

best desires'. I suggest that the same mistake has occurred here.

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**WEREWOLVES AND SEVERED
HANDS: WEBSTER'S *THE DUCHESS
OF MALFI* AND HEYWOOD AND
BROME'S *THE WITCHES OF
LANCASHIRE***

IN his popular treatise on witches and witchcraft, *Discours des Sorciers* (Lyon, 1590), the judge Henri Boguet reports the following case of lycanthropy:

Here it will be relevant to recount what happened in the year 1588 in a village about two leagues from Aphon in the highlands of Auvergne. One evening a gentleman, standing at the window of his château, saw a huntsman whom he knew passing by, and asked him to bring him some of his bag on his return. As the huntsman went his way along a valley, he was attacked by a large wolf and discharged his arquebus at it without hurting it. He was therefore compelled to grapple with the wolf, and caught it by the ears; but at length, growing weary, he let go of the wolf, drew back and took his big hunting knife, and with it cut off one of the wolf's paws, which he put in his pouch after the wolf had run away. He then returned to the gentleman's château, in sight of which he had fought the wolf. The gentleman asked him to give him part of his bag; and the huntsman, wishing to do so and intending to take the paw from his pouch, drew from it a hand wearing a gold ring on one of the fingers, which the gentleman recognised as belonging to his wife. This caused him to entertain an evil suspicion of her; and going into the kitchen, he found his wife nursing her arm in her apron, which he took away, and found that her hand had been cut off. Thereupon the gentleman seized hold of her; but immediately, and as soon as she had been confronted with her hand, she confessed that

it was no other than she who, in the form of a wolf, had attacked the hunter; and she was afterwards burned at Ryon.¹

Albert H. Tricomi has recently argued that Boguet's narrative 'is a pertinent source' for *The Duchess of Malfi*,² in relation to the dead man's hand episode during Act IV of Webster's play:

Ferdinand. I come to seal my peace with you: here's a hand
Gives her a dead man's hand.

To which you have vow'd much love; the ring upon't
You gave.

Duchess. I affectionately kiss it.

Ferdinand. Pray do: and bury the print of it in your heart:

I will leave this ring with you for a love-token;

And the hand, as sure as the ring; and do not doubt

But you shall have the heart too; when you need a friend

Send it to him that ow'd it; you shall see

Whether he can aid you.

Duchess. You are very cold.

I fear you are not well after your travel:—

Hah! lights! — O, horrible!

Ferdinand. Let her have lights enough. *Exit.*

Duchess. What witchcraft doth he practise that he hath left
A dead man's hand here?

(IV.i.43–55)³

While Webster's play and Boguet's narrative share the common elements of a werewolf and a severed hand with a wedding ring, the suggestion that Boguet is the ultimate source for this episode in *The Duchess* is not convincing. There is no evidence that Webster read in French, and Boguet's treatise – popular as it was on the Continent – was only available in the French original.⁴ Moreover, Boguet's tale is barely analogous to the play: the hand in question in *The Duchess* is not severed from the lycanthropic character Ferdinand – whose hands remain intact throughout the play – but rather it is intended to be mistaken by the Duchess as belonging to her husband Antonio. Whereas the audience knows that her husband

¹ Henri Boguet, *Discours des Sorciers* (Lyon, 1590); translated into English as *An Examen of Witches*, trans. E. Allen Ashwin, ed. Montague Summers (London, 1929), 140–1.

² Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Severed Hand in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*', *Studies in English Literature*, xlv (2004), 347–58, 356.

³ All references are from *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. John Russell Brown (London, 1964).

⁴ Tricomi recognizes the 'defect in designating Boguet as a source is that despite Webster's strong attraction to Continental sources, he usually resorted to them in translation' (351).

in still alive, the Duchess is momentarily shocked by the possibility that the severed hand *does* belong to her husband. However, as soon as the lights return she recognizes that the hand is not Antonio's, but instead 'a dead man's hand' (IV.i.55). We never learn the actual origin of the severed hand in Webster's play, whereas the origin of the severed hand in Boguet's tale is unequivocally clear. Even in the unlikely event that Boguet was the source for this scene, Webster is only faithful to Boguet's narrative insofar as he retains the three separate elements of a severed hand, a werewolf, and a wedding ring. What is noticeably lacking in Webster's version is the precise link between the three found in Boguet. In light of these doubts, Gunnar Boklund's earlier assertion that Simon Goulart's *Admirable and Memorable Histories* (London, 1607) is Webster's ultimate source for the references to lycanthropy in *The Duchess* is confirmed, since Goulart's account is clearly identifiable in Webster's play and was readily available in English translation.⁵

Although it seems that Boguet's narrative is not a source for Webster's play, it reappears in a clearly identifiable form in Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's *The Witches of Lancashire* (London, 1634).⁶ During the night, a Soldier has been 'nipp'd, and pull'd, and pinch'd' by 'a company of hell-cats' (V.iii.74–5), but managed to injure one of the offending animals in the melee:

Soldier. Yet I have kept my face whole thanks to my scimitar,
My trusty bilbo, but for which I vow,
I had been torn to pieces. But I think
I met with some of them. One, I am sure,
I have sent limping hence.
(V.iii.77–81)

When the Soldier retires to the local inn, he reports his attack to the owner and another

local, Generous and Arthur, who request to see the Soldier's bloodied sword – or any evidence to support his tale of supernatural swashbuckling – but instead find a severed hand:

Soldier. What's here? Is't possible cats should have hands
And rings upon their fingers?
Arthur. Most prodigious!
Generous. Reach me that hand.
Soldier. There's that of three I can best spare.
He gives the hand to Generous.
Generous. [Aside] Amazement upon wonder, can this be?
I needs must know't by most infallible marks.
Is this the hand once plighted by holy vows?
And this the ring that bound them? Doth this
last age
Afford what former never durst believe?
Oh, how have I offended those high powers
That my great incredulity should merit
A punishment so grievous, and to happen
Under mine own roof, mine own bed, my
bosom?
Arthur. Know you the hand sir?
Generous. Yes, and too well can read it.
(V.iii.93–106)

Generous, like the château owner in Boguet's tale, recognizes the ring immediately and concludes that the hand belongs to his wife, who, as of the night of the Soldier's attack, has mysteriously taken ill. Taking the severed hand, Generous confronts his wife with the damning evidence:

Generous. In company there's comfort. Prithee, wife,
Lend me thy hand, and let me feel thy pulse.
Perhaps some fever – by their beating I
May guess at thy disease.
Mrs Generous. My hand, 'tis there.
Generous feels her pulse.
Generous. A dangerous sickness and, I fear't, death.
'Tis odds you will not'scape it. Take that back
And let me prove the t'other if perhaps
I there can find more comfort.
Mrs Generous. I pray excuse me.
Generous. I must not be denied. Sick folks are peevish
And must be o'errul'd, and so shall you.
Mrs Generous. Alas, I have not strength to lift it up.
Generous. If not thy hand, wife, show me but thy wrist,
He shows her the hand found at the mill.
And see how this will match it. Here's a testate
That cannot be outfac'd.
Mrs Generous. I am undone.
(V.iv.43–56)

Whilst the other supernatural episodes that appear in the play are culled directly from the evidence given at the 1633–4 trial at Lancashire – many of which, such as the reported metamorphoses of a witch and a boy into greyhounds and a horse, are in fact a child's recollection and reinterpretation

⁵ Gunnar Boklund, *The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters* (Cambridge, 1962), 32.

⁶ Although published under the title *The Late Witches of Lancashire*, it is clear from the running heads of the 1634 edition as well as contemporary accounts that the play was performed as *The Witches of Lancashire*: Herbert Berry, 'The Globe bewitched and *El Hombre Fiel*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, i (1984), 211–30. All references to the play are from *The Witches of Lancashire*, ed. Gabriel Egan (London, 2002).

of the stories coming out of the earlier Lancashire witch trials of 1612 – any references to a severed hand are noticeably absent from the trial transcripts. Therefore, Heywood and Brome must have found their source for this episode elsewhere; and, in light of the obvious similarities present in both texts, it would seem highly likely that Boguet's narrative – or a version of it – was this source.

Critics usually credit Heywood for writing the witchcraft scenes in *The Witches* – leaving the domestic comedy to Brome – since Heywood was fascinated by witchcraft and was familiar with the literature of many Continental demonologists, including Jean Bodin and Johannes Weyer, whom he quotes at length in his *Γυναικειον, or Nine Bookes of Various History Concerninge Women* (London, 1624). It is possible that Brome wrote the severed hand episode; however, like Webster, neither Heywood nor Brome appear to have read in French,⁷ but, as Martin has shown, both have relied on translations of their sources. This presents the same problem for assigning Boguet as a direct source for *The Witches* as for *The Duchess*, since Boguet's tale is unique and no earlier source for the tale has been proposed,⁸ and it was only available in the French original. Assuming that no earlier version of the tale can be found, and that Boguet is the origin of the severed hand motif, we are left with three possible sources of transmission: first, that either Heywood or Brome *did* in fact read French

⁷ Critics doubt whether Heywood had any command of the French language: W. Bang, *Pleasant Dialogues and Drammas Von Tho. Heywood*, Materialien Zur Kunde Des Älteren Englischen Dramas, vol. III (Louvain, 1903), 339; and R. G. Martin, 'A Critical Study of Thomas Heywood's *Gunaikeion*', *Studies in Philology*, xx (1923), 160–83, 175. However, Arthur C. Clark believes that Heywood translated and used songs taken from other languages, including French: 'Thomas Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* [Review]', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. iii, 11 (1952), 285–9.

⁸ The folklore surrounding this tale, at least in England, seems to have been generated by the play itself: John Roby, *Popular Traditions of Lancashire*, 3rd edn, III (London, 1843), 218–53. Rauchbauer suggests that the Generous incident is 'another example of the dramatist's use of an international migratory tale motif': 'The Subplot of Thomas Heywood's *The Captives*: Some Facts and Speculations', *Etudes Anglaises*, xxx, 3 (1977), 345. However, it appears that neither Rauchbauer nor Roby were familiar with Boguet's treatise.

and had access to French demonological works including Boguet's *Discours des Sorciers*, but in most other cases opted for Latin translations instead; second, that there was a Latin translation of Boguet's *Discours des Sorciers*, in manuscript form or otherwise, which has been subsequently lost; or third, that Heywood or Brome came to knowledge of the severed hand tale via word of mouth.

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Reader's Query

DUTCH ADMIRALS. – Found in the inventory, dated 30 December 1689, in Surrey History Centre of John Collier, a farmer of Horsell, Surrey, 'Item one tubb of Dutch Admiralls & one tubb of rye in the barne. £2.10.0'. Neither Google nor *OED* have any reference to what this substance might be.

RICHARD CHRISTOPHERS

Woking, Surrey

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Reader's Reply

SOKAL HOAX. – In the review of Elizabeth Spiller's *Science, Reading and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580–1670 in Notes and Queries*, ccl (2005), 412–14, on page 413 the reviewer refers to the 'Sokol hoax' and then to its author 'Alan Sokol'. In fact the hoax and its creator both are properly denominated 'Sokal'.

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