
This book really is about a dog. It is a compendium of everything there is to know about Prince Rupert’s white poodle, Boy, which does not actually amount to a whole lot, or as the author himself admits, could have been “written on the back of a beer mat” (163). But, of course, this book is about much more than just the dog and even his famous master. Mark Stoyle takes as his task an examination of the legends that grew up around Prince Rupert and his dog, particularly Boy’s association with the occult in both Royalist and Parliamentarian propaganda. He argues two major propositions both of which are well supported and convincing. Firstly, Stoyle shows that a focused analysis of the pamphlet literature concerning Boy reveals that Cavalier hacks were initially responsible for the image of Boy as an occult phenomenon. This is not new, as Stoyle admits. Dianne Purkiss, among others, has suggested as much. But Stoyle’s analysis of the polemics surrounding Boy, as well as his laser-like focus on everything about the Prince and his dog, certainly cements the case. His other argument is much larger, more interesting, and more difficult to prove. Stoyle contends that the Naseby massacre of Royalist women, who were believed by their Parliamentarian killers to be Irish witches, as well as the numerous witch-hunts that erupted toward the end of the Civil War, need to be understood within the context of the polemical discussions of Rupert’s witch-dog. The renewed discussion of witches, the occult, and animal familiars within the press exacerbated an already tense atmosphere, helping witch hunting to become more of a reality.

Stoyle begins by meticulously recording every bit of evidence surrounding the growth of Prince Rupert’s black legend. How the Prince himself became known as “shot-free” (bullet proof); how he acquired his famous poodle, which in seventeenth-century England was considered a rather “exotic specimen” (25), and how Rupert was very quickly perceived by parliamentarians as a rash and brutal soldier of fortune. The dog’s reputation for insidious supernatural powers started as something of a lark, a Cavalier joke on the credulity of their
Puritan opponents. Written in the guise of a letter to parliamentarians by a spy within the Royalist camp, *Observations upon Prince Rupert's White Dog, Called Boy* (1643), by one T.B., begins the myth of Boy as a devil dog. Prince Rupert’s dog can prophesize, change shape, go invisible, speak numerous languages, and, like the Prince himself, is immune to harm. Further, the dog and the Prince “lye perpetually in one bed, sometimes the Prince upon the Dog, and sometimes the Dog upon the Prince” (59). What is fairly obvious is that this pamphlet is a Royalist satire on puritanical superstition and ignorance. Interestingly enough, as Stoyle points out, many of the devil dog’s powers, such as shape shifting and magical invulnerability, were fairly rare within English witchcraft literature prior to 1643. This is also true of the allegations of demonic sex between the dog and Rupert. But after the publication of *Observations* and the deluge of other tracts centered on demonic dogs, as well as Prince Rupert’s supposed “malignant she-monkey,” all of these attributes of the witch’s familiar became part of witchcraft lore. Thus what Stoyle is arguing is fairly significant. What started as a Royalist prank re-energizes the whole witchcraft debate, providing, as the author himself puts it, “an intellectual atmosphere in which the subject witchcraft could be discussed…” (118).

Witchcraft, however, was not merely discussed after 1643. Between 1645 and 1647 England witnessed a fairly significant outbreak of witchcraft hunts, imprisonments, trials and executions. In June 1645 the first incident of a renewed witchcraft hysteria occurred at Naseby when hundreds of Royalist camp women trying to flee the field were slaughtered or mutilated by Parliamentarian soldiers under the impression that the women were Irish or witches or both. From there we find even more tragic episodes of witchcraft hunts, usually led by Puritans in Parliamentarian strongholds: 14 witches hanged at Chelmsford in Essex; 20 executed in Norfolk; 18 in Bury St. Edmond’s in Suffolk. And in all of these trials, historians (such as Alan Macfarlane) have noted several new features: the witches’ confessions are more keenly sexualized than in previous trials and their familiars play more prominent roles. So it is that Stoyle can argue that the propaganda about Boy as a witch dog during the wars reinvigorated witchcraft anxieties. If he is right, what began as Cavalier ruse concluded in crimes against women.
Stoyle is certainly aware of just how hard it is to make any definitive connection between the polemics about Boy and the witchcraft craze at the end of the Civil War. Insofar as it comes to witchcraft, this book is suggestive more than anything else, but Stoyle’s research is as impeccable as it is exhaustive. All of which makes this an important book for anyone interested in the power of early modern print culture, the English Civil War, and witchcraft, to say nothing of those devotees of Prince Rupert and his famous dog.


In the popular imagination, the Ottoman harem, or any harem for that matter, is depicted as an exotic and orientalized realm where women are beautiful, mysterious, and experts in the art of seduction. Fortunately, recent scholarship has not succumbed to such objectification, especially since the 1993 publication of Leslie Pierce’s groundbreaking *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, in which Pierce painstakingly pieces together the impressive lives of Ottoman women within and beyond the seraglio. Far from being voiceless victims, Ottoman women were indeed, as eighteenth-century Englishwoman Mary Wortley Montagu pronounced, during her travels in Turkey, “the only free people in the empire.” As Pierce elucidates in her book, if an Ottoman woman gained the Sultan’s favor and bore his successor, she could become the “valide sultan,” a position of great authority and influence in the harem and at court. During the early modern period, a series of successive valide sultans, by virtue of not being native Turks, seemed predisposed to forging Ottoman relations with the West. These women included Hurrem (also called Roxelana or Roxolana), wife of Suleyman I (r.1520-1566); Nurbanu, wife of Selim II (r.1566-1574); and Safiye, valide sultan of Murad III (r.1574-1595). Of these three women, Hurrem in particular captured the European imagination and is mentioned in numerous texts, although, arguably, Nurbanu and Safiye’s interventions led to more