

TRANSADVOCATE

The Traditional Holiday was Queer

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Abstract

Did you know there's enough queer magic running through our Holiday traditions to make MAGA apoplectic?

Article



Did you know there's enough queer magic running through our Holiday traditions to make MAGA apoplectic? You've heard the hysteria before: the Left's war on Christmas, woke is destroying the NYC Thanksgiving Parade, and... my god... the Left is even transing the gingerbread men:



Because it's the Left that is preventing us from engaging with the traditional aspects of the holiday season, you see. Because Santa Claus is just white, Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, who is also white BTW, and if we just return to the true holiday traditions, the West won't be destroyed by Leftist woke, you see.

I, for one, agree with the political Right; the Left needs to care more about the traditional aspects of the Holiday season. So, the first thing we need to do is return the NYC Thanksgiving Day Parade to its Victorian roots as a drag queen parade.



What follows is The Philadelphia Record's 1887 account of the annual New York City Thanksgiving Day parade:

...I wish some one would explain to me why Thanksgiving is ragamuffins' day in New York. I have made some inquiry, but have never got a satisfactory answer. Every Thanksgiving day the streets are filled with boys dressed in women's clothes and with hideous masks on their faces, who chase after pedestrians and solicit alms. Then there is the regular parade of "The Ragamuffins," which seems to be a regularly organized club, the members of which are recruited from the Fourth ward. They parade through the streets in carts and on horseback, and are dressed in the most outlandish and fantastical costumes. The great fun of this lawless turnout is the kissing and hugging by men of other men dressed up as women. And such women! They are decked out in filthy finery, wear tow hair plaited and hanging down their backs, paint their cheeks and black their eyes and wrestle with their supposed sweethearts. Woe betide a person if, surprised by this singular cavalcade passing up Fifth avenue, he should stop along the curbstone to examine it more carefully. He could thank his stars if he should get off with no more serious attention than an "Ah, there! stay there!" or a "Johnny get your gun!" directed at him, two popular slang expressions out of which I have never been able to glean anything, though they seem to have an occult meaning for the initiated.

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Lest you think the modern "Ragamuffin Parade" is representative of the Victorian Ragamuffin Parades, these New World holiday activities[1] come from the long Old World tradition of the Christmas Mumming and Mummering, which, traditionally speaking, frequently featured drag. Consider the following snip from the Wikipedia article on Mummies:

In keeping with the theme of an inversion of rules, and of disguise, crossdressing was a common strategy, and men would sometimes dress as women and women as men. Travelling from house to house, some mummers would carry their own musical instruments to play, sing and dance in the houses they visited.

Like the 1887 article, a 1909 issue of Appleton's Magazine speculated on the origin of this New York tradition of a Thanksgiving Day mass-crossdressing event:

Why Thanksgiving Day should be a day of mummary is not known... The favorite disguise among the boys is to tog themselves out in the worn-out finery of their sisters. All day long they swarm about the streets in groups and parties, parading to the music of tin cans, importuning the passer-by for pennies... Perhaps these revels are the remnants of Guy Fawkes Day and the Gunpowder Plot.

Notably, without using the “ragamuffin” or “mumming” terminology, a 1911 newspaper speculated that immigrants brought the practice to New York City. By 1924, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade became the de facto Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The Tradition of Transgressing Christmas Gender

We in the US have a long tradition of very ignorant people very confidently asserting that the Coca-Cola Santa Claus is all about honoring the nativity story promoted by theocratic fascists. While a lot of print and digital ink has been spilled pointing out that the Bible isn't even consistent about the birth of Jesus -featuring different birthplaces, times, ancestry, and events- or how the nativity story functions to import Zoroastrian mythology into the foundation of Christianity, theocratic fascists are eager to tell anyone who will listen, how it's the woke who are somehow queering the Christ out of Christmas traditions. So, in the interest of bringing traditional aspects of Christmas more fully into our collective consciousness during this time of year, let us consider the queer aspects of our traditional Christmas figures:

Odin/ Santa Claus

In the same way that Wednesday honors Odin as his day, the Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum notes that “Yule” is the name for Odin, so that Yule time honors Odin.

Aspect	Óðinn (Odin)	Santa Claus
Main festival association	Yule (jól), a holiday honoring Odin that was later secularized as a midwinter figure attached to Christian feast.	Christmas, a holiday honoring Jesus that was later secularized as a midwinter figure attached to Christian feast.
Appearance	Old, white-bearded man in fur-trimmed coat, sometimes depicted as having one eye.	Old, white-bearded man in fur-trimmed coat.
Mode of travel	Winter nighttime rider associated with the Wild Hunt.	Winter nighttime rider associated with gift giving on Christmas Eve.
Mount	8-legged flying horse.	8 flying reindeer.
Companions / observers	Magical ravens who bring him news and an elven retinue from the Wild Hunt.	Magical omniscience and an elven retinue associated with flying reindeer.
Relation to gifts	Grants victory, poetry, and favors.	Grants presents to children.

Aspect	Óðinn (Odin)	Santa Claus
Religious context today	A largely secular pop-culture figure embedded in, but now transcending, the Pagan Yule celebration.	A largely secular pop-culture figure embedded in, but now transcending, the Christian Christmas celebration.

Notably, in addition to Odin, the Wild Hunt was led by some of the queer Christmas characters we consider below, including Knecht Ruprecht and Perchta.

Okay, “So what?” you might say. How does Odin, acting as a mythological backdrop to Santa Claus mythology, establish a tradition of queerness?

While Odin’s traditional queerness is often excised from modern representations, the ancient lore about Odin did touch on his queerness. For instance, *ergi* was a slur that essentially correlated to the mid-20th century meaning of “fag” or “queer.” This homophobic slur was sometimes used against men who practiced a type of women’s magic called *seiðr*. Not only did Odin practice *seiðr*, but he was also a master of the craft. As an aside, a master of *seiðr* would have the all-knowing power we now attribute to Santa Claus. Regardless, in one of the Old World sagas, Odin comments on Loki’s gender transgressions and Loki likewise lists Odin’s gender transgressions, explicitly saying that Odin was *ergi*.

The Perchta

Before Christianity came for Alpine region winter traditions, there was a winter goddess, Perchta, who had two gendered aspects: the female Frau Perchta and the male Quantembermann. As Christianity was spread at the point of a sword throughout the Alpine region, the lore became that Perchta, now demonized, was enslaved and was recast as Krampus.

Perchta as female Krampus	Perchta as male Krampus

Like Odin, Perchta led the Wild Hunt.

Belsnickel

master's anxiety changed to his wonder at the durability of the Christmas back to 2.

Only a few years ago in examining the record of Allegany county we saw a formal deed of manumission of Ephraim Carter by Jesse Tomlinson in 1839 just one year before the death of the liberator. At the same time, the old patriarch disposed of his large belongings by deeds to his children and heirs, but to each of his slaves, he gave something by far more valuable—free land.

In these times with their far back numbers, we did not hear of that mystical personage now known as Santa Claus, but he or she was sure to visit every household where young children were on Christmas eve. But there was more reality about him than now. He was known as Kriskinkle, Beltznickle and sometimes as the Xmas woman. Children then not only saw the mysterious person, but felt him or rather his stripes upon their backs with his switch. The annual visitor would make his appearance some hours after dark, thoroughly disguised, especially the face, which would sometimes be covered with a hideously ugly phiz—generally wore a female garb—hence the name Christmas woman—sometimes it would be a veritable woman but with masculine force and action. He or she would be equipped with an ample sack about the shoulders filled with cakes, nuts and fruits, and a long hazel switch which was supposed to have some kind of a charm in it as well as a sting. One hand would scatter the goodies upon the floor, and then the scramble would begin by the delighted children, and the other hand would ply the switch upon the backs of the excited youngsters—who would not show a wince, but had it been parental discipline there would have been screams to reach a long distance.

We too had our juvenile experiences in the deep past on these mirthful occasions. Once, we yet remember, that old Beltznickle was unusually severe. The switch was longer, more active and repetitive than of yore. Still we got our share of the scattered good things. Latter on we learned who she was none other than the best of mothers.

Fiddleing in those times was an occupation, in the winter season especially, and the musicians quite well compensated. Joseph Dewitt, Sr., of the Flatwoods, long since deceased, would occasionally make his appearance in his fringed

Beltznickle is a character who disciplines children during Christmas. A rough-bearded visage, Beltznickle is also known as the Christmas Woman. In 1824, Jacob Brown wrote that Santa Claus wasn't part of their Holiday tradition in Allegany County, Maryland. Instead, Beltznickle was the central Christmas character:

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Interestingly, Nova Scotia has turned Beltznickle into a verb, so that women who crossdress during mumming parades are said to be “belsnickling.”

The Christmas Witch

In the US, some Icelandic Christmas traditions are becoming more widely known in pop culture. For instance, the gigantic Yule Cat, Jólakötturinn, is becoming more popularized, as are the 13 Yule Lads. Whelp, they exist because of Grýla, the Christmas witch, who is the mother of the Yule Lads, and to whom the Yule Cat belongs. Grýla, who is intersex, also appears in many mumming traditions.

Knecht Ruprecht

Seemingly related to Beltznickle, at least in function, is the queer Christmas character, Knecht Ruprecht. Notably, Jacob Grimm said that in Britton, Knecht Ruprecht is known as Robin Goodfellow[2]. In other locations, Knecht Ruprecht is also known as Rû Clås and Bullerclås, and accompanies Santa Claus on his rounds.

Knecht Ruprecht is accompanied by men in drag. Young women who dress as the male Knecht Ruprecht figure are known as De hêle Christ “The Holy Christ,” making the Right’s grievances around queering Christmas seem ahistorical at best. Like Odin, Knecht Ruprecht led the Wild Hunt.

The Protestant Gender Neutral Christmas Christ

In 1527, Martin Luther rejected the Catholic practice of celebrating Saint Nicholas. So, during Christmas, Old World Protestants would celebrate the gender-neutral Christkind or Christkindl as the gift-bringer on Christmas Eve rather than the Catholic-coded St. Nicholas.





Therefore, it is traditional for Protestants to organize their Christmas round an officially genderless Christ-child gift-bringer whose public embodiment is that of a teenage girl in bridal costume representing a male savior, rather than Santa Claus.

La Befana and Italian Holiday Drag



Figure 1. Source: *Corriereproposte.it*.

Italy has, for centuries, embraced the Holiday tradition of La Befana, who is a Holiday witch who brings coal to the bad children on Epiphany Eve. While the Holiday tradition includes women dressed as Befana, the Christmas Witch, it also features groups of men dressed in drag called “befanotti,” who go door to door on that night, singing for food “for themselves and for Befana.” In Venice, rather than parading through town in drag, celebrants have a boat... drag race...called the “Regata della Befana” wherein men dress in drag and race boats along the Grand Canal.

The next time a theocratic fascist claims that the Left is erasing our Holiday traditions, they better be in walking in a drag parade, waiting on an intersex Christmas witch, and be celebrating a non-binary Christ child because, if they’re not doing that, THEY are the ones trying to destroy our Western Holiday traditions.

So, this year, make your Holiday more traditional with some gender transgression.

[1] Here, it should be noted that practically all Jim Crow-era costuming events from Ragamuffin and Mardi Gras to Halloween and Christmas Parades, often included people, and not infrequently children, dressed in race and class-baiting costuming.

[2] A strong case can be made for Robin Goodfellow’s queerness, from his identification with women’s roles and rape prevention, to his homoerotic partnership with Oberon; there’s a reason portrayals of him over the years tend to cast him as a woman, as androgynous, or as explicitly non-binary.

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