

Grizzel Greedigut: A Name ‘No Mortall Could Invent’

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Matthew Hopkins, England’s most notorious witch hunter, rested his reputation on his experience in confronting the supernatural. To this end, he greatly exaggerated the intensity of his first encounter with an accused witch, Elizabeth Clarke. In Hopkins’ account, Clarke mentioned a familiar named *Grizzel Greedigut*. But earlier publications show that this did not happen, and that Hopkins appropriated the name from the dubious confession of another woman, Joan Wallis. Today, we have largely accepted *Grizzel Greedigut* as a bizarre, nonsensical name, but it would not have been all that absurd at the time. *Grizzle* often described grey animals, and *Grissel* was a fairly popular name, an abbreviation of *Grisilde*. *Greedigut* meant ‘glutton,’ and was the name English colonials used for the American anglerfish. Without knowing more about the name’s historical context, we fall for Hopkins’ cynical ploy to maximize the strangeness of his encounter.

KEYWORDS witch’s familiar; Matthew Hopkins; animal names; onomastics; witchcraft

1. Introduction

Relatively little work has been done with the names of witches’ familiars. It might be assumed that these wicked critters usually had fanciful names, but this is surprisingly not the case. James Serpell (2002, 174–175) surveyed the familiars’ names that appeared in print publications associated with the English witch trials, and found that, historically, “most familiars tended to be given either standard (for the period) animal names ... or a reasonably consistent range of ‘diminutives,’” like *Pusse*, *Ball*, *Bunne*, and *Robin*. Exceptionally strange names included *Sathan* and *Mamillion* (174). Emma Wilby (2005, 226) likewise characterized familiars’ names as “prosaic.”¹ However, in 1645, Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne took advantage of the socially tumultuous situation in

England and began travelling from town to town as witch-hunting consultants. In the course of their work, they turned up an extremely disproportionate amount of unusual names; Serpell suggested that they showed “particular inventiveness” in crafting them themselves. The witch-hunters also recycled names from case to case: for example, mice named *Prickeares* turned up in three “entirely separate” trials (2002, 174).²

Richard Coates (2013) explored one familiar’s name in detail. *Pyewacket* appeared in Hopkins’ *The Discovery of Witches* (1647) as the name of an imp supposedly revealed by accused witch Elizabeth Clarke. *Pyewacket* became a fairly popular name for pet cats in the twentieth century, owing to its use in the 1958 film *Bell, Book and Candle*. Coates identified the likely source of this unusual moniker as Pegwagget, a large Native American village in present-day Maine, then part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1642, Darby Field was the first Englishman to encounter and report on the settlement; John Winthrop, the Governor of Massachusetts, mentioned the occasion in his journal (Kilbourne 1916, 20). Winthrop was a known correspondent of Hopkins’ father, and the younger Hopkins may have heard the name while visiting with a relative of Winthrop’s. Emerson W. Baker (2015, 107) points out that Native Americans were widely regarded by Puritans as akin to witches, and notes that “this unique and exotic name for a people ... believed to be in league with the devil obviously had made an impression on Hopkins”—implicitly dismissing Hopkins’ claim that Elizabeth Clarke provided the name. Coates (2013, 215) shares this suspicion, writing that “whatever the witch said (and her words may have been a pure invention of the Witchfinder) ... the name we have on the printed page was filtered through the content of Hopkins’ brain”. The witch-finding methods described in Hopkins’ pamphlet were later used in the first witch-trial in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, demonstrating a line of communication between England and the colony, and a shared transatlantic interest in, and understanding of, witchcraft.

This article discusses the origins of one of the other names that Hopkins attributed to Elizabeth Clarke, *Grizzel Greedigut*. While less popular than *Pyewacket* came to be, the name has reappeared a number of times: the 1985 comedy-horror film *Ghoulies* featured two elves named *Grizzel* and *Greedigut*, and later on in that decade an electronic musician released music under the moniker *Grizzled Greedigut*. In 1996, UK punk band Witchknot released a song called *Griezzell Greedigut* on their album *Squawk*, and in 2010, an American black metal band, Devil’s Dung, released *Griezzell Greedigut is the Name of My Imp* on their self-titled cassette. Other writers have noted that this name appeared partially or completely in two earlier witch trials (e.g. Gaskill 2008, 55). Because of their appearance in witch trials, and their infrequency today, it has sometimes been taken for granted in academic and popular literature that *Grizzel Greedigut* was a ‘bizarre’ name (Gaskill 2008, 55n122; Bush 2003; B. Cox & Forbes 2013, 12). In fact, each element appears independently in many

other early modern sources as names for animals, often without any trappings of witchery at all.

2. Hopkins' Familiars

Matthew Hopkins is England's most notorious professional witch-hunter. As the self-styled 'Witch finder Generall,' he travelled throughout East Anglia with his partner, John Stearne, building cases against suspected witches between 1645 and 1647 (Hopkins 1647, frontispiece; Gaskill 2009, 81). The duo used their professed expertise to examine an exceptional number of suspects: estimates vary, but at least 240 people were subjected to Hopkins' treatment, about 100 of whom are believed to have been executed (Sharpe 2001, 324; Gaskill 2008, 49).³ Some, including Stearne, have suggested that as many as 300 were put to death (Stearne 1648, 11).

Before long, Hopkins' zeal and indiscretion caused him to fall under scrutiny. In 1646, a Huntingdonshire clergyman named John Gaule wrote *Select Cases of Conscience touching Witches and Witchcraft*, a book deeply skeptical of Hopkins. To dissuade his critics, Hopkins had *The Discovery of Witches* printed in 1647. This self-celebratory question-and-answer pamphlet addresses concerns about his qualifications and methods with bluster and bravado. In the text, Hopkins openly eschews traditional witch-hunting expertise in favor of what he learned first-hand by combatting diabolical agents, beginning with an encounter near his home in Manningtree, Essex, in March of 1645.⁴

At the command of magistrates Sir Harbottle Grimston and Sir Thomas Bower, Elizabeth Clarke was subjected to a watching test – closed in a room and observed by several others for three nights, with the expectation that her familiars would enter, thereby outing her as a witch (Gaskill 2005, 42). On the fourth night, according to Hopkins, she called in her familiars before himself and nine other witnesses. Among her imps were:

1. *Holt*, who came in like a white kitling.
2. *Jarmara*, who came in like a fat Spaniel without any legs at all ...
3. *Vinegar Tom*, who was like a long-legg'd Greyhound, with an head like an Oxe, with a long taile and broad eyes, who when [Hopkins] spoke to, and bade him goe to the place provided for him and his Angels, immediately transformed himself into the shape of a child of foure yeeres old without a head, and gave halfe a dozen turnes about the house, and vanished at the doore.
4. *Sack and Sugar*, like a black Rabbet.⁵
5. *Newes*, like a Polcat. All these vanished away in a little time. (Hopkins 1647, 2)

In addition to the five that Hopkins claims to have seen in the room, Clarke supposedly revealed the names of some other witches' familiars, including

Elemauzer, *Pyewacket*, *Peckin the Crown*, and *Grizzel Greedigut*.⁶ Hopkins (1647, 2) describes these as names ‘which no mortall could invent,’ leaving the reader to surmise that Satan himself had crafted them.

In fact, Elizabeth Clarke probably never gave the names of *any* of the four unseen familiars. Several other accounts of her confession that night exist, and none of them allude to any of those names. The most important of these appear in *A True and Exact Relation* (1645) (hereafter cited as *T&E*), which printed pre-trial testimonies and confessions relating to the case.⁷ This includes Hopkins’ own description of the event, which is at odds with his later account in many ways. For one thing, rather than Elizabeth naming ‘severall other Witches ... and [their] *Imps*, and *Imps* names,’ Hopkins related that she told her observers that ‘shee had five Impes of her owne, and two of the Impes of the old Beldam *Weste*’ (*T&E* 1645, 2). The testimonies of several other witnesses, including John Stearne, are given as well; throughout them all, there is not a single reference to Elizabeth naming any of the unseen imps, much less any mention of the names themselves. Finally, after Hopkins’ death in 1647, Stearne’s own attempt at self-vindication, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft* (1648), was published. This work contains yet another detailed narrative of the incident, but again, doesn’t even hint at Elizabeth naming a single unseen familiar. (*Newes*, too, is not attested to anywhere but in *The Discovery of Witches*.) On the other hand, Elizabeth having named Holt, Jarmara, Vinegar Tom, and Sack and Sugar are all corroborated in other sources.⁸

Whether by design or through carelessness, it seems that Hopkins either invented or appropriated the names of the unseen familiars. Sometimes, their sources are transparent: for example, *Elemauzer* probably came from Helen Clarke, another accused witch questioned around three weeks after Elizabeth Clarke.⁹ According to her confession, which also appears in *A True and Exact Relation* (1645, 10), her familiar was a white dog named *Elimanzer*. Other times, their sources are more opaque, as in the case of *Pyewacket*, described above.

Whatever their sources, Hopkins’ insertion of these names into Clarke’s confession served to maximize the apparent intensity of the experience. By introducing a litany of infernal names, supposedly belonging to unseen familiars kept by yet-undiscovered witches, Hopkins suggests a large underground consortium of witchery and magic. Alongside these names, all of the most fantastic elements of Elizabeth’s confession, as recounted in *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, are absent from the earlier accounts in *A True and Exact Relation*. According to these, Jarmara had short legs, but was certainly not ‘without any legs at all,’ and Vinegar Tom was no transforming ox-headed greyhound, but merely a ‘Greyhound with long legges’ (*T&E* 1645, 2).

3. Grizzel Greedigut

In Hopkins’ pamphlet, *Grizzel Greedigut* is printed as the name of a single familiar, both within the body of the text (on page 2) and in the frontispiece.

Unfortunately, one of the most easily accessible versions of *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, the Project Gutenberg eBook, mistakenly places a comma between the name's two parts.¹⁰ It also misprints *Elemauzer* as *Elemanzer*. Other accessible editions of the text, like Christina Hole's (1957, 68) *A Mirror of Witchcraft*, make the same error. (S.F. Davies' (2007, 4) *The Discovery of Witches and Witchcraft*, by contrast, reproduces the names accurately.) Scans of the original are available from *Early English Books Online* (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>), but users are required to log in for access. Naturally, this errant comma has led to some confusion over whether the moniker referred to one or two creatures in Hopkins' account. For example, Coates (2013, 216), using the Project Gutenberg edition as his source, noted that "*Griezzell Greedigutt* in the woodcut is spelt differently and divided into two by a comma in the text so that the numbers of familiars do not match". Although Hopkins definitely indicates *Grizzel Greedigut* as the name of only one creature, its two parts each have histories as names in their own right.

3.1. *Grissell and Greedigut*

John Davenport's (1646) *The Witches of Huntingdon* documented the "examinations and confessions" of several accused witches, "exactly taken by his Majesties Justices of Peace for that county" (cover). One of the accused was Joan Wallis of Keyston. In her signed account, given under examination on 8 April 1646, she described two of her familiars, named *Grissell* and *Greedigut*, who came to her "in the shapes of dogges with great brisles of hogges haire upon their backs" (Davenport 1646, 12).

Gaskill has already noted that these names "tally suspiciously with Elizabeth Clarke's imp" (2008, 55). It's tempting to suggest that Elizabeth Clarke knew (or knew of) Joan Wallis and her two familiars, but this is extremely unlikely, as the two women lived about 95 miles apart; while there was a marked increase in mobility during the English Civil War, this likely did not expand to Clarke, an elderly woman with one leg (Hill 1991, Chapter 3; *T&E* 1645, 6). Serpell (2002, 177) has hinted that Wallis' *Grissell* and *Greedigut* were lifted from Clarke's *Grizzel Greedigut*, but this does not hold up chronologically, as *The Witches of Huntingdon* was printed a year before *The Discovery of Witches*, where the name first appears in relation to Clarke. Hopkins claimed that Clarke had said the name a year before Wallis's trial, but as noted above, this conflicts with the actual testimonies from the time. In his annotated edition of Hopkins' and Stearne's writings, Davies (2007, 53n5) acknowledged Wallis' confession as Hopkins' source, noting that Stearne mentioned *Grissell* and *Greedigut* "in the correct place" – i.e. as Wallis's familiars, without any relation to Elizabeth Clarke.

While there is no conclusive evidence that Hopkins was involved with Wallis's trial, Stearne probably was. He seems to have known Wallis, describing her as "a very ignorant, sottish woman" (Stearne 1648, 13), and personally examined John Winnick (21), who was accused during the same episode and whose examination

is also printed in *The Witches of Huntingdon* (Davenport 1646, 3–4). Stearne would have discussed this trial with Hopkins, and Hopkins would likely have read *The Witches of Huntingdon* before writing *The Discovery of Witches*. He must have gleaned *Grizzel* and *Greedigut* from either his friend or this pamphlet.

Hopkins may have hoped to obscure his plagiarism by combining *Grissell* and *Greedigut* into a single, two-part name. It's also possible that he simply had the names floating in his memory and garbled them slightly when putting them into print, as Davies (2007, 53n5) has suggested; this may also be what happened with the realization of *Pyewacket*, which is slightly different from *Pegwagget* and most of its attested variant spellings (Coates 2013, 216).

3.2. *Grissil(l)*

Grissill first appears as a familiar's name in an even earlier pamphlet, *The Witches of Northamptonshire* (1612, C3 verso).¹¹ It is mentioned during a description of Arthur Bill of Raunds:¹²

It said is [sic] that hee had three Spirits to whom hee gave three speciall names, the Divell himself sure was godfather to them all, The first hee called Grissill, The other was named Ball, and the last Iacke, but in what at [sic] shapes they appeared unto him I cannot learne.

It is probably this familiar that is referred to as *Grissil* in Richard Bernard's influential *A Guide to Grand-Jury Men* (1627),¹³ in a paragraph that Malcolm Gaskill (2008, 55n122) suggests “may have alerted the witchfinders to the bizarre names of familiars”. In fact, Bernard's (1627, 113) list jumbles the common with the strange: “Mephastophilus, Lucifer ... Ball, Puss, Rutterkin, Dick”. Some of these names are odd to us now, but were well known at the time of publication. For example, *Ball* had been the name of one of Henry VIII's favorite dogs (Weir 2008, 33), and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) Online defines *Rutterkin* as “a swaggering gallant or bully”, often applied to Catholic clergy in the mid-late sixteenth century.

3.3. *Wider Usage of Grizzel and Greedigut*

Although both *Grizzel* and *Greedigut* are unfamiliar to most modern English speakers, they were fairly common names in Early Modern England. According to the *OED Online*, *grizzle* (also spelt *grysell*, *grissel*, etc.) could mean ‘of a grey colour’ or ‘a grey animal.’ It is from this word that the first part of *grizzly bear* is derived. *Grissell* is listed as a good color for gamecock breeding hens in *Pleasures of Princes* (1614).¹⁴ It was often used in reference to horses: the lyrics to the traditional ballad ‘J. Armstrong's Last Goodnight,’ dated to around 1620, include the lines, “But little Musgrave, that was his foot-page/With his bonny grissell got away untain”, and W. Brereton mentioned renting “a grissell gelding” in 1634 (OED Online). This meaning is fitting, since familiars and



FIGURE 1 The frontispiece of Matthew Hopkins' (1647) *The Discovery of Witches*. © The British Library Board E.388.(2.) frontispiece.

other household animals were often named for their coloration. Bernard's list of familiars also includes *Swart* (i.e. black, swarthy), *Blue*, *White*, and *Callico*, and Nicholas Cox's (1686, 19) list of "some usual Names of Hounds and Beagles" included *Blue-man* and *Blue-cap*.

Grissel was also the "later form of the proper name Grisilde," and was "the proverbial type of a meek, patient wife" (OED Online). It appears with this meaning in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* (1623). As usual, the name could be spelled in many ways: *Grizel* was the form preferred in Scotland and the north of England (Hanks et al. 2012), and it appears as *Grissil* in Thomas Dekker's play *Patient Grissil* (1603).

Meanwhile, *Greedigut*, a compound of ‘greedy gut,’ was a widespread term for a glutton. *The Trial of Treasure* (1567), an anonymous play printed by Thomas Purfoote, includes a villainous character named Greedigut who advises the character Lust to immoderately consume houses and lands. In Arthur Golding’s 1567 translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, among Actaeons’ pack of dogs was a “brach callde Greedigut with two hir Puppies by hir” (Rouse 1904, 68). *Thomae Thomasi Dictionarium* (Thomas 1644, Z4 verso), a Latin-English dictionary, defines *glúto* as “a glutton, a greedigut, one that devoureth much meate”, Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Greedigut was the common name used for the large-mouthed goosefish (*Lophius piscatorius*) by “the early colonial writers” (Field 1907, 37). William Wood (1634, 32) poetically celebrated New England’s many fish species, writing in praise of “the Scale fenc’d Sturgeon, wry mouthd Hollibut/The flouning Sammon, Codfish, Greedigut”.

4. Conclusion

In light of this evidence, it seems strange that Hopkins should have claimed that “no mortall could invent” a name like *Grizzel Greedigut*. By combining the two words into a single moniker, he may have hoped not only to obscure his source (i.e. Joan Wallis), but also to create a name bizarre by virtue of its unusual composition. Serpell (2002, 174) cheekily praised Hopkins’ “inventiveness” when it came to coining names, but the witchfinder was no H.P. Lovecraft. Recall that among the supposedly inhuman names was also *Peckin the Crown* or, as it appears in the frontispiece, *Pecke in the Crowne* – a strange thing to call an animal, but also made up of normal parts, meaning either ‘pecking the crown’ or ‘dent in the crown.’ Another of Hopkins’ innovations was *Newes*, the polecat, whose name may have been inspired by the title of the influential witch-hunting pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* (1591).¹⁵ This work was later reprinted and popularized in James I’s *Daemonologie* (1597), essential reading for any Englishman interested in witchcraft; predictably, Hopkins (1647, 6) cited this work, so he almost certainly read it.

Hopkins’ reputation relies upon his cultivating a sense of otherness on the part of his adversaries. As he tells it, he is qualified as a witch-hunter by virtue of his experience confronting the clearly demonic; the inhuman names are just as otherworldly, in his narrative, as the ox-headed greyhound and the legless spaniel. Today, Hopkins is remembered at best as a charlatan. It is ironic, then, that as the once-common meanings of *Grizzel* and *Greedigut* have been largely forgotten, we have fallen for Hopkins’ design to present these names – and, by extension, Elizabeth Clarke – as self-evidently aberrant.

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Notes

1. Wilby (2000, 287–288) earlier noted the similarity between many familiar names and the names of fairies in English and Scottish publications, but it is not demonstrated how substantially these differ from general, non-supernatural naming elements. For example, permutations of *Tom*, *Brownie*, *Ball*, and *Jill* are listed. A corpus of historic pet names would be useful for this sort of comparative research, but, to my knowledge, none exists.
2. A good listing of familiars' names appears in Serpell (2002, 175). Barbara Rosen (1991, 396) lists only familiars mentioned from 1558–1618, predating the Hopkins-helmed witch hunts.
3. Jim Sharpe (2001, 323n11) provides a guide to the many relevant manuscript and print materials, and Malcolm Gaskill (2005) provides the best modern account of Hopkins' brief but bloody tenure.
4. At the time, the legal year in England began on 25 March. We know from other sources that the incident Hopkins relates took place on 24 March (Gaskill 2005, 49). Because he was using Old Style dating, Hopkins indicates this as happening in 'March 1644.' For the sake of fluency, I use New Style dating throughout this article.
5. Spelled *Sacke and Sugar* in the frontispiece.
6. In the pamphlet's frontispiece, these names appear as *Ilemauzar*, *Pyewackett*, *Pecke in the Crowne*, and *Griezzell Greedigutt*.
7. The full title is *A true and exact Relation Of the severall Informations, Examinations, and Confessions of the late Witches, arraigned and executed in the County of Essex*.
8. In addition to *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, they are named in the following sources: a. Holt (Hoult): Stearne's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 4); Edward Parsley's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 6); b. Jarmara: Hopkins' testimony (*T&E* 1645, 2); Stearne's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 4); Edward Parsley's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 6); and in *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft* (Stearne 1648, 15) as *Jermarah*.; c. Vinegar Tom: Hopkins' testimony (*T&E* 1645, 2); Stearne's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 4); Edward Parsley's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 6; d. Sack and Sugar: Stearne's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 4); Edward Parsley's testimony (*T&E* 1645, 6)
9. It's unclear if the two women were related.
10. Accessible here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14015/14015-h/14015-h.htm>
11. I consulted scans of the original publication through *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*. The document is also reproduced in Rosen (1991, 344–356).
12. Raunds and Keyston (Joan Wallis's hometown) are less than five miles apart. That Arthur and Joan each reportedly kept a familiar with the same name in such proximity seems to indicate that this was not a particularly unusual moniker in this area during the first half of the seventeenth century. Whatever sort of animal Arthur's Grissill was, it was almost certainly dead by the time of Joan's trial over 30 years later.
13. I consulted scans of the original document through EEBO, which requires users to log in. A transcription of the text is available through the EEBO Text Creation Partnership at <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A09118.0001.001>.
14. Quoted in Peter Boswell's *Treatise on the Poultry-Yard* (1841, 94).
15. For more on the diffusion and reprinting of Scottish publications in England, see Blakeway (2016).

Disclosure statement

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