

Laughter and Libations: A Pagan-Safe Songbook



K. S. Wright
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Laugh'ter (laf ter) n. mere diversion of pleasure.

Li-ba-tion (lī bā'shen) n. the ritual pouring out of wine to honor a god.

By 1879 caroling was defined as “going around from place to place singing Christmas songs” and was thought to be a revival of an old English custom. This is not the case. In reality, caroling traces its origin back to the Old French carole, “a kind round dance accompanied by singers,” (c. 1300.) Those who did the singing and dancing, carolers, owe their moniker to the root word carl (n.) “bondsman; a common man of low birth,” from the Old Norse karl, meaning “man.”

When the housecarls went carousing, bawdy drinking songs ensued. It is not hard to imagine the lords and ladies of the manner eagerly offering them a cup of whatever was on hand just to get them to take their signing and dancing elsewhere.

The aim of *Laughter and Libations* is to trace common carols back to their less than pious roots, revving their original intent, which was to celebrate feasting and fornicating, drinking and dancing. This guide is divided into three sections: 1) Traditional Treasures, which provides history and original lyrics of the carols, 2) Simple Substitutions, showing how to change a Christmas carol into one celebrating Yule, Saturnalia, or what-have-you, and 3) Ridiculous Rewrites, which contains Christmas hymns for which there are no other existing lyrics, rewritten in a Pagan-Safe form.

In addition to popular carols, recipes for common winter beverages are included to enhance the spirits of the revilers.



Drink and be
Merry!

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About the Author:

Khaliela Wright is a full-time economist, part-time novelist, and occasional blogger. Unapologetically pagan, she endeavors to find ways to incorporate her religion into daily life.

You can learn more about her and see samples of her work on her website: KhalielaWright.com

Traditional Treasurers



Boar's Head Carol

The "Boar's Head Carol" dates back to at least 15th century England and describes the ancient tradition of presenting a boar's head at a Yuletide feast. Several versions of the carol exists, but the best known one was composed by Wynkyn de Worde and published in 1521 as *Christmasse Carolles*.

The tradition of serving a "Christmas ham" traces its roots back to the pagan tradition of sacrificing a boar to Freyr (or *Ingvi* to the Anglo-Saxons) during the sonar-blót on Yule eve. Those present would lay hands on the animal and swear oaths to be upheld during the coming year, and was followed by drinking toasts to each other, the gods, and the king. This tradition is attested to in the *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, and in the *Ynglinga* saga.

Lyrics

The boar's head in hand bear I,
Bedeck'd with bay and rosemary.
And I pray you, my masters, be merry,
As many as are at the feast.

CHORUS

The boar's head I bear,
Giving praises to the Lord.

The boar's head, as I understand,
Is the rarest dish in all this land,
Which thus bedeck'd with a gay garland
Let us serve with a song.

CHORUS

Our steward hath provided this
In honor of the King of Bliss;
Which on this day to be served is
In the hall of Queen's Hall.

CHORUS

The boar's head in hand bear I,
Bedeck'd with bay and rosemary.
And I pray you, my masters, be merry,
As many as are at the feast.

While many of us are not keen on serving up a boar's head, serving a solstice ham should suffice for your Yuletide activities. In keeping with the spirit of drinking and merriment, the recipe below incorporates bourbon into the cooking.

BOURBON BRAISED HAM

1 spiral cut ham (approx. 10 lbs)
2 leeks, copped (white and pale parts only)
1 large onion, copped
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped, PLUS 1 garlic clove minced
1 tbsp. dried thyme
1 tbsp. dried parsley
1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
4 cups of water
¼ cup Dijon mustard
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
1/3 c Bourbon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Put ham in roasting pan with leeks and onions. Sprinkle with 3 cloves of chopped garlic, thyme, parsley, and peppercorns. Add water. Cover roasting pan tightly with lid and roast for one hour.

While ham roasts, in a small bowl mix together mustard, remaining clove of minced garlic, Worcestershire sauce, and Bourbon.

Remove ham from oven and baste with mustard sauce, then return to oven, basting with pan juices occasionally. Roast 2 hours more or until thermometer reads 160°F.

Serves 8

Greensleeves

(What Child Is This)

"What Child Is This?" was written by William Chatterton Dix in 1865. At the time of its composing, Dix was recovering from an illness that left him bedridden and severely depressed, precipitating his spiritual renewal. The song was first published six years later, in a hymnal edited by Henry Ramsden Bramley and John Stainer, *Christmas Carols Old and New* in 1871. The mystery of who paired Dix's original poem with the music of "Greensleeves" remains unsolved.

"Greensleeves" happens to be a traditional English folk song. The song traces its origins back to a broadside ballad titled "A Newe Northen Dittye of ye Ladye Greene Sleves" and was registered at the London Stationer's Company by Richard Jones in September 1580. The tune appears in several 16th and 17th century sources, many of which are preserved in the Seeley Historical Library at the University of Cambridge.

Lady Green Sleeves was likely a promiscuous woman or prostitute. At the time, the word "green" had strong sexual connotations. The phrase "a green gown", refers to grass stains on a woman's dress as a result of having sex outdoors. The original lyrics tell the tale of a wanton man who loses his heart to the local whore. The whore, unimpressed by his declarations of love, spurs him.

What Child Is This Lyrics

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come peasant, king to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby;
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary

Greensleeves Lyrics

Alas, my love, you do me wrong,
To cast me off discourteously.
For I have loved you well and long,
Delighting in your company.

CHORUS

Greensleeves was all my joy
Greensleeves was my delight,
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but my lady greensleeves.

Your vows you've broken, like my heart,
Oh, why did you so enrapture me?
Now I remain in a world apart
But my heart remains in captivity.

CHORUS

I have been ready at your hand,
To grant whatever you would crave,
I have both waged life and land,
Your love and good-will for to have.

CHORUS

If you intend thus to disdain,
It does the more enrapture me,
And even so, I still remain
A lover in captivity.

CHORUS

My men were clothed all in green,
And they did ever wait on thee;
All this was gallant to be seen,
And yet thou wouldst not love me.

CHORUS

Thou couldst desire no earthly thing,
but still thou hadst it readily.
Thy music still to play and sing;
And yet thou wouldst not love me.

CHORUS

Well, I will pray to God on high,
that thou my constancy mayst see,
And that yet once before I die,
Thou wilt vouchsafe to love me.

CHORUS

Ah, Greensleeves, now farewell, adieu,
To God I pray to prosper thee,
For I am still thy lover true,
Come once again and love me.

CHORUS

The Thirteen Yule Days (The Twelve Days of Christmas)

"The Twelve Days of Christmas" is yet another Christmas songs that isn't. A French version from 1856 exuberantly begins, "The first day of the year," making it a song celebrating New Years, not Christmas. The opening verse for an even older Scottish version is, "The king sent his lady on the thirteenth Yule day," referencing the Pagan holiday associated with the winter solstice, and paying homage to the tradition of the 13 nights of Yule and the Yule Lads.

The song, as commonly sung today, derives from a 1909 arrangement by English composer Fredric Austin. However, many versions of the song exist, with numerous variations of the verses. Unlike popular music of the time, the song's irregular and changing time signature and meter reflect the song's older folk origin. In 1864, William Henry Husk noted that some versions of the song began appearing on broadsides in England in as early as 1714. One common version of the song, published in England in 1780, as a chant or rhyme, appeared in the popular book *Mirth without Mischief*.

In early versions, the word 'on' is absent from the beginning of each verse. 'On' was not added until Austin's 1909 version. In many cases, the gifts come from "my mother," or "the king," opposed to "my true love." Many other differences between the verses exist.

Rather than a partridge in a pear tree, the first verse often contained a "juniper tree" or "June apple tree," and in one case "a part of a mistletoe bough." The "four calling birds" first appeared in English as "four colly birds." Colly is a regional English expression for black, and was thought to have been a misunderstanding of the French "four collet birds," meaning ruffed. The flourish on the verse, "five golden rings" was not added until Austin's 1909 version. Prior to that, the verse was sung in same manner as all the others. Also, William S. Baring-Gould suggests that the presents sent on the first seven days were all birds, thus, this verse may have been sung, "five goldspinks," since a goldspink is an old name for a goldfinch.

Subsequent verses, depending on region and year of song, contained combinations of the following:

- Ducks a quacking
- Cocks a crowing
- Hares a running
- Hounds a running
- Bulls a roaring
- Asses racing
- Badgers biting
- Bears a beating
- Fifers fifing
- Bells a ringing
- Ships a sailing

"The Yule Days," published in Chambers, *Popular Rhymes, Fireside Stories, and Amusements of Scotland* has been linked to "The Twelve Days of Christmas" in scholarly literature. The lyrics to this 1842 version of the song are as follows:

The king sent his lady on the thirteenth Yule day,
Three stalks o' merry corn,
Three maids a-merry dancing,
Three hinds a-merry hunting,
An Arabian baboon,
Three swans a-merry swimming,
Three ducks a-merry laying,
A bull that was brown,
Three goldspinks,
Three starlings,
A goose that was grey,
Three plovers,
Three partridges,
A pippin go aye;
Wha learns my carol and carries it away?

"Les Douze Mois" ("The Twelve Months") was published in de Coussemaker, *Chants Populaires des Flamands de France* in 1856. The song and its translation are below:

Original French Lyrics

Le douzièm' jour d'l'année,
Que me donn'ez vous ma mie?
Douze coqs chantants,
Onze plats d'argent,
Dix pigeons blancs,
Neuf bœufs cornus,
Huit vaches mordants,
Sept moulins à vent,
Six chiens courants,
Cinq lapins courant par terre,
Quat' canards volant en l'air,
Trois rameaux de bois,
Deux tourterelles,
Un' perdrix sole,
Qui va, qui vient, qui vole,
Qui vole dans les bois.

English Translation

The twelfth day of the year
What will you give me, my love?
Twelve singing cockerels,
Eleven silver dishes,
Ten white pigeons,
Nine horned oxen,
Eight biting cows,
Seven windmills,
Six running dogs,
Five rabbits running along the ground,
Four ducks flying in the air,
Three wooden branches,
Two turtle doves,
One lone partridge
Who goes, who comes, who flies,
Who flies in the woods.

Toyland

“Toyland” is a song from the operetta *Babes in Toyland*, which weaves together various characters from Mother Goose nursery rhymes. Victor Herbert composed the score and Glen MacDonough wrote the lyrics. The original production opened at the Chicago Grand Opera house on June 17, 1903. There have been many adaptations to the original operetta since, including four movies. Ten songs from the score were recorded by Decca Records in 1944. Despite common misconceptions, the production, with its June debut date, was not intended to be associated with Christmas.

Lyrics

When you've grown up my dears,
And are as old as I,
You'll often ponder on the years
That roll so swiftly by, my dears,
That roll so swiftly by.
And of the many lands,
You will have journeyed through,
You'll oft recall
The best of all,
The land your childhood knew!
Your childhood knew.

CHORUS

Toyland. Toyland.
Little girl and boy land.
While you dwell within it,
You are ever happy then.
Childhood's joy-land.
Mystic merry Toyland,
Once you pass it's borders,
You can never return again.

When you've grown up, my dears,
There comes a dreary day.
When 'mid the locks of black appears
The first pale gleam of gray, my dears,
The first pale gleam of gray.
Then of the past you'll dream
As gray-haired grown-ups do,
And seek once more
Its phantom shore,
The land your childhood knew!
Your childhood knew.

CHORUS

Simple Substitutions



I Heard the Bells on Midwinter's Day (I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day)

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" is based on a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Longfellow wrote the poem on Christmas Day in 1863, however, "Christmas Bells" was not published until February 1865, in *Our Young Folks*. The song tells of the narrator's despair, upon hearing Christmas bells during the American Civil War. The poem was set to music by English Organist, John Baptiste Calkin, in 1872 by accompanying it with the previously composed melody "Waltham." Verses that reference the Civil War are frequently omitted.

The following is Longfellow's original poem, with appropriate pagan substitutions:

I heard the bells on ~~Christmas~~ (Midwinter's)
Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all ~~Christendom~~ (Pagandom)
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

~~Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!~~

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
~~"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;~~
(~~"The Gods aren't dead, nor do they sleep;~~)
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

The more adventurous cook and try their hand at making home-made eggnog. The less adventurous can simply pick up a container at the local grocery store and add the bourbon and brandy to help raise their holiday spirits.

EGGNOG

3 cups whole milk
7 large eggs
1 cup sugar
2 cups heavy cream
1/3 cup bourbon
1/3 cup brandy
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/3 teaspoon nutmeg

Bring milk to a boil in a 2-quart heavy saucepan. While milk is warming, whisk together eggs and sugar in a large bowl. Add hot milk in a slow stream, whisking continuously. Pour mixture into saucepan and cook over moderate heat, stirring constantly with wooden spoon, until mixture reaches 170^o F.

Remove from heat and pour through a fine mesh sieve into a clean bowl. Stir in cream, bourbon, brandy, vanilla, and nutmeg. Cool completely, uncovered, then chill, covered, at least 4 hours.

Ridiculous Rewrites



Dancin' Around the Yule Tree (Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree)

"Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" was written by Johnny Marks and recorded by Brenda Lee in 1958, when she was only 13 years old. The song has since been recorded by numerous other music artists. Since the song is decidedly Christmas orientated (not to mention, still under copyright) a re-write was necessary.

Dancin' around the Yule Tree
for a blessing of the crops,
Mistletoe hung where you can see
Every couple tries to stop.

Dancin' around the Yule Tree
Let the fertile spirits sing,
Later we'll have some roasted hog
and we'll do some caroling.

You will get a drunken feeling
When you hear,
voices singing, "Let's be jolly;
Quaff the ale and partake in folly."

Dancin' around the Yule Tree
Have a happy solstice day,
Everyone caroling merrily
In the grand ol' Pagan way.

You will get a drunken feeling
When you hear,
voices singing, "Let's be jolly;
Quaff the ale and partake in folly."

Dancin' around the Yule Tree
Have a happy solstice day,
Everyone caroling merrily
In the grand ol' Pagan way.

God Rest You Merry, Paganfolk (God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen)

“God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen” is an English carol in the Roxburghe Collection (iii. 452) and is listed as no. 394 in the Roud Folk Song Index. The earliest printed edition of the carol can be traced back to a 1760 broadsheet. An alternate version was printed in 1775 in *The Beauties of the Magazines, and Other Periodical Works, Selected for a Series of Years*. The melody commonly associated with the song first appeared in the 1829 parody *Facetiae*, by William Hone.

Since the song has no older pagan roots, re-writing was necessary in order to fully enjoy the tune.

God rest you merry Paganfolk,
Let nothing you dismay,
Remember that the Sun returns
Upon this Solstice Day,
To save us all from winter's power
Ushering Spring on its way.

CHORUS:

And it's tidings of comfort and Joy,
comfort and joy,
And it's tidings of comfort and joy!

From Odin, our All Father,
all worthy knowledge came,
And unto certain Paganfolk
A blessing of the same;
For the earth was dark and dim,
Whence from Yulelogging we came.

CHORUS

Now, when they came a'bearing ham,
To where our feasting table laid,
They found us hearty Paganfolk;
Unto our host we say,
“Bless the horn and passed it ‘round,
Unto the Gods we pray.”

CHORUS

With sudden joy and gladness,
The Paganfolk were beguiled,
To see the sun again return,

Bringing weather mild,
O' then with joy and cheerfulness
Rejoiced each mother's child.

CHORUS

Now to the Gods sing praises,
All you within this place,
Like we true loving brethren,
Each other to embrace,
For at the merry time of Yuletide,
The Gods' and our lives interlace.

CHORUS

Those who acquire their solstice greenery by collecting it from the great outdoors often find themselves chilled. A hot toddy is the perfect way to warm both body and spirit. (My grandmother also swears by them for treating cold, no matter how old or young the patient.)

HOT TODDIES

Cranberry Toddy

3 cinnamon sticks
5 whole star anise
1 (3 inch) piece of gingerroot peeled and thinly sliced.
3 quarts cranberry juice
1 cup sugar
2 cups amber rum.

Make a spice bag by tying cinnamon sticks, anise, and ginger in a double layer of cheesecloth. In a saucepan stir together cranberry juice and sugar, add spice bag and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, 10 min. Add rum and serve hot.

Makes 14 cups.

Lemonade Toddy

1 individual size packet (0.14 oz.) Crystal Light Lemonade.
2 tablespoons honey
2 oz. whiskey
Hot Water

Divide contents of lemonade packet evenly between two mugs. Add 1 tablespoon of honey and 1 oz of whisky to each mug. Top off with hot water and stir until lemonade crystals are dissolved.

Makes 2 drinks.