

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Can You Sew Cushions

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O can ye sew Cushions, and can ye sew Sheets,
And can ye sing balluloo when the bairn greets?
And hee and baw birdie, and hee and baw lamb,
And hee and baw birdie, my bonnie wee lamb.
Hee O, wee O, what wou'd I do wi' you?
Black's the life that I lead wi' you;
Monny O you, little for to gie you,
Hee O, wee O, what would I do wi' you.

SMM V (1796), 456 (no. 444), with music; supplied by Burns
[punctuation added]. Stenhouse, in his notes (394)
gives a second verse:

I've placed my cradle on yon holly top,
And aye as the wind blew, my cradle did rock;
O hush a ba, baby, O ba lilly loo,
And hee and ba, birdie, my bonnie wee dow.
Hee O! wee O!
What will I do wi' you, &c.

The complete song in Chambers PRS (1847), 177, + m.;
(1870), 14; music p. 15, from SMM, as is Ford CR 127 (4
stanzas of 8 lines, + chorus), Montgomerie SNR 127 (4x4,
= 1 st. + chorus, with music also.

ODNR 61-2 (no. 22), under "Hush-a-bye, baby" [as in Halliwell
NRE (1842), 102 (CLXVII); first ref. to Mother Goose's
Melody, c. 1765] which may be connected with the 2nd stanza
B[from Stenhouse]. Lady Nairne added 2 stanzas.

See Lucy Broadwood in FSJ (JFSS) no. 19 (V.2), 1915, p. 243,
identifying the air as = Crodh Chailein; and further, the
tune and the words of the chorus recall another Highland
song, "Oran Tlaidh an Eich-Uisge" ("Lullaby of the Water-
Horse") noted by Frances Tolmie in Skye (FSJ no. 16 [IV.3],
1911, 160):

The neighing refrain "Hee-o, wee-o," etc. ["Heigh O,
heugh O" in MacLeod-Boulton, Songs of the North, I.14-

15], in the English text seems quite pointless; but, when compared with the Gaelic original, the grafting together of the two Highland lullabies becomes clear and the chorus invested with some importance, seeing that in the Highland "Water-Horse" we have an ancient Norse survival, and that the poor "Kelpie," neighing his child to sleep, was the lonely husband of "brown-haired Morag" who, homesick, fled, to live on dry land once more; regardless of the tender lamentations of her forsaken merman.

MS