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Nicht Owre

Nicht Owre

A' the nicht owre and owre,
And a' the nicht owre again,
A' the nicht owre and owre,
The peacock followed the hen.

The hen's a hungry beast,
The cock is hallow within;
There's nae deceit in a pudding,
A pie's a dainty thing!

And a' the nicht owre and owre--Da Capo.

Chambers PRS (1847), 186; (1870), 23 (indicated tune,
Brose and Butter); Ford CR 18; Montgomerie SNR (1946),
20 (no. 6).

Previously in English collections, (Bell, 1812); see below.
St. 2 in Herd 1776 II.203-4, part of a rather suggestive song
that has parallels which are downright bawdy:

Gi'e my love brose, brose,
Gi'e my love brose and butter,
Gi'e my love brose, brose,
Yestreen he wanted his supper.

Jenny sits up in the laft,
Jocky wad fain hae been at her,
There came a wind out of the wast,
Made a' the windows to clatter.

Gi'e my love, &c.

A goose is nae good meat,
A hen is boss within,
In a pye there's muckle deceit,
A pudding it is a good thing.

Gi'e my love, &c.

After Herd, the stanza is found in a Robert Burns MS. (Adam
MS.) of 1785-6, slightly varied, but whether by Burns or

traditional is hard to say:

A dow's a dainty dish;
A goose is hollow within;
A sight wad mak you blush,
But a' the fun's to fin'.

Kinsley (Burns, 1135) considers it likely that the Adam MS. version of the song is an Ayrshire variant of Herd's fragment, and the version that appeared in 1799 in the notorious Merry Muses of Caledonia (pp. 38-9) is Burns' revision; which does not (n.b.) contain the "goose" stanza. He observes that the stanza "may be read as a nonsense-verse replacing some traditional bawdry which is represented by the rest of the song in the [Burns] MS. and MMC; but goose, hen and magpie are all low terms for a woman, and from the Restoration onwards 'pudding' had several sexual applications". The pye of Herd and Chambers need not be a bird; if it has indeed a sexual meaning, one may compare st. 9 of "Green Leaves on the Green, Oh" (in The Merry Muses, c. 1830, 70; in the falsely dated "1827" ed., 89): "He put his hand right over her thigh,/ Green leaves on the green, oh!/ And found a thing like a pigeon-pie,/ And you know very well what I mean, oh!" Brose and butter have erotic connotations; cf. "The Shepherd's Wife" under "Bonny Saint John". The tune Brose and Butter is 17th century, reputedly a favourite air of Charles II in his exile (see, e.g., Ford, Song Histories [1900], 189-90). This would date the tune to 1640 at latest. It seems to be published first in Scotland in Robert Bremner's Collection of Scots Reels IV (1758), 32 (Glen, SDM). Although not in every collection, it is well known to pipers, and a Northumberland set is called The Peacock Follows the Hen (in e.g. John Peacock, Favourite Collection of Tunes, c. 1800; and with its words, in Bruce and Stokoe [1882], 152, the alternative title being Cuddle me, Cuddy; the authors got the words from Bell, Rhymes of Northern Bards [1812], 322). (see Chappell, PMOT II.603-4; Wooldridge's ed., II.74).

MS