

Query

HAIR OF THE DOG

In preparing an edition of *Le dit des planetes*,¹ an estates poem written in northern France in the first half of the fourteenth century, I encountered the earliest example that I have yet seen of the reputed post-libitory benefits of consuming *the hair of the dog that bit you*:

Et quant ce vient a l'endemain,
La teste leur deust et la main
Leur tramble, lors vont par effors
Au poil du chien qui les a mors. (vv. 109–12)

And when the next day comes around, their head ails them and their hand trembles, then they struggle back to the hair of the dog that bit them.

The idiom has its origins in the medicine of antiquity, with Pliny the Elder proposing a similar treatment for rabies:²

in canis rabiosi morsu tuetur a pavore aquae
canini capitis cinis inlitus vulneri.

When a person has been bitten by a mad dog, he may be preserved from hydrophobia by applying the ashes of a dog's head to the wound.³

I have, however, been unable to find an earlier example than the one in *Le dit des planetes* that uses the phrase specifically to refer to alcohol. The earliest such reference with this meaning to appear in the corpus of the *Early English Books Online* project dates to 1546, in the work of John Heywood:⁴

¹ Both surviving copies of this text appear within Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français, 24432, on ff. 84^{rb}–86^{va} and 263^{ra}–265^{rb}.

² Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff (ed.) (Leipzig, 1906), XXIX.36.

³ Translated in John Bostock and H. T. Riley, *The Natural History of Pliny* (London, 1855–1856), V, 405.

⁴ John Heywood, *A Dialogue Conteyning the Nomber in Effect of All the Prouerbes in the Englishe Tongue Compacte in a Matter Concerning Two Maner of Mariages, Made and Set Forth by Iohan Heywood* (London, 1546), 130.

Early we rose, in haste to get awaie.
And to the hostler this mornynge by daie
This felow calde, what how felow, thou knaue,
I prairie the leat me and my felowe haue
A heare of the dog that bote vs last nyght.

In Sir Edward Eizat's 1695 *Apollo mathematicus*, we also find the following proposal to cure 'sleepy Diseases':⁵

Was it a furfiet of Drink? Then take a Hair of the Dog
that bit you: For

*Si tibi nocuerit hesternā potatio vini
Cras iterum bibes & erit tibi medicina.*

If Sickness caused by Drink you mind to Cure,
To drink just as much the next day be sure.

For French, no such example appears in the texts of the *Base de français médiévale*, and the earliest example of which I am aware outside of *Le dit des planetes* appears in a work by Rabelais, published posthumously in 1564:⁶

Reprendra il du poil de ce chien qui le mordit ?

Will he have some more hair from this dog that bit him?

The hair of a dog does make other appearances before this work, as in the second redaction of *Les Évangiles des Quenouilles*, a collection of folkloric knowledge first published around 1480, where it is suggested that should a wife wish to retain her husband's affections, she should concoct a potion containing 'du poil de la droite patte de son chien' (some hair from the right paw of her dog).⁷

We also find the intriguing suggestion in the older, first redaction of *Quenouilles* (ca. 1470) that should a woman wish for her husband to get

⁵ Edward Eizat, *Apollo Mathematicus, or, The Art of Curing Diseases by the Mathematicks According to the Principles of Dr. Pitcairn: A Work Both Profitable and Pleasant, and Never Published in English Before: To Which Is Subjoined, A Discourse of Certainty, According to the Principles of the Same Author* (London, 1695), 39–40.

⁶ M. François Rabelais, *Le Cinquiesme et Dernier Livre des Faicts et Dicts Heroïques du Bon Pantagruel* (Paris, 1564), 110^f.

⁷ Fouquart de Cambray, Duval Antoine, and Jean d'Arras, *Le Traittié Intitulé Les Euvangiles des Quenouilles Faictes à l'Honneur et Exaucement des Dames* (Bruges, ca. 1479–1484), 33.

along with her relatives, having never done so, then she need only mix 'la pissate du chien' (the dog's piss) into his food or drink, and all will be resolved.⁸ I make no claim as to the efficacy of this remedy.

Are readers aware of uses of *the hair of the dog that bit you* to refer to drink in vernacular European languages that predate the one in *Le dit des planetes*, or is it possible that this is the oldest such example?

SEBASTIAN DOWS-MILLER 

Merton College, University of Oxford,
United Kingdom

<https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjae135>

© The Author(s) (2024). Published by Oxford University Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

⁸ Chantilly, Bibliothèque et archives du château, 654, f. 11^v.

© The Author(s) (2024). Published by Oxford University Press.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Notes and Queries, 2024, 00, 1–2

<https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjae135>

Query