I ride round the world?' 'What do I think?' The bishop's shepherd volunteers to take his master's place, disguised as him, and answers them: 'Twenty-nine pence' (since Christ was sold for thirty, and He was better than you) 'Go with the sun, and you will do it in twenty-four hours', and 'You think I am the bishop, but I am his shepherd.'

There is a clearly defined Gaelic oecotype of this story, from which only five versions (CS 1, 2, 7, 9, 15) out of fifteen depart at all significantly, and that in little more than one question and the names of the characters. Anderson might have described it as a 'Brother Redaction', for the person who is set the question is in regular forms described as a priest (*sagart*—in versions from Protestant as well as Catholic areas, which may provide an indication of the age of the story) and the one who answers them is his brother, a simpleton (*amadan*), who remarks in most cases that if he is killed it will be less of a tragedy than the death of the priest. Exactly the same pattern is followed in three of the six Irish versions available to me in print, all from Munster (*Béaloideas* 2:

196, 6:251, both from Co. Waterford; Ó Duilearga 1948:159, from Co. Kerry). Moreover we shall see later that another redaction of Irish or Scots origin makes these two characters brothers, though only 11 of the 410 oral versions and three of the 62 original literary versions studied by Anderson do so: it may perhaps be significant that three of the four versions of Child 45 which Anderson treats as original (the Percy Folio and the two broadsides which Child omitted as 'in a far less popular style') make them brothers or half-brothers. The third character, the questioner, is sometimes the usual king (emperor, CS8) in Gaelic versions, but a special sub-type has developed in South Uist and Benbecula (CS 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12) where he is just a landowner who wants rid of the priest, because he is anti-clerical or more probably anti-Catholic. This is presumably a fairly recent development, but similar to the Irish version (Ó Duilearga 1948) where the questioner is the 'ministir' or Anglican vicar of the parish: he has the power to have the priest killed, as in some South Uist versions, but this is probably something carried on from older versions where he was a king, rather than a memory of penal times.

In the standard version the questions asked are Anderson's G, N, and Q: 'Where is the centre of the world?' 'What am I worth?' and 'What am I thinking?' This corresponds to the pattern in Anderson's 'Old French redaction', established by 1500 or so, and the oldest redaction regularly including the final question Q which is standard in most modern European versions of the story. The two last questions are answered as in the ballad (apart from differences in the figure under thirty pence which is chosen) and the first is answered 'Here!'—the fool normally thumps the floor with his staff to indicate the exact spot, and challenges the king to doubt him, or maintains that as the Earth is round any point is in the middle. Sometimes the third question in the ballad, 'How long does it take to go round the world?' (F) is substituted for G (CS 2, 7, 9, 15) but these versions also differ from the standard type in lacking the brother relationship and we may well suspect English influence. CS 7, from a well-known Lochaber storyteller, the late John MacDonald, retains the priest but makes his saviour George Buchanan, whose role as a wise fool, if not in this story, derives from a once popular series of chapbooks (*cf.* Briggs 1970 2:95–102). In CS 9 priest and fool are replaced by a Jew and an Irishman, again suggesting an outside influence, possibly even American.

CS 1 and 2, retold from memory by Campbell of Islay, offer between them five questions, A: 'How many ladders would reach the sky?', F, G, N and Q. There is a curious change of roles here: the questioner is a master who is testing his pupil (compare the Fife version and the 'Pat and Mike redaction' below) but the questions are answered by the *master's* brother, a miller as in the Fife version. The MacCraw brothers from North Uist who told Campbell the variant versions were drovers who would no doubt often have been in the Lowlands on business, and it may be reasonable to suggest that they were conflating Scots and Gaelic versions which they knew. Unfortunately I have been unable to get access to some versions of the story recently recorded in North Uist by Mr A. J. MacDonald, which might throw light on the MacCraws' versions, in time

for this note. Finally, CS 15 (a version from Barra) has replaced George Buchanan by a native Gaelic figure, Gillcasbuig Aotrom, a character popularised by Dr Norman MacLeod but based, I am told by the Rev. William Matheson, on a historical person from Skye: this version is reprinted below (p. 150). The moralised introduction with a speaking skull may be borrowed from the international type AT 470A (see *Scottish Studies* 1:65–9), but has been well, perhaps deliberately, integrated into AT 922.

The Scots version from Fife known to Anderson, now most accessible in Simpkins (1914:251–2), where the king is named as James V, corresponds closely to the 'Old French redaction' both in the characters (king, priest and miller) and the questions (F, G, N, Q—F added perhaps under the influence of the ballad). But the two Scots versions in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies belong to a different family. Both were recorded in Blairgowrie from members of the Stewart tinker clan whose roots were further North: Andrew Stewart (recorded by Hamish Henderson on SA 1955/152 B9, printed in Briggs 1970: 2:485–7) a well-known storyteller: and John Stewart (recorded by Maurice Fleming, SA 1955/37 A1), father of another noted storyteller, Mrs Bella Higgins. The characters in both versions correspond to Anderson's 'German servant redaction' (*Deutsche Knechtsredaktion*): a king, a miller and a young man who is rewarded with the hand of the miller's daughter—not actually the miller's servant as in Germany, but 'Silly Jack' in Andrew Stewart's version, a shepherd in the other. The latter in fact corresponds to what Anderson (1923:265) considers the form from which the 'servant redaction' arose. The questions, however, are not typical of these German forms, though known in Germany: they are H, J, Q. H, 'How many stars are in the sky?' answered here with a nonsense figure and a challenge to dispute it, appears in Germany but is commonest in Eastern Europe; J, 'How heavy is the Moon?' 'A hundredweight, because there are four quarters to it', is a relatively uncommon question according to Anderson, chiefly found in France and Germany, though recent American versions may swell the numbers somewhat. The same combination occurs in an Anglo-American version with an Irish hero, Anderson's *Am* GE 4 (*Journal of American Folklore* 21:58); and even more interestingly, with the characters a landowner, a miller and a young priest, in a version in Irish from Tuam, Co. Galway (*Béaloideas* 16:88). There seems some reason to suspect, therefore, that our two versions from the north-east of Scotland are survivals of a redaction once widely known in these islands.

This account covers all the Scottish versions known to me: but there is reason to think that one more redaction was known in Scotland, perhaps in the south-west. E. C. Kirkland (1961) has described the American versions, mainly collected by himself and his students, where the questions are asked by a teacher of a little Irish boy, who will be thrashed unless he answers them, and answered by his twin brother. Among the questions, Q ('What am I thinking?') may be taken for granted; B, 'How deep is the ocean?', answered, 'A stone's throw', is common; the third varies. In this 'Pat and Mike redaction', as it might be called, the boys are always Irish (presumably living in the United States); but this may perhaps indicate, not that the story comes from Ireland,

but that it developed in a country with a substantial immigrant Irish population. The evidence that this country may have been Scotland rests on the source of three versions: the version learned by Mr Kirkland from his father, one other version collected by him, and the only British version of this redaction known to me (Wilson 1938:182–3). The source of the first two was a South Carolina evangelist called MacLendon, known as 'Cyclone Mac' and later described as 'Scotch', who used the story in his sermons in the 1920s. The third was collected in Westmorland from a woman who had heard it from 'a travelling Scotchman' about 1924, and the twins are there 'two little Scotch boys' called Bobby and Tommy. Here the teacher sets the questions in the hope of finding an excuse not to make Bobby top of the class over the head of his own son. Incidentally, in this redaction, as in the Scots recordings and the ballad, the questions are always set in advance: in Gaelic versions they are never revealed until the substitute appears to answer them. The questions are J, 'How heavy is the Moon?', B, 'How deep is the sea?' as in the American versions, and Q. Again one may ask whether a Scotsman would have told a story about the cleverness of 'two little Scotch boys'—how much of the telling is due to the English narrator?—but at least there is evidence to suggest that this version of the story was recently known in Scotland, and may yet be collected there.

The following version is CS 15, mentioned on page 149: it was recorded from Donald John MacKinnon, Horve, Barra, by Peter Cooke and Morag MacLeod in February 1972. The text has been transcribed and translated by Morag MacLeod.

Domhall Ruadh agus an Claban

Am bodach a bha seo, bha a coiseachd troimhn' choillidh—Domhall Ruadh a bheireadh iad ris. 'S dé thachair ris a's a' choillidh ach claban (ceann duine, fhios agad—cnàimh, claban mar a bheir iad). Thug e breab dha le 'bhròig mar siod. "Dé," os esan, "a chuir thus' a seo?" 's fhreagair an ceann e, "Chuir bruidhinn a seo mi," os esan. Ghabh am bodach an t-eagal, ach 's ann thuirt e ris fhéin, "Innsidh mi dha'n rìg he, gun do bhruidhinn an claban a bha seo rium." Chaidh e dh'ionnsaigh a' rìgh. "Nach do thachair claban rium 's a' choillidh 's bhruidh . . ."

"Bhruidhinn e?" os a' rìgh, "Dé thuirt e riut?"

"Dh'fhaighneachd mi dha, 'Dé chuir thus' a seo?' 'Chuir bruidhinn a seo . . .'."

"Chan'eil mise 'gad chreidsinn," os a' rìgh, "ach cuiridh mi air falbh còmh riut dithisd dha na geàrd bhios aige (*sic*) air a' gheata, agus feuch am bruidhinn an ceann tha sin ruibh. Nisd mara bruidhinn e ruibh," os esan, "tha mi dol a chur a' chinn dhiotsa, ma bhios tu 'g innse bhreugan dhòmh-sa."

"O bhruidhinn e ceart gu leòr," osa Domhall Ruadh, " 's esan a rinn sin," 's dh'fhalbh e fhéin 's na marcraichean a bha sin. Chaidh iad d'an choillidh, Domhall Ruadh 's na feadhainn a chuir a' rìgh a mach còmh ris. Fhuair iad an ceann 's thuirt Domhall Ruadh,

chuir e sròn a bhròige ris, "Dé chuir thus' a seo?" Cha d'thuirt an claban guth. "Dé chuir thus' a seo?" Cha d'thuirt a guth. "Seadh," os àsan—rug iad air—"Feumaidh tu dhol còmh ruinn. Feumaidh sinn an ceann a chur dhiot airson 'ith 'g innse bhreug." Thug iad air beulaibh a' rìgh e, fhios agad. Bha 'm bodach bochd air chrith, agus, "Carson a bha thu 'g innse bhreugan?" os a' rìgh.

"O chan e breugan. . . ."

" 'Se breugan a bh'agad, agus feumaidh sinn an ceann a chur dhiot fhéin son 'ith 'g innse bhreug ma tha. Ach leigidh mi dhut ao' chothrom eile," os esan. "Cuiridh mi trì ceistean ort," os esan, " 's ma fhreagras tu mi gheibh thu air falbh. Bheir mi dhut trì latha," os esan, "son a' freagairt. Thig thu—tha'n diugh Di-Màirt 's thig thu ann a sheo Di-Haoine agus cuiridh mi ort na ceistean 's mar a freagair thu mi, theid a' chroich ma d' cheann."

Dh'fhalbh Domhall Ruadh 's e air chrith 's cha robh fhios aige bho Dhia gu dé dhèanadh e. Có bha spealladh air an taobh shuas ach Gilleasbuig Aotrom. Chaidh e suas go Gilleasbuig 's thuirt e, "A Dhia, Ghilleasbuig, nach cuidicheadh tusa mise, mar a tha mi, 's feumaidh mi na ceistean tha seo a fhreagairt dha'n rìgh Di-Haoine 's chan'eil fhios agamsa, tha'n ceann a' dol. . . ."

"Had," os esan, Gilleasbuig, "leig thusa mise ann," os esan, "agus bheir dhomh do cheap, do sheacaid 's do bhriogais 's do bhròGan 's d' aodach air fad." Thàinig Di-Haoine 's, "Thugainn fhéin còmh rium 's falaich thu fhéin a muigh ann a shin."

Chaidh Gilleasbuig a staigh 's aodach Dhomhaill Ruaidh air 's thuirt a' rìgh—cha do dh'aithnich e e—"Sheadh, tha thu air tighinn. Bheil thu deiseil son nan ceistean agamsa fhreagairt?"

"Tha."

"Nisd, mar a freagair thu iad," os esan, "bidh 'n ceann dhiot. Seadh. 'Se cheud cheist," os esan, "dé 'n ùine bhios mise dol m'an cuairt an t-saoghail?"

"Bheir a' ghrian," os esan, "ceithir uaire fichead 's cha deanadh sibhse cho luath sin e."

"Seadh, glé mhath," os esan. "Shin agad a' cheud thé. 'N dala ceisd," os esan, "gu dé as t-fhiach mise?" os a' rìgh.

"O," os esan, "reic iad ar Slànuighear air deich ar fhichead 's tha mi diabhalta cinnteach nach t-fhiach sibhse sin," os esan.

"Glé mhath," os esan, "ach tha mi dol a bhreith ort ann a seo," os esan. "Co air tha mise smaointinn an dràsda?" os a' rìgh.

"Tha sibh smaoineachainn gur e Domhall Ruadh a th'agaibh a seo, ach sìbh tha fada ceàrr; 's ann a th'agaibh ach Gilleasbuig Aotrom," os esan.

Fhuair e dheth màr sin, 's bha a fhéin 's am bodach Domhall Ruadh a' dol dhachaigh 's bha 'n claban cionnan 's a' choille romhpa, 's thug am bodach breab air. "Dé chuir thus' a seo a chuir ann an crois mi?"

"Chuir bruidhinn a seo mi," os an claigeann.

Sin mar a chuala mise.

TRANSLATION

Donald and the Skull

This old man. he was walking through the wood—Red-haired Donald he was called. And what did he come across in the wood but a skull (a man's head, you know—bone, a skull as they called it). He kicked it with his shoe like that. "What," said he, "sent you here?" and the head answered him, "Speaking sent me here," it said. The old man got a fright, but he said to himself, "I'll tell it to the king, that this skull spoke to me." He went to the king. "Did I not come across this skull in the wood and it spoke. . . ."

"It spoke?" said the king. "What did it say to you?"

"I asked it, 'What sent you here?' 'Speaking sent me here.' "

"I don't believe you," said the king, "but I'll send two of the guards whom I have at the gate with you, to see if that head will speak to you. Now if it doesn't speak to you," said he, "I'll take your head off, if you're telling me lies."

"Oh, it spoke right enough," said Donald, "so it did," and he went off with those riders. They went to the wood, Donald and the men that the king sent with him. They found the head and Donald said, pointing to it with the toe of his shoe, "What sent you here?" The skull said nothing. "What sent you here?" Not a word. "Well," said they—they grabbed him—"You'll have to go with us. We'll have to chop your head off for telling lies." They brought him before the king, you know. The poor man was trembling, and "Why were you telling lies?" said the king.

"Oh it wasn't lies. . . ."

"It was lies and we'll have to chop your head off for telling lies. But I'll give you another chance," said he. "I'll put three questions to you and if you answer me you'll get off. I'll give you three days," said he, "to answer them. You'll come—today's Tuesday and you'll come here on Friday, and I'll give you the questions and if you don't answer me, the noose will go over your head."

Donald went away trembling and he didn't know what on earth to do. Who should be scything further up the way but Gilleasbuig Aotrom. He went up to him and said, "For God's sake, Gilleasbuig, won't you help me, in my great need, when I've got to answer these questions for the king on Friday and I don't know, my head is going to. . . ."

"Huh!" said Gilleasbuig, "you let me go there," said he, "and give me your cap, your jacket, your trousers and your shoes, and all your clothes." Friday came, and, "You will come with me and hide outside there."

Gilleasbuig went inside, wearing Donald's clothes, and the king—he didn't recognise him—said, 'Well, you've come. Are you ready to answer my questions?"

"Yes."

"Now, if you don't answer them," said he, "it's off with your head. Right, the first question," said he, "is, how long will I take to go round the world?"

"The sun takes twenty-four hours," he said, "and you couldn't do it that fast."

"Yes, very good," said he. "That's the first one. The second question," said he, "what am I worth?" said the king.

"O," he said, "they sold our Saviour for thirty [pieces] and I'm mighty sure you're not worth that," said he.

"Very good," said he, "but I'll catch you here," he said. "What am I thinking about right now?" said the king.

"You're thinking that this is red-haired Donald, but you're very far wrong; it's Gilleasbuig Aotrom," said he.

He got off in this way, and he and the old man, Donald, were going home and the self-same skull was in the wood in front of them, and the old man kicked it. "What sent you here, getting me into trouble?"

"Speaking sent me here," said the skull.

That's how I heard it.

NOTE

1 The Gaelic versions studied are as follows: the prefix CS for Scottish Gaelic (Celtic, Scottish) is that used by Anderson and the Finnish School in general.

CS1	Campbell 1890 2:406	Brothers MacCraw, North Uist
CS2	Campbell 1890 2:407	Brothers MacCraw, North Uist
CS3	Campbell 1939:35-8; Shaw 1955:62–3	Seonaidh Caimbeul, South Uist
CS4	IFC MS 1303:178–83	James MacKinnon, Barra
CS5	IFC MS 1154:53–7	Angus MacMillan, Benbecula
CS6	IFC MS?	Angus John MacLellan, Benbecula
	[I have been unable to locate this version, but have used the summary given by the collector, Dr Calum MacLean]	
CS7	SSS MS 1:87–8	John MacDonald, Highbridge, Lochaber
CS8	SSS MS 11:1031	Ewen MacPherson, Banavie, Lochaber (learned from an Appin man)
CS9	SA 1953/168/4	Mrs Catriona MacKinnon, Skye
CS10	DJM MS 68:6345–54	Mary Ann MacInnes, South Uist
CS11	SA 1958/29 A2; SA 1960/7 A3	Angus MacLellan, South Uist
CS12	SA 1960/8 A2	John MacMillan, South Uist
CS13	SA 1960/106 B2	Nan MacKinnon, Vatersay
CS14	SA 1967/1 A3; *Tocher* 5:156–9	Angus Henderson, Tobermory, Mull
CS15	SA 1972/32/6; *Tocher* 5:152–5 [reprinted above]	Donald John MacKinnon, Barra

I have not attempted to give numbers to Scots and English versions, since the practice in regard to versions in English (GE) is confusing. Thus Anderson's GE 1 is from Fife (but retold in standard English) but the following numbers are *Am*GE 2–4, from the United States, of which 2 and 3 are in fact variants of the ballad, which being regarded as a literary version is listed differently. On the other hand Kirkland uses GE 1 for theWestmorland text (which he treats as Scottish) and disregards both Anderson's GE 1 and at least one prose text from England with a claim to priority (Briggs 1970: 2. 410–11, from Leather 1913:177–8).

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