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Milk, Blood and Gall: Witches' Bodily Fluids from the Treatise to the English Stage

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Abstract: The relationship between humoralism and literature has been broached by many critics, often in the lovesickness or in the melancholic-as-genius aspect. Yet, barring a few individual cases, there has been no general study linking witches with humours in the seventeenth century English dramatical corpus. The present study attempts to fill this gap by identifying the medical or demonological treatises that influenced playwrights' representations of witches. Witches bodies are better understood by taking into account Thomas Laqueur's theory of the one-sex body, following the transformation of fluids into one another which is characteristic of their fundamental imbalance. Firstly, milk turns into gall inside witches-mothers rejecting their motherhood, then into blood inside witches feeding familiars in a distorted image of motherhood. The absence of blood in amenorrhoeic witches is shown as a reccurent cause for their melancholy which has physiological and psychological consequences, in particular a licentiousness that makes witches seek blood in its semen form. Black bile is thought to be the devil's humour, yet in the Weyer-Bodin controversy theoreticians do not agree on whether witches are melancholic women suffering from hallucinations or real agents of the devil. On the other hand, plays ascribe either physical or emotional causes as well as symptomes coherent with a melancholy disease to witches, and playwrights use symbolical representations of melancholy on stage. In conclusion, it is difficult to establish a typology of such representations, given that each witch is uniquely composed with a particular playwright's understanding of humoralism, often conflating several distinct ideas.

Keywords: witch, melancholy, blood, milk, demonology, humoralism, plays, seventeenth-century.

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Just like every other body during the early modern period, witches' bodies were encoded according to humoralism. Indeed, it is the foremost medical theory during the Renaissance, and according to it, blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile must be balanced for the body to be healthy, and excess or lack thereof is the cause of all sickness. Yet, humoralism is not altogether consistent, firstly because its main two sources, Hippocrates and Galen, offer sometimes conflicting explanations, and secondly because they spawned along the centuries various interpretations. Those medical treatises fuel literary representations, yet one cannot expect plays and theoretical treatises to be entirely one and the same in their representations of witches' bodies, nor the plays to be entirely consistent from one playwright to another. Indeed, some writers had a layman's understanding of melancholy, others a specialist's knowledge, but none expected said knowledge from the public.[1] Thus, they would use popular *topoi* on melancholy, and often avoid an explicit medical diagnosis.

My main purpose is to highlight the precise sources which English playwrights used to fuel their representations of witches, which resulted in complex characters that were defined by physiological as well as symbolic elements. Those representations are actually a conflation of several distinct ideas, sometimes contradictory ones, within Renaissance scientific literature on bodily fluids in general, and on melancholy in particular.

To grasp the full literal and symbolic meaning of references to such bodily fluids as milk, blood, or gall, Thomas Laqueur's theory of the one-sex body is key. In *Making sex*, he remarks on the fundamental fungibility of fluids in humoralism: "in the construction of the one-sex body the borders between blood, semen, other residues and food, between the organs of reproduction and other organs, between the heat of passion and the heat of life, were indistinct and, to the modern person, almost unimaginably – indeed terrifyingly – porous."[2] My exploration of bodily fluids follows their transformations within witches' bodies, from milk to blood or gall, and from blood to black bile, with a final emphasis on black bile that threatens to infect their entire body, as well as spread to anyone in contact.

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[1] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), 70.

[2] Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 42.

Milk, though not one of the four humours, is as essential a fluid to the understanding of humoralism as blood or bile. It is considered blood turned white by the heart's heat, for instance 17th century English physician John Sadler writes that "the childe, while it is in the matrice is nourished with this bloud; and it is as true, that being out of the womb, it is still nourished with the same; for the milke is nothing but the menstruous bloud made white in the breasts; and I am sure womans milke is not thought to bee venomous, but of a nutritive quality, answerable to the tender nature of an infant."[3] This nutritive, physiological quality is thus linked with a moral quality, tenderness. Moreover, Marylynn Salmon underlines the ubiquitous idea that milk could heal the sick and old, as well as babies because "the white, frothy appearance of breast milk indicated its highly concocted, and therefore powerful, state."[4] Finally, it is symbolically charged with positive connotations, such as charity in Pero and Cimon's story, or tenderness and grace, in the Virgo Lactans. These connotations are also present in plays, as apparent in *Macbeth* (1606) through the simile made by Macbeth: "pity like a naked newborn babe."[5] Hence various Christian values are embodied in the mother's tenderness for her newborn child, in the milk feeding it by synecdoche, and in the said newborn by a sympathetic transfer.[6]

If milk is used as a symbol of the mother's tenderness for her newborn, witches, on the contrary, tend to reject the positive qualities of motherhood, and of breast-feeding. One of the most well-known examples is Lady Macbeth, refering to milk three times in Shakespeare's play. She utters "yet do I fear thy nature,/ It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness"[7] while talking about Macbeth,

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[3] John Sadler, *The sicke vvomans private looking-glasse wherein methodically are handled all uterine affects, or diseases arising from the wombe; enabling women to informe the physician about the cause of their griefe*, (London: Anne Griffin, 1636; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2003), 9-10, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A11278.0001.001.

[4] Marylynn Salmon, "The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America", *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 2 (1994): 247-69; www.jstor.org/stable/3788897, 251.

[5] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), (I.7.21), 132.

[6] "Sympathetic" here is to be taken in its Renaissance meaning, where anything can be influenced by something with which it has any physical proximity, or symbolic link.

[7] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.5.14-15), 123.

exhibiting a transfer of this feminine quality onto him, and a criticism of the positive value born by milk. In "Come to my woman's breasts,/ And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers"[8] occurs the first transformation of milk into another bodily fluid. Gall is usually a synonym for bile, but it can be either of the two humours, yellow or black bile. This refusal of all motherhood poses a threat through the corruption of the milk's very essence and colour: it becomes venomous rather than curative. Her refusal of motherhood is final in: "I have given suck, and know/ How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:/ I would, while it was smiling in my face,/ Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,/ And dash'd the brains out."[9] Aside from the usual association between milk and tenderness, the brutality and corporality of this baby's death is the most shocking corruption of a mother's role in the eyes of the audience. Thus, rejection of motherhood goes through a rejection of tenderness as a virtue, of milk itself, and a final destruction of the newborn's body.

Similar violence is to be found in John Studley's translation of Seneca's *Medea* (1581): "With crimsen colourd blood of babes harte, their alters wil I staine. Through liuers, lounges the lightes & through euery gut and gall."[10] The literal evisceration of her own children announced by Medea is emphasized in the English version by the use of such central organs as the liver – where blood is produced, the gall – where yellow bile is produced, and the heart – seat of life; as well as by emphasis on the red colour. The mother's milk freely given is symbolically transformed into the babies' blood violently taken. Medea's breast is itself corrupted by her rage, as pointed out by "sweete the poyson rancke within the brest,"[11] and as evidenced by the adjectives associated with it: "smothering,"[12] "burning,"[13] "boylyng,"[14] "brazen,"[15] "cancred,"[16]

[8] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.5.45-46), 125-126.

[9] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.7.54-58), 135.

[10] John Studley, *The seventh tragedie of Seneca, Entituled Medea, translated out of Latin* (London: Thomas Colwell, 1581; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2002), (I.127-130), 3, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A11912.0001.001.

[11] John Studley, *Medea*, (I.217), 4.

[12] John Studley, *Medea*, (IV.9), 31.

[13] John Studley, *Medea*, (I.161), 3 and (III.6), 18.

[14] John Studley, *Medea*, (II.303), 11.

[15] John Studley, *Medea*, (I.148), 3.

[16] John Studley, *Medea*, (V.208), 44.

"stewing."[17] Heat, this natural and positive quality that turns blood into milk is here in excess, and since overheating had negative consequences on the blood,[18] it thus poisoned the milk. The witch becomes infanticidal because her body is imbalanced.

The witch need not be specifically a mother to embody an anti-mother figure, in particular when she is a striga. Ben Jonson references the greco-roman origin of the witch in two of his works. In *The Masque of Queens* (1609), the fifth hag says: "Under a Cradle I did creep,/ By Day; and, when the Child was a sleep,/ At Night, I suck'd the Breath; and rose."[19] The blood, as well as the breath are seen as the vehicle of the spirit, thus sucking one is quite the same as sucking the other. Here the playwright is influenced by Bartolomeo Spina and his treatise *Tractatus de Strigibus et Lamiis* as well as by the *Malleus Maleficarum*[20] from which he takes up the idea of witches sucking children's blood and spirit. The symbolic connection between breath and blood is more explicit in *The Sad Shepherd* (1637), where Maudlin is acting like a striga: "Thence shee steales forth to [...] Writhe Childrens wrists! and suck their breath in sleepe!/ Get Vialls of their blood."[21] Here the destruction of life is doubled by the simultaneous use of breath and blood, by the physical pain convoqued by "writhe", and associated again with sleep, *id est* when the child is most vulnerable.

Nonetheless, the most ubiquitous inversion of motherhood performed by witches is the breast-feeding given to their familiars, letting them suck their blood instead of milk. It seems to be a specifically early modern English obsession, given that familiars are nearly absent in continental treatises and trials. In one trial's instance, the body of the witch Alice Samuel showed a third teat, and we are told that "the jailor's wife took the same teat in her hand, and

[17] John Studley, *Medea*, (IV.479), 39.

[18] Marylynn Salmon, "The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America", 258.

[19] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens,* in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson* (Delphi Classics, 2013; British Library, Early English Books Online, 2015), 2069-2070, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri: eebo:citation:99844873.

[20] See the annotations in the playwright's hand in Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* (London: N. Ores ,1609).

[21] Ben Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd,* in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson* (Delphi Classics, 2013), (II.8.24-30), 1945.

seeming to strain it, there issued out at the first as if it had been beesenings, which is a mixture of yellow milk and water: at the second time there came out in similitude as clear milk, and in the end very blood itself."[22] The presence of "beesenings", which we would call colostrum today is interesting, as it was considered impure because of its color and consistency.[23] Colostrum turns into milk then blood, reversing the expected order or transformation: such an unstable state for bodily fluids is unnatural and dangerous.

Of course, whether spirit familiars have a real need of being fed blood is debated at the time. In daemonologist Matthew Hopkins' interpretation, though they have none, it allows the devil a greater hold on the witches' souls: "He seekes not their bloud, as if he could not subsist without that nourishment, but he often repairs to them, and gets it, the more to aggravate the Witches damnation [...] But in this case of drawing out of these Teats, he doth really enter into the body, reall, corporeall, substantiall creature."[24] Thus, the witch gives her blood, which is her life force, for a familiar that does not need it. Yet the idea that the Devil still needs to be embodied is somewhat ambiguous. Explicit scenes with stage directions showing the familiar sucking the witch's blood appear in [III,3] of Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (1616); [II,1] and [IV,1] of Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634); and [IV,1] of William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621). The familiars are described and identified as animals whose drinking of blood is usual "There was a bat hung at my lips three times/ As we came through the woods and drank her fill,"[25] and they are a typical feature of witches stories within the diegesis: "I have heard old beldams/ Talk of familiars in the shape of mice,/ Rats, ferrets, weasels, and I wot not what,/ That have

[22] *The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three witches of Warboys* (London, Widow Orwin, 1593). Reprinted in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 297.

[23] Marylynn Salmon, "The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America", 257.

[24] Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches* (London: R. Royston, 1647; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2009), 4, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A86550.0001.001.

[25] Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, ed. Marion O'Connor, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), (III.3.7-8), 1151.

appeared, and sucked, some say, their blood."[26] They exhibit the greatest variety of pets possible, as well as the variety of name they could be given. Those names reference real occurences (Tommy, Elizabeth Sawyer's dog)[27], their spirit nature (Puckling), but mostly the breast-feeding function, such as Suckling, Mamilion, and Mawsy (jaw). The sucking of blood is shown as quite corporal, and the mixing of animal and human categories would have been considered highly diabolical by the audience.[28]

The breast-feeding of familiars is associated with a tenderness one could expect of a mother towards her human child. Elizabeth Sawyer is a doting mistress to her black dog: "Ho, ho, my dainty,/ My little pearl! no lady loves her hound,/ Monkey, or paroquet, as I do thee."[29] The Lancashire witches are likewise affectionate with their familiars: "Come Mawsy, come Puckling,/ And come, my sweet Suckling,/ My pretty Mamilion, my joy!/ Fall each to his duggy/ While kindly we hug ye/ As tender as nurse over boy. / Then suck our bloods freely."[30] One can note a multiplication of surnames and possessives to show the motherlike affection their witch bestows upon them.[31] The comparison "as tender as nurse over boy" enhances the maternal relationship between the witch and her familiar, presenting an "obscenely distorted inversion of the normal mother child relationship."[32] The positive association of milk and tenderness is thus defiled by the transformation of milk into blood and of the newborn into a demon. Furthermore, connotations of bestiality are present through the sexualization of the animal: "There's one comes down to fetch his dues,/ A kiss, a coll, a sip of blood."[33] There is a series of innuendos in words such as "duggy" (breast sexualized, dug), "coll" (embrace), "kiss",

[26] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, in *A Woman killed with kindness and other domestic plays*, ed. Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), (II.1.100-103), 147.

[27] James Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets: The Concept of the Witch's Familiar in Early Modern England, 1530-1712", in *The Animal-human Boundary: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Angela N. H. Creager and William Chester Jordan (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 175.

[28] James Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets", 181.

[29] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.162-164), 176.

[30] Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, ed. Gabriel Egan, (London: Nick Hern, 2002), (IV.1.107-113), 72-73.

[31] For instance "dainty," "my little pearl," "tomboy," "tomalin," "my sweet," "my pretty," "my joy."

[32] James Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets", 181.

[33] Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (III.3.49-50), 1152.

"hug", "loves", "lips". In *The Witch of Edmonton* a sexual relationship is quite explicit: "Stand on thy hind-legs up. Kiss me, my Tommy,/ And rub away some wrinkles on my brow/ By making my old ribs to shrug for joy/ Of thy fine tricks."[34] The choice of using an actor inside a dog costume to play Tommy and the stage direction "[She embraces the Dog]"[35] allows the bestiality to be physically represented on stage rather than simply alluded to. Incest is joined with bestiality to create a representation of the witch as the quintessential "anti-mother".

Blood is associated with the heart, it is moist and warm, the precise opposite of black bile. Robert Burton, in his famous 17th century treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), defines it this way: "Blood is a hot, sweet, temperate, red humour, prepared in the mesaraic veins, and made of the most temperate parts of the chylus in the liver, whose office is to nourish the whole body, to give it strength and colour, being dispersed by the veins through every part of it. And from it spirits are first begotten in the heart."[36] Blood is thus seen as the location of the spirit, as one's principle of life and vitality, but also in a moral sense, as one's sins and virtues. By consuming it or sharing it, one could receive its positive (or negative) qualities, hence the first transfusion experiments, based on the idea that by giving sheep's blood to a man he would receive its placidity. Menstruation fits into this system in a slightly different way depending on the Hippocratic or Galenic theory.[37] The first view was of menstruation as a purification: women being colder than men could not purify their blood through sweat, and instead did it through their menses.[38] The second view was of menstruation as a plethora, an excess of blood from the digested food, which was discharged periodically through one of the "Natural passages."[39] Whether one agreed with the plethora or the purification system, the result was the same: women's bodies needed to menstruate to be healthy.

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[34] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.157-160), 176.

[35] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.160), 176.

[36] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 6th edition (London: Hen. Crips & Lodo Lloyd. 1652; Project Gutenberg, 2004), 167, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10800.

[37] Sarah Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15-18. The author notes a third theory appearing in the middle of the seventeenth century, but deems it a modernized version of the Hippocratic purification theory.

[38] Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past & Present*, Volume 91, Issue 1, May 1st, 1981, 47-73, https://doi.org/10.1093/past/91.1.47, 50.

[39] Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England", 51.

If a woman did not menstruate, according to the Hyppocratic system, her blood would putrefy, or to put it in Sadler's words: "The suppression of the Termes is [...], making the bloud viscuous and grosse,"[40] *id est* turn into an unnatural black bile. According to the plethora theory, if the blood had nowhere to go, it would make its way up until it reached the brain. French daemonologist Pierre Le Loyer (Peter De Loier) analyses the consequences as it follows: "Then the same blood, not finding any passage, troubleth the brain in such sorte, that it causeth many of them to have idle fancies and fond conceipts, and tormenteth them with diverse imaginations of horrible specters."[41] Hence amenorrhoea was a state considered unhealthy for women, and caused melancholy,[42] either through unnatural black bile, or by an overabundance of blood turned adust into the brain. The two theories are similarly connected to melancholy by Burton: "that menstruous blood turned into melancholy, [...] by putrefaction or adustion,"[43] and the playwrights do not seem to make any difference between them.

Witches, being often old, were therefore melancholic because of their amenorrhoea: "why should an old witch be thought free from such fantasies, who [...] upon the stopping of their monethlie melancholike flux or issue of bloud, in their age must needs increase therein."[44] Reginald Scot suggests thus that old age and its inevitable amenorrhoea leads logically to melancholy and to an increase in "fancies."[45] One stage example is Lady Macbeth, whose amenorrhea was diagnosed by Jenijoy La Belle.[46] The well-known quote "Make thick my blood;/ Stop up the access and passage to remorse,/ That no compunctious visitings of nature/ Shake my fell purpose"[47] refers to such an affliction through the "thick" – akined to "viscous and grosse;" the "visiting

[40] John Sadler, *The sicke vvomans private looking-glasse*, 14-15.

[41] Peter De Loier, *A treatise of specters,* trans. Zachary Jones (London: Printed by Val. S., 1605; Boston Public Library, 2016), 110, https://archive.org/details/treatiseofspecte00loye.

[42] Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England", 54.

[43] Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 410.

[44] Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1st ed. 1584), ed. Brinsley Nicholson (London: Elliot Stock, 1886; Princeton Theological Seminary Library, 2009), 42, https://archive.org/details/discoverieofwitc00scot.

[45] Sarah Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, 177-178.

[46] Jenijoy La Belle, ""A Strange Infirmity": Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhea," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1980): 381-86, doi:10.2307/2869201.

[47] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.5.41-44), 125.

of nature" – synonym for the menses in 17th century medical language; and "access and passage" – the "natural passage" of the uterus. I would like to underline the use of remorse and compunctious in relationship with blood, exemplifying the positive quality associated with this fluid that Lady Macbeth denies.

The usual interpretation is that the absence of menstruations is a way for Lady Macbeth to try to turn herself into a man.[48] It is in keeping with Laqueur's one-sex body, since for a Renaissance audience Lady Macbeth could indeed literally change her sex by the power of her imagination. Yet it is not the only change that derives from her amenorrhoea. If melancholy blood reached the brain it also had a psychological impact, as evidenced by Burton describing the melancholic's symptoms: "Some think they see visions, confer with spirits and devils, they shall surely be damned, are afraid of some treachery, imminent danger, and the like."[49] It can explain Lady Macbeth's hallucinations in [V,1],[50] the fear she tries to deny by her question "What need we fear,"[51] as well as the threat of her pending damnation implied in her remark "Hell is murky."[52] The Doctor also mentions her "infected mind,"[53] which is to be interpreted in a very literal way. Those hallucinations are associated with a lack of sleep by 17th century English physician John Pechey: "The signs of it are [...] much Cogitation, Suspicion, Shame-facedness, Dejection of Mind, disturbed Sleep, frightful Dreams, a preposterous Judgment; [...] and sometimes the Melancholy is so high, as that they grow almost Distracted, and are ready to make away with themselves."[54] This is coherent with the Doctor's assessment of the situation: "she is troubled with thick-coming fancies/ That keep her from her rest,"[55] with the sleepwalking, and with the interpretation of Lady Macbeth's death as a suicide.

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[48] Sarah Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, 171-172.
[49] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 457-458.
[50] The "Out, damned spot!" in William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 216-220.
[51] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.1.32), 218.
[52] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.1.31), 218.
[53] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.1.62), 219.
[54] John Pechey, *A general treatise of the diseases of maids, bigbellied women, child-bed-women, and widows together with the best methods of preventing or curing the same* (London: Henry Bonwick, 1696; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2006), 245-246, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A53915.0001.001.
[55] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (V.3.58-59), 225.

In plays, witches look for a sexual partner in what appears to be an attempt to replace their missing blood. Their licentiousness is a symptom of their melancholy, because according to 17th century physicians, adust black bile released hot vapours that stimulated sexual appetite[56] – hence the common advice for young melancholy women to get married. Several witches exhibit those symptoms, such as Erictho in John Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606): "Know we, Erictho, with a thirsty womb,/ Have coveted full threescore suns for blood of kings.[...] We, in the pride and height of covetous lust,/ Have wish'd with woman's greediness to fill/ Our longing arms with Syphax' well-strung limbs[...] Now are we full/ Of our dear wishes. Thy proud heat, well wasted,/ Hath made our limbs grow young."[57] Likewise, Hecate covets Almachildes in *The Witch*: "'Tis Almachildes: fresh blood stirs in me,/ The man that I have lusted to enjoy;/ I have had him thrice in incubus already;"[58] and Elizabeth Sawyer has a relationship with Tommy in *The Witch of Edmonton*: "Have I given up myself to thy black lust [...] I am on fire, even in the midst of ice,/ Raking my blood up."[59] The first common metaphor is of the seed as heat. Indeed, Laqueur points out that semen is a greater form of blood: it is a quintessential bearer of life, and in particular of heat.[60] The warm quality of this blood turned semen is obvious in "proud heat", the image of the sun with the "blood of kings" *id est* Syphax's semen, and "fire", made more intense by the antithetic "ice" recalling the coldness of melancholy. Another element is the systematic association of lust and blood which is a commonplace in early modern times[61]. Blood is characterized by its movement in "fresh blood stirs in me", and "raking my blood up". Moreover, the sinful nature of such relationships is enhanced by the repetition of "coveted," "covetous lust," "woman's greediness," "I have lusted to enjoy," and "thy black lust." The colour black could be here a way

[56] Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77.

[57] John Marston, *The Wonder of Women, or The Tragedie of Sophonisba* (London: John Windes, 1606; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2003), (V.1.9-21), 22, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A07083.0001.001.

[58] Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (I.2.195-197), 1137-1138.

[59] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (V.1.4-11), 186.

[60] Thomas Laqueur, *Making sex*, 38.

[61] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 131-132.

to point out the role of black bile in lust. It is not love, but an insatiable sexual appetite caused by the humoural imbalance.

Nevertheless, such a transient transfer of heat as the one obtained in congress does not cure them: by spending blood through seed, one loses life. When one is young and has too much blood it can be positive, but if one is old and lacks blood, it is all the more dangerous.[62] In plays, it can be ambiguous, for instance, Erictho seems at first to have won heat and blood: her "thirsty womb" is "full" after the sexual act, and her "limbs grow young" because of it, but it is at the expense of Syphax's heat, which is "wasted." Hecate has "thrice already" used Almachildes' heat, but still covets him, and the reference to the "incubus" form will imediately be associated by an early modern audience to the physical destruction of Almachildes, and his prematural aging. Furthermore, talking to Stadlin about her nocturnal visit to the Mayor's son, she remarks: "I think thou'st spoil'd the youth: he's but seventeen."[63] The insistence on his youth makes all the more tragic his destruction through coitus with the witch-incubus, with the verb "spoil" which should be taken in a physical way. Similarly, *Macbeth*'s witch destroys the sailor by such a visit: "I'll drain him dry as hay:/ Sleep shall neither night nor day/ Hang upon his pent-house lid;/ He shall live a man forbid:/ Weary sennights nine times nine/ Shall he dwindle, peak and pine."[64] The images of destruction are enhanced by the comparison with hay, and by the triple use of "dwindle," "peak," and "pine"[65] reinforcing the corporal impact on the sailor's body. The insomnia, hallmark of melancholy is shown as a doubly negated sleep, and the sailor catches the typical dryness that reveals a lack of blood. Hence witches try in vain to compensate their lack of a hot blood by the sexual act, thus draining their partners of their blood and of their very life.

Black bile is one of the four humours in a man's body and is mostly positive. Burton defines it as "cold and dry, thick, black, and sour, begotten of the more feculent part of nourishment, and purged from the spleen, [it] is a bridle to the other two hot humours, blood and choler, preserving them in the blood, and nourishing the bones."[66] The melancholic is considered a thinker,

[62] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 146.
[63] Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (I.2.32), 1134.
[64] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth,* (I.3.17-22), 110-111.
[65] Peak: become sick, pine: to lose flesh.
[66] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 167-168.

thoughtful and reserved, and is associated with genius.[67] But too grave an imbalance or corruption of the bile can lead to the production of an unnatural black bile, and cause sickness. Black bile is also associated with the Devil more closely than any other humour, and is thought highly contagious. For instance, 17th century French physician James Ferrand writes: "Whom so ever the Divell overcomes, he overcomes by Melancholy. And therefore the Physitians for very good reason call Melancholy, the Divell Bath."[68] The medical idea behind this is that melancholy impairs judgements. Burton is more explicit: "melancholy persons are most subject to diabolical temptations and illusions, and most apt to entertain them, and the Devil best able to work upon them."[69] The melancholic fantasies can make one reject God, which is why the humour is often associated with the work of the Devil.

Not only is black bile the devil's humour, but there is also the strong suspicion that witches, being the devil's intrument, can cause it in others. Some demonologists associate the act of bewitching to a contagion by black bile. For instance Scot quoting this common opinion amongst them writes: "Women are also (saith he) monethlie filled full of superfluous humours, and with them the melancholike bloud boileth; whereof spring vapors, and are carried up, and conveied through the nosethrels and mouth, &c; to the bewitching of whatsoever it meeteth."[70] The fungible quality of humours allows them to leave the liquid state for a gaseous one, thus becoming contagious by mere proximity. Angus Gowland, studying Burton's relationship with this idea, shows that he was somewhat more moderate, arguing that indeed witches could cause melancholy, but refusing to give a precise explanation on how[71]. Hence not only is black bile symbolically linked with the Devil, but it can be caused by witchcraft, and even caught by simple contact with a melancholy witch.

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[67] See for further studies: Patrick Dandrey, *Les tréteaux de Saturne: Scènes de la mélancolie à l'époque baroque,* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2003) and Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1964).

[68] James Ferrand, *Erotomania or a treatise discoursing of the Essence, Causes, Symptomes, Prognosticks, and Cure of Love or Erotique melancholy*, trans. Edmund Cilmead (Oxford: L. Lichfield, 1640; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2006), 210, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A00695.0001.001.

[69] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 223-224.

[70] Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, 227.

[71] Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 86-87.

Amongst theoreticians, two competing interpretations of the melancholy witch existed. In England, they are voiced by Reginald Scot, in *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584), and by James VI of Scotland, in his *Daemonology* (1597). But they take up and translate arguments first written respectively by the Dutch physician Johannes Weyer, author of *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563), and the French jurist Jean Bodin, author of *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580). Weyer and Scot support the idea that witches are often "poore melancholike women, which are themselves deceived. [...] For as some of these melancholike persons imagine, they are witches."[72] For them, witches are victims of their melancholy, suffering from hallucinations. On the contrary, Bodin and King James believe in the absolute reality of witchcraft and try to counter Weyer's argument by stating that "they are [...] giuen ouer to the pleasures of the flesh, continual haunting of companie, and all kind of merrines, both lawfull and unlawfull, which are thinges directly contrary to the symptomes of Melancholie."[73] Several inconsistencies and ambiguities allow such disagreements: firstly there is the juxtaposition of two theories, the Galenic model of depression and anxiety and the Aristotelian model linking genius with melancholy; secondly, the disease melancholy could be ascribed either to the natural black bile, or to the unnatural black bile caused by any of the four humours turned adust; finally the very word melancholic could refer either to the humour, to the melancholic complexion (a natural tendency to sadness and solitude), or to a sickness.[74] A third approach reconciling both visions should be mentioned, that of Burton: he is moderately sceptical, yet does not deny the power of the devil. His main argument is that each case is unique, with some examples in which melancholy is caused by the devil, and some by the humour.[75]

Barring a few exceptions, playwrights do not take a position in the controversy. One of those is Ben Jonson, whose witches are poor melancholic women without powers. For instance in *The Masque of Queens*, we can find

[72] Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, 41.

[73] King James, *Daemonologie in Forme of a Dialogie Diuided into three Bookes* (London: Printed by Robert Waldegrave, 1597; Project Gutenberg, 2008), 25, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25929/.

[74] Sam Migliore, "The Doctor, the Lawyer, and the Melancholy Witch," *Anthropologica* 25, no. 2 (1983): 163-92, doi:10.2307/25605124, 183. See also on the controversy Sydney Anglo, "Melancholia and Witchcraft: The Debate between Wier, Bodin, and Scot," in *Folie et déraison à la Renaissance* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1976).

[75] Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 87.

the annotations: "All which are meer Arts of Satan, when either himself will delude them with a false form, or troubling a dead body, makes them imagine these vanities."[76] This idea of delusion is supported by the text, where the Dame exclames: "All our *Charms* do nothing win/ Upon the Night; our labour dies!/ Our *Magick*-feature will not rise."[77] Even in *The Sad Shepherd* where the witch has some power, she is explicitly associated with melancholy: "A Witch/ Is sure a Creature of Melancholy,/ And will be found, or sitting in her fourme,/ Or els, at releife, like a Hare."[78] Not only is it a rare occurence of "melancholy" used in conjunction with "witch," but her connexion to the hare, associated with melancholy and madness in early modern Europe undermines the reality of her witchcraft. The delusion of melancholy witches also appears in plays without them, like in John Ford's *Perkin Warbeck*: "Thus witches,/ Possessed, even to their deaths deluded, say/ They have been wolves and dogs, and sailed in egg-shells/ Over the sea, and rid on fiery dragons,/ Passed in the air more than a thousand miles,/ All in a night."[79] The hyperbolic accumulation of fantastical actions is undermined by the timeframe for doing them – one night, thus it ridicules the suggestion that any of it could be real, with an emphasis on "deluded." Yet most playwrights seem to use typical causes and symptoms of melancholy for their witches without undermining the reality of their powers within the diegesis.

Several causes of melancholy identified by theorists can be found in plays. Three main causes are old age, poverty, and ugliness, usually in conjunction. For instance, Burton notes that "This natural infirmity is most eminent in old women, and such as are poor, solitary, live in most base esteem and beggary, or such as are witches."[80] He devotes one subsection to poverty and want,[81] and exclaims: "To be foul, ugly, and deformed, much better be buried alive."[82] The socio-economical conditions of witches are usually ignored by the playwrights,

[76] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* (London: N. Ores, 1609), 11.

[77] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson*, (Delphi Classics, 2013), 2072.

[78] Ben Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd,* in *Complete Works of Ben Jonson* (Delphi Classics, 2013), (II.7.16-19), 1943.

[79] John Ford (and Thomas Dekker?), *Perkin Warbeck,* in *John Ford 'Tis a Pity she's a whore and other plays*, ed. Marion Lomax (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), (V.3.103-108), 319-320.

[80] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 235.

[81] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 382.

[82] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 410.

except in *The Witch of Edmonton*, where the main protagonist becomes a witch because she is shunned for her poverty and ugliness: "And why on me? Why should the envious world/ Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?/ 'Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,/ And like a bow buckled and bent together."[83] This is a rare case where the witch defines herself as poor and ugly. Another common cause for melancholy is the excess of hot passions, such as anger, which creates "adust melancholy" by burning the humours and drying the body.[84] Burton devotes one subsection to envy and malice,[85] another to hatred, and desire of revenge[86] and one to "Anger, a perturbation, which carries the spirits outwards, preparing the body to melancholy, and madness itself."[87] Elizabeth Sawyer could also be melancholic because of her anger and thirst for revenge: "Would some power, good or bad,/ Instruct me which way I might be revenged/ Upon this churl, I'd go out of myself,/ And give this fury leave to dwell within."[88] She shares her hatred and desire of revenge with Medea: "Now sorowes smarte doth rub the gall/ and frets wyth sharper rage. [...]/ Be redye wrath, wyth all thy myghte/ that furye kyndle maye."[89] Medea's rage is more precisely situated in the gall, so one can presume she suffers from adust choler, but Medea's melancholy might also be due to her lovesickness,[90] since her hatred is linked to her thwarted love for Jason.

The ambiguities of the melancholy theories bleed out into our dramatic corpus, where the distinction between natural, unnatural black bile, or melancholy arising from adust humours is never explicit and symptoms are not altogether coherent with the type of melancholy. For instance, adust melancholy is thought in its hot stage to produce an exaggerated joy.[91] Those symptoms are exhibited by the witches Mall: "We must a little laugh and

[83] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (II.1.1-4), 145.
[84] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 24.
[85] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 296.
[86] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 297.
[87] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 300.
[88] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (II.1.105-108), 147-148.
[89] John Studley, *Medea*, (I.171-178), 4.
[90] Peter Toohey, "Medea's Lovesickness" in *Melancholy, Love and Time: Boundaries of the self* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 59-103.
[91] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 34.

thank/ Our feat familiars for the prank"[92] and Meg: "Now let us laugh to think upon/ The feat which we have so lately done."[93] The Lancashire witches range from young to old, rich to poor and do not seem to have any of the emotional causes identified by Burton. Such a symptom is also present in Hecate: "Oh, what a dainty pleasure 'tis / To ride in the air / When the moon shines fair / And sing, and dance, and toy, and kiss."[94] Joy is usually expressed in the common activities of dancing and singing, associated with a witch's sabbat.

Most symptoms of melancholy are physical: the melancholic has usually a pale face with sometimes a hint of yellow, and is also associated with black.[95] In *The Masque of Queens*, the Dame calls to her the hags, including*:* "Thou, black-mouth'd *Execration,* stand apply'd;/ Draw to thee *Bitterness,* whose Pores sweat Gall."[96] Blackness and gall are two physical signs of melancholy, and the black mouth is also present in *Sophonisba* with "her black tongue."[97] Syphax further describes Erictho with these elements: "A loathsome yellow leanness spreads her face,/ A heavy hell-like paleness loads her cheeks."[98] The yellow is associated with yellow bile, and paleness with black bile. Heaviness is another sure physical sign of melancholy in witches.

The melancholic is not only likely to be very hairy but hair unkempt is also a sign of madness in the seventeenth century. For instance, Erictho "heaves proud her head/ With long unkemped hair loaden,"[99] showing the sure signs of madness and a pervasive heaviness. *Macbeth*'s witches are "wild in their attire" and have "beards:"[100] not only are their beards unnatural for women, but wild could also be interpreted in relation to their hair. In association with heaviness, the flesh itself is lean, and dry. Overabundance of the dry humour is evidenced in *The Witch of Edmonton*: "I am dried up/ With cursing and with

[92] Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (II.1.6-7), 26.
[93] Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (II.1.22-23), 27.
[94] Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (III.3.61-64), 1152-1153.
[95] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 33.
[96] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens*, 2069.
[97] John Marston, *The Wonder of Women,* (IV.1.123), 21.
[98] John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.105-106), 20.
[99] John Marston, *The Wonder of Women,* (IV.1.111-112), 20.
[100] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.3.38) and (I.3.44), 112.

madness, and have yet/ No blood."[101] The madness is of course melancholy, in connection to a lack of blood. Of note are Erictho's "lean knuckles"[102] and the portrait of *Macbeth*'s witches as "wither'd" and with "choppy finger laying / Upon her skinny lips."[103] Such a dryness is not only a sign of old age, but a physical imprint of melancholy on their bodies.

Melancholy can also manifest through an affinity to things dry and cold, like in *Sophonisba*'s grave-robbing: "From half-rot sear-cloths then she scrapes dry gums/ For her black rites; but when she finds a corpse/ But newly graved, whose entrails are not turn'd/ To slimy filth, with greedy havock then/ She makes fierce spoil, and swells with wicked triumph/ To bury her lean knuckles in his eyes;/ Then doth she gnaw the pale and o'ergrown nails/ From his dry hand; but if she find some life/ Yet lurking close, she bites his gelid lips,/ And, sticking her black tongue in his dry throat."[104] The corpses Erictho plunders are characterized by their dry quality (dry gums, dry hand, dry tongue), and their cold "gelid lips." Black bile is also associated with earth, implied by the corruption of the dead, buried flesh. Furthermore, the consumption of entrails, full of black bile, but not yet "slimy filth" is a final mark of her close similitude to the corpses.

Finally, melancholics love solitude and darkness. They seek out desert places, and shun the light.[105] Those are consistent with some of the witches' abodes, for instance Maudlin's: "Within a gloomie dimble, shee doth dwell/ Downe in a pitt, [...] down unto the ground,/ 'Mongst graves, and grotts, neare an old Charnell house,/ Where you shall find her sitting in her fourme,/ As fearfull, and melancholique, as that."[106] The charnel-house, a repository for dead bodies, as well as the grotts (caves), and the pitts and dimbles (hollows in the landscape) are all places of loneliness and obscurity, and this choice of dwellings is explicitely connected to Maudlin's melancholy, here manifested psychologically by her fearfulness. Likewise, Erictho lives in a "desert"[107]

[101] William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, (IV.1.154-156), 176.
[102] John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.119), 20.
[103] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (I.3.38) and (I.3.42-43), 112.
[104] John Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.114-123), 20-21.
[105] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 32.
[106] Ben Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd,* (II.8.15-21), 1944.
[107] J ohn Marston, *The Wonder of Women*, (IV.1.100), 20.

and describes her abode as: "once a charnel-house, now a vast cave,/ Over whose brow a pale and untrod grove/ Throws out her heavy shade, the mouth thick arms/ Of darksome yew (sun-proof) for ever choke;/ Within rests barren darkness; fruitless drought/ Pines in eternal night."[108] The same typical places are even more explicitly linked to obscurity with an overabundance of synonyms for darkness.

At the end of this study, it should be emphasized that most English dramatists depict their witches without clear understanding of the distinction between the melancholic disorders.[109] The melancholic male *topoi* associated with sadness or lovesickness is replaced for these women by the excessive joy and desire of blood adust or by hallucinations and fearfulness. Sometimes the cause for their melancholy is physical, sometimes it is emotional, but it always links them to the devil. Nonetheless, all our witches share a characteristic imbalance of humours that betrays a sick and often monstrous body. They can transmit black bile to others, as well as take their most precious bodily fluids, semen or blood, – those fluids are not safe inside one's body and can be corrupted from outside. In short, witches embody one of the deepest fears of early modern England: contamination. As Firestone says in *The Witch*: "they are able to putrefy it, to infect a whole region."[110]

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[108] John Marston, *The Wonder of Women,* (IV.1.164-169), 21.

[109] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, 71.

[110] Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, (III.3.18-19), 1151.

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