Blood beliefs in early modern Europe

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the significance of blood and the perception of the body in both learned and popular culture in order to investigate problems of identity and social exclusion in early modern Europe. Starting from the view of blood as a liminal matter, manifesting fertile, positive aspects in conjunction with dangerous, negative ones, I show how it was believed to attract supernatural forces within the natural world. It could empower or pollute, restore health or waste corporeal and spiritual existence. While this theme has been studied in a medieval religious context and by anthropologists, its relevance during the early modern period has not been explored. I argue that, considering the impact of the Reformation on people's mentalities, studying the way in which ideas regarding blood and the body changed from late medieval times to the eighteenth century can provide new insights about patterns of social and religious tensions, such as the witch-trials and persecutions. In this regard the thesis engages with anthropological theories, comparing the dialectic between blood and body with that between identity and society, demonstrating that they both spread from the conflict of life with death, leading to the social embodiment or to the rejection of an individual. A comparative approach is also employed to analyze blood symbolism in Protestant and Catholic countries, and to discuss how beliefs were influenced by both cultural similarities and religious differences. Combining historical sources, such as witches' confessions, with appropriate examples from anthropology I also examine a corpus of popular ideas, which resisted to theological and learned notions or slowly merged with them. Blood had different meanings for different sections of society, embodying both the physical struggle for life and the spiritual value of the Christian soul. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 develop the dualism of the fluid in late medieval and early modern ritual murder accusations against Jews, European witchcraft and supernatural beliefs and in the medical and philosophical knowledge, while chapters 5 and 6 focus on blood themes in Protestant England and in Counter-Reformation Italy. Through the examination of blood in these contexts I hope to demonstrate that contrasting feelings, fears and beliefs related to dangerous or extraordinary individuals, such as Jews, witches, and Catholic saints, but also superhuman beings such as fairies, vampires and werewolves, were rooted in the perception of the body as an unstable substance, that was at the base of ethnic, religious and gender stereotypes.

1. Blood themes: Introduction

1.1 Blood, feelings and the soul. Perspectives

The subject of this thesis concerns the exploration of ideas on blood in early modern Europe, considering the importance of religious and medical theories in witchcraft beliefs and how they were assimilated by the population. From this study I hope to demonstrate that blood, and the bodily symbolism attached to it, is not only a reflection of social and individual beliefs, but can be used as means to read and interpret them. Blood will be considered as a cultural theme which encloses values and concepts of the world at different periods, and that can also be employed to understand how human identity is built inside a society. In the words of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his *Thick Description: toward an Interpretive Theory of Cultures*:

> Culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.[1]

In this work blood themes will be employed to explore the early modern European world as a multifaceted reality, a corpus of interwoven theories and notions, ranging from the belief in witches to the medical knowledge of the body, and the two diverging religious contexts of Protestantism and Catholicism, which will be compared to find significant variations or parallels. It is also clear that different views of blood not only correspond to different faiths, but to the presence of plural blood traditions, medical and religious, and to the perception of them by different groups of people within the same society. Thus we are confronted with the problem of identification. We need to be aware of the background and nature of the people we are discussing. 'Popular culture' seems in fact more than a homogeneous complex of beliefs a quite vague concept, concerning different branches of the same society. According to the cultural historian Peter Burke, the usual definition of "people" in

[1] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays.* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p.89

western culture emerges from opposed categories: the people are the poor for the rich, the laity for the clergy, the commoners for the nobility, and, we can add, the illiterate for the literate. These categories are not definitely detached and independent one from the other. Elites shared the same patterns of belief of ordinary people, while learned notions diffused, although changed, into the world of popular knowledge. The continuous interaction between learned and popular culture makes the distinction problematic.[2] To explain this I will focus a moment on the possible receptions of the witch-figure in early modern society, a fundamental point of this thesis. Witchcraft historiography reflects the problem of the reception of the witch-figure by different sections of society, and historians have widely considered the socio-economical problems and changes in early modern society, the religious tensions and the impact of Reformation, and the construct of the witch-figure and its relation with gender. In this thesis I develop new perspectives regarding these factors, starting from the physical perception of the witch and concentrating on the object she or he exchanged with the devil. Although blood figures in many secondary works on the subject and in the primary sources as one of the most important things claimed by the devil, there is no exhaustive work which explicitly analyzes its role. Thus, exploring blood beliefs related to magic and witchcraft I will consider the body of the accused and of the victim in order to understand the feelings and fears of both elites and common people, and the relation between the physical and the spiritual world that was at the basis of the alleged crime.

Though generally recognised as an enemy with supernatural skills, the witch did not represent the same danger and menace to all the populace, and his or her physical person was not the vehicle of the same power for all the people involved in accusations. Witchcraft was a religious crime for theologians and judges, but it was perceived as mainly a source of sickness and death for the rest of the community, which feared *maleficium*, that is the capacity to harm by magic. Regarding the motivations of the accused, witchcraft was seen as a means of obtaining revenge - an illusory ability, often depending on distorted passions and feelings, and even on an involuntary action, resulting from an innate negative power inscribed in certain

[2]Peter Burke, "Popular Culture between History and Ethnology.".*Ethnologia Europaea*, vol. XIV (1984): pp. 5-13; Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), pp. 20-28. See also: Natalie Zemon Davies, "Toward Mixtures and Margins." *The American Historical Review,* Vol.97, No. 5 (Dec., 1992): pp. 140-141

individuals. Keith Thomas explained the predominant early modern view of witchcraft as follows:

> Witchcraft had become a Christian heresy, the greatest of all sins, because it involved the renounce of God and deliberate adherence to his greatest enemy. *Maleficium* was a purely secondary activity, a by-product of this false religion. Whether or not the witch injured other people, she deserved to die for her disloyalty to God. Around this conception was built up the notion of ritual devil-worship, involving the Sabbath or nocturnal meeting at which the witches gathered to worship their master and to copulate with him.[3]

Originating in Catholic medieval Europe, the intellectual idea of witchcraft developed further after the Reformation. In the Protestant context this was reflected in theories regarding the witch's body, such as the idea of a mark left by the devil after the compact. For theologians the body of the witch represented mainly the evidence or the means for a devilish alliance, while for common people it was a source of anxiety and danger that influenced their ordinary lives. Thus diabolism, which insisted on the heretical content of witchcraft, was the predominant idea, not because it was shared by all early modern people, but because it was the reason for the basis of the legal persecution. The main focus of beliefs at the basis of accusations remained instead the physical effects produced by witchcraft. In both views the point of convergence was the representation of the body of the witch and of the victims, which provided evidence as to the nature of the diabolical pact and the causes and consequences of *maleficium*.

The body meant different things to different people, and so it provides a means of exploring the mentalities of those involved, trying to understand where learned ideas and popular ones coincided or diverged. Blood is not only the object of the research, but it will be used to discuss both homogeneity and contrasting traditions analyzed in the same context. In fact it was indicative of both theological and popular views of witchcraft. The aim is to understand what the same symbol could signify to contiguous but different sections of society. We are confronted with several questions when considering the relation between blood, body and power and its perception in

[3] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 521

the early modern world. Did blood retain its own magical potency? Or was it just the channel for supernatural forces? Was witchcraft a devilish delusion which altered the minds of the involved? Or were there certain individuals who through their bodies could magically affect others? And, more important, who did early modern people fear most, the witch or the Devil? Did blood symbolism highlight these anxieties?

The first problem we need to cope with, for answering these questions, concerns the approach to primary sources. Treatises of witchcraft, pamphlets, trial-records, medical books and also works of folk-medicine provide partial stories. We are always reading through the narrator's point of view, with his specific background, while, in the case of witchcraft confessions, we often do not know where the influence of judges and theologians ends and the personal truth of the accused starts. With regard to treatises of domestic medicine, which, as we will see in chapter three, were appositely written for common people, we surely do not find the cures and the thought of the many empiric healers, often illiterate, that early modern people consulted. Popular culture is generally distorted or manipulated when not completely absent in the available texts. This assumption is still more valuable when the "people" are minor groups inside a society, where "minor" means not predominant and whose formation was determined by ethnicity or gender, like, as we will see soon, Jews and women, but also by other factors, such as age.

The examination of those source materials close to the interrogatives and doubts regarding popular notions, provoke the important question of the feelings involved.[4] Reading confessions or treatises of witchcraft we cannot avoid thinking of words such as fear, anger, and desperation as an integral part of the narratives. Where the supernatural activities of the witch could be doubted, also by his or her contemporaries, emotions were real and relied on cultural perceptions of blood and body, which, encapsulating both life and death, were the physical and tangible ground of witchcraft beliefs. So, the body can also furnish an insight into the emotional universe of the various people who feared and shared fantasies about witches. In this exploration, we are also reminded that body and blood are not foreigner objects, coming from a faraway past, but they constitute our own reality. Dealing with the body we are dealing with ourselves, with questions immanent to the present in which we are dwelling and that requires more than the analysis of the sources to be

[4] See Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?,* pp. 51-52, where the author briefly discuss the involvment of cultural history with people's mentalities and feelings, in contrast with intellectual history's concern with systems of thought.

understood. Despite the belief in witches and supernatural enemies, are the reactions of those people, when confronted with sickness and death, so distant from our own? Is their perception of blood as a precious, but precarious vital substance less valuable than our ideas on the subject?

As Miri Rubin has discussed in a recent essay on cultural history, "bringing to the traces of the past wishes, pain, hope and desire is now acknowledged as not only a useful but a necessary part of human reflection and learning about the past".[5] A task in which not only our knowledge is involved, but our own thoughts and emotions are challenging us to be more than historians, individuals that find themselves merged into other individuals' lives, in different cultures and times. As Marc Bloch pointed out in discussing the work of the historian, and tracing an important parallel between historical and anthropological research, the object and the aim of history are first of all human beings themselves, caught in the continual changes of time. Once we are focused on people we will have to reconstruct the human spirit and thought which inhabited the world of facts, in order to cope with the problem of duration, that is the impact and the influence of the past on the present, the discovery of analogies and differences between us and them, the people that we are and those that we were. The role of the historian is therefore a continual attempt to understand: to investigate the past in order to cast a light on the present, without pretence of judgement or condemnation, but with a sort of empathic feeling. Analyzing the different attitudes of people, contextualizing them, we will also be able to recognize in their lives a spectre of our own ones. History, then, can become the place of a fraternal encounter,[6] founded on the acknowledgement of human variety, of its limits and battles, repeating through ages. Considering this point of view, we return to the problem of popular culture, with the consciousness that, though it remains difficult to disentangle learned notions from common people's beliefs, establishing clearly who believed what, our own experience of things such as pain and fear, in connection to physical life, can be useful to comprehend that of early modern people. Through blood we can explore the conflicts and emotions of the past, which we can interpret as more or less vaguely familiar.

The problem of the different approaches to the symbolism of the body and the crucial involvement of feelings is a prominent and recurring theme in this thesis,

[5] Miri Rubin, "What is Cultural History Now?" In David Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?* (New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2002), p. 81
[6] Marc Bloch, *Apologia della storia. O mestiere di storico.* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), pp. 107-108

particularly regarding the centrality of the relation between soul and blood in witchcraft cases. Early modern people recognized in the soul the force that enlivened the blood, yet there was no universal agreement on what the soul was exactly. This point will be argued in detail in the first three chapters, but it is important to make a preliminary discussion in this Introduction. For theologians and philosophers it had a divine origin and the moral qualities of people manifested in it, influencing the general welfare of the body, but also attracting positive or negative external forces. Being washed by Christ's own sacrificial blood, the Christian soul represented spiritual life, the only one that needed to be preserved, and which the devil assaulted through the compact with witches. So blood was the vehicle for a mystical union between the human soul and God: the seed of eternal life was sealed into it. Yet, beside religion, philosophical theories showed contrasting views of the soul. The Renaissance philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi from Padova, for example, in his treatise on the immortality of the soul, asserted that the rational soul, the intelligence, could not be detached from the sensitive one, which animated the body, and henceforth it had to be mortal. Although he was not interested in discovering a specific, physical location of the soul inside the individual, he stressed the impossibility of the intellectual faculties of man to exist separately from the body.[7] Contemporaneous Neoplatonic theories were influential. The seventeenth-century utopian Tommaso Campanella believed, for example, in the real existence of a living divine principle permeating all the visible things of the universe.[8] Blood could respond to the thoughts, representing the place of the encounter and mutual dependence between soul and body, and also act as a symbol of a vital, sacred essence permeating the physical world.

As to the notions of common people, corporeal fantasies and theories concerning the soul emerged strongly. Witches were feared for their capacity to spoil physical existence, not for the menace they represented for the spiritual union with God. Thus the soul itself was often considered a material substance that could be confused with the blood which carried it, or with other corporeal parts. The conflict between the mundane and the supernatural dimension was feared by the whole community, but the moral universe of the learned did not always share the more practical anxieties of common people. If theologians and the writers of witchcraft treatises saw blood as the

[7] Andrew H. Douglas, *The philosophy and psychology of Pietro Pomponazzi.* (Cambridge:Elibron Classics, 2005), pp. 74-83

[8] Laura Bossi, *Storia Naturale dell'Anima..* (Milano: Baldini e Castoldi Dalai, 2003), pp.96-101

place where supernatural forces manifested in order to bring the human soul to salvation or damnation, the majority of the populace was concerned with the preservation of actual life, in which either the devil or God could be invoked in the attempt to escape from poverty and death.

The problematic and multi-faced relation between the supernatural and the soul is well exemplified in the belief in fairies, which still survived to a certain extent in both early modern Protestant and Catholic worlds. Difficult to classify for theologians, who generally ascribed fairies to the devil, they represented for common people the dangers and the longings for human existence which stood immediately beyond the physical dimension. The motif of a sinful moral life, which could be found in stories of vampires or werewolves to explain their blood-thirst and their cruelty, was rarely present in fairy-beliefs. Yet these spirits were continuously after bodily fluids and the physical world, apparently in order to obtain the vital strength that their bodies lacked.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to think of two clearly distinct perceptions of the soul. Common people's preoccupations and the religious ideas shared the same world in which they gradually flowed one into the other. It is more correct to speak of a hybrid complex of theories, a sort of chorus, in which we try to highlight the different voices.

1.2 Late medieval and early modern Europe: blood and the sealed body

In Europe blood themes emerge prominently in the ritual murder accusations made against the Jewish community during the late medieval period, which served to outline and exclude an ethnic and religious enemy, enforcing the Christian community. The blood libel was rooted in the religious complex of beliefs regarding the Eucharist and Christ's blood which actualized the power of salvation inside the human being, cleansing it from sin. The notion of the greedy vampire Jew, contrasted with Christian visionaries and saints, who shed their blood in a mystical effusion, reaching a union with God through their physical person. These practices and beliefs can initially be explained by the idea of a "grotesque", porous body, as Michail Bachtin has defined it, that is a place in which landmarks are constantly blurred, and new and old, decay and birth are drawn together. It is an open structure, a fleshy map

whose margins are continuously in contact with supernatural and natural elements.[9] This kind of body is never completely detached from its environment, but influenced by other bodies and external elements, even mirrored or translated into them. In the surrounding universe not only superhuman agents merged with human society, but individuals themselves could influence each other through the properties of their bodies. Yet, recently, Bettina Bildhauer has argued that the medieval view of bodies was more complex and based on a fundamental closed model which should be preserved. The bodily structure, its boundaries and openings, existed in relation to the movement of blood outside or inside it, causing life and death but also "violation and wholeness, pollution and cleansing, sin and redemption". Outlining the margins and henceforth the danger or the power which could derive from their transgression, the body was defined as the result of a cultural construction.[10] Considering both these visions and interpretations, it will emerge that the instability and the porosity of the body were due to the capacity of its fluid to move through and beyond it, becoming powerful and mortally dangerous, according to the people who shed or employed it. These ideas are manifest in the symbolism of Christ's own passion and blood, which was the basis of Christian society. As Caroline Walker Bynum has stated, in a religion founded on the enfleshment of its own God, the body was seen as an opportunity for redemption, more than of entrapment: "medieval piety (at least in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) speaks of life coming from death, of significance located in the body, of pain and suffering as the opportunity - even the cause – of salvation".[11]

The Christian body formed a unit with the soul and needed to be sealed against sin, spiritual enemies and the assault of the devil. Therefore, in the case of ritual murder accusations, blood became the principal symbol of a struggle to survive between two different social groups, one predominant and the other marginal though "invasive", but it also highlighted the fight at a spiritual level, where the holy blood was opposed to a weak, devilish one. In this regard the practice of drawing blood in late medieval and early modern Europe was attributed to Jews, human witches, but also to vampires and other supernatural creatures. These different types of aggressors, both real individuals and supernatural entities, found a point of convergence in the

[9] Michail Bachtin, *Rabelais and His World.* (Massachussets Institute of Technology, 1968), pp. 349-359

[10] Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp.6-7

[11] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion.* (New York: Zone Books**,** 1992), pp.116-117

contradictory representation of a body which was both enclosed and transient. In fact its enclosure is not permanent. It can be unsealed and endangered, or also redirected against other individuals: the dead against the living, the spiritually and physically impure against the healthy ones.

The unstable nature of the body was well manifested in women, whose blood "escaped" monthly through the process of menstruation. The evidence of female periodical bleeding placed women in a critical zone: the transgressive power of their blood should be contained, silenced and also controlled, targeting it as intrinsically negative. In her book, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero*, the feminist historian Peggy McCracken has discussed problems of gender and blood in the context of medieval French literature, reading the texts in relation to medical and religious beliefs, but also anthropological views. She showed two different models for male and female bleeding which deeply affected and influenced categories of gender and cultural values. She has argued that while male blood and bleeding is a public experience, connected to heroism, to lineage in familiar relationships and to sacrificial practises, female bleeding is a private matter, while women's blood, though connected with parturition and life, is often feared for its polluting qualities.[12] This discourse is a very relevant starting point, for example, for an examination of women as witches in the early modern period, but I will try to employ it in order to challenge gender ideas, discussing whether men, not necessarily distinguished by ethnic features, could share the same qualities of female blood. In other words, from a theory of gendered blood I will move to ideas of bad and good blood, often in opposition inside the same individual.

During the early modern period social conflicts were no longer reducible to tensions and racial hatred between different communities, but concerned the whole of Christian Europe, whose unity had been challenged by the changes and the processes of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Henceforth danger and enmity no longer concerned outsiders, but could spread from within. Thus we will see how late medieval witchcraft beliefs were emphasised during the witch-trials and in the witch-persecutions that, significantly, concerned European countries at a time when the struggle between Protestant and Catholic authority was crucial and stronger. A witch

[12] Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003)

could be recognized in everyone, and in his/her figure were concentrated the fears which ran through the continent.

Thus the first aim of the thesis is to focus on understanding the role of blood symbolism in the individuation of the aggressor and its relation with supernatural creatures who craved human blood. Blood themes will be discussed, therefore, to highlight why superhuman beings were attracted by the living community, and how the human witch could cooperate with them in directing his or her malevolence towards the other. At this point it could be asked if blood, being the source of life, was relevant only in its dangerous aspects. The answer is obviously negative. If we look back at the late medieval period this dual value of the fluid is confirmed. In her recent book *Wonderful Blood*, Caroline Walker Bynum has explored the meaning of blood in the religious life of late medieval northern Germany, focusing especially on the fifteenth century. She has stressed that the blood theme embodied several, often contrasting things, such as violence, love, devotion and passion, highlighting also that the same holy blood that saves human souls, spills out from Christ's wounds, violating the bodily order. "Blood is a sign of desecration that makes holy; hence it sets apart, it consacrates".[13] Positive and negative conceptions of blood mixed, when we consider more than one relevant field, such as theological speculation, medicine and philosophy and popular theories. Bynum also focused on the late medieval religious preoccupation with blood that concerned northern European countries. Considering the early modern period, I wonder how blood theories changed after the Reformation in those contexts were the presence of the religious symbolism of the fluid had been so fertile less than one century before. Comparing the Protestant and Catholic worlds, this thesis will show the extent which blood's power was demonized, becoming principally the vehicle for the devil, and where the fluid still retained its own magical properties. In Catholic countries saints' bleeding bodies, the cult of relics, but also love magic, although forbidden by the Church, expressed positive values of blood towards life that were all absent from the Protestant world. Did they simply disappear? Or it is better to think that blood's inner properties underwent a transformation, that the same cultural idea became concealed and implicit? Counter-magic recipes and beliefs, which we will examine in the chapter on England, seem to validate this last theory.

[13] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood. Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Germany and Beyond.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 16

Then, to better understand the functioning of blood in witchcraft symbolism and how it could enclose different dichotomies, (life-death, human-supernatural, and power-danger); medical treatises and theories will be examined. This choice is due primarily to the fact that diseases caused by supernatural powers had often, even in the early modern age, a recognised medical explanation, which was shared also by sceptical thinkers. An early modern learned individual could dismiss witchcraft as a satanic delusion, while continuing to believe in a concept of the body, where religious and medical ideas were deeply entangled. Thus the body will appear as a microcosm in which living fluids, blood and humours repeated the conflicts and also the useful connections that took place outside between opposing individuals (the witch and the victim), but also supernatural and human beings. Furthermore attention will not be exclusively centred on the witch's body, but also on the representation of the victim's, and also the superhuman agent related to blood. The final aim is to show that the qualities and behaviour of blood determined the individual's bodily and spiritual identity, but that this was not definitive. It could change, be reversed, following the pattern of blood that either nurtured or polluted.

Blood symbolism was not exclusive to late medieval and early modern Europe. It is a well known anthropological theme, which can be encountered in different periods, places and cultures across the world. It has been widely employed to investigate ideas on violence, danger and gender, questions which are all relevant for this thesis. Thus to have a wider comprehension of people and beliefs I will be informed by interdisciplinary research, drawing together, when necessary, anthropology and history, to open a variety of indicative comparisons between pre-industrial western societies and pre-industrial contemporary societies, without forgetting the specific cultural setting and particularity of the people concerned. In the next paragraph I will explain how the cooperation between history and anthropology can be useful to the present discussion, before showing the anthropological theories on blood which I will consider and apply.

1.3 History and Anthropology. Methodologies

In the 1990s the conjunction between history and anthropology was debated by historians and anthropologists in a collection of essays contained in the anthropological journal *Focaal*. The editors assert that anthropology has often been

sought by historians in order to put in their works a parallel with an "authentic human experience". The interdisciplinary approach generates two different research approaches: historical anthropology and anthropological history. The former is concerned with the use and the analysis of broader universal themes in the exploration of small groups, local historical realities; while the latter, connected to the field of cultural history, employs anthropology to discuss the history of a certain period and of social groups inscribed into it.[14] According to this distinction, the present work, focusing on the whole early modern Europe, though then comparing in more detail the contexts of England and Italy, seems to belong to this second category.

As Peter Burke recently underlined, anthropology is a relevant field of investigation for historians confronted with the problem of popular culture.[15] In fact anthropology gives us the possibility to focus on the importance of symbols, reflecting on their meaning inside a culture and also on the level of awareness of the people which used them. When written evidence of the past is lacking we can explore ethnographical material in which the symbol or subject we are interested in is relevant, to find not an unproblematic solution, but at least interesting "suggestions", "illuminating alternatives, instructive differences, visions of mutual estrangement".[16] Centuries, places, attitudes and cultures change, but the problems of people remain similar: survival, the struggle with misfortune, sickness and calamities, the experience of pain. In this regard Clifford Geertz's words on the use of anthropology in the interpretation of cultures are still valuable:

> The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said.[17]

[14] Don Kalb, Hans Marks, Herman Tak, "Historical anthropology and anthropological history: two distinct programs." *Focaal* 26/27 (1996), pp. 5-13. See also Don Kalb, Herman Tak (eds.), *Critical Junctions : anthropology and history beyond the cultural turn.* (Berghahn Books, 2005)
[15] Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?,* pp. 41
[16] Natalie Zemon Davies, "The possibilities of the past." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History.* No.12 (1981), p.10; Stephen Greenblatt, "The Eating of the Soul." *Representations* 48 (1994), pp. 97-116
[17] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 30

A good example of the possible collaboration between the two disciplines, which is also important for this thesis, is provided by a recent article by the historian Ronald Hutton on the approaches to witchcraft in both the disciplines.

Magical theories and the idea of sorcery are acknowledged worldwide. Although the witch-trials are a phenomenon which interested only the religious world of late medieval and early modern Europe and lately New England, the basic belief in the existence of witches and supernatural aggressors is to be found also in the distant context of modern pre-industrial cultures. Ronald Hutton has pointed out the strong influence of anthropology in cultural studies of witchcraft, starting from the debates of the seventies, particularly that between Keith Thomas and the anthropologist Hildred Geertz,[18] to contemporary use of comparative studies. He suggests that there are at least five characteristics that are universally valid for the witch-model: 1. non-physical means to harm; 2. the witch's activity inside, and against, a small community, that is through relations of neighbourhood or kinship; 3. social disapproval; 4. inheritance or a consolidated tradition behind the witch figure; 5. counter-magic, that is the possibility to defend from witchcraft. What is equally relevant is that witchcraft is not always encountered in other cultures. Both in the present and in the past, some societies lack the figure of the witch, while in others the phenomenon can have peculiar, determinate characteristics without exhaustive comparisons outside. Widening the horizons will be useful in the attempt to explore the mentalities of the people who had to cope with the anxieties and the alleged diseases arising from witchcraft, but who did not leave their testimony in treatises or documents. If we must remember that the phenomenon we are analyzing is featured by the culture in which it is settled, we have also to be aware of the fact that is the struggle with certain basic problems more than the frames in which cultures set them, that is common to all the societies.[19]

When one applies this to blood themes the use of anthropology appears still more valuable. In fact while the presence and power of witches is not universally attested, beliefs regarding blood and the body belong to every society. Relying on this universality the historian Melissa L Meyer has written a comprehensive book on

[18] Hildred Geertz and Keith Thomas, "An anthropology of religion and magic: two views."*Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6 (1975), pp. 71-110

[19]Ronald Hutton, "Anthropological and Historical Approaches to Witchcraft: potential for a new collaboration." *The Historical Journal* 47(2) (2004), pp. 413-434

rituals, beliefs, and meanings of blood ranging from prehistoric contexts to contemporary cultures and drawing together history, anthropology and also archaeological research. Starting from the symbolism of blood in the dichotomy life-death, she has identified useful categories in which the fluid is culturally and religiously valuable, such as the crucial passages of social and individual existence, conception, birth, adulthood, and ideas on sacrifice, and on gender and identity.[20] According to these categories blood, but also its qualities, such as the redness or the liquid density, can be linked to themes of violence, diversity, social acceptance or exclusion. So, for example, the anthropologist Uli Linke has discussed violence inside German national and political culture, from the rise of Nazi-fascism to nowadays, employing blood images and their relation to gender and ethnic differences. Particularly she has worked on the dangerous meaning of women's blood issuing out of bodily margins opposed to 'healthy' male blood, which was kept inside. Thus the construction of the enemy, in this case the Jew, was based on his feminization through a blood imagery that can be traced back to the enduring medieval European belief of the menstruating male Jew. In fascist racial discourse, at the basis of the Holocaust, Jews were seen as an infection and further "liquidated" that is primarily reduced to blood which flowing out could pollute, but could be equally washed away, and then consumed, dried up by fire.[21] Linke's work demonstrates how anthropological theories can be successfully employed to interpret historical periods, focusing not only on the facts, but on their symbolical importance for the people involved. In this regard blood and body is a sort of map of memory that can be decoded and translated into an understandable language.

While I will use different anthropological sources to draw comparisons with European blood themes, I will focus mostly on relatively old works, such as the books by René Girard and Mary Douglas from the late Sixties and the Seventies for theoretical approaches. In fact they are still valuable and, as I will discuss in the next paragraph, they can be applied to the early modern age in order to highlight the relation that existed between the representation of the body and that of society. On the contrary, contemporary books, such as Melissa L. Meyer's *Thicker than Water*

[20] Melissa L. Meyer, *Thicker than Water. The Origins of Blood as Symbol and Ritual.* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005)
[21] Uli Linke, "Gendered Difference, Violent Imaginations. Blood, Race and Nation." *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (September 1997), pp. 559-573. See also Uli Linke, *Blood and Nation: The European Aesthetics of Race.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999)

(2005), widely consider blood-symbolism but do not necessarily add anything substantively new to the ideas already expressed by previous anthropologists.

1.4 Blood, power and violence. Anthropological views

Representing the vital force hidden inside the body, blood encapsulates both life, when it moves regularly within physical boundaries and death when it issues from them or when its movements are somehow stopped or hindered. It can represent the continuity and the legacy of existence and reproduction, but also corruption and frailty when it is dried up, wasted or polluted. Due to its liquid nature it becomes a prominent symbol of the instability of human nature. It cannot be fixed, it is able to nurture existence and, at the same time, to alter it, spreading inside it the negative qualities of sickness and decay. Blood constitutes the vehicle through which the body affirms its centrality to the construction of a society and its cultural identity. As the anthropologist Mary Douglas stated:

> The body is a model which can stand for every bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.[22]

The rules which determine a social order, influencing patterns of exclusion and inclusion, reflect the bodily enclosures represented by the protection of the skin and of the hard skeleton. Yet Douglas also argued that "the physical body is polarized conceptually against the social body" and that "the anxiety about bodily margins expresses danger to group survival".[23]

In fact the physical state shows the limits of the human being, endangering the attempts to establish safe, solid cultural spaces. In this regard blood is the emblem of

[22] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*. (London and New York: Routledge 2002), p.142
[23] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 154

a certain permeability which concerns both the body and society. It is a vehicle of power and transgression and it can be employed to enforce the individual, consolidate human relations and alliances, but it can also become the channel for deadly intruders. So, for example, in the ritual practices of different cultures (from Africa to South-Eastern Asia and Australia) collected in the pioneering book *Les rites de passages* by A. Van Gennep, blood is used in the rites of aggregation. It is shared as a means of communion, as for example during marriages, when the future husband drinks the blood of the future wife and vice versa. Through the fluid they actualize and integrate their life-force in each other, and in this way they gain a social value as a couple, an active part of the whole, able to enforce it through new descendants. Blood is here considered as the principal nourishment of life. The same concept is stressed in a more recent book on Australian aboriginal people, for whom

> Blood is a carrier of life-force, which diffuses through a person's body, radiating life and energy. It is a non-renewable resource that is recycled between generations. Blood is also infused with the qualities and potencies of a person. During initiation ceremonies, novices drink the blood of ritually experienced men in order to imbibe their qualities and strength. Blood is a medium of exchange between the living and the dead and between different life-forms.[24]

Developing this idea, in Stith Thompson' s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* we find again blood as a wonderful drink (*D 1041 Blood as a magic drink; D 1335.2.1 Blood as magic strengthening drink),* capable of restoring health and youth. Yet if we focus on this use of blood for a moment it will be clear that it has a double meaning: on one hand blood is an enriching substance, on the other one it entails a transgressed margin and therefore the risk of loss. It empowers the receiver, while it weakens the giver. Furthermore, the symbolism of life and death lies close to that of health and disease. Thus inside blood fertility and nourishing properties are close to the source of contagion and wasting. The idea of blood as a means of exchange implies that both the positive and negative qualities of the person, healthy and sick blood, can be equally transmitted. Dealing with blood and boundaries we have to consider not only

[24] Arnold Van Gennep, *I riti di passaggio.* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri,1981), pp.26-28, 114-115; Heather McDonald, *Blood, Bones and Spirit. Aboriginal Christianity in an East Kimberly Town.* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), pp.107-108

the regular or the irregular movement of the fluid, but also its inner qualities. The ingestion, acquisition or loss of blood is strongly connected to the features of the fluid: beside an enlivening blood, there is also a polluting, bad one. So, for example, if we consider two different manifestation of the bodily liquid, milk and menstrual blood, we will have in the first case an empowered, healthy blood which transmits life from the mother to the newborn child, and which is employed in the making of dairy foods, while in the second case we are confronted with discharged matter, that must be kept out of any sensorial contact. Nevertheless, in both cases, the issuing of blood symbolizes an alteration of a normal status, enriching or impoverishing it. Therefore it indicates the potential vulnerability of the individual through the body, which is perceived as a gateway both towards the human dimension and the otherworld, precluded to man by his mortality.

When blood is shed we enter what the anthropologist René Girard has defined as the sacrificial dimension of violence, in which the body is employed and disrupted in order to preserve or dismantle a social balance. According to Girard sacrifice is, more than a means of atonement to obtain the gods' benevolence, a way to redirect the violence which affects the whole community. While violence is generated by actions that abolish differentiations and boundaries of every type, from ethnical to physical and parental, sacrifice re-establishes the differences, through the annihilation of a chosen victim, the scapegoat, which is not the symbol of innocence, but of the impurity that must be destroyed.[25] "The function of ritual is to 'purify' violence, that is, to 'trick' violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals". This process of destruction and purification passes through the language of the body, crossed, disrupted and washed by blood.

> Blood that dries on the victim soon loses its viscous quality and becomes first a dark sore, then a roughened scab. Blood that is allowed to congeal on its victim is the impure product of violence, illness, or death. In contrast to this contaminated substance is the fresh blood of newly slaughtered victims, crimson and free flowing?

[25] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*. (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 2-4,58

Blood displays the double potential of violence and its own duality: it is the symbol of danger when congealed on the body' surface, a kind of dark mark indicating impurity, it is the emblem of vitality when issuing freely.

> The physical metamorphosis of spilt blood can stand for the double nature of violence.... blood serves to illustrate the point that the same substance can stain or cleanse, contaminate or purify, drive men to fury and murder or appease their anger and restore them to life.[26]

As the object of a contest between order and disorder, it also indicates the alleged guilty individuals or the preferred victims. Identities are contained and displayed in the bodies according to their relation to blood. Aggression, danger and power not only depend on people's will, but can be linked to the qualities and the behaviour of their blood itself. Following the dichotomy pure-impure, the division will be between people identified by a wasted, clogged, polluting blood and those who possess a fresh, vital fluid, running in their bodies. Yet we have also to consider that the distinction is not definitive. Being a liquid substance, blood's properties can in fact be changed and influenced by both internal and external factors. So a normal healthy body can be reversed, becoming a contagious, spoiled one. This is the case with the already mentioned menstrual blood, which can be equally seen as an obnoxious matter, spreading disease and 'malevolence', and as the symbol of fertility.[27] Anthropological beliefs regarding menstruation are also useful to focus the attention on both the specific quality of blood and the relation with the body where it is contained. Is menstrual blood intrinsically negative, or does it acquire its fearful features when escaping out of physical boundaries?

It is worth discussing a few anthropological examples which highlight the different interpretations. In Papua New Guinea attention was directed towards the process of discharge. An abnormal flux of menstrual blood could in fact be evidence for witchcraft, reversing the nurturing features of maternity into spoiling, deadly ones. Among the Bimin-Kuskusmin people "witches menstruated continuously, even while pregnant, and lactated menstrual blood".[28] Among the Yupik Eskimo menstrual matter retains a double power: if on one side it has medical properties, employed in

[26] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 37-38
[27] Melissa L. Meyer, *Thicker than Water*, pp.125-131
[28] Melissa L. Meyer, *Thicker than Water*, p.131

the cure of several diseases, on the other it is a menace for the living creatures, especially for a man's "breath soul" (the soul that is settled in the head). If the man gets in touch with menstrual vapours, rising from the female body, he can become mad, or lose the necessary mental concentration to focus on the hunt.[29]

A very complex relation of fluids inside the female body, that resumes the meanings attributed to menstruation, can be found in the Jewish Karaite tradition, where the menstruating woman is a danger to the lactating one. If the two women meet and the former moves towards the other, looking at her, the second one's milk is believed to stop.

> The point of encounter between the menstruating woman and the lactating woman is in fact a zone of 'confrontation' between two 'liminal personae'. Symbolically the two women compete not over an abstract position of power, but rather over matters of immediate physical significance: fertility and the production of milk.

The substance that helps the lactating woman to get her milk back after the encounter with the menstruating one is urine, which is almost transparent and not so thick as blood or milk. Probably its shapeless nature and its weak connotation in terms of power are the best remedy to nullify the negative contrast.

> The urine of the lactating woman flows over the urine of the menstruating woman in order to reconcile the tension between two forces. If urinating is a symbolic act that forces the presence and reality of the body to the ground, then what we have at the end of the ritual is a congruence of the two bodies over the ground with the milk covering the surface of blood.[30]

Urine has no link with reproduction, it is a bodily liquid deprived of strength, through which the other two fluids can express them. This last example is telling us that although necessary, broken or trespassed boundaries bring always certain disquiet.

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[29] Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Boundaries and Passages. Rule and Ritual in Yup'ik Eskimo Oral Tradition.* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), pp. 165-169

[30] Ruth Tsoffar, "The Body as Storyteller: Karaite Women's Experience of Blood and Milk." *Journal of American Folklore* 117(463) (2004), pp. 8, 15

But it also suggests that an exploration of blood entails a comprehension of its links with all the bodily fluids in which it can be changed or that can alter its flow.

The anthropological discourse on menstrual blood shows that, being a female phenomenon, it is strongly gendered, indicating women as a special group inside society both feared and powerful. Although menstruation can be included in a larger discussion on bleeding which concerned men as well, while men bleed occasionally, and generally if wounded, women do that regularly, naturally breaking physical boundaries.

Thus, adopting these anthropological theories, this work is the first attempt to investigate the role played by the beliefs regarding the body and blood in the context of early modern Europe, aiming to demonstrate how they affected deeply the categories of religion and gender, and influenced the social conflicts which resulted in the witch-trials.

1.5 Chapters' outline

Looking at both Protestant and Catholic Europe the present work will try to show how the perception of blood changed in the context of magic, religious and medical theories and the extent to which there were significant similarities between the 'common' people in Protestant and Catholic countries. The first three chapters focus on general ideas on blood, while the last two consider the beliefs in a Protestant country, England, compared to the Catholic Mediterranean and Italian area, which is explored in the final chapter. Before outlining the chapters, it is necessary to comment on the use of primary sources in this thesis. It will be clear from the bibliography that English primary printed sources outnumber the Italian ones. This is partly due to the difficulty of accessing Italian archives, which are poorly catalogued if at all. For example, while I have made considerable use of British online resources such as EEBO, I could not do the same for the Italian early modern period. So I had to rely mostly on Italian primary printed sources, available in both the British Library and in the Italian National Libraries, and on secondary works in order to draw significant comparisons with the English material.

Witchcraft beliefs are analyzed in the first chapter, pointing out the Protestant conception of the devil's pact, where blood was explicitly involved, theological and

popular descriptions of the witch's mark, the painless spot on the bodies of the accused, the presence of bodily fluids in maleficent magic, and the employment of blood and the body in the construction of an ideal human enemy. In the witch-figure that emerges, supernatural elements, such as unnatural blood-thirst and the capacity to harm through magic, are linked to a gender stereotype, according to which witches had to be generally old and female. Then, looking at the significance of blood, I will attempt to give an explanation for the stereotypical witch, but will also show that each body had the potential for magical activity. If, as according to theologians, this depended exclusively on the satanic compact, we will see how in popular culture the existence of witches reflected a more complex emotional universe where concern with the body and the physical reality were central.

The second chapter focuses on the relationship between supernatural beings and human blood. Three kinds of creatures are considered: fairies, vampires and werewolves. All of them were concerned with the soul. Fairies, often ascribed to the realm of the dead, used to steal bodily liquids, mainly milk, in order to nourish themselves, while vampires pushed by blood-thirst against the living community also embodied the power of the soul to reanimate a decaying body. Finally, with werewolves the unity of the soul and the corporeal was strengthened, but also distorted, in the idea of the monstrous transformation. Detached from life, or, as in the case of the werewolves, from their ordinary course, these beings embodied religious and physical deviance and so were linked to the imagery of the witch.

In the third chapter the ideas of the Aristotelian and Galenic models of medicine are explored, such as humoral theory and the link between soul and body as expressed by blood, as well as the discovery of blood circulation and the first experiments in transfusion in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Attention is especially directed towards the dichotomy of bad and good blood, which was central in the diagnosis of sickness. It also entailed the connection between blood and the moral sphere, imagination and feelings, all important things in the early modern debate on the reality of witchcraft. The final part of the chapter focuses on menstruation and the divergent perception of the necessary process of discharge and menstrual matter itself, universally seen with suspicion. This discourse will also concern the gender categories which I have mentioned previously.

In the fourth chapter the English witchcraft context is analyzed in more detail. Marginal in the broader picture of the great witch-hunts which were going on in

central Europe, England had a relative low percentage of witch prosecutions and executions. Yet the demonological treatises by English thinkers and preachers, the centrality of *maleficium* in the prosecutions, and some distinctive features related to notions regarding blood, make English witch-beliefs interesting for exploring both the impact of Protestantism on ideas regarding the body, and the survival of Catholic faith and fairy tradition in popular culture. In the last chapter the focus moves to Italy and the Mediterranean. Examining blood beliefs connected to witchcraft and religion, I will discuss the analogies and the differences with the Protestant world. The starting point will be the Catholic idea of the sacred revealed in the world, showing the link between physical reality and supernatural forces. Such theory, when used or interpreted by common people, often lost its divine content, highlighting instead the extraordinary properties of bodies and 'things'. As well as the comparisons between Italian and English witches and the art of *maleficium*, other uncommon individuals, particularly the saints, who manifested godly rather than demonic power, will also be examined in the context of popular beliefs which were often nurtured by Catholic religious ideas. In this context blood itself became a magical object.

2. Drawing blood: The devil's pact and witchcraft

2.1 Blood and witchcraft

Theories regarding the body played an important part in the complex of witchcraft beliefs which nourished the period of the trials and persecutions in Europe. The witch-body became the evidence of a dangerous power according to the mentalities of both common and learned people: the accusers, the judges and the accused themselves. The body and especially its fluid, the blood, became the means of exchange between a supernatural force and the physical world, highlighting the instability inscribed in certain individuals and defining the ideal status of both victims and aggressors.

In this first chapter we will discuss the presence of the blood theme in the culture of late medieval Europe and how it evolved in the context of the witch-trials. Blood will appear at the centre of a discrimination process, which catalyzed religious and social conflicts, individuating the ideal enemy in different kinds of social groups: the Jews and then women, old or poor people, categories which were ascribed to the witch-stereotype. Arriving to the witch we will be confronted with a first question: has the witch-figure a correspondence in the real accused? And how through the discourse on blood, is possible to explain the presence of alleged witches which differed from the stereotyped one? To understand this we will examine the involvement and the importance of blood in European witchcraft beliefs, analyzing both the ideas of diabolism and *maleficium*. While the first belonged more strictly to the religious field and was determined by Catholic and Protestant theories, the second was prominent in the accusations and embodied social and individual problematic relationships inside the community. How, therefore, were religious motifs assimilated in the confessions and the tales of common people? And how did popular theories of blood influence the writers of theological treatises?

In such discussion blood is the key-symbol which combines supernatural elements with natural ones. Thus the study of its representation constitutes a good starting point to explore the relation between an otherworldly and a human dimension which was so important in the process of the Reformation. In fact on the one hand, being the primary token for the work of the devil and its demons, it acquires the status of

extraordinary substance within demonological speculation. On the other it is the real, subtracted force present in the human body.

To investigate to what extent the two natures of the liquid mixed in the perception of people in relation to witchcraft and the power to harm we need to consider the meaning of blood in the Christian world, where it enclosed the redemptive power of Jesus' sacrifice, together with its physical symbolism of life and health. We will therefore deal with the representation of the devil in witchcraft narratives, underlining the centrality of the satanic pact and how it depended on the *otherness* implicit in the figure of the witch. Consequently the question of harmful magic will be considered in conjunction with the spaces where witchcraft was supposed to happen, involving people directly and hindering the normal course of life. In this environment we will finally be able to follow the blood path through the problems of gender and identity concerning witch-beliefs, which pointed strongly, but not exclusively towards a continental model of the female witch.

2.2 Intruders: from Jews to witches

Blood themes in early modern Europe are integral to the belief in witchcraft and the diffusion of witch-trials. The bodily liquid constituted the most important means of exchange between the devil and his allies. Blood was placed at the centre of a social conflict, where the dangerous *others* were members of the community who sacrificed their human and religious identity to the principal supernatural enemy. As we are going to see, the liquid became the physical evidence of the fears and the tensions which ran through the continent, functioning as the indicator of victims and aggressors, determining people's identities through their own bodies. Nevertheless, the prominence of blood in patterns of social and religious exclusion and violence was not a novelty of the early modern age. In fact it had been at the centre of the ritual murder accusations against the Jews in late medieval Europe.

According to the blood libel belief, Jews killed Christian children, draining their bodies of blood as part of an alleged plot against Christendom. They were said subsequently to employ the pure blood for religious and magical practices and to cure several diseases from which they were thought to suffer. Some scholars have explored the religious meanings of the blood libel belief and regard it as having

originated in both the Jewish and Christian traditions of Europe.[31] Others have examined cases of alleged ritual murder mentioned in official records, chapbooks and early literature and have discussed their impact on people's mentalities.[32] Finally, the figure of the Jew has been analysed, pointing to a dehumanised portrayal of his bodily features in a variety of sources, and his marginalisation in an ideal Christian world.[33] The impact of the blood libel was so strong on the mentalities that at the end of the sixteenth century, the Protestant English writer, John Foxe, in his *Actes and Monuments*, was still mentioning it to defend attacks on the Jews by the nobility and populace.[34] Similarly when in 1656 Jews had been readmitted in England, the puritan barrister William Prynne was still writing about their "usual practice of crucifying children almost every year",[35] even if almost two centuries has passed from the alleged cases of ritual murder in Western Europe.

In accordance with their blood-thirst Jews had anomalous, monstrous bodies: they had devilish horns attached to their forehead, an unnatural pale skin, they smelled, they suffered from blindness at birth, a copious menstrual flux affected both adult men and women, and they had extraordinary long lives.[36] Thus they appeared as dangerous living dead ready to aggress the Christian community in order to empower themselves.

This concept was well highlighted in the geography displayed in the thirteenth century *Ebstorf Mappa Mundi* ("Ebstorf World's Map"). The map shows the known world inscribed in Christ's own body, whose head, hands and feet point in the

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[31] Herman Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice: Human Blood and Jewish Ritual. An Historical and Sociological Inquiry.* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1909); Cecil Roth, "The Feast of Purim and the Origins of the Blood Accusation." *Speculum* 8, no. 4 (1933), 520-6; R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder. Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1988); Massimo Introvigne, *Cattolici, Antisemitismo e Sangue. Il mito dell'omicidio rituale*. (Milano: Sugarco Edizioni, 2004)

[32] Joseph Jacobs, "Little St. Hugh of Lincoln: Research in History, Archaeology and Legend." In Alan Dundes (ed.) *The Blood Libel Legend* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1991), pp. 41-71; Gavin I. Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder." *Speculum* 59, no. 4 (1984), pp. 820-846; Gillian Bennett, "Towards a Revaluation of the Legend of 'Saint' William of Norwich and its Place in the Blood Libel Legend." *Folklore* 116, no. 2 (2005), pp. 119-139

[33] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983)

[34] John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*. (London: John Daye, 1570), p.213

[35] William Prynne, *A short demurrer to Jewes.* (London: Edward Thomas, 1656), Part 1, pp. 31-32. For early modern attitude towards Jews in England see also John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, p. 213.

[36] Venetia Newall, "The Jew as a Witch-Figure." In Venetia Newall (ed.), *The Witch Figure* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 114; Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 50-51; R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, pp. 2, 127-128

direction of the four cardinal points.[37] At the edge of the north-eastern corner of the map there are two naked men who are biting bleeding human feet and hands, and between them a naked distressed person is bleeding from his severed limbs. The caption underneath states: "Here Alexander [the Great] has enclosed the two unclean people, Gog and Magog, who will accompany the Antichrist. They eat human flesh and drink blood." Distinguished by marked Semitic features and referred to as the "Red Jews" in several medieval German texts, the dreadful Gog and Magog are illustrative of the unpleasant, frightening and invasive nature which a predominantly Christian Europe was then attributing to the Jewish community. But the origin and significance of the Gog and Magog characteristics attributed to the Jews are far more ancient. They appear for the first time in biblical tradition, where, in the book of Genesis, they are ascribed to the tribes descended from Japhet and, therefore, excluded from the elect people descended from Shem (Gen., 10:2-4). In the Books of Ezekiel and Revelation, the two monsters represent the pagan threat and the forces summoned by Satan in the final war against God (Ez, 38:15, 39:11; Rev, 20:7-8). As Victor I. Scherb explains, Gog and Magog indicate whoever and whatever does not belong to the chosen people, who are both the Jews of the Old Testament and the Christians of late classical and medieval times. Cultural and social identity is also built on consensus and exclusion. In this regard, the two monsters symbolise the dangerous other, demarcating a boundary they are always trying to cross; they embody the subversive powers against which the solidarity of a people is reinforced.[38] They cannot, however, be eliminated or put completely outside the world, as their position in the *Ebstorf Mappa Mundi* shows. As Bildhauer has highlighted, their enclosure on the map is not absolute:[39] they not only inhabit a liminal space, but carry also the ambiguity of marginality, looking like humans but acting like monsters. They are able to attack and to enter the society that rejects them, sucking the blood that encloses its spiritual and vital value. To understand the menace they represent we have to interpret their behaviour and the nature of blood, considering the chosen victim, which is both the unlucky individual with the severed limbs, and the *Corpus Mysticum*, the physical and the spiritual body. Christ's blood is believed by Christians to cleanse the human soul of mortal sin and to secure the

[37] Bettina Bildhauer, "Blood, Jews and Monsters in Medieval Culture." In Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Millis (eds.), *The Monstrous Middle Ages.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003),p.79
[38] Victor I. Scherb, "Assimilating Giants: The Appropriation of Gog and Magog in Medieval and Early Modern England." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, no. 1 (2002), pp. 59-61
[39] Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, pp.158-161

religious community. Thus, by sucking blood from the wounded man, the two monsters are desecrating and stealing the instrument of salvation, with the purpose of attacking the whole of Christianity.

Nevertheless, it seems that destruction is not the only aim of Gog and Magog. In the bodily domain Gog and Magog are related to blood in the same way in which danger is close to power. Blood penetrates and escapes from the flesh, either providing the vital force or taking it away. Drinking the bodily fluid, therefore, has a double function—that of consuming a living being to empower another. The two allegoric creatures are nourished by the essential substance which they extract, and which enables them to adversely affect the individual and social body which they are maiming, or, as the adjective "unclean" suggests, pollute it. Opposed to an order where blood controls physical health and seals a pact for salvation between a divine agent and its people, uncleanness represents the disrupted state where the bodily fluid is transposed, staining and dismantling the ideal integrity. Then, while the fear expressed by the monstrous beings finds a visible and, therefore, a destructible form in the ethnical and religious difference embodied by the Jews, the power they actualise is "associated with beginnings and endings".[40] It moves between the two poles of life and death, between which society attempts to consolidate its space for survival.

The idea of a ritual murder at the base of conflicts between different groups was not related only to the Jews and the Christians. According to Norman Cohn in his study of the origins of witchcraft, "the murder and the cannibalistic feast form part of a ritual by which a group of conspirators affirm its solidarity; and in each case the group's aim is to overthrow an existing ruler or regime and to seize power".[41] The bloodshed of ritual murder could be seen, therefore, as being not the only testimony to the alleged conspiratorial character of the Jew in medieval Europe. In early fourteenth-century France, Jews had been accused, along with lepers and Saracens, of being involved in a plot to destroy Christian society through the poisoning of water sources.[42] One recipe purportedly given to a leper by a Jew contained reference to human blood and urine, three kinds of herbs, and the body of Jesus Christ.[43] The use of blood in conjunction with the Host in this last case suggests also a clear magical

[40] Victor I. Scherb, "Assimilating Giants", 59
[41] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (Sussex University Press, 1975), p.7
[42] Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia Notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba.* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), 5.27
[43] Sophia Menache, ""Faith, Myth and Politics: The Stereotype of the Jews and their Expulsion from England and France." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 75, no. 4 (1985), 369

purpose, which had a strong resemblance to Christian popular practices, more than to Jewish ones. Johann Eck, the influential sixteenth-century German theologian, explained, for example, how many Christian individuals' despoiled wayside crucifixes to make magical amulets from the pieces they stole. Yet, we need to consider, as Trachtenberg argues, why these mutilated images—unlike the Host—were not said to bleed, and why Eck forgot to mention this point.[44]

At the light of the importance of the Holy Host blood became an integral part of the ritual murder accusation, where it was not mentioned until the late thirteenth century. In fact, as Trachtenberg has emphasised, many of the earlier accusations against Jews were only vaguely supported and the ritual use of dead children and blood was not specified as something Jews engaged in, although there was mention of the "abstraction of the blood and other parts of the body," and reference to the head of a Bernese boy, Rudolph, said to have been severed by Jews in 1294.[45] It is then probable that the blood libel legend, as we understand it, began when the idea of ritual murder became entwined with the crime of Host desecration, which was first attributed to the Jews in Belitz, a German town close to Berlin, where in 1243, all the Jews of the community were burned at the stake. The Host was believed to have been stolen either for magical purposes or to be ritually mutilated so that it would bleed copiously. In the fourteenth century, when the notion that Christian blood was required by Jews for mock-crucifixions during the celebration of Passover, came to the fore, the picture was complete, the boundary had been crossed. Jews were believed to be shedding, stealing and finally employing the substance of life to empower themselves.[46]

Furthermore the belief at the origin of the crime was not to be found in Jewish religious tradition, where the use of blood was forbidden. Blood retained for the Jews a sacral force which could not be managed by people, but belonged exclusively to God.[47] According to the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy blood contained "the life of the flesh", that is the soul, and therefore could not be consumed by human people (Lev. 18: 10-11 Deut. 12: 23-4). Significantly it was properly due to this connection between blood and soul that the blood accusation was diffused in Christian Europe. The belief was in fact strictly linked to Christian magical tradition

[44] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jew*, pp. 99-101; 121
[45] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jew*, pp. 126, 135-137; Herman Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice*, pp. 186-188
[46] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jew*, pp. 114, 134-135
[47] Cristiano Grottanelli, *Il sacrificio.* (Bari: Laterza, 1999), pp. 46-49

and to the diffused crime of host desecration, during which the holy wafer could bleed, revealing the concealed Christ's living body.[48] Christian blood was considered powerful and healthy because it contained the soul that had been washed by the sacrifice of Christ, who was still present in the host. Henceforth Jews, deprived of the eternal life, desired the blood to share the divine salvation.

Up to early modern times the reality of ritual murder was acknowledged and the idea that Jews secretly recognised the divine person of Jesus was diffused. In seventeenth-century England, the preacher John Donne was still affirming that Jews used Christian blood to paint the body of their dead in order to assure them salvation, in the event that Christ was indeed the real Messiah. Such beliefs, as James Shapiro has emphasised, highlighted both the murderous menace represented by the Jews and the universal value of Christianity.[49] Despite lacking evidence the accusation served, therefore, to target an ethnic and religious enemy, a scapegoat, to which the Christian community could address its own fears, anxieties and unresolved conflicts. Blood drew the separation line. On one side there were the blood-spoilers, with their defective bodies and their negative feelings, on the other the community, cleansed and preserved by the divine blood of the Saviour. The liquid constituted together physical and spiritual life and the spectre of decay: it was healthy and rich inside Christian people, poor and sick inside the Jewish ones. The dichotomy between existence and death, divine and diabolical was then resolved in the same corporeal substance, and therefore communal margins and bodily ones had to be sealed in order to prevent its dangerous dispersion.

Nevertheless the explicit ethnical and religious difference of the Jews marked them clearly as dangerous intruders, which could therefore be localized and expelled. When the witch took the place of the Jew, landmarks became more confused and Christian magical and religious beliefs turned against the members of the community: everyone could be identified as a witch, the ally of the devil, sealing a pact with him and renouncing to the Christian faith.

2.3 The devil's brood and the cannibalistic feast

[48] Herman Strack, *The Jew and Human Sacrifice*, pp. 130-132; R.Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder,*pp. 43-51; 75

[49] James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 107

The witch itself was not an original invention of the early modern period. Witches or sorcerers accused of *maleficium*, that is the capacity to harm other individuals by supernatural means, had operated in the known world since antiquity, but the presence of such people did not imply their persecution. It is during the late medieval period, that the witch started to be seen as the personification of the theological evil, becoming not just a single malevolent person, but the member of a sect of devil worshippers, which through and beyond the physical body of society, attempted to destroy its spiritual order. Even if the Catholic Church was primarily responsible for creating the diabolic witch, consequently both Catholics and Protestants fought witches in the attempt to christianise Europe, and especially its rural people, among whom magic and ancient pagan beliefs still diffused and mingled with Christian ideas. Christina Larner argued that Christianity was "the first political ideology of Europe", moving together the religious and the judicial system, in a time in which religion was fundamental for the legitimacy of power and the construction of a united political identity. The witch was therefore the perfect object for the purpose, representing

> not merely erroneous beliefs about Christianity but the total hostility to it. Furthermore, although the pursuit of heretics, Jews, or Moors, could serve a similar purpose, it might arouse discontent, particularly among other heretics, Jews, or Moors, and some countries were without such categories of person. The pursuit of witches could only be applauded. It was done on behalf of the community distressed by their activities. Heresy-hunting might be divisive; witch-hunting united people.[50]

Although this interpretation is controversial,[51] and Larner did not acknowledge the importance of local realities or of tensions inside small communities, the statement can be used here to highlight the continuous attempt to draw resistant boundaries inside a society, against the menace of death and disruption. The features of the

[50] Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The witch-hunt in Scotland.* (London: Chatto e Windus, 1981), p. 195. For a discussion of the attitude towards witchcraft by the Catholic and Protestant Church see: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* pp. 437-440; Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe.* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 437-490

[51] See for example Brian P.Levack, "State-building and witch hunting in early modern Europe". In Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, Gareth Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft in early modern Europe. Studies in Culture and Belief.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 96-115

witch-figure, which could in theory be manifested in every kind of individual, exacerbated this attitude. Furthermore, they strongly reflected fears that were at the core of human psychology, more than the result of external influences.

As Kieckhefer demonstrated, the new idea of witchcraft consisted of the overlapping of religion and magic, of theologians' "learned notions" about diabolism with the popular beliefs concerning sorcery. In philosophical terms a justification was found in the diffused Aristotelian theories, according to which magic could not act independently in the world, but only thanks to the intervention of a spiritual agent: "The populace adhered to the simpler belief in the power inherent in a witch or her actions, whereas the learned elite insisted repeatedly that the witch of herself has no magical power, and that all she does, she does through the mediation of demons."[52] Witchcraft became the greatest heresy, because it implied the renunciation to God through a declared allegiance with Satan. But, as Norman Cohn has underlined in his work on the background of the witch-hunt, the main features of this emerging diabolical cult are not to be found far from Christianity itself. Christian literature was haunted by demons and by the dramatized representation of the Devil which was depicted in animal or disquieting anthropomorphic form and connotated by a heavy smell, in contrast with the spiritual elements exalted by the Christian faith. Yet the devilish monstrosity, that during medieval times had been an attribute of the Jews, was now not only the materialization of a dangerous *otherness*. It could be no more marginalized as the evidence of a different ethnic and religious group, but it could, instead, manifest itself in every individual belonging to the community, which became part of the satanic congregation. Considering this, we are going to see how, beyond the religious tensions, the gruesome, "extraordinary" physical experience of the new enemies was targeting the idea of a corporeal power that Christianity was going to depreciate with the age of Reformation.

The flowing of blood traced, in this respect, the landmark between the bodily and spiritual world involved in the belief, between a polluting carnal agent and a pure moral one, and it was traceable in the two main features of the accusation of diabolism: the sabbath and the demonic pact contracted with the Devil.

The notion of a nocturnal secret meeting of witches developed in its most known form in the fifteenth century in southern Switzerland and northern Italy, and it

[52] Robert Kiekhefer, *European Witch Trials. Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500.* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 83

consisted of the fusion of ancient popular beliefs, referring to agrarian cults and to the processions of ghosts guided by goddesses such as Diana, Hecate, Holda, Perchta and of the clerical and judicial ideas of a maleficent coven, built up over years of heretics' persecution. The sabbath worked as an inverted Christian rite. The Holy Mass in fact established the union between God and His people and the human community shared Christ's own purity through the sacrament of Eucharist; through the sabbath the Devil contaminated witches with his own evil power, giving them the necessary, un-human capacity to harm. Although demonologists adopted the Augustinian idea according to which no evil was possible in the world if not to result in a greater good, this sounded quite faintly against the gruesome, dramatic actions performed by the Devil's brood.

The behaviour of the witch at the sabbath appeared for the first time in the confession of the Italian Matteuccia di Francesco at Todi, on the 20th March of 1428. To attend the coven she anointed herself in a peculiar unguent made of the blood of nocturnal and rapacious birds and of infants killed for the purpose. Consequently, she evoked the demon Lucibello, who manifested to her in the shape of a he-goat; then she rode it and they flew to the hazel of Benevento, where many witches were assembled around Lucifer himself.[53] Some of the main elements were already displayed: infanticide, the shape-shifting ability (later attributed to the witch herself), the flight, the adoration of the Devil. They will recur in the demonological treatises of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, that described the sabbath as a meeting where witches danced, consumed banquets, copulated with the demons, made poisonous concoctions, planned the future evil actions, and shared the company of filthy animals such as vipers, lizards and toads. Lust and consummation were the most significant tracts of the reunions. Salt and bread were missing from the banquet because they were Christian elements, but the lack of salt, employed to preserve food, suggested also a not durable state, the wasting of life implied in a relation with devilish forces.

The emerging contrast with the Christian ritual is evident: while during the Eucharist the holy host empowered the devotees with the eternal life of salvation, the sabbath's unpleasant food reminded of the natural weakness and inconstancy of both flesh and human feelings, which allowed the Devil to enter the world and find allies.
A peculiar aspect of the sabbath, beyond those already mentioned, was the employment and the feeding on human children's parts. As Johannes Weyer reported

[53] Domenico Mammoli (ed.), *Processo alla strega Matteuccia di Francesco. Todi 20 marzo 1428*. In Res Tudertinae, Todi, 1983

in the *De praestigis daemonum*, his sceptical treatise about witchcraft, witches were believed to suffocate infants, preferring those unbaptized, and then, dug up the dead small bodies from their graves to cook them in a cauldron, in order to separate the flesh from the bones and melt this last to obtain a drinkable wax-like substance.[54] Witches used this liquid to make their salve that was then used in poisoning, to help them in avoiding confession under torture, but also, as Matteuccia did with the infants' blood, to anoint their bodies and so be able to fly to the covens. In an early confession during 1561, one of the few cases of Lorraine presenting a cannibalistic sabbath, the alleged witch La Grosse Alison declared to have killed a baby and consequently unbury the corpse to eat it at the next coven. Later in 1609 the midwife Jennon Petit confessed the murdering of several babies, in order to take their corpses to her Master Persin at the sabbath and turn them into a magical powder.[55] The infants' flesh and humours were so powerful that during the persecution of 1589-1590 in Lutheran Nordlingen, Maria Marb, confessed to have been baptized by the Devil with the blue water in which dead children have been cooked.[56]

This aberrant, ritual anthropophagy recalls the murderous practices of the Jews, but also beliefs related to the holy host, which were at the basis of both the blood libel and witchcraft accusations. Christian religion is founded on the human sacrifice of Christ, whose flesh and blood are symbolically translated in the bread and wine consumed during the Eucharist.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth century, the sacrament appeared in all its dramatic physicality: the doctrine of transubstantiation was established at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, giving rise to the adoration of the consecrated host. The belief in the real presence of the Holy Body in the wafer was accentuated by the diffused idea of the physical apparition of Christ child inside it, linking, as Miri Rubin has noted, the Nativity to the Passion, the moment of birth to that of death, and locating in the blood the channel for this communion.[57] It was during this period that the feast of Corpus Christi Day was instituted by Pope Urban IV to celebrate the

[54] Johann Weyer, [*De praestigis daemonum*] (1583*). Witches, Devils and Doctors in the Renaissance*. Trans.by John Shea, (New York, 1991), pp. 172-173.
[55] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours. The Social and Cultural Context of European Witch-Hunt.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 65, 243-244
[56] Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze. Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 115. For the use of dead infants see also Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 99-100.
[57] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 136-140.

miracle of the bleeding host that occurred at Bolsena in 1264, when, according to the priest, drops of blood fell from the consecrated wafer. Red spots quite commonly appeared on the hosts due to the presence of a bacterium that develops easily on wafers left in humid, dark places. But the scientific explanation of the phenomenon arrived only in the nineteenth century, when Ferdinand Cohn named the bacterium *Micrococcus Prodigiousos*, "the microbe of miracles." Until then, the miracle of the Child in the Host had served to prove the reality of transubstantiation, but it also challenged the minds of the people with horrible images of murder and cannibalism.[58] Witchcraft beliefs enforced these ideas. In fact the value of the sacrament of Eucharist was not only spoiled but inverted at the sabbath, where the devilish food produced waste instead of the immortality of the soul. Similarly the baptismal water washed away sins, while the mock-baptism that took place at the satanic meetings polluted. Through the mock-baptism the witch entered a new damned existence, rejecting the salvation contained in the sacrament.

The sabbath acquired a new feature, with regard to the ritual murder accusation against Jews, in the misuse of the sacramental power. The life-force of young bodies became the means to sanction the diabolical union and the evidence of an ultimate sacrifice to the Devil. Jews employed blood for practical purposes, although they chose the Christian one for its religious purity; while in the accusation of diabolism against witches, the blood emerges mostly as the vehicle for a spiritual communion with the Devil in the place of God. Thus the theme of the ritual sacrifice, as a means of allegiance, was closer to the alleged practices of the heretics who were believed to assemble in nocturnal, orgiastic meetings, where they sacrificed little boys and made powders from their bodies. A striking example is that of the Fraticelli, a heretical sect persecuted in central Italy during the fifteenth century, accused of killing children through the singular method of the *barilotto*. The heretics stood in circle around a fire and passed the child from hand to hand until it was completely dried up.[59] They were not simply killing him in order to use its dead body's elements: they were *consuming* it, sanctioning the existence and the harmful power of the sect.

Drying up is a process that requires liquid substances. Witches made liquids from dead bodies, used the water in which the children were boiled, and finally sacrificed infants to the Devil, shedding the vital fluid, the blood. It was a widespread notion, in

[58] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp.136-140
[59] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 46-50

demonological literature, that witches promised their own children to Satan, often offering him the best parts of them, such as the hearts as reported by Pierre De Lancre. According to Jean Bodin, "Witches are frequently convicted by their confession of having sacrificed to the Devil their infant children before they are baptised. They raise them in the air, and then insert a large pin into their head, which causes them to die."[60] The awful action of pushing a nail inside a child's head implied the spilling of blood from one of the central parts of the body, the place of language and sight, two elements that recurred as particularly harmful in witchcraft beliefs. Although this is not explained in the demonological text, we can also try to interpret the action as a symbolical means of exchange between life and death, the physical and the spiritual dimension. Shedding blood from the head entailed then a translation of power that allowed a supernatural being, the Devil, to enter the world through both the flesh and the senses, involving the seat of reason and the corporeal nature of the individual.

In his demonological work Boguet acknowledged both the sacrificial and practical aspect of blood, mentioning explicitly the similarity between witches' covens and heretics' meetings. The author described the incestuous practices of witches at the sabbath, adding that the children of those forbidden intercourses were killed at the moment of birth: "they cut them about all over their bodies and collected their blood in phials, and afterwards burned the bodies. They then mixed the blood with ashes and made a sauce, with which they seasoned their food and drink."[61]

The sabbath was the borderline place in which the transfer of power took place, from the actualization of life to the capacity of harming it. Sabbath narratives were generally situated in marginal and extreme zones, spaces such as the top of mountains asthe Brocken in Germany or the island Blåkulla in Sweden, between an earthly and an aerial or watery dominion. The time in which the meetings happened was another ideal borderline land, the night, while the stereotyped elected victims themselves carried the signs of marginality, being mainly infants who had just entered the world. Finally blood, the liquid substance that the Devil required and crossed to reach his human targets, was itself liminal. The sabbath was imagined as a marginal space by both demonologists and common people. But while for the first one it was spiritually dangerous and inhabited by demons, by Hell itself, for the populace it was, as Briggs

[60] Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches.* (1580). Trans. by Randy A.Scott. (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), p. 225
[61] Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*. (1590). Trans by E.A. Ashwin (London, 1929), p. 57

has written, the "gateway to the land of the dead". A place in which everything was familiar, and yet ambiguous, like the dead themselves are – people that we knew, but that we do not know anymore. So, if in the demonological treatises, it took place on far away mountains, the people located it close to their homeland, between the wild woods or moors and the village, or also, as it is testified in a macabre confession from the seventeenth century German village of Obermarchtal, at the gallows, where the execution of witches took place.[62]

The popular mind is a practical one, also in the conception of the most extravagant ideas. In this regard danger, risk and sufferance are always primarily physically understood. Those who carry and reflect these concepts had to come from somewhere close to the actual bodies and lives of people, in order to directly influence them. They are familiar and disquieting at the same time, close to the village borders instead of distant, suggestive mountain tops. They do not recall foreigner demonic forces but the dead, those who had once shared the same anxieties and joys of the living, and therefore knew better than incorporeal devils how to hurt and destroy existence. Nevertheless, learned notions were also not totally free from the relation between demons and the dead. This is well shown in the description of the odour emanating from the devil and his allies. Both Bodin and Boguet, quoting the Italian Renaissance philosopher Girolamo Cardano, wrote that a foul-smell connotated both demons and the places they frequented, adding that, as a consequence, the bad odour became a peculiarity of the witch as well. In fact it was transmitted to human beings during their copulation with devils, which acquired a corporeal form, snatching the bodies of hanged and dead people.[63] Thus the odour of physical mortality distinguished evil spirits.

The supernatural stench had already marked the Jews, the unbearable *foetur Judaicus*, which they allegedly tried to cover by employing Christian blood. Suggesting corruption, decay and therefore a link with supernatural beings, such as demons or the dead, it therefore served to exclude groups or individuals from society, but also to ward off the menace they represented. Anthropologically the smell could indicate a disrupted or extraordinary state of being, identifying the individuals as dangerous or powerful. Constance Classen has emphasised that, from a cultural perspective, the olfactory perception of "the other" can be used as a "potent metaphor

[62] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 41-42; Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze*, p.109
[63] Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania*, p. 155; Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, p. 21

for social decay," which is feared by the established order. The sense of smell, more than the others, is connected with physical potential. In fact a strong odour is not only a single body' sign of distinction, but it emanates from it, lingering in the air, penetrating into places and things, provoking infection and disruption. Travelling into the air it is also linked to blood, according to the existing correspondences between the four humours and the natural elements stressed by early modern philosophical and medical theories. In a world in which the body had no fixed contours and could be equally healed or damaged by contact with the external environment, where infected air corrupted the blood, and, similarly, a sick body spread disease in its vicinity, smell was either a source of healing or of danger.[64] The polluting "other" can be identified by gender, age or social status, or a combination of these, or, as in the case of the Jew, by ethnicity and religion. As Classen notes, the first type of otherness has to do with what we cannot know at all, the otherworld, the supernatural, and ultimately the dead. In early modern Europe, the idea of supernatural odour was further distinguished by moral and spiritual qualities. Physical integrity was secondary to the election of the soul. The saints were believed to remain intact after death and to diffuse pleasant oils and exhalations from their uncorrupted bodies, while a horrible brimstone smell was associated with the Devil and with whoever was in league with him.[65] Bad smells derived from spoiled blood, which affected both the individual's body and the surrounding environment. Being linked to the place of the sabbath and to the witch, the stench marked both the aggressor's marginality and transgressive features acquired by his or her own body after the contact with not-human creatures.

Other bodily qualities distinguished the witch from ordinary human beings and we need to consider them before tracing their relation to the blood-link between the witch and the devil. According to demonological works the witch could fly - an impossible task for human beings that consequently implied a superhuman nature. The witch could also change shape, becoming a magical animal: a wolf, a dog, a cat, a hare. The Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg has established a connection between the content of the treatises and popular ideas. Analyzing the origin of the sabbath myth and concentrating especially on these last two elements Ginzburg identified a complex of

[64] Constance Classen, "The Odor of the Other: Olfactory Symbolism and Cultural Categories." *Ethos* 20, No. 2 (1992), pp. 135, 140-141; Richard Palmer, "In Bad Odour: Smell and Its Significance in Medicine from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century." In W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter (eds.), *Medicine and the Five Senses*. (Cambridge University Press: 1993), p. 68

[65] Constance Classen, "The Odor of the Other", pp.149-152; Piero Camporesi, *La carne impassibile.* (Milano: Garzanti, 1994), pp. 7-13; pp.40-42

ancient Eurasian shamanistic beliefs, regarding the relation with the deceased. The dead, perceived as always anguishing for the life they no longer possess (they are described as thirsty), are natural enemies of the living, which have to fight against them for the fertility of the land, during periodical, nocturnal meetings, generally four in a year, according to the seasons.[66] The work goes far from the historical setting in which the sabbath reached its popularity, that is the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and lacks a discussion about the influence of Christian thought in the European tradition of a harmful witchcraft, in which learned and popular beliefs were linked. Nevertheless Ginzburg's ideas are morphologically interesting and valuable in the way in which they shape a sort of universal witch-figure. His work suggests in fact the proper *otherness* of the witch, a person who is called out of life, or better, placed in a suspended, demonic plan between life and death, in order to enact a supernatural force in the world. The people involved in the fertility battles, such as the *benandanti* in Friuli, could leave their bodies and go in spirit to the realm of the dead, thanks to the dried caul that they wore around their neck or somewhere else on their bodies. A bodily element was therefore the instrument of a spiritual experience. The caul was in fact seen as the materialization of birth, the link between the spiritual world from which the soul comes, and the actual one in which it is pushed inside the flesh.[67] Thus being born with a caul carried with it the ability to shift from a worldly dimension to a ghostly one, but it also affected the moral nature of the individual, transmitting to it beneficent or maleficent aspects.

The same extraordinary qualities are to be found in the Hungarian witches. The *tàltos*, who resembled the Siberian shaman, carried the sign of their marginality not externally in the form of a caul, but in their own bodies. A *tàltos* was a person born with teeth or with a surplus finger, just like the shaman has a surplus bone.[68] It is curious to underline the difference between shamans and *tàltos* in their connection to the dead. While it is based on a similarity in the case of shamans, due to the presence of the extra-bone, an element recalling death and so the possibility to travel in its land, for the case of the *tàltos* the proximity with the dead implies also a certain

[66] Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia Notturna*, p.136
[67] For a description of the caul's properties see Nicole Belmont, *Les Signes de la naissance. Etude des representations symbolique associés asex naisances singulieres*. (Paris: Plon, 1971), quoted lengthily in Gabor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 137. The caul is here described as the seat of the 'external soul', a sort of spiritual essence that can appear to the person during the sleep under an animal form.
[68] Gabor Klaniczay*, The Uses of Supernatural Power*, pp. 139-141

superhuman aggressiveness. We cannot dismiss the fact that someone born with teeth is already able to harm or hurt as an infant. The extraordinary qualities of those close to the dead, often correspond to dangerous abilities. This aggressive aspect of the supernatural power is typical of witchcraft, while it is almost unknown in shamanistic beliefs. The shaman is a predestined person that has commerce with the spiritual world, having beside his natural genitors a spiritual animal-mother. He visits the demons, he is dismembered and resurrected by them, but mainly to effect cures among his people; there is a vague idea of a harmful magic inside his human community. As Ronald Hutton has stated in his book on the perception of Siberian shamanism in Western European cultures, "native Siberians do not seem to have believed in witches (…) they attributed uncanny and capricious misfortune to the operation of malevolent spirits which were a part of the natural order".[69] Also those known as black shamans were not completely evil and their abilities were beneficial for some people.[70] The early modern European witch on the contrary, was an aggressive creature operating inside the community on the behalf of the evil one, but there was apparently no predestination in such an individual, which was not admissible for the Christian demonologists. The intrinsically marvellous nature of the witch of popular beliefs, as it could have been proved by the caul or an anomalous adjunctive bodily part, was emptied of magical power, and the witch's diversity became an acquired one, the symbol of a submission to an external powerful agent. Then the possible comparison between shaman and witch relies only in the idea of predestination and in the use of their bodies during their encounters with the supernatural. The shaman has to lose his body, which is cut and eaten by the spirits of the various diseases, while the bones, his enduring part, are gathered to call him back to his human state. Natural life is in the softness and the decay of the flesh, which the shaman must leave behind, becoming himself the invisible spirit preserved in the bones, to allow the demons to instruct him. In a similar way the Devil had to enter the witch, to perform through the human agent, his evil in the world: this was possible thanks to the special composition of the human being, understood as a kind of intermediate state between matter and spirit. In the words of the English doctor and witch-believer, John Cotta:

[69] Ronald Hutton, *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination*. (London: Hambledon and London, 2001), p.141
[70] Ronald Hutton, *Shamans*, pp. 142-144

> Bodily and corporal substances are the heavens, the celestiall bodies of the Starres, of the Sunne, of the Moone, the bodies of the elements, and all the elementarie substances from them derived and composed. Spirituall substances are either Angels, or Divels, or soules of men after death, separated from their bodies. Mixed substances, partly Spirituall, partly bodily, are mankinde compounded of a naturall body and an understanding soule.[71]

Blood figured as the emblem of this mixture between physical and spiritual substances inside man, which it represented as a liquid, that is a matter between the gassy and the solid state, and as the carrier of both the body's and Christian's soul life. It became, then, the Devil's required human source, to act inside the world through the witches' subordination.

2.4 The pact

According to Daneau, Bodin, Boguet at the coven the Devil placed his claw on the forehead of the witch to take away the power of the Holy Chrism and of the Baptism[72], and he also often asked witches to sign the pact with their own blood, as a symbol of loyalty, in the manner of ancient oaths. Repeating all these features of the demonic pact, Guazzo in his *Compendium Maleficarum* significantly stressed that the Devil claimed, among the witch's bodily goods, the blood.[73] Yet there is no further explanation of the way in which the devil intended to use the fluid. We can infer that he was going to employ it as a vehicle to enter the physical domain. The idea of a supernatural entity that comes in the world through the blood was again not a completely new element: ritual magic of the Middle Age largely implied the use of parts of human flesh from a corpse or from the magician himself; or the sacrifice of blood, preferred by demons due to its nobler nature.[74] The fundamental difference stood in the relation between the human being and the superhuman forces: while medieval necromancers controlled demons through their magic, witches were

[71] John Cotta, *The triall of witchcraft. Shewing the true and right methode of the discovery: with a confutation of errouneus wayes.* (London, 1616), p. 23
[72] For a confutation of the idea see Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft.* (1584) (New York: Dover, 1972), p. 24. In Scot's opinion was absurd to believe that the Devil could nullify the work of God through the baptismal water.
[73] Francesco Maria Guazzo*, Compendium Maleficarum*. (1608) Trans. E.A. Ashwin (London: 1920), p. 14
[74] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 164-165.

subordinated to the Devil. Although through their evil actions they looked for some ephemeral, material satisfaction, they were bounded to him. Thus, attempting an interpretation of the demonological idea, the Devil was probably using their blood to gain their souls, obliging them to wear the proof of the enslavement: the devil's mark, a sign that Satan put on their bodies sanctioning their pact.

A mark suggested primarily a physical sign, a peculiarity that distinguished an individual from the other. Hidden from sight, at least according to theologians, it encapsulated the secret of identity in which moral qualities were reflected in the bodily ones. Furthermore this precise sign recalled bloodshed, the issuing of an internal, forbidden matter. It subverted the inside and the outside, revealing transgression and instability, that from the witch could affect the whole community.
The devil's mark was mainly a Protestant feature, revealing the individual nature of the relation with the Devil, in a perfect agreement with the reformed religion, which stressed the importance of self-responsibility in front of God. In his study of witchcraft in Switzerland, Monter found that the mark was diffused in the trials of Protestant Jura, but almost absent in the Catholic region. If, for example, we consider one of the most famous legends regarding witchcraft in Italy, the tale of the hazel tree of the town of Benevento in the south of the country, where witches and fairies were supposed to hold their covens, we find no mention of the mark. Only during the seventeenth century the Catholic opinion accept the idea of the demonic mark.[75]

Protestant theology denied the existence of Purgatory, and so also of a spiritual experience accessible to the living: the intermediate state between nature and the supernatural that was at the base of the idea of the sabbath. On the contrary, it affirmed the absolute detachment of God from the natural world, concentrating all the attention on the individual and on the consequence of human behaviour. The only help was to wait for divine Providence, which could not be forced by any employment of blessed or sacred objects or by supplication, although both Calvinists and Lutherans stressed the importance of prayer. One of the most dramatic episodes of the fight against the Catholic magic universe was the destruction of sacred images in the Calvinist Low Countries during 1550. Statues of saints were broken to demonstrate that they were completely inanimate and undeserving of veneration; the sacrament houses containing hosts, and the hosts themselves destroyed. Saints could

[75] William Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: the Borderlands during Reformation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 157-167. Pietro Piperno, *Della superstitiosa Noce di Benevento*. (Napoli, 1640)

not cry, hosts could not bleed: the drastic process of disbelief acted by Calvinists rebuffed not only Catholic doctrines, but also the popular employment of sacramental power. The individual was alone with himself, neither could he attribute his misfortune to the devil nor to others' wickedness, but had to accept every difficulty with gratitude, because it came from God to prove him and his moral strength. The result, instead of the secularization of the world, that is the rejection of the magical properties of the sacred, was what Scribner defines as a desacralisation of it, a sense of decline in the capacity to experience the sacred,[76] which more than bringing to the people the strong feeling of a new self-centred and self-confident faith, left them in a state of abandon and loss. The relation with the otherworld and its demons was not rationalized at all, but grew in the obsession of demonologists: the dead were still, nature and objects were mute, God a vague shape of light at the border of sterile prayers, but the Devil was still there, smelling of brimstone.

By contrast the growing distance of the divinity caused the configuration of a close, real Devil, with whom it was still possible to make a coven using the power of the body, which was useless for God. The Protestant attempt to fugue the physical experience of the supernatural drove it right into the flesh of the individual witch. "Witchcraft was an intensely physical experience", writes Roper.[77] Indeed it was, not just in the displays of *maleficium*, but in the dramatized body of the accused. The witch's body was the only "real", physical place in which the supernatural allegiance took place, and that showed evidence of it, as marked by the Devil.

Demonologists' accounts of the mark were quite marvellous. It was described as resembling an animal's footprint, that of a hare, a toad, a dormouse, a spider, recalling its superhuman origin and the shape-shifting ability attributed to the witch. It was generally well hidden, close to the sexual parts such as on the lower back or the female genitals, so that one of the practices during the interrogation of the supposed witch was the shaving of his/her body. But men also bore it on the eyelids, the armpit, the shoulder, while women could have it on the breasts. It could either be painful or not for the witch, but its more significant feature was that when prickled or pierced it resulted insensible and did not bleed at all. King James the VI based his

[76] Bob Scribner, "Reformation and Desacralisation: from Sacramental World to Moralised Universe". In R. Po-Chia Hsia, R.W. Scribner (eds.), *Problems in the Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Europe.* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997). For the Calvinists attack to the images see: Gary K. Waite, *Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 142-144.

[77] Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze*, p. 9

Daemonologie on the diffused continental ideas regarding witchcraft, trying to put together the notion of a painful devil's mark with that of its absolute insensibility during the examinations. He explained that the mark was placed on the witch's body during the first satanic coven, and remained unhealed and sore until the second meeting, when the Devil healed it, proving to the witches his capacity to hurt and cure, and showing to them that all their future, maleficent skills depended upon him.[78]

Moving from witchcraft literature to the context of the witch's mark, involving witches and witch-finders, we are confronted with more practical, although improbable, solutions and descriptions, about how to discover it, and how to obtain one from the Devil. Following the idea that the mark was hidden on the body and that, being the work of Satan, it subverted the power of Christian sacraments, between 1617 and 1619 two Catholic "self-made" witch-finders from Catalonia used to wash suspected witches with holy water, in order to bring to light the mark in the form of a crow's foot.[79] The power of the holy water was indeed a Catholic feature, but it is worth noting that the notion of the water rejecting the witch was also employed by Protestants during the swimming test, as attested in continental treatises and in King James' work. The suspected witch had his or her hands and legs tied with a rope, and was then thrown into a pool: if the accused did not sink that was a clear sign of the demonical pact, through which the power of the baptism was drawn out from the blood.

An interesting comparison between water and blood emerges: they both bring vital force, they are both connected with Christian beliefs, yet water cannot be contaminated by the work of the Devil, its transparency conceals no ambiguity, no trace of the violence linked to the thick, red blood. In Christian religious terms, water is after all just the symbol of Salvation, while blood, being the symbol of the Passion and of Christ's sacrifice, entails both death and resurrection. In 1613 at Bedford, during the interrogation of Mother Sutton and her daughter, the water ordeal was utilized alongside the examination of the witch's body for the weird teat or nipple that English witches bore instead of the mark. The swimming test in England appears rarely, but this peculiar trial helps highlight that witch finders were not really

[78] James VI, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597), p. 33. See also Lambert Daneau, *A Dialogue of Witches*. Trans. T. Twyne (London, 1575); Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania*, p. 113; Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium*, pp. 15-16.
[79] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, p. 164

conscious of what they were looking for on the examined individual.[80] A body could bear different kinds of marks and so create certain confusion in both the accused and the accusers' minds. Defining the identity of the bearer, determining a moral and sinful status, their presence did not just nurture the accusations, but confused people's perception of themselves. Several cases of supposed witchcraft in southern Germany attests to the increasing feelings of panic and desperation, presenting women asking the executioner to be examined to see if they bore the satanic mark. In 1590 Barbara Stecher from Nordlingen pricked the mark she found on her foot herself to verify if it bled, and in 1626 Waldburga Schmid from Warzburg was shocked when she was told that the two big holes in her feet were diabolical signs and consequently confessed.[81]

But how was the mark impressed by the Devil on the witch's body? In Calvinist Geneva, where the diabolical aspect of witchcraft was central to the trials, the Devil usually marked witches by biting them. Similarly during the summer of 1590, the Scottish witch Meg Dow from Gilmerton (south-east of Edinburgh), confessed to have been marked by "the Innemy", Satan, who bit her little finger, making it bleed conspicuously. As noted by Maxwell-Stuart this last case was unusual for two reasons: first, it was an exception in the sixteenth century Scottish trials, where the mark was not mentioned; secondly it differed from its description in the European theological treatises, where it was always located close to the privy parts of the body. The position of the mark deprived of any sexual element recurred lately in the seventeenth century Scottish confessions, where the marks were found on the neck and on the shoulders.[82] A curious description of the devil's mark was presented in a pamphlet, dated 1591, where we find the first account of a sabbath in Scotland: "it hath lately been found that the Devil doth generally mark them with a privy mark, by reason the witches have confessed themselves that the Devil doth lick them with his tongue in some privy part of their body before he doth receive them to be his servants."[83] Licking is an action less violent than sucking or biting, but which resembles them very closely. The Devil licked, tasted, as if attempting to take

[80] Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1550-1618*. (Amherst: University Massachussets Press, 1991), pp. 341-343. The surplus teat of the English witches was of a different nature from the mark: as we will see later it was the bodily place at which the familiar spirit sucks.
[81] Lyndal Roper, *Witch-Craze*, pp. 54, 271 n23
[82] William Monter, "Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537-1662." *The Journal of Modern History,* vol. 43 No2 (Jun., 1971), pp. 179-204. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's conspiracy. Magic and witchcraft in sixteenth-century Scotland.* (Great Britain: Tuckwell Press,2001), pp. 122-124.
[83] Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*, p. 194.

something away from the witch's body. Doing this, he left a mark imprinted on the physical surface or reasonably, in other words, he injured the witch.

Reginald Scot, in his sceptical attitude to witchcraft, was more rational than the demonologists: in fact if he wanted to dismantle the belief, he needed tangible proofs and basis, bringing the Devil's work to a more earth-grounded setting. In his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* henceforth we find a logical explanation about how the mark was given to the witch: "and [the Devil] giveth to every novice a marke, either with his teeth or with his clawes".[84] Then the supernatural stain was acquired by the witch physically through an assault by the Devil and consequent bloodshed. This is striking in the cases from the Basque Countries during the years 1608-1610, where witchcraft accusations presented both the features of the sabbath, the *aquelarre*, and of the devil's pact. At the first coven, which many of the accused confessed to have attended as children, the witches were introduced to the Devil and later assaulted by him to be signed. Miguel de Guiburu and Juanes de Sansin were scratched on their forehead; Juanes de Guiburu was scratched on the shoulder; many were marked in the eyes, having their pupils "stamped" by the Devil, and over the ear. The Devil stuck a nail into the shoulder of Estevanìa de Navarcorena, and consequently she suffered violent pain from the mark. The case of Old Graciana de Barrenchea is still more gruesome, with the Devil tearing a lump of flesh out of her nose; Maria, Old Graciana's daughter, not only received the mark, but was deflowered by the Devil so that she came home all covered with blood.[85] When the alleged witches were brought in front of the court many of them still exhibited the scars; the Inquisitor Valle, who believed in the guilty of the accused, wrote in a letter to the Suprema:

> It is a fact that the Devil sets his mark on them, for I have seen it with my eyes on the Lesaca witches. The mark is a small one. On some it can barely be seen. When it is pricked with a needle they feel nothing even if pressure is exerted; and even if the needle pierces the skin and is pressed right in they feel nothing.

[84] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 25

[85] Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1609-1614).* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980) pp. 73-76. The Basque case is significant also because, despite of the testimonies of the two credulous Inquisitors sent to the local tribunal, the Spanish Inquisition, the Suprema, adopted a rational, sceptical position regarding the witchcraft cases, contrary to that of the community. In the opinion of the Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar y Frias, many accusations could rise by the Devil's delusion, or by the malice and angry feelings of the people.

> The witch marks that I have seen are the size of a pinhead and form a small depression in the skin. It has really amazed me![86]

Similar cases of scratching are to be found in Denmark: the Devil came at the moment of the pact, under the disguise of a "lad" or of a black dog, pricking or wounding the witch. A woman had the mark on the stomach, another on the arm, that she put in front of her eyes where "her lad" tried to scratch a hole; a last one on the forehead.[87] Contrary to the descriptions of demonologists both in the Basque Countries and in Denmark, no mark was strictly connected with the sexual parts of the accused. It seemed more that the Devil attacked witches frontally, pushed by an urge to draw blood, and so hurting them in the upper part of the body: the face, the shoulders, the arms. The sexual obsession, that appeared for example at Loudun in 1634, where the insensitive marks had been discovered in great number on the back and on the testicles of the Jesuit Priest Urbain Grandier, is far from these witchcraft confessions. The Loudun case was settled in a total religious context. Grandier had been accused of a pact with the Devil sanctioned during the sabbath, of the ownership of magical books, and also of causing the demonic possession of several Ursuline nuns. Diabolism played the main role and suspicion rose from the religious theme of heresy itself.[88] The facts of Loudun were free of wider communal tensions and of an idea of the witch as a physical aggressor: the devil's allies were connotated only by their spiritual aberration. Differently, as Henningsen has suggested, in the Basque countries the suspicion of witchcraft had its main factor in conflict at the village level. Discontent, revenge, economical struggle, led the people to the employment of diabolical themes in their accusations. The heretical content and the spiritual deviation were the means to exclude potentially dangerous individuals, but the unresolved problems they reflected originated in the material environment of survival and everyday life.

More significantly, likewise, in Denmark, the idea of the satanic mark emerged only in 1620 and the most important feature of the accusations remained *maleficium*. The importance of the Devil was strongly diminished, and we actually find himself at

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[86] Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, p. 117

[87] Jens Christian V. Johansen, "Denmark: The Sociology of Accusations". In Bengt Ankarloo, Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries.* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1993), pp. 339-366

[88] Lara Apps, Andrew Gow, *Male witches in early modern Europe.* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 57-58

the service of the witch. The sabbath was never mentioned; the Devil's figure in the popular mind was linked to religion and there physically confined. It is curious to find that the coven with him often took place in the churchyard, and the Devil himself stood just inside the church, so that the future witches had to refuse Christ by blowing into the keyhole of the Church's door. The space where the sacred was experienced became in the popular mind the ideal place for every supernatural manifestation, either divine or devilish.

The devil's mark had then two slightly different meanings: from a religious point of view it was the sign of possession, evoked by its sexual location, through which the Devil took control over the witch; while in popular belief it was the sign of an aggression, through which the Devil took something from the witch. It is also possible to infer that while demonologists saw the mark as the removal of the Baptismal seal and the sign through which the satanic imitatation and inversion of the Christian principles worked,[89] common people interpreted it in terms of sympathetic magic as a transmission of abilities. The witch was a potential aggressor inside the community, so the Devil had to be himself a previous aggressor to her.

Looking at the case of Finland, where the typical continental themes of witchcraft arrived relatively late, we find that in the zone of Osterbotten the absence of interest for the devil's mark was one of the probable cause thanks to which no real great persecution occurred; while a series of trials took place in the Åsland islands between 1665 and 1668, during which the presence of scars on the bodies of the women involved was considered the evidence of the devil's mark. The investigations were led by the judge Nils Psilander, who came from Sweden, where the witch-hunt was more active. He came from an educated family, so probably he was well conscious of the diabolism's features and how to build them up from the confessions of the suspected. Yet the answer of the first accused tells us more about how really the relation with the Devil was understood in the practical mind of people. Indicted for practising soothsaying to solve cases of theft, Karin Persdotter satisfied Psilander's expectations and conviction regarding the devil's pact, but explaining how the Devil

[89] For the Baptismal seal see: Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of Witchcraft*. (London, 1617), pp. 88-92. For the imitation of God by Satan see Richard Bernard, *A guide to grand-iury men diuided into two bookes: in the first, is the authors best aduice to them what to doe, before they bring in a billa vera in cases of witchcraft, with a Christian direction to such as are too much giuen vpon euery crosse to thinke themselues bewitched. In the second, is a treatise touching witches good and bad, how they may be knowne, euicted, condemned, with many particulars tending thereunto* (London, 1630), pp. 258-265

marked her, she said that after having accepted his proposals and being taken to Blåkulla, the "black man" bit her on the breasts, and she still had the visible sign of the teeth.[90] Henceforth the supernatural meeting was again described as an aggression and a very well-directed one- against the female breasts, from where the substance of life issued. As we will see better later, by biting the woman's chest the Devil was looking for nurturing blood, the same that the witch tried to steal from other human beings.

On two points there was a total agreement: the devil's mark was insensible and it could not bleed. As Larner wrote, referring to the Scottish cases, the discovery of the mark could be a shocking experience for the witch, who was the object of the ignominious work of the witch-prickers. To quote an example, Mr Paterson, a pricker at work during the second half of the seventeenth century, who turned out to be a woman in disguise, used to drive the pin deep inside the mark and afterwards he asked the witch to find it and take it out. The prickers were often fraudulent men, endowed with good medical skills: "they understood the principle of confused sensation and which parts of the body could be most successfully assaulted".[91] But as well as the medical explanation, the symbolical meaning signified by the absence of pain and bleeding is also worth considering. From the mark, the Devil, explicitly or implicitly, drew blood, and thereafter the spot was like a dead, dried up small bodily part. Tracing a religious influence we find that late medieval Christian idea of purification and freedom from sin through a corporeal sufferance, expressed in the emission of blood. Medieval saints were saturated by the divine. They actualized in their own flesh the passion of Christ, receiving the stigmata, bleeding abundantly from their nostrils. While, for example, the Cathars' heretical doctrine opposed the corrupted and polluting body to the perfection of the spirit, the official religion located inside matter itself, even if a mortified one, the place where the soul could find the communion with God and its own salvation. On the contrary, after the satanic allegiance the witch could not bleed if hurt in the marked part; could not shed tears[92] and was rejected by water. So he or she had very extraordinary problems with the fluids surrounding and issuing from the body, that, in religious terms, implied the impossibility to be with Christ, and to obtain the eternal life. This impediment also

[90] Antero Heikkinen, Timo Kervinen, "Finland: The Male Domination." In Bengt Ankarloo, Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, pp. 328-330
[91] Christina Larner, *Enemies of God*, p. 111
[92] Henri Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, pp. 121-122

testified to a difficult relation with material life itself (mainly figured inside liquid substances), characterized by both intense desire and deprivation. Scars, holes, depressions in the skin; nipples, teats, moles; they were all the physical expression of something lacking or exceeding.

The mark, then, shaped a bodily place where the Devil was increasing and feeding his power, while the witch was deprived of *something* through her blood. Blood was the powerful vehicle for life: the spiritual, eternal one, but also the animal, actual one, contained in the soul. As we will discuss in the third chapter on medicine, according to the body's theories of the time, displayed in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton, the soul acted in the body through three kinds of spirits, vital, animal and natural, which constituted of a subtle vapour manifested inside blood.[93]

Transposed to Christianity the theory has a good comparison in Christ's sacrificial blood, that through the Eucharist runs into the human blood itself, reaching, washing and rescuing the soul from sin. In the opinion of demonologists the human soul was the unique, real object craved and attacked by the Devil. Thus, considering together the medical and religious concepts on blood and the spirits, we can go further in interpreting the demonological ideas, arguing that the devil stole the soul from the vital fluid, causing the physical "death" of the place that he signed, scratched or bit. Yet it could be inferred that the insensibility and lack of bleeding of the mark were the most hybrid features of diabolism, embodying together the religious meaning of pain and bleeding (accorded to the saints, denied to the witch) and the magical one of a sympathetic aggressive power. The strength of a magical thought was hard to destroy, and was at work, at least unconsciously, in the demonologist's mind as well. Witchcraft ideas and demonological ones were reshaping themselves, showing once more how difficult it is to establish who the people were, how much learned ideas influenced people's confessions and tales, and, on the other side, to what extent popular beliefs entered the theories presented in the theological treatises.

To make clear distinctions, dividing the demonological from the popular sources, is also made difficult by the way in which ideas and beliefs changed through times. Towards the end of the seventeenth century we still find the satanic pact, but often with different purposes and features. In fact the pact was no longer found only in connection with witchcraft, although it was still affirmed its magical contents and finalities In some cases it was depicted as the fastest, yet dangerous, way to enrich

[93] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. 3 vols. (London, 1621): I, p. 148

oneself. A pact written with blood could replace the devil's mark, while the only soul endangered was that of the human contriver. This new idea of the pact had an important influence on folk literature which told the story of doctor Faustus, the sixteenth century German magician who sold his soul to the devil Mephistopheles in order to acquire fame and richness during life.[94] After reading the quoted book an English boy from Nottingham, during 1672, carved on a pale the words of the contract and sprinkled his blood upon them, signing with his name. The devil appeared demanding for his soul, but the boy was so frightened that he refused and later became a preacher. In 1692 the Spanish student Emanuele Matha, resident in the Italian town of Siena, wrote with his blood a diabolical pact in which he would have renounced both his body and soul if the devil appeared in human form in the space of thirty minutes. In an anonymous piece of paper found among the documents of the Sienese trials, we found written: "I command you, devil, that when I wear this ring you will immediately bring here what I desire and I promise to give you all that you want from me in exchange". If the writer followed the magical tradition, the ink he employed, though now unrecognizable, should have been blood. According to the historian Oscar di Simplicio, cases like this were not rare in the Sienese area during the second half of the seventeenth century: the original antecedent for similar written pacts seems to be ceremonial magic, in which magicians conjured demons employing blood, and controlled them in order to obtain superior knowledge. Yet as Di Simplicio has argued, in these new demonic pacts the thirst for knowledge is lost: the only thing pursued by the subscribers was an immediate result, generally in the form of material richness.[95] Also the devil was not enslaved or overwhelmed by the man, though there was no consequent *maleficium*, the evil spirit benefited from the pact, obtaining a human soul.

This kind of pact seems a sort of hybrid in which conjuration and witches' coven features were mixed. Soili-Maria Olli, exploring the idea of the pact in eighteenth century Sweden, has asserted that the male satanic allegiance differed from the female one, though the means employed were always the same, the blood. While women sealed the pact for "antisocial purposes", and their link with the devil had a sexual connotation, men looked for a supernatural help in order to enrich and

[94] *The Historie of The Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor Iohn Faustus*. Translated in English by P.F. Gent (London, 1610)

[95] George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New-England*. (Cambridge Massachussets, 1929), p. 146. Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria. Maleficio e magia nell'Italia moderna*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), pp. 78-80

empower themselves, remaining free from the devil's influence at least till death, when they had to give him their soul.[96] We will see if this kind of division between a female and a male magic can be adopted to discuss the harmful powers of the early modern witches and the way in which they spoiled or manipulated blood and bodily substances.

The witch-figure, on which we will concentrate, had a double role of victim and of wicked enemy. She or he was caught in the soul, enslaved and wasted by the Devil through the bodily fluids, the blood; but it was also through blood that the Devil was plotting the path to follow for assaulting individuals and the lives of communities.

2.5 Harmful magic: vampirism, lameness and pins

Witchcraft accusations rose from widespread feelings of fear, rage, and suspicion, in which flourished and were manifested both the religious obsession of the theologians and the economical struggle for survival which entailed all the social spheres of life: the family, the neighbourhood, the village. Witches consumed and wasted existence in every shape, from the world of nature to the welfare of the community. They interfered with fertility, the living balance and the vital fluids which preserved and regenerated life. According to demonological treatises, during the sabbath the devil and the witches planned and caused natural catastrophes: they could destroy crops, summoning hail and storms, and cause plague and draught. The English Puritan preacher William Perkins reported that:

> The wonders done by Inchanters are, 1. The raising of stormes and tempests; windes and weather, by sea and by land: 2. The poysoning of the ayre: 3. Blasting of corne: 4. Killing of cattell, and annoying of men, women, & children: 5. The procuring of strange passions and torments in mens bodies and other creatures, with the curing of the same: 6. Casting out of deuills.[97]

[96] Soili-Maria Olli, "The Devil's Pact: A Male Strategy". In Owen Davies and Willem De Blècourt (eds.), *Beyond the Witch Trials. Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 111-112

[97] William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft so farre forth as it is reuealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience.* (Cambridge: Cantrel Legge, 1610), p.127; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 541

The accusation was found mainly on the continent, yet weather magic remained mostly a demonological feature, linked to the idea of a plot against Christian society. It had certainly influenced maritime communities, where shipwrecks and sea disasters were connected to the control of winds by witches.[98] Nevertheless it is important to mention it here, because it was the result of a corporeal power of the witch, which was extended from her or his person to the natural world. The waters of the great calamities were in fact connected to blood and bodily fluids, at the centre of narratives of *maleficium*, the maleficent magic performed by the witch, which, more modestly, involved private contexts, reflecting communal and personal tensions.

We are now going to see which kind of crimes were mentioned in confessions and accusations and if, in accordance with them,there were certain types of individual who better fitted the figure of the witch.

As we have already seen in the theological descriptions of the diabolical allegiance, among the allegedly preferred victims of witchcraft infants and children stood out. In one of the most famous accusations the witch was likened to a supernatural creature, the vampire, and was considered a bloodsucker. In the creation of the vampire-witch two ideas conflated: the first one rooted in the medical philosophy of the time and the other one relying on superhuman features, which generally pertained to the dangerous dead. We are going to discuss both the ideas briefly here, to explore them better in chapter two and three. According to the Italian philosopher of the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino, human blood naturally attracted human blood. The old women, called witches, were believed to drink the children's blood to have their youth back; they were believed to go down the chimneys of the houses, especially on Thursday night, to suck out infants' lives. Blood was, then, considered as a remedy for old age and decay as it is testified by a unique case of real vampirism. As in a gruesome fairy tale, during the late sixteenth century the Hungarian countess Elizabeth Bathory killed more than sixty young girls to drink their blood and reacquire her youth. The case was not known in Western Europe until the end of the seventeenth century, but nevertheless it confirms a widespread European belief regarding the features of blood.[99] Several cases of vampirism appeared in the confessions at Logrono in the

[98] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 77-78, 330-331; Robert Muchembled, "Satanic Myths and Cultural Reality". In Bengt Ankarloo, Gustan Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, pp. 147-148.

[99] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books of Life.* (1489). A Critical Edition and Translation and Introduction and Notes by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark. (New York: Renaissance Studies. State University of New York at Binghamton, 1989), p. 57; Piero Camporesi, *Il sugo della vita. Simbolismo e magia del*

Basque Countries. Both men and women confessed to having sucked blood from the wounds of children who consequently died.[100] The Frenchman Pierre de Lancre wrote in his demonological work that the confession of infanticide by witches was confirmed by the evidence of the little victims' bodies; in fact "the parents find their children suffocated, or their blood all sucked out".[101]

The accusation of vampirism was not common to all Europe, as I will discuss in the two final chapters. Though the folkloric motif of the vampire-witch survived almost everywhere, trials in Protestant areas were almost free of these kinds of witches, while they still figured in the trials of Catholic countries, where the witch-figure was shaped by the ancient symbolism of the Strix. This was a nocturnal predatory bird that allegedly sucked infants' blood. In medieval times it became the most diffused witch-stereotype, indicating an old woman that killed children during the night. [102] Yet if, according to theologians, the witch could not perform real magic, but could only serve the Devil, it was not possible to admit openly a supernatural ability linked to her or his person. The same concept was valuable for blood, which in Protestant areas was deprived of all its wonderful powers. In theological discourse witches inflicted death in order to accomplish the Devil's will. The same process at work behind the satanic pact was represented in the magical spoiling action: blood was just a channel to reach the soul.

If we move to the anthropological context of witchcraft, outside the Christian religious system, we will find a quite different idea of vampirism, which highlights this last point. Among two different populations, the African Azande studied by Evans-Pritchard, and the Nalumin and Gebusi of Papua Guinea, death is not understood as a natural event, but it always depends upon some enmity: it is a consequence of witchcraft. Nalumin people, for example, believe that "if you are sick and recover, you have survived an attack by one of the *biis* (witch); if you die, you have been murdered".[103] The Azande distinguish between sorcery and witchcraft.

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sangue. (Milano: Garzanti, 1997), p. 45; Charlotte Wells, "Leeches on the Body Politic: Xenophobia and Witchcraft in Early Modern French Political Thought." *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No.3 (Summer 1999), p. 354

[100] Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate,* pp. 28-30

[101] Pierre De Lancre, *Table de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons*. (Paris, 1613), p. 343. Charlotte Wells, "Leeches on the Body Politic", p. 358

[102] Pico della Mirandola, *Libro ditto strega, o delle illusioni del demonio*. Translated by Leandro Alberti (1524). (Venezia: Marsilio, 1989). See also Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers. Witchcraft, Sex and the Crisis of Belief.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp.277-79; Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 206-208

[103] Stephen Greenblatt, "The Eating of the Soul.", p. 100

While the first is an art composed of magical skills such as the creation of amulets and spells, witchcraft is a physical substance that develops as the body grows old, so that old people are the most powerful, and often the most unscrupulous in the use of it. Although witchcraft is a part of the organism, it acts psychically through its own "soul" that leaves the corporeal dimension at night to look for its victim. Witchcraft harms by vampirism, which does not mean the sucking of blood, but the eating of the soul, intended as the living principle of the person. The victim does not die instantly, though, he sickens and is slowly wasted, because the witch needs a certain amount of time to consume totally the vital essence. The witch could then be discovered and eventually killed by the relatives of the dead person. Among the Gebusi the whole tribe kills, cooks and eats the alleged witch, ingesting, and so nullifying, the threat to the community, and reintegrating both the soul of the murderer and that of the victim.[104]

In early modern Europe the soul was not just the enlivening immaterial substance inside human bodies, but it came from God and was washed by Christ's blood, the saviour's sacrifice. A human being could not simply steal it from another, and the aggression implied not only the destruction of the individual, but posed a risk to the religious value of the whole community. The physical world of European witches constituted the scene for a universal spiritual battle between godly forces and devilish ones. So, while in popular tales and accusations corporeal wasting and the victims' death figured prominently, in the theological debate they were the evidence and the consequence of supernatural actions in which witches were no more than assertive and dangerous mannequins.

There were other kinds of *maleficia* widespread in Europe, where the work of the witch on fluids was less evident and direct. One of the commonest practices ascribed to witches was that of causing sudden diseases and hurting people through pins, needles and other sharp objects being inserted into wax figures. The magical process was sympathetic. The figure represented the chosen victim: the witch drew the pin into the bodily part she or he intended to hurt; the image was then buried or left in the proximity of the victim's dwelling. One of the sicknesses generally attributed to this kind of spell was lameness, which witches provoked by pricking the victim's foot. Witches assaulted both human beings and animals in this way, causing their legs to

[104] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 1-14, 25-26, 51; Stephen Greenblatt, "The Eating of the Soul"

rot and incurable handicaps. Senelle Petter from German Lorraine confessed in 1590 to having lamed and killed people and animals by sticking a sewing needle in the ground where her victims had to walk. The late seventeenth century German witch, Appolonia Glaitter was also accused of being the cause of the lameness of two people.[105] Causing lameness or sickness meant obstructing the everyday activities, hindering the working abilities of animals and individuals and so making their survival more difficult.

Yet the witch was also, at least symbolically, gaining something from the aggressed bodies: driving pins into their magical images, she or he was opening the skin's boundaries, perforating them and letting out blood. This magic therefore implied or suggested a blood-loss, the waste of physical energy and life represented by the fluid. This last point is confirmed by the extraordinary behaviour seen in those bewitched or in people allegedly possessed by demons. According to Weyer they were supposed to vomit an incredible amount of hard, sharp objects, pointed pieces of wood, glass, iron, and also knives, nails and pins,[106] causing the spitting of blood or internal laceration and bleeding of organs and membranes. Through this kind of aggression the witch obtained a double result: the suggested or effective hemorrhagic flux was in fact weakening the individual physically and spiritually. *Maleficium* and demonianism converged in the evidence of the fluid, which was both the matter of life and the saviour's blood. While witches destroyed human beings, the Devil was allegedly attempting to weaken the religious community, wasting the souls rescued from the divine sacrifice.

2.6 Domestic spaces

Though men, as in the trials at Logrono, could also be accused of such kinds of magic, *maleficium* generally took place in domestic spaces, involving the house, the welfare of children, the boundaries of the body and the sphere of fertility and reproduction, which were identified as typical female areas. Mothers, midwives, and housewives, all concerned with the protection of life and its borders, had their counterpart in witches, who invaded the enclosed spaces, and played an inverted

[105] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp.54-55; Alison Rowlands, "Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany."*Past and Present*, Vol.173 No. 1 (Nov. 2001), pp. 50-89
[106] Richard Kiekhefer, *European Witch Trials,* pp. 51-53; Johann Weyer, *Witches, Devils and Doctors*, pp. 286-287, 301-303

maternal role: spoiling and destroying instead of nurturing and preserving. [107] In the words of the historian Merry Wiesner early modern women had

> close connections with many areas of life in which magic or malevolence might seem the only explanation for events – they watched over animals that could die mysteriously, prepared food that could become spoiled unexplainably, nursed the ill of all ages who could die without warming, and cared for children who were even more subject to disease and death than adults in this era of poor hygiene and unknown and uncontrollable childhood diseases.[108]

Inside early modern patriarchal society women gained a recognized identity thanks to the idea of motherhood. The value of a woman was measured by her maternal features and her behaviour towards her family and her domestic activities. In Lutheran Germany, for example, the sacrificial nature of maternity was exalted: women were supposed to suffer and also to die during childbirth in order to allow the newborn to live. They acquired importance inside the community for their capacity to be the channel of life,[109] but were at the same time deprived of a value as individual beings. From such a perspective, the witch, who was seen as the anti-mother, distorted and enforced the powers and dangers ascribed to women.

The duality of the mother/witch seems to reduce witchcraft to a female affair, gendering strongly the magical aggressor and enforcing the misogynous theories expounded in the demonological treatises, since the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in the late fifteenth century, where woman was described as the ideal partner for the Devil due to her spiritual weakness, her susceptibility to his seductions, her insatiable carnal lust and her sharp tongue.[110] The involvement of the body, blood and living fluids in *maleficium* apparently confirms the link between femaleness and bad nurturing. As the mother had the capability to grow the infant inside her, and consequently to give it her milk, unsealing and transforming her own

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[107] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early modern and twentieth-century representations.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 91-112

[108] Mary E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 270

[109] Ulinka Rublack, "Pregnancy, childbirth and the female body in the early modern Germany." *Past and Present* 150 (1996), pp. 84-110; Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany. Rothenburg 1561-1652*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 159-160.

[110] Karen Jones, Michael Zell, "'The divels speciall instruments': women and witchcraft before the 'great witch-hunt'." *Social History* Vol.30 No.1 (Feb. 2005), pp. 45-63

body to enforce another one, the witch wasted and consumed her victims; she was the *malefica*, but also the *venefica*, the poisonous agent. The force retained by women was inscribed in their social rules, in the porosity of their own bodies, from which fluids issued normally during lactation or during menstruation. This will be discussed further in the medical chapter regarding beliefs and theories about menstruation, but it is worth looking briefly at these two processes now, before going further with the discussion on *maleficium*, so that we will better understand the features of female physicality and how they could affect the surrounding environment either positively or negatively.

The female body was perceived as an open container, leaking both nutrition and waste, divided between an upper "clean" part and a lower "dirty" one that could pollute the first. Milk, menstruation and blood had therefore to do with impurity, because they represented an uncontrolled state, in which the body was contaminating the outer space. The crossed corporeal borders were also the emblem of a power physically not socially constructed, in other words that could not be changed, ruled, or overwhelmed by established human laws, and only controlled to a certain extent. In this sense, the concept of danger and impurity, which could be connected to the witch figure, is to be understood as something that humans could try to repair or explain, but that they could not stop or completely prevent.

Lyndall Roper has provided some seventeenth-century German cases in which the spells of witches interfered with the process of feeding and growing up, obstructing the transmission of maternal milk or spoiling it. The period of pregnancy and the first months of the child were particularly endangered. If something went wrong the lying-in-maid, the woman that took care of the mother and the child, could be accused of *maleficium*. The alleged witch could waste the food prepared for the mother, sprinkling her soup with diabolic powers. The poisoned substance, entering the organism, affected the blood and the fluids, finally polluting breast-milk that nourished the infant. As we will see in chapter three, milk was a refined blood, conveyed to the mother's breasts, instead transformed in the discharge matter of menstrual flux. So through food the witch influenced the fluids, disrupting the nutritive capacities of the maternal body. The infants so bewitched were unable to drink from their own mother, and quickly withered; also the bodies of the injured (and often killed) children bore the horrible signs of *maleficium* - sores, extra nipples, swollen lumps, wounds.

A reversal process was enacted: the woman was no longer nurturing the thirsty child, but the infant was transformed into a "drinking vessel", covered by teats that could be sucked by the witch, who dried the little body up. The accusations to Ursula Neher, during 1650 and the description of her victim's body exemplified this point: "its [the infant's] little breasts had been sucked out so that milk had been pressed out from the child's little teats contrary to nature,… and from this time on the child had lost weight so that it looked as if hardly a pound of flesh remained on it".[111]

It is worth noting that the aggressive relation between the female witch and the infant relied not only in the magical abilities of the woman, but also on the specific liminal state, to which we have already hinted regarding the myth of the sabbath and which connotated the newborn child. According to the medical theories it was generated and nourished by menstrual matter when inside the womb and depending of maternal breast-milk after birth. Therefore the infant was not detached completely from the mother and it did not have a clear acknowledged individual and social status.

Ideas regarding the marginal position of the young child and its connection to maternal blood are to be found universally. The observation that the ceasing of menstrual flux coincides with pregnancy has often led to the assimilation, in different cultures, of menstrual blood with the matter forming the foetus, so establishing a special connection between the mother and the future child.[112] Mary Douglas has discussed the special condition of the foetus among the Nyakyusa and the Lele of Africa, where menstrual blood has a strong affinity with the unborn child. The child is formed by that blood, and, like it, is inscribed in a boundary inside the body: already a physical presence, but not yet a living, visible creature. It is described as a creature that has a vampire's craving for the fluids of life, whose presence inside the pregnant woman becomes a danger for her own liquids and even for cattle's milk and fresh food. The malevolent nature of the unborn child does not depend upon inner or spiritual qualities of the future being, but it is due to the struggle between life and death, which it embodies, bringing death into life (crossing a boundary, spoiling milk) and life into the hidden place of death (forming itself from the mother's blood). Similarly for some cultures, as the Maoris, menstrual blood is expressly an undone person, and consequently the premature child is a dangerous one, probably because being not able to complete itself in the womb, it is gifted, at the moment of birth, of

[111] Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*: *Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* . (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 207. See also Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze*, pp. 127-129.
[112] Melissa L. Meyer, *Thicker than Water*, p. 51

an extraordinary, devastating desire for the fullness of existence and blood.[113] The special bond established through the corporeal liquids between the mother and the son has been also underlined by Julia Kristeva, who has noted that in the Bible the practice of cooking a young goat, a "milk goat", is considered an aberration, because this kind of food would be a strongly polluted one. The maternal milk is a binding element that locates the mother and the son on a border zone, in which the small sacrifice of the mother's blood during breastfeeding detaches the world of pre-life and death from the actual world in which the child is transported.[114]

Although early modern Europe was generally free of this negative perception of the foetus, which nevertheless survived to a certain extent in folkloric tradition, as we will discuss in the next chapter, the newborn child was placed in a special space in the flux of existence, where it shared the ambiguous and powerful features of supernatural beings. So, for example, at Norimberg in 1549, during the trial of a mother suspected of infanticide, the corpse of the victim figured as the main accuser, when, after she had invoked its spirit to testify her innocence, the dead infant rose its arm, indicating her as the murderer.[115] As the historian Adriano Prosperi has discussed, analyzing a case of infanticide in Bologna during 1709, in which the guilty mother killed the child immediately after birth, the identity of the infant was difficult to establish, especially as the duration of its life was so short. The female body was a source of anxieties which it transmitted to the generated beings: a new human life as a demoniacal being could be nourished by the woman, according to the same complex of theories which saw her either as a mother or as a witch. Furthermore even when the newborn was found complete in all its physical parts, it still had to be recognized as a member of the community. It needed a name and to be baptized in order to acquire a place in Christian society.[116] Henceforth there was a special link running through the bodily fluids that allowed the female witch to aggress infants, acting as an inverted genitor. The same connection existed between the magical malefactor and

[113] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 118-120

[114] "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 14:21); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection.* Trans. By Leon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 105

[115] Merry Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany*. (Brunswick: New Rutgers University Press, 1986), p. 71

[116] Adriano Prosperi, *Dare l'anima. Storia di un infanticidio.* (Torino: Einaudi, 2005), pp. 129-149. See also Ottavia Niccoli, "Il corpo femminile nei trattati del Cinquecento". In Gisela Bock, Giuliana Nobili (eds.), *Il corpo delle donne.* (Ancona: Transeuropa, 1988), pp. 25-43

the other fluids which could be found inside the female sphere and the domestic space, milk in particular.

Milk-spoiling or stealing figured in other accusations and it is still diffused in traditional stories where the witch figure is often confused with supernatural beings such as fairies. Witches' spells affected the dairy, wasting the cream, butter and other milk derivates; they were also accused of interfering with other liquids on which the ordinary economical balance of families depended, such as beer and ale in England or wine in Germany.[117]

The aggressor reversed the normal process of lactation, as it is shown in the Scottish case of Janet Murdoch during 1671, in which the cows gave blood mixed with flesh. Domestic animals gave blood when milked or were completely dried up, while the witch received their nourishment: the crime also assimilated witches with fairies, the most notorious milk-stealers. The methods of stealing were based on different types of sympathetic magic, employing the bodily parts of the bewitched animal, or resorting to other natural liquids to attract milk. A Scottish witch could drive the milk through a rope obtained from the hair of different cows, with a knot for every cow, accompanied by the singing of enchanting verses similar to this one:

Meare's milk, and deer's milk,
And every beast that bears milk,
Between St. Johnston and Dundee,
Come a' to me, come a' to me!

French witches used dew collected in the fields near the person who they wanted to harm, and whose cows' milk passed directly into the witches' cows, as it is suggested by the spell:

Drag, drag, my rags,
All my neighbour's milk;
Jump, jump into my pail!

Consequently all that the witch had to do was wash the cows' udders with that dew and wait for milk to flow. Other means recalled the action of hurting, opening a wound in the cow's body, so that the blood/milk could exit: a witch stuck a sharp

[117] For examples of seventeenth-century Scottish witches accused of milk-stealing see: P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *The Great Scottish Witch-Hunt.* (Great Britan: Tempus, 2007), pp. 51-51,

object, a knife, an axe in the wall of the neighbour's house, or in a date post; then she or he sat down with a pail pretending to milk an invisible cow. The most extraordinary method diffused especially in England, Scotland and Ireland, employed the shape-shifting ability of the witch, who in the preferred form of a hare, sucked the cow dry.[118] The transformation was rarely found in the trials' materials, but acknowledged in folkloric narratives, until modern times.

Differently from blood there was no duality in milk. It carried the healthy and feeding qualities of the vital fluid and exemplified the positive female features. Witchcraft beliefs inverted this symbolism to violent and horrible consequences, as it is shown in the execution in 1600 of the 59-year- old Anna Poppenheimer and her family, Lutheran peasants from Catholic Bavaria. The condemned had their flesh torn by red-hot pincers, and Anna had her breasts, the place of her power and also her vulnerability, cut off, and "the severed nipples forced into her mouth and then into the mouths of her adult sons in a bloody parody of breast-feeding".[119] Remarkably the punishment of Anna Poppenheimer recalls the female saints' self inflicted tortures during the medieval period.

Torture was for these women a means to control the body, humiliating the mortal nature of the flesh; and of procuring the means of a spiritual ascension to the divinity. The female body was, in this regard, more powerful than the male one: being the vessel of existence, it could also be the channel for a godly life, employing the ambivalence of blood which fed both the flesh and the soul. As Caroline Walker Bynum has suggested, the fertility of the female body was translated by the female saint from the natural to the spiritual domain: fasting and mutilation were linked to the only food which these women could tolerate, Christ's blood, the same which the devil wanted to annihilate. Drinking from Christ's wounds and through the desire for the holy host the female saints reached a mystical union with Christ where sufferance and joy were both contemplated. Mystics such as the Flemish Beatrice of Nazareth or

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[118] George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New-England*, pp. 163-173. For the witch in the cellar in Germany see Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze*, pp. 118-119. For the accusation of milk-stealing in Sweden: Bengt Ankarloo, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)." In Bengt Ankarloo, Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries.*), pp. 285-318. Christina Larner, *Enemies of God*, pp. 122-123. For the Scottish enchantment see: William Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders*. (London: Folklore Society, 1879), pp. 199-200. For the French witches and for milk-stealing in general see Stephen Wilson, *The Magical Universe Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe*. (London: Hambledon and London, 2000), pp. 106-111.

[119] Llewelyn Price Merral, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* .(New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 62

the Italian Caterina da Siena, required Christ's blood as the only necessary food for the soul, experiencing deeply the humanity of Christ, affirming to drink directly from his wounds, as from maternal breasts, during their ecstasies.[120] Late medieval religious tradition was also the context of the cult of the Magdalene, in which the idea of sin and salvation converged in that of femaleness, matching the imagery of the body with that of the soul. To attain salvation Magdalene surrendered physically and morally to Christ. Images of the time show a penitent Magdalene adoring the copious blood of the crucifix, bathing in Christ's sacrificial blood, which had the power to cleanse guilt.[121] The symbolism of the Magdalene was inverted in that of the witch at the sabbath, where the blood served to seal the demonic pact and to waste the soul instead of rescuing it. Yet there is also a strong affinity between the two experiences. Both the female bodies of the saint and the witch seem, at this point, the best ones for a supernatural experience. The first one reached it consuming her physical substances and drinking the pure Lord's blood in order to nourish the soul; the other consumed people's own bodily substances, to be the vehicle for the Devil.

2.7 The decaying body

Femaleness and the stereotype of the anti-mother mingled with that of old age: the maleficent, lonely hag who searched for young, healthy life to restore lost youth. These ideas suggest that the potency of the witch relied strongly on the body - an ageing woman, who could no longer give birth, and who spread a distorted maternal power which destroyed instead of nurtured. Being the liquid through which life was brought forth inside the individual, blood can be seen as the ideal symbol of the struggle between the witch and the victim.

Lyndal Roper, who has focused on elderly harmless women as the principal victims of the hunts in early modern Germany, has emphasised the theme of female-female rivalry, entailing the preservation of existence, fertility and child-bearing, in

[120] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 161-179. Laurie A. Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision." In Ulrike Wiethaus (ed.), *Maps of Flesh and Light. The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics.* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp. 41-42. Claire Marshall, "The Politics of Self-Mutilation: Forms of Female Devotion in the Late Middle Ages." In Darryll Grantley, Nina Taunton (eds). *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture.* (Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), pp. 11-18

[121] Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen. Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000)

which old, sterile women were opposed to mothers, children and young women, driven in their evil-doing by the feeling of envy.[122] Examining the English context of witchcraft, Malcolm Gaskill has pointed out four categories in which it could be located:

- religious deviance and secular crime
- an explanation for misfortune and a focus for blame
- an expression and manifestation of fear and anger
- a potential source of power.[123]

These indicators are useful, characterising the mentalities of the accusers and the accused, and, except for the first point which had its origin in the theological debate, they can be adopted to explain the stereotype of the old witch. Useless and weak in the social scale of values, she symbolically and physically embodied proximity with the end of life, and so became a perfect scapegoat in which the community could recognize and destroy its deepest anxieties.

As we have seen regarding the symbolism of Gog and Magog, while inside society the old woman was marginalized, such marginalization became a source for a dangerous power redirected towards the community. Weakness was inverted in otherworldly strength. The ageing individual acquired grotesque connotations, the monstrosity of the approaching death, which affected the internal balance, stopped reproduction and changed the physical abilities of the person. In terms of blood and power it seems that while the fluid was weakened in its living principles, it was otherwise enforced in its deadly ones. Opposite to the maternal womb the old body was the gateway to sickness and decay. This physical reality merged well with the alleged social position of such women, widows or spinsters, poor and deprived of rights.[124] If the stereotype seems valuable for certain contexts, the trials demonstrate that not all witches were old, female or characterised by a weak social and economical status. It is correct, as we have done, to speak of the ageing female witch as a stereotyped figure, which allowed several exceptions that can be dismissed. As it has been widely discussed by Robin Briggs for the cases of Lorraine and by Alison

[122] Lyndal Roper, *Witch-Craze*, pp. 80-81
[123] Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 78
[124] George Minois, *History of Old Age.* (Southampton: The Camelot Press, 1989), pp. 300-307

Rowlands for the German case of Appolonia Glaitter, old age was not always synonymous with poverty, disease and marginalization. Elderly or middle-aged people accused of witchcraft could instead be rich, healthy and powerful. Also the age of the accused at the time of the trials did not necessarily correspond to the first accusations: reputation played an important role and developed over the years.[125]

Men could be accused of witchcraft. In some countries and regions, such as Iceland, Finland and Normandy, male witches were in the majority. Children also figured in some trials in eighteenth-century Germany and they played an important role as accusers in Sweden, where they testified to have taken part in sabbaths.[126] As Christina Larner has famously stated, "all women were potential witches", but not all witches were women: witchcraft was "sex-related", not "sex-specific". Although many of its prevalently feminine aspects are undeniable, it is primary true that *witches were persecuted as witches*, that is for their allegiance with the Devil and for the suspect of *maleficium*; not because they were *just* women.[127] Witchcraft ran in the blood, that is it was to be found in different generations of the same families, so it was possible to transmit it as a legacy to both male and female descendents. It has also been argued that a gendered society produced a gendered magic. Exploring the Dutch context, Willem de Blécourt has distinguished a female harmful magic from a male enriching one. Although both men and women could act through witchcraft using the same practices, the results seemed quite different. The patriarchal society was transferred and disrupted in the world of witches, where the man, maintaining his cultural place of control, was transformed into the witch who used magic for his own benefit, while the woman was changed to an unlucky aggressor, never able to have a minimum gain from her wasting actions and ruled by another male-character, the Devil himself.[128] Yet, men could also be accused of employing female magic. If it is true that in the witch trials male witches were not treated differently from female-ones, a fundamental point is that, as Apps and Gow have underlined, they were often "associated with certain traits that feminised them implicitly".[129]

[125] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 228-229. Alison Rowlands, "Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany"
[126] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 224-226
[127] Christian Larner, *Enemies of God,* pp. 92-93.
[128] Willem De Blècourt, "The Making of the Female Witch: Reflections on Witchcraft and Gender in the Early Modern Period". *Gender and History*, vol.12 No 2 (July 2000), pp. 298-300
[129] Lara Apps, Andrew Gow (eds.), *Male witches in early modern Europe*, p. 127

We have discussed the magic of witches as deeply rooted in their physical persons and in the complex link between the body and soul expressed by blood. In the attempt to resolve the problem of gender, to explain why, although everyone could be accused, women were the 'best' witches,[130] I am going to consider a case in which a male witch operated as a female one.

The historian Malcolm Gaskill has explored the accusations made against the seventeenth-century middle-aged Kent farmer William Godfrey. John and Susan Barber, who rented Godfrey's property in 1609, testified how the man had attacked Susan during childbirth, sending to her his familiar spirits to take the infant away, and also how, after being refused the piglets he wanted to buy from John because they were too young, he had bewitched the livestock, drying up the sow's milk, causing the consequent impaired growth of the piglets and the mysterious death of several horses. When Margaret and William Holton, who lived in the same house between 1613 and 1615, found the laundry mysteriously sprinkled with what looked like blood, suspicion was immediately directed towards Godfrey, whose evil influence was also suspected when their one-year-old child sickened and died.[131] According to the accusations, Godfrey stopped the flow of milk, spoiled food, and injured and eventually killed children. He was also the contrary of the witch-stereotype: he was not old (and certainly he was not post-menopausal), he was not poor and he was not a woman. Yet he was accused of *maleficium* in 1617 and his magic followed the same patterns we have met with in the case of the female witch. Living inside a community, Godfrey was not free from the possibility of conflicts involving economic pressures and the emotional sphere of envy, fear, suspicion and desire which dwell inside every human society, and that, as Gaskill has written, led his neighbours to perceive him as a witch. But he also had the supposed power to harm because he was not excluded from the domain of bodily fluids on which witchcraft relied, and on which both social tensions and religious anxieties were reflected.

The criminal "raw power", in Robin Briggs' definition of the witch,[132] did not spread directly from him or her but passed through the agent, using the unstable energy of the body, being primarily dangerous for him or herself. The potential

[130] Edward Bever, "Witchcraft, female aggression, and power in the early modern community." *Journal of Social History,* vol. 35, No.4 (Summer 2002), p. 957
[131] Malcolm Gaskill, "The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England." *Historical Research*, Vol.71 No. 175 (June 1998), pp. 142-171
[132] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, p. 277

aggressor encapsulated the anxieties and the beliefs connected with a fluid body which was placed on the threshold of life and death. In this regard some bodies gained more power than others, but everyone underwent the inevitable process of decay and corruption to which both the physical and spiritual condition were linked. Beyond the witch it is this bodily evidence which was feared and permeated the world through blood, which brought spiritual redemption and natural life, but also disruption and death, either empowering or endangering the human identity.

3. Supernatural Beings: Fairies, vampires, werewolves

3.1 Blood and Supernatural Beings

From the examination of European witch-beliefs blood emerges as the vehicle employed by witches to waste the course of life that the liquid should assure, and by the devil to establish his domain over the human soul. It follows that blood was a crucial element of division between the natural world and the supernatural one. Like the witch, otherworldly creatures could use the fluid essence to penetrate the sphere of human and physical life, altering its normal course. But beyond the devil and his host, what exactly were these supernatural beings? What was their relation to witches? How were they represented in popular knowledge? Was their reality attested or denied by the theologians?

The three kinds of creatures that we are going to explore here are fairies, vampires and werewolves. All of them were present in different European traditions before the age of the witch-trials and they all interacted with the representation of the witch. In fact, supernatural and human features cohabited in the figure of the magical malefactor, although he or she could be identified in every common person.

Fairy beliefs were especially strong and relevant in the context of the Scottish trials, but they survived also in remote regions of England, such as Cornwall. The belief in vampires and werewolves was, instead, widespread in eastern and central Europe. Despite the fact that only the vampire was explicitly a deceased person, all these creatures had a relation with death and the human soul, which once again can be read through the value of blood. Fairies were characterised by a longing for human beings together with a 'defective physicality', that is they presented abnormal bodies, characterized by deformities, or animal limbs. They also consumed and stole human and animal milk. Vampires sucked the blood of the living, stopping their normal process of decay as corpses and confusing dangerously the boundaries between life and death. Finally werewolves, although not belonging to the host of the dead, could shed blood, changing themselves from ordinary people to bestial and violent beings.

What we are going to see here is how the desire of fairies, the need of the vampire, and the werewolf's capacity of transformation, pointed all towards blood, because they depended on the immaterial, vital principle it contained. This idea was strengthened in the demonological treatises, where these creatures were linked to the

work of the devil and acquired the ability to corrupt or dismantle the Christian soul, beyond that of endanger physical life.

3.2 Fairies and witches

Witches were people who thanks to their abilities set themselves apart from the rest of the community. They differentiate themselves and doing this they lost an acceptable position in human society, but also gained other qualities and characteristics. Placed at the boundaries of life and death, directing evil spells against single individuals or whole villages in order to steal or destroy their physical and spiritual existence, witches' work can be equated with the activities of supernatural beings, particularly those mysterious creatures identified as fairies since antiquity.

For medieval and early modern theologians the devil was the supernatural enemy responsible of the work of witches inside their communities. Yet, according to the popular mind the devil was just one extraordinary and feared creature among others, which manifested the presence of a superhuman dimension disquietingly close to the known world. The most common kind of these beings were fairies who were believed to entice people to their homeland, and steal children and dairy products. Examining the Hungarian witch-trials Éva Pócs has discussed the supernatural transgression of human society's borders as deriving from a distinctive state "caught in between" the living world and the dead one. Witches shared this condition as well, and witchcraft beliefs conveyed motifs from fairy-lore together with the diabolic content of religious treatises.

It has been noted that the relationship between fairies and witches was one of similarity, more than of submission. They had in common, for example, features such as nocturnal meetings and dancing, shapeshifting and flight, and, what is more meaningful for the present work, the relation to blood, the vital essence, in all its symbolic and tangible manifestations.[133]

Fairies' attraction towards human people, and, as we intend to demonstrate, towards their bodies and blood, can be related to different attitudes in Catholic and Protestant countries. In Ireland, for example, where the belief in fairies was strongly rooted and still present up to recent times, there was no witchhunt, while witches' common domestic crimes, such as children's wasting or milk stealing were attributed

[133]Éva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead.* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

to supernatural beings. In Sicily, as we will see better in chapter five, the presence of fairies was connected to beneficent witches, the ladies from the outside, characterised by a special "sweet blood".[134] In some parts of Europe witches' confessions abounded with fairy narratives. According to popular belief the witch could receive supernatural powers from fairies instead of from the devil. European tradition considered fairies as dangerous, devilish creatures, but while in Catholic countries the satanic elements still mingled with beneficent aspects, the Protestant world generally saw fairies as damnable beings who tempted people in accordance with Satan's will.[135] Some good examples come from Scotland, where fairies had been demonized by King James' work on witchcraft.[136] The belief was diffused especially in the Highlands, where alleged witches or magical healers found their allies in the fairy queen or other fairy spirits.

Hard to classify among the categories of extraordinary creatures, fairies were variously considered spirits of the dead, past divinities from the pagan world and manifestations of natural forces. They were placed between good and evil and embodied the features of the otherworld together with a physical craving for the human dimension. When the theologians of the Reformation denied the existence of Purgatory, and therefore of an intermediate state of the soul after death, ghosts, apparitions and fairies being too far from the angelic hosts, were ascribed to the satanic ones, although certain confusion existed - as testified by some treatises and by the common people's accounts.[137]

The belief in supernatural beings, which could be described as bloodsuckers, merged with the world of demonic witches. The Swiss Protestant theologian Ludwig Lavater, in his work on apparitions and ghosts, mentioned the ancient *lamiae* or *striges*, female demons which ate children and sucked out human blood.[138] It is worth noting that these supernatural creatures mirrored the aggressive behaviour of human witches, but they wasted only the physical life, while there was no mention of

[134] Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from the Outside." In Bengt Ankarloo, Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft. Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 191-218

[135] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 729

[136] James VI, *Daemonologie*, pp. 74-77;Canon J.A. MacCulloch, "The Mingling of Fairy and Witch Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland." *Folklore* vol. 32, No. 4 (Dec.1921), pp-227-244

[137] See for example Ludwig Lavater, *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght*. (London: 1596). Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits.* (London: 1691), p.4; John Aubrey, *Miscellanies.* (London: 1696), p. 156.

[138]Ludwig Lavater, *Of Ghostes and Spirites*, pp. 5-6

spiritual disruption. Undoubtedly the satanic allegiance that characterised both fairies and witches was the poignant justification for the persecution of people like the Scottish Bessie Dunlop in 1576 or Alison Pearson in 1588, who allegedly communicated with the fairy world. The demonic origin of fairies was strengthened by the effort to eradicate the "auld ffayth", as Bessie Dunlop defined it,[139] that is Catholicism, from the popular mind, where it still endured, with its legacy of rituals, sacred objects, saints and spirits, in which people could find the visible presence of a benevolent divinity and a magical remedy for their practical problems.

Yet when fairy beliefs, widespread among common people, merged with the demonological ideas surrounding witchcraft, the result was a Devil-figure which resembled a fairy lord, more than the enemy of God and of the Christian faith. This means that the spiritual dimension, in which devilish forces were though to act, acquired the features of the physical one where humans and traditional fairies allegedly confronted themselves in everyday life. So the Devil's attempt to spoil the human soul through the satanic allegiance and the employment of witches' blood was transposed in the alleged longing of fairies for the human world. In this regard Peter Maxwell-Stuart, in his study on witchcraft and the Devil in the Scottish Highlands, has analyzed the particular prominence of the *sìthean* (the Gaelic term for fairies), finding that in the narratives of the accused the fundamental ideas of the diabolical pact and the mark could be associated to the encounter with these creatures. For example, the sixty years old Isobel Watson, tried in 1589, explained that the scar that she had on the forehead was a mark the *sìthean* gave her with a knife when she had been taken to their house, at the age of eighteen years. She showed other marks on a finger, on an arm and on her left hand where they had bitten her.[140] The pattern of the supernatural aggression is similar to the ones encountered in witches' tales of the sabbath and the coven with the devil, yet the encounter was not followed by any special requirement to do harm inside the human community. Detached from the most common beliefs regarding fairy activities, which we will explore later, this kind of tale was apparently only the result of a demonological framework translated into witches' confessions, but deprived of its spiritual content, which common people did not completely understand.

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[139] Robert Pitcairn, *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland 1488-1624.* (Edinburgh, Bannatyne Club: 1833), p. 52. For a wide discussion of the Reformation attitude towards fairy-beliefs in Scotland see Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief.* (Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 2001), pp. 106-138

[140] Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's conspiracy,* pp. 115-117

Popular knowledge and learned notions about the supernatural mark converged in the depiction of a transgressed boundary between the human and the fairy world, hidden in the blood-loss which the scar suggested. Fairy customs were not directly linked with blood-thirst or the waste of the human liquid. According to the Elizabethan tradition, fairies mostly pinched or nipped people.[141] Their behaviour was milder than the devil's, as described in the previous chapter, though there was a physical contact between the human and the fairy and an implicit interference with the corporeal balance and the flowing of its fluids. Pinching and biting could in fact cause visible marks, hindering the normal flux of blood. This concern with bodily aggression reflected emotions and fears linked to the image of a dangerous outsider that were shared by both elites and common people. Yet while the devil was after human blood to employ it as a means of disrupting the divine work and the spiritual foundation of Christian Europe, it seems that fairies were after human and animal strength for more practical purposes. As we will see, they actually needed the force of human beings for themselves. In this regard the fairies of popular tradition differed from the devil of the theological treatises. They both looked after blood or bodily fluids, but fairies were free of the desire to take advantage through it on the human soul and consequently overcome God's power. The religious anxiety of the Christian community was displayed in the demonological treatises and in the description of the supernatural enemy which wasted the human soul washed by Christ's blood, but it found its tangible evidence in the popular perception of supernatural creatures who, from the margins of life, looked after the vital fluid in order to strengthen their own, physically weak, existence.

3.3 Elf-shot and Milk-stealing

The most well known harmful activity attributed to the fairies in the British Isles is the elf-shot: a prehistoric flint arrowhead, which people thought a fairies' weapon. Fairies flicked these darts off their thumbnails, harming cattle and sometimes human beings, causing consumptive diseases or a sudden death. The evidence of the elf shot was provided by the sharp stones themselves, which could be found by people and employed for ritualistic and medicinal purposes, due to the healing power they

[141] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.728-729

allegedly possessed.[142] Yet the way in which the elf shot worked seems more magical then its alleged evidence: in fact it did not leave any trace or visible wound on the body. Alaric Hall has recently investigated the nature of the elf-shot in the Scottish witch-trials, stressing the attention on the confusion aroused by the word *shot*: "in Modern English it almost invariably denotes projectiles or their releasing. But *schot* occurs several times in Older Scots meaning 'a sudden sharp pain; a spasm of pain; a shooting pain'."[143] Looking at the confessions of the witches who could both use and cure the elf-shot, it emerges clearly that the attack and the sufferance were physically linked. If, in fact, the wound could not be seen it could be felt and touched as a hole or as a lump of flesh. The remarkable feature of the injured part was its lack of bleeding. A good illustration of this can be found in the folklore of Orkney and Shetlands. In these islands fairies or trows were believed responsible for cattle's illnesses until modern times. In one nineteenth-century account on fairy activities a wise woman, specialized in the cure of the elf-shot, examined the body of a cow that had been shot by fairies. The woman looked for a hairless spot and a protuberant lump under the animal' skin: "the final test was to pierce the cow in various places with a large needle - if the poor beast did not bleed externally, obviously she was bleeding internally from her hurt."[144]

The object of the tale is similar to the famous bloodless spot searched for on the bodies of alleged witches during the early modern period, the Devil's mark which obsessed the minds of demonologists. Yet the story of the Shetland woman is relatively modern, quite far from the period of witch-trials. Thus it can be read as a testimony of the persistence of the belief in supernatural beings and their dangerousness, at least in peripheral areas of Europe. This fact also suggests to us how deeply the religious ideas, which had dominated the witch-hunt, were entangled with the popular ones, and how the fear of a bodily aggression was stronger than that of a spiritual contamination, so that it still endured when the craze and the persecution from above in the continent had come to an end. Furthermore, the belief that there had to be bleeding *somewhere*, interpreted as an internal haemorrhage by

[142] Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, pp. 93-94; Alaric Hall, "Getting Shot of Elves: Healing Witchcraft and Fairies in the Scottish Witchcraft Trials". *Folklore* No. 116 (April 2005), pp. 19-36. See also the discussion on the elf-shot in early medieval England in Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England. Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Indentity.* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp.96-118

[143] Alaric Hall, "Getting Shot of Elves", p. 22

[144] Ernest Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), p. 43

the nineteenth-century wise woman, can be attributed to early modern people as well. They did not explain it properly as an internal problem and as a reversed blood flux, but they were curing it as a mysterious loss of vital substances. Besides the employment of herbs and charms, the elf shot could be healed following more interesting types of sympathetic magic, as some examples from Scotland show. Jeane Scott, tried at Paisley during 1650, cured the elf-shot "by three fingeris of different persons putt in the holl". John Burgh from Fossoway (1643) used to sprinkle the cows with water in which "two inchantit stanes", that is two arrowheads, had been placed; while Steven Malcome from Stirling in 1628 similarly cured a woman, Jonet Chrystie, making her sit in a stream of water where he put an "elff arrow stone".[145] Now we have to try to interpret the healing process. In the first case someone was actually filling the hole, so that an intact healthy body was transmitting its life-force to the pierced, damaged one. The second and the third cases are maybe still more significant, being based on the properties of the fluid which enlivens all natural life, water, and on the qualities of the harming-object itself, which must retain a part or the whole of what it broke or drew.

My view is that the magic properties of the darts did not derive from the fairies which shaped them, but from the bodies they wounded, and more exactly from what came out and consequently was stolen. The late seventeenth-century Scottish minister of the church of Aberfoyle, Robert Kirk, himself a believer in fairies, gives us valuable evidence for this interpretation:

> With their weapons they [the fairies] also *gon* or pierce Cous or other Animals, usually said to be Elf-shot, whose purest substance (if they die) these subterraneans take to live on, viz the aereal and aethereal parts, the most spirituous matter for prolonging of Lyfe, such as aqua-vitae (moderatly taken) is among liquors; leaving the Terrestriall behind. The cure of such hurts is, only for a man to find out the hole with his finger; as if the spirits flowing from a mans warme hand were antidote suffcient against their poyson'd darts.[146]

[145] Alaric Hall, "Getting Shot of Elves", pp. 25-26; Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan, , *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 77

[146] Robert Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691). Edited and Commentary by S. Sanderson, (Cambridge: 1976), p. 60

So fairies lived on the "substance" they extracted through the elf-shot, which was magically conveyed into the stone itself. The poisonous action of the arrow was not a process of contamination, but one of subtraction, that was consequently healed by a replacement. If it is not yet clear what this substance was, its location is an easy deduction: it had to be something inside the matter that spread from the wound, it had to be carried by the blood. This can be demonstrated by another use of the elf-shot: its employment by fairies to steal milk from cows. It was believed that if a cow did not give milk it must have been struck by fairies,[147] who had a particular desire for animal or human milk, the refined, nurturing blood. Milk-stealing was one of the practice that the witch inherited directly from the fairies, as Kittredge attested in his early work on witchcraft: "Cows may be dried up by the English Hobthursts; they may be milked by Scottish and Irish fairies, by hedgehogs (a shape often assumed by imps), or by snakes, especially black snakes".[148]

Yet, beyond these tales, there was a fundamental difference between witches and fairies that could be ascribed to another belief according to which milk was the object of an exchange between human individuals and supernatural ones, rather than an act of theft. Milk libations and the offering of meals to fairies were widely practised in Scotland and Ireland during the seventeenth century. The milk was poured into holes in the ground and thought to reach fairies and other subterraneans beings; or it was left as an offer to a particular fairy, which helped families and people in their daily work. This is the case of familiar fairies such as the Brownie in Scotland or the Dodds in Sussex and the Pixie in Cornwall. Other wilder creatures were also ready to take care of the cattle by night in exchange for human food and milk, such as the Scottish Glaistig-Gruagach, a female spirit which resembled a goat in her lower bodily parts, and the solitary Urisk.[149]

The view of milk as an exchange token is useful to understand some differences between the perception of witches and that of fairies. The action of witches, believed to steal milk and other products employing their magical skills, was seen as totally negative. They were intruders in other people's domestic spaces and activities, which they damaged in order to enrich themselves. Fairies, on the contrary, received offers

[147] William Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-Lore*, p. 185
[148] Kittredge, George Lyman, *Witchcraft in Old and New-England*, p. 166
[149] Donald A. Mackenzie, *Scottish Folk-Lore and Folk-Life. Studies in Race, Culture and Tradition.* (London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son Limited, 1935), pp. 179, 208-209, 219-221; Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides* (Edinburgh,1772), p. 313. For the Dodds see Jaqueline Simpson, *The Folklore of Sussex*. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1973), pp. 57-58

of food and milk, revealing certain dependence on their human neighbours. Thus the offer established a relation between people and the supernatural beings which, if respected, guaranteed to the former fairy help or a relative immunity from fairy aggressions, and to the latter the required nourishment. A neglected offer to fairies could turn them into real blood-wasters. In the Isle of Man it was believed that if people forgot to put drinkable water (a living fluid again) outside the door for fairies, these last would have suck the blood of the sleepers "or bleed them and make a cake with the blood. What was left of the cake they would hide about the house, and if it was not found and given to the sleepers to eat they would die of a wasting disease."[150]

Also when we meet those fairies which are definitely evil, some kind of transgression must occur to be harmed by them. Let us, for example, consider two scary fairy monsters known as the Nuckelavee, a sea monster from Shetland, and the Kelpie, a water spirit from the Highlands. The fear regarding the former was strong and widespread until the eighteenth century. It was believed to destroy crops and cause plague with its poisonous breath, and it was described as bloodthirsty, skinless, with blood thick and black as tar in its exposed pulsing yellow veins, yet he could not cross streams, and its human victim could find salvation trespassing them. The Kelpie appeared in the preferred form of a gentle horse, but also sometimes as a man. It attracted human beings to draw them into a pool of water and devour them; yet it seems from all the narratives that it could do nothing if not approached by the human being. It could be recognized and avoided thanks to weird or disquieting features that identified it as non-animal and non-human.[151] The notable fact regarding these creatures is their provenience from a watery-domain, that is from the universal vital fluid, which, like blood, retains a deep ambiguity, begetting danger and existence, as is well shown by the Nuckelavee, which coming from the sea, is hindered by the running water which brings life forth. As we are going to see in the next chapter, the vitality of blood depended strongly on its correct movement inside a body, so we can infer that similarly the flowing water is a symbol of energy and health opposed to sickness and death coming from stagnating liquids.

Another case of an evil fairy which cannot do anything to man if a boundary is not trespassed is the Red Cap, found in the folkloric tradition of the Lowlands, which

[150] Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 114-115

[151] Ernest Marwick, *Scottish Folk-Lore and Folk-Life*, pp. 22-23; Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, pp. 69-70

haunted castles ruins and towers, and was depicted as "a short thickset old man, with long prominent teeth, skinny fingers armed with talons like eagles, large eyes of a fiery red-colour, grisly hair streaming down his shoulders, iron boots, a pike staff in his left hand, and a red cap on his head". If travellers stopped in his castle, he started to fling stones at them and could also kill them during the night. It then plunged its cap in its victims' blood, so that it obtained its characteristic crimson colour. The best counteraction, the author proceeds, is to repeat the Scriptures or to hold up a cross: then the Red Cap will vanish in a flame, leaving just the bodily part that showed its aggressive nature - a large tooth.[152] Despite the alleged devilish provenance of the fairy, the only way to be hurt and killed by it entails a human's violation of a threshold: someone has to enter the house of the spirit, which can act only inside its delimited space. It is worth noting how the colour red, in the previous example, and in general as a symbol for blood, gained double nature in fairy beliefs. So in the German and Scandinavian folklore the red cap or red hair and beard, was an attribute of the home-sprite, which generally was a benevolent helping creature;[153] but red berries or thread were considered to protect against the evil fairies.[154]

What remains to be analyzed is why fairies needed and craved milk, blood or other mysterious substances that they could extract from cattle and human beings. The first striking concept that lies behind their alimentary habits, or their aggressive hunger, is that fairies must have some kind of bodies to feed. Different from other spiritual beings, fairies, despite their capacity to appear or disappear at will, were not completely unsubstantial. According to Robert Kirk they have "light changeable bodies" similar to condensed clouds or made of "congealed air"; a kind then of unfixable, fluid bodies or as he says, talking of the particular nourishment they need:

> Some fairies have bodies or vehicles so spungious, thin and desecate, that they are fed by only sucking into some fine spirituous liquors, that pierce like pure air and oyl: others feed more gross on the foyson or substance of cornes and liquors, or on corne itself, that grows on the surface of the Earth, which these fairies steall away, partly invisible, partly praying on the grain as do Crows or Mice.

[152] William Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-Lore*, p. 253
[153] Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*. (London, 1883), vol.2, p. 508
[154] Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief,* p. 89; Donald A. Mackenzie, *Scottish Folk-Lore and Folk-Life*, pp. 274-275

Going on Kirk adds than some fairies also feed on " the pith and quintessence of what man eats", and that "what food they extract from us is convey'd to their homes by secret pathes, as some skillfull women doe the pith of milk from their neighbours cows". We can infer that the substance fairies are extracting is a liquid one, in accordance to their own porous bodies that place them in a range of beings among spirits and human people.[155] This view of fairy behaviour, although coming from a religious person, is not reflecting the theological speculation on the diabolical legacy of fairies, but a widespread popular belief in which their interference with everyday life was more pregnant than the debate on their spiritual nature. Yet the discussion on the physical habits and appearance of fairies can give a useful insight on their supernatural origin. The fairy body, always in need of certain vital qualities of the food, either milk or blood, is a defective one, which lacks something, and so it is condemned to live neither in darkness nor in the brightness of the day, as the same Kirk observes, but in the fading light of the sunset, in a perpetual state of waiting, for a supernatural freedom or for a physical completeness. Traditionally fairies are attracted by milk and its derivates. This strengthens the idea of physical nourishment, which is sought for by the supernatural beings and which is expressed better by dairy products than by blood. Yet we have seen that witches themselves spoiled milk and that the fluid was considered a kind of refined blood. Milk brought forth physical life in the same way in which blood carried the active principle of the soul inside the body. Henderson and Cowan have noted that there was a widespread belief that fairies, entrapped between Heaven and Hell looked for human contact in order to obtain a soul;[156] yet if this could be one of the religious explanations, the fairy behaviour implied a physical interaction that had its more evident results in the worldly sphere of life. The soul was placed at the centre of the contest between human beings and fairies, but it dramatically required a bodily passage to enact its power. In this regard the ideal victims of the fairies were, as with witches, infants and children, whose sicknesses could be explained as the work of supernatural beings. An example comes from the records of Durham ecclesiastical court. In 1568 a wise woman was asked to heal the sick child of Edward Wydrington. Interrogated regarding the nature of the disease, she answered that the child: "was taken with the

[155] Robert Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth,* pp. 50-55. See also: R.U. Sayce, "The Origins and Development of the Belief in Fairies." *Folklore* Vol. 45, No.2 (Jun.1934), p. 99
[156] Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 95

fayre and bad hir sent 2 for southrowninge water, and theis 2 shull not speke by the waye, and that the child shuld be washed in that water, and dib the shirt in the water, and so hang it upon a hedge all that night, and that on the morowe the shirt shuld be gone and the child shuld recover health."[157] The obscure ritual recalls the one regarding the cure for the elf-shot, in which running water was employed. The function was probably the same: if the mysterious sickness could be ascribed to the wasting action of fairies on the body and its fluid, water was sympathetically cleansing the clogged blood and washing away the supernatural mortal influence, replacing the child in the human world.

Still more significant for the relation between fairies and children is the widespread tradition of the changeling, the creature that the supernatural beings left in the cradle, when they took away a mortal infant. Fairies allegedly needed human children to strengthen their own brood, which was always weak and often unfertile; the substitute they left was often crippled and distinguished by a voracious appetite. As Martin noted, it was a fairy child who deserved human milk to thrive or a very old being.[158] A folkloric description of the Welsh changeling, the *plentyn-newid*, reports that it

> has the exact appearance of the stolen infant, at first: but its aspect speedily alters. It grows ugly of face, shrivelled of form, ill-tempered, wailing and generally frightful. It bites and strikes, and becomes a terror to the poor mother. Sometimes it is idiotic; but again it has a supernatural cunning, not only impossible in a mortal babe, but non even appertaining to the oldest heads, on other that fairy shoulders.[159]

The changeling is mentioned in several witch-trials records from Scotland. Wise women were often consulted in order to heal the disgraced creature or to return the mortal child; also in some cases the child and the power of life it owned could be given to fairies in exchange for their help. This emerges for example from the trial of the already mentioned Isobel Watson, who gave to the *sìthean* her child aged two, to be able to heal her sick husband. Fairies let in the cradle for compensation one of

[157] Charles L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*. (London: Heath Cranton Limited, 1933), p. 447
[158] Martin Martin, *A description of the Western Islands,* pp. 117-118
[159] Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins: Welsh Folk-lore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions.* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, &Rivington, 1880), p. 56

their children which looked like her own, but Isobel refused to feed it, and her husband throw it into the fire.[160]

The reality behind such violence and the nature of changelings had its basic rationale in the anxieties regarding childhood and more explicitly in the acceptance or refusal of impaired children. Joyce Munro has underlined how the changeling was embodying the parents' feeling of failure regarding their infants, while Susan Elberly has discussed the problem of disabled children in relation to not socially (and humanly) recognized creatures. In this sense "being taken by fairies" corresponded to a removal from the social world.[161] Emotions played a fundamental role and converged strongly in the bodily representation, leading to the exclusion of the abnormal child. Human diversity was interpreted as an un-human nature, which was bringing the supernatural features of death to society. The different child became one of the supernatural creatures, showing its withered and bloodless physical reality once the power of the enchantment was broken. All the fairies had anomalous, bony bodies, and were in constant need of new blood, as Diane Purkiss noted.[162] The fairies' incursion into this world was motivated, then, by a kind of physical impairment that distinguish them but also by the ideas of a transgressed boundary and of a supernatural replacement, however weird and dramatic, as in the case of the changeling. Also, the replacement was possible thanks to the particular liminal state of the human involved: a child, often an unbaptized one, someone who still has to built its identity, and which is still strongly dependent by the nurturing mother.

Looking for anthropological comparisons, the importance of blood as the dividing line between the living community and the land of the spirits, associated with the special position of young people is well proven. The Bangwa people of Cameron had a rite which specifically involves sight, blood and infants or young members of the village which are called the "children of gods". These children are particularly frail and at risk of dying. They can be infants born with deformities or mental diseases, twins, which are generally seen as a sign of instability and danger, but also

[160] Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan*, Scottish Fairy Belief,* pp. 96-100; P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy*, p. 115.

[161] Joyce Munro, "The Invisible Made Visible: The Fairy Changeling as a Folk Articulation of Failure to Thrive Infants and Children". In Peter Narvaez (ed.), *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays.* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 251-283; Susan Eberly, "Fairies and the Folklore of Disability." *Folklore* Vol. 99, No.1, pp. 58-77

[162] Diane Purkiss, *At the bottom of the garden. A dark history of fairies, hobgoblins, and other troublesome things.* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp.68-70. See also: Katherine Briggs, "The Fairies and the Realms of the Dead.".*Folklore* Vol. 81, No. 2 (Summer 1970) pp. 81-96

adolescents suffering depression. The ritual is generally performed on young girls that are going to marry and which fall inexplicably "ill". "The girl's 'illness' (usually due to awkwardness about her marriage or adolescent depression) is attributed by the diviner to her being a child of the gods. After long weeks of seclusion during which she is fed nourishing food and rubbed with a mixture of oil, camwood, and medicine, there is a 'coming-out' ceremony in which blood from a sacrificed goat is rubbed in her eyes: to prevent her seeing her way back to the happy world of *efeng*".[163] *Efeng* is here the world of the spirits, a place perceived by the Bangwa as richer and safer than their own world. The ritual is clear: through blood and the symbolism of sight the belonging to this concrete world is restored, while the link to the invisible land of spirits is cut.

As this last ritual suggests, the relationship with the spiritual world is dependent not only upon the attitude of the spirits toward humanity, but also upon a particular condition of the mortal person and upon a spatial crossing, both symbolic and real. The theme of travelling to fairy land abounds in fairies narratives, where the supernatural place is never far away from the known world, while the human permanence there can result either in loss or in empowerment.

3.4 Fairyland and the dead

But where was and what happened inside the land of the fairies? The fairy-domain shows in many regards the same spatial problems represented in the symbolism of the body. It is in fact trapped between life and death, it lies inside the human dimension but it is also a place of supernatural activity. So, for example, the wise man John Walsh, from Dorsetshire, examined during 1566, gave a rich description of the fairies he used to meet for advice on the hills, large heaps of earth supposed to be the graves of the ancestors, but which, above all, were located inside the natural world itself. The supernatural could reveal itself in the reality and the landscape of everyday life. In this regard the tales told by Richard Bovet in his *Pandaemonium*, written almost one century after John Walsh's examination, are particularly interesting. Bovet was primarily referring to the "normality" of the fairy-appearance, describing them as men and women "of a stature, generally, near the smaller size of Men; their habits used to

[163] Robert Brain, "Child-Witches. Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations". In Mary Douglas (ed), *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (Edinburgh: Tavistock Publication, 1970), pp. 161-179

be of red, blew, or green, according to the old way of Country Garb, with high crown'd hats". Yet from this almost human likelihood, strange events and illnesses could derive. So Bovet proceeds in reporting the story of a man which saw a fairy fair in a distance:

> he resolved to ride in amongst them, and see what they were; accordingly he put on his Horse that way; and though he saw them perfectly all along as he came, yet when he was upon the place where all this had appeared to him, he could discern nothing at all, only seemed to be crouded, and thrust, as when one passes through a throng of people: all the rest became invisible to him, until he came at a little distance, and then it appeared to him again as at first. He found himself in pain, and so hasted home; where being arrived, a Lameness seized him all on one side, which continued on him as long as he lived, which was many years (…).[164]

When the man crosses the fairy-fair he came out impaired, as if he had been the victim of an invisible aggression: we will remember that lameness was one of the diseases caused by witches and that the impairment of a body corresponds, symbolically, to the growth of death inside it. Similarly in the folkloric sources a sudden blindness is typically caused by fairies. Katherine Briggs reports that it is important "to see a fairy before it sees you[165]", as if through the sight, the first means for the recognition of others' bodily identity, fairies could be discovered for what they really are under their enchantments, but also, if unseen, could affect man. Journeying among the fairies could result in an aggression by the superhuman creatures and the traveller could be deprived of certain vitality. The case of the aforementioned Scottish witch Alison Pearson deserves a particular attention in this context. She was tried for "haunting and communing with the gude neighbours and the Queen of Elfland", yet she had not only been helped by fairies, but also punished for having revealed their secrets. Her relation with the otherworldly beings implied the presence of a painful physical sign on her body. In fact she had been struck by them, and on her skin remained an insensible spot, similar to the Devil's mark.[166]

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[164] *The Examination of John Walsh.* (Dorsetshire, 1566); Richard Bovet, *Pandaemonium, or the Devil's Cloyster.* (1684) (England:Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), pp. 124-126
[165] Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, p. 156
[166] Robert Pitcairn, *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland*, p. 162-164

Man should observe some rules and prohibitions to go safely in their land, amongst which the most significant is that regarding food. One example of the power of fairy food is that of the seventeenth-century Cornish woman Anne Jefferies, a healer who learned from fairies how to effect her cures. As stated previously, the contact with the fairies was an extraordinary event, but it happened inside the margins of everyday life thanks to the manifestation of something anomalous which could be either the trespassing of a boundary or the special status of the human being involved. People met fairies during periods of physical and economical disease, or during significant moments of their personal history, such as childhood or old age. To encounter a fairy, an alienation from existence, a symbolical or effective proximity to the realm of death should occur. Being an orphan Anne entered this category of fragile human creatures and so became close to the small spirits which came to help her. After her first meeting with them, she started to live on the food that they supplied to her, "the most delicious bread", gaining from this nourishment her abilities and also, in a certain sense, the essence of the fairies themselves.[167] Yet if in this case the eating of fairy food and the consequent sharing of a supernatural condition had a positive result, generally people should prevent themselves from eating or drinking anything in fairyland, if they wanted to stay alive, to be able to come back to their human existence. Fairyland was in many regards the reverse of the actual world: food, normally nourishing and giving strength, in fairy land impoverished the human visitor, who consequently was affected by mysterious diseases, or in the poetic imagination of modern folklore, by an unquenchable longing.

In a pamphlet regarding the wonderful adventures of a certain Dr Moore in Ireland, a wise-woman was asked where the man, who had suddenly disappeared, had gone. She explained that he was in a wood among fairies and she added "that in one hand he had a Glass of Wine, and in the other a Piece of Bread; that he was very much courted to eat and drink, but if he did either, he should never be free from a Consumption, and pine away to death."[168]

These examples suggest the long discussed theory that fairies are somehow linked to the dead. Dead people could be found among them, and fairies themselves looked like the dried bodies of the deceased. Also, if it is true that the "wee folk" is a relative

[167] Moses Pitt, *An account of one Anne Jeffaries.* (London: 1696)
[168] *Strange and Wonderful News from the County of Wicklow, in Ireland, or, a Full and True Relation of what happened to one Dr Moore.* (London, 1678)

literary and modern idea, smallness is an attribute of some fairies described in pre-modern times, as for example the Cornish pixies or green fairies which communicated with Anne Jefferies. Exploring Scandinavian and Irish folk belief Reidar Christiansen said that the smallness of fairies was probably to be linked with the dimensions holes in the ground and the prehistoric earth dwellings where they were supposed to live. Yet smallness also signifies a diminished status, a body which is retiring (disappearing) or is unable to develop anymore.[169] It may be of some help to look for a different tradition in time and location, to try to understand how the idea of fairies as spirits could merge with that of them as anomalous, sometimes small, bodies. Among the Inuit it was believed that the soul was a bubble of air inside the living being, containing a miniature of the individual: at the moment of death the bubble exploded, releasing the small individual which grew to normal size in the land of the dead.[170]

Going back to fairies with this in mind, their liminal state can be better rooted in the idea of the religious and vital soul carried in the blood; not rescued by Christ or not completely free from a material pulse expressed by their weird physicality, fairies are looking for the liquid vehicle of life: the eternal one after death or the worldly one of humanity. Through blood and human energy fairies steal the time they embody, a temporary length that equally distanced them from life and death. Fairyland is, in fact, traditionally immersed in a wonderful stillness; yet when the accidental visitor comes back to the world he finds himself suddenly old and decaying as if ages had passed.

Blood-thirst, the liminal temporary and physical state, the damaging effects on human beings, the body and soul's connection, seem all to be explained by another theory according to which fairies are a particular kind of dead, the unbaptized ones, or more often the untimely dead. The theory of fairies as unbaptized dead is part of the religious discussion of their alleged diabolical and sinful origin, while the wider category of untimely deceased confronts with the problem of the bodily potential and its relation with the boundaries of life. Death is in fact the end of a living activity, but it does not correspond to the total destruction of the corpse, which undergoes a slow process of decay. Furthermore, when the individual dies precociously we are

[169] Reidar Christiansen, "Some Notes on the Fairies and Fairy Faith". In B.O. Amqvist (ed.), *Hereditas, Essays and Studies presented to Professor Sèamus Ò Duilearga.* (Dublin, 1975), p. 28.
[170] Bernard Saladin D'Anglure (ed.), *Interviewing Inuit Elders (vol.4): Cosmology and Shamanism* (Nunavuc Arctic College, 2001), pp. 9-10, 19

confronted with a body not yet consumed by time, and still with plenty of the energy of the blood. Folklore studies have dealt with the idea in the Irish and British context of the fairy belief, yet one of the best works on the subject is the exploration of the Scandinavian dead-child tradition by Juha Pentikainen. The author has discussed the supra-normality of the dead child in accordance with its extraordinary nature in the brief period of its life, where it was not an independent individual which could be incorporated inside the community, but a potential one, still strongly dependent on the maternal body. In certain regions of southern Sweden the dead child was believed to continue to grow in the otherworld, but the complex of beliefs regarding the "afterbirth" in Norway is perhaps ever more relevant. *Utburd* was the most known appellation for the Scandinavian dead child, yet it was not always a proper deceased human being, but a weird creature formed from the unburned afterbirth. It could also result from any neglected "physical loss" associated with childbirth, as for example the mother's own blood.[171]

Beliefs regarding the power of the afterbirth, the placenta, and the blood shed during childbirth, are widespread in different worldly traditions. They transmitted vital force to the foetus, but were also placed under the influence of spiritual entities. As in Norwegian folklore the afterbirth could be perceived as matter without a defined form and equated to blood which runs out of physical boundaries, as a powerful symbol of fertility but also of violence and danger. Some tribes of Southeast Asia thought that the blood which came with newborn children should be removed, because it attracted supernatural beings which stole it together with the life of the baby. The same blood was pushed by midwives towards the infant in order to empower it with life and divert the attention of demons. Similarly Navajo people treated the blood of childbirth as a separate individual, an undeveloped human being that should not be destroyed so as not to damage the newborn one.[172] These examples show the supernatural hunger which was revealed by blood together with the capacity to nurture. This conjunction generated feelings of fear and anxiety, suggesting that at the centre of the physical struggle, there was a limited source for it, contended by human and superhuman creatures.

[171] Juha Pentikainen, *The Nordic Dead-Child Tradition.* (Helsinki, 1968), pp.57-61, 155-158, 190-216. See also for the Irish tradition: Tok Thompson, "Hosting the Dead: Thanatopic Aspects of the Irish Sidhe". In Gabor Klaniczay, Éva Pócs (eds.), *Communicating with Spirits (Vol.1): Demons, Spirits, Witches* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2005), pp. 193-204

[172] Melissa L. Meyer, *Thicker than Water*, pp. 74-81

To better understand this we can explore inside the same cultures theories of generation and pregnancy linked to blood, generally menstrual blood, that evidence how it was positively considered able to convey spiritual beings into living bodies and formed individuals. The Walbiri from New Guinea have believed for long times that foetuses were spirit children of the ancestors that could grow up inside the womb thanks to the pivotal rule of blood. People from the Tobriand Islands similarly thought that "the spirit entered the mother's head and descended to the womb on a 'tide of blood'". The northern Australian Yirrkala explained pregnancy and the interruption of menstrual flux as the travel of blood into the sky, where it was changed "into a spirit child, *jurtu*".[173] Drawing together danger and power blood was the element able to convert bodies into spirits and vice versa. The travel to the otherworld, or to the human one from a supernatural dimension, and, coming back to our context, the experience in fairyland, all implied a blood-price. Entering bodies or stealing their vital principles always meant working through the fluid.

To end this discussion on the fairy-beliefs we can look at two very famous Scottish medieval ballads which tell the story of Thomas the Rhymer of Elcidourne, a man who was abducted by the Elf-Queen, and who gained the gift of prophecy, and that of Tam Lin, taken by fairies as a child and rescued by his mortal lover.[174] In the first one Thomas and the Elf-Queen enter fairyland crossing the river of all the human blood; while in some versions of Tam Lin, the boy in order to be able to go back to the human world is finally immersed in water or sometimes washed by milk, in a sort of baptismal process. From these examples the role embodied by the vital fluids emerges more clearly: blood, milk and above all water, keeps the world alive. They represent a boundary between two different countries, but they are also driving the living and the dead dangerously together, instead of dividing them, if a drop is poured, stolen, or lost. In this liquid life-symbolism blood becomes central when we focus specifically on human physicality and its own margins.

In conclusion, the employment of blood to read the relation between fairies and human beings means bringing the landmark between the natural and the supernatural world directly inside the body. In fact it can be seen not only as the object of a context, but the real place in which it happens and is manifested. To the integral bodies of people corresponded the abnormal or strange ones of fairies, while when a

[173] Melissa L. Meyer, *Thicker than Water*, pp. 56-57
[174] Diane Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden,* pp. 68-70. Lizanne Henderson, Edward J. Cowan (eds.), *Scottish Fairy Belief*, pp. 90-93

person entered the fairy host or he ate fairy food, this resulted in the symptoms of a consumptive disease that gradually dried up flesh and fluids. Hence there is a correspondence between the outer realm of fairies or the dead and the inner forces that regenerate or consume the individual and are explicit in the flowing of blood.

Furthermore, following this blood theme we find that the communication between fairies and humans, which was regulated by prohibitions and advices, but also by rules of good neighbourhood, was symbolized in the libations of food, and originated in a certain perception of the body and its animating principle. The fairy attraction for human society and for natural life could result in aggression or a physical action thanks to a proximity to and a resemblance between the supernatural beings and the soul carried by blood. Blood had to be sealed in order to avoid a contact that could result in a lack of distinction between the spiritual matter of the human individuals and that of the dead or fairies, leading to sickness and death.

The differences and the contiguity between the living and otherworldly creatures, enclosed in the blood, are even more evident in the next extraordinary being we are going to discuss: the vampire.

3.5 The Vampire

In her study on the Hungarian and Rumanian fairies Éva Pócs argued that being taken by the fairies corresponded to a state of death. The supernatural creatures were assimilated with the host of the untimely dead, especially when revealing dangerous behaviour such as the *rusalkas,* which combined both the features of the nature spirits, being the personification of water, with that of the anomalous dead: young brides, unbaptized girls, women who died before reaching their natural and social accomplishment - that is marriage and motherhood.[175]

In south-eastern Europe we find another supernatural being, another untimely dead, which is particularly relevant, and which was a real preoccupation for early modern people: the vampire. As we have already seen, the witch figure had vampiristic features, which identified him or her as an extraordinary, almost non-human aggressor. The belief was close to that in the alleged 'real' vampire, widespread in

[175]Éva Pócs, *Fairies and Witches at the boundary of south-eastern and central Europe.* FFC no 243 (Helsinki, 1989)

Slavic popular beliefs, where it overlapped and merged with the idea of the living witch. According to Agnes Murgoci the Rumanian vampire could be of three kinds:

a) the reanimated corpse, "the dead vampire type"
b) "the live-vampire type" a person which was to become a revenant after death, but that even during life behaved like a vampire, being able to send the soul wandering at night committing evil actions. This one was obviously the category to which witches and wizards belonged.
c) The *varcolac*, a peculiar supernatural creature that was ate the sun and the moon during the eclipses.

The last type is particularly interesting because it shows some characteristics that could be defined as "shamanistic", and that belong to other powerful beings diffused in Eastern Europe.[176]

Both Éva Pócs and Gabor Klaniczay have discussed the relation between the shaman and the vampire according to the preservation or the endangerment of the natural world's balance. The first, communicating with the dead, effected cures and assured the fertility of the land, while the second, coming back from the otherworld or refusing to enter it, caused sterility and illness. The two figures are linked in the aforementioned Hungarian *tàltos*, who after death, risked being entrapped between the realm of life and that of death, due to his own supernatural attributes, which during existence, allowed him to travel between the two worlds.[177]

Early modern Western Europe was relatively free of this shamanistic vampire, but it was otherwise full of a religious preoccupation in which the relation between this world and the other one, the body and the soul, were central and often conflicting. As Introvigne has noted in his work on the history of the idea of the vampire, one consequence of this conflicting vision was the shaping of a supernatural physical aggressor which was after the potency of the human individual.

Although accounts of vampires mostly come from eastern and south Eastern Europe, during the late seventeenth century and the eighteenth century there was an active debate in Western Europe regarding the reality of the vampire. The belief in

[176] See later in this chapter the discussion on the Hungarian *tàltos* and the werewolf.
[177] Agnes Murgoci, "The Vampire in Roumania". In Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Vampire. A Casebook.*. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 12-13; Éva Pócs, "Hungarian Taltòs and His European Parallels". In M. Hoppàl, J. Pentikainen (eds), *Uralic Mythology and Folklore* (Budapest and Helsinki: Ethnographic Institute of the Hungarian Academic of Sciences - Finnish Literature Society, 1989), pp. 140-158. Gabor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power.* See also: Carla Corradi Musi, *Vampiri Europei e Vampiri dell'Area Sciamanica*. (Messina: Rubettino Editore, 1995),pp. 63-91

this kind of creature was, in fact, evidently in contradiction with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. The uncorrupted "miraculous" body of the vampire was the negative reflection of that of the saint, while its bloodthirstiness could be interpreted as the inversion of the Holy Communion, where Christians were materially absorbing the flesh and the blood of Jesus. The vampire constituted the disruption of a divine order according to which the soul should be freed from the corporeal reality and reach the otherworld, or, as in the case of the saints, be able to operate marvellously inside the body thanks to its holiness. According to the description of the eighteenth-century French Benedictine abbot Augustine Calmet, when vampires were taken out of the ground they "have appeared red, with their limbs supple and pliable, without worms or decay; but not without great stench",[178] in contrast with the perfumes and oils issuing from the saints' corpses.

Medieval saints bodies, especially female ones, "flowed outwards in extraordinary effluvia: ecstatic nosebleeds and weepings, periodic stigmatic bleedings, mystical lactations, exudings of sweet smells and curative fluids after death".[179] While the corporeal nature of the saint was a giving presence, which influenced positively the surrounding environment, the vampire retained inside it the bodily fluids, attempting to steal those of the living people: it represented the frailty and voraciousness of death in opposition to the spiritual richness of a holy life. The stench, the evidence of a physical decadence, not rescued or animated by the divine power, constituted the link between the vampire and the plague that it was believed to cause, suggesting that this extraordinary dead was not only destroying human life, sucking blood, but also affecting the world with its power, slightly different though close, as we will see later, from its supernatural hunger.

Klaniczay has discussed the western interest in the Slavic vampires in parallel with the idea of satanic possession. They both represented an idea of the evil incarnate, but also of an evil that was coming completely from the outside: the dead or the Devil, more than the living witches, were those responsible. There was a theological debate concerned the impossibility of the vampire. It could not be accepted as a returning soul or a spirit according to the Catholic theory of Purgatory, because it was a physical, tangible presence; yet it also could not be tolerated as a revenant, because

[178] Augustine Calmet, *The Phantom World*. 2 Volls. (London, 1850). [Translation of the *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des demons et des esprits* (1746)], Vol. 2, pp. 31-32

[179] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Bodily Miracles and the Resurrection of the Body in the High Middle Ages". In Thomas Kselman (ed.), *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*. (Notre Dame, Ind., 1991), p. 71

only God had the capacity to reanimate a corpse. No demon, or worse a human witch, could do that. Pursuing this kind of reasoning Calmet listed several examples of alleged vampires in the eastern context, to dismiss, at last, the belief in them as superstitious. Yet the wonderful narratives he presented constitute for us an insight into a real preoccupation for many people. The assertive attitude to the belief of people and of the ecclesiastic and secular authorities themselves, which allowed the destruction of the incriminated corpses, was denounced by the archbishop of Trani, Giuseppe Davanzati, who compiled his *Dissertazione sopra i vampiri* between 1738 and 1743, analyzing the vampire plague in Moravia. Davanzati concluded that the vampire was a human fantasy.[180] Why then, did some people, included the elites, believe in the vampire?

Looking at the works which supported the existence of the vampire, or of similar beings, we can see how the religious discourse reflected a deeper anxiety, which spread again from the bodily realm. In 1657 a brief treatise was published, written by the French Jesuit Father Francois Richard, which discussed the Greek vampire, the *vrykolakas*, while in 1679 there was published at Lypsia the *Dissertatio historico-philosophica de masticatione mortuorum*, by the Protestant theologian Philip Rohr, which concerned the central eastern belief in the *nachzehrer*. Rohr stated that the reanimation of some corpses was the work of the Devil. Following Protestant theology Rohr argued that the peculiar process and the horrible noises of the mastication inside the grave, typical of the *nachzehrer*, which appeared generally in times of plagues, were due to the Devil's attempt to cast enmity and fear between the living and the dead, and for which the only remedy was not in the destruction of the corpses, but the personal faith in God which had to be strengthened. The conclusions of Father Richard were more articulate. He interpreted the living dead as a "false revenant", which was animated by a demon. This was possible first with the permission of God, and then thanks to a certain natural potential for activity in the dead body.[181] The reasons for it are to be traced back to the wickedness of the person during life, and similarly the dangerous corpse could be destroyed by holy rituals and prayers. Yet if Father Richard's explanation is a moral one, the appearance of the

[180] Gabor Klaniczay*, The Uses of Supernatural Power*, pp. 179-186; For a wide discussion of the theological debate in early modern Western Europe see: Massimo Introvigne, *La stirpe di Dracula. Indagine sul vampirismo dall'antichità ai nostri giorni.* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997), pp. 63-136. See also Giuseppe Davanzati, *Dissertazione sopra i vampiri.* (Napoli: Fratelli Raimondi, 1774)

[181] For this belief see also: Nancy Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture." *Past and Present*, no. 152 (1996), pp. 3-45; Jean Bodin, *De la Demonomanie*, pp. 224-6

corpse and the apotropaic effects of the religious counteraction were strongly physical. The body of the false revenant or *vrykolakas* was intact, full of blood and not subject to rigor mortis; prayers influenced its decay, withering it to the bones.

The physical problem of the after death emerges and is more defined in a later work on the *nachzehrer*, published twice in 1725 and 1728, by another author from Lypsia, Michael Ranft, who gave a full theory of the decaying process and the appearance of the corpses, based no more on the influences of evil or good spirit but on natural magic. According to Ranft, inside the body close to the living soul, which came from God, there was a vegetative soul, which after death could remain close to the corpse, producing its incorruptibility. While for Ranft the mastication of the shroud was inexistent and the consequent sounds had a medical explanation, the fear of the *nachzehrer* and its own alleged actions were rooted in the imagination, which was equally strong both in the members of the community and in the dead, in which it was caused by a memory of the past conserved inside the vegetative soul. Magic and not religion is the key to understand the *nachzehrer*, which was not a living corpse, but a dead one, closed in its grave, still full of the imaginative capacity of its second soul, which caused the unnatural mastication.[182] The ambivalence of the soul recalls the double function of the blood which carried it, incorporating the religious and the bodily strength, and which was the craved good for the vampire.

Ranft's ideas, despite their medical accuracy, were probably the closest ones to the popular terror of the vampire, highlighting how physical death could correspond partially to the freedom of the Christian soul, but not to the end of the body and its living principles, which were still looking after the fluid vehicle of power. In this regard we must remember that the popular view of the vampire involved more than its wicked nature during life, some signs of predestination, such as being born with a red caul, which indicated the future bloodlust, or the more fantastic idea of the two hearts (the surplus one for the destruction of humanity), that could be found inside its body. These signs, such as the red caul,[183] where shared also by the witch, who in popular beliefs was distinguished by supernatural physical attributes more than by the evidence of a religious deviance.

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[182] Massimo Introvigne, *La stirpe di Dracula*, 64-77; J.S.W. Helt, "The 'dead who walk': materiality, liminality and the supernatural world in Francois Richard's 'of false revenant'." *Mortality*, Vol.5, No.1, 2000, pp. 7-16

[183] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death. Folklore and Reality.* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1988), p.151

Ideas of guilt and wickedness were secondary to the general perception of the vampire as an untimely dead. Two famous examples of alleged vampires in different periods of the modern era demonstrate how in the popular mind the body itself, and the causes of death, were the origin of the power more than moral conduct or the satanic influence. The first tale contains the unnamed shoemaker of Silesia, who committed suicide during 1591. The second one is about the Serbian Peter Plogojowitz, which died in 1725 and consequently attacked several people from his village, sucking their blood. The first example seems to validate the notion of guilt and personal responsibility in the individual who became a revenant (the shoemaker in fact committed suicide), together with that of a premature death, according to which the body had to be full of blood, of the vital energy that allowed it to wake again and terrorise the community. The second case is more defined, presenting for example the idea of epidemic vampirism, but also more challenging, because Plogojowitz lived a normal life, not marked by signs of predestinations, by an evident wicked nature or by dramatic actions which provoked his death. The vampiristic contagion spread from him simply because he had been the first person to die in a series of sudden deaths.

Paul Barber has used this case to begin his exploration of medical ideas that supported the reality of the vampire.[184] According to a contemporary report, after Plogojowitz's corpse exhumation,

> the body except for the nose, which was somewhat fallen away, was completely fresh. The hair and beard – even the nails, of which the old ones had fallen away – had grown on him. The old skin, which was somewhat withish, had peeled away, and a new fresh one had emerged under it. The face, hands, and feet, and the whole body were so constituted, that they could not have been more complete in his lifetime.

As it was also noted, there was "some fresh blood in his mouth, which, according to the common observation, he had sucked from the people killed by him".[185] This is how a vampire was supposed to appear inside the grave. Although, as Barber has

[184] For the shoemaker from Slesia see: Henry More, *An Antidote Against Atheism: or, an Appeal to the Natural Faculties of the Mind of Man, wheter there be not a God.* (London, 1655). And Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, pp. 5-15

[185] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, p. 6

noted, the body presented some of the changes due to natural decay, the presence of blood at the mouth, issuing from the bodily opening through which food was ingested and language came out, upset the witnesses as an unnatural sign. Poor medical knowledge turned into an emotional impact: the case is, in this regard, a good starting point for the exploration of the mentalities of the people involved. It was in fact not religion or medicine that nurtured the vampire's belief, but the body itself, the source of power and horror.

The bloodlust of the vampire was also difficult to explain through the Christian symbolism of blood and the attraction that the soul exercised, for example, on fairies. If in their case the human sphere could be conceived as an ideal world of plenitude and salvation, opposed to the fairy land of desire and consumption, in the case of the vampire everything was reduced to the domain of carnal life and negative emotions. The vampire was the complete outsider, not a creature coming from a purgatorial state: its soul was already lost and could not be saved, but only destroyed. In this sense it is understandable that one of the apotropaic practices against vampirism was the use of the vampire's blood itself to prevent the attack of the revenant. "Whether or not vampires drank the blood of human beings, we have most persuasive evidence that human beings have drunk the blood of vampires". The belief is controversial. Vampire's blood could be also considered dangerous; among the Gypsies people from the Balkans, for example, it was believed that being splashed by such blood during the destruction of the revenant could be fatal.[186] The apparent contradiction was probably resolved in the ambivalence of blood itself, which physically manifested the living and dying process of a body, being, as we will better see in the next chapter, a fundamental good that was at continuous risk of corruption.

This same duality was reflected by the category of the untimely dead to which the vampire belonged. The corpse was animated by the remaining blood's force and the embodied vital soul, yet it needed fresh, healthy blood to sustain its supernatural existence, and nurture its residual fluids, which underwent a double process of waste and dryness after death. This concept is also important for understanding another early modern belief, with which the more sceptical thinkers also agreed, that of the "ordeal by touch" or the bleeding corpse. The bodies of murdered people were supposed to bleed copiously if the murderer came nearby and touched them. According to James I:

[186]Paul Barber , *Vampires, Burial and Death*, pp. 64, 73

> in a secret murther, if the deade carcase be at any time thereafter handled by the murtherer, it wil gush out of bloud, as if the blud wer crying to the heaven for revenge of the murtherer, God having appoynted that secret super-naturall signe.[187]

The belief in the bleeding corpse as a proof in alleged cases of murder was often associated with the suspicion of witchcraft. So, for example, in 1612 Jennet Preston in the county of Yorkshire was accused of having bewitched Thomas Lister. The agonized man had cried out that the woman was pressing his chest heavily. When after his death Jennet came to touch the body "it bled fresh blood".[188] When in 1629 the alleged witch Jonet Rendall, of Orkney, was confronted with the corpse of her victim it "immediatelie bled mutch bluid as ane suir token' that she was the author of his death". Similarly "a man was executed in Kirkcaldy in 1662 for the murder of his father, the proof of his guilt determined by the blood which fell from the victim's nose when he touched it".[189] As Paul Barber has argued, the phenomenon had a natural explanation: in fact after death blood can liquefy once more, especially if the person has died suddenly. "Uncoagulable fluid blood is normally present in the limb vessels and often in the heart of any healthy person who dies a sudden natural or unnatural death from almost any cause."[190] Yet for early modern people the explanation relied in the special link that existed between the soul and the body, and which was expressed by the spirits carried by the blood. At the end of the seventeenth century the Englishman John Webster, himself sceptical of the reality of witchcraft, affirmed that the moment of death did not always correspond to the departure of the soul, which could still be impressed by emotions and impressions from the world outside, although the body was still and breathless. In his words:

> the Soul being yet in the Body, retaining its power of sensation, fancy and understanding, will easily have a presension of the murderer, and then no

[187] James VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 80
[188] Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 218
[189] Lizanne Henderson, "The Survival of Witchcraft Prosecutions and Witch Belief in South-West Scotland." *The Scottish Historical Review* 85.1 (2006) pp. 56-57
[190] Keith Mant (ed.), *Taylor's Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence.* (Edinburgh, London and New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1984), p. 152, quoted in Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, p. 114

> marvail that through the vehement desire of revenge, the irascible and concupiscible faculties do strongly move the blood, that before was beginning to be stagnant, to motion and ebullition, and may exert so much force upon the organs as for some small time to move the whole body, the hands, or the lips and nostrils.[191]

Webster explained the relation between the body and the soul in terms of a divine love which a sudden, cruel death, brutally interrupted: thus the soul still present in the corporeal dimension claimed revenge, which was realized through the sweating of the vital fluid.[192] So for the untimely dead blood was the required substance to enliven the residual vitality, but also an instrument of the soul to re-establish a moral order, broken by criminal actions. The vampire and the revenant embodied the danger of decay close to the living community, but they also symbolized the work of the soul and the moral and spiritual context to which human individuals were subdued through the corporeal dimension.

3.6 Human counter-measures

After having considered the nature of the vampire we need to explore the reactions of early modern people and the involvement of blood and liquids in their countermeasures. In his work Paul Barber has examined anthropological and folkloric sources, similar to the early modern narratives, to obtain a wider comprehension of the practical solutions that people employed to defend themselves from the vampires. It is worth mentioning some of them whose possible functioning is not so obvious.

One of the most curious practices to nullify the menace of the vampire, throwing it in to water, was widespread in Russia and some parts of Albania. It was based on satisfying the vampire's thirstiness, in accordance with the ancient and widespread notion of the thirsty dead. In Russia it was believed that the vampire could cause droughts, so pouring waters on dead bodies, or drowning the alleged revenant, served sympathetically to interrupt the malevolent influence of the dead. A relationship between water and the soul also existed in normal cases of death In Albania, Romania and Bulgaria during a funeral the containers of water were either covered up or

[191] John Webster, *The displaying of supposed witchcraft.* (London, 1677), p. 308
[192] John Webster, *The displaying of supposed witchcraft*, pp. 309-310

emptied. In Romania it was believed that the soul could drown in water, while in Bulgaria the water close to the place of a funeral or a burial became undrinkable. So, close to the practice of offering water to the corpses, we find the belief in a dangerous link between the dead and the liquid, which in the case of the "hydrotropic" dead reveals the distance between the mortal state and the fluid of life, and the fear of contagion for the living community.[193] The vampire had to be destroyed, then, not only due to its aggressive and mortal features, but as a source of a certain impurity and disease, deriving from its contact with the human world. Vampires were invasive, because their presence could affect society, bringing with it death as a kind of sickness that could be transmitted, more than as the result of the natural course of time. Equally the life-token embodied in water could be dangerous for the dead, hindering the process of separation of their souls from their bodies.

So the most famous countermeasure for vampires was its total physical destruction, achieved by driving a stake or spindles into it, piercing it and finally burning it. The power of its residual bodily fluids had to be dispersed, dried up, and "cleansed" to avoid its diffusion. People could also try to prevent the return of the revenant by burying sharp objects with the body. This happened especially when a corpse appeared "bloated". According to Slavic folklore this aspect was the result of the vampire's activity (blood-sucking) and of the devil's operation which blew the skin off the corpse with his demonic force. Peter Plogojowitz's body, for example, "had grown much fuller of flesh" and consequently had the head, feet and hands cut off, the heart torn out and destroyed, the dismembered body burnt and the ashes thrown in the water. The visible effect of such brutalities was the release of air and the draining or the extinction of the bodily fluids. Yet Barber has argued that the buoyancy of the corpse, which primarily depended on the pressure of the blood sucked by the vampire, was also due to the soul's attempt to escape.[194] The idea recalls the two souls discussed by Ranft and suggests that the detachment from the world required a long period of time, of which death was only the starting point. In this sense decomposition was a kind of pacification: blood was withered to the bones, the soul freed.

The second definitive death and the dangerousness of the body is the universal aspect of the revenant creatures. Turning to anthropology it is useful to mention some

[193] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, pp. 74-75; R.C.Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead. A Cultural History of Ghosts.* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1984), pp. 7-8
[194]Paul Barber , *Vampires, Burial and Death*, pp. 158-165

examples, such as the work by Robert Hertz at the beginning of the last century, *The collective representation of death,* in which the author analyzed the burial practices of different Indonesian tribes, especially the Dayak of Borneo, describes a strong, dangerous link between the body and the soul (the living spirit) after death. The corpse is not safe for the people of the community. A hunger for past life struggles within it and it will stop only when all the flesh is completely decayed, revealing what is generally invisible: the dried, resistant part of the human structure, the bones. Thus dying is not the exhalation of the breath. It is the complete decay of the flesh, the end of the blood's force in the body. Looking at the bones, we are looking at something invisible, at death itself.

In her analysis of the Greek *vrikolakas*, Juliette Du Boulay, argued similarly that there are certain rules, which are not moral, but physical, that must be observed at the moment of death, in order to connect the passage of the blood and the travel of the soul. The village people came close to the dead body to perform a circular anti-clockwise dance around it, which was believed to influence the dead, facilitating the flux of blood towards its natural end. If the dance was interrupted or the circle broken, the dead person could come back, sucking the blood of its kin.[195]

The problem of kinship is well highlighted in modern folklore but it does not seem a prominent feature in the early modern sources. For example, the eighteenth-century French botanist Pitton de Tournefort, in his sceptical observation of the apotropaic practices and the beliefs regarding the *vrikolakas* in the Greek isles, does not mention the relatives of the dead corpse among its favourite victims. Yet the American folklorist Alan Dundes has employed it, together with the idea, known especially in Rumania, that the vampire sometimes sucks milk instead of blood, to interpret its behaviour as similar and opposed to that of the infants and death itself as a reverse of the birth process. Birth and death are placed in the same liminal zone, in which the body is not completed, considered in the moment of its growth or decrease. If an order is somehow broken, a ritual not performed or respected, the vampire will try to break the boundary between the human and the superhuman, the land of the living and that of the deceased.[196]

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[195] Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand.* (London: Routledge, 2004); Juliette Du Boulay, "The Greek Vampire: A Study of Cyclic Symbolism in Marriage and Death." *Man*, Vol.17 No.2 (June 1982), pp. 219-238

[196] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death,* pp. 21-28. Alan Dundes, "The Vampire as a Bloodthirsty Revenant: A Psychoanalytic Post Mortem." In Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Vampire, A Casebook.* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 161-170

This analysis provokes us to ask ourselves if the body is ever to be seen as a fixed, hard structure. Going back to the apotropaics against the vampire it is now important to note a discussion regarding the early modern vampire's aggression: different from the famous romantic vampire, the early modern one was not identifiable by its fangs, but absorbed the blood through the porosity of the body.[197] Then the blood could always easily escape from the corporeal margins, and so put the individual constantly at risk.

Other creatures, that figured widely in early modern beliefs and supernatural tales show the frailty of the body, but disquietingly they were not coming from death or from the land of fairies, but from living human society, in which they actually dwelled, causing death and fear, enforcing a feeling of terror towards the supernatural which then nourished the witch-figure in conjunction with the idea of an overwhelming, disquieting otherworld.

3.7 Shapeshifting and the Werewolf

One of the alleged and more fantastical abilities of the witch was that of shapeshifting. A witch could change bodily form to that of a preferred animal, generally a cat or a hare, to attend the sabbath and to enter people's houses at night and suck the inhabitants' blood. This vampiristic feature of the witch is found especially in Catholic contexts, as will be discussed in the last chapter regarding Italy. Related to bloodsucker witches we find cats which were believed to suck another bodily emission, the breath, and could be considered as one of the causes of the nightmare, to which I will return in the discussion on medical ideas.[198] Yet the most wonderful shape of the magical aggressor was that of the werewolf.

Like the vampire, the early modern werewolf was at the centre of a theological debate regarding the reality of metamorphosis. Despite the presence of werewolves in the witch-trials, especially in France and Germany, it was widely asserted that the

[197] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, p. 157; Massimo Introvigne, *La stirpe di Dracula*, pp. 45-46

[198] For cats see: Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria. Maleficio e magia nell'Italia moderna.*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), 312-322. Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 63, 91-92; Robin Briggs, "Dangerous Spirits. Shapeshifting, Apparitions, and Fantasy in Lorraine Witchcraft Trials". In Kathryn A. Edwards (ed), *Werewolves, witches and wandering spirits.* (USA: Truman State University Press, 2002), pp. 14-15. Owen Davies, "The Nightmare Experience, Sleep Paralysis, and Witchcraft Accusations." *Folklore* 114 (2003), pp. 181-203

transformation was forbidden by nature and by God. With the important exception of Jean Bodin, the werewolf was interpreted as the result of the Devil's delusion or as the effect of the 'disease' known as lycanthropy. Bodin discussed the werewolf as a physical transformation which left the soul of man unchanged. According to him, reason and not the body was the "essential form" from which the soul could not be separated. This idea served to justify the integrity and the uniqueness of the human being, constituted by reason and by a divine soul, but it also generated the scandalous contradiction of a rational being contained in an inferior animal body. Theologians contested such a thought, following the Aristotelian conception which affirmed that the soul could not be severed from the body during life.

As we have seen, the link between body and soul was so strong that it lasted also after death, requiring a certain period to complete the detachment, which normally corresponded to corporeal putrefaction. So the werewolf disrupted the natural and divine order of the cosmos. Both metamorphosis and metempsychosis, that is the capability of the soul to travel from one body to another, could not be accepted, as the idea of the devilish manipulation of the human body was contradicted by the theological belief in the exclusivity of God's power. In the words of Henri Boguet: "it is impossible for the body of a brute beast to contain a reasoning soul"; and, he continued, "when the soul is separated from the body, death must necessarily ensue, how is it possible for Satan to bring the witch back to life, seeing that to do so is possible with God only, as we have fully shown elsewhere?"[199] The Devil's work was completely illusory, so Boguet explained how Satan, while the witch was sleeping, went in the form of a wolf to kill human victims. According to the demonologists witches could not change themselves into wolves: they were simply deluded about the possibility of the transformation. The crime was instead seen as real: witches murdered and ate children with the ferocity of beasts, but in a human form.[200] Also the bestiality of the supposed werewolf was expressed in its implicit relation with blood. In fact the creature did not employ the blood for its own purposes, like the vampire or fairies; it neither wasted the substance, as the witch was accused of doing, cruelly killing the victim, it broke the physical boundary in which the liquid was contained, desacralising its divine power, which came from Christ's sacrifice.

[199] Henry Boguet, *An Examen of Witches,* pp. 142-146.
[200] Nicole Jacques-Lefèvre, "Such an Impure Cruel and Savage Beast…Images of the Werewolf in Demonological Works." In Kathryn A. Edwards (ed.), *Werewolves, witches and wandering spirits*, pp. 184-186

The material reality and basis for the belief can be also discovered in early modern works on witchcraft, which discussed the qualities and influences of imagination upon the individual. Boguet himself explained that the Devil deluded witches, confusing the four humours which ruled the body, encapsulating the emotions and impressions coming from the head. By disrupting the natural bodily balance the Devil could feed what he wanted into human fantasies and so make witches believe that it was the truth. Similarly, though denying witchcraft, Wier and Scot, attributed the phenomenon of the werewolf to a humoral imbalance which caused lycanthropy. The causes were the same as melancholy: black bile, thickened blood, smoky vapours that rose to the head corrupting imagination and the capacity for judgement. The Italian Pietro Pamponazzi, underlining the power of imagination, described the metamorphosis as an alteration of the physiognomic features of humans who lived in the manner of animals. One last explanation that is worth mentioning is that presented by the French Jean de Nynauld in his *De la Licanthropie*, written in 1615. De Nynauld denied any physical or metaphysical basis for the metamorphosis, but affirmed the diabolical illusion. The Devil gave witches a salve to put on their bodies, due to which they believed they were transformed into a wolf.

As Robin Briggs has discussed, the werewolf belief was the embodiment of the binary thought that characterised witchcraft: world and anti-world, human and diabolical, were inscribed in the unresolved duality of body and soul which such a being represented.[201] If the soul was what must be preserved and saved, or what could be stolen by supernatural forces, the body was always the place in which such forces could strengthen: it was the unstable, dangerous location of power.

Caroline Oates, in her work on French werewolves, underlined that though some trials records reported that witches and werewolves could operate in spirit, it was generally their physical form that was the means for aggression. "The aggressors inflicted harm by their gaze, touch, breath and the general malevolence issuing from their bodies which attacks their victims, invades their minds and bodies, gives them nightmares and frightening visions at night or on the road and absorbs their vitality

[201]Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, pp. 51-52; Johan Wier, *Witches, Devils and Doctors*, p. 494; Caroline Frances Oates, 'Trials of Werewolves in the Franche-Comté in the Early Modern Period' (London University, 1993), p. 44, 94. Jean De Nynauld, *De la Licantropie* (Paris, 1615) In Erberto Petoia, *Vampiri e Lupi Mannari*. (Roma: Newton Compton, 2003), pp. 255-256. Robin Briggs,"Dangerous Spirits. Shapeshifting, Apparitions, and Fantasy in Lorraine Witchcraft Trials", pp. 2-3.

and productivity."[202] Also, if a medical explanation could be employed to confute the transformation, there is no evidence, as Oates has noted, of any pathological condition suffered by the accused before the trial, which could justify the delusion of the Devil.

In one of the most famous cases, that of the thirteen-year-old Jean Grenier, the idiocy of the boy, which led to his imprisonment in a monastery for seven years, did not prevent him from being tried and was not mentioned at all before the examination in court.[203] The confessions show a popular terror that, despite demonological or medical theories regarding the reality of the transformation, was strongly linked to perceptions of the body. The importance of the werewolf-figure in this discussion relies, in fact, in its connection with a corporeal unstableness that allegedly allowed the metamorphosis from human to animal. Some people, such as the two werewolves of Poligny in 1521, confessed to being able to change themselves thanks to the devilish salve, others such as Jean Grenier, or a few cases reported by Boguet, confessed to changing into a beast wearing a wolf-skin. The belief that by putting something on the body the transformation could be effected was quite widespread. The German werewolf Peter Stubbe, for example, claimed to have received from the Devil a girdle to shift his shape and be able to commit all the cruel crimes he wanted.[204] In Estonia and Livonia the motif of the animal skin was again mentioned to explain the ability to shapeshifting.[205] During his first interrogation the eighty years old Livonian werewolf Thiess, tried in 1692, confessed that he and his companions became werewolves by wearing wolf pelts. How is it possible that an animal skin acted so dramatically on the whole person?

Before answering this question we need to consider for a moment the Livonian werewolf and its alleged relation with shamanistic traditions, which is a crucial point in the debate. Focusing briefly on these theories I will try to highlight better the link between soul and the body.

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[202]Caroline Frances Oates, 'Trials of Werewolves', p. 78

[203] Caroline Frances Oates, 'Trials of Werewolves', p. 222; Erberto Petoia, *Vampiri e Lupi Mannari*, pp. 257-260

[204]Caroline Frances Oates, 'Trials of Werewolves', pp. 123-126. George Bores, *The Damnable Life and Death of Stubbe Peter* (London, 1590)

[205] Bengt Ankarloo, "Witch trials in northern Europe 1450-1700." In Bengt, Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (eds). *The Period of the Witch Trials*. (London: Athlone Press, 2002), 92; Maia Madar, "Estonia I: Werewolves and Poisoners." In Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, pp. 270-271

The case of Thiess is a famous one. In fact it had been employed by Carlo Ginzburg in his interpretation of shapeshifting and witchcraft as part of a complex of beliefs linked to Euro-Asiatic shamanism, which survived in popular tradition and were more identifiable in marginal European countries, such as those in the east. In the case of the werewolf the shamanistic derivation seems more valuable due to the animal shape which became the symbol of an intermediate state of being between the human dimension and the otherworld. Through the animal metamorphosis Thiess was able to reach a supernatural land ("hell", "the land at the end of the sea", "the underground") to fight against evil wizards and the devil in order to save the crops from their attacks. So werewolves appeared here as positive figures who defended the fertility of the land. Ginzburg compared their travel in the underworld to the experience of an ecstatic trance during which they underwent a temporary death, allowing the soul to leave in animal disguise. In his interpretation they actually behaved like the dead and were distinguished by the same ferocious thirst that led them to visit domestic cellars after their battles, to consume beer and alcoholic drinks.[206] One objection to this is that in their soul-journey to the otherworld Arctic-Siberian shamans were helped by animal spirits, but they did not acquire an animal form. Also as Willem de Blécourt has recently argued in an article on the Livonian werewolf, the shamanistic parallel brought forth by Ginzburg is questionable in many senses. Two of the most significant objections can be mentioned. First of all, trance and shapeshifting can not be so easily equated. The process of metamorphosis did not necessarily require a trance and there was no mention of the spirit helpers which assisted the shaman during his performances and travels. And then, while for the shaman the acquired animal form was a sort of evolution that gave him superior powers, establishing a relation with his demonic relatives and helpers, for the werewolf of the witch-trials it represented the opposite. The animal shape was a regression to bestiality and ferocity, in which the rational principles were distorted by the monstrous passions of the body. The supernatural helpers of the shaman came often in animal form indicating that the human condition was a sort of degradation. The trance freed the soul of the shaman, allowing him to understand the language of nature and of animals and also to experience magic flight to other dimensions.[207]

[206] Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia Notturna*, pp.130-151

[207] Willem de Blécourt, "A Journey to Hell: Reconsidering the Livonian 'Werewolf'." *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* (Summer 2007). See especially: pp. 53-57. See also Mircea Eliade, *Lo sciamanismo e le tecniche arcaiche dell'estasi.* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1999) pp.110-121, 509

In the Christian context of witch-beliefs, notwithstanding the apparent similarities, it is hard to find similar ideas and the metamorphosis, as de Blécourt underlines, "was part of the process of demonization, not a previous characteristic".[208] As Gàbor Klaniczay has underlined, even in the aforementioned eastern European countries it is not possible to trace back valuable historical sources validating the theories of a shamanic derivation and furthermore, where shamanistic beliefs survived they were so fragmented and dispersed that it is difficult to use them in a satisfactory analysis.[209]

In the early modern context when a wolf pelt or a girdle, or a salve, was put on the person, it functioned simply as disguises under which the body enacted its terrible transformations. They were not the means for it, but they represented a boundary, dividing the human from the animal, the natural from the supernatural, which the body was able to transgress.[210] Also although the animal transformation was denied in the theological debate, the accused used a physical imagery during their confessions. A young Estonian werewolf tried in 1651, for example, attested to having been a werewolf for two years, killing mostly small animals. When the judges asked him if only his soul was changed, he replied that he bore the marks of dog's teeth on his leg, showing that his supposed metamorphosis had been a physical experience.[211] There is no trace of a demoniacal work in such depositions, but only the confirmation of an extraordinary corporeal power.

Even the devilish delusion that theologians recognized at the basis of shapeshifting, worked through the permeable, unfixed substance that animated the body, distorting reason and imagination as we are going to see in the next chapter.

It is in understanding the body's hunger, and its fugacity towards death that the belief has a justification: the werewolf was a ferocious waster of lives, who sucked the blood of dogs, lambs and not only young people, as it is attested by almost all the known cases. Such indistinct lust for blood suggests that it was not only looking for Christian souls, according to its diabolical origin, but for the source of life itself, through which the living principle could be nurtured and kept inside physical borders. The werewolf was, then, stressing the condition of the human being related to his or her soul, which was seen as either a divine gift or the hidden source of vitality. Soul

[208] Willem de Blécourt, "A Journey to Hell", p.66
[209] Gàbor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power*, pp.144-146
[210] For a discussion of similar ideas in the medieval context see: Caroline Walker Bynum, "Metamorphosis, or Gerald and the Werewolf." *Speculum*, Vol. 73. No 4 (Oct.1998), pp. 987-1013
[211] Maia Madar, "Estonia I. Werewolves and Poisoners", p.270-271

and body could be considered a unit, but they were also opposing each other. While the former was a fixed centre linked to the body through the richness or the poverty of the blood, the latter was continuously lingering between an ideal plenitude and a dramatic voracity.

Finally, while fairies and vampires even if at different degrees, represented the proximity of a supernatural dimension attracted by human blood and its spiritual content, the werewolf pushed further such attraction, revealing the body itself as an enemy, a vehicle for dangerous intrusion. The religious debate portrayed these three kinds of beings as satanic allies that endangered or even destroyed the Christian soul. Nevertheless the fears and beliefs of common people concentrated more on the physical attributes of supernatural creatures and on their interference with material welfare. This is more evident in the cases of werewolves: in fact no vampire or fairy could tell its own story in front of a court, but a werewolf, being primarily a living individual, could. In their narratives the soul was scarcely mentioned and the violence of their attacks was directed only towards corporeal life. While in the popular vision fairies and vampires represented a menace coming from the realm of dead, in werewolf beliefs landmarks were completely blurred and the supernatural activity took place just inside the bodily margins. In terms of blood we have seen that the werewolf was a blood-waster. There was no evident lack of vitality and blood in his person, as for fairies or revenants. But if the fluid was the channel between the spiritual and the physical dimension, the soul and the body, we can infer that inside it there is the key to understand the alleged metamorphosis: both the illusory one of the demonologists and the real one in which the accused believed. Popular terror, religious motifs and demonological accuses grew out of the idea of this special link, enclosed in the blood, which although at different degrees, all the populace shared.

To explore further the way in which natural and supernatural, health and waste, lived together inside the liquid we need to turn to early modern medical theories, and the way in which the perception of blood slowly changed between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century.

4. The integral body: Theories of blood

4.1 The liquid body and the spirited blood

In the previous chapters we have explored the belief-system related to blood in a supernatural context, where it embodied the dichotomy of life and death. Considering blood as a prominent symbol of survival, we can summarize the discussion on the power it represented in three points:

- blood as the life-force, which both the witch and the supernatural being attempted to waste.
- blood as the vehicle for the soul, and, specifically in this context the Christian one, which the devil or non human creatures such as fairies, desired above everything else.
- the physical stereotyping of the harmful agent, the aggressive intruder, which, lacking the living substance, was often described as dried, very old, monstrous.

Two further conclusions emerge from these concepts: a description of the body as a permeable structure, in which external and internal agents influenced each other; and, what seems to be, an idea of blood as a fundamental limited good which needed to be preserved. As we will see more clearly later the first idea finds its confirmation in the popular and learned medicine of the time; while the latter, which survived in folklore, is far more complex.

Being the fluid of life it seems obvious that blood should not escape from its bodily margins, that it was a symbol of preservation and strength inside the veins, while it became the negative evidence of weakness and waste when poured outside. Also the medical world was not free from religious and spiritual speculation, where blood represented the means of the pact between God and the individual, bringing salvation into the mortal nature. Therefore shedding blood could be interpreted as the desacralisation of it and of the soul contained inside man. The diminution of life, implied by a blood-loss, corresponded to the escaping of the enlivening, divine breath, which was preserved integral in the sealed blood.[212]

If we consider early modern medical theories we will see that the ambivalence of blood did not involve only its abundance or scarcity inside the body, but also its inner qualities and ideas of richness, putrefaction or corruption. Alan Dundes employed the

[212] Giorgio Cosmacini, *La religiosità della medicina. Dall'antichità ad oggi.* (Bari: Laterza, 2007), pp. 85-86

notion of a limited amount of bodily fluids in the definition of a "wet and dry" symbolism at the base of both the belief in the dangerous dead, such as vampires and revenants, and the Indo-European folklore of the evil eye. Humidity symbolized a healthy state of life, opposed to the withering of the bones, representing decay. Following this idea, the evil eye, the capacity to harm through sight, involved people with a weak or old constitution harming people with a young, healthier one.[213] Turning to the origins of this discourse we find the Neoplatonic movement of the Renaissance, where medicine merged into philosophy, and blood was placed at the centre of the maintenance of physical welfare. In the words of its most important exponent, Marsilio Ficino: "*Vita est per humiditatem, mors per siccitatem*", the life contained in the blood and in the bodily liquids was in opposition to the dryness of death. This contrast developed in the theories regarding the process of ageing, according to which although it was inevitable, it was not completely irreversible. Youth and old age were not only reflected in the appearance of the body, but coincided with the richness or the poverty of the blood it concealed. The thirteenth-century philosopher, Roger Bacon, whose work was reprinted during the seventeenth century, asserted that the only effective medicine against ageing was youth itself. Ficino and his contemporaries went further, discussing youth and health as bodily substances which dwelt in the blood and that could be restored through the same liquid: "There is a power in human blood to both attract and, in turn, to follow human blood".[214]

Thus young blood could be recommended to old people as a remedy to prolong life. Renaissance and early modern doctors advised to draw and conserve blood as a vital quintessence, especially from young men of healthy and sturdy constitution; to consume drinks which resembled blood such as red wine or milk; to eat the flesh of long-lived animals. By contrast sexual intercourse, which constituted a loss of male fluids, was considered dangerous by Ficino, and doctors up to the eighteenth century advised moderation in sexual activities to avoid the complete drainage of the body.[215]

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[213] Alan Dundes, "Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye: An Essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview." In Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye: A Casebook.* (Wisconsin University Press: 1982), pp. 257-312; Alan Dundes, "The Vampire as Bloodthirsty Revenant: A Psychoanalytic Post Mortem." In Alan Dundes, (ed.), *The Vampire. A Casebook*, (Wisconsin University Press:1998), pp. 159-170

[214] Roger Bacon, *The cure of old age and preservation of youth.* (London: 1683),pp. 99-100; Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books of Life*, p. 199

[215] Piero Camporesi, *Il sugo della vita*, pp. 38-40; Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books of Life*, pp. 122-125; Tobias Whitaker, *The tree of hvmane life, or, The blovd of the grape : proving the possibilitie of maintaining humane life from infancy to extreame old age without any sicknesse by the use of wine.*

Doctor Du Laurens, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, explained old age as a disease curable to certain extent, whose seed every human being bore internally.[216]

Following similar "prolongevist" theories the earliest attempts at transfusion were enthusiastically conducted on animals at the end of the seventeenth century, in the attempt to reinforce life.[217] Though influenced by the discovery of the circular movement of the blood by William Harvey, the belief in the efficacy of transfusion had its root in the tradition that considered blood as the central element of youth and health. The main idea at work here entailed the replacement of both a lost, dried blood, with a new rich stream, and of weak for strong blood. The distinction is subtle, but significant: if blood seemed the elixir of long life and the most effective remedy for every disease, this derived not so much from the fluid itself as from its qualities and the "substances" that it carried. The first one to practise transfusion was the French doctor Jean-Baptiste Denys, who in 1667 transfused blood from a lamb into the veins of a boy. The patient had suffered a long fever, losing strength and his mental lucidity. He was also affected by a kind of lethargy, the origin of which was attributed to the scarcity of the blood left in his body after the abnormal ebullition of the feverish state. After the transfusion of new blood the boy acquired new energy and lost the desire to sleep continuously. The practice inspired enthusiasm in the medical field, but was also seen as controversial and abandoned soon after due to the theological aberration it constituted. In fact it disrupted the sacral state of blood, considering it just as a bodily product and not as the vehicle of the divine. For the Christian religion the transfused blood was seen as the antagonist of life, deprived of the soul deriving from God.[218] Henceforth an apparent contradiction dwelled in the substance of blood: on one side its corporeal nature, endangered by time and sickness, on the other the eternity which, through the soul, linked it directly to the otherworld and to the image of Christ. We will discuss the physical theories of blood first, to see consequently how moral and spiritual features converged in to them.

A consumptive notion of the body and of life, strictly linked to blood, was present in Galen's humoral theory and in Greek philosophy, which deeply influenced the

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(London: 1638), p. 30; Leonardus Lessius, *A Treatise of health and long life with the future means of attaining it*. Translated by Timothy Smith. (London: 1743), pp. 63-65.

[216] Andreas Du Laurens, *A discourse of the preservation of the sight; of melancholike diseases; of rheumes, and of old age*. (London: 1599), pp. 172, 186-187.

[217] John Lowthorp, *The Philosophical Transactions and Collections to the end of the Year 1700, Abridg'd and Dispos'd under the General Heads*. 2nd ed., Vol. 3. (London: 1731), p. 230

[218] Giorgio Cosmacini, *La religiosità della medicina*, pp. 88-89

medieval and early modern medicine, but it was the Arab physician Avicenna, during the tenth century, who gave a clear explanation. According to it the human being was born with a limited amount of radical moisture, deriving from the sperm, a perfected form of blood, and contained in the humours. During life it was dried up by the vital heat, the active principle of existence and of the soul in the body. The Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino adopted this theory locating the two fundamental substances expressly in the blood; he discussed how ageing and death derived from the consummation of the moisture by the heat, but also how an excessive richness of humidity could be equally dangerous, causing the corruption of the blood and leading to the putrefaction of the flesh. Peter Niebyl has affirmed that the idea was somehow disappearing in the early modern times, yet it is more correct to say that it became implicit, absorbed in the mentality of people and in the medical world.[219] During the second half of the seventeenth century the eclectic Nicolò Serpetro, a Sicilian priest, writer and natural philosopher, still acknowledged the myth of a wonderful lamp, made with human blood, which, once it had been lit, burned until the vital wind was sealed inside the individual which it represented. If the flame was strong and high it meant that the man was spiritually and physically healthy, while if it was weak and trembling it indicated not only corporeal sickness, but also sadness, fear and loneliness.[220] In the seventeenth century Nicholas Culpeper, relying on both learned and popular sources, still affirmed: "All medicines working by a manifest way, perform their office by heat or cold, moisturing or drying".[221] Diseases and cures did not act directly on the organs, but on the blood and on its vital properties, wasting or restoring them.

The idea of the radical moisture and the natural heat was linked to the Galenic theories which understood health as the result of the right humoral balance, and the Aristotelian conception of a tripartite soul. If we consider further this representation of the body, it will appear as a container of vital forces, where the entering substances could either feed or hinder, in the same way in which the escaping ones could weaken or purify. Food, transformed into chyle in the stomach, was directed to the liver and there was concocted, replenishing the radical moisture and begetting the four

[219] Peter Niebyl, "Old Age, Fever and the Lamp Metaphor." *Journal of the History of Medicine.* Vol.26, No. 4 (Oct., 1971), pp. 351-368. Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books*, pp. 168-175.
[220] Niccolò Serpetro*, Il mercato delle meraviglie della natura. Overo Istoria naturale*. (Venezia: Tomasini, 1653), p. 15
[221] Nicholas Culpeper, *Febrilia or A Treatise of Fevers in Generall.* (1656), p. 39. In Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Last Legacy.* (London, 1657)

humours: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The four humours were further inscribed in an interpretive system of external and symbolic correspondences, which linked them both to the four elements, air, water, fire and earth; and the four ages of man, while the radical moisture and the vital heat determined their distinctive qualities. Therefore blood was hot and wet; phlegm was cold and wet; yellow bile was hot and dry, while black bile was cold and dry. Blood was believed to be attracted by the different organs and bodily parts which required it: it did not circulate, but "ebbed and flowed", according to a kind of tidal movement. Coursing through the veins it irrigated the bodily parts and was consumed by them. The stream which reached the right ventricle of the heart divided in two: one portion flowed through the pulmonary artery into the lungs; and the other crossed the heart to the left ventricle and was heated and replenished by air in a "spirituous blood", before continuing its travel.[222] The brain, the liver and the heart were considered the most important organs, connected to the animal, vital and natural spirits which expressed the work of the soul. In the words of Robert Burton:

> Spirit is a most subtle vapour, which is expressed from the blood, and the instrument of the soul, to perform all his actions; a common tie or medium between the body and the soul (…). Of these spirits there be three kinds, according to the three principal parts, brain, heart, liver; natural, vital, animal. The natural are begotten in the liver, and thence dispersed through the veins, to perform those natural actions. The vital spirits are made in the heart of the natural, which by the arteries are transported to all the other parts (…). The animal spirits, formed of the vital, brought up to the brain, and diffused by the nerves to the subordinate members, give sense and motion to them.[223]

Thus, even if the spirits were the expression of the reasonable soul coming from God, they were not formed by a "celestial substance", but by a corruptible, vaporous matter, which retained a physical origin and needed nourishment to be preserved.
In this order of things we can agree with the assertion that the type of body and the

[222] For a description of the Galenic system see: Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 69. Bernard Seeman, *The River of Life. The story of man's blood from magic to science.* (London: 1962), p. 101; Roy Porter, *Blood and Guts. A Short History of Medicine.* (London Penguin Books: 2002), pp. 26-30, 59.
[223] Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, I: pp. 147-148.

qualities of its humours were the changing factors which allowed sickness to develop, while all the diseases were at last reducible to one. In fact we had many kinds of bodies for just one variable sickness, which depended on the healthy or corrupted nature of the humours. Sir Francis Bacon in his *History naturall and experimentall of life and death. Or of the prolongation of life,* described the process of ageing thus:

> *Age* is nothing of it selfe; being onely the measure of time: That which causeth the Effect, is the *native Spirit* of bodies, which sucketh up the moisture of the body, and then, together with it, flyeth forth; and the *Aire ambient,* which multiplieth it selfe, upon the *native Spirits,* and jayees of the body, and preyeth upon them.

Bacon added that the "matter of reparation", that is whatever replenished the blood and consequently all the spirits, could be eternal, but not so the instruments of this reparation. The "drier and most porous parts", like the sinews, the veins, the membranes, the arteries, the bowels, through which the blood and the spirits nourished and restored the body, tended to dissolution.[224] In such a precarious and limited body, the blood stood as the matter of continuity between life and death, linking generation to consumption and putrefaction. Thus the danger of disease derived not always from a lack of blood, but from a deviant behaviour of it, that caused corruption instead of the preservation of a vital balance.

Putrefaction itself was generative. Toads, worms, and other kinds of repulsive creatures were believed to proliferate in stagnating waters as in corrupted blood. So for example in Italian folklore putrefied menstrual blood begot basilisks and monsters. The late sixteenth-century Italian magician and natural philosopher Giovan Battista Della Porta shared the old tradition according to which snakes could come out from the human flesh and marrow, while unknown animals could be born from decayed earth. The German philosopher and magician Cornelius Agrippa similarly argued that the hair of menstruated women placed under a dung-heap could generate snakes. In the words of the philosopher Tommaso Campanella, which encapsulate well all these wonderful beliefs, death was only a transformation: though the living

[224] Francis Bacon, *History naturall and experimentall of life and death. Or of the prolongation of life.* (London: 1638), Preface, pp. 28-29

spirit, the soul, was lost, the dull matter remained.[225] On the other hand healthy blood was in many cases considered the best healing means. The sixteenth-century physician Lennio, discussed blood as the better of the juices, good for example to stop the spasms of epileptic patients, or to be distilled in a "salt" against every physical pain. Bacon, though rejecting it, mentioned the medieval belief that a bath of infants' blood could cure leprosy and the putrefied flesh; Culpeper inserted in his collection of remedies the use of the blood from a one-year-old kid freshly killed, to break "the stone in the body". They also both suggested, with less morbid tones, the employment of human milk, as a replenishing, rich and purer derivation of blood.[226]

Considering blood we can see how medical ideas tangled with magical ones: these beliefs were in fact at the basis of the late medieval accusation to Jews, which we have discussed in the first chapter, and partially nurtured the world of witchcraft. The properties of blood, but also its presence and its quality inside the body, could determine the moral behaviour of the human being. Good blood, being the symbol of health and spiritual innocence, was opposite to bad blood, which instead of targeting the weakness of the individual became the physical evidence of his dangerousness.
Up to the eighteenth century this view of the body as ruled by "bad" or "good" blood was still accepted in some medical circles; George Cheyne is his treatise on long life wrote:

> The Grand Secret, and Sole Mean of Long Life, is, To keep the Blood and Juices in a due State of Thinness and Fluidity, whereby they may be able to make those Rounds and Circulations through the animal Fibres, wherein Life and Health consist, with the fewest Rubs, and least Resistance, than may be.[227]

The probable reason for the longevity of this belief, despite the discovery of the circulation of blood in 1628, which undermined the Galenic model, relied on the Aristotelian theory of the spirits which Harvey also accepted. He followed the

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[225]Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della magia naturale, libri XX*. (Napoli, 1677), Book II, pp. 41-42; Cornelius Heinrich Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy.* Translated out of the Latin into the English Tongue by J.F. (London, 1651), Book 1, p. 108; Tommaso Campanella, *Del senso delle cose e della magia.* (Bari: Laterza, 1925), p. 254; Piero Camporesi, *La carne impassibile*, pp. 92-100

[226] Levinus Lennius, *The touchstone of complexions generallye appliable, expedient and profitable for all such, as be desirous & carefull of their bodylye health. First written in Latine, by Leuine Lemnie; and now Englished by Thomas Newton.* (London, 1576)**,** p. 71, 108; Francis Bacon, *History naturall and experimentall,* p. 330; Nicholas Culpeper, *Febrilia*, pp. 22, 33

[227] George Cheyne*, An Essay on Health and Long Life.* (London, 1724), p. 220

anatomical studies of Renaissance medicine, which, in the person of the Flemish physician Andreas Vesalius had already challenged some of the Galenic theories, deriving mostly from the dissection of animals and not human corpses. Among the corrections that Vesalius provided, it is worth mention his failing to prove the presence of pores in the sectum of the hearth through which, according to Galen, blood should pass. Discovering the link between the veins and the arteries through the ventricles, and also the rapidity of the transmission of the fluid, Harvey pursued this observation right to the end. Yet a mechanical definition of life was far from his observation: he still considered "motion, heat and spirit" the determining factors for the behaviour of the blood. The concepts of attraction and discharge, describing the thickening or the flowing of blood, had just found a centre in the heart. Significantly Harvey was still employing Aristotle's discussion on the soul and the spirits to validate his conclusions. He explained, for example, how the bodily extremities easily congealed and dispirited by external factors, were restored by the heat and the motion of the blood pulsing from the heart.

> Hence it is – he further asserted – that it may come to passe, that the heart being untouch'd, life may be restor'd to the rest of the parts, and soundnesse recover'd; but the heart being refrigerated or affected with some heavy disease, the whole animal must needs suffer, and fal to corruption. When the beginning is corrupted there is nothing which can afford help to it, or those things which do depend upon it.[228]

Up to the end of the early modern period, Hippocratic theories of the body as divided in three parts (the containing flesh, the contained humours, and finally the spirits, the hidden substances of life and motion),[229] were still the more widespread, attributing to the body a value beyond itself, in an universal order which it mirrored. It is evident, also, that though deriving from Aristotle, the discussion on the spirits combined with the religious system where the physical integrity depended on the purity of the soul, washed by Christ's own blood.

The link between bodily and moral life has a further confirmation in the blood libel

[228] William Harvey, *The Anatomical Exercises of Doctor William Harvey, Professor of Physick and Physician to the Kings Majesty, Concerning the Motion of the Heart and the Blood*. (London, 1653),p. 83; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, pp. 71-74
[229] Nicholas Culpeper, *Febrilia*, p. 1

and the alleged qualities of young blood. As we have already discussed, Jews were accused of employing the blood of Christian children for several purposes. Johann Eck explained their preference for young blood as follows: "They desire innocent Christian blood, not that of an old Christian whose innocence, acquired through baptism, has been forfeited by his subsequent sin." The blood of a Christian child had been cleansed of original sin, and had not yet been contaminated by the many other sins which the imperfect human being commits in the course of life. Related to this idea of purity is the magical idea, underlined by Trachtenberg, that new things were endowed with a greater power and that they were, therefore, more effective than existing ones. Children's blood was the richest of all as it was full of both spiritual and physical force waiting to be actualised.[230]

Thus the early modern body looked like a soft corporeal entity, where the rigid structure of the skeleton was just a necessary, but marginal background, while the blood was the vehicle for a spiritual activity whose medical comprehension was deeply influenced by the Christian ideology. In this view the horror of decay did not spread from the image of the bony body, but from the grotesque and fetid one of putrefaction whose effect could be experienced during life and that depended on the functioning of blood as health itself. Furthermore it was explained as the visible result of sinful conduct, which did not dry or consume the body, but was explicit in the growth of infection. A weak and corrupted blood flowed towards disease and death, becoming the gateway to hell and to the influence of demoniacal forces that disrupted the human balance and which could not be healed by medical knowledge.

4.2 Consumptive diseases

During the early modern period most diseases were classified as consumptive. Nevertheless, a consumption, which acted on the body through the blood, did not always have the same causes. The first emerging association and the most evident is surely with the loss of the vital fluid. Though the medical practice of bleeding was recommended for the maintenance of a healthy status, an uncontrolled, strong evacuation of blood was considered dangerous, comporting the dispersion of the nourishing juices. The most useful source to understand how consumption worked on the blood is the seventeenth-century treatise by doctor Richard Morton, where he

[230] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jew*, p. 146

discussed the several causes and manifestation of it, concentrating especially on *phtisis*, pulmonary tuberculosis. An abundant menstruation, the continued spitting of blood, every kind of prolonged haemorrhage, but even the great loss of other fluids, as a strong flux of the whites due to gonorrhoea, or through lactation, sweats, excessive discharge of urine subtracted the vitality of the body and the substances for its reparation. Every bodily fluid was connected to blood: in the reproductive theories of the times, semen and milk were a sublimation of it, carrying the essence of the future life and its first enriching nourishment.[231]

Regarding milk, Morton explained that it was "nothing but the Nutritious Juice continually separated from the Mass of Blood by the Glandules of the Breasts".[232] More curious and expressly connected with the lungs, was the consumption coming from the spitting of blood, which could be caused by an intrusive object in the body or by an abnormal behaviour of the blood. Sharp things such as nails and pins could enter and perforate the lungs through the inhaled air, generally, Morton argued, when laughing, and lead to pains and ulcers. In this case the bleeding was accidental and could be resolved expectorating the harming object, through the violent cough that it caused. The spitting of blood was, then, both the loss of the vital substance and the drastic solution of an internal problem: it could extenuate the patient, but rarely ended in a continuative waste. More obnoxious was a "habitual" consumption deriving from the "chalky stone" or other kinds of stones, formed in the lungs. The stone tore the membranes and spoiled the blood which flowing in all the body produced new ulcers. Morton affirmed how the ulceration in the lungs could also be due to the stones located somewhere else, usually in the kidneys or in the bladder. The sharp, solid substances worked on the blood, inflaming or corrupting it, and therefore affecting the whole physical constitution. From this observation it followed that consumption was not always the consequence of a wounding pain and of blood-loss, but also the manifestation of the need to expel the "serum", that is the matter of urine or superfluous humours, taking away the altered, fermented blood.

Due to these differences, implied in the same sickness, even the alleged best remedies were to be advised with some care. Among the suggested cures were: a milk diet, in cases of blood-loss or impoverishment of the fluid; "lubricating medicines",

[231]Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud.* (Cambridge, Massachussets and London: Harvard University Press: 1992), pp. 104-106. Richard Blackmore, *A Treatise of Consumptions and other Distempers belonging to the Breast and Lungs.* (London: 1724), pp. 3-20. Richard Morton, *Phthisiologia or a Treatise on Consumptions*. (London: 1694), pp. 11-19;
[232] Richard Morton, *Phthisiologia or a Treatise on Consumptions*, p. 32

which provoked a gentle vomit or cleaned and helped the bladder; opiates, especially laudanum, against the pains, balsamic medicines and oils. Yet a milk diet and balsamic substances, whose aim was to enrich and fill the weakened blood, could equally be risky in cases of fermentation, increasing the heat of the fluid or could give new nourishment and volume to the stones. Then the opening of a vein and bleeding could be employed to expel the intrusive object, without a violent expulsion and laceration through spitting, or other kinds of emission.[233]

If we move to deal properly with the sickness of tuberculosis the idea of consumption reveals better the wasting process involving blood, which was not easily reducible to its loss or reintegration. As Lindemann has noted, tuberculosis has been poorly investigated by early modern historians.[234] Its dark attractiveness, which in the nineteenth century became part of the myth of the romantic genius, was surely influenced by the supernatural element, present in the folkloric narratives of the past. We have seen in the previous chapter how supernatural beings could affect the normal flux of human blood. Yet the alleged work of fairies or superhuman agents, which sucked up the person who got in touch with them, was explicable, beyond the conflict between life and death, in the spiritual matter which connected the supernatural beings to the substances embodied in the blood. It was not blood in itself, the subtracted or given force, but the spirits it carried: their impoverishment or obstruction was ultimately responsible for the bodily destruction, depriving it of the vital connection with the divine soul.

To understand completely how tubercular consumption was working we have to consider early modern ideas regarding the link between the blood and the lungs, and on the process of respiration. This last was largely misunderstood, so that in the seventeenth century the learned Scotsman Alexander Ross, who contested the new discoveries by Harvey, could write that lungs and respiration were not indispensable for life. He mentioned several examples of animals, such as fishes, which lived without breathing, and asserted how the respiratory process could be substituted by transpiration, implying then the porous nature of the body.[235] This view derived from the accepted Galenic theories which associated respiration with refrigeration. The hot blood was squeezed into the lungs and cooled and tempered by the air; nevertheless it seems that external air could perform the same healthy action, though not moderated

[233] Richard Morton, *Phthisiologia*, pp. 225-243.
[234] Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, p. 58
[235] Alexander Ross, *Arcana Microcosmi.* (London: 1652), Book. III, pp. 56-58

through the pores of the body. It was William Harvey who primarily questioned the real utility of respiration, and doubted that the aim of the air was that of cooling or feeding; yet he himself still agreed to some extent on the matter of the lungs, considered by Vesalius to be a kind of solidified blood. Until Marcello Malpighi's discovery of the membranous tissues and the honeycomb structure of the lungs in the second half of the seventeenth century, there was then a certain anatomical undifferentiation, which permitted the reduction of the flesh of the lungs and of other organs to blood.[236] Every imbalance of the vital liquid could therefore affect the lungs, while external interferences reflected directly on it.
Discussing the consumption of the lungs, Morton recognized its causes in a feverish affection, which distempered and dispirited the mass of blood.

> The Fever has its beginning from an Inflammation of the Tubercles of the Lungs, to wit, when – ever one or more of those Tubercles happen to be inflamed by the taking of Cold, the liberal drinking of Spirituous Liquors, too much exercise or from any other such-like Accident, which by putting the Blood into great a motion may make it too hot.

It could also derive from the sudden stopping of usual and necessary evacuations through which the body got rid of the excrementitious humours.[237]

Looking back at the theory of radical moisture and vital heat, it seems then that consumption could proceed from the latter: rising from an accumulation of polluted humours, it burned the spirits, depriving the blood of them. According to Bacon, as we have already stated, the "native spirit", that is, the heat, kept the body alive, while pursuing a depredatory action on it at the same time. Its work could be retarded but not avoided, and if no other kind of consumptive sickness occurred, it led to ageing and decay. Though Galen had located the vital heat at the beginning of life in the pure matter of the male seed, its origin was not human or animal. While the vital spirit, the moisture, belonged to the "animate" beings and was continuously alimented by organic substances, the native spirit was to be found in the living creatures as well as in the inanimate ones, a category in which both minerals and vegetables entered. It

[236] Leonard Wilson, "The Transformation of Ancient Concepts of Respiration in the Seventeenth Century." *Isis*. Vol. 51, No. 2. (Jun., 1960), pp. 161-172; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, pp. 80-81.
[237] Richard Morton, *Phthisiologia,* pp. 100-101, 62-64

moved and dried up existence. It endured the body because it could not be repaired by the fragile physical matter. It was, then, probably the substance closer to the neoplatonic divine soul which stood before and beyond the natural world. Beyond repair it should be somehow mitigated and detained, by a double control on the internal balance of the humours, and on the external environment, excluding hot air and looking for a fresh, clean ambience which performed a refrigerating action on the blood and the spirits. Due to this double influence from the outer air and the inner spirit, hard and fat constitutions were thought as the most resistant to consumptions: the first because less permeable, the second because its blood and flesh were full of feeding and moisturizing substances.[238]

All the healing methods entailed a sympathetic working of the ingested medicines, oils, foods and drinks or other external remedies such as fresh baths and good air, on the blood itself to make it less dissipated. But, as we have seen for the milk diet, in such a precarious system it seems that the most important thing for a cure to be effective was the correct balance in times and quantities of its administration and its relation to the person's bodily constitution. In cases of consumption, the loss of the spirits merged with the impure blood, or a blood where some humours prevailed on others, and with the impure ambient, which could transmit disease. Blood could be deprived of spirits, but it could even be infected through other external polluting contacts, it happened for example in the case of venereal diseases such as gonorrhoea or syphilis, also called the French pox, which Morton mentioned, although briefly, regarding consumption.[239] I will return to syphilis later, but it is significant to note how this poisoning sickness, which was cured mostly through bleeding, linked consumption to the plague and contagion to the spiritual world of sin and redemption of which disease was just the physical result.

4.3 Bleeding and putrefaction

Blood-letting, close to the habitual purgation of the body, was considered the universal remedy and prevention for every disease. It counter-balanced the ingested substances, and the effects of the ambient, through a moderate evacuation, keeping blood in the due thinness, freshness and fluidity. In his treatise at the beginning of the

[238] Francis Bacon, *History naturall,* pp. 43-50; Alexander Ross, *Arcana Microcosmi*, pp. 25-28.
[239] Richard Morton, *Phthisiologia,* pp. 250-254; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, pp. 56-57

seventeenth century the physician Simon Harwards recommended phlebotomy for almost every kind of disease, though with some attention regarding gender, constitution and age of the patient and those sicknesses which inflamed the blood. The main idea behind blood-letting was that of a plethoric blood, that is an excess of it, which stagnated in the body, polluting it. Such belief was further connected with the excess of the humours in the blood, which kept or spoiled its quality and which depended on the ingested type and quantity of food.[240] If consumption entailed an excessive heating of blood, the main reason for which bleeding was employed was the over-abundance of the moisture, the vital and materic substance converted into the humours that risked suffocating the spirits, while thickening and obstructing their container. The final result was always the dissolution of the body, but the danger here was not represented by the loss, the dryness and the ghostly appearance which, for example, denoted both the syphilitic and the person affected by tuberculosis. It was not the menace of the ambient which depredated the body, but on the contrary, corruption, which though connected to the outside, grew and multiplied in the body invading and deforming it from the inside. Skin-diseases, the measles and buboes of the plague were the evidence of this eruptive internal decay, whose first passage toward the physical destruction was a putrid, monstrous replacement. The last balance to save was between the two opposing, equally vital and deadly elements of fire and water. An excess of fire led from the original purification to the disintegration, while en excess of humidity lead from the reparation to the drowning of the spirits.

As a preventive cure, beside purges and diet, Italian doctors asserted the utility of the "fountain" or *ruttorio*, an artificial wound kept open in the flesh by the insertion of hard objects, as for example chick-peas or small metal plates. Through this sore the virulent, smelling humours were discharged and the blood was cleansed of those excrements that the normal bodily evacuations (sweat, urine, menstruation) did not expel. The doctor Scipione Mercuri also advised the practice of *scottatura* that is a wound obtained through burning children affected by epileptic convulsions behind the neck. In this case the purifying action of the fire was thought to consume the wicked, stagnating humour, renovating the blood. As Camporesi notes, in some parts of Italy, as in Florence, the burning or boiling was practised during the same day of baptism. In the popular mind the evil and the disease mixed together and the ritual

[240] Roy Porter, Dorothy Porter, *In Sickness and Health*. *The British Experience 1650-1850.* (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), pp. 49-50; Simon Howards, *Phlebotomy.* (London: 1601); Nicholas Culpeper, *Last Legacy,* pp. 8-10

purification corresponded to a physical fiery cleansing of the infectious humours that embodied the sin after birth.[241]

Another diffused healing method to drain the plethoric humours, which relied on the porosity of the body, was "cupping", that is the employment of glasses heated in hot water. So Culpeper suggested: "apply them close to the part of the body to be cupped; as they cool, so the Air in them will condense, and to avoid Vacuum, draw the humours through the pores of the skin". Cupping was a milder blood-letting, which did not assault the body, harming it, but instead disrupted the surfacing capillaries, attracting the subtler part of blood in the form of vapours.[242]

Among the diseases that came from putrefaction was what Culpeper defined generically as rotten fever, and more specifically plague and smallpox. Rotten fever was the manifestation of the corruption of the humours and depended much on the structure of the bodies. Sanguine and fleshy constitutions, apparently the healthier ones, were the most suitable for this disease, due to the richness of blood and to the poor cooling action of the air, which could ended in the growth of excrements and pollution. Yet air as well has not only a positive refrigerating rule. The external environment could be one of the causes of pestilences and contagious diseases, which entered the body and altered the humours passing through the corrupted air that rose from unnatural heat, droughts, great rains, putrefied, unburied corpses. Writing at the end of the sixteenth century Simon Kellwaye explained how, once in the body, the plague proceeded from melancholic blood, that is a blood were coldness and dryness prevailed, inflaming and suffocating the spirits and erupting in botches and bubbles on the surface. The only real internal factor that helped the plague in its development was sin: the vitiated humours depended on a religious disposition of man which, beyond him, affected the surrounding human and natural context. In the words of another physician, Thomas Sherwood:

> There are divers causes of this disease. The first is sin, which ought to be repented of. The second an infected and corrupted air, which should be avoided. The third an evill diet, which should be amended. The fourth are evill humours heaped together in the body, being apt to putrifie, and beget a Fever,

[241] Piero Camporesi, *La Carne Impassibile*, pp. 150-154; Scipione Mercuri, *Degli errori popolari d'Italia.* (Verona: 1645), pp. 332, 417.
[242] Nicholas Culpeper, *Febrilia*, pp. 29-30; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, pp. 217-219

which must be taken away by convenient medicines.[243]

So the first preventive or healing effects were obtained by praying and repenting; purging pills, decoctions of lenitive herbs, emetics, diuretics and of course bleeding followed.

Smallpox was a sickness deeply related to the plague, whose differences were mainly displayed in the swollen, but less disfigured aspect of the patient and the milder violence of the pains. It was caused by vitiated, evil air and by the accumulation of wasted humours in the blood. The great number of children figuring among its victims was attributed to the polluted menstrual blood in which they were generated. Due to the youth of the patients, bleeding was not always advised. Kellwaye recommended for example not to bleed from the child's arm, provoking an excessive evacuation. Whitaker, on the same subject, advanced a stronger and significant opposition to blood-letting, affirming that through it the body discharged the putrefied blood, but the responsible humours were not repaired. Up to the seventeenth century a sympathetic cure, called "the red treatment", was employed. The patient was surrounded by red things, clothed in red and healed with red drinks and food. The aim was obvious. Through the colour red the brightness and freshness of the blood was restored. Smallpox also provides us an example of how medical opinions diverged. Even if the origin of it, and all the other diseases, was placed in the unbalanced blood, there was no definite agreement or division between the consumptive and the corruptive agents. Thus while many physician advised bleeding and sweating to purge the body, during smallpox, the famous doctor Thomas Sydenham proposed a "cooling therapy", to repair the dispirited bodily fluids.[244]

Finally, as the idea of the relationship between sin and the plague may suggest, the blood was only the vehicle, transporting the agents of the reasonable soul. This means that also passions, feelings, spiritual or intellectual dispositions could influence its movement. There was a lack of clear distinction that we are going to investigate, for

[243] Simon Kellwaye, *A defensatiue against the plague contayning two partes or treatises: the first, shewing the meanes how to preserue vs from the dangerous contagion thereof: the second, how to cure those that are infected therewith. Whereunto is annexed a short treatise of the small poxe: shewing how to gouerne and helpe those that are infected therewith.* (London: Privately Printed, 1593); Thomas Sherwood, *The charitable pestmaster, or, The cure of the plague conteining a few short and necessary instructions how to preserve the body from infection of the plagve as also to cure those that are infected : together with a little treatise concerning the cure of the small pox*. (1641), Ch.1

[244] Simon Kellwaye, *A defensatiue against the plague;* Thomas Whitaker, *An elenchus of opinions concerning the cure of the small pox together with problematicall questions concerning the cure of the French pest.*(1661); Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, p. 51

which mental disease, emotions, dreams depended upon concrete substances and produced on the body the same effects of sickness.

4.4 Breaking physical boundaries. Blood and imagination

To speak of the body was to speak of the soul. Though the opposition of the divine soul to the mortal human body was a central idea in the western tradition, rooted in both Christian theology and in the platonic philosophy, it was apparently blurred in the construction of the theory of the spirits. The rational soul, deriving from God, was identified with the mind and ruled on the corporeal or sensitive one, which was thin, subtle, comparable to a spectre or a shadow, but nevertheless inscribed in a physical status. This last could be impressed, shaken, snatched by both internal and external agents and above all by a sinful or a pure moral conduct. In his *Natural history of the passions*, published in the late seventeenth century, Walter Charleton explained that two souls cohabited inside the body. The rational one was incorporeal, indivisible and finite and was identified in the intellect and on which depended the discerning and understanding capacities of the individual. The sensitive soul, on which depended life and sense, was instead made of a fiery substance, an intermediate state of being between the matter of the body and the unsubstantial nature of the reasoning principle.[245] A few years later, the physician Thomas Willis similarly argued that the corporeal soul permeated the bodily parts and the circulating blood, maintaining the whole constitution of the person; yet if it was disturbed it could alter the circulation of the liquid, the humours and the activities of the various organs. The sensitive soul was distributed in the body thanks the action of the spirits, that moved between the brain and the heart and impressed on the blood both fantasies and passions.[246] Life was brought forth by blood, but it came from the sensitive soul: vital spirits and vital blood, carried by the arteries, were often confused, spiritual and physical life merged more deeply in the evidence of blood.

The ambiguity of the spirits' nature seems less important than the sympathetic relationship between the body and the qualities of the soul, obtained through their mediation. Inside the human structure physical characteristics coincided with the

[245] Walter Charleton, *Natural history of the passions.* (London, 1674), pp.46-53
[246] Thomas Willis, *Two discourses concerning the soul of brutes which is that of the vital and sensitive of man. The first is physiological, shewing the nature, parts, powers, and affections of the same. The other is pathological, which unfolds the diseases which affect it and its primary seat; to wit, the brain and nervous stock, and treats of their cures: with copper cuts.* (1683), pp. 13-18

spiritual ones: choleric, phlegmatic, sanguine, melancholic individuals bore in their bodies the evidences of their emotions, and were more inclined to certain passions and sicknesses according to the prevailing humour in the blood. According to the disposition of the heart, humours and body, "diverse sorts of persons be subject to diverse sorts of passions, and the same passion affected diverse persons in diverse manners".[247] We will see now in more details how passions behaved inside the body and how mental sickness was explained, following a dual path that proceeded from the emotions to the humours and then moved to the head and vice versa. In this discussion we will also explore better the link between the sensitive and the rational soul that allowed passions to overcome mental balance.

In the words of Agrippa, the passions of the mind could alter the body through imitation, impressing on the blood the image of the thing seen or heard. In this way they could induce certain diseases, agitating and heating the humours, or, as in the case of pregnancy, also transmit the features of a distorted imagination to the foetus, through the nourishing blood.[248] Robert Burton gave a complete explanation, highlighting the mutual influence of passions and humours:

> the body works upon the mind by his bad humours, troubling the spirits, sending gross fumes into the brain, and so disturbing the soul, and all the faculties of it, with fear, sorrow, etc. (…), on the other side, the mind most effectually works upon the body, producing by his passions and perturbations miraculous alterations, as melancholy, despair, cruel diseases, and sometimes death itself.[249]

The seat of affections was the heart, from where they worked directly on the blood: they primarily fixed their impressions on it through the spirits and then affected its movements in the rest of the body. The stronger the feeling, the faster was the process of the blood's accumulation. Disturbed, sudden, prolonged emotions influenced the bodily temperature, provoking changes in the humoral balance. Pleasure, for instance, made the fluid circulate; fear and anger agitated and heated it abnormally, while grief

[247] Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in generall.* (London, 1684), pp. 37-38. See also Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam. Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 183-187. Timothie Bright, A *Treatise of Melancholy*. (London: John Windet, 1586), pp. 37-69
[248] Cornelius Heinrich Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Book I, pp. 204-205
[249] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: p. 250.

refrigerated the body, overwhelming the natural heat, oppressing the heart with thickened blood, withering the bones, depriving the rest of the organism of its normal flux and so weakening its normal strength. In the words of the English clergyman Edward Reynolds no passion was comparable to sorrow or grief, which "stoppeth the voice, looseth the joints, withereth the flesh, shrivelleth the skinne, dimmeth the eyes, cloudeth the countenance, defloureth the beauty, troubleth the bowels, in one word, disordereth the whole frame".[250] The immediate evidence was given by an abnormal paleness which distinguished the afflicted individual. Though negative feelings were the worst, it was thought than every kind of excessive passion could be dangerous, even joy or love, because their continuous action on the humours caused the drying up or the suffocation of the spirits. Also happiness and love could turn into sorrow, if lacking, betrayed or obsessively searched, and so they could distress the individual in the same way in which negative emotions did.[251]

When the blood, full of corrupted humours and their exhalations entered the brain, they reached the imagination, sickening the whole mind. Imagination, together with common sense and memory, constituted the three inner senses of the sensitive soul. Common sense discerned the things of the surrounding world and was seated in the frontal part of the brain. Imagination or fantasy considered in depth and recalled for a longer period the same matter judged by the commons sense, making new things and thoughts by the observed objects, that were consequently stored inside memory. Both memory and imagination were seated in the back of the brain, together with memory, close to the intellect, that belonged to the rational soul and differentiated man by the animals. While for animals imagination was the only faculty of apprehension, inside the human being the intellect could correct the errors of fantasy and elaborate the images and the notions into useful ideas. The intellect exercised control on fantasy, dividing true from false ideas, deciding what was worth speculation and what had to be discarded, as "extravagant, useless conceptions".[252] Yet the rational soul did not control completely the sensitive one, which, in the words of Charleton:

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[250] Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man.* (London: R.H. for Robert Bostock, 1640), 232

[251] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: pp. 252, 253; II: 103; Thomas Willis, *Two discourses*, pp. 44-54; Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde*, pp. 60-64; William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine or A Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases. (by regimen and simple medicines)* (London, 1772), pp. 139-148; Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam.*, pp. 182-183

[252] Walter Charleton, *Natural history*, p. 49

> being much neerer allied to the *body*, and immediate Guardian thereof; is by that affinity and relation obliged to addict itself altogether to the gratification, welfare and conservation of the same. And that this province may be more gratefull and agreeable to so delicate a Governess, she is continually courted and presented by all the *Senses* with variety of blandishments and tempting delights. So that charmed by those powerful enchantments of sensible objects, and intirely taken up with care of the body, and in that respect prone to pursue pleasures: she too often proves deaf to the voice of *Reason* advising the contrary, and refuses to be diverted from her sensual to nobler affections.[253]

The three inner senses corresponded to the outer five senses, to which they were connected through the spirits. Imagination was the only sense partly free from the power of reason and therefore it could be dangerous and deceptive. Again in Burton's words it was "the instrument of the passions", amplifying their effects. Similarly a distorted imagination acted on the body, descending towards the heart, where it pushed blood and passions into motion. According to this theory a deranged mind put at risk not only mental health, but also the physical one, because to fancies of imagination followed distempered spirits and corrupted humours.[254] Furthermore, following the same sympathetic relationships, man was placed in a system of correspondences that went beyond his own person, allowing similarities and connections that thought of in terms of disease, made every kind of contagion possible. This meant the effects of mental sickness could be endemic to a certain extent. During the early sixteenth-century the Italian philosopher Pietro Pamponazzi, for instance, described how spirits and blood, corrupted by fantasies and feelings, produced vapours and exhalations which affected the whole welfare of the person. Through the pores and the openings in the body they also could spread to the external environment.[255]

From these descriptions physical boundaries seem almost non existent: in the early modern thought the skin was a porous matter where the body was displayed, more than concealed or separated from the outer world. Blood and spirits were easily

[253] Walter Charleton, *Natural history*, pp. 58-59
[254] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: pp. 157-160, 257-258; Thomas Willis, *Two discourses*, pp. 38-43
[255] Pietro Pomponazzi, *De Naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantatinibus* (Basle, 1556). In David Gentilcore, "The Fear of Disease and the Disease of Fear." In William G. Naphy, Penny Roberts, *Fear in Early Modern Society*. (Manchester:Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 196

influenced by the external world[256] and the landmarks became more obnoxious when we arrive to imagination. Due to its own spiritual nature in fact it had to do with the visible as well as the invisible reality, where demonic forces were at work, trying to enter and manipulate the human being. Imagination and blood cooperated, linking the spiritual domain to the physical one: while the first continuously worked on the passions and could become the gate for malevolent influences, a weakened or unnatural bodily condition made the spreading of sickness easier.

For a good example of this we can look at the state of sleep to which every body surrendered its defences, and, consequently, investigate the perception of dreams and the peculiar disease of the nightmare. Sleep was caused by an abundant afflux of blood to the head: the liquid was full of vapours coming from the digestive process of the stomach, which overwhelmed the spirits so that the senses were temporarily obstructed, giving to the body and the mind the opportunity to renew their energies. During sleep blood was hotter than during the waking hours and its correct ebullition acted on the imagination, provoking dreams. The purer the exhalations from the concocted nourishment, the sweeter were the dreamy visions.[257] In his treatise on dreams, published in 1689 Thomas Tryon explained how a prolonged flux of blood to the head was unhealthy. In sleep blood washed the cortex of the brain, it heated up but did not circulated, so that it could stagnate there, overfilling the head and causing headaches and other diseases, including sleep-walking, typical of young people and those with sanguine complexions. Exuberant blood swelled and stimulated the animal spirits of the nerves, responsible for motion, so that even if all the other senses and spirits were inhibited the person moved as apparently awake. Though sleep-walking was not particularly dangerous, it demonstrated how not just sickening humours and vapours, but every kind of excess carried disease. The most frequently suggested healing method for sleepwalking, but also for headaches induced by excessive sleep, was bloodletting, which helped to keep the mind at a cool temperature.[258]

Bad vapours and humours, especially black bile, were instead the origin of awful dreams and the phenomenon of the nightmare, or sleep paralysis, a disease in which

[256] Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth Century Germany*. Trans Tomas Dunlap.(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.123; Claudia Benthien, *Skin. On the cultural border between the self and the world*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 38-40.
[257] Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Dreams and Visions.* (1689); Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I:p. 160; Thomas Willis, *Two discourses*, pp. 90-92
[258] Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Dreams*, pp. 22-23.

the mind and the body were both involved. The diseased person felt physically oppressed, hindered in movements, respiration and speech, but was also subject to sudden, strong frights and hallucinatory states. The medical explanation relied on Galen's theory of disturbed digestion, according to which sleep-paralysis was due to the rising of bad vapours to the brain where they hindered the flux of the spirits through the nervous system. Another theory, though generally dismissed by the eighteenth century, posited that an excessively relaxed stomach did not complete a proper digestive cycle, causing the malfunction of the circulation of blood, which, in turn, led to stagnation in the head and other parts of the body. The supine position, assumed during sleep, was believed to help the blood to stagnate and the disease to take advance of the person. Pregnant women or those recovering from childbirth were among the most affected.

Beyond this widely accepted explanation there was also a supernatural one, according to which, the nightmare or the *incubus* was caused by witchcraft or by fairies and devilish animals. The belief derived from the troubled mind and the frightful visions which accompanied the bodily sensation, so that common people were prone to assert that a witch or a demon was sitting on their chest, oppressing their sleep.[259] Discussing the power of imagination, Robert Burton wrote this summarized description of the disease:

> although this phantasy of ours be a subordinated faculty to reason, and should be ruled by it, yet in many men, through inward or outward distemperature, defect of organs, which are unapt or hindered, or otherwise contaminated, it is likewise unapt, hindered, and hurt. This we see verified in sleepers, which by reason of humours and concourse of vapours troubling the phantasy, imagine many times absurd and prodigious things, and in such as are troubled with *incubus*, or witch-ridden: if they lie on their backs, they suppose an old woman rides and sits so hard upon them that they are almost stifled for want of breath; when there is nothing offends but a concourse of bad humours, which trouble the phantasy.[260]

[259] Owen Davies, "The Nightmare Experience sleep paralysis, and witchcraft accusations." *Folklore* 114 (2003), pp. 181-203; Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Dreams*, pp. 24-25; William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, p. 556

[260] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I:p. 253

The supernatural theory did not have a real medical validation, nevertheless the fact that it was sometimes accepted together with the scientific one, suggests that diseased bodies and imaginations could become the prey for external spiritual intruders. Up to the eighteenth century we find that the "indisposition of the body" could allow spirits and otherworldly beings to interfere with the process of dreaming.[261] The historian Janine Rivière has discussed ideas regarding the natural and divine origin of dreams in the context of reformed England. Though some reformers denied the continued existence of prophetic dreams, some astrologers and philosophers believed in their power, while in popular culture dreams were often used as a means of divination.[262] The interest in dreams and their role in the reformers' fight against superstition, testifies to a belief in the proximity of the supernatural, which endured among common people, but which also stimulated intellectual debate. In both cases the means by which a connection was established between the body and the imagination, and allowed the work of external, demonic influences, was the blood where spiritual and physical matter mingled together.

4.5 Passions of the mind: frenzy, madness and melancholy

Mental sickness was mainly reduced to three kinds that could easily change from one into the other: "frenzy", melancholic states, and the generic definition of "madness", under which other diseases were included, such as lycanthropy and hydrophobia. Different feelings and humours corresponded to different diseases, yet the way they worked together on the brain was almost the same: insanity often came or was linked to physical sickness and could be the final symptom of approaching death. In his study on madness in early modern England, Michael MacDonald wrote: "The majority of people in early modern England died of fevers and infections; villagers visiting the sick and dying had many opportunities to witness the delirium that mortal illnesses could cause".[263]

Frenzy was the only one distinguished by an acute feverish state, caused by an excess of choler (yellow bile). The heating and stagnation of choleric blood led to the

[261] Andrew Baxter, *An Inquiry into the Nature of Human Soul.* 2 volls. (1733), vol. 1, p. 144. Robert Allan Houston, *Madness and Society in Eighteenth Century Scotland.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 318-319

[262] Janine Rivière, "'Visions of the Night': The Reform and Popular Dream Beliefs in Early Modern England." *Paregorn* 20.1 (2003), pp. 109-138

[263] Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 184

ebullition of the spirits, which inflamed the cerebral membranes affecting imagination. From the suffocation or putrefaction of excessive moisture an unnatural heat damaged the vital principles and the faculties of the soul. The disease was linked to the passion of anger, which worked at its best in choleric complexions, where yellow bile was naturally abundant. Madness had the same causes as frenzy, that is excessive and burnt choler, which lead to the inflammation of the cerebral membranes, but came without fever and did not always affect memory.[264] Melancholy was a far more fascinating and multiform disease, difficult to classify, which could affect different categories of people, proceeding both from physical and psychological conditions, and ending in mental insanity if prolonged or chronic. According to Robert Burton it was: "a kind of dotage without a fever, having for his ordinary companions fear and sadness, without any apparent occasion". While William Buchan in his *Domestic Medicine* gave this comprehensive description of the disease:

> Melancholy is that state of alienation or weakness of mind which renders people incapable of enjoying the pleasures, or performing the duties of life. It is a degree of insanity, and often terminates in absolute madness. It may proceed from hereditary disposition; intense thinking, especially where the mind is long occupied about one object, violent passions or affections of the mind, as love, fear, joy, grief and such like. It may also be occasioned by excessive venery; narcotic or stupefactive persons; a sedentary life; solitude; the suppression of customary evacuations; acute fevers, or other diseases. Violent anger will change melancholy into madness; and excessive cold, especially of the lower extremities, will force the blood into the brain, and produce all the symptoms of madness. To all which we may add gloomy or mistaken notions of religion.[265]

This explanation, written in the second half of the eighteenth century, did not differ too much from the ones we find in the previous century and was based on the humoral theory and the sympathy between the spirits and the passions. The equivalence with physical sickness was still valuable, so that Buchan recommended bleeding if melancholy was due to bodily obstructions, asserting also that any other

[264] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: pp. 139-140; Thomas Adams, *Diseases of the soule a discourse diuine, morall, and* physicall (1616), pp. 12-17; Nicholas Culpeper, *Last legacy*, pp. 24-25.
[265] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: p. 169; William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, pp. 539-540

kind of bodily evacuation (menses, bleeding noses, looseness), were also effective. The significant difference was the absence of the supernatural motif, if not mentioned as pure superstition or popular belief.

Melancholy could be either material or immaterial, deriving from the humours or from distempered spirits alone, which altered the functions of the brain with no apparent help from physical substances. This last theory is probably an important, even if remote, base for the psychological explanations of the modern age. Blood is little involved. In fact, as Burton wrote, sudden, powerful fears or emotions can affect so deeply the spirits and the natural heat, that bloodletting is almost useless.[266] A further, more diffused, categorization divided it in natural and unnatural, depending on the humour from which it was proceeding. Natural melancholy was cold and dry and depended upon the superabundance of black bile, which Burton defined as the humour of the devil. It could be congenital, a "distemperature" received by the parents through the seed, or also acquired through the milk of breastfeeding. The humoral balance and the quality of the spirits of the infant's body could in fact be largely determined by the nurse's milk, and lead the child to be subject to both physical diseases and affections of the mind. Unnatural melancholy or "melancholy adust" resulted from the degeneration of every one of the four humours inside the blood, both due to putrefaction or to an excessive action of the vital heat.[267] During the eighteenth century there was a small change in this distinction, and black bile was mainly considered responsible for the disease, while, instead of corrupted humours, writers used the term "vapours", which encapsulated every possible distemper that entered the head from the body and damaged the animal spirits.[268]

It seems then that, although slowly, the perception of the body and of disease was shifting from a materic to an unsubstantial definition, and contemporarily the attention was moved from blood to its spiritual dwellers. The first bodily cause for melancholy was an original predisposition of the individual; then we find ageing that corresponded to an increasing presence of the melancholic humour inside blood. The aged could be characterised by melancholic qualities: the old body became cold and dry, due to the diminishing of the vital heat, the weakening of the action of the spirits, and the accumulation of burnt humours from unconcocted food. The whole person

[266] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: pp. 335-336
[267] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I:pp. 173-175, 331; Thomas Elyot, *Castel of Health.* (London: 1547), p.66
[268] John F. Sena, "Melancholic Madness and the Puritans." *The Harvard Theological Review*. Vol. 66. No. 3 (Jul.1973), p. 296; John Purcell, *A Treatise of Vapours and Hysteric Fits.* (London, 1702)

was weakened, the body unable to discharge itself completely of impurities and corrupted blood, the heart was more easily the target of sadness and negative feelings.[269] When the melancholic blood or its exhalations reached the brain it carried falsities with it, fantastical and extreme thoughts that ended in delusion or even madness. This happened because the qualities of coldness and darkness, proper to melancholy, were contrary to the ones of the spirits. In his treatise on sight and melancholic diseases Du Laurens gave an interesting description of how the abundant humour in the brain corrupted the images coming from the eyes. Overwhelmed by blackness the spirits moving from the eye to the imagination distorted the vision, making the ordinary world unrecognizable and filling the mind with fright.[270] As we will see later, eyes were not only an entrance: they let in vision, but they also could let out the obnoxious vapours which were intoxicating the brain.

Entering the spiritual domain once more, parallels could be drawn between melancholy and religious attitudes. Melancholic imaginations misled the soul: the condition of the humours influenced the beliefs and the faith of people. Some English Protestant theologians, for example, considered melancholy as the origin of puritan fanatism. Dealing with this subject Joseph Glanvill discussed how "sweet blood" and humours naturally drove people to religion and God, while melancholic vapours prevailed in the Puritans' minds, deceiving them and provoking despair.[271] Yet if according to Protestant doctrines Puritanism could be the result of ignorance and disease, in the same way in which Catholicism had been previously considered, and vice versa, the most feared and dangerous spiritual menace was the devil. Every religious aberration led back to his influence. In the early modern world the presence of demons was acknowledged or debated as an ordinary fact and it was generally strengthened by emotional distress, as Stuart Clark has emphasised.[272] Melancholy offered a plausible, medical explanation for the interference of extraordinary, spiritual creatures in the bodily domain. Melancholic imagination caused the vision of supernatural beings, fairies, the dead, but it also allowed the devil in. Demons and evil spirits could in fact take advantage of a weak mind to manipulate it, consequently affecting the whole body. Acting through the distempered spirits and passions such as

[269] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: pp. 210-211
[270] Andreas Du Laurens, *A discourse of the preservation of the sight*, p. 92.
[271] Joseph Glanvill, *Way of Happiness*. (London, 1670), quoted in Anthony Horneck (ed.), *Some Discourses, Sermons and Remains of the Revered Mr Jos. Glanvill.* (London, 1681), pp. 79-80. Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, III: p.372
[272] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 393

fear and sorrow, the devil entered the mind in the form of a subtle spirit to delude it, and inserted himself in the corrupted humours of blood, causing sickness.

Witchcraft was similarly explained, as the result of a damaged fantasy and diabolical work. The melancholic witch was primarily deluded by the devil; yet this delusion could spread also in the minds of the alleged bewitched victims. If witchcraft did not exist, it was otherwise endemic due to the same sympathy between bodies and spirits that we have explored regarding feelings: the belief in it and the reality of the devil's presence nurtured the negative passions which corrupted the blood and the imagination, leading to sickness.[273] Spiritual and mental illness coincided and grew in weak bodies. Robert Burton observed that the first cause for every disease was sin and melancholy and madness derived primarily from God's punishment. The preacher Thomas Adams went further in his allegorical tract, *Mystical Bedlam*, describing twenty different kind of madness, each one matching a specific passion. Thus the soul became the instrument of sickness, in accordance with God's will.[274]

4.6 The intruder: epilepsy, envy and fascination

We have to remember that in the notion of "soul", the medical world and the theories related to spirits and humours merged inevitably with the religious idea of the soul, rescued by Christ' sacrifice. In the word itself lies a fundamental ambiguity, that is necessary to understand when we consider how the early modern medical philosophy was interwoven with religion, how the natural was submitted to the supernatural. Nevertheless, the physical effects that were attributed to the passions also indicate the importance of the bodily sphere: passions in fact ran in the blood, they could be transmitted from a body to another. If sin was the main cause for sickness, not all the diseases derived from a sinful life; also the interference with an extraordinary cause was not always dependent on the victim's guilty behaviour.

In this regard it is valuable to consider briefly the ideas of the late seventeenth-century German doctor, Georg Ernst Stahl on epilepsy, discussed by the Italian historian Francesco Paolo de Ceglia. Stahl emphasised the dependence of both health and sickness on the intention of the soul and he considered that some kinds of spastic

[273] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: pp. 199-205

[274] Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, I: p. 178; Thomas Adams, *Mystical Bedlam* (London, 1615)

symptoms, as for example those affecting some women after abortion, derived from immoral conduct. Yet he specified that the defectiveness of human nature was prior to every accident or guilt and the soul itself could not have a complete control over it. In his theories, epilepsy did not depend at all upon God's punishment or sin, but it was the direct manifestation of the soul's attempt to expel plethoric humours or intrusive objects which slowed the motion of the blood and the normal course of the bodily functions. He did not give a neural explanation, directing his attention towards the spasm, which physically displayed the inner movements and orders of the soul. Through the spasm the soul acted directly on the body, without the mediation of the spirits, which for Stahl did not exist. Among the leading factors for the origin of the disease was amenorrhoea amongst women, the accumulation of blood in some organs, due for example to congenital defects, and the influence of the passions of the soul. Epilepsy could in fact have a choleric origin, due to the implosive nature of anger and rage, which literally pushed the blood from the centre of the organism to the peripheries, causing the spasms. Among the intrusive agents, there could be intestinal worms, or objects ingested by accident or which found their way inside the body through its openings, but also the influence of the moon and spells cast by a witches. According to Stahl spells worked on the ideas and the passions in the soul through a certain connection established between the witch and the victim, which was hard to define.[275] Stahl's ideas on the effects of witchcraft seem not far from those which linked it to melancholy.

It is important to highlight that in Stahl's discussion lacked both the spirit theory and the interference of devilish entities with the human imagination. This double exclusion is useful to express the relation between different individuals, the witch and the victim, simply in physical terms of blood, without the mediation of spiritual forces. There is something in certain kind of bodies which can affect the others, often through passions. This is also the case of inexplicable diseases due to the feeling of envy, which spread directly from the sight, reaching and attacking the victim, sometimes even without a precise intention. Though in fact envy stood among the main causes for witchcraft, the envious person was not necessarily a witch, or someone with hurtful intentions. As Adams in his *Diseases of the soule* explained, envy was very similar to the feeling of anger. Yet while the effects of the latter were

[275] Paolo Francesco De Ceglia,"The Blood, the Worm, the Moon, the Witch: Epilepsy in Georg Ernst Stahl's Pathological Architecture.". *Perspectives on Sciences*. Vol. 12, No. 1 (2004), pp.1-28

directed on the individual himself, the first consumed his neighbour.[276] The bodily waste of a person, the "pining away", could be attributed to envy and more exactly to the "evil eye", the negative power which could be transmitted through the eyes. According to demonologists fascination was only the work of the devil and did not depend on the bodily state of the human witch. The sixteenth-century Spanish inquisitor Pedro Sanchez Ciruelo asserted that fascination was not due to any natural law or magic, but was caused by the devil, who through his human allies sent poisonous and invisible substances to the victims, altering the normal balance of their complexions. The toxic smells and vapours passed through the breath and the eyes of the witch, corrupting the humours of those who he or she intended to hurt, causing both mental and physical sickness. Consequently infection could spread to other bodies, generally those of the weakest, infants and elderly people, through natural contagion, but the primary cause was always demonic. The same idea was stressed by the Italian bishop of Pozzuoli Leonardo Vairo, who affirmed that fascination went against nature, destroying physical reality in order to attempt to undermine the divine order and man's faith. Magical powers as wickedness were, then, ingrained into the human body.[277] The famous French inquisitor, Pierre de Lancre, enforced this view, affirming that fascination could only be of demonological origin and that witches were able to fascinate people only after having contracted a pact with the devil.[278]

Beyond the demonic theories, the early modern discussion on the evil eye and fascination appeared as a mixture of spiritual and bodily ideas, in which many philosophers and thinkers asserted a physical and natural origin in which the influence of passions and feelings was connected to the presence of spoiled humours or consumptive sicknesses proper of the sight. In the words of John Webster, who at the end of the seventeenth century attempted to dismantle the reality of witchcraft through practical and medical explanations,

> those that had infected and sore eyes might infect others, and this was nothing but contagion, or corrupt steams issuing from one body to another, which may happen in many diseases, as is manifest by the Writings of divers learned

[276] Thomas Adams, *Diseases of the soule*, pp. 17-18
[277] Piero Sanchez Ciruelo, *Reprobación de las supersticiones y hechizerias.* (Medina del Campo: Guillermo de Millis, 1551), pp. 140-144. Leonardo Vairo, *De fascino.* (Paris: Nicolaum Cesneau, 1583), pp. 216-231, quoted in Erberto Petoia, *Malocchio e Jettatura*. (Roma: Newton Compton, 1995), pp. 183-190
[278] Pierre De Lancre, *Incredulité et mescréance du sortilège.* (Paris, 1622), pp. 73-112

> Physicians, as in bodies infected with the Plague, French Pox, Leprosie, Ophthalmies, and such like.[279]

Webster went further, affirming that the alleged work of the witch, "fascination", when not rooted in ignorance, fear, or superstition, originated from the sickening "effluvia", the vapours or steams which came from the eyes of an infected person.

Alan Dundes explains how the evil eye works on fluids, milk, seed, blood, but also on plants trees, causing their withering and consequent death.[280] Consumption was therefore generated by a corrupted body: intoxicated humours from a sick complexion entered and spoiled a healthy one, which, in terms of stereotypical witchcraft, was often a young person or a child, richer in blood of a better, cleansed quality. This idea is confirmed in the writings on envy by Francis Bacon, who focusing on the identification of the envious person, affirmed that he was generally someone unable to accept his condition. Among these people figured morally despicable individuals, but also the old and those affected by physical deformities. Thus the emotional balance of human beings was once more linked to the status of the body.[281]

Yet envy was not the only feeling able to inspire fascination: a strong desire could also magically work on a chosen target. So Della Porta explained that close to maleficent fascination, there was also one inspired by love. The sentiment was transmitted through vapours and the contained spirits to the imagination of the victim or the beloved one, and was then impressed in the imagination. It remained there for long time and it consequently affected the spirits, obtaining the obedience of the blood.[282] The spiritual domain of passions was conveyed into the relation between different bodies, compromising not only the welfare of the single individual, but also those around him or her.

Turning now to ideas of blood in the theories of menstruation, we will gain a better understanding of how corruption and health were diffused in the body, causing or curing sickness, and also how they spread out from the physical margins, and so affected others.

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[279] John Webster, *The displaying of supposed witchcraft*, p. 25. See also Roger Bacon, *His Discovery of the Miracles Art, of Nature and Magick.* (London: Simon Miller, 1659), pp. 11-14
[280] Alan Dundes, "Wet and dry", p. 258
[281] Francis Bacon, *De invidia*. In *The Works of Francis Bacon.* (London: Longmans, Simpkin & Marshall, 1870). Vol. VI, pp. 392-397
[282] Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della magia naturale,* Book. VIII, pp. 356-358

4.7 Menstruation

The menstrual taboo is known worldwide and has nurtured a specific female stereotype of dangerousness and supernatural qualities. As stated by the anthropologist René Girard, menstrual blood is considered impure and consequently polluting, first of all because breaking bodily boundaries and being seen as a copious blood-shed, it represents a mortal violence that from the individual can affect the community. As an emission of blood the process is in fact seen with horror and disquiet. But Girard has agued that the violence implied in menstrual blood is markedly different from bleeding connected to wounds, murders, aggressive behaviour, and "in many societies" it is "regarded as the most impure of impurity". The first reason is to be found in its connection to sexuality and thus its relation to the generative process.[283] In fact at first sight sexuality is "a permanent source of disorder" inside the community, because it leads to rivalry, incest, illicit relationships, jealousy. We can add that it also represents danger when associated with generation, to one of the moments in which both the parents and the future child are placed in a marginal zone, between life and its absence.[284] In this regard it is not the periodic discharge of blood, but the substance itself, and the female womb in which it is formed, which is significant in the tangled ideas of impurity and risk.

So moving back to early modern Europe, when we consider ideas regarding menstruation, we have primarily to divide ideas on the matter itself from those on the monthly process, and then see how they mingled or could be differently perceived by the medical community and the popular mind.

As already hinted, menstrual blood shared with the womb in which it was begotten, the fundamental importance for the preservation of existence, but also the suspect for its mystery. As Eric Ross has underlined in his article regarding witchcraft and syphilis in the sixteenth century, the female body could, in fact, become the place for hidden and unexpected infection, causing stillbirths, abortions, and congenital malformations, which in the mentalities of people could be explained by the intervention of a supernatural agent, and also lead them to look at women with an increasing suspicion and fear.[285] Blood was primarily seen as an exceptional object,

[283] Renè Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 34-37
[284] Renè Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 36
[285] Eric B.Ross, "Syphilis, Mysoginy and Witchcraft in 16th Century-Europe." *Current Anthropology*, Vol.36 No.2 (Apr.1995), pp. 333-337

violating the bodily boundaries, and placing women on a marginal, sometimes suspicious area. Though not always seen as poisonous the blood was nevertheless universally powerful. Menstruating women could cause disease to cattle, curdle milk, and afflict men during intercourse draining their seed. But their blood could also be used in fertility charms and in love potions.[286] The same menstrual matter, due to its link with fertility, was not always perceived as polluting, but could be useful and magically positive, as we will see in the last chapter. This dual potential, widespread in distant cultures, placed women in an ambiguous zone, where they embodied weakness and strength, human vulnerability and deadly menace.[287]

In the western world ideas on menstruation were strongly dependent on the religious view of blood and the complex of feelings which it entailed. If perceived as a shedding of the fluid rescued by the sacrifice of Christ, the monthly flow carried the waste of both physical and spiritual life. Moreover the ancient books of the Bible have precise prescriptions regarding the behaviour of menstruating women and the nature of their blood. Sin and danger are attributed to it, and it is often employed in metaphorical language to indicate any kind of disorder. The book of Leviticus describes menstrual blood as impure and infectious: according to it, contacts of any type with a menstruated woman must be avoided in order to remain spiritually and physically pure.[288] In the medieval period religious beliefs combined with medical explanations concerning certain sicknesses, locating them in the context of sinful behaviour. People affected by leprosy or smallpox were believed to have been conceived in menstrual blood, while during the sixteenth century it was still accepted by doctors such as the French Ambrose Parè and the Dutch Lemnes, that monsters could be generated through intercourse with a menstruated woman. As highlighted by Ottavia Niccoli, the theories regarding extraordinary conceptions in menstrual blood were mainly due to a mistranslation by a Latin copyist, of an apocryphal text and to the affinity between the words "monstruum" and "menstruum".[289] It was not usually the poisoning of the blood, but its stagnation inside the female body, which was

[286] Stephen Wilson, *The Magical Universe,* pp. 399-401; T. Buckley, A.Gottlieb (eds.), *Blood Magic: the Anthropology of Menstruation*. (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 35

[287] Melissa L. Meyer, *Thicker than Water*, p.129

[288] Patricia Crawford,"Attitudes towards menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England." *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), pp. 57-58; Lev. 15: 24; 18:19; 20: 18

[289] Ambrose Parè, *The workes of that famous Chirurgion Ambrose Parey.* (London, 1634), pp. 757, 769-770; Ottavia Niccoli, '"Menstruum quasi monstruum". Parti mostruosi e tabù mestruale nel '500." *Quaderni storici* Vol. 44 (1980)

weaker than the male one, the bad condition of the womb and the action of other corrupted humours, that afflicted it.[290] The medieval treatise *The Secrets of Women*, by the pseudo Albertus Magnus, which was reprinted many times during the early modern age, influencing popular beliefs on medicine and blood, explained that if conception took place when a woman had her menses, the venom of the fluid could affect the foetus, causing leprosy or epilepsy.[291] Though emptied of a sinful connotation the venomous nature of menstruation was discussed also in the sixteenth century, when it was addressed as the cause for the pains which women suffered during their periods. The exhalation of the humours could also reach the head, provoking headaches.[292] Yet the repulsive, poisoning action of the blood was entangled with its powers of attraction, due both to its rule in sexual life and, in the case of women conducting a promiscuous life, to the mixture of different male seeds with the menstrual substance in the blood.

Menstrual blood could also be differently employed in love-magic, both to attract the lover and to heal love-melancholy. According to Cornelius Agrippa, for example, love could be provoked by the employment of menstrual blood or every other bodily substance which enclosed a venereal appetite, such as sperm, the heart, and the matrix, taken from birds such as pigeons, wag-tails, turtles, sparrows and swallows which were symbolically connected to the passion.[293]

Basing its functioning on sympathy and repulsion love-melancholy could be healed through the sight of menstrual blood. According to Burton in fact a prolonged unsatisfied love acted on the blood, thickening it and inflaming the brain, risking to bring the lover to complete madness. The sight of the menstrual liquid connected to corruption, disgusted the sick one, which constructed his passion on abstract, idealistic theories of the beloved woman. As Dawson writes in such cures menstrual blood marked the otherness and the horrific aspect of women, giving aid to

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[290] Cathy McClive, "Menstrual knowledge and Medical Practice in Early Modern France 1555-1761." In Andrew Shail, Gillian Howie (eds.), *Menstruation. A Cultural History.* (Palgrave macmillan 2005), p. 80

[291] *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' s De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries'*. Trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 129-131. For a late early modern reprint of the books see also: Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *The secretis mulierum, or: The Mysteries of Human Generation Fully Revealed.* Trans. J. Quincy (London, 1725). For medieval ideas on the transmission of disease through maternal blood see: Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 186-188

[292] Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes towards menstruation", pp. 58-59

[293] Cornelius Heinrich Agrippa, *Three books of occult philosophy*, Book I, p. 46

misogynistic views of these latter as duplicitous and impure.[294]

Examining the ideas on the process of menstruation gives us a better comprehension of how they involved the concepts of pollution, purgation and generation. The accepted theories saw the whole process of menstruation as necessary and healthy for women. The female body was considered less efficient than the male one, unable to cleanse completely itself from impurities or to consume and employ all the nurturing substances. In this regard Thomas Laqueur argued the diffusion of the one-sex model, which described women as defective males; an idea stressed also by the fact that ancient and medieval authors failed to give a precise Latin definition for the female genitals.[295] As we will see, theories and beliefs related to the sexes mingled with those of purgation and polluting blood in far more complex and ambiguous ways.

The two main explanations for the menstrual process were the Hippocratic and Galenic ones, which have been discussed by Patricia Crawford. According to Hippocrates women need to purge themselves through the monthly evacuations in order to purify their humours. Being of colder and more passive complexions than men, women could not expel all the impurities, for example through the sweat. Menstrual flux was the result of the fermentation of blood, which in this way expunged excreta and spoiled humours. Galen instead discussed menstruation as the discharge of plethora, excessive blood, which women were not able to concoct, transforming it in life-force.[296] This discharged blood, was therefore not necessarily infected, it could be described as fragrant and pleasant, "pure as any other blood".[297] To a certain extent the Hippocratic conception also referred to menstruation as a process of expulsion of surplus as well as poisonous blood. In fact Hippocrates established a link, for example, between menstruation and tuberculosis, believing that women affected by the pulmonary disease had a scarce and irregular flow, due to the consumptive action of the haemoptysis.[298] The first theory became increasingly secondary during the seventeenth century, and left the sign of its influence mainly in the popular ideas connecting danger with menstrual blood. Yet menstruation

[294] Lesel Dawson, "Menstruation, misogyny and the Cure for Love." *Women's Studies*. No. 34 (2005), pp. 461-484
[295] Thomas Lacqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 96. See also: Danielle Jacquart, Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, pp. 15-25
[296] Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes towards menstruation", pp. 50-52
[297] Alexander Ross, *Arcana Microcosmi*, p. 87; John Freind, *Emmenologia*. Trans. T.Dale (1729), p. 4
[298] James L. Brain, "Male menstruation in history and anthropology." *The Journal of Psychohistory*, vol. 15. No. 3 (Winter, 1988), p. 317

remained the evidence of a broken boundary, retaining its own complexity, even among those doctors who accepted Galen's ideas on plethora, up to the eighteenth century. In a society which considered humoral unbalance to be the most probable cause of every disease, and saw in bloodletting the best remedy, the process of menstruation was interpreted as a healthy evacuation, the natural counterpart of the medical practice of bleeding. According to the English doctor John Freind the softer constitution of women and their homely life facilitated the accumulation of a major quantity of blood in their bodies.[299]

Nevertheless, as discussed by Gianna Pomata in her essay regarding male menstruation, the stronger physical structure of men did not imply that they had no need to suppress excessive humours. They mainly resorted to phlebotomy; but also haemorrhoids, nosebleeds, abundant and thick urine or other kinds of evacuation were positively welcomed by physicians as vicarious menstruation. Stressing the differences between the sexes, "plethora" also created affinities and indicated how sometimes the female body could be an implicit model for the male one, having a weaker complexion, but being more efficient in terms of regular purgation.[300] As Pomata highlighted, such ambiguity is well summarized, although beyond the intention of the author, in an eighteenth-century Italian tract on the subject:

> It is well known from Hippocrates that woman is weaker than man; that her flesh is softer and more loosely knit; that she works at less arduous tasks, and in consequence dissipates less humours and by the same account she produces and collects in her body more blood: which blood… finds the most convenient way out through the uterus. Whereas man, made of stronger and more tightly-knit fibers, when healthy and vigorous, more easily discharges the superfluous humours by way of insensible perspiration; and he normally has sensible evacuations more abundant than usual only once every season.[301]

It seems that the cause for sickness more than the blood's nature was its quantity.

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[299] John Freind, *Emmenologia*, p. 19

[300] Gianna Pomata, "Menstruating Men: Similarity and Difference of the Sexes in Early Modern Medicine." In Valeria Finucci, Kevin Brownlee (eds.), *Generation and Degeneration. Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 109-152. For positive views of the menstrual process and male menstruatio in medieval Europe see: Monica H. Green (ed.), *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 215

[301] Andrea Pasta, *Dissertazione sopra i mestrui delle donne.* (Bergamo, 1757), pp. 41-42.

So the quality of the fluid was secondary to the urgency of discharging any surplus. Excessive blood should be expelled in order to avoid stagnation and the accumulation of rotten humours. There was also an acknowledgment of the possibility of other ways towards the outside found by the fluid if the normal passages were obstructed. Extraordinary events such as the account of a French girl with regularly bleeding eyes could be interpreted as an abnormal pathway for menstrual blood. The doctor who confirmed it explained that the blood, having encountered an obstacle in the womb (the matrix), was redirected to the brain, gushing from the eyes.[302] In the normal menstrual process, the flux proceeded from the matrix and then ran either through the vaginal and the uterine vessels. There was no clear agreement regarding the principal channel, though the richer flow was considered to be discharged from the uterus, especially in women already with children. During pregnancy the flux was directed through the vaginal vessels; yet if it was hindered it could rush through the uterus taking away the foetus and provoking abortion.[303] Thus danger depended on excessive flow, but also on an absence of it, which could end in female diseases as green sickness or amenorrhoea. The first case was considered mortal, entailing the loss of the vital fluid, while the second one, as Crawford has noted, became alarming when entangled with the Hippocratic idea of corrupted blood. Green sickness concerned young girls, who after a certain age did not have their menarche, but it could also be found in married women. Some doctors associated it with the suppression of both menstrual blood and the female seed, which was released by women during copulation. Another disease with the same origins was that known as the "suffocation of the mother", or "mother-fits", where the mother was the womb itself. Its symptoms were characterised by an impression of suffocation and by convulsions of different intensity which affected the woman. The undischarged menstrual blood and seed putrefied inside the womb, affecting the humours and the body, and exhaling obnoxious vapours which, reaching the head, corrupted imagination causing melancholic fantasies, nurturing ideas of devilish possession and witchcraft. Though the work of the devil could be partly acknowledged, due to the sympathy with spoiled humours, the medical explanation, consider him just as an external contributor, who "stirred up" the already sinking blood. The recommended cure was totally natural, based on bloodletting or other ways of inducing evacuations

[302] Cathy McClive, "Menstrual knowledge", pp. 80-81
[303] Cathy McClive, "Menstrual knowledge", p. 76; Freind, John, *Emmenologia*, pp. 33-34

and vomits.[304]

Blood-loss and amenorrhoea were potential dangers and causes of disease not only for women, but also for children. Menstruation in fact had an important role in the reproductive and lactation process. Aristotles considered the embryo to be formed by the pure male seed and the residual substance in the female womb after the expulsion of menstrual blood. The theory was dismissed during the early modern period. Freind explained, for example, that its validation would entail that only menstruating women, that is those who are actually expunging blood, could conceive, and that was quite improbable. Also it contradicted the idea that menstrual blood was not impure at all. More influential was Galen's model of the two seeds, male and female, forming the embryonic life that was consequently fed in the womb by the abundant blood, which therefore did not end in menstrual flux.[305] This view was retold by Albertus Magnus in his medieval treatise. The author explained conception as the result of the interaction between female menses and male seed. Menses were immediately released, when man released sperm: they were consequently sealed in the womb, to avoid any dispersion of substance and so causing the stopping of menstruation.[306]

After childbirth, good blood was conveyed into the breast, where it was changed into milk. It follows that menstruation could be dangerous both for pregnant women, leading, as we have seen, to miscarriages, but also a poor supply of nourishment for the foetus and breastfeeding women. Therefore sexual abstinence was advised, due to the belief that sexual intercourse provoked the secretion of the female seed, a distilled blood itself, and, if ending in conception could steal the precious milk to the already born child.[307] This theory of conception suggests that the foetus was mainly formed by menstrual matter and maternal blood. It also provides a further explanation for the connection between the unformed child and the matter of childbirth with supernatural activity, which was discussed in the second chapter.

European folklore and anthropological comparisons show the dangerous and the power of the substances which were expelled with the newborn child. Seen as not yet

[304] Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes towards menstruation", pp. 52-55; Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother.* (London, 1603).
[305] Angus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals: The Perception of Fertility in England from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century.* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), 16-17; Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes towards menstruation", pp. 51-52; John Freind, *Emmenologia*, pp. 5-8
[306] *Women's Secrets*, p.65
[307] Angus McClaren, *Reproductive Rituals*, pp. 66-67; Michael Stolberg, "Menstruation and Sexual Difference in Early Modern Medicine". In Andrew Shail, Gillian Howie (eds.), *Menstruation*, pp. 91-92; John Freind, *Emmenologia*, pp. 63-65

wholly developed human beings, they craved blood and could determine the physical welfare of the infant. Now it can be asserted that their disquieting behaviour depended not only on a thirst for wholeness and life, but on the qualities itself of the blood in which the child was generated. The historian Jacques Gélis has argued that the blood which could issue with the child, was considered a repugnant, impure and corrosive liquid, like the menstrual one. It was, in essence, bad blood.[308] An undeveloped human being corresponded to an intrinsically polluted blood, which did not have the necessary time to be washed and cleansed by a purer and nourishing one flowing inside the body. As a consequence this bad blood, instead of producing life, attracted and spread negative forces. Similarly, corrupted blood, due to the stagnation inside the womb, or to venereal diseases, poisoned the milk and caused sickness in the child. This last idea, extrapolated from medical contexts and linked with the concept of contagion through vapours that we had already explored, reshaped the figure of the aged woman, especially in relation to younger people and children. In this regard Pseudo-Albertus affirmed that the eyes of infants could be spoiled by the look of a postmenopausal woman.[309]

Reviewing religious and magical ideas attached to menstrual blood and the medical theories of purgation and discharge, which involved both women and men, it is worth mentioning the complex of beliefs on the menstruated Jew. Rooted in the medieval accusation of ritual murder and the alleged use of Christian blood by the Jews, the marvellous construction was still diffused in the early modern period. The belief had its basis in the same concept of guilt and moral degradation that we have encountered in the discussion on the bleeding desecrated host. In the thirteenth century, Thomas de Cantipré expressly connected the alleged menstrual flux suffered by male Jews with the self-incriminating statement they addressed to Pilate, claiming responsibility for the death of Christ. Cantipré argued that:

> the criminal disposition is even now transmitted to children by some taint in their blood. The godless posterity inexpiably suffers torment through the

[308] Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth inEarly Modern Europe.* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), p.107
[309] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *The secretis mulierum, or: The Mysteries of Human Generation Fully Revealed.* Trans. J. Quincy (London, 1725), p. 90

violent coursing of this taint through their veins till they repentantly admit themselves guilty of the blood of Christ, and are healed.[310]

Yet the notion of the menstruating male was not necessarily an aberration, and only became so when linked to the categories of religion and ethnicity, when the body's alleged physical evidence was regarded as a form of symbolic pregnancy. Exploring the figure of the menstruating Jew in the writings of two seventeenth-century Spanish physicians, John Beusterien has discussed how physicians focused on the idea of corrupted blood being linked to the lower parts of the body, in order to define Jews as being impure and, therefore, inferior. The medical theory of menstruation was ignored in order to give emphasis to the spiritual depravation and bodily monstrosity that denoted the Jew, and raised the social barrier of racial exclusion.[311] If it is true that a form of manipulation was at work here, it is important to observe that it developed within a framework of fertile popular belief. David Katz has discussed the same belief in the context of early modern England, pointing out that male Jews were thought to incorporate in their bodies the best of male and female characteristics, being able to purify themselves through the regular evacuation of blood. Yet, this feature placed the Jews in an ambiguous gender zone, which enforced the idea of them as being incomplete and untrustworthy human beings.[312] Moreover, the evacuation of blood, no matter how much it was medically explained, was a blood-loss as it entailed the disappearance of the vital fluid. As Peggy McCracken pointed out "Jewish male bleeding represents an excessive bleeding, a bleeding that cannot be controlled".[313] It suggests a weakened body, but it also expresses both a spiritual and physical menace for the established social order.

Furthermore it is worth noting that while doctors dealt with menstruation and bleeding in a positive manner, the popular mind was still scared by such processes, fearing the complete drainage of the body of its vital fluid.[314] The need for Christian blood by the Jews was then explained by the periodical loss of the liquid through their

[310] Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. Vol. XI. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.153
[311] John L. Beusterien, "Jewish Male Menstruation in Seventeenth Century Spain." *Bullettin of the History of Medicine*. Vol.73, No.3 (1999), pp. 447-456; David S. Katz, "Shylock's Gender: Jewish Male Menstruation in Early Modern England." *The Review Of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 50, No. 200 (Nov., 1999), pp. 449-452. See also: Irven M. Resnick, "Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses." *The Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (2000), pp. 241-63
[312] David S. Katz, "Shylock's Gender", p. 459
[313] Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve*, p. 104
[314] Gianna Pomata, "Menstruating Men", pp. 123-125

own bodies. The monstrosity of the Jews relied ultimately in the weak quality of their own blood, spiritually and physically impure, in conjunction with the failure of their bodies to keep it sealed inside.

4.8 The diffusion of medical theories and folk-remedies

Concepts of bad and good blood, linked to the ways the body absorbed or expelled it, can be employed to read problems of gender, age, ethnicity, and religion, and their relevance and impact inside a society. Theories regarding menstruation also shaped the social sphere, determining the role of women, but even of men who shared female features, tracing paths of exclusion or inclusion into the community. In medical terms blood was considered as a means of physical and spiritual exchange. Breaking the margins both through its regular flux and the polluting effluvia of its not expunged humours, it did not only affect the body, but changed it in an intruder, an invasive presence interwoven with the others, bringing both health and disease, the preservation of life and its continuous disruption.

But what was the impact of this views and ideas on the vast majority of people? Medical ideas circulated inside early modern society thanks not only to the books of physicians, but also to those of different healers, such as herbalists, midwives, self-taught physician, astrologers and those who based their discussions on their direct experience. As Andrew Wear has pointed out, discussing the context of early modern England, it is necessary to separate the term "popular" from "popularized", regarding medicine. The popularization of medicine depended on the diffusion of theories through written treatises and the dilution of knowledge in order to reach large portions of the society. By contrast, in the concept of popular medicine, all the sort of remedies and recipes were mixed and made available for the literate as the illiterate, including magical healing and beliefs. During the seventeenth-century we find, for example, the works of Nicholas Culpeper "Student in Astrology and Physick", written and printed for the common people as well as for apothecaries. Another example is the book by Jane Sharp that drew from her own skills in the art of midwifery, and from medical texts by male authors, in order to produce a serious handbook on female sexuality, reproduction and childbirth, accessible to women and other midwives. While in the eighteen century the Scottish doctor William Buchan wrote his famous *Domestic Medicine*, reprinted several times in English and also

translated into French, which was intended to dismantle "Ignorance, Superstition and Quackery" and educate people in the real medical art. These texts came out together with new editions and reprints of sixteenth-century *Books of Secrets*, such as the aforementioned texts of Della Porta and pseudo Albertus Magnus, where the marvellous was explained in terms of natural magic and philosophy, and which were largely employed in folk-medicine by empiric practitioners, quacks and cunning folk. These texts were not only reprinted and translated, but new books borrowed from them. Recipes were extracted and rearranged from their pages. Some books, as the Italian Alessio Piemontese's *Secreti*, became so famous and well known, that additional, similar works appeared, going under the name of the original author.[315] As William Eamon has emphasised in his work of diffusion of *The Books of Secrets*:

> The empiric/charlatan was more deeply connected to the social realities of the people than the official Galenic physician, whose humoral theories were far removed from the rules and beliefs by which most of his patients lived. Then as now, the people wanted action, not an intellectual understanding of their ailments' causes.[316]

Folk-medicine gave immediate answers to the health questions of people, concerning, beside speculations on bad and good blood and correct circulation, the more easily understood problem of blood-loss and safe physical boundaries. As we have already seen, this different perception was particularly evident in ideas on menstrual blood. In one edition of Alessio Piemontesi's *Secreti*, magical recipes abounded and one, based on a relation of sympathetic magic, suggested binding a dead toad around a woman's neck to stop her menstrual flux.[317] It is evident that here menstruation was not understood as a positive process of discharge, but as a dangerous haemorrhagic flux, that washed away the life-force of the individual. Dried

[315] Andrew Wear, "The popularization of medicine in early modern England." In Roy Porter (ed.), *The Popularization of Medicine 1650-1850.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 17-41*;* Matthew Ramsey, "The Popularization of Medicine in France, 1650-1900." In Roy Porter (ed.), *The Popularization of Medicine*,pp. 97-133; Elaine Hobby (ed.), *Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book. Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); William Eamon*, Science and the Secrets of Nature. Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 357-360, 251-252

[316] William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, p.241

[317] William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, p. 252

toads were employed up to the nineteenth century in other magical remedies to stop blood fluxes, as for example, blood from the nose.[318]

When sickness and health are inscribed in witchcraft beliefs we need to consider carefully how intellectual and popular medical notions of blood were interwoven, influencing each other. Before exploring specific cases of witchcraft in the different religious contexts of England and Italy it is possible to distinguish two different roles of the fluid in determining the representation of the witch inside the community. On one side we have the path of aggression, from the devil to the witch and then from the witch to the victim, in which the prominent symbolism concerned physical violence and blood dispersion. On the other, there is the individuation of the ideal aggressor, whose bodily qualities reflected his or her spiritual corruption, abounding in spoiled humours. In both cases blood became the symbol of imbalance and disorder where life was either stolen or polluted.

[318] See for example T.F.Thiselton Dyer, *Domestic Folk-lore.* (London, 1881), pp. 150

5. Feeding your own demon: The case of England

5.1 Blood connections: the devil's mark, fairy tradition and the familiar spirit

In the previous chapters we have explored general theories regarding blood in early modern Europe, ranging from the impact of the Reformation to witchcraft beliefs, the supernatural and the medical world. We are now going to see how these ideas worked in English culture and religion. English witch-trials give us a significant perspective on the wider context of the European ones, in part due to the isolated position of the country, in which the Protestant religion merged slowly and to different degrees with continental, demonological ideas, and with a substratum of folk beliefs. It is hard to distinguish an original popular thought in the complex of existing pamphlets and trial-records, because witches' confessions were not spontaneous narratives, but were instead deeply influenced by the theological debates and by the perspectives of the writers. As Marion Gibson has discussed in her work on the stories about witches, though no torture was employed in England, different elements were mixed in a single confession: the perspective of the pamphlet writer, the rumours diffused in the community, the reported speech and thoughts of other people more or less involved with the accused, and finally the accused's perception of the crime. It remains quite difficult to establish a comprehensive definition of witchcraft which could be suitable for every section of the populace: the learned classes, the common people, the accusers and the accused.[319] Also, although attention focused on witchcraft as a religious crime, its heretical content did not have the same importance for the common people that it had for theologians. Nevertheless a certain process of integration of different sources is recognizable in the construction of the witch-figure and the perception of the body in relation to supernatural forces from the late sixteenth century onwards.

As noted by Keith Thomas the main feature of English witch accusations until the sixteenth century was *maleficium* and not diabolism. The accusations spread from tensions at village level more than from the suspect of religious deviance, and, differently than in other countries, even the law was concerned with witchcraft as a social crime, more than with its alleged heretical content. The Witchcraft Act passed

[319] Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft. Stories of Early English Witches*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 125-128

under Henry VIII in 1542 primarily condemned the practice of conjuration, while the second, issued by Elizabeth in 1563, insisted on *maleficium*, yet none of them denounced magic and witchcraft as a capital offence to God. The witch was the malevolent neighbour, a menace in human, recognizable shape who attempted to destroy the physical existence of people and their belongings, causing illness and death, injuring cattle and farm animals or hindering domestic welfare. It seems then that though involving magic, witchcraft was understandable in practical terms: such continental elements as the capacity to provoke storms, destroying the crops or sexual magic were rare in the English context.[320]

The religious meaning of witchcraft is found in theological tracts from the late sixteenth century: with biblical references proving the existence of witches in the world, the presence of the Devil and the notion of a compact with him, which inverted and destroyed that between humans and God, emerged as the real base of witchcraft..[321] Yet as James Sharpe has noted, it would be erroneous to consider the popular universe as separated from the theological one: the notion of *maleficium* and of harmful magic worked at different levels within the religious tradition. If the prosecutions largely focused on the criminal implications, the realm of belief was far more wide and complex. We should try to understand the peculiar features of English witchcraft by considering them as hybrids, where the various factors were deeply tangled and difficult to isolate.

One of the most distinctive elements was the idea of the familiar spirit, the demonic agent which helped the witch to perform maleficent magic, and which had with the owner a strong bodily relation. It was in fact supposed to suck the witch's blood, leaving on her/his body a mark, a teat, an extra-nipple, which stood prominently as evidence during the trials. The spirit could be described either as an animal or as an invisible creature. The English familiar was a kind of evolution of ideas diffused since antiquity. According to Charles Ewen l'Estrange: "ancient philosophers supposed that demons entered into beasts because they were desirous of bodily warmth and that, revelling in the smell of blood, they in return for the gratification of their senses, willingly destroyed persons as desired by the sacrificants".[322] Centuries later supernatural beings showed the same blood-thirst.

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[320] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 436-439, 528-534
[321] James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness. Witchcraft in Early Modern England*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 80-102
[322] Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 72-73

At first sight the familiar seems the English transposition of the continental and Scottish idea of the devil's mark that we explored in the first chapter, yet the idea of the familiar spirit is a more complex belief, where several recurrent motifs are interwoven and linked to the need for human blood. As already stated elsewhere,[323] though, regarding the problem of its uniqueness, the English familiar spirit can be situated in the wider context of European witchcraft beliefs, as an interesting variant. It can be ascribed variously to the fairy tradition of the British Isles, to the representations of the devil, and to the notion of conjuration in high magic.

In the following paragraphs we will see how the familiar spirit was discussed in the earliest English treatises on witchcraft, and consequently move on to the confessions and the descriptions of contemporary witches, cunning folk and accusers. In one of the first English tracts affirming the reality of witchcraft, the author Henry Holland explained the origin of the familiar spirit mentioned in the Bible, referring to the episode of the Witch of Endor (Samuel: I, 28) where it is presented as a demonic being with whom the witch cooperate to perform the work of the devil: "there must be two cooseners at the lest, so there are, & the witch is one, the deuilan other".[324] In the same pages Holland discussed the meaning of the words used for the familiar, which more properly indicated a "bottle", a small container from which the familiar whispered. Blood as the means to seal the bargain between the witch and the devil or the familiar spirit is mentioned later in the treatise, regarding an episode from the continent:

> There was *(saith he)* a young man about Wittemberge, who beeing kept bare and needie by his father, was tempted by way of sorcerie, to bargaine with the Deuill, or a familiar *(as they call him)* to yeeld him selfe bodie and soule into the deuils power, vpon condition to haue his wish satisfied with money: so that vpon the same, an obligation was made by the young man, written with his owne blood, and giuen to the deuill.[325]

Two of the first cases mentioning a familiar spirit are not directly linked with *maleficium*, but with conjuration and the employment of magic by cunning folk.

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[323] James Sharpe, "The Witch's Familiar in Elizabethan England." In G.W. Bervard, S.J. Gunn (eds.), *Authority and Consent in Tudor England* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), pp. 220-227
[324] Henry Holland, *A treatise against witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1590), C1
[325] Henry Holland, *A treatise* , F1

In 1510, far from the period of the witch trials, John Steward, an ex-school master from Yorkshire, was accused of conjuring spirits in order to detect stolen goods. According to the tale of Sir Thomas Spurret, Steward owned spirits in the form of "humble bees, or like humble bees, and kepte theyme oute by oone and oone, and gave iche oone of theyme a drop of blode of his fyngor".[326] The presence of this record seems to testify to the idea of the familiar, though somehow linked to a shared complex of learned theories, but it was not an English transformation of the devil's pact, but an original belief.

During August 1566 the wise man John Walsh from Dorsetshire, gave a detailed account of his magical practices, mixing together continental ideas on high magic and local fairy beliefs. The man confessed to being able to summon a familiar spirit thanks to a ritual performed with a book that he had inherited from his master. This spirit

> would sometimes come unto him like a gray-blackish culver, and sometime like a brended dog, and sometime like a man in all proportions, saving that he had cloven feet". Regarding the method of conjuration he explained that "the first time when he had the spirit, his said master did cause him to deliver him one drop of his blood, which blood the spirit did take away upon his paw.[327]

The presence of a book, a master, and the ritual objects (two wax candles), suggest that the summoned spirit derived from the tradition of learned magic. The use of human blood in conjuration was also known since antiquity. In the Greek-Roman tradition blood was offered to spirits and to the dead to give them the corporeal strength they lacked, while since late antiquity Neoplatonic thinkers, such as Porphyry, and early Christian writers, discussed the offering of animal blood as a means to obtain the help of wicked demons.[328] Norman Cohn has discussed how magicians offered animals' or their own blood to demons to get their help, while in the second half of the fourteenth century the Spanish inquisitor Nicolas Eymeric, in his *Treatise against the invokers of demons*, denounced this kind of ritual and the

[326] George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, p. 179
[327] *The Examination of John Walsh*
[328] Ken Dowden, *European Paganism. The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.167-71; A.D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity. A sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 32-34

evocation of demons of heresy.[329] Cunning folk often possessed magical books or exhibited them in their repertoire of high magic, though their knowledge of it was all directed to practical aims (recover stolen goods, unbewitch people, the composition of written charms), without any interest in philosophical speculations and spiritual powers.[330] Yet in Walsh' case the conjured spirits and the use of blood were quite different from the witch's familiars and the idea of a devilish pact. The conjurer's spirit usually came only when invoked through specific rituals;[331] then there was no mention of a mark, or of any other sign left on the human body. The wise man was not giving away his soul to the spirit through the living force of blood: the two entities remained detached, so that, as Walsh affirmed, when deprived of his book, he could no more summon the demon. In such practices blood was only an object used for its magical properties, and not a channel to establish a connection of mutual dependence between a demonic and a human nature. There was no physical aggression from the spirit: it did not suck or scratch the man with a claw to draw blood, but it simply took it on its paw. As we have already seen in the second chapter, John Walsh also confessed to being in contact with fairies that occasionally helped him to discover if someone was bewitched. Hence we may infer that the invoked spirit has more in common with the invisible inhabitants of the hills than with the devil and his demonic crew.

Witchcraft accusations at Chelmsford in Essex tell us more regarding the nature of the spirit. Here Elizabeth Francis confessed to keeping a familiar in the form of a spotted cat, named Satan, "Every time that he did anything for her, she said that he required a drop of blood, which she gave him by pricking herself, sometime in one place and then in another, and where she pricked herself there remained a red spot which was still to be seen". The same familiar, changing its form from cat to toad and then to a black dog, was then kept by Agnes and Joan Waterhouse, mother and daughter, who gave it blood pricking their hands or faces and putting the substance directly into its mouth.[332] In 1579 at Windsor other witches confessed to give blood, sometimes mixed with milk, to their familiar spirits, taking it from "the flank", "the

[329] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 173-177
[330] Owen Davies, *Cunning Folk. Popular Magic in English History.* (London: Hambledon & London, 2003), pp. 143-145
[331] Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*, p. 69
[332] John Phillips, *The Examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex before the Quenes majesties Judges, the XXVI daye of July Anno 1566*. (London, 1566), Unnumbered pages.

right-hand wrist",[333] while at the famous trial at St.Osyth in Essex during 1582, we find the first account of a sucking familiar, that shows a direct contact between the witch and the spirit. The eight- year- old Thomas Rabbet testified that his mother, Ursula Kemp, had four familiars, a grey cat called Titty, Tiffin a white lamb, Piggin a black toad, and Jack, a black cat, which, "in the night-time will come to his mother and suck blood of her upon her arms and other places of her body".[334] In these early confessions, in spite of the extraordinary nature of the familiar, sometimes called "imp", the devil was not present, and in the accounts the permanence of the mark was simply indicated as the result of the continued pricking or sucking from the witch's body. The physical places where the blood was drawn reflected more the logical functioning of a frontal assault by the spirit and its urgency to feed itself (it was often described as capricious and hungry), than not to the fantasies of sexual intercourse of the continental demonologists. One case is curious in this regard: Joan Robinson, tried at St. Osyth, made her nose bleed to feed the cat,[335] giving to it the blood which came out during the nasal haemorrhage. The lack of sexual connotation also suggests that while for demonologists blood issuing from the lower parts of the body was the more apt and powerful for the devil, in the popular mind this differentiation did not exist. All blood drawn from the body was good.

One more important argument concerned the different behaviour of the devil and the familiar spirit in their relations with witches. If the mark was the proof of witchcraft, both in the case of a satanic meeting and in that with a familiar, the duration and the modality of the encounter between English witches and their demonic spirits were not depicted as extraordinary supernatural events. They exhibited the features of ordinary domestic life, and located in the routine of the everyday world. While in continental trials the devil appeared only at the first stage of witchcraft, sealing the pact with the witch, in the English context the familiar performed most of the maleficent work, using the witch physically to empower itself through blood. When it had received its daily nourishment, it acted quite

[333] *A Rehearsal both straung and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile, Alias Rockingham, Mother Dutten, Mother Devell, Mother Margaret, Fower notorious Witches, apprehended at winsore in the Countie of Barks. And at Abbington arraigned, condemned, and executed on the 26 daye of Februarie laste Anno.1579* (London, 1579). Unnumbered pages.

[334] *A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S.Oses in the countie of Essex; whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of lawe. Wherein all men may see what a pestilent people Witches are, and how unworthly to lyve in a Christian Commonwealth. Written orderly, as the case were tried by evidence, By W.W. 1582.* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1582), Unnambered pages.

[335] *A true and just Recorde*

independently, consuming its victims and causing sudden lameness and sickness. Speaking of her four familiars Ursula Kemp confessed, for example, that "the two he-spirits were to punish and kill unto death, and the other two she's were to punish with lameness and other diseases of bodily harm, and also to destroy cattle". Joan Upney, tried at Chelmsford in 1589, said how one of her toads sucked a victim to death. At the same trial Joan Prentice confessed to having asked her spirit to "nip" the child Sara Glascock without hurting her, while the spirit "nipped" the girl eventually killing her.[336]

It is important to focus on the verb employed here, "to nip", which means to bite, but even to drink, to suck. The dangerous contact with the familiar spirit, experienced by the victims of witchcraft, is close to the dangerous link between fairies and humans that were explored in the second chapter. Men and women who entered the fairy realm fell ill and pined away; fairies used to kidnap infants and children or to steal milk directly from cows; similarly familiar spirits assaulted children and consumed people and cattle. In her recent work Emma Wilby has underlined the relations that occurred between the fairies and familiars, especially in the case of cunning folk. She has discussed the "fairy familiar" as the spirit of the wise man, and labelled the witch's one as a "demon familiar" in order to highlight its evil nature. She has also made a comparison between English cases and Scottish witchcraft accusations, where fairies played a significant role. The parallel is enforced by the apparent real physical presence of both fairies and familiars. In fact accused witches confessed to have a visual and corporeal meeting with such creatures.[337]

Also, as primarily noted by Robert Kirk, the vampiristic habits of the familiars were connected with the elf-shot and the piercing of animals by fairies, which in this way drew out their nourishment. Kirk attributed the witch's mark to the "damnable practise of Evil Angels, their sucking of blood and spirits out of the Witches bodys (till they drein them, into deformd and dry leanness) to feed their own vehicles withal, leaving what we call the Witches mark behind".[338] Notwithstanding this, we have to remember that in England, and especially in East Anglia, where we find the

[336] *A true and just Recorde*, in Barbara Rosen*, Witchcraft in England*; *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches, Arreigned and by Justice condemned and executed at Chelmes-forde, in the Countye of Essex, the 5. day of Julye, last past.* (1589), Unnambered pages.
[337] Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits.* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), pp. 56-57
[338] Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth*, p. 97; Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, pp. 109-110.

greater part of the witchcraft accusations, fairy beliefs were weaker than in Scotland and had diminished by the end of the sixteenth century.

In the English context fairies were replaced by the devil and his host. In the same year in which in the Highlands Bessie Dunlop confessed to being in touch with the spirit of a dead man, Thom Reid, who led her to the fairies, the devil made his first recorded appearance in the narratives of English witches. The Chelmsford witch Joan Prentice confessed that the Devil appeared to her in the form of a ferret and "standing with his hinder legs upon the ground and his forelegs settled upon her lap, and settling his fiery eyes upon her eyes, spake and pronounced unto her these words following, namely: 'Joan Prentice, give me thy soul'". When the witch protested that her soul belonged to Christ, who had rescued it by shedding his own precious blood, the ferret, named Satan, replied: "I must then have some of thy blood, which she willingly granted, offering him the forefinger of her left hand."[339] Here we have an explanation of what the spirit was looking for: the soul sealed by the baptismal water inside the human being, an idea that clearly did not derive from an original fairy tradition, but was influenced by learned demonological ideas. The notion of a league with the Devil was implicit in the earliest phase of the English witch trials, but became more evident during the seventeenth century, when, probably due to the diffusion of continental and English texts, theological and popular concepts merged more deeply.

In an unpublished work in which the judge Stephen Bradwell discussed the famous case of Mary Glover in 1603, the devil's mark and the teat at which the familiar sucked are described as the same thing:

> They [the witches] have on their bodies divers strange marks at which (as some of them have confessed) the Devil sucks their blood; for they have forsaken God, renounced their baptism, and vowed their service to the Devil, and so the sacrifice which they offer him is their blood.[340]

With the Witchcraft Act of 1604, the idea of the familiar as a "wicked spirit" was enforced, thanks to the fact that the King James I was himself a strong believer in the reality of diabolic witches. In the Act the relationship with the spirits was presented

[339] *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches,* in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*, pp. 186-187
[340] Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England,* pp. 314-315

as a key proof of witchcraft. Also while in the previous treatises the presence of demonic spirits was not always stressed, in subsequent ones descriptions of the familiar and the mark were more accentuated. Learned theories appeared more frequently, mixing with popular narratives. For example, in the pamphlet of the case of the Northamptonshire witches in 1612, the mark is described as completely insensible, while at the trial of the Lancashire witches the devil shows himself in human form to seal a Faustian pact with the witch Elizabeth Southerns.[341]

By contrast the callousness of the mark, which, as we have seen, was considered an important proof in continental and Scottish areas, was rarely mentioned. One example is the case of the Yorkshire witch Anne Hunnam (1652), on whose body was found "a little blue spot upon her left side" which had grown "out of her flesh" and when a pin was thrust into it she did not feel it. Similarly in the same year in Kent the pins thrust in the marks on the arms of three accused witches did not produce any pain or blood-loss. Yet in Berkshire in 1634, when another blue sign was found on William Walles' body, it bled after having being pricked.[342] The presence of a blue spot, which recalls a haematoma, seems to highlight the sucking of blood and its spiritual content from the witch's body, but its bleeding, when discovered by the searchers, although normal in physical terms, remained controversial in the context of witchcraft, showing a demonological belief not completely absorbed in the popular one.

Similarly while the requirement of the witch's soul became evident, the notion of sexual intercourse with the devil never strongly emerged, although the mark or the teat could be found in the "privy parts" of the witch's body. In his *Mistery of Witchcraft* of 1617 Thomas Cooper wrote that witches sacrificed their blood to the Devil and that the mark was located "upon some secret place of their bodies" at which Satan painfully sucked, leaving it insensible afterwards.[343] Margaret Flower, at Lincoln in 1618, said that her black spotted cat used to suck "within the inward parts of her secrets"; Elizabeth Sawyer, in 1621 at Edmonton, confessed that the Devil sucked her blood "a little above the fundiment", where there was a mark in the shape

[341] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 530; James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 73-74; *The witches of Northampton-shire Agnes Browne. Ioane Vaughan. Arthur Bill. Hellen Ienkenson. Mary Barber. Witches. Who were all executed at Northampton the 22. of Iuly last. 1612* (1612), C2; Thomas Potts, *The Discovery of Witches in the County of Lancashire* (1613). (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2003), pp. 18-19

[342] Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 452, 322, 455

[343] Thomas Cooper, *The Mistery of Witchcraft*, pp. 92, 88

of a "teate", due to the "continuall drawing". In 1622 the gentleman Edward Fairfax of Fewstone, writing about the bewitchment of his daughters by a group of old widows, affirmed that the witches confessed that they met the Devil, giving him "body and soul" in exchange for "a lease back of life", which was written in blood. The learned idea of the satanic pact merged with that of the hidden mark (here located on the breast), while the descriptions of the familiar spirits became more fantastic, both in their shape and in their number. Among the animal spirits possessed by the accused there was "a dragon with three heads dripping blood",[344] while the widow Margaret Moone of Thorpe in 1645 was found to have marks as "three long teats or bigs in her secret parts", which were sucked by her twelve spirits. The devil also behaved like a familiar. At Exeter in 1682 two teats were found hanging in the secret parts of Temperance Lloyds' body, from which, as she confessed, the devil in the shape of a black man used to suck her blood, causing her great pains.[345] While a few years later, in 1690, four witches were condemned at Worcester, and the women that searched them "found several large Teates in the secret Parts of their Bodies: and at the same time asking them, how they came there, they both made Answer, that the Devils Imps had don[…]it".[346] Nevertheless the sexual aspect did appear in demonological treatises. According to the famous work by Richard Bernard, *A Guide to Grand Jury Man*, the mark could be detected in several, different parts of the accused. The familiar spirits in fact

> leaue markes vpon them, sometimes like a blue spot, as it was on *Alizon Deuice*, or like a little teate, as it was on Mother *Sutton* and her daughter, of *Milton Milles* in Bedfordshire. These markes are not onely, nor alwayes in the sucking place, for the marke was not on Mother *Samuels* chinne of *Warboys*, but they bee often in other very hidden places, as vnder the eye-browes, within the lips, vnder arme-pits, on the right shoulders, thigh, flanke, in the secret parts (…) and seate.[347]

[344] Charles Ewen L'Estrange , *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 241-242
[345] Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 275-276; *A true and impartial relation of the informations against three Witches, Temperance Lloyd, Mary Trembles and Susan Edwards, who were indicted, arraigned and convicted at the Assizes holden for the County of Devon at the Castle of Exon. Aug. 14 1682* (London: Freeman Collins, 1682), p. 11
[346] *The full tryals, examination, and condemnation of four notorious witches at the assizes held at Worcester.* (1690), p.6
[347] Richard Bernard, *A guide to grand-iury men.* (London: 1630), p. 112

So the body became an open source for blood, an idea which will be important when dealing with the presence of male English witches, beyond the more acknowledged the female ones. In this regard it is worth noting that in the period between 1645 and 1647, during the harsh persecutions of the two "witch-finders" Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne in East Anglia, the number of familiars or "imps" and teats for every witch increased, but again they did not necessarily have a sexual connotation. The attention was more directed towards explaining how to distinguish the devil's mark from every other natural mark that could be found on a body (moles, haemorrhoids, skin's imperfections).[348]

The location and the number of the marks connotated the body as a place for supernatural encounters independent from the demonological sexual theme, gender and the stereotype of the female witch, which by contrast was confirmed by the large percentage of women accused in England. The activity of familiars and the location of marks seem to suggest, in both popular and learned ideas, the search for a kind of nourishment - the human soul contained in the blood. To better understand this feeding habit and its relation with femaleness, we will now turn to explore the witch's body itself and to verify if, according to a certain stereotype, it can be affirmed that some people could be more suitable for the devil's work than others.

5.2 The nurturing witch

When confronted with the witch's body we have to explore the problem of power, which was both directed against the witch and emanated from her or his own person against the human community. The extra-nipple could be interpreted as part of the beliefs surrounding maternity, where it stood as a symbol of both the aggression of the devilish spirit and the nurturing properties of the witch's blood. The distorted maternal attitude of the witch was reinforced by the act of feeding the familiar with other foods, such as bread and milk, as a caring mother would do. As Diane Purkiss and Deborah Willis have posited the witch can be considered as an evil nurturer, a monstrous mother, which took care of a demon, instead of an infant.[349] Also, as

[348] Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches: In Answer to severall Queries, Lately Delivered to the Judges of the Assize for the County of Norfolk.* (London, 1647)

[349] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representation.*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 130-137, Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture. Witch-hunting and maternal power in Early Modern England*. (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 65-66

Willis has noted, maleficent magic can be read as "misdirected nurture".[350] Furthermore it must be noted that certain ideas of monstrosity, spread from the notion of maternity itself and consequently were translated into the realm of witchcraft. We have seen in the third chapter that the foetus was formed by the matter of menstrual blood activated by the sperm: growing inside the mother, the child was indistinguishable from her, feeding on her and so blurring the boundaries between the two beings. An account by Richard Watkins, published in 1651, regarding an alleged neonatal infanticide, which then turned to an involuntary miscarriage, is useful for highlighting this ambiguous bodily relation. During 1650 Anne Greene was sentenced to death for the murder of her foetus of about four months, nevertheless she miraculously survived. The author took this as a sign of her innocence, reporting testimony affirming that the woman had been affected by haemorrhagic flux for several weeks before the birth. He explained that she could not be guilty of the miscarriage, because the foetus was nothing more than "a lump" of the bloody matter coagulated, which the mother could not control.[351]

As has been discussed in the first three chapters, the foetus hidden in the womb could be considered with suspicion, as a being not entirely human or which could become a monster due to the sinful conduct of the mother. It was part of the body, showing all its dangerous potential, but it was not yet a member of society. The mother herself was full of alarming power: feeding the future being she was also affecting it with the qualities of her imagination, running through the blood, which could be either negative or positive. Also, after the birth, the interdependence of the newborn child and the mother was characterised by the lactation process, in which, as we have seen, milk was thought to be a refined blood that was conveyed from the womb to the breast. In similar conditions the responsibility of the mother was strengthened, while in witchcraft contexts the maternal link underwent a grotesque transformation, constituting the real ground for the incredible narratives regarding familiars.

[350] Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, p. 33

[351] Richard Watkins, *Newes from the Dead. Or, A True and Exact Narration of the Miraculous Deliverance of Anne Greene, Who Being Executed at Oxford… Afterwards Revived* (Oxford, 1651). In Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars. Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 133-135. Laura Gowing, *Common bodies. Women, touch and power in seventeenth century England*. (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 48-50

As Malcolm Gaskill has shown,[352] the emotional world of people played a fundamental role in both suspect and confession. Alleged witches shared the same universe of belief of their accusers and the presence of the devil was as plausible for them as for the rest of the population. The social danger and malevolence of the witch could merge with personal experiences of guilt and despair. Even if familiars appeared often in animal form, they could also represent children or infants prematurely lost by the mother. In the case of Margaret Moore of Sutton, in Cambridgeshire, 1647, the death of her three children was an important element in the construction of her encounter with a devilish spirit, which probably led Margaret herself to think she was a witch. Regarding the night the spirit visited her she confessed that

> she heard a voyce Calling to hir after this Manner, Mother Mother to which the said Margeret answered sweet Children where are you what would you have with me & thay demanded of hir drincke which the said Margeret Answered that she had not drincke then theire Came a voyce which the said Margeret Conceaved to be hir third Child & demanded of hir hir soule, otherwise she would take a-way the life of hir 4th Child which was the only Child she had left to which voyce the said Margeret made answer that rather then she would lose hir last Child she would Consent unto the giving a-way of hir soule & then a spirit in the liknes of a naked Child appeared unto hir & suckt upon hir Body.[353]

Therefore nurturing the familiar in the shape of a child, sacrificing her soul, was a means of coping with guilt, but also of accomplish her maternal duty, sadly interrupted. The body and the blood became a means of expressing unspoken and disturbed feelings: while the mother brought life into the human community, the witch brought death, inverting the natural processes of lactation, giving blood instead of milk, and producing infection instead of growth.[354] Furthermore, according to the stereotype of the English witch, pollution was contained also in the person of the witch herself, an old woman that could no longer give birth or discharge her body of

[352] Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft and power in early modern England: the case of Margaret Moore." In Jenny Kermode, Garthine Walker (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts. In Early Modern England.* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 125-145
[353] Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft and power", p. 133
[354] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, pp. 134-136

corrupted menstrual blood. Reginald Scot described witches in such terms, showing how old age could be associated with horror and marginalization:

> One sort of such are said to be witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale fowle and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen (…). They are leane and deformed showing melancholie in their faces, to the horror of all that see them. They are doting, scolds, mad, divelish.[355]

According to Alan Macfarlane, in his study of Essex trials, the construction of this ideal enemy reflected the economic struggle for everyday life at village level, in which old people, and especially old women and widows, were disadvantaged, finding themselves begging or relying on the neighbourhood for survival. Neighbours could direct their guilty feelings against these beggars when their request for help was denied.[356] Another explanation of the link between witchcraft and old age concerns, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the notion that women's ageing bodies constituted a source of disorder and contagion. Deborah Willis has described the post-menopausal body of the witch as a place of both rejection and transformation of the maternal task. The witch was called "Mother", in many trials, despite the fact that she could no longer feed children. An enemy and a spoiler in the community in which she lived, she was otherwise a parent to demonic beings, suckling them with her unpurged blood.[357] A sympathetic correspondence was established between the bad blood of the old woman and the otherworldly, deadly nature of the familiar, which allowed its entrance in the human society. Reginald Scot, a sceptic regarding the reality of witchcraft, affirmed the polluting power of old female bodies. Due to the abundance of melancholic blood the devil could easily place his delusions in the minds of old people, leading them to believe they were witches. Yet, despite this supernatural agency, postmenopausal women could affect others through the "vapours" which rose from their unpurged bodies and came out from the eyes.

> Old women, in whom the ordinary course of nature faileth in the office of purging their naturall monthly humours, shew also some proof hereof. For they

[355] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 4
[356] Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England. A regional and comparative study.* (London: Routledge, 1970)
[357] Deborah Willis, *Malevolent nurture*, pp. 33-34

> leave in a looking glasse a certain froth, by means of the grosse vapours proceeding out of their eyes, which commeth so to passe, because those vapours or spirits, which so abundantly come from their eyes, cannot pierce and enter into the glasse, which is hard and without pores, and therefore resisteth: but the beams which are carryed in the chariot [...] conveyance of the spirits, from the eies of one body to another, do pie[...] to the inward parts, and there breed infection, whilest they, search and seek for their proper region. And as these beams and vapours do proceed from the heart of the one, so are they turned into bloud about the heart of the other· which bloud disagreeing with the nature of the bewitched party infeebleth the rest of his body, and maketh him sick; the contagion whereof so long continueth, as the distempered bloud hath force in the members.[358]

Such theories were grounded in the perception of a certain dangerous permeability of the human body, according to which life and death were considered as a fluid flux in which living creatures were immersed and never completely detached one from the other. There is also another aspect linked to the relation between bodies and old women which placed womanhood in a special position in early modern society. Women had important tasks at the beginning of life and at its end: they took care of infants as midwives, they accompanied dying individuals, assisting, washing and preparing their bodies. Elderly women figured prominently in this kind of works and, as Laura Gowing has explained, the poorest and the oldest were specifically chosen. In fact, in return for the charity they received, they were expected "to wash or nurse their sick neighbours – intimate bodily tasks that were never asked of men".[359] Old women also worked as searchers of signs of sickness and plague on dead bodies. So they were close to infection, mortality and to the secrets concerning the beginning and the end of life.[360] If their economic and social marginality corresponded to the most humble and discredited activities, their contact with impurity also endowed them with a power that aroused suspicion in the community.

Yet not all women involved in these jobs were old or post-menopausal, and likewise not all suspected witches had a relation with a familiar spirit. Though the aged female body of the stereotype presents the most suitable features for demonic

[358] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 350
[359] Laura Gowing, *Common bodies*, p. 77
[360] Laura Gowing, *Common bodies*, pp. 75-78

influences and witchcraft activity, it did not become an exclusive model. The stereotyped witch reversed the process of nurturing, but even if old women could reflect better this feature, age was not an exclusive element. As the trial records show, many witches confessed to possessing a familiar since their youth or to have inherited it from a relative. The aforementioned cat Sathan was passed to Elizabeth Francis by her grandmother when she was twelve years old and subsequently to Agnes Waterhouse and her daughter Joan, who was not an old woman at the time. The familiar was often passed among different generations and it fed on the witches' breasts, establishing a maternal contact that did not necessarily apply to old or ageing women. The Lancashire witch Alison Device was persuaded by her grandmother to allow a "thing like a black dog, which desired her soul, to suck at her breast, a little below her paps"; while the Leicestershire witches, Margaret and Phillip Flower, whose mother had been a witch herself, had familiars in the shape of cats and rats, which sucked at their breasts or from the 'privy parts'.[361] The transmission of the demonic spirit seems to follow the idea that witchcraft ran in the blood, as a hereditary legacy, while one of the more plausible reasons for the widespread equation between old women and witches relates to the reputation that such people acquired during their lives. The preacher John Gaule, in his *Select cases of coscience* in 1646, listed the two first signs indicating a witch as "Strong and long suspicion" and "Suspected Ancestors".[362] So a person could be an alleged witch and have a relation with a familiar spirit long before conviction.

When we are confronted with male witches, though rare in England, the stereotype is challenged further. During the Hopkins and Stearne persecutions in Suffolk in 1645, John Bysack confessed to having suckled for twenty years six familiars in the shape of snails, which sucked blood "from his heart". Curiously, probably due to Hopkins' and Stearns's obstinacy and influence, the application of snails to the chest, which could have been associated with the healthy practice of bleeding, was read as a proof of witchcraft. In the same year in Northamptonshire a very old man confessed to having kept imps, but they sucked him no more because "he was too old to give blood".[363] Although the witch in this case was a male one, this last confession seems to reinforce the idea that the need for human blood by the spirits was not completely

[361] *The examinaton and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex* (1566); Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*, p. 140; Charles Ewen L'Estrange , *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 232-233
[362] John Gaule, *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcraft.* (London, 1646), p. 80
[363] Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 284-285, 306-307

resolved in terms of inverted maternity or sympathy between polluted bodies and evil supernatural forces. The blood, not transformed into the nourishing milk this time, was not only helping a creature to grow, on the contrary it was strengthening the bond between the human being and the familiar, bringing the spirit into the witch. The dryness of the witch's body also highlights once more the problem of the marginal zone inhabited by the accused, in this case not due to the gender stereotype, but to his old age. If on one side the familiar searched for blood, on the other the frailty of the human structure, deprived of its vital fluids, attracted death and hence the otherworld, where the spirits dwelt.

It is important to note that the same physical symbolism and its connection with the supernatural is traceable in the contrary experience of eighteenth-century English female visionaries. We have already seen the communion that existed between Christ's body and medieval female mystics, and also the analogies and the antithetical relationship between the bodies of saints and vampires. Regarding this last example the corpses of saints became the place of the divine, while that of the vampire spread moral corruption and wickedness. In both cases the power of the saintly soul was enacted by the presence and the qualities of the blood.

As Susan Jester has noted, after the Reformation the religious experience of female women became more dramatic and violent: no longer hidden by the walls of the convent, the mystics had to cope with the external world in which their travails were often not valued and their spiritual values continuously challenged. Yet they still had characteristics resembling those of medieval female saints, especially those concerning the connection between the soul and the corporeal state. An interesting case for the present discussion is that of the Shaker woman Ann Lee, from Manchester, who was afflicted by severe pains and spiritual tortures, opening her own body to the experience of the passion of Christ. In her own words, as they appear from the testimonies after her death, the sacred was experienced through a sacrifice of blood which brought to the consummation of the flesh, withering it to the bones.

> In my travail and tribulation, my sufferings were so great, that my flesh consumed upon my bones, and bloody sweats pressed through the pores of my skin, and I became as helpless as an infant… I travelled in such tribulation,

wringing my hands and crying to God, that the blood gushed out from under my nails, and with tears flowing down my cheeks, until the skin cleaved off.[364]

Almost dead, with all her blood drained out, the woman was closer to God: her soul, like her own bones, was cleansed from the pollution of the flesh. Flowing out the liquid was washing away her sinful, mortal status. In contrast, in the case of the witch, the normal physical decay and the consequent scarcity and weakness of the blood revealed the concealed bony structure and the presence of a soul which, no more hindered by the presence of a healthy body, could become the subject of a negative supernatural power.

According to Bernard, demons were considered able to do their work independently from the witch. Therefore the real responsible for *maleficia* was the devil in his various manifestations, not the human person, whose power was the result of a devilish delusion.[365] Yet, through the witch's blood, the action of the supernatural on life became more effective, while the participation of the human agent in destructive work was concrete. This problematic was central in the debate regarding the reality of witchcraft, which divided English intellectuals since the beginning of the trials. At the end of the seventeenth century the power of the demonic imps and their corporeal state were still controversial subjects, as it is shown by the works of Joseph Glanvill, a believer in witchcraft, and John Webster, who followed the sceptical ideas expressed by Reginald Scot a century earlier. The basis of the discussion was the possibility for the devil to act in the world, which comported a comparison between the power of the devil and that of God. This possibility was a heretical belief for the sceptic thinkers, but it was accepted by those defending the reality of witchcraft, who spoke of God's permission, and considered the misfortunes and accident caused by witches as a proof for man's faith and rectitude. On one point the two authors converged: they both identified the devil as the author of either spoiling actions or fantastic delusions, and the witch as the mere means, his victim.[366]

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[364] Susan Juster, "Mystical Pregnancy and Holy Bleeding: Visionary Experience in Early Modern Britain and America." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 57, No. 2, (April, 2000), pp. 258-259

[365] Richard Bernard, *A guide to gran-iury men*, pp. 156-167

[366] Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus. Or Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions.* (London: 1689), pp. 10-18; John Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London, 1677), pp. 81- 82. For the idea of God's permission behind witchcraft see William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft*, pp. 123-125

Nevertheless, beyond the religious controversy, the witch had features that distinguished him or her from the others, which depended on gender, old age, social status, physical diversity, but also more widely on the perception of human bodily nature. In fact, as we have seen, even if old women could be the better target for familiars, almost every one could become a witch and make a covenant with the devil, in the same way in which everyone gives blood if bitten or scratched. What we have to investigate now is what happened to the exchanged blood and how a supernatural creature was related to it. After having explored the figure of the witch we need to focus on the nature of the familiar spirit, examining its shape and appearance and how it gradually changed towards the end of the prosecutions.

5.3 The animal form and the representation of the soul

The common element between the human witch and the superhuman spirit was the soul carried by the blood: the element of the body that contained an immortal part and, rescued by Christ' sacrifice, possessed divine features. The familiar spirit was after it, but, to a certain extent, it also had sympathetic similarities with the fluid and its embodied substance.

In their first apparitions familiar spirits were described as those animals which people could find easily in their environment, from the domestic cat, dog or chickens, to toads and ferrets. The Puritan preacher William Perkins put the possession of a familiar as the second manifested proof of witchcraft, after the devil's pact. He also specified the visible, corporeal state of the spirit, affirming that it "took conference" with the witch "in forme or likenesse of a mouse, catte, or some other visible creature".[367] For this reason Ewen, and later Thomas, have tried to resolve the problem of the English familiar, discussing the pet-keeping habits of marginalized old women, although, as Serpell has noted in his articulated essay on the familiar, the explanation is logical, but unsatisfying, especially when we look for Continental comparisons. On the Continent there is no trace of something like the familiar spirit, but pet-keeping was not surely a peculiarity of England, while the animal form was a widely diffused element in the context of witchcraft.[368] Some historians accredited

[367] William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft,* p.186
[368] Charles Ewen L'Estrange*, Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 69; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 525; James A. Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets. The Concept of the Witch

the familiar spirit to be the English variant of the shape-shifting witch. In England we find that witches sometimes changed themselves into hares, a motif which still endures in popular folk-tales. In the last famous trial for witchcraft, that of Jane Wenham in 1712, the alleged victims attested to have been pursued by the witch's cats and that one possessed the Wenham's own face: there is here a significant confusion regarding the witch and the familiar as two separate beings.[369]

Emma Wilby recurred to shamanistic elements to discuss the bodily relation between the witch and the familiar, ascribing the belief to a more ancient tradition that survived despite the diffusion of Christianity. She claimed that the accuseds experiential perspective, that is the possible reality behind their supernatural encounters, has been discarded by historians, together with the place of the familiar spirit in the context of comparative religions. It is undeniable, as Wilby has affirmed, that human and animal blood played an important role in almost every tradition regarding meetings with the dead or the spirits. Also in accounts of shamans the consummation of their flesh and blood, and the dissection of their bodies by spirits, in order to enter the otherworld, is a recurrent theme.[370] Nevertheless we have to remember that in the context of early modern England not the whole body was controlled or dismembered by spirits, but just the witch's blood was required.

As we have already pointed out for the discussion on the werewolf, the comparison with shamanism is a fascinating one and probably morphologically correct, yet the lack of written evidences diminishes its historical value and forces us to focus more strictly on the period of the witch-persecutions, considering specifically early modern perception of bodies, blood and animals. What instead we can argue is how the animal form changed, from the first apparitions to the last trials, and to what extent this mutation was connected to the requirement of blood.

We have noted that in the first descriptions of familiar spirits they were depicted as animals, and usually very common ones, which could be found in the domestic environment. Also, as has already been stated the witch did not always nurture the spirit with blood, but with other kinds of foods, less painfully obtained. Though it is impossible to prove it conclusively, we can infer that, in the earlier narratives, the

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Familiar in Early Modern England,1530-1712." In A.N.H. Creager, W.C. Jordan (eds), *The Human/Animal Boundary* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), pp. 159-160

[369] George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* , pp. 88-104; Phyllis J. Guskyn, "The Context of Witchcraft: the Case of Jane Wemham." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*.Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn 1981) ,p. 52

[370] Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, pp. 143, 183-190

feeding relation with a spirit belonged to a popular belief in the supernatural, manifested in the physical forms of animals, which did not necessarily imply blood as the principal token. Later, as we are going to see, the shape of the familiar changed, probably in accordance with the increasing influence of demonological and learned notions.

The animal form was a known attribute of the Devil, especially in his earlier apparition, both in England and in Europe. Considering the impact of Protestantism in England Darren Oldridge has discussed how the popular physical representation of the devil at the end of the sixteenth century, gradually mixed with the learned idea of immaterial evil, which slowly prevailed towards the end of the seventeenth century.[371] Examining the narratives on familiar spirits, we will find a similar process in their descriptions across the period of the trials: from physical to more ethereal beings. The materiality of the spirit is not a surprise in the early modern world, where uneducated people considered also the soul in physical terms. In this regard Keith Thomas has collected the story of an old man, who despite his regular attendance of religious sermons, when asked about God and Christ spoke of them as normal people, while about his own soul he said "that it was a great bone in his body".[372]

The choice of the animal form responded primarily to the conception of the supernatural as the other: animals were the first evidence of diversity brought into life, sharing the same common needs of man, but being different and separated from him. Animals have also been associated with magic and *maleficium* since medieval times and not exclusively in England. The cat, one of the preferred forms for the familiar spirit, was for example widely linked to magic despite its relation with a supposed witch. It was believed that cat could suck the breath of sleeping children. In 1621 one of Edward Fairfax' daughters said that a cat had tried to suck her breath and had left in her mouth a smelling taste, attempting to poison her. As discussed in the previous chapter, respiration and the circulation of blood were strongly interconnected: also the blood was related to the element of air, which could enter the

[371] Darren Oldridge, "Protestant Conception of the Devil in Early Stuart England." *The Historical Association* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 232-246

[372] *The Workes of ... Mr William Pemble* (3rd editionm 1635), 559. In Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Declice of Magic*, p. 194

porous body and being polluted by it without significant corporeal obstacles. Breath-sucking seemed to be just a variant of blood-sucking.[373]

Toads had a reputation for venomous, diabolic creatures. As we have seen in the first chapter in the Basque countries the devil gave toads to witches during the sabbath; while in the trials of late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century in Normandy the venom of toads was associated with the crime of the Host desecration, and therefore implicitly with the spoiling of Christ's body and blood. Despite the Reformation, the magical power of the Host endured also in some English cases, where keeping the communion bread after the sacrament, to give it to a toad later, was considered a means to become a witch. In a record from 1647 the alleged witch William Shelley said that after having drunk the wine a person should "go out with the bread in his hand and pisse against the church wall, at which time he shall finde something like a toade or frogge gapeing to receive the said bread".[374] The employment of urine can suggest the offensive act towards the religious significance of the host, and an inversion of the meaning of Christ's blood sacrifice. Opposite to the precious vital substance of the saviour there is the discharge of the less noble bodily fluid, that, instead of cleansing human soul, is able to attract the lower sort of living creatures, toads, which were believed to be generated in polluted waters.

Relating this last belief to the one in the blood-sucking familiar, we can infer that sharing bodily fluids with animals could signify descending to the lower state of humanity. Though it is hard to say what exactly it could mean for the accused, who did not have the knowledge of the authors of the treatises and pamphlets in which their stories were collected, we cannot avoid considering the religious significance of this action in the Protestant context. The Reformation enforced an anthropocentric view of the world, stressing the responsibilities of man in front of God. Far from the rituals of Catholic Europe, the Protestant individual was alone in front of his destiny, helped only by his faith. In his sermons the preacher Godfrey Goodman discussed the differences between man and the "dumbe beasts", which did not possess a reasonable soul. The beasts were made for man, both to punish and to serve him: to have care of

[373] George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, pp. 178-179; Owen Davies, "The Nightmare Experience", pp. 195-196

[374] James A. Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets", pp. 171-173; William Monter, "Toads and Eucharists: The Male Witches of Normandy, 1564-1660." *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 20, No.4 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 563-595; James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 151-152

them, but also to remember his own place in the world was one of man's duties.[375] Therefore the nurturing witch was an inversion not just of motherhood but of the divine order of the world.

Yet if we go further and consider the specific link between the familiar and the blood, we find that they were already terminologically related. The general word that indicated the demon, that is "spirit", was the same which indicated the qualities of the soul carried by blood through the organism. Material and immaterial being were not completely detached, but could flow one into the other to the fluid perception of existence. Spirits were both exterior and interior substances: the distinction was blurred inside the permeable body that we have examined in the medical chapter. Also in the Aristotelian tripartition of the soul, animal spirits were those connected to the brain, from which they spread sense and motion through the neural system.[376]

In their cooperation with the witch the familiar spirits reflected the similar spirits contained in the blood. The idea that the soul was somehow physical and expressed by blood was present in both medical theories and popular beliefs that referred to the contact with supernatural beings. One strange confession, already highlighted by Emma Wilby, seems to confirm the double location of the demonic spirit, both inside and outside the witch. In 1618 the Leicestershire wise woman Joan Willimot confessed that the devil (her master), asked her

> to open her mouth and he would blow into her a fairy which should do her good. And that presently after his blowing, there came out of her mouth a spirit which stood upon the ground in the shape and form of a woman, which spirit did ask of her soul, which she then promised unto it.[377]

The familiar spirit enclosed the projections of the feelings of the accused, but also of the person's own soul: the object that the devil tried to win. This is confirmed by another curious case, that of Anne Ashby, trialled in Kent during 1652, in which the

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[375] Godfrey Goodman, *The fall of man, or the corruption of nature, proued by the light of our naturall reason Which being the first ground and occasion of our Christian faith and religion, may likewise serue for the first step and degree of the naturall mans conuersion*. (London, 1616); Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals. Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture*.(London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 35-37; James A. Serpell, "Guardian Spirits or Demonic Pets", p. 181

[376] For a discussion on the perception of the soul through ages see: Laura Bossi, *Storia Naturale dell'Anima*, pp. 182-192

[377] Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*, p. 376; Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*, pp. 100-101

demonological feature of carnal intercourse mixed with the strange origin of the familiar spirit. The woman confessed to have had a sexual meeting with the Devil, after which she had fallen in a state of possession. She added that the spirit Rug, a mouse, came out of her mouth.[378] It is not clear if, according to the accused, there was some connection between the intercourse and the apparition of the spirit, yet the curious story of it being begotten inside the witch's body and coming out as her own breath from the mouth suggests us a certain correspondence between the witch's physicality and the demon's nature.

The allegiance between the demonic pet and the bodily spirits seems to be more evident with the gradual change of the location of the mark on the witch's body. We have already considered the involvement of sexual aspects; nevertheless during the seventeenth century among the unusual places for the mark were counted also the breasts and the head. Though the extra-teat on the chest primarily indicates the maternal attitude of the witch towards the familiars, it also suggests the heart, the seat of human passions. Similarly the head is the place where imagination was contained and both the head and the heart were the bodily parts in which the activity of the soul was stronger. The Leicestershire witch Ellen Green (1618) was sucked under her right ear and on the neck; John Wynnick of Northamptonshire (1645) confessed that the Devil in the shape of a bear, but big as a Rabbit "skipped on his shoulder, and fetched bloud with his claw, on the side of his head"; the Suffolk witches at Bury St.Edmunds (1645) confessed to have teats in their privy parts, on their tongue and "in the crowne" of their head; Mary Bush of Bacton (1645), after an intercourse with the Devil in the shape of a young black man, had her blood drawn out of her mouth".[379]
Not just the mark's bodily place changed, but also the representation of the familiar: from the animal being, though able to change its form, in the seventeenth century the spirits started to present more exotic or gruesome aspects, and to be called more generically as "imps". They were losing their corporality, and were assimilated both to the theological notion of an immaterial devil and to the light, vaporous substances enclosed in the blood.

[378]Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and demonianism*, pp. 321-322
[379] Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*, p. 378; John Stearne, *A confirmation and discovery of witchcraft containing these severall particulars : that there are witches ... together with the confessions of many of those executed since May 1645* (London: 1648), p. 21; *A True Relation of the Araingnment of Eightene Witches* (London, 1645); Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 284

Confirming the increasing monstrosity or unnatural form of the familiar, the Northamptonshire witch Agnes Browne (1612), though not able to give a full description of the spirit, asserted that it had longer arms than the victim's ones. The familiar spirit Vinegar Tom, during the persecutions in Essex in 1645 was described as a greyhound dog "with an head like an Oxe", while Farmara was a legless spaniel. Other spirits, though marked by a name, were not described at all, as if they did not possess a definite form.[380] The less recognizable forms of the familiar and the process of its spiritualization were far from popular notions, but close to the theological discussion on the possibility for the Devil to enter a physical shape and be fed through human blood. Thus Protestant religious ideas of the mark and the devil grew on the original cultural belief in a demonic or fairy pet.

The witch-finder Matthew Hopkins explained that the Devil was not after the blood, but he needed to seal a pact, employing the bodily fluid to convince witches of the reality of their powers. Being the 'Prince of the Air' the Devil could change shape at his own will, acquiring a body of thickened air, but he could not create anything, because life and creation belonged to God. Regarding the teats and the imps, Hopkins further said that the devil entered the creatures' bodies, which were presumably real animals, working inside them to make a compact with the witch. In the same period John Gaule reconsidered these ideas, affirming that if the imp was a real cat or dog or any other animal possessed by the Devil, it could be killed, while it was impossible if it was a spirit made of condensed air and deprived of natural life.[381] In the confession of the Somerset witch Elizabeth Style, at Wincanton in 1664, there were mentioned two different uses of blood by the devil. He appeared under the form of a handsome man and asked Elizabeth to sign a "Paper" with her blood, to give him her soul in exchange for the promise of a wealthy and pleasant life for twelve years. Then he went further, asking the witch if he could suck her blood.

> This after four solicitations, the Examinant promised him to do. Upon which he prickt the fourth Finger of her right hand, between the middle and upper joynt (where the sign at the Examination remained) and with a drop or two of her Blood, she signed the Paper with an *[O]*. Upon this the Devil gave her Sixpence, and vanished with the Paper. That since he hath appeared to her in

[380] Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England*, p. 347; Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches*, pp. 2-3
[381] Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches*, p. 5; John Gaule, *Select Cases*, pp. 78-79

> the shape of a *Man,* and did so on *Wednesday* seven-night past, but more usually he appears in the likeness of a *Dog,* and *Cat,* and a *Fly* like a Millar, in which last he usually sucks in the Poll about four of the Clock in the Morning, and did so *Jan.* 27. and that it usually is pain to her to be so suckt.[382]

While the blood employed for the pact had a mere symbolic function and sanctioned Elizabeth's obedience to the diabolical laws, the following "nurturing" process suggests that the devil was enforcing the physical link with the human being, regenerating his malevolent power on the witch.

A full explanation of how the demonic imp was formed and consequently worked on blood was reported by Joseph Glanvill, who, mixing the theological speculation of his times to neoplatonic ideas, asserted that the spirits or "genii" were

> recreated by the reeks and vapours of humane blood, and the spirits that proceed from them: which supposal (if we grant them bodies) is not unlikely every thing being refresh'd and nourish'd by its like. And that they are not perfectly abstract from all body and matter.

Having established the similarity between blood and the familiar spirit, the author went on discussing blood-sucking and writing that:

> the familiar doth not only suck the witch, but in the action infuseth some poysonous ferment into her, which gives her imaginations and Spirits a magical tincture, whereby they become mischievously influential; and the word venefica intimates some such matter. Now that the imagination hath a mighty power in operation, is seen in the just now mention'd Signatures and Diseases that it causeth; and that the fancy *is* modified by the qualities of the blood and spirits, is too evident to need proof. Which things supposed, 'tis plain to conceive that the evil spirit having breath'd some vile vapour into the body of the Witch, it may taint her blood and spirits with a noxious quality, by which her infected imagination, heightned by melancholy and this worse cause, may do much hurt upon bodies that are impressible by such influences.[383]

[382] Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, pp. 136-137
[383] Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus,* pp. 17-18

Such an explanation seems confirmed by the medical theories regarding the influence of emotions on blood and bodies that we have explored. Even John Webster, in his attack on Glanvill regarding the mark, denied the corporeal form of the Devil or of imps, but not the power of imagination and the sensitivity of some people to feelings, which could be compared to the germs of sickness. The idea of a venomous substance that cooperated with the melancholic humour and affected the brain, was valuable both for the believers in the reality of witches and for the sceptics, who considered witchcraft as a delusion. The conception of the body and the blood as the main instruments involved in witchcraft cases was the fundamental point on which the two sides agreed.

5.4 Scratching

In witchcraft accusations the body was at the centre of violence and horror: it was both powerful and defenceless. The English witch's body in particular displayed both the features of the aggressor and the victim. The witch was a dangerous enemy for the community, but was also tormented by both the Devil and the alleged bewitched person. Many witches were brought in front of their alleged victims and were scratched by them in order to be healed. According to Ewen the very first case of scratching is to be found in 1279, far from the period of the hunts, when John de Warham was fined at Norfolk "for blood draught on fair Alice."[384]

During the early modern period George Gifford, in his *Dialogue concerning witches and witchcraftes*, said how a witch could be "clawed unill she gave blood"; William Perkins dedicated a long paragraph to the discussion of scratching, affirming that though people could be cured, the practice was against God's will. Attesting the contrary was impossible for the Protestant mind, which had deprived nature and bodies of any magical virtue. The responsible for the healing obtained through scratching, was again the Devil, whose power grew among those who believed in such remedy.[385]

Nevertheless alleged bewitched people often forced the witch to a direct, violent confrontation. At Windsor the cunning man Father Rosimond, also known as

[384] Charles Ewen L'Estrange , *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 28
[385] George Gifford, *A Dialogue concerning witches and witchcraftes.* (London, 1593), p. 11; William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft,* pp. 54-55, 207

Osborne, advised a man to look for Elizabeth Stile, the supposed witch, and "to scratch her by the face" to stop the pain that afflicted him.[386] Around the same time Mother Staunton at Chelmsford was scratched on the face with a needle. In 1604 a very old witch, Agnes Fenn, ninety-four-years-old, was variously tormented: pricked, struck and stabbed with a knife on her face. Mary Bush in 1645 lost all her power when scratched by her victim; the Somerset witch Jane Brooks in 1657 was scratched by a boy, who after affirmed to be healed from his fits, but the cure's effects lasted for about a week. Goodwife Bailey in 1661 was forced out of her house by Andrew Camp who thought she had bewitched his children, and clawed by his wife who said she would have tore her eyes out of the head and her tongue out of her mouth.[387]

Not all the scratching produced the desired results, or ended with the flowing of blood. At Stapenhill, in 1597, Alice Gooderidge was scratched by a boy on the back of the hands and on the face, but the victim did not recover. A few years before, at Warboys in 1593, Alice Samuel and her daughter Agnes had been accused of the bewitchment of Mr Throckmonton's children, who were possessed by spirits. When one of the spirits suggested to the little girl to scratch Agnes, she did it, but "no blood came, only water". While at Norfolk in 1617 Edmund Newton attempted to draw blood from Mary Smith, but the nails "turned like feathers".

The fierceness of the assault could end tragically. So in 1600, at Hockham in Norfolk Margaret Francis died after being scratched by Jan Harvey.[388] The possible explanation for the healing method relied in the process of bewitchment. Practicing *maleficium*, the witch established a contact with the victims' bodies, through which she stole the vital properties contained in their blood. As Diane Purkiss has said: "Like the maternal body, the witch's body is locked into a controlling, dominating relation with the bodies of others: it is the seat of her power, and it can be located wherever her power is".[389]

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[386] *A Rehearsal both straung and true*

[387] *A detection of damnable driftes, practized by three vvitches arraigned at Chelmifforde in Essex, at the laste assises there holden, whiche were executed in Aprill*. (1579); Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchraft in The Star Chamber* (London: 1938), pp.18-19; Charles Ewen L'Estrange , *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 284; Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, p. 120; W.J. Hardy (ed.), *Hertford County Records*, Vol.1, (1905), p. 137, quoted in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 633

[388] I.D., *The Most wonderfull and true storie, of a certaine witch named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill, who was arraigned and convicted at Darbie at the Assises there* (London, 1597), p. 9; Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 170-171, 190-191, 231, 193

[389] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, p. 129

The conception of the body as a porous matter, where the skin did not constitute a hard barrier, implied an extreme vulnerability, thanks to which the human beings could be assaulted by different agents and, as the physician Edward Jorden pointed out "even to the overthrow of our owne bodies".[390] Accusations and confessions dealing with the vampire-witch or direct assaults were extremely rare in England; the witch could affect the victim's body without even touching it or avoiding any contact.

As it has been underlined by Frances Dolan, bewitchment generated a sort of identification between the aggressor and the aggressed, which were both the instruments for the devil's power.[391] Scratching seems to be the counterpart of the effects produced on the victims: bewitched people could vomit pins, needles, various sharp objects, which pierced their bodies, even if blood did not gushed out, or it did so internally. The physician John Cotta wrote in 1616 that during their fits people had been seen vomiting:

> crooked iron, coales, brimstone, nailes, needles, pinnes, lumps of lead, waxe, hayre, strawe, and the like, in such quantity, figure, fashion and proportion, as could neuer possibly passe downe, or arise vp thorow the naturall narrownesse of the throat, or be contained in the vnproportionable small capacity, naturall susceptibility and position of the stomake.

The physician and apothecary William Drage in his *Daimonomageia*, discussed the diseases caused by witchcraft, mentioning the objects that could be vomited, "voided by stool":

> Knives, Scissars, Bryars, whole Eggs, Dogs Tails, crooked Nails, Pins, Needles, sometimes threaded, and sometimes with Hair, Bundles of Hair, pieces of Wax, pieces of Silk, live Eels, large pieces of Flesh, Bones and Stones, and pieces of Wood, Hooks, and pieces of Salpeter.

During the trials at Lancaster in 1612 Mother Demdike (Elizabeth Southerns) confessed that to kill a person the witch has to make

[390] Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*, G2v.
[391] Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, pp. 183-184

> a Picture of Clay, like vnto the shape of the person whom they meane to kill, & dry it thorowly: and when they would haue them to be ill in any one place more then an other; then take a Thorne or Pinne, and pricke it in that part of the Picture you would so haue to be ill: and when they would haue any part of the Body to consume away, then take that part of the Picture, and burne it. And when they would haue the whole body to consume away, then take the remnant of the sayd Picture, and burne it: and so therevpon by that meanes, the body shall die.

An example in which blood itself was conspicuously vomited is retold by Richard Baxter, in his treatise on spirits (1691). Mary Hill, an eighteen years old girl living at Beckyngton in Somerset, was taken by terrible fits during which she vomited crooked pins, nails, pieces of brass and finally a handful of blood. While, finally, the case of the old woman, Amy Duny, at Bury St.Edmunds in Suffolk in 1664, shows an example of the bodily power transferred from the witch to the animal imp and finally to the victim. Suspecting her of the bewitchment of her son, Dorothy Durent, following the advice of a wise man, held the toad she has found in her child's blanket on the fire with a pair of tongs. The day after Dorothy went to visit Amy to find her scorched by fire on the legs, the thighs and the face. Tormenting the toad, the witch herself had been weakened as if the two were a bodily unit.[392] The victim' spasms and convulsions suggest that, beyond the sufferance due to the sharping pains of bewitchment, there was also an attempt to get rid of an intruder inside the body.

Here are at work several ideas that we have explored in the previous chapters. Primarily, the piercing of a body recalls the extraction of fluids and henceforth the beliefs regarding the elf-shot together with the dangerous habits of fairies towards human beings and cattle. But we find also the manifestation of medical theories on

[392] John Cotta, *The triall of vvitch-craft shewing the true and right methode of the discouery: with a confutation of erroneous wayes* (London: 1616), p.77; William Drage, *Daemonomageia, a small treatise of sicknesses and diseases from witchcraft, and supernatural causes : never before, at least in this comprised order, and general manner, was the like published : being useful to others besides physicians, in that it confutes atheistical, sadducistical, and sceptical principles and imaginations.* (London, 1665), p. 5; Thomas Potts, *The Discovery of Witches*. See also: Sona Rosa Burstein, "Demonology and Medicine in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century." *Folklore*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar.1956), pp. 16-33; Richard Baxter, *The certainty of the worlds of spirits and, consequently, of the immortality of souls of the malice and misery of the devils and the damned : and of the blessedness of the justified, fully evinced by the unquestionable histories of apparitions, operations, witchcrafts, voices &*c (London, 1691), pp. 75-79; William Renwick Riddell, "Sir Matthew Hale and Witchcraft." *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology,* Vol.17, No.1 (May, 1926), pp. 7-8. See also: *The full tryals, examination, and condemnation of four notorious witches at the assizes held at Worcester*, pp. 5-6

the humoral balance inside the body, on epilepsy and on sicknesses of the brain. The affected organism had to do with an obstruction, which was spoiling the vital fluid, hindering its natural movement, but that was also pushed towards the bodily openings. The expelled object indicated not only the witch's attempt to deprive the person of blood and spirits, but also the continual activity of the body to preserve its internal welfare. Blood-loss was translated in both a mortal danger and a healing practice. Among the witchcraft rituals, Drage listed the strange use to make a hole with a knife in a bowl, which afterward was wonderfully filled with blood. At the same time the victim, in this case a horse, would have pissed blood to death.[393]

Nevertheless we have seen that bleeding was the most effective cure for every disease. Drawing blood from the witch, through sympathetic magic, can be regarded as an ambiguous variant of bleeding, in which the aggressor was weakened, while the bewitched person was delivered from the infection that clogged his or her body.

If we focus briefly on medical theories of bleeding, interpretations of scratching appears controversial. Theologians' negative opinions, as Perkins' one, and the popular ideas seem all to point out that the power subtracted through the aggression was the one that the witch has stolen from the victims and was contained in the blood, which so became a sort of magical object. Yet, this blood was not consequently employed. It simply ran out and people allegedly recovered. This could be due to the influence of Protestant religion on popular theories, but it could also have another explanation. In fact if through scratching the witch was deprived of power it is to understand who this power really belonged to. The devil or the witch? Through the discussion of medical theories on the spirits and the humoral balance, it has been asserted that the devil could take advantage of corrupted humours to delude or gain control on the witch's mind and imagination. The examination of the familiar spirit also suggests that demons were working from inside the witch, through the blood.

Henceforth it could be equally true that a corrupted body attracted supernatural evil beings, and that the latter spoiled the individual's morality working through the spirits and the blood. Following this perspective, scratching can be interpreted as a bleeding practice that drew out polluted humours, but the pollution was spiritual instead of physical. Thus it weakened the devil's influence, more than the witch's one, over human beings.

[393] William Drage, *Daemonomageia*, p. 13

Despite the difficulty of proving it, such an idea is useful for challenging the notion of popular belief being free of learned influences. It is partly confirmed by the fact that while in the sixteenth century witches had been scratched everywhere on their bodies, during the seventeenth century witches were generally scratched on the face and on the forehead. John Hutton, of Chatton in Nortumberland, was, in 1650, scratched by the child Margaret Muschamp a dozen times on the forehead, but he gave no blood, while, obtaining a few drops from his arm, the girl was relieved from her fits. Jane Wenham, the last convicted witch (1712), was scratched furiously on the forehead by the sixteen- year-old Anne Thorn.[394]

The head, as we have said, was the seat of the rational soul, the ultimate object pursued by the devil and the place where imagination was located. If the devil exercised some kind of control on the witch, either illusory or effective, it should be concentred in his or her head. This was also the physical place of the seal of the baptism, broken through the demonic pact. In a rare English sabbath, described by Glanvill and involving the witches of Wincanton in 1664, the devil used to baptize wax pictures of people to bewitch, with an "oyl" on the forehead, before the witches stuck pins and needles into them.[395]

According to the same popularized medical ideas that we have seen, the witch, more than the devil, could be the ultimate agent of power, confirming that bodies themselves were able to act on each other. The permeable physical structure, where passions and diseases had the same epidemic force on blood, was the basis for the possibility of a supernatural activity. Moreover, after the conclusion of the witch-trials' period, people continued to scratch alleged witches to protect or heal themselves, in the same way in which they continued to believe in witchcraft. Up to the whole nineteenth century alleged witches were violently scratched or assaulted.[396] Scratching remained primarily the most economic and fastest way to get rid of a witch, because people could do it without the assistance of cunning folk or of a court. What early modern Protestant theologians denied was that either blood, which embodied both the witch's and the devil's strength, or such a violent form of bleeding could produce magical effects, suggesting that human beings could resolve their problems without prayers to obtain God's intervention.

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[394] Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, pp. 318-319, 385
[395] Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, pp. 137-139
[396] Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, *1736-1951.* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 193-194, 199-200

A curious example of a scratched witch, whose blood was then used in a kind of magic ritual, was that of a sixty old years widow Comon in Essex during 1699. The woman was accused to have caused lameness in Mr Cox. When she was asked to let him draw her blood to be healed, she refused, but the man scratched her arms with his nails. Then he dipped a handkerchief in the witch's blood and consequently burned it.[397] Burning the blood should probably result in the destruction of the witch's energy and is a cure that recalls counter-magic involving witch-bottles that we are going to analyze in the next section. Yet it is also to underline that, despite its alleged healing consequences, scratching was especially a direct method to annihilate the dangerous other, causing visible, corporeal harm. Cures and blood theories, both medical and theological, could be associated to scratching, but surely in the mind of the alleged victims were secondary to the capacity to inflict pain to the enemy, to aggress the aggressor.

Among counter-magic practices there were other indirect cures which, working on either the victim or the alleged bewitched objects, got to the witch to defeat him or her, confirming the idea of a physical connection that passed through the bodily fluids.

5.5 Witch-bottles and counter-magic

At St.Osyth, during the trials of 1582, Bennet Lane described the bewitchment of her spindle by Agnes Herd. To be able to use it again as before, without continuously breaking the thread, she "put it into the fire and made it red hot, and then cooled it again". Through her magical skills the witch was somehow acting inside the spindle: warming it the woman destroyed the witch's power. Destroy the alleged enchanted object, or working on the victim's body in order to fight the witch's operation where the means of counter-magic, which people adopted, often following the advice of cunning folk, despite the prohibition of the Protestant Church.

According to William Drage to nullify *maleficium*, people needed to "punish the thing bewitched" in several ways:

> putting red hot Iron in the Churn. when Butter would not come, hath burned her in the Guts; burning the Excrements of one bewitched, hath made her *Anus*

[397] Charles Ewen L'Estrange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 379

> sore; tying the Fat or Cauldren of Drink hard with Cords, that hath boiled over when scarce any Fire was under, hath made the Witch be sore girt and pained; stopping up Bottles of that Drink that hath been bewitched, hath made the Witch able neither to urine or deject, until they were opened; if an Horse or Hen, &c. be bewitched to death, if they are burnt alive, and in the fit, the Witch comes, and complains.[398]

We need to see how also these practices acted on the bodily fluids, inverting the wasting power and directing it towards the aggressor, thanks to the belief that part of the witch was inside the bewitched. One of the most common magical healing consisted in boiling the urine of the patient. As suggested by Reginald Scot "the urine of the sick body made early in the morning" had to "be softly heated nine daies together continually, untill all be consumed into a vapour".[399]

Urine was commonly used in counter-magic. During the seventeenth century cunning folk advised the alleged bewitched patient to employ it in the fabrication of witch-bottles, bottles or bellarmines filled with the victim's urine, bodily parts as hair and nail pairings, pins, needles, thorns and other sharp objects made out of wood or iron. The bottles were corked and generally heated on the fire, but they could also be buried. Glanvill reported the story of a man, whose wife had been sick for a long period, and who was told by an old wise man to make a witch-bottle with his wife's urine and set it on fire. When the method revealed to be ineffective, the wise man suggested burying the bottle and the woman recovered, but the wizard who had bewitched her died.[400] The functioning of the magical bottle was so explained by Joseph Blagrave: "there is a part of the vital spirit of the Witch in it, for such is the subtlety of the Devil, that he will not suffer the Witch to infuse any poisonous matter into the body of man or beast, without some of the Witches blood mingled with it".[401]

According to Brian Hoggard, the witch's bodily part, sympathetically connected to the bottle, was the bladder: the insertion of pins caused pain and sufferings into the aggressor's body, leading him or her to remove the spells. Ralph Merrifield has

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[398] *A true and just Recorde*; William Drake, *Daemonomageia*, p. 21

[399] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 196; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 186

[400] Owen Davies, *Cunning Folk*, pp. 105-107; Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, pp. 206-207; Brian Hoggard, "The Archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic." In Owen Davies, Willem De Blècourt (eds.), *Beyond the Witch Trials*,p. 171. For an early study on witch-bottles see Ralph Merrifield, "Witch-bottles and Magical Jugs." *Folklore*. Vol. 66, No. 1 (Mar., 1955), pp. 195-207

[401] Joseph Blagrave, *Blagrave's Astrological Practice of Physick* (London, 1671), pp. 154-155

discussed the archaeological discovery of some witch-bottles in London, probably coming from the seventeenth century, inside which, in addition to hair and bent pins, there were the remains of pieces of cloth, vaguely representing human hearts. Thus the bottle was anthropomorphized, representing the whole witch's body.[402] What remains to analyze is the choice of urine and how it was linked to blood.

Urine was considered the excrement of blood, deriving primarily from the chyle which remained unconcocted in the liver, but also from the watery surplus parts of nourishment from the whole body. Therefore urine manifested the general state of the humours, contained in the liver and in the system of the veins, revealing impurities and diseases which could influence different bodily organs.[403] If urine could be a substitute of blood, surely easier and less painful to obtain, it is arguable that the use of heating it, in order to injury the witch and destroy his or her spells, responded to the relationship between the vital heat and the radical humidity which ruled over the physical fluids. The fire dried up and dispersed the witch's humours, sealed in the victim's urine, weakening the aggressor and quickening the process of ageing. The witch's blood was then consumed, while the magical power was nullified.

5.6 The power to harm and Protestant influences

Considering the whole discussion on blood in the English Protestant context of the witch-trials, from the relation between the witch and the familiar, to the practices of counter-magic, the first conclusion we can draw is that the vital fluid was mainly a token of danger and destruction. No significant positive elements emerged. Both the witch and the victim could be harmed through the blood, which kept its healthy properties only if sealed inside the living being. The fluid was therefore symbolizing a bodily strength always directed towards the community or the suspected individual. Moreover blood, due to its vital features, was the means through which a spiritual being could interfere with the human society, but it was deprived of its proper effectiveness.

The role of blood is fundamental to understand how religious theories on diabolism merged with cultural and popular themes, existent in English magical and witchcraft ideas prior to the age of persecutions. We have said that in the blood-relation between

[402]Ralph Merrifield, "Witch-bottles", pp. 200-201
[403] John Fletcher, *The Differences, Causes, and Judgements of Urine.* (London, 1641), pp. 103-105. Joseph Blagrave, *Astrological Practice of Physick*, pp. 167-168

the familiar spirit and the witch were interwoven an original English belief and the Protestant continental notion of the mark. The latter never completely overwhelmed the former, yet, during the seventeenth century, became more evident until its gradual disappearing with the end of the trials. Despite the centrality of blood, its employment more than showing the wonderful qualities of the liquid, underlined themes of violence and disruption in which both aggressor and aggressed were injured and defeated. In the context of the Protestant theological debate in fact, the witch was unable to act directly on the victims' bodies, but could work only thanks to the intervention of a demonic helper. Furthermore blood was always perceived as a hidden substance that was extracted, forced out, consumed. Also in the case of the polluted blood of menstruation, important in the stereotype of the old witch, the substance remained inside its physical boundaries, coming out just as vapours or exhalations from the eyes. This last remark is important for a comparison with the magical uses of menstrual blood in Catholic countries, which I will discuss in the last chapter. To summarize it seems that the power of the blood manifested in its transgression of boundaries or in the interruption of his healthy activity inside the body, more than in its inner characteristics. The importance of the bodily potency endured in witchcraft beliefs beyond the diabolical theme, but in the Protestant background it also underwent the same desacralisation process which entailed nature and its forces.

Curiously, in this regard, while during the eighteenth century the motif of the mark, or extra-nipple, was rare, practices of counter-magic continued, underlining the independence of witchcraft and *maleficium* ideas from the demonological speculation. The practice of blooding the witch is, in this sense, probably the only, resisting indicator of a popular belief in a power ascribed to the person's own physicality, but, although it allegedly restored the lost health, the functioning of blood remained implicit. What we have is a reversed aggression, another ferocious blood-shed. No one was, for example, explicitly drinking, smearing, and using the witch's blood to recover. We can infer that the Protestant thought has dismantled the original meaning of scratching, leaving the belief in the counter-action, (which was anyway contrasted by theologians) but concealing or dispersing the value of the blood so obtained. Similar conclusions derive from the practices of counter-magic which concerned the patient's urine. We have explained how magical and medical notions worked inside the fluid to fight the witch. Yet we can still wonder, why urine and not

blood, the first carrier of humours and vital heat. The more probable reason relies in the less influential religious perception of urine, respect to that of blood. Urine was not the token of physical and spiritual life; it did not recall any Christian value or important belief, it could not be seen as a sacred object that people managed for their own aims. Furthermore the properties of urine were used only to provoke a loss, damaging in another individual (the witch).

In early modern England religious and medical theories rethought in the complex of witchcraft-beliefs, translated feelings of fear, despair, rage and a sense of detachment from the divine presence, which nevertheless was sealed into human blood. In fact although the fluid bore the sign of salvation, washing the soul through Christ' sacrifice, in empiric terms it could not give any immediate help or remedy. It was instead only marking paths of mutual aggression and exclusion from the moral and social margins of the community.

6. Witches, love magic and healing blood: The case of Italy

6.1 The magical universe, Inquisition and the body

Examining ideas about blood and the body in cases of witchcraft from early modern Italy and the Mediterranean, we have to bear in mind the distinction between persecution and the belief, and how the Catholic faith influenced both. In the Protestant context the heretical content of witchcraft was strongly demonized, and a negative view of magical activities in general prevailed. By contrast in the Catholic world, where the demonological themes primarily appeared during late medieval times, the religious belief itself became part of the witchcraft universe, supplying often the counter-measures and the matter for the magical spells. As has been already widely discussed, the Holy Office of the Roman Inquisition was relatively mild in terms of the prosecution of witchcraft, though the same cannot be said regarding cases of heresy. Both the Roman and the Spanish Inquisition often considered witches as poor, ignorant, old women deluded by the devil, more than powerful and dangerous criminals. Torture was rarely employed, while since the second half of the sixteenth century it became forbidden to proceed against people denounced by suspected witches. Yet, as Romeo has underlined, the Holy Office in Italy did not denied the reality of the sabbath or of the satanic pact even during the seventeenth century: the caution concerned the judicial procedures, more than the possibility of *maleficium* or the presence of a congregation of witches. The efforts of the inquisitors were directed towards the control of the tensions inside communities and of the risk of collective violence, which could derive from an arbitrary identification of an ideal scapegoat.[404]

On the other hand the belief in witches endured strongly among the population and, as we will see, magical theories and practices survived almost unchanged until modern times. Both the long survival of the belief and the attitude of the Inquisition find an explanation in the Catholic tradition, which considered the actual world as still suffused by holy and supernatural powers. If the premise of the witch-persecutions in the Protestant countries was the desacralised universe, with the

[404] Giovanni Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma*. (Firenze: Sansoni, 1990), pp. 65, 70, 80-84. Giovanni Romeo, *L'Inquisizione nell'Italia moderna.* (Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. 47-51, 83-84

consequent separation from the divine, the increasing pressure of the danger of damnation and the idea of self-responsibility, here we have the opposite situation. Though the basis of the belief remained almost the same, they were inscribed in a system which contained the possibility of the manifested supernatural and which produced the tools to cope with it. As David Gentilcore has shown, the Post-Tridentine Catholic church sponsored its own cures against sickness and misfortune, which were given by priests and friars. "This was compounded by the widespread conception of the ecclesiastic as an intermediary between heaven and earth, sacred and profane, who was therefore a potential healer par excellence".[405]

So on one side we have the theologians who affirmed strongly that, the neoplatonic theories on natural magic, witchcraft and magic were implicitly diabolical. On the other we have a religious tradition which continuously supplied remedies of supernatural origins to the populace.[406] Henceforth in the Catholic context the problem with which religious reformers and inquisitors were confronted was not simply the denial of any magical power, but also with the clear distinction between the official and authentic power of the sacred and that employed by witches. They had to convince people that only God and nature had the potency to influence the course of life, while the devil's work was only manipulation and illusion.[407]

As in the rest of Europe the accusations spread inside small communities, from envy, competition, suspect, difficult relationships; they also reflected a moralistic view of disease according to which every sickness had its reason in a wrong or sinful behaviour. Nevertheless, as noted by Sofia Messana comparing the context of Sicily to that of Essex, while in Protestant countries, during periods of social and economical crisis, such tensions nurtured the persecution of witches, in Catholic ones magic became a reliable source to resolve problems.[408] Then a similar cultural motif, at the basis of witchcraft accusation, was re-shaped by diverging religious contexts, sorting different results. In the Italian background not just evil witches, but exorcists, priests, friars, the souls of the saints and of the departed relatives, were involved in

[405] David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch. The system of the sacred in early modern Terra d'Otranto*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 7

[406] Mary O'Neil, "Magical Healing, Love Magic and the Inquisition in Late Sixteenth-century Modena." In Stephen Haliczer, *Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe*, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987), pp. 89-90

[407] Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari.* (Torino: Einaudi, 1996), pp. 381-382

[408] Sofia Messana, *Inquisitori, negromanti e streghe nella Sicila Moderna (1500-1782)*. (Palermo: Sellerio, 2007), pp. 123-125

patterns of magic. The magical universe communicated with the sacred one, so it is not a surprise to find that, notwithstanding the efforts of the Inquisition to separate religion from spells, enchantments and popular beliefs, in some trials the members of the church themselves could be accused of sorcery. Though the Holy Office stressed that only the remedies recognized by the church were valuable, people did not make so much difference: the priest, the wise man or woman, the saint or the supernatural agent shared the same extraordinary abilities, which were both healing and harming.

The Inquisition mainly considered the heretical content of witchcraft, its moral deviance and its effects on people which could be repaired through repentance. So the judges carefully examined the evidences, resorting to the help of physicians to establish the real causes for sickness or injury before proceeding with incarceration and torture.[409] The inquisitors were in fact obliged to verify the "corpus delicti", the reality of the circumstances which surrounded the accusation of *maleficium*, as it was prescribed by a treatise written at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *Instructio pro formandis processibus in causis strigis et maleficiourum* by the cardinal Desiderio Scaglia. Since the late sixteenth century realistic explanation also circulated for both the sabbath and the cases of infanticide by witchcraft. According to a treatise written for the confessors, the place of the sabbath was a real one, a deserted land, or a hidden space on mountains and in woods, where witches went corporeally. Regarding infanticide, the treatise reported that witches killed children, but did not suck their blood, as affirmed in a widespread popular belief, which we will explore soon. They instead generally strangled the infants, and were helped by the devil, which deluded their imagination, leading them to believe in shapeshifting and vampirism.[410]

Differently, the magical powers and not only the criminal actions were real for the populace, who considered the witch as another manifestation of the extraordinary forces that could interfere with everyday life. The malevolent individual was involved in the same complex of beliefs to which the supernatural helper belonged: the devil and the saint contrasted with each other on the same ground. In this regard an episode that took place in the surroundings of Otranto, in south-eastern Italy during 1745, is significant. It is worth noting that in this period magical and witchcraft tradition was of little interest for the judicial systems of Europe, but endured in popular culture.

[409] John Tedeschi, "Inquisitorial Law and the Witch." In Bengt Ankarloo, Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft. Centres and Peripheries*, pp. 92, 101
[410] Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, pp. 374-375, 380-381

Following the advice of the abbot, Giacomo Carrozzo denounced Antonia Mancarella. The woman was accused of having asked the help of both the devil and the Virgin Mary in the search of a hidden treasure.[411] The devil was considered as a trickster more than as the lord of evil, and his powers were not closer to the physical world than that of the divine people.

This notion of the devil and of a supernatural power which could work through spiritual as well as human beings was reflected in the complex of theological ideas and alleged proofs for witchcraft and in the witch's body itself. If we have seen that in the English context common people also perceived the witch as intrinsically dangerous, there is at least one significant difference between the Catholic and the Protestant context in the mixture of theological and popular ideas which led to the identification of the aggressor. While the devil's pact, together with the sabbath, figured in the Italian cases and accusations, the trials were free of the idea of the devilish mark, the extra-nipple, scar, mole or lump of flesh, which played such an important role in Protestant Europe, but was not listed among the crucial proofs recognised by inquisitorial procedure.[412] The witch sealed the satanic covenant with blood, she or he generally sacrificed it to write a written pact, but during the examination there was no a search for the mark, which in northern countries could be as decisive as a confession. It has also to be noted that the idea of a pact sealed in blood, was not widespread in Italy until the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century, when the Holy Office reinforced its repressive measures against magical practices. The sacrificial blood of the pact seemed also often to be employed for personal gain, rather than for a voluntary submission to the devil. As noted by Alberto Bolognetti, the apostolic nuncio in Venice during the late sixteenth century, the enchantments, although under examination for their heretical content, had their origin not in a specific inclination to heresy, but in the vanity of people, who tried to acquire material riches or to win the love of someone. A certain Andrea, for example had written a contract, sealing it with blood in which in exchange for his soul he asked the devil to assure the love and dedication of his wife. Later, repenting and afraid of his action, he threw away the piece of paper.[413]

The written pact was also employed by maleficent witches. During 1586 in Naples, for example, Graffia di Polidoro, fifteen years old, and Ippolita Palomba, seventy

[411] David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch*, pp. 250-251
[412] John Tedeschi, "Inquisitorial Law and the Witch", pp. 93-94
[413] Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, pp. 407-408

years old, confessed to having written a satanic pact with their own blood, while Antonia Lombarda was said to have spilled blood from her finger to write it on a piece of paper. Similarly in the Senese area in 1634 the alleged witch Onesta told how she had been instructed by another notorious witch, Giovanna La Palandrana, on how to invoke the devil, spilling three drops of her blood on paper. It is curious to add, in this last case, that the devil appeared then, in the form of an old man with a white beard and clothed in red, and was apparently ready to obey La Palandrana.[414] It seems therefore that the blood figured only as a means of exchange, but that the real powerful person was not the devil, presented in a familiar shape, but the expert witch herself.

We will see later how blood could be used in written magic beyond the demonological context of the pact. For the moment the absence of the mark suggests that the witch was not seen simply as a vehicle, and her/his relation with the supernatural was not so dramatic and full of self-responsibility as in the Protestant world. Although inquisitors insisted on the importance of the devilish illusion in witchcraft cases, the fact that the witch was not marked seems to outline a certain familiarity in the relationship between the magical universe and the actual world. The sign of her or his otherness was not explicit and dramatized, suggesting that an encounter with a superhuman being was not perceived as particularly extraordinary, despite its consequences. We must remember that the belief in diabolical witches developed in medieval Catholic Europe, growing inside the perception of an immanent sacred or a close supernatural dimension. Reformation had consequently distorted and dramatized, without being able to nullify it, the interaction between the spiritual and the physical world.

If the body and the blood of the witch seemed not to be prominent in the Italian trials, they had otherwise a central position in the magical beliefs, attracting or even emanating extraordinary forces. According to the physician Battista Codronchi, who at the end of the sixteenth century wrote a treatise on witchcraft, witches were provided with great powers inside the human community. In fact they could affect people's minds, causing violent passions, and disrupting the welfare of their souls, causing terror, sickness, melancholy, epilepsy, dementia, fevers, convulsions and

[414] Giovanni Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*, pp. 176-177, 4-11.; Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria,* pp. 324-325

several illness difficult to heal or still unknown, and draining the bodies of their victims.[415]

The idea of witches merged with that of wonderful individuals, able to communicate with superhuman entities, as in the case of the Sicilian *donne di fora*, the "ladies from the outside". Sicily was under the Spanish judicial system and as in Spain witch-trials were not widespread. Yet in the region up to the nineteenth century there existed particular female healers, who could cure the diseases caused by fairies or malevolent witches. They attended "in spirit" nocturnal meetings, which resembled the sabbath, and were generally women distinguished by the possession of "sweet blood".[416] The meaning of this "sweet blood", linked to the Sicilian fairy-cult, is quite obscure, but we can try to give an interpretation, employing the ideas on the spiritual world and the soul which we have discussed regarding supernatural entities. The ladies of the outside often considered fairies similar to the shadows of the dead, with whom they shared the otherworld.[417] How their blood attracted them can be explained through the sympathetic relation, which we have already explored, that existed between spiritual beings, and the "spirits" contained in the vital fluid. Blood more than soul, the material principle in which the invisible substance was manifesting, was the connecting agent. The sweetness of blood probably indicated its quality: opposite to the witches, the ladies from the outside should be of healthy constitution in order to defeat sickness. A moral factor is connected to the physical condition of the magical operator. But having to do with supernatural matter, the healer was placed in a landmark zone. The ladies of the outside, dealing with spirits, were sought, but also feared by people.

The belief in fairies, which as we have seen for England and Scotland endured in peripheral lands, was linked to the fear of the dead and especially untimely death. It was believed in Sicily that while the souls of the criminals burned at the stake were purified by the fire and so totally detached from the human sphere, those of hanged people remained on earth, tormenting whoever was close to the place of their last departure. The probable explanation for this is that, as in cases of alleged revenants or vampires, hanged bodies, not consumed by the flame, retained the necessary physical

[415] Battista Codronchi, *De morbis veneficis ac veneficis.* (Mediolani, Apud Io. Bapt. Bidellium, 1618. First Edition: Venetiis, Apud Franciscum de Franciscis Senensem, 1595), Prefatio.
[416] Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from the Outside", pp. 195-196
[417] Sofia Messana, *Inquisitori, negromanti e streghe nella Sicila Moderna,* p.558

strength to bond their sensitive soul and look for the force contained in the humans which approached their graves.

If the ladies from the outside were the mediator between common people and fairies, the Catholic church had similar agents in the Brotherhood of the Whites, founded in 1541. The friars had the role of assisting the convicted until the very last moment, in order to give them comfort, but also to remove from the community the menace of the permanence of their spirits on earth.[418]

Blood was not mentioned in this belief, yet the physical person of the friar was endowed with a certain quality, which helped him to cope with supernatural dangers in the same way as the *donna di fora*. While the latter had an inner mysterious ability to attract the superhuman, evident in her "sweet blood", the friar became powerful thanks to his belonging to the Catholic church: in other words he was part of a godly immunizing force which took residence in his body. These individuals possessed special bodies which allowed them to defeat the proximity and contagious condition of death. As we are going to see by exploring the Italian context, bodily powers and the supernatural mixed, involving either the work of the devil and *maleficium* as in the Protestant world, or the whole sphere of the sacred. The same witches that caused sickness, were often able to heal it (*qui scit sanare scit destruere*), reversing the process of contagion or bewitchment. In spite of the efforts of the Inquisitors to keep magic separated from religion, the Catholic rituals became part of a popular universe of beliefs centred on the body where prayers turned easily to spells, where the blood was employed not only to harm and waste, but also to attract and bind.

6.2 Vampire witches

If the witch's mark and the bleeding witch were not present in the Catholic tradition, we have here an even stronger relation between the witch and the victim's blood, which endured in the folkloric tradition. Since antiquity in fact a witch was considered to be an old woman which sucked the blood if infants and children.[419] According to the philosopher Pico Della Mirandola the witch killed the infants drying up their blood. In a treatise on all the existing jobs, written at the end of the sixteenth century, the midwife could sometime become a witch, bewitching children to death,

[418] Sofia Messana, *Inquisitori, negromanti e streghe nella Sicila Moderna*, pp. 343-345
[419] Piero Camporesi, *Il sugo della vita*, p. 30

hitting and wounding their heads to suck the blood and the breath out.[420] During 1539 the Modenese witch Orsolina la Rossa di Gaiato, confessed to wasting small children by sucking their blood:

> I suck their blood from under the nails of their hands or of their feet, or else from their lips, and I spit that blood into the hearth, after having first put all the ashes to the side, and I make a focaccia with that congealed blood and then I keep it. And if I were to find unguarded babies, woe them!

Yet she also admitted to be the responsible for a more ancient bloodshed, during which she had invited the other witches to consume the bread cooked in children's blood, causing the death of about sixty infants.[421] In 1540 the witch Cecca confessed to having ridden on a he-goat with a friend to the house of Francesco Collavoli in San Miniato, a village close to Florence, where they sucked the blood from the left breast of Collavoli's little daughter, provoking her sickness and death within days.[422]

Between the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth one, during the interrogations of the *benandanti* in north eastern Italy, the theme of the wasting or vampire witch emerged several times. The *benandanti*, beneficent wizards, confessed to attending "in spirit" (though there was a certain confusion regarding the immateriality of the soul), nocturnal meetings, where they fought against witches and wizards for the destiny of the harvests. They were also said to be able to cure and unbewitch the victims of *maleficia*. Mysterious agrarian cults and Catholic tradition mixed in their confessions, confounding the judges. Only when their practices started to be more influences by diabolical themes, the Inquisition was seriously concerned. During their description of the nocturnal fights they also made accusations against people of the community who they recognized as witches. At the end of the 1618, for example, Maria Panzona, arrested as a thief, accused Aloysia la Tabacca of sucking the blood of human creatures, among which mostly children. A few years later in

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[420] Pico della Mirandola, *Libro della strega o delle illusioni del demonio* (1524), p. 129. Tommaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni el mondo, e nobili et ignobili.* (1585). (Reprinted by Roberto Meietti: Venezia, 1601), p. 836

[421] Matteo Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell. Witches, Sorcerers, and the Inquisition in Renassaince Italy*.(Florence: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 119. Marina Romanello (ed.), La *stregoneria in Europa (1450-1650)* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1978) pp. 119-131

[422] Franco Cardini (ed.), *Gostanza, la strega di San Miniato.* (Bari: Laterza, 1989), p.120. Giuliana Zanelli, *Streghe e Società nell'Emilia Romagna del Cinque-Seicento*. (Ravenna: Longon Editore, 1992), pp. 69-70

1622 Lunardo Badau a fifteen years old *benandante*, confronted directly with Menega Chianton, affirming that she travelled to Udine to make her devilish work and suck the infants. When the suspicion regarding the activities of the *benandanti* and the pressure of the judges increased, the *benandante* Michele Soppe, during one of his last interrogation in 1649, confessed that he succeeded in healing the alleged bewitched people thanks to the help of the devil Satanasso, and that he sucked the blood of children as the witches did.[423]

In the cases of the Senese area, examined by Oscar di Simplicio, the narratives present, beyond the vampiristic activity of the witch, the evidence of the victims' bodies. During 1591 in the community of Frosini the women told to the priest several stories of wasted infants: some of these children sickened after visiting a certain Cecca del Corso; others, immediately after their deaths became all livid, as if wounded and bruised in several different places. The cause of these sudden, premature losses was always identified as the work of a witch. In 1595 at San Casciano de' Bagni, Bimba, a local healer, gave an interesting explanation of how the children were spoiled. She said that when a child was consumed, the fleshy pulp was decreasing, while the bones were increasing, or in other words, the bodily fluids which were nurturing the body dried up. Significantly she did not link it to *maleficium*, but to nutritional problems: yet her position was quite unusual and ignored at the time.

The visits of witches or of the demons were often described as nocturnal experiences in which the dream was dangerously confused with reality. In 1598 at Chiusi, a woman told to the inquisitor how the devil or his human agent sucked the blood from the infant which was sleeping close to her, and how, when she awoke, she identified the aggressor as a woman of the village called Agnesa.[424] During 1599 the male witch Giandomenico Fei was accused of the bewitchment of several children through malevolent words and through the power of his touch. On the right arm of a sick child three holes were discovered, while after his death two more holes appeared on the head, suggesting that the witch had been sucking his vital fluids. After a few years, at Castelnuovo Berardenga, the child Francesco Cosimi was found dead by his nurse. His chest was livid on the right side, and his head looked damaged, as if hit or perforated. Bruises and contusions were also discovered on the body of a female

[423] Carlo Ginzburg, I *benandanti. Stregoneria e culti agrari tra Cinquecento e Seicento*. (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), pp. 142, 133, 175
[424] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, pp. 95-98, 317

infant that died in 1617. Blood and small holes, were also found on the dead body of a two months child, Berbardino in Pitigliano during 1665. There was the imprint of a hand on his back and the sign of a small puncture with a few traces of blood on the right chest; on the forehead was visible the mark of two fingers which seemed to have pressed the child' skull.[425]

The vampire witch recalls the familiar spirit's attitudes inside of English cases. Both the Italian witch and the familiar allegedly sucked blood, and the both consume their victims. Yet the former acted directly, while the latter was the intermediate factual agent for the maleficent work of English witches. We have two original cultural beliefs, blood as a means to obtain power, disease and death caused by consummation, but they changed in different religious contexts. The vampire witch kept her own capacity to harm, showing the strength and danger that could derive from certain bodies, which in Protestant cases, figured many as vehicles for supernatural entities. This feature of the Italian witch is confirmed also by the power of touch which was attributed to him or her, close to the alleged vampire activity.

6.3 The power of touch and maleficium

As we can infer from the previous examples, the evidence of *maleficium* was indicating more than the vampiristic uses of the witch, the pressure, and the touch of the aggressor. The contusions showed a drained and ruined body, which, more than punctured or bitten, was touched by another powerful individual. Despite the belief that the witch could do nothing without the devil, which was diffused throughout both the Protestant and the Catholic world, here the witch was endowed to a certain extent with supernatural force contained in the body. This idea seems to be confirmed by the fact that those who harmed often had reputations as healers, as in the case of Giandomenico Fei, or of Rufina dello Sbardellato, who was called "saint Rufina" by the people of her village, because she knew all the curative herbs and the remedies. These kinds of witches could sometimes cure their own victims, breaking the negative spells. The category of individuals who both waste and heal, merged with the notion of the primary witch, known across Europe since antiquity, which was a person naturally maleficent, able to spread sickness. As has been discussed by Éva Pócs regarding witchcraft in Eastern Europe, this witch had a strong relationship with

[425] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria,* pp. 124-125, 130-131, 150, 358

the superhuman creatures that influenced or harmed the living community: witches were therefore human individuals with demonic features.[426]

Witches could have powers which were assigned to the dead or demons. In the Tuscan context examined by Di Simplicio we find, for example, that in the town of Pistoia it was believed that the dead could touch living creatures, leaving a visible sign on their bodies, generally at the rear base of the head, causing illness.[427] In a case from the Modenese area, in 1531, the healer Brighento attributed the mysterious lameness of Maddalena Ferrari to an "evil shadow" on which she had trampled by accident. Proceeding from a pain in the knee, the sickness "dried up the woman as a piece of wood", and a doctor, questioned about it, replied that the woman had been bewitched and possessed no more blood in her body.[428] The effects on the corporeal fluids are here ascribed to a shadow, which could belong either to a human being or to a demon, whose negative connotation is enough to cause a supernatural interference with human health. Both the power of the dead or of the witch, as a humanized demon or an extraordinary person, passed through their bodies as a kind of direct contagion, in a fluid system where the skins and the rigid structures did not constitute a protection.

Applying the theories about blood and the body which we have met in the previous chapters, we will try now to explain how the witch damaged the victim. Through touch the witch was working on the bodily fluids and the blood, hindering its movements. Stopping the motion, the humours stagnated or were overheated, disrupting the regular state of the body.

If we look again at Sicily and to the tradition of the healers and the *donne di fora*, we find among their cures the capacity to dissolve or break the *fattura* that is the most common form of *maleficium*, generally also called toccatura *di strega* (witch's knot or witch's touch). The female healer Minica Griega, called to cure a bewitched child, tied him up with a thread and then she cut it, pronouncing some mysterious words. She was applying a kind of sympathetic magic, according to which sickness was understood as an obstacle, something which binding the victim.[429] This belief remained almost unchanged in the south of Italy until recent times. Exploring the magical context of modern Lucania, the ethnologist Ernesto de Martino explained

[426] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della Stregoneria*, pp. 134, 150; Éva Pócs , *Between the Living and the Dead*, pp. 59-71
[427] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della Stregoneria*, p. 319
[428] Matteo Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*, p. 116
[429] Sofia Messana, *Inquisitori, negromanti e streghe nella Sicila Moderna*, pp. 530, 538-539

how a *fattura* worked on the bewitched body. In Lucan popular magic fascination is also defined as an *attaccatura di sangue*, a process of coagulation of the victim's blood.[430] Through the spell the blood is stopped inside the veins. If in modern times this explanation is symbolic, in the early modern period it was probably thought a real event, which was confirmed by medical theories. The blood could be clogged by inserting sharp objects, pins, needles, thorns, in small figures of clay. In this case the spell could work both directly, through sympathetic magic, and also as an invocation of the devil, indicating to him who and where to attack. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Sicilian healer, a "man from the outside", *uomo di fora*, Vincencio Librino, after visiting a sick woman, affirmed that she had been bewitched. He was able to exhibit a doll transfixed by several nails that, according to him, was the magical object through which the spell worked. He started to take out the nails from the figures providing relief to the patient and gradually healing her.[431] On the other hand the witch Piera at Massa in Tuscany in 1587 confessed to have transfixed three nails in a figure of clay to invoke the devil and cast a spell on a designed victim.[432] Piercing wax dolls or pieces of cloth with pins or needles was employed also in love magic. In 1519 the Modenese witches Costanza Barbetta and Anastasia "la Frappona" were accused to have taught to several women how to obtain the love of a desired man, sticking pins in to the hem of their clothes, as if it was the lover's heart itself.[433]

In the context of high magic, conjuration also could become part of *maleficium*. For example, in the first half of the sixteenth century in the Modenese area among the accusations towards Chiara Signorini, suspected of the bewitchment of Margherita Pazzani, made the conjuration of the "five devils". These were the words of the spell: "Five fingers I place on the wall (on the ground)/ five devils I conjure/ nine drops of blood they draw from her/ six they give to me, three they keep for their labors/ and may she never have peace nor rest/ nor sleep nor good health/ and may not be able to lie nor move nor work in the fields/ until she will come speak to me". As written by Matteo Duni "the goal was to make Margherita's health problems worsen by symbolically having the devil 'draw blood' from her, until she changed her attitude

[430] Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e Magia*. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002),p. 15
[431] Sofia Messana, *Inquisitori, negromanti e streghe nella Sicila Moderna*, p. 555
[432] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, p. 67
[433]Matteo Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*, pp. 97-103

towards Chiara".[434] Though the physical aggression was pursued by the devils, it seems that they were subordinated to the witch, who was the main character on the scene of the maleficent ritual.

Witches could cause disease also unwillingly as we have already seen in England. We meet again the stereotype of the old woman, who spread evil vapours from her corrupted body, but significantly, here it endured up to recent times. In fact it had originated not only in the specific system of early modern medical beliefs and in the humoral theories, but in a religious context still valuable in contemporary Italy, where the wonderful and the sacred still mixed with the human dimension.

6.4 Evil eye and the importance of feelings

As it has been underlined by De Martino during the period of the Reformation, the ideology of fascination was both influenced by demonological theories, which designed it as the result of a pact with demons, and natural magic which explained it in physical terms.[435] In the early modern world supernatural forces acted according to the dichotomy pure/impure, rooted in the body and its functioning. An impure body, that is a body which was no more able to purge itself, or was somehow disrupted, was spreading disease and consequently could attract evil forces. This belief, which relied on medical theories regarding the health and humoral balance, remained almost unchanged in both Catholic and Protestant countries. The philosopher Tommaso Campanella explained the capacity to arm through the eyes using the same ideas expressed by Reginald Scot regarding the relation between old age and witches. The evil eye could derive both from an aged, spoiled body full of bad humours and from feelings such as an intense desire or envy, which, as we have already discussed, were physically communicated to the victims, wasting bodily fluids.[436] Bodily elements as wasted humours could be associated and work similarly to emotions due to the ambiguity of the word "spirit", which meant both the physical substance contained in the blood and the vehicle of the soul.

The most commonly adopted technique to ward off the evil eye involved the use of oil and water: some drops of olive oil were cast in a bowl of water, if there was *malocchio* (the evil eye), the oil expanded into several stains in the water, while if not

[434] Matteo Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*, pp. 64-65
[435] Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e Magia*, pp. 131-132
[436] Tommaso Campanella, *Del senso delle cose e della magia*, Libro IV, cap. 14

it remained compact.[437] We can try to explain the process sympathetically. The oil was probably related to the thickened humours and blood, hindering the normal flux symbolized by the water. If it expanded in the bowl it then indicated the spreading of bad, spoiled humours into the body, and the consequent danger of disease.

Ideas featuring the evil eye, which were discussed in chapter three, were diffused across the Catholic world. A treatise on witchcraft written in Spain by a friar during the first half of the sixteenth century, explained it as a natural infection, spreading from the eyes of people who were not able to discharge their bodies from corrupted humours, to change all the food in nourishment, or were in specific impure states, as the case of a menstruated woman,[438] who, though purifying herself through menstruation, was also in contact with the obnoxious matter of her surplus blood. The evil eye worked thanks to a special relation between bodily fluids, although running in different bodies. As we have seen Della Porta affirmed that the eye could infect the air and consequently spread disease to other living creatures.[439] It was particularly dangerous for children, richer in good and healthy blood and for the process of lactation, which could be spoiled or interrupted.[440]

From these considerations the differences between witchcraft beliefs in the Protestant and the Catholic world do not seem strong and relevant. The cultural theory at the basis of the evil eye was in fact the same. Nevertheless the fundamental element of differentiation appears when we examine the object itself, the blood and the body's elements, involved in the belief. While in the Protestant context it figured mainly as a vehicle or a chosen channel for the devil's work, here it was endowed with a proper force, it was the material symbol of the divine and diabolical potencies which flowed in ordinary life. As we have repeated in the past chapters, feelings played a fundamental rule in the universe of witchcraft. The presence of wasted infants' bodies, or of illnesses difficult to explain gave birth to emotional reactions, which, instead of pointing towards the possible real causes of the disease, evidenced the need of a visible, malevolent responsible. Yet in the Catholic world these feelings were not only directed against individuals, but also inscribed in the substances through which magic operated. The cooperation of fantasies, passions and bodily

[437] David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch*, p. 147
[438] David H. Darst, "Witchcraft in Spain: the Testimony of Martìn de Castañega's Treatise on Superstition and Witchcraft (1529)." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 123, No. 5. (Oct. 15, 1979), pp. 309-310
[439] Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della magia naturale,* Book VIII, pp. 354-358
[440] Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e Magia*, pp. 55-63; David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch*, p. 146

parts or other objects is evident in erotic magic, which, almost absent in northern Europe, was one of the main features of Mediterranean cases of witchcraft. In the following section we will see how feelings of hatred, love and desire that attached to blood could cause melancholy and also frenzy and madness, breaking the corporeal balance of spirits and humours, could be manipulated and influenced by the same substance on which they acted.

6.5 Menstrual blood, love magic

Spells and *maleficia* were not only working on bodily fluids, but blood itself could be employed as an effective ingredient in magical recipes. Menstrual blood especially was considered potent and ambiguous. As we have seen in the medical chapter, though menstruation was mainly considered a healthy process, menstrual blood was often considered with suspicion, as impure, toxic matter. Discussing witchcraft in England we found how unpurged blood in postmenopausal women could spread evil vapours and consequently contagion, affecting others. In several Italian cases we find the proper matter involved in trials and accusations of bewitchment. The already mentioned doctor Codronchi listed menstrual blood among the objects he found in the cradle of his alleged bewitched little daughter:

> searching […] the blanksheet, I found several signs of *maleficium*, precisely chickpeas, grains of coriander, a piece of coal and of dead-bone, a certain unknown thing which an expert told me to be made by these wicked women mixing some objects to menstrual blood; also I found feathers interlaced with threads.[441]

In this case blood was linked to residual objects. As noted by the historian Giuliana Zanelli, they all represent the end of a vital cycle, animal or vegetal: they are discharged matter, but also things involved in a process of transformation. Their power was, then, to ascribe to the liminal zone they inhabited.[442] In this regard menstrual blood, being not a completely dead substance, represented pollution, able to spread disease instead of growth.

[441] Battista Codronchi, *The morbis veneficis*, pp. 43-45
[442] Giuliana Zanelli, *Streghe e Società*, p. 63

Yet menstrual blood was mainly employed in love magic. According to Codronchi, women gave to men their menstrual excrements in order to change their minds and obtain their love.[443] The spells for love and erotic magic went generally under the name of *ligatura* (knotting), a variant of fascination and of the *toccatura di strega*, which consisted in the interference with the sexual passions and activities of an individual through the use of special objects, among which menstrual blood itself, sympathetically connected to the reproductive organs. "Knots" were employed mainly to hinder the consummation of a sexual relationship, causing male impotence. As noted by De Simplicio regarding the Senese context in relation to the Scottish and English ones, in the Protestant records cases of *ligatura* were generally absent, while they continued in the Mediterranean up to recent times.[444] Nevertheless it would be wrong to consider the belief as locally circumscribed: it was more part of a continental system of ideas regarding blood and the body which changed in its manifestations after the religious schism.

Love magic cannot be easily dismissed as a minor branch of witchcraft or of early modern Europe's magical world. Both magic and passions had the power to bind, creating a physical and spiritual bond between two individuals. The connection relied on neoplatonic theories according to which existing things and living beings were related through a sort of universal attraction or correspondence. In a treatise by Giordano Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, the famous philosopher and magician explained the binding forces and how to enact them, highlighting the transitive effects of magic, which working on bodies and passions, was evidenced at its best in erotic magic. In order to work on a desired victim, nurturing his or her passion, the individual had to develop the same feeling in himself or herself and in this process the emotional and imaginative world overlapped with the bodily reality. Bruno suggested to the magical operator to desire strongly, but also to keep the semen, so that it could be empowered by passion.[445] Therefore in love magic it is well shown how the corporeal fluids not only spread disease and corruption, or when weakened and wasted by age, allowed the devil's delusions to take possession of imagination, but they also naturally transmitted the desires of a person to another one.

[443] Battista Codronchi, *The morbis veneficis*, p. 144
[444] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, pp.115-116
[445] Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros e Magia nel Rinascimento*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006), pp. 141-160

We are now going to focus on specific cases, trying to track a model of continuity with the theories we have already met. Remaining in the Senese context we find a curious case of knotting in 1594, in which menstrual blood and the power of the written word were both employed. In Radicondoli Caterina di Benedetto cast a spell on Aurelia to stop her sexual activity with her husband, Fulvio. She asked Pietro, a ten years old boy, to write four mysterious words on her forehead and on the wrists. The ink was her own menstrual blood which thickened on her skin.[446] The story presents some interesting points, which can be useful to detach the popular belief in magic and witchcraft from the theological one. First of all the diabolical element seems completely absent. The written form of the spell recalls the satanic pact, yet the idea that objects, bodily parts, and words had only the power to attract the devil, which was the real agent of *maleficia*, does not seem relevant here. As it has been underlined by Di Simplicio the reality of *maleficium* among the common people did not embody demonological theories,[447] which were often constructed on precedent folkloric elements that survived after the period of the trials. Power was ascribed mainly to the employed substance, the act of writing words and the two performers of the spell: the menstruated woman and the child. While in the narratives of the sabbath children figured as the preferred victim, here the young boy became the accomplice, although unsuspecting. Therefore we have on one side the impure woman and her spoiled, discharged blood, on the other the young person, endowed with a healthy constitution. We can infer that the two extremes of this bodily language, based on the quality of fluids, made the magical process work better.

In 1624 in the village of Montisi we find instead a more classical example of love magic: Giovanni Guazzi was unable to have sexual intercourse with her lover, Laura la Starna. She then suggested to him to search his house for a spell, made by his wife. Following the advice he found a piece of white cloth full of menstrual blood in which a red thread had been run through several times. He brought the object to Laura la Starna who burned it, breaking the spell.[448] In other words the fire consumed the bad humours contained in the blood, destroying its effects.

Under the category of love magic were also spells and rituals performed to obtain the love of someone, provoking an irresistible attraction. This kind of magic was the main theme of the witch-trials in the town of Venice. Here diabolism was totally

[446] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, pp. 68-69
[447] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, p. 322
[448] Oscar Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, p. 252-253

absent,[449] while the powers associated to the body stood as the prominent elements. Menstrual blood was employed together with other bodily fluids, as milk or semen, in order to arouse passion. As described by the historian Guido Ruggiero, love and body magic had three main focuses: "one sexual – the phallus; one affective – the heart; and one reproductive – female genitals along with menstrual blood.[450] The link between the heart, as the seat of passion, and the other organs which stood for sexual desire and reproduction, was at the base of love magic and had its origin in the notion of a permeable world, both inside and outside the body, in which emotions and disease worked corporally, enlivening, moving or disrupting humours. In the same way in which the victim's body could be affected by the toxic vapours coming out from the eyes, it could be influenced by a lover's passions, contained in the blood. In the attempt to be a part of the other, binding his love, menstrual blood could be given to eat or drink to the beloved one, often mixed with herbs.

In 1588 the courtesan Paolina de Rossi was accused of having asked her servant to put her menstrual blood into the wine of Gian Battista Giustiniani, in order to gain his passion. She mixed it with sage, to make the drink more powerful. It is worth noting that sage was also one of the main ingredients for abortive medicine. In 1571 Elena, a female healer, told the Holy Office that she used it to cure women "whose period has not come".[451] Veronica Cattanea mixed her menstrual blood with leaves of belladonna to arouse love in a man; yet belladonna was generally employed with menstrual blood to produce the opposite effect. For example, Elisabetta Catroni placed some leaves of the plant under the mattress of a nobleman, writing on them the name of his new lover. She also made him drink some mother's milk. The belladonna in conjunction with this liquid should have destroyed the passion between him and the other woman.[452]

As already hinted, other bodily substances could be employed in love magic. Moving to Spain, another Catholic country where love magic was widely practised, we meet a curious spell, widespread among Spanish sorceresses, the "conjuration of the oyl lamp's wick" in which the purifying power of the flame was connected to the

[449] Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice. 1550-1650.* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989),pp. 4-5
[450] Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passion. Tales of Magic, Marriage and Power at the End of the Renassaince.* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), p. 124
[451] Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice*, p. 130; Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passion*, pp. 61, 80-82
[452] Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice*, p. 130

use of male semen. The woman collected it after having had intercourse with the man. "The cotton or linen with which the woman cleaned herself after intercourse was twisted into a 'wick', then placed in an oil lamp and ignited". The spell also included some formulae to recite, while the lamp was burning, in which the name of the desired man was repeated, connecting through sympathetic relation, his heart to the wick, the flame to the feeling of love.[453] In other cases menstrual blood or semen could be mixed with pubic hairs or even asses' brains in order to obtain a man's love or to cause impotence.[454] In both the Italian and the Spanish contexts menstrual blood and physical liquids, mixed with different ingredients and ingested by a designed victim, could interfere with his feelings, passions and sexual activities: the duplicity of the resulting effects was a consequence of the ambiguity of the fluids' nature. In fact if on one side menstrual blood has a strong connection with reproduction and fertility, on the other it was considered spoiled matter, a result of undigested food and degenerated humours, which needed to be expelled. So, employed in love magic, it could arouse both attraction and repulsion, in accordance with the other substances and the sorceress' will.

Coming back to the Venetian trials, the idea of a despicable matter is explicit in the case of Splandiana Mariani, who used semen, like the Spanish women, in her love magic. She poured the semen in the wine of those she wanted to bewitch, and she defined it as *sporchezzo*, "filth", giving to it what it seems a negative value. Yet, as Ruggiero has noted, the category of filth was differently understood during early modern times. To quote the author: "Power, filth and reproduction seem not to fit very well together logically in this vision, but, of course, society today is not without similarly illogical layerings of meaning in its vision of reproduction and sex".[455] Though this assertion is understandable, we need to be careful in targeting this kind of thought as illogical. Thinking of the physical substances which embodied ideas of filth and reproduction, we have to cope also with the dichotomy pure and impure in which both physical and spiritual theories merged. In the third chapter, dealing with general ideas on menstruation, we have already seen how the term impurity can be connected to a dangerous state. So "filth" as well, which is primarily bodily corruption, discharged matter, can be read as "danger". Anthropology can help to

[453]Maria Helena Sànchez Ortega, "Sorcery and Eroticism in Love Magic." In Mary Elizabeth Perry, Anne J. Cruz, (eds.), *Cultural Encounters. The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*. (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), pp. 60-61, 81-82
[454] Maria Helena Sànchez Ortega,"Sorcery and Eroticism in Love Magic", pp. 60-61
[455] Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passion*, pp. 118-119

highlight this point. Mary Douglas has discussed the idea of danger connected to that of uncleanness. Dirt or uncleanness is a state of being excluded from the established social order, where the human and the superhuman can be drawn together without the necessary control.[456] In this view menstrual blood, semen or more rarely human milk, represent a special matter which possess the transgressive qualities of marginality and therefore can attract extraordinary forces from the outside or reveal those hidden inside, both evil and good. In a context such as that of early modern Italy this potential contained in bodily fluids was evidenced in all his possibilities. In fact, it interested not only specifically maleficent magic in which the devil and demons could be involved, but the whole sphere of the supernatural and the sacred.

Another Venetian sorcerer, Santa, was suspected, in 1618, to making love potions using menstrual blood added to several gruesome objects such as stones and bones of the dead, stolen from cemeteries.[457] As noted by Valerie Molero, regarding the magical context of eighteenth century Spain, in the performing of love magic sexual and macabre elements, Eros and Thanatos, were often mixed. Sperm, menstrual blood, pubic hairs figured together with bones of animals, generally cats, or of the dead. Teresa Pérez, accused in Madrid in 1735 and already famous for her love enchantments, suggested to Mariana Sànchez to employ his lover's semen in conjunction with some pubic hairs to enforce their mutual love and attraction and contemporarily she prepared a maleficent spell against Mariana's husband to provoke his death. *Maleficium* should work through sympathetic magic using a shroud and some wood, and burning them together. The consumption of the shroud by fire indicated the death of the husband, whose body would have been slowly dried up. Antonia Gòmez, at the end of the eighteenth century, employed in her love spells, male semen, one bone from a dead body and three drops of her own blood; she then mixed the ingredients in both her lover and her husband's meals, so that the first could have intercourse with her while the second one would not have discovered it.[458]

The same blood and substances could cause different effects on different people. This was probably due to the power of feelings which affected blood, bringing desire or repulsion, sexual fulfilment or moral oblivion. The employment of mortal residuals, beyond the connection with "filth" and henceforth danger, remind one of

[456] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 2, 150
[457] Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition of Venice,* p.131
[458] Valèrie Molero, *Magie et Sorcellerie En Espagne au Siècle des Lumières. 1700-1820.* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), pp. 191-196

the principal themes of the demonological idea of the sabbath, that is the exhumation and desecration of corpses, but also to the beliefs regarding the physical potential of death, probably connected with a supernatural dimension. Bones were in fact bodily parts connected with death and the otherworld in the moment in which they became visible. Thus used together with blood in magic they suggest a power which, although based on physical and real substances, was able to involve supernatural forces.

In an Italian case the association with the supernatural is explicitly the connection with the sacred. Laura Malipiero was in fact accused of employing menstrual blood in her recipes, in conjunction with the wine of the Eucharist; similarly in Friuli Laura Ricci confessed to the inquisitor that she gave her husband a drink containing her menstrual blood mixed with holy water in order to bind his love.[459]

Attesting a certain confusion regarding ideas on magic and the sacred, but also the intense physical experience of the feelings on which these enchantments were working, it is worth mentioning a prayer to Santa Marta, used as a love spell:

> O blessed Martha, for love of me go to that wood where Our Lord Jesus Christ baptized his twelve Apostles… Cut three branches of fire and flame and for love of me send them to the heart of N.N. Send them through the veins of the heart, of the head, of the lungs, through the marrow of the bones, the flesh of the legs, with such love that it beats and scourges, so that for my love he should suffer incessantly… For love of me, take away from him drink, food, sleep, power that he might not go or stay, nor ride or drive nor walk, nor have relations with any woman, until he should come to me to satisfy all my desire and do all that which I will ask of him.[460]

In this prayer, confiscated from the Modenese prostitute Margherita Chiappona at the end of the sixteenth century, there was no mention of menstrual blood, yet the woman's wishes were "sent" through the body of the lover as fluids, in the same way in which the spirits were thought to run through the veins and the organs, reminding of the idea according to which passions impressed their shapes on the blood.

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[459] Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice*, p. 132; Giuliana Ancona, Dario Visitin, "La persecuzione della magia e stregoneria in Friuli Venezia Giulia" In *Caccia alle Streghe in Italia tra XIV e XVII secolo. Atti del IV Convegno nazionale di Studi Storico-antropologici. Triora (Imperia), 22-24 ottobre 2004.* (Bolzano: Praxis, 2007), pp. 173-174

[460] Mary O'Neil, "Magical Healing, Love Magic and the Inquisition in Late Sixteenth-century Modena". In Stephen Haliczer, *Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe* (1987), p. 102

The host was also employed in this kind of magic in conjunction with blood and written spells. The desecration of the host, which had become rare in Protestant countries, was still present here. Two cases from Modena are useful to highlight its magical uses. During 1499 Bernardina Stadera was accused to have desacrated three hosts, writing magical words on them, probably with blood, while almost twenty years later, in 1517 the allegiance between religion and magic was still more apparent in the case of a wizard-priest, Don Guiglielmo Campana. The man confessed to having been asked by a woman to give her a magical remedy in order to conquer her husband's feelings. The spell contained the prayer of Epiphany written with the woman's blood, extracted from one of her fingers.[461] This kind of magic drew together bodily fluids and sacred object; blood acquired a double meaning and therefore an even greater power. On one side it was the menstrual fluid, embodying reproductive energies and human feelings, on the other it was the blood of the host: the emblem of Christ's passion and his own living substance. Two kinds of blood were mixed in the enchantment: one human and the other superhuman, blurring the differences between natural, magical and miraculous forces. The lack of differentiation, of necessary boundaries, allowed the extraordinary into everyday life. When "bad blood", that is menses, spoiled humours, sick vapours from the eyes, enter into contact with the good one, physical health was endangered or, in the case of love magic, passions and feelings manipulated, disrupting their natural course. Similarly the ingestion or the contact with superhuman blood changed the ordinary balance of a human body. The two ideas mingled in the popular mind, so that demons and godly forces could be equally employed, depending on the required magical aid, and consequently, a spell in which both were present could result stronger. Let us now explore the theories of blood connected to the sacred, considering some religious corporeal practices and the bodies of the saints in which the devil could not enter, and which were working miracles not magic.

6.6 Saints, healing blood and relics

Until now we have found that losing blood was seen as completely positive only in the medical practice of purging through bloodletting, while, when associated to witchcraft it determined a lost of vital power or a magical, dangerous exchange with

[461] Matteo Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*, pp. 81-87

devilish creatures. In the case of scratching, the bloodshed nullified the witch while healing or procuring relief for the bewitched person. We have already explained it in terms of a restitution of stolen vitality to the victim, yet it is also comparable to some practices diffused among some religious orders of the Catholic Church, where the bloodshed indicated the humiliation of the human, carnal state to reach the divine one. The violence, directed towards the other in the English context of witchcraft, became here self-inflicted in order to defeat not an evil aggressor but the body itself, which hindered the immortal, spiritual life coming from Christ's sacrifice symbolized by the blood. The human soul cleansed by Christ's sacrificial blood, which we have found at the centre of the devil's pact motif, and which had to be sealed and protected inside the body according to the theological debate, in this religious context was righteously escaping its physical boundaries, to reach a superhuman state. This did not necessarily imply a negative vision of the body. In the words of the seventeenth century Spanish doctor of the church, Teresa d'Avila, the soul, invested by godly power, nourished its whole corporeal dwelling, strengthening the body, although it was not always aware of it. Yet the body had to suffer during existence, because it could not cope, or even contain the great interior force of the soul.[462]

So blood issuing outside its margins symbolized both the potency of the soul and the effort of the body to be one with its vital principle. The value and the symbolism of the fluid did not change from those of witchcraft cases, but the destination of the precious gift was divine fulfilment instead of diabolic damnation. What in the case of the vampire-witch or the scratched one was seen as a crime, a theft of Christian souls through blood, was here perceived as a restitution to the creator.

A famous Italian female saint of the late sixteenth century, Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi illustrated the five effects of Christ's blood, poured from his wounds on the human soul. The blood coming from the left foot gave to the soul its self-awareness; the blood from the right foot purified and strengthened it; the blood from the left hand enlightened the soul, which acquired the cognition of God; the blood from the right hand placed the soul inside compassion and love. Finally, the blood from the chest nurtured the soul, changing it into pure blood itself, so that the soul could not perceive anything else but blood: it was transformed into Christ's holy substances,

[462] Santa Teresa di Gesù, *Opere.* (Roma: Postulazione Generale O.C.D., 1985), pp. 960-961

another shape of the saviour.[463] Christ's blood was the means through which the Holy Father was binding the human soul, annihilating its mortal legacy to infuse the divine qualities.[464] In this religious discourse human blood was washed and replaced by the godly one; furthermore the spirits, which expressed the soul, were not just related, but assimilated to their liquid vehicle. In the words of the saint blood was the soul itself, so that the physical evidence of the mortal condition became the means of its overcoming.

The order of the Flagellants was diffused in Europe, during late medieval times, but disapproved and contrasted by the church's chiefs for its extreme bodily practices which ended in a kind of blood obsession. The friars travelled through villages, injuring their bodies in public squares and streets. They sacrificed their vital fluid in imitation of Christ's Passion, purging the body from sins and its material nature that hindered the experience of God. During the sixteenth century the Flagellant brotherhoods and the brotherhoods of the Blood of Christ were institutionalized in Castile and Catalonia, in Spain. According to the historian William Christian, the influence of the orders was a consequence of the widespread belief in the power of the images and the crucifix, carried by the flagellants in their processions and which was thought to be able to exude real blood. During the fourteenth century, at the time of the Black Death, when Jews had been accused for the plague, devotional crucifixes became very popular, due to their alleged ability to ward off the enemy and the disease.[465] From the sixteenth century images and crosses started to be employed in healing remedies and sometimes, although rarely in medieval sources, they exhibited their miraculous forces. One example is that of Good Friday in 1590 during a procession of one Flagellant brotherhood in a village close to Barcelona, Igualda, when one of the cross showed a liquid "bloodlike substance", which was seen as a manifestation of the divine. As Christian has noted few of these cases were considered fakes by the Inquisition, while most of them were taken as true.[466] If the bleeding crosses represented Christ's immanence in the world, the bloody disciplines of the Flagellants attested the human counterpart, the attempt to be free from the mortal flesh.

[463] Maria Maddalena De' Pazzi, *Le Parole dell'Estasi*. Edited by Giovanni Pozzi (Milano: Adelphi, 2006), pp. 53-54
[464] Maria Maddalena De' Pazzi, *Le Parole dell'Estasi*, pp. 140-143
[465] William A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), PP. 184-185
[466] William A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain,* pp. 194-195

Once more blood manifested its double nature: it was the death of the human dimension and the flux of supernatural life. Physical pain was linked to ecstasy. Mortifying the body the religious men started their spiritual inner travels: the fury of their torment was as intense as the joy of their visions. This is the case of a friar from Puglia, Giuseppe from Copertino, in south eastern Italy, born at the beginning of the seventeenth century, who was lately venerated as a saint. The friar was considered a mystic, a prophet and a healer, able to break maleficent spells and cures diseases, such as epilepsy, even after his death. He used to fustigate himself, in order to bleed, with crooked nails placed on strings and cords and steel blades, and then he covered the wounds with chains, cilicio and iron plates so that his whole person was continuously scarred and plagued. He had beaten himself so brutally and for so long that the walls of his cell were stained with blood. As the anonymous eighteenth century hagiographer reported, his physical complexion resembled that of a corpse more than a living person. Yet this penitential annihilation was rescued by the intense activity of his spirit which was connected to the divine through the flowing out of the blood.

Crowds were deeply impressed by such individuals and by bloody exhibitions, which often became instruments for mass conversion and repentance. Another religious man from Puglia, the popular preacher Francesco di Girolamo, used to make long public sermons, during which he practised collective confession and public manifestation of pain and piety at the feet of the crucifix, shedding tears and blood, whipping his denudated shoulders and leading the people to do the same. Penitential processions could end in excess and fanatism, with people taken by frenzy who beat themselves to escape from sin.[467] This hysterical, collective behaviour was not far from the feelings of rage and fear which animated the witches' persecution, or, at an individual level, cases of personal justice and revenge in which the alleged victim aggressed and scratched the witch. Yet the object of physical cruelty and blood obsession was not another person, but the body itself. The healing blood released was not the one taken or polluted by a maleficent neighbour, but one's own: the significance of the trespassed landmark of flesh and skin was inverted, from dangerous to powerful.

But power was not equally distributed in all individuals. As the witch' s body differentiated itself from the others due to its capacity to harm, the saint's one did so

[467] Piero Camporesi, *La carne impassibile*, pp. 61-65

due to its ability to cure from spiritual and physical disease, not only the owner, but the whole religious community. As noted by Piero Camporesi the body of the saint disrupted physical laws, it brought eternity and perfection inside the experience of everyday life.[468] They showed the paradox of Christ's blood itself: it had to be violently separated from the divine to rescue the whole human community. As Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out discussing the fifteenth century theological debate on Christ spilled blood, it was a sign of life, of self-offering, and the evidence of bodily death in which godly salvation was inscribed. [469]

After their death, the saints' bodies were still more valuable. Their parts and their blood instead of deteriorating remained intact, preserving local people from sickness or calamities. As a channel of continuity between the actual world and the celestial one, saints' blood did not dry up or rot inside the corpses. When Francesco di Girolamo died, one of the present people, who wanted to keep a relic for himself, cut a callous from the foot. The blood started to come out, pure, red and conspicuous so that it was collected inside a bottle and was consequently employed ad a wonderful remedy. The day of his funeral the blood was still dripping from the coffin.[470]

The blood running out from the veins of the dead saints, resembles that of the swollen bodies of revenants or vampires, yet while the latter attested the murderous activity of the untimely dead, saints' blood was kept abundant and healthy by their soul, which was closer to God than anyone else. The bones, the emblem of mortality and of a completed passage to the otherworld, were hidden inside of the unspoilt body of the saint. The extraordinary individual attested the connection of a supernatural power with the physical principle of life. If there was a transgression of worldly boundaries it was not to bring danger, the devil or other evil creatures in the human society, but to confirm a total communion between the physical reality and the spiritual one, where the bodily surface did not conceal, but manifested the blessed soul. So during 1694 in Puglia the corpse of the venerable Chiara d'Amato remained unburied for two days, while a barber bled her arm, so that the devotees could collect and preserve her blood. The liquid could be also taken during the life of religious people which showed the signs of a future sanctity. In 1623 in the town of Lecce a woman, Lucretia Petrarola, took some of Bernardino Realino's blood after he had

[468] Piero Camporesi, *La carne impassibile*, p. 41
[469] Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Wonderful Blood*, pp.112-131
[470] Piero Camporesi, *La carne impassibile*, p. 67

fallen, hurting himself. The blood conserved in an ampoule remained fresh as if still sealed in a healthy, sanguine complexion.[471]

The permanent efficacy of the bodily liquid is demonstrated by the miracles of the liquefaction of the blood relic, concentrated especially, but not exclusively in the region of Naples. The alleged miracle, still considered true by the Catholic Church, works in this way: the dark substance, contained in an ampoule and believed to be the saint's blood, periodically melt, losing its normal coagulated state. Even more wonderful is its consequent solidification, back to the previous condition.[472] The most famous blood relic that liquefies is that of Saint Gennaro, the patron saint of Naples. Gennaro was a bishop of Benevento, who was beheaded in Pozzuoli at the beginning of the fourth century, during the persecution of Diocletianus. His blood relic appeared about one thousand years later in Naples.[473] According to a source of the early eighteenth century the relic, consisting of the blood and the remains of the skull, were kept inside a golden and silver bust representing the saint. It was believed that the liquefaction happened when the blood, which was hard and coagulated, was placed in front of the skull: then looking at it, it started to flow as if just released from the living body. When the blood did not liquefy as expected, or did so unseen by the people, it was a sign the something sinister had occurred in the town, such as the spread of the plague. Another cause for the hardening of the blood or the failure of its melting could be the presence of a heretical person close to it.[474]

During the seventeenth century an important event was connected to the miracle of the blood. On the 16th of December in 1631, the relic liquefied while Vesuvio, Naples' volcano, was erupting. The population interpreted the coincidence as a sign of the benevolence and the protection of the saint, who through his blood was alerting the town of the natural calamity. From then onwards the 16th of December became one of the official date of the liquefaction. The blood which flowed during the eruption was not just that of the saint. While the relics were brought to the church of Nostra Signora del Carmine, friars and common people followed it, shoeless, in a

[471] David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch*, p. 189

[472] For a general work on blood relics in Italy see: Giovanni Battista Alfano, Antonio Amitrano, *Notizie storiche e osservazioni sulle reliquie di sangue dei martiri e dei santi confessori e asceti che si conservano in Italia e particolarmente in Napoli.* (Napoli: Arti grafiche Adriana, 1951)

[473] See: Giovanni Battista Alfano, Antonio Amitrano, *Il miracolo di S. Gennaro: documentazione storica e scientifica*. (Napoli: Scarpati, 1924)

[474] Camillo Tutini, *Memorie Istoriche della Vita, Miracoli e Culto di San Gianuario Martire. Vescovo di Benevento, e Principal Protettore della città di Napoli*. (Napoli: Printed by Michele Luigi Muzio, 1710), pp. 198-199

procession, bringing crosses on the shoulders, crying and lamenting loudly and beating themselves in order to bleed. Tears, blood and prayers, linked with the intercession of the patron saint and of the Holy Virgin, had the function of moving God to piety, obtaining his forgiveness for the sinful conduct of Naples' inhabitants. As the volcano's activity was the evidence of God's rage towards humanity, the blood poured from the relic and from the tortured bodies of the devotees represented the desire of the soul to be cleansed by mortal guilt.[475]

Another significant blood relic was that of Saint Nicola from Tolentino, which gave protection to several Italian towns and to some convents in the south west of the country among which Saint Agustine Major in Naples and San Giovanni in Carbonara. Nicola is a medieval saint, who died at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The legend said that during 1345 a friar cut one of the arms from the corpse to bring it to Germany, his home country, as a protection. The body had to be completely dried up at the time, but miraculously blood came out from the severed arm and the friar filled a cup with it. During 1510 when Julius II was the Pope, blood came out from the right arm and this was lately interpreted as a premonition for the misfortunes of Christianity and the shame brought to the Church by Luther in 1517. Blood flowed out again in 1570, 1574 and 1594, indicating the Turkish menace, while in 1625, 1641 and 1645 the miraculous blood poured from the left arm.[476] In the year 1698 when the blood flowed from both the arms in September and October, there happened two great calamities: in the south of Italy Vesuvio erupted stones, ash and lava, while in the north, in the town of Turin, lightning accidentally hit gunpowder magazines, causing a violent explosion and a great fire. The bleeding relic functioned both as a premonition sign, as in the case of Saint Gennaro's blood, and as a symbol of the healing powers of the saint, who was believed to have cured several diseases, both physical and spiritual.[477]

It is important to clarify that blood-relics were not considered more powerful than other parts of deceased saints, but the abnormal behaviour of blood inside these dead bodies showed their extraordinary nature. In this regard the story of Nicola da

[475] Camillo Tutini, *Memorie Istoriche della Vita, Miracoli e Culto di San Gianuario Martire*, pp. 61-68. Vittorio Paliotti, *San Gennaro. Storia di un culto, di un mito, dell'anima di un popolo.* (Milano: Rusconi, 1983), p. 162

[476] *Storia della Vita, canonizzazione, sangue, panellini, e prodigi di S.Nicola da Tolentino. Tratta puramente da legittimi documenti da un Religioso Agostiniano della Congregazione di S.Gio a Carbonara.* (Napoli: Stamperia Simoniana, 1768), pp. 175-190, 147-148, 153-154

[477] *Storia della Vita, canonizzazione, sangue, panellini, e prodigi di S.Nicola da Tolentino*, pp. 164-165, 239-335

Tolentino is significant: the fourteenth-century friar did not look for the blood, but for the arm of the saint. Yet it is the wonderful and rich flux of the fluid that attests to the divine potency contained in the corpse.

It is worth noting that the female body stereotype, which I have described regarding witchcraft accusations, and in some narratives of medieval mystics, is not pertinent in the case of relics and the corporeal status of saints. Relics belonged both to male and female saints, the divine could be hosted and experienced by both the genders. Rescued and washed by the saviour's blood every kind of body could nurture the sacred. As has been discussed in the third chapter, bleeding was an acknowledged healing practice in the context of early modern medical theories. Also, natural periodical bleedings were welcomed and, in certain cases, men were supposed to experience vicarious menstruation that equated them with women in the monthly process of discharge. Despite these remarks, the connection between bodies and blood was gendered in both witchcraft and medical beliefs. There was the vision of an unbounded maternal female body through which blood flowed bringing both life and health, for example in the form of milk, or sickness in the form of polluted humours. Nevertheless, when the attention is concentrated on the substance itself, the blood, these theories are challenged. According to the religious thought every person's blood, was rescued by Christ' sacrifice, as every corrupted blood attracted demons. The difference did not rely in male or female blood, but in the capacity of certain bodies to show the fluid's potency. In the case of relics, belonging to dead people, the gender problem disappeared, in the same way in which no special attention was directed towards the gender of the vampire, another special dead. Blood appeared as the sacred liquid, the magical object whose power overwhelmed the drying process of death. Showing the immanence of the divine inside the natural world the importance of relics was denied in Protestant contexts and believed as a sign of God in the Catholic ones.

Among the relics preserved in different Italian towns, there was also one which had a prominent importance and which was at the centre of a long theological debate: the precious blood of Christ that spilled from his body as he agonized on the cross. The blood from the lateral wound on Christ's chest was conserved in the town of Mantova, where it had been brought by the soldier Longino, who suffered his martyrdom there, being beheaded in the suburb of Cappadocia. Longino was the name of the soldier who pierced the crucified Jesus and, consequently converted to

Christianity. He took some of the holy blood and went to Mantova, becoming the first apostle and martyr of the town. The tradition was recognized and approved by Pope Gregory XIII during the foundation of S.Barbara Church in 1562. In 1608, during the celebrations for the marriage of his son, Prince Francesco, with Margherita from Savoja, Don Vincenzo institutionalized the Order of the Blood of Jesus Christ, said also the Order of the Knights of the Saviour. During the plague in 1630 the relic was carried in a penitential procession in the streets of the town, but it had no healing effect.[478]

The debate, which began in medieval times, concentrated on the possibility of the presence of Jesus' blood on earth after his Resurrection, when his human person had been completely absorbed and immersed in the divine one. Those who asserted the reality of the relic referred to the writings of the thirteenth century theologian Saint Tommaso d'Aquina, where this eventuality was not denied. The blood poured from the cross was seen as totally material, detached from the divinity of the Father. It also exemplified Christ's compassion for humanity, which through this mortal remain inspired feelings of devotion and charity.[479] The problem of the material presence of the divinity in the human world resembles that of the devil incarnate in the context of witchcraft accusations, though the reasons at the base of the two beliefs were slightly different. In theological terms, the devil could not enter a human or animal form because his power was not comparable with the godly one; it could not perform miracles and depended on the divine will. By contrast Christ's mortal remains stood at the centre of the conflict between the body and the soul, both enlivened by the blood. The body was the place where the supernatural and the human met, but, in the symbolism of the blood, and of the substance that it carried, the soul, the two spheres mingled, the otherworldly life was defined by the same ideas which shaped the actual one. In the holy relics there was the manifestation of the overwhelmed frailty of the body, although the evidence was still a tangible, physical one.

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[478] Federigo Amadei, *Difesa dell'Antica Umana Tradizione in Mantova, Contro i Critici, che contendono a questa Città la Reliquia, del Sangue Laterale del Redentore e l'Altra di S.Longino ivi decapitato nella contrada di Cappadocia. Con alcune storiche notizie spettanti Mantova*. (Mantova, 1748), pp. 3-7; Francesco Agazzi, *Saggio Storico sull'Insigne Reliquia del Preziosissimo Sangue di Gesù Cristo. Che si venera nel sotterraneo della R.Basilica di S.Andrea di Mantova. Pubblicato in occasione del suo solenne trasporto nel nuovo altare.* (Mantova: Stamperia Della R. Accademia, 1820), pp. 22-25

[479] Federigo Amadei, *Difesa dell'Antica Umana Tradizione in Mantova*, pp. 32-33; Gasparo Asiani, *Istoria del Sangue Tratto dal Costato di Gesù Cristo per Longino. Mentre pendeva in Croce, e per lui portato a Mantova*. (Mantova: presso i figliuli di Francesco Osanna Stampatori Ducali, 1609), pp. 50-51

6.7 Blood, magic and the sacred in Catholic world

The sacred and the demonic, which were both running in the blood, employing it to save or destroy, heal or waste, nurtured and confused the popular mind, in which the spiritual dimension more than a detached and far finality, became the language of interpreting the world. We need to reconsider the story of the old English man which spoke of his soul as a bone hidden in the body, that we have retold in the fourth chapter. Notwithstanding the religious schism and the different approach to magic between Protestant countries and Catholic ones, we meet in Italy the same notions in popular belief, but in this case nurtured by a church which still accepted the miracle. The cosmology and the theories described by a miller from the north-east of Italy, is in this regard, relevant. Domenico Scandella, said Menocchio, had been arrested for his heretical beliefs at the end of the sixteenth century, and consequently burnt at stake. During the interrogations in his words emerged obscure popular elements, coming from a lost oral tradition, but deeply influenced by the religious books and the literature which he had read and collected. His confused, but subversive, philosophical system was full of what Carlo Ginzburg has defined as a religious materialism, where the physical existence was filled with divinity. Regarding the soul he described it as not subject to the destiny of mundane things, but the substance which composed it was just a refined, nobler kind of matter.[480] Although the soul could go beyond the body, tempted by the devil, rescued by Christ and the saints, there was no immaterial principle in its origin. The world was the visible shape of God and the supernatural: powerful and dangerous spiritual forces hidden inside the skin and the veins.

The similarities between these two last stories, attest to a common pattern, which survived beyond the impact of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, although it underwent changes according to the diverging religious environments. Blood, was central in both Protestant and Catholic witchcraft themes, where it represented the link between the body and the soul, and embodied the dichotomy life-death. But while in England it was weakened and desacralised, constituting merely the vehicle for supernatural powers, in Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, it retained its

[480] Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500.* (Torino: Einaudi, 1999), pp. 80-82

magical properties. It also differently determined the abilities and the role of witches and other extraordinary human beings, such as saints, connected to it. We have seen that common people identified in the witch the supernatural enemy, which was feared more for the capacity to harm, than for the heretical association with the devil. Also they sought for their magical remedies and counter-measures to defeat the aggressor. In other words, people, despite religious and theological differences, continued to believe in the ability to harm, or to heal, that spread from bodies and physical nature. In Post-Reformation Catholic world such belief was strengthened by the recognised reality of sacred objects and individual inside the religious context. Henceforth we find the presence of bleeding saints, relics and miracles attributed to them, absent from English cases, which enforced the idea of a positive power to employ among the populace. English bleeding witches, scratched or sucked by familiar spirits, always indicated aggression and disruption, even when the finality was the annihilation of maleficent spells. On the contrary the blood of living and dead saints was interpreted as a gift, whose flowing was re-establishing a divine order, a communion with God. Beside the belief in relics, we find other examples apparently similar to Protestant ones, but in which human physicality had a more prominent role. It is the case of witches, that, as we have said, directly influenced other bodies, but it is maybe more evident when we consider love magic and potions in which bodily parts and blood were largely used, and that was absent from the early modern English world. All this is telling us about an original complex of theories, regarding blood and corporeal potency that survived, almost unchanged, in Catholic countries during the early modern age and that went beyond witchcraft accusation and trials. It was based on a certain perception of bodies, which did not consider them only as the easy targets of the devil's work, thanks to the religious and medical ideas connected to them, but as the centre itself of an extraordinary magic potency.

Conclusion

In the movie "The Village" by director M. Night Shyamalan the mental-retarded Noah Percy, after he attempted to murder his rival in love, cries hysterically to his mother "Bad colour! Bad, bad colour!", indicating the red of his own shirt, all soaked in blood. The village is isolated by woods, culturally severed from the rest of the world. Red is also the colour of the forbidden berries and flowers, which can be found in the forest inhabited by alleged hidden creatures with long, sharp nails, a detail that once more recalls the capacity to hurt, tear, and shed blood. Red indicates danger, the need to be safely enclosed: the people in their village, the living fluid inside the body. We find again the correspondence between the individual and the social body, and the metaphorical pregnancy of blood, the precious substance that must be sealed and conserved. Yet the aggressor is not always necessarily an outsider. It can be a member of the community, who embodies some special features: the mad boy in the out-of-time village of the movie or the witch, the satanic ally, back in early modern Europe. Thus blood becomes not just the colour of danger (and power), but also of fear, suggesting that margins are never completely definite. If beyond them there is the land of the "other", connotated by uncertainty, damnation, loss, its boundaries are transgressed in our bodies, where the inside is no safer than the outside.

The idea of the body, more than being natural evidence of life, is culturally built, reflecting the beliefs in which it is contextualized, but also retains disquieting qualities which belong to the physical world, beyond cultures and times. Expressing the corporeal transient state, blood is useful to explore the behaviour of people, the problems of identity and the precariousness of existence, represented by sickness, death and even the interference of supernatural beings. In this regard the presence of blood in early modern witchcraft beliefs resulted crucial to construct a hideous body that losing its human features became an invasive, menacing presence able to disrupt the life of the entire community. This work is the first one attempting an investigation of society through the blood theme in early modern Europe. Books on medieval blood by McCracken and Bildhauer focus mainly on texts and literature from France and Germany while Bynum's works on the perception of the body are settled in the specific field of the medieval religion. Dealing with the historical context of the witch-trials this thesis tried to widen the horizons, considering also the complex of popular ideas which constituted a fundamental part of witchcraft beliefs. As several

historians has discussed, it is often problematic to distinguish learned views from the popular ones in the pattern of the accusations.[481] Adopting a different approach, grounded in the role of the blood and the body in the system of beliefs, it has been possible to argue more extensively to which degree the two views merged. While the learned views emphasised the spiritual value of blood, in popular belief the physical reality of the fluid was central. This meant that blood was interpreted by learned people and theologians mainly as a channel for the soul and the forces which influenced it. It became the tangible proof of deviation and the expression of a Christian reversed symbolism in diabolical witchcraft. The Protestant idea of the witch's mark and of a compact signed in blood implied the removal of the baptismal seal and the contamination of the blood washed by Christ's sacrifice in which the soul was contained.

These themes were present also in popular beliefs, as the confessions of European witches confirm. But the allegiances with the devil, the pact, the mark were inscribed in gruesome narratives in which the focus shifted from heresy and the damnation of the soul, to the visible evidence of a physical loss. Witches received their mark through a corporeal attack by the Devil that deprived them of physical energy and often of bodily fragments. When we consider *maleficium*, what witches were accused of *doing*, popular ideas overwhelmed theological ones, which belonged to the context of persecutions. Here we find a witch who, through magical skills, impaired the world of physical existence. Provoking disease and waste, the aggressor drained bodies of their vitality. The problem of the soul, religiously understood, was marginal.

Thus it can be said that the cultural theme of witchcraft depended on the idea of a supernatural aggression that occurred through blood. On this basic theme acted theological speculation which transformed witchcraft tradition into a crime that had to be prosecuted not because it caused death or sickness, but because it did so in the name of the Devil. For learned people blood attracted the Devil because it constituted an entrance to the Christian soul and to the religious/spiritual order of society that he wanted to disrupt. Yet, although we have briefly hinted that witches worked on their victims' bodily fluids, it is not clear why blood should attract witches in popular notions of *maleficium*. We have defined evil magic as a supernatural activity. So the witch had some features that identified him or her with supernatural beings that

[481] See for example: Robert Kiekhefer, *European Witch Trials*; James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*; Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*

craved blood, such as fairies, vampires and finally werewolves which, different from the other two did not employ vital fluids, but simply shed them. The relation between these creatures and witches is a well known one, but it has been mostly discussed by focusing on the magical skills or the malevolent nature which characterised both. This thesis has tried to highlight the similar physical basis that explained the aggressive behaviour of these creatures, beyond their moral qualities. It is, in fact, in their bodies, dried, swollen, beastly, that the signs of their *otherness* and the seed of their blood-lust are recognizable. Fairies and vampires especially had an explicit link with the soul that pushed them towards the fluid enclosing it. Demonized in the context of Christian religion, in which their interference with the world was explained as the devil's work, supernatural beings were allegedly after the human soul to destroy or weaken it. But popular views of the soul saw it as the bodily vital principle that had to be defended from otherworldly creatures, either establishing with them relations of good-neighbourhood, as in the case of fairies, or destroying their physical remains, as with vampires. From this discussion another conclusive point emerges regarding the witch: he or she should be characterised by both an evil nature and an extraordinary body that nourished a specific witch-stereotype.

The witch's body and magical ideas on blood presented significant changes in their representation according to their different religious contextualization. The impact of Reformation caused a change in the perception of the witch and of magic more generally. Some Protestant and Catholic theologians agreed on the impossibility of magic. Witches were only instruments of the devil and his delusions. Yet in Protestant countries the progressive desacralisation of the natural world nurtured anxieties and fears which enforced the need to root out witchcraft through harsh persecutions. By contrast in Catholic countries the presence of the sacred that could be revealed in the physical reality, and the recognized efficacy of wonderful remedies administrated by the church, influenced the number of the accusations that ended in prosecutions, which was relatively low. Although this is well known, witchcraft historiography still lacks a comparative analysis of the two different confessional European contexts regarding the persecution. Yet the different religious attitudes influenced ideas of the witch and on the power ascribed to bodies and nature, and to have a better comprehension of the meaning of blood in early modern Europe it is important to compare them. Blood was apparently deprived of its own potency inside Protestant beliefs, where it mainly figured as a positive substance sealing the soul

when inside the body, while it expressed danger when issuing out, as in narratives regarding the mark. To better understand the blood ideas in Protestant cultures, I chose to focus on England, where, due to its relative distance from the continent and the main context of witch-persecution, a good amount of significant popular beliefs survived. The belief in the familiar spirit, counter-magic practices such as scratching and the use of witch-bottles, all testify to a magical value of blood in witchcraft. The former was a hybrid of religious features (the mark, the pact) and popular ones (the demonic pet), that prove the importance of blood as a connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. We can also recognize the popular element in the activity of the familiar. Theological ideas on the mark do not attest a specific use of the drawn blood by the devil. By contrast the familiar spirit was supposed not simply to mark the witch, but also to suck her or his body. This belief is an important basis of Deborah Willis' discussion on the witch as a bad mother, whose nurturing blood fed evil, dangerous beings. Counter-magic ideas also suggest in a more explicit way, the employment of blood as a source of power. Yet something was somehow missing: the scratched witch's blood was let out without any further specified use, witch-bottles were filled with urine, another bodily liquid, linked to blood, but less evocative. In the distorted maternal relation between the familiar spirit and the witch the effective power of blood remained implicit. To know the whole story, inscribed in the fluid, we need to look at Catholic countries, where blood and bodies were intrinsically powerful. So for example in the Senese cases explored by Di Simplicio the witch appears as a person endowed with a natural capacity to harm and attract evil forces. Looking at Italian and Spanish popular magic the first thing we note is the presence of love magic, which was much less evident in the Protestant world. Love-magic recipes had among their ingredients menstrual blood as well as other bodily fluids, which were used to bind a lover. We also find other extraordinary creatures or 'objects' that characterise the capacity of blood and bodies to manifest the supernatural positively. These last were the bodies of bleeding saints and mystics, and also their mortal remains: the relics amongst which blood was central. Relics and saints belonged to both the imagery of Catholic theologians and common people, although the former consider them mainly as the physical revelation of God's presence, while the latter were interested in the magical effects and cures produced by their blood. Saints were morphologically comparable to witches, that is, they displayed a transgressive relationship between blood and their bodies. The fluid

escaped its corporeal margins, often violently, yet while in the case of witches the aim was a union with the devil, mystics or saints manifested the divine, aiming to imitate Christ's passion. They healed, where the witches wasted.

It is possible to conclude, then, that both in Reformation and Counter-Reformation contexts blood could convey the supernatural inside the human world and establish a link between the spiritual and the corporeal dimension. Yet, while 'inside blood', blood which stayed within bodily margins, was generally considered positive, 'outside blood', which transgressed the body, aroused different reactions and ideas. In Protestant contexts it was negatively seen, used to harm and cause injuries, though, as in scratching, the target was the witch. In Catholic countries, however, blood could equally waste and heal. The body was settled in a universe of magical correspondences where the supernatural and ordinary life could not only conflict but also collaborate. Thus the blood theme in a comparative context helps not only to identify popular and learned notions, but also a common complex of theories concerning the body which survived across Europe, despite the religious differences.

Beyond the magical context, blood beliefs were also rooted in the medical theories of early modern Europe that were common to both Protestants and Catholics. Although Galenic humoral theory has been employed in studies witchcraft, especially to discuss the relation between melancholy and the devil's delusion, this is the first attempt to explain witchcraft beliefs using medical ideas on sickness and health. This requires focusing on the body itself and the processes that were going on inside blood, comparing the magical, wasting effects due to *maleficium*, with those of natural consumptive diseases. Galenic ideas, which remained influential up to the eighteenth century, reduced the conflict between health and sickness by the opposition between good and bad blood and their capacity to affect and contaminate each other. Bad and good blood were not exclusively determined by physical factors. Feelings, moral attitudes and imagination could affect the state of humours, thanks to the action of the spirits, the intermediaries between the body and the soul carried by the blood. Feelings such as envy, fear, anger and desperation played an important role also in witchcraft accusations, as it has been pointed out by historians.[482] Considering them in the medical ideas concerning blood it is possible to see how they worked effectively inside the bodies of victim and aggressors, establishing moral and physical

[482] See for example Lyndal Roper, *Witch-craze*, pp.81-83 ; Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft and power in early modern England"

connections between them. Spiritual and corporeal dimensions interacted and contagious sickness or health were as concrete as demons or supernatural beings that could delude a person's imagination, taking advantage of corrupted humours. The word spirit was in fact indicating both a superhuman being and a substance of a very subtle consistence enclosed in the blood. Furthermore, religion and medicine were not detached spheres of knowledge. Disease was primarily interpreted as the result of sin. In this view it was equally admitted that demons worked more easily on weak and sick individuals than on healthy ones. Thus the attention was directed to the complexion, the quality of the bodies more than to the external origin of sickness. Medical theories also tell us something more about the different values of blood from the Protestant perspective as opposed to the Catholic one. In a context where the divine was not included in the natural world, good blood could not produce anything beyond health, while bad blood attracted devils, expressing the fears and desperation of people alone in front of a distant God. In contrast, Catholic thought still allowed people to recognize the integral power of blood which enclosed the moral and physical qualities of the individual and could be transmitted from one person to another.

The need to maintain the purity of the body, connected to the properties of bad blood, are well represented in ideas concerning menstruation, in which the healthy process of discharge was linked to the expelled, polluted matter that possessed dangerous, extraordinary properties.

Popular views of the body did not always correspond to learned ones. Popularized medical theories, recipes and cures based on the magical properties of things and bodies, and healing methods suggested by healers and empirics mixed in folk-medicine, in order to give people practical remedies to fight diseases rather than philosophical speculation on the body and the humoral balance. So, while bleeding was considered, for example, the panacea for every sickness by physicians, because it let out spoiled humours, common people, although practicing it, saw 'outside blood' as a blood-loss, which weakened the body. They scratched the witch to deprive her or him of power, though then they did not employ the obtained blood. On the contrary, Catholic bleeding saints, recalling Christ' sacrifice, were welcomed because on one side they lost the emblem of the mortal life which entrapped the soul, and on the other their blood washed the sins of the whole community. In both cases the predominant image was that of a loss of physical vitality.

In this map of the ideal aggressor I have constructed, we can now assert that, considering religious and medical beliefs, witchcraft acted through a contrast of blood forces, the witch's one that should be spoiled and weak, versus the victim's one, full of potency. This kind of body apparently points us towards the early modern gender stereotype, where the witch was the anti-mother, old and female. By wasting life the witch was inverting the meaning and the role of motherhood: where the mother lactates to nourish newborn children, the witch sucks them to death, or, in the case of the English witch, gives her own blood, which has not been changed into healthy milk, to demonic spirits. The female body was also naturally transgressing, through her regular excretions of both menstrual blood and milk, an image of an ideal close-up body, where life and soul were concealed and protected. Age was another fundamental factor. The elderly were seen as either full of corrupted humours, which they were no more able to expel, or featured by dried bodies, where blood and the necessary moisture were almost totally consumed by the vital heat of the spirits. They were next to death and they turned this deadly power against the community. The image of the old woman strengthened this idea, because no longer able to menstruate she could not discharge the excessive spoiled blood, which naturally abounded in the inferior female body. Through these corrupted humours disease could spread outside (escaping for example from the eyes in the form of vapours), and the devil found an entrance to the human imagination. Yet the aim of this thesis was not to confirm but to challenge this stereotype. The problematic relation between gender and blood discussed by McCracken, who focused on the examples of gendered blood, and Bildhauer who, on the contrary, pointed out the transgressive behaviour of the fluid inside gender, bodily and henceforth social margins, is here discussed within blood itself. In this thesis I hope to have demonstrated that danger and power depended not only on the location of blood and its movements outside and inside the body, but also on its inner qualities. Transgressive bad blood was in this regard very different from the transgressive good one, and also differently acknowledged according to different religious contexts.

Blood symbolism is no less significant when we consider young female or male witches. It also shows how the gender stereotype fails when considering extraordinary beings, such as vampires and Catholic saints. Death or the divine power nullified gender differences, highlighting the potency of the body itself. Though the

female body seemed more suitable for witchcraft, every individual could manifest the ambivalence of blood, embodying disease or health, moral corruption or goodness.

Finally, beyond showing the existence of a social and religious order reflected and subverted by the body, blood provides the possibility to attempt a reading of the unwritten story of people's feelings connected to the ideal scapegoat, the witch. In this regard anthropological comparisons have been useful in this work. As I pointed out in the introduction, I mainly used the theories of René Girard and Mary Douglas to highlight patterns of violence and exclusion inside a society and their relation to bodily boundaries and transgression. Then I took examples from modern pre-industrial cultures when necessary and possible. Anthropology cannot be of much help when considering the specific religious and medical contexts. There is no working comparison, in fact, for the value of Christ's blood or the humoral theory, which were distinctive of early modern European culture. On the contrary ethnographic material worked well for shared worldwide ideas, such as the witch-figure and the capacity to harm by magic, or beliefs regarding the activities of supernatural beings and theories on menstruation. In these cases it helped to identify in the body the source of fear and aggression which in early modern Europe became the grounds for the diabolical theories that lay behind the witch-persecution.

Thus what this work has tried to prove is that the reality of witchcraft did not rely in religious deviance or gender theories, but in the power of the body to convey the emotional world of people, the pain and the disquiet experienced when confronted with human natural limits, of which witchcraft beliefs were a profound early modern manifestation.

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