

A Breton Analogue To 'Wandering Willie's Tale'

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In a recent issue of *Scottish Studies*¹ I drew attention to a Danish local legend collected by Evald Tang Kristensen which is a close analogue to 'Wandering Willie's Tale' in *Redgauntlet*, and argued that though it was chronologically possible for Scott's work to have influenced folk tradition on the Continent, it seemed more probable that this story was an International Migratory Legend, and so a piece of genuine folklore, as Scott himself had claimed. I ended by remarking, 'Perhaps one day further analogues will be found to clinch the matter.'

Recently, I have myself found another by chance, from Brittany. It was published by Anatole Le Braz, who collected it from Hervé Brélivet, a native of Dineault, at Quimper in 1888; he called it 'L'Homme à la Quittance' (Le Braz v. 2: 449–55). A farmer at Dineault, called Jean Gomper, went to pay his quarterly rent to his landlord at Chateaulin, but not finding him at home handed the money to his son, saying the receipt could wait till next market day. Two days later the landlord died, and the son's agent claimed the rent was still due, and unless a receipt could be shown, all his goods would be seized. In despair, Gomper cries that God is not just. But his wife advises him to consult the parish priest, who undertakes to get him to Hell and back, to get his receipt from the dead man. He must not accept the first piece of paper offered, nor yet the second, for only the third is genuine; nor must he take it straight into his hand, for it will be fiery hot, but must ask for it to be thrown onto the ground. The priest then breathes on Gomper's forehead, and he at once finds himself in Hell, described as a huge space full of wheels of fire ceaselessly turning, and a long avenue of red-hot iron chairs to which the damned are fixed. After unwillingly giving the receipt, the dead man asks Gomper to warn his son that there is a red-hot seat awaiting him too, unless he mends his ways. Then Gomper feels a gust of cool air on his face, and finds himself back in the dining room in the presbytery. Next day he delivers the receipt, and the message.

There is some humour in the telling, especially in the dialogue between Gomper and the dead man, where the former is as deferential and the latter as irritable as in life, despite the changed circumstances. But morality is prominent too; damnation is vividly portrayed, and the priest warns Gomper: 'Do not blaspheme again against God's justice, and live as a good man should.'

The existence of this further variant strengthens the case for an authentic folklore basis for Scott's short story.

NOTES

1 (SS 32: 130–33).

REFERENCES

LE BRAZ, ANATOLE

1893

La Légende de la Mort chez les Bretons Armoricaains. Paris.