

## A Note on Propitiating Leprechauns in *The Crying of Lot 49*

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For a friend of mine

*Doorbell rings. Lady opens the door, a milkman stands there.*

**Milkman:** Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake baker's man. Good morning, madam, I'm a psychiatrist.

**Lady:** You look like a milkman to me.

**Milkman:** Good. (*ticks form on his clipboard*) I am in fact *dressed* as a milkman . . . you spotted that—well done. (Chapman 214)

During Oedipa Maas's first evening at the Echo Courts motel, where she meets with the lawyer Metzger, "On the doorsill," we read, "the Paranoids, as we leave milk to propitiate the leprechaun, had set a fifth of Jack Daniels" (40). J. Kerry Grant's *Companion to The Crying of Lot 49* notes, "While Irish folklore is replete with tales involving the propitiation of leprechauns, I have been unable to find any specific reference to the leaving of milk for that purpose" (41). Grant has an ally of sorts in the Irish innkeeper, Tatie (J. M. Kerrigan), in the film *The Luck of the Irish*, who informs and admonishes the visiting American freelancer, Stephen Fitzgerald (Tyrone Power). When Fitzgerald returns downstairs from his room to retrieve some forgotten items, he observes Tatie taking a bottle from the bar and quietly, and somewhat drunkenly, placing it outside the front door.

**Fitzgerald:** What are you doing with that bottle of whiskey?

**Tatie:** Shh! Themselves have sharp ears, and they might have heard us stating our names. It's a good thing to leave a little something on the doorstep.

**Fitzgerald:** I always thought the traditional thing for leprechauns was a glass of milk.

**Tatie:** Milk? Good night, Mr. Fitzgerald!

In this charming film, Fitzgerald is in Ireland with his friend and boss, Bill Clark (James Todd), when their car falls through a weak bridge into the Gentle Burm. Upstream at a waterfall he meets a peculiar shoemaker (Cecil Kellaway), who directs him to the Kittiwake

Inn in Ballynabun, where the dialogue with Tatie occurs. Naturally, a pretty young Irish woman, Nora Daley (Anne Baxter), works there as well. Fitzgerald is told that the shoemaker was a leprechaun, and when he sees him again, he catches him and forces him to dig up his pot of gold, believing it all to be some sort of ruse. He then refuses to take the pot of gold, not wanting to rob the peculiar man he still doesn't believe is a leprechaun, which endears the sprite to him. Fitzgerald is in a hurry to return to New York, where newspaperman D. C. Augur (Lee J. Cobb) and fiancée Frances Augur (Jayne Meadows) await. Augur wants Fitzgerald as a speechwriter for his Senate campaign, which will entail selling his soul, and Frances is physically attractive but very controlling. A mysteriously familiar little man shows up in New York as Fitzgerald's new manservant. From there, one can well imagine the way things develop; it is nevertheless delightful.

In a later scene in which the leprechaun, who fancies the name Horace, is shown working for Fitzgerald, Horace takes butter from the refrigerator, which is revealed to be full of milk; and a moment later the building's super stops at the door with the Milkman (Norman Leavitt) to inquire whether the morning's dairy delivery has been received, as everyone else's is missing. In the closing scene in the Irish inn, echoing the earlier one, Bill goes downstairs to retrieve his forgotten spectacles and observes Fitzgerald leaving a bottle on the doorstep "for a friend."

It is easy to imagine how Pynchon's idea of milk (or Jack Daniels whiskey) as a propitiation for the pygmy sprites might have originated with these scenes. For proper synchronicity, too bad the film was not released a year later. Possibly the Paranoids' role as milkmen, or whiskeymen, subtly evokes the same private delivery system featured more explicitly elsewhere in the novel. Perhaps it also hints at the sexuality of the milkman making the rounds of homes inhabited by housewives left home by their working husbands, closely following the mailman. Compare B. B. King's song "Fool Me Once," in which he laments that his lady also loved his pal, "And the milkman and the postman / And in a dream / I saw her with the local / Football team."

The novel on which the film is based, *There Was a Little Man*, by Guy Jones and Constance Jones, was published the same year the film was released. The film is substantially the same overall as the novel, while yet having requisite differences aplenty due to the demands of adaptation. For example, the leprechaun in the novel is three feet tall and, when in America, appears as only one foot tall. He notes, "'None of my people were what you would call tall'" (Jones 118). The film has Horace comment on his own relative largeness (Kellaway's natural height) as "a page o' me family history we won't go into if you don't mind."

The scene of Fitzgerald suggesting milk appears to have been an invention of the screenwriter, Philip Dunne, not having an exact analogue in the novel. After arriving in the U.S. and exploring the territory, the novel's leprechaun remarks,

"I stood patiently watching a man milking. Would you believe it, when he was done, when the poor creature was as dry as a desert, he took every pail into his house with him without so much as spilling a drop, let alone setting out a dish at his door for a passer-by less tall than himself that might happen to be thirsty." (Jones 133-34)

The dish of milk makes sense here since the leprechaun is only about a foot tall now. After turning up at Fitzgerald's place, Horace does not appear to appropriate the milkman's deliveries, but speculates he might need a cow to properly serve Fitzgerald (who arranges instead to have the milkman deliver an extra bottle). Horace does later say, however, "'There is one custom you have here of which I highly approve. They put the milk bottles at the door within easy reach'" (Jones 134).

The final scene of the novel is much as in the film:

He went to the bar and poured out a small glass of whisky. This he took to the door and set carefully on the step outside. He then shuttered and barred the door.

"Would you mind telling me what the devil you're up to?" Clark asked.

"Closing for the night."

"I can see that. I mean, what were you doing with that whisky?"

"Oh, that." Fitzgerald elaborately mopped a few drops from the bar and began to polish its already shining surface. "It's just a habit I've got into. It's a drink for a friend of mine." (Jones 245)

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#### Note

<sup>1</sup>Transcriptions from *The Luck of the Irish* are mine. My thanks to the helpful people of the *Internet Movie Database's* "I Need to Know" message board. I had seen the scene above on television without knowing what film it was from, and they were able to identify it for me merely from my description of it.

#### Works Cited

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