

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Understanding the Female Body in Early Modern England

Pojetí ženského těla v raně
novověké Anglii

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Anglistika – amerikanistika

Praha, Květen 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc. For her assistance and support during my BA studies. She gave me various ideas, which helped to create my thesis. I would also like to thank my family and my dear friend Alena Novotná for their support and care.

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feminita, tělo, raně novověká anglická literatura, raně novověká anglická kultura

KEY WORDS

Early Modern English literature, Early Modern English culture, femininity, body

THESIS ABSTRACT:

The BA thesis will concentrate on the comprehension of the female body in early modern England, dating from 1400 to 1789, with a focus on the woman's reproductive system which was clearly connected to the understanding of her as a feminine being in a socio-cultural context.

Firstly, I will analyze the representation of women in English translations of the Bible, where woman is classified as an inferior being to man. The reason is that God first created Adam and from his side came Eve, which leads to an interesting analogy later discussed by Thomas Laqueur and defined by the theory of one sex model. Adopting this concept for my own analysis I shall argue that woman was biologically regarded as an "imperfect" man, therefore her organs were seen as the same as man's but incomplete. Because Eve was the first sinner, the purpose of her reproductive system, meaning mainly menstruation and labour pains, was seen as a type of punishment. It had a great impact in the cultural sphere, meaning that female sexuality conjured fear and repulsion, yet had an undeniable allure.

The discussion will continue with the description of how the female body was seen medically. Human constitution was derived from the Greek physician Claudius Galenus, whose understanding of anatomy and medicine was principally influenced by the theory of humorism, which worked with the idea of four bodily humours. Men's bodies were hotter and women's colder. The cold disposition was not very advantageous to woman's position in the world of men, because it functioned as an explanation to various reproductive issues. For example, the birth of a girl was explained by insufficient heat in the womb. Heat was seen as a source of vigour, strength, courage and intellect, which thus again meant that men were naturally superior to women.

One of the most interesting parts of the female body was the womb. It was seen as a separate organ with a will, therefore woman was wholly at its mercy. Combined with predominantly cold humour it only further weakened her. Many physical and psychological

problem were attributed to it, particularly such female problems as irrationality, uncontrollable passion, hysteria and womb disease, and other diseases which will be paid attention to. It's periodical cleaning called menstruation was seen as something polluted and dangerous. As a result, woman was constantly at the mercy of her own body and any disbalance could severely change her life. She was perceived as someone who is not in control of herself and therefore must be governed by a man.

The analysis of the discourse of the body is essential in order to understand what it meant to be a woman. For example, medical books seem to be much influenced with underlying socio-cultural assumptions about the differences between the sexes and thus they participated in the construction of a proper femininity. Medical and literary works influenced each other, as when menstruation was referred to as "flowers". Such metaphorical ways of description and their cultural implications will also be a part of my analysis. I plan to incorporate various types of documents such as drama, poetry, correspondence, medical books or midwife handbooks in my analysis.

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá chápáním ženského těla v raně novověké Anglii mezi lety 1400 a 1700 se zaměřením na ženský reprodukční systém, který souvisel s chápáním ženy jako feminní bytosti ve společensko-kulturním kontextu.

Tato práce se bude nejprve zabírat anglickým překladem Bible, ve které byla žena vyobrazena jako podřízená muži. Důvod byl ten, že Bůh nejprve stvořil Adama a z jeho žebra poté Evu. Tato myšlenka byla pak později rozvedena Thomasem Laquerem, který na jejímž základě vymyslel teorii modelu jednoho pohlaví. Tato teorie bude zakomponována do mé práce. Argumentuji, že žena byla biologicky chápána jako nedokonalý muž a proto byly její orgány viděny v analogii s mužskými orgány, nicméně jako jejich nedokonalé verze. Protože Eva byla první hříšnicí, smyslem ženského reprodukčního systému, tj. menstruace a porodních bolestí, bylo ženu potrestat. Tato myšlenka měla velký vliv na kulturní sféru; ženská sexualita budila strach a odpor, přesto byla nepopíratelně přitažlivá.

Následovat bude popis ženského těla z raně novověkého lékařského pohledu. Tehdejší lidská anatomie byla odvozena od řeckého lékaře Claudia Galéna, jehož pojetí těla bylo ovlivněno zejména humorální teorií, která popisovala tělo skládající se ze čtyř tekutin. Mužská těla měla převahu teplých tekutin, proto byla teplejší a ženská měla převahu studených tekutin a tak byla studenejší. Studenost byla pro ženu ve světě mužů nevýhodná, jelikož jí byly vysvětlovány různorodé problémy reprodukčního systému. Například narození dívky se vysvětlovalo nedostatkem tepla v děloze. Teplo bylo chápáno jako zdroj energie, síly, odvahy a intelektu, což přirozeně vedlo k tomu, že byl muž ženě nadřazený.

Jednou z nejzajímavějších částí ženského těla byla děloha. Byla chápána jako samostatný orgán s vlastním vědomím a tak jí byla žena vydána na milost. V kombinaci s její přirozenou studeností byla tak neustále oslabovaná. S dělohou bylo spojeno značné množství fyzických a psychologických problémů, například typicky ženská iracionalita, nekontrolovatelná vášně, hysterie, syndrom putující dělohy a jiné. Pravidelné čištění dělohy,

menstruace, bylo viděno jako něco nečistého a nebezpečného. A tak byla žena neustále vydávána napospas svému tělu a jakákoliv nerovnováha jí mohla ohrozit na životě. Byla viděna jako někdo, kdo nemá kontrolu sám nad sebou a proto musí být pod mužským dohledem.

Analýza diskurzu ženského těla je důležitá pro pochopení toho, co to znamenalo být ženou. Například lékařské knihy byly značně ovlivněny socio-kulturními domněnkami o ženském těle a tak se podílely na konstrukci femininity. Lékařská a literární díla se navzájem ovlivňovala, například synonymem pro menstruaci bylo anglické slovo *flowers* (květiny). Podobné metaforické popisy a jejich kulturní důsledky budou také součástí mé práce. Předmětem analýzy budou rozličná díla: dramata, poezie, korespondence, lékařské knihy, a manuály pro porodní báby.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the tale “The Wife of Bath” from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, the wife tells a story which refers to the Aesopian fable of the painting of the lion. A man and a lion are looking at a painting of a man killing a lion. The lion says that if a member of his species had painted the picture, the outcome would be different. The moral of this story that is relevant to this thesis is that men have always painted themselves in the dominant role throughout history. It teaches that the truth of any picture or a story has more to do with the prejudices and predilections of the author rather than with the actual reality. The history has always been masculine and the Middle Ages, the times of great inequality between genders, are the proof.

Nowadays, menstruation and other processes connected with the female body are seen as a matter of little or no importance. In my analysis, I hope to broaden our understanding of how the Early Modern English society functioned in terms of its perspective towards the female body, how the superstitions and beliefs influenced the everyday lives of women and the relations between the genders.

I will concentrate my analysis on works from the Early Modern period, i.e. from 1500 to the French Revolution in 1789. I consider the events which happened during this period to be most influential for the construction of femininity as living conditions improved and people could concentrate on intellectual matters. It was the period of the English Renaissance, Reformation and the Civil War and was marked by the boom of English drama, poetry and music. The change from Catholicism to Protestantism significantly shaped contemporary political, religious and cultural life.

It is my intent to show that the female reproductive system and its understanding were construed on the basis of Biblical teachings and then used to justify women’s submission. I will analyse the Early Modern understanding of female bodies from a theological and medical point of view. I will especially pay close attention to the female reproductive system

and the various diseases connected with it. I will attempt to construct a picture of an Early Modern English woman, how she was viewed by society and how she saw herself. I shall support my findings with excerpts from the Bible, medical practitioners' books, various conduct books and midwifery guides. I will also provide literary examples from writers and journalists from the works of the Early Modern era.

2 RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

2.1 First sin

The life of a woman in early modern England was difficult right from the beginning. With Christianity having been a part of everyday life for centuries and subsequent developments in medical theory partly derived from the Book of Genesis, she was sentenced to a life spent in subordination. Women in the seventeenth century “were never allowed to forget that they were the daughters of Eve, that they carried her guilt”¹. The Genesis myth of creation states:

21. And the LORD God caused a deepe sleepe to fall vpon Adam, and hee slept; and he tooke one of his ribs, and closed vp the flesh in stead thereof.

23. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shalbe called woman, because shee was taken out of man.²

16. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorowe and thy conception. In sorow thou shalt bring forth children: and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and hee shall rule ouer thee.³

These three biblical passages served as evidence for a woman's secondary status. The shape of the rib taken out of Adam was proof of her crooked nature. Women were blamed for all the sorrows of humankind. The fact that Adam had already named all the beasts before she

¹ N. H. Keeble, *The Cultural Identity of a Seventeenth Century Woman: A Reader* (Routledge, 1994), 10.

² Genesis 2: 21-23.

³ Genesis 3:16.

was created served as proof of his intellectual superiority and women's subordination to men. A woman was generally seen as the weaker being, inferior and in need of masculine guidance⁴. Her place was in the domestic area. A man was to rule his estate and the woman was to keep house. As a consequence, her identity was lost within marriage and she had to devote herself to fulfilling her husband's wishes and to lose her own will in his. However, there were frequent diatribes against women who did not live up to this ideal, which testifies to the fact that reality was often different, even far removed from this ideal. One can recall Shakespeare's famous character from *The Taming of the Shrew* – the sharp-tongued Katherine who initially defies the required role of an obedient daughter.

There are various instances of female inequality and subordination which can be found in poetry. One such example is in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. His work shows that his mind-set is based on an inequality between the two genders:

Severe but in true filial freedom placed;
Whence true authority in men; though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valour formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him:

...

As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
And by her yielded, by him best received,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.⁵

The authority here is placed into the man's hand. As was the medieval practice, a woman's physical appearance was a direct mirror of her own soul. The ideal woman was a beautiful one, with a modest pride, subjected to a man and adorning the inner God in him. The implication here is that the man is her the link to God. And as mankind is subjected to God, so must be the woman to the man as he is made in His likeness. However, Milton's view of women is not

⁴ Keeble, 1-2.

⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Penguin Classics, 2003) Book IV., 293-311.

strictly negative. He requires women to be submissive and modest, however, they should be led to subjection gently and carefully. Milton, therefore, agrees with the contemporary ideas but imposes them with more consideration.

2.2 Women's intellect and souls

As was previously stated, women were perceived as inferior beings to men. They were made in the image of man and thus they were subordinated to him. Philosophers and theologians even debated whether women had souls. In some medical textbooks, women were understood as contributing nothing to conception. Male seed was understood to give life and spirit and the female was a passive receptor, carrier and in fact, did not need a soul. Even the relationship between a husband and a wife was based on the same analogy of an active agent and passive recipient – the man represented the soul and woman the body. With his higher intellect he was to rule over the corporeal woman.

The question of souls was not a frequently discussed topic and in some cases it was not even meant seriously. There were some exceptions though. For example, John Donne who wrote that “we deny souls to others equal to them in all but speech”⁶ implying that even a serpent could speak if it had vocal cords. He complained that if women have “so many advantages and means to hurt” men, why do men “descend so much with the stream to allow them souls?”⁷ Donne argued that only men were made in the image of God and that a woman's connection to God was only indirect, therefore she, together with animals, who were not made in His image, could not have a soul. The female spiritual status could therefore be in some cases understood as doubtful, however, the majority of the population of England did still view women as having souls.

⁶ John Donne, *The Major Works* (United States: Oxford University Press, 1990) 141.

⁷ Donne, 141.

2.3 Female rationality

If a woman's spiritual status was by some considered problematic, so must have been her mental status. Human rationality was understood as an aspect of soul. If women did not have a soul, they also could not be rational. Some Early Modern female writers reacted to this idea with a more or less accepting attitude such as Margaret Cavendish, who at first wrote that "in Nature we have as clear an understanding as men"⁸ but then admitted that there was great difference between the two sexes and even went as far as to list some of the examples of female intellectual differences, such as that :

"...we have more wit than judgment... more courage than conduct, more will than strength, more curiosity than secrecy, more vanity than good housewifery, more complaints than pains, more jealousy than love, more tears than sorrow, more stupidity than patience, more beauty than constancy, more ill nature than good."⁹

However, there were also those who vehemently argued for female intellectual equality. Such is the case of Bathsua Makin, who states that it is a "barbarous custom to breed women low"¹⁰ and says that the reason why women are so mentally incapacitated is because they are not educated.

"...women ought to be brought up to a comely and decent carriage, to their needles, to neatness, to understand all those things that do particularly belong to their sex..."¹¹

She states that instead of letting women paint their faces and dress in pretty clothes, closer attention should be paid to the state of their knowledge and educating them but does not venture further than to make them proficient wives and mothers. Although in her *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* Makin adopts a male persona, she was, in reality, a

⁸ Keeble, 48.

⁹ Keeble, 48.

¹⁰ Keeble, 51.

¹¹ Keeble, 51.

woman, which again points to her anxiety that as a woman, she may not have been taken seriously because women were understood as intellectually underdeveloped.

2.4 Women's lives before and after the Reformation

There were two substantial intellectual and political revolutions that had an impact on women's lives during this period – humanism and the Reformation. Each of these meant a change in moral and public life. Firstly, a chaste marriage became more crucial for salvation than maintaining a woman's virginity, as it was before. Secondly, the family became a unit of ethical education, a system which had an essential influence on the individual's role in life. The male was established as the head of the religion in the house, which “replaced the wider constituency of the priest as the head of his parishioners.”¹²

These changes affected women in two ways. They became more enclosed in the domestic sphere, functioning as birth givers, educators and moral guides, and they also became partners to their husbands. They were invited to study the Bible in order to be successful mentors to their children. Next, there was more emphasis on the New Testament, specifically on the Pauline epistles. These epistles are the thirteen New Testament books which have the name Paul.¹³ Among other messages, they promoted a spiritual equality between husband and wife, which was needed in order to achieve salvation. However, the Protestant reading of Biblical texts during the Reformation insisted on personal interpretation and thus some understood these texts as advocating womanly submission and bodily inferiority. Womanly submission was for instance advocated by Martin Luther. As Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks state: “Although he disapproved of wife-beating, he did not categorically

¹² Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 10.

¹³ Sam O'Neal, “Overview: the Epistles of the New Testament,” *www.thoughtco.com*, Thoughtco, March 2017 <<https://www.thoughtco.com/overview-the-epistles-of-the-new-testament-363407> > 31.12.2017.

condemn it if no other means of discipline sufficed. Women were to be pious, quiet, and submissive.”¹⁴

Additionally, with the end of Catholicism in England also came the demise of various female saints, namely the removal of the Virgin Mary from churches and the closing of convents. It was a radical change as until then, Mary had been worshipped alongside the male images of Christ and God. Luther felt that she was “accorded much more esteem than she should be given or than she accounted to herself.”¹⁵ The Protestant views on Virgin Mary were not in fact negative, she was simply deemed to be receiving too much honour for being “only” the mother of Christ. It was seen as a case of idolatry. Additionally, Catholics saw Mary as not equal to God or Christ, but as a representative of noble virginity and maternity. Virginity was not preferred by protestants and thus with the closing of convents, the Protestant reformation constructed a newer, updated image of femininity; it confined women even more to the domestic sphere and although they were spiritually equal to men, they were in reality still in an inferior position.

One of the reasons why the value of virginity has declined and instead, a chaste marriage was preferred was simply demographic. After the Reformation, many Catholic families left their homeland in search of a land that would let them practice their Catholic beliefs. Therefore, England was in need of more citizens and one of the solutions was to introduce this new idea of chaste marriage which would help to secure more births. Additionally, Protestantism also allowed clergy to marry, which significantly reduced illegitimate births. The idea of chaste marriage meant that the husband and wife could have a sexual relationship, but with decency, modesty and self-control. Not only the wife, but also the husband had to be chaste. A chaste woman had to suppress all of the qualities associated with her as the sufferer of Eve’s sin.

¹⁴ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 11.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Festival Sermons of Martin Luther* (Michigan: Mark V Publications, 2005) 157.

Women were primarily understood as “carnal and deceitful, easily susceptible to pride, loquacious, and the source of the world’s problems.”¹⁶ They tempted men and if men lusted, it was their fault. If a woman chose celibacy, it would break the bond to the original sin. If protestants could not support virginity, they had to somehow promote chastity and therefore self-control. Any women that did not meet these requirements became inherently dangerous.

2.5 Women as witches

The increased value of women in the domestic realm also had an unfortunate side-effect. The changing of the view of the ideal woman from a virgin to a productive wife and mother had excluded women from any other roles.¹⁷ William Monter points out that:

Given the uncertain religious and political climate this restrictive definition of women’s roles within the rigid patriarchal social structure, led to expressions of misogynistic violence.¹⁸

He notes that both the fear of change and the loss of the feeling of security added to the anxiety of the period, which led to the highest rates of executions of women ever experienced in history: the witch-hunts and infanticide trials of the sixteenth century. Between 1560 and 1670 an astonishing number of 30 000 women were executed for witchcraft.¹⁹ Most of these women lived their lives outside of male control. The accused witches were mostly women past menopause, who generally lived alone near rural settlements. Similarly, those accused of killing their babies were almost exclusively unmarried women living in the city. The convictions were always based on little evidence (a fabricated testimony of a neighbour was deemed sufficient).²⁰

¹⁶ Melissa Hofmann, “Virginity And Chastity For Women In Late Antiquity, Anglo-Saxon England, and Late Medieval England: On The Continuity of Ideas,” *TCNJ Journal of Student Scholarship* 4 (2007): 2, < <https://joss.pages.tcnj.edu/files/2012/04/2007-Hofmann-Virginity.pdf> >, 30.12.2017.

¹⁷ Kimberly M. Radek-Hall, “Women from the Renaissance to Enlightenment,” *ivcc.edu*, 2017 < https://www2.ivcc.edu/gen2002/Women_from_the_Renaissance.htm > 31.12.2017.

¹⁸ Radek – Hall.

¹⁹ Radek - Hall.

²⁰ E. W. Monter, “Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil’s Handmaid: Women in the Age of Reformations,” (1998): 38, *readinglists.ucl.ac.uk* < <http://readinglists.ucl.ac.uk/items/768F0C73-6482-BB10-52AA-76C02093CDCA.html> >, 31.12.2017.

Some women were also persecuted because of their knowledge of herbs and medicine. They posed a threat to physicians as they could perform various procedures which were forbidden by law, such as abortions. However, the main reason for their persecution came out of a long process of institutionalisation. Every institution of power needs scapegoats. Various social, political or natural problems could always be blamed on witches such as crop-failure, disease or rebellion. It is no wonder that the regions with the highest social or political unrest were often those which had the greatest problem with witches. The reason why witches were mostly women was because of their questionable spiritual status as they were the daughters of Eve. Women's inherent over-sexuality also played a role. As it is stated in *Malleus Maleficarum*: "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable."²¹ These conflicts were not a problem of only this period but a culmination of hysterical persecutions over the centuries.

2.6 Female conduct

The Early Modern period saw a rise in conduct manuals and guides, which were meant to educate women on proper behaviour. They were written in the form of homilies, prayers or sermons. Their authors were both men and women; they became especially popular in the 18th century and later declined with the rise of the novel. Conduct literature was mostly addressed to men, who had the responsibility to govern their families as husbands, fathers or brothers and had to teach it to their children or wives. Other than keeping the house cleaned and well-stocked, a wife also had to display proper behaviour. She had to be submissive and obedient to her husband and to be a mentor to her children.

Conduct literature was classified into three subgenres: conduct manuals, conduct books and fictionalized forms.²² These manuals were mostly directed towards upper-class women and meant to teach them how to properly represent themselves and not interfere in their husbands'

²¹ Heinrich Kramer, James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (Ontario: Devoted Publishing, 1928) 41.

²²Věra Pálenská. "Seminar 3: Conduct Literature." British Women Writers, 10 Oct. 2011, Masaryk University: Faculty of Arts, Brno.

business.²³ It was also exhortative. It prescribed certain behaviour in the private and public sphere. The content was always structured, most usually divided into two parts. Firstly, it dealt with certain ideal feminine virtues, such as chastity, silence, obedience or humility. Secondly, it revolved around female roles such as those of a maid, wife, mother, widow and others.

It can thus be argued that the Early Modern female gender was a socio-cultural construct, fluid in its development over the years. It changed from the Catholic ideal of a virgin and mother to the Protestant idea of a chaste wife, productive mother and a moral guide. Kate Aughterson states:

Conduct literature is thereby among the most overtly ideological in this period. It exhorts women... to behave according to certain gendered preconceptions of feminine and masculine behavior and asks them to internalise that knowledge in terms of both internal and external compliance. It does so by constructing and reasserting the old dichotomy of women as virgin or whore, and in asserting a particular space for good women [the home] and bad women [the streets].²⁴

However, even though these manuals show what society wanted women to be, it does not mean that all of them actually behaved in this manner. Women in these books are portrayed as being in need of counsel, as beings that require male guidance to teach them the proper behaviour in all spheres of their life.

Some writers did not forget about Eve's curse. There are instances in various conduct books in which the woman is absurdly instructed to give up some kinds of food. Juan Luis Vives, a correspondent of Catherine of Aragon, wrote for her daughter *The instruction of a Christian woman*, a conduct book, which states: "Let their meal be mean and easy to get, neither not of itself, nor spiced with spices, nor delicate. And they ought to remember that our first

²³ Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Ideology of conduct: essays on literature and the history of sexuality* (Methuen, 1987) 7.

²⁴ Aughterson, 68.

mother for meat was cast out of paradise...”²⁵ According to Vives, a woman should keep in mind her first sin, and even incorporate the punishment into something as basic as eating food. Even if she receives honours, she should not think herself worthy of them and flee from them, as the prescribed custom is to be ashamed, as if the thing was not deserved. Vives writes that for both genders it is not appropriate to marry again if their husband or wife dies. He concentrated especially on women: “Confess thy own viciousness. For none of you taketh a husband but with the intent that she will lie with him. What a ragiousness is it to set thy chastity common like a harlot...”²⁶ It could be argued that he is influenced by the idea of women’s inner lasciviousness. His views on women are strongly affected by his belief that women are intellectually equal if not superior to men and therefore must be confined and dominated by men.²⁷ However, he does not take into account that widowed women with children would in many instances be forced to live their lives in poverty, as was previously mentioned. This could be one of the cases in which women probably did not follow these instructions. Especially in the lower classes, some kind of financial security was essential for a family’s survival.

In their marital conduct book, Robert Dod and John Cleaver write that an ideal woman should keep from idleness because she would be tempted to all sorts of vile things. She should be courteous to her neighbours and not gossip about them. Modesty was seen as a basic virtue. Dod and Cleaver note that every woman should give to those in need of help, but they stress that she should give of her own, not of her husband. Her apparel should be sober and modest. Every wife has a duty towards her husband: she looks up to him with reverence as her relationship to him should be as that of a man to God. They admit that she can express her

²⁵ Aughterson, 71.

²⁶ Aughterson, 74.

²⁷ Stephen Derek Kolsky, “Making Examples of Women: Juan Luis Vives’ *The Education of a Christian Woman*,” *Early Modern Culture Online*1.(2012): 14-38, journal.uia.no <
<http://journal.uia.no/index.php/EMCO/article/view/41> >, 31.12.2017.

opinion, but always keep in mind that she is his subordinate.²⁸ However, a silent woman still remained as the ideal.

3 MEDICAL DISCOURSE

3.1 Humoral Theory

The female identity was not only constructed through mental (spiritual and intellectual) capacities in prescriptive literature and the Bible, but it was also determined by the linking of such capacities to the physical body. The venue for these constructs was primarily the discourse of medicine and sexuality. Humorism or humoral theory was one of the key theories which shaped the understanding of the human body, starting in ancient Greece and still dominating throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In the eighteenth century, its role taken over by scientific practice.²⁹ Most frequently it is associated with Galen, but it was also greatly influenced by his teacher and predecessor Hippocrates. According to this theory, there were four bodily fluids or humours. These humours were blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. A proper balance of these humours meant good health, but an excess of any one humour would result in a bodily disease. The humoral theory constituted the way in which the English took care of their bodies and formed their diet, activities and even their clothing or bathing habits in the Early Modern English period. Bathing was for example viewed as harmful, especially for men, as masculinity was associated with the hot (blood), dry humours (black bile) and femininity with the cold (phlegm), wet (yellow bile) humours. Paster argues that there is an inherent misogyny in this belief system because the main aspect of humorism is that it prefers heat over coldness and consequently sees the colder, wetter female body as inferior. Therefore, it views the female sex as something with “a limited capacity for productive energy,

²⁸ Aughterson, 79.

²⁹ Nicholas Grene, “The Four Humours Theory,” *College of DuPage* (2014): 1-5, ESSAI <<http://dc.cod.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1497&context=essai>>, 31.12.2017.

individuality and higher reasoning.³⁰ Additionally, female menstruation was seen as a proof of the humoral theory as it reinforced the belief that health was based on the free flow of fluids throughout the body. Woman, as a colder and wetter being, could not use all of the blood that was made in her system and thus such blood along with the impurities in her system was monthly evacuated. Menstruation was actually something which purged woman every month and was in some cases even seen as an advantage in contrast to men, who had to use bloodletting.

3.2 Theory of one sex model

For the Early Modern woman, the humoral theory was not an abstract theory, but a fundamental part of how she viewed herself. It was a way of thinking which understood sexual identity in terms of similarities. It entertained what Thomas Laqueur, a contemporary historian and sexologist, calls a “one-sex model” of human biology.³¹ It claims that woman was analogically related to man, which meant that her organs were the same as the organs of a man, but underdeveloped. It was thought they had the same functions, which meant that for example, the clitoris had the same functions as a penis. But woman was not medically seen as merely different, she was perceived as inferior or as an incomplete man. A woman’s body was understood as moist and cold, therefore inferior to the heat and dryness of a man. “Heat was the cause of vigour, strength, courage and intellect, and thus it followed that men were naturally superior to women in all these respects.”³²

Another reason why a woman was seen as inferior was that females were understood to be the product of an incomplete development caused by an insufficient generative heat in the womb. During conception, the man’s contribution was seen as hot and therefore active and

³⁰ Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 14.

³¹ Catherine Gallagher, Thomas Laqueur, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (California: University of California Press, 1986) 8.

³² Keeble, 18.

dynamic, and the female's cold, and so passive and receptive – the man was the “agent” and the woman the “patient”.³³

Thus medieval medicine supported the Christian belief of a woman being subordinate to man. Her identity was constructed on the basis of biblical teachings, mainly Genesis, and subsequent prescriptive medical literature was based on its contents.

3.3 Female bleeding

3.3.1 Terminology – Language of Transitional Bleeding

The term transitional bleeding refers to the various stages of female life marked by a change of a woman's status. The first bleeding – the beginning of menarche turned a young girl into a maid. After the second transitional bleeding, the bleeding after the first intercourse, the maid became a mistress. The third and last transition, marked by post-partum bleeding, introduced the mistress to the role of mother. The terminology that the Early Modern woman used dramatically differs from what is used today. During this time, speaking openly about menstruation was widely regarded as a societal taboo. For example, in the diaries of Lady Hobby, she speaks freely about her enema but has no words for her menstruation and uses various allusions. Even in medical discourses or private diaries, menstruation was referred to in terms such as “courses, customs of women, flowers, gift, benefit of nature, months, monthly sickness, ordinaries, terms, time common to women, those, visits.”³⁴ A frequently used term was *flowers*, which was derived from a horticultural metaphor. Jane Sharp, a seventeenth-century midwife stated that “fruit follows flowers – without menstruation, conception was impossible.”³⁵ Crawford proposed that the usage of the term *flowers* is derived from one of the Early Modern theories of why a woman might menstruate - a ferment model which saw menstruation as analogous to the production of alcohol. The blood lost during the first

³³ N. H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 184.

³⁴ Read, 1.

³⁵ Read, 2.

intercourse was called “the flower of virginity”. After birth came the post-partum flow which Jane Sharp called “purgations” and menopause was called “the cessation of terms or flowers.”³⁶

3.3.2 *Female Adolescence*

The coming of age differed for both genders. The end of male puberty was marked by the production of semen, which proved that the boy was sexually mature. For girls, there had to be a more gradual series of events to become mature. Thomas Blout’s dictionary states that it is the age of fourteen years in men and twelve in women. The reason why women reached puberty sooner was exemplified by Albertus Seba:

Because as in things Artificiall, those which are done in most haste, are the worst accomplished; so Nature employeth lesse time to the increase of Females, as being lesse perfect then Males, which have much more naturall heate, and are more vigorous, strong, and robust. Then they are: It is also the cause wherefore Daughters are deemed by right of Law capable of Marriage at 12 yeares of age, and Males onely at 14, which age is called *Pubertie, or Youth.*³⁷

It is clear that the author presents a rather negative view of women – they were seen as less perfect than men and therefore they were quicker to complete, reaching maturity at twelve. This supposed age of puberty was not always so strictly followed. There was always an allowance of a few years as menarche was the actual point in life in which a woman reached maturity and became marriageable. However, not every family followed that rule as there was a difference between the legal and the Christian understandings of when a woman reached maturity. According to the legal statute of 1575, any sexual relation with wife or maiden not of full age (i.e. twelve years) was a criminal act, which would mean that any young woman over twelve years could theoretically be married and begin having sexual intercourse with a man. But according to the Christian precepts, true marriageable age was variable and determined by signs

³⁶ Read, 2.

³⁷ Read, 41.

of sexual maturity and the ability to conceive. Therefore, a pious Christian could not marry a young girl, who, although legally mature, was not yet menstruant.

Such a case is demonstrated in *The Narrative of Benjamin Albyn* (1691). Albyn was a cloth merchant who self-published a vindication narrative in which he cited all the injustices that he believed were done to him. One of those is a story of how he almost married a young girl. He stated that the girl was over the age of consent, meaning twelve years. But when he first saw her, he realized that she was pre-pubescent and had a chest like a boy. When he asked the family whether the girl is not too young to marry, saying "... if I married her I would bed her."³⁸ the father answered that she would be "fit" by the time of marriage. He was later informed by an acquaintance that the father had no intention of ensuring that she would only marry him after becoming menstruant. Albyn was eventually able to make another deal with the girl's father and proposed a financial settlement which relieved him of his obligation to marry his daughter. They both signed a warrant which has an interesting clause at the end:

Farthermore I do declare, That my Daughter being so young, as that the Customs of Women had not passed upon her, Benjamin Albyn did object, that immediate Marriage was untimely, and such present Copulation with her might cause her to be perpetually Barren.³⁹

As can we can see the girl was of legal marriage age, but as the document says, it still did not make her marriageable, because she has not yet reached menarche and would thus be damaged by any attempts at the consummation of the marriage. Firstly, an intercourse during menstruation would be a mortal sin and secondly, as she did not yet reach menarche, copulation would destroy her body and she could become unable to have children. Therefore, female adolescence had to meet several requirements: firstly, the girl has to be over twelve and secondly, she needed to have achieved menstruation, which would make her marriageable and

³⁸ Benjamin Albyn, *The Narrative of Benjamin Albyn* (London, 1691) 8.

³⁹ Read, 43.

secure that she would be able to have children. However in wealthy families, such marriages still occurred for dynastic reasons but remained unconsummated until the bride reached menarche.

3.3.3 Menarche

Menstruation is an important milestone in a woman's life. It is a major biological difference between both genders to which different cultures ascribed different meanings.⁴⁰ In Early Modern England, it was seen as a time of sexual awakening. Women were thought to be naturally more sexual than males. Robert Burton writes in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* that women “...begin Pubescere as they call it, at 17 yeeres old. And then they begin to offer themselves, and some to rage...”.⁴¹ He explains that they have such great sexual desire that “of women unnatural, unsatiabie lust, what contrey, what village doth not complaine.”⁴² As we can see, it was thought that a young woman would offer herself in a very immoral way because women are “generally an unthinking sort of creature, and scarce reflexive on what they say, being overruled by their passions”.⁴³ Females were seen as intellectually underdeveloped in contrast to men, who had to control them. Their behaviour was medically explained to be caused by an excess of blood, which encouraged the mind to lasciviousness.⁴⁴

In Early Modern England, the lack of menstruation was not seen as the first sign of pregnancy. Rather it was understood as a serious health issue. A healthy woman needed menstruation to remove the corrupted humours from her body. In fact, a regular menstruation was so important that in *Culpeper's Complete Herbal* from 1655 out of 325 herbs 80 were used to provoke menarche and 51 to stop it.⁴⁵ The lack of menstruation during pregnancy was explained in the way that the foetus used all of the excess blood for its nourishment. Therefore,

⁴⁰ Patricia Crawford, “Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Oxford University Press* May (1981): 47, JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650518> >, 31.12.2017.

⁴¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Henry Cripps, 1621), 54.

⁴² Burton, 55.

⁴³ Burton, 541.

⁴⁴ *Aristoteles Master-piece, or, The secrets of generation displayed in all the parts thereof ...* (London: Warwick, 1684) XXXVIII.

⁴⁵ Read, 123.

it was considered normal to bleed in the early stages of pregnancy, as it was thought that the undeveloped foetus could not consume all of the blood.

It was forbidden to have intercourse during the monthly sickness because the excess blood was thought to have poisonous properties. All of this was derived from a passage in Leviticus, which states:

19. And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be unclean: everything that she sitteth upon shall be unclean.

21. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even.

22. And whosoever toucheth anything that she sat upon shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even.

23. And if it be on her bed, or on anything whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it he shall be unclean until the even.

24. And if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and all the bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean.⁴⁶

These passages illustrate that menstruation was seen as a discharge of everything unclean in a woman. The woman was the carrier of Eve's curse and her monthly period was seen as one of its manifestations. Pliny the Elder, a Roman natural philosopher wrote in his *Natural History* that wine sours when a menstruant woman passes by, grass dies and fruit falls. "a looking-glass will discolour at her glance, and a knife turn blunt. Bees will die, and dogs tasting her blood run mad."⁴⁷ Despite the fact that views forbidding intercourse during menstruation made sense in order to maintain some kind of hygiene, such views as Pliny's imply that this blood, and the menstruating woman herself, had a vastly negative cultural image – as a form of pollution.

After a woman's menarche had passed, she was considered at her healthiest physically but had to visit the church to be ritually cleansed. Generally, women were forbidden to do various works and activities during their periods. They could go to church, but as they were

⁴⁶ Leviticus 15:19-24.

⁴⁷ Crawford, 59.

considered unclean, they were advised not to touch various objects as they would make them unclean and they were strictly forbidden to have sex. They mostly kept to themselves and spent their period in their homes.

This general aversion towards a menstruating woman was also projected into poetry. As some critics claim, menstrual revulsion is an important feature in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. There are two addressees in his *Sonnets* – the “dark lady” and a young man. The young man is depicted⁴⁸ as a more fitting object of desire as his beauty is more “steadfast” and “temperate” than that of a female. The reason for that is that he does not menstruate - his loveliness will not “fade” because it does not take part in “nature’s changing course”⁴⁹. Such an interpretation may be far-fetched, nevertheless, female menstruation could here be depicted as a sign of the duplicitous nature of a woman as she can be fickle and false.

It might seem that menstrual bleeding was a surprisingly frequently discussed issue but it must be noted that during the Early Modern period, blood was associated with various beliefs about life and death. The blood of Christ saved mankind from damnation, the blood of a martyr had the power to heal and the blood from an innocent would corrupt the one who drew it. Such blood had a positive impact. Female menstrual blood, on the other hand, did not.

Women saw their monthly course as a private matter. Men talked publicly about it but it was thought that women would rather not discuss information regarding their bodies. There was even an anatomist in the 16th century who avoided talking about female anatomy due to a fear of indecency.⁵⁰ It was believed that women would rather suffer from their disease than go to a doctor. The reason for that could be their modesty and shame but there are some cases recorded in which a medical practitioner attacked his patient. It seems that women had their own ideas about their bodies and frequently chose to consult their ails among themselves rather

⁴⁸ *Sonnets*, 18.

⁴⁹ Lesel Dawson, “Menstruation, Misogyny, and the Cure for Love,” *Women’s Studies* 21.8. (2006): 465, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870500277880>>, 31.12.2017.

⁵⁰ Crawford, 68.

than see a physician. Quite often they consulted a midwife, which is something that medical practitioners disapproved of.

3.3.4 *Dual character of a menstruous clout*

Medieval women used various products to absorb their menstrual flow. The most common was a linen pad referred to as a clout. While the word for menstruation was avoided at all costs, the word “menstruous clout” was used quite frequently. In some discourses, it acquired negative connotations of pollution and evil qualities, but in others, it was a sign of a woman’s pride and chastity.

Menstrual bleeding acquired negative meanings in everyday language as it was associated with uncleanness. The simile of a menstruous cloth was used by Protestants as well as in various subgenres of devotional publications, for example in Nicolas Billingsley’s Presbyterian “*Treasures of Divine Raptures*” verse 178 “On a Clout” reads: “Self-right’ousness enwrapping us about,/Is as a rotten rag, or menstruous Clout.”⁵¹ Phyllis Mack states that the use of this simile in everyday and literary language was quite common: “When they [Protestants] spoke of the absolute nullity of human virtue in relation to divine love and judgement, that human nullity or spiritual nakedness was often seen as feminine.”⁵² Female menstruation was, of course, the greatest signifier of femininity. Another example can be found in anti-Catholic propaganda. In fear of the growth of Catholicism, Anthony Gilby wrote a treatise warning against the supposed rise in popery and writes: “... to cast away the reliques of Idolatrie like a menstruous clowte.”⁵³ So disgusting was the idea of a female menstrual pad that it even became a cure for the well-known erotic melancholy otherwise known as lovesickness. To cure a lovesick man one had to show him the menstrual blood of his mistress. This cure was not a new invention. It actually first appears in a text from the first century BC. The roots go back to

⁵¹ Read, 117.

⁵² Read, 118.

⁵³ Read, 117.

Lucretius and Ovid and there is also a medical text describing a story about a female pagan philosopher and mathematician called Hypatia of Alexandria, who cured a man who fell in love with her by throwing a menstrual pad at him. The intended effect was to provoke revulsion instead of inciting desire and free the lovesick man from his unhealthy obsession. Although there are multiple reasons for why a man would be in need of such a cure, Lesel Dawson argues that an:

overwhelming erotic passion had the potential to disrupt male gender identity (men were seen to be effeminized by passionate emotions) and to upset conventional gender power structures. In several instances, the corrective cure served to re-establish the traditional gender hierarchy, resolving anxieties about the power of love and restoring male sexual authority and self-mastery.⁵⁴

In this case, the hatred towards women is used as a means to achieve bodily and mental health. Menstrual blood is not seen as merely a fluid, it symbolizes female depravity and uncleanness.

A very significant transition in a woman's life was becoming a full woman after the first intercourse. It was an occasion in which the bloodied garments were a symbol of woman's pride and had a positive meaning. In the Early Modern era, this kind of bleeding was understood as another kind of menstruation. It was an important occurrence, a second occasion of bleeding as a part of woman's path to maturity. The hymenal bleeding was a welcome event, proving that the bride was a true virgin. Many women kept their bloodied sheets with pride as a memento. But in some cases, these sheets were required to prove that the woman was faithful to her husband. For example, Catherine of Aragon sent for her bloodied garments to prove before Henry VIII that she was really a virgin when she married him. If a woman was found unchaste, she was considered ruined for the rest of her life.

⁵⁴ Dawson, 501.

3.4 Sex and pregnancies

Laura Gowing states that fertility mattered enormously to women's roles and to marriage.⁵⁵ Each bleeding during woman's life marked a change in her status. If a woman became pregnant, she transitioned into being a matron. A whole new world opened for her as she, starting with the rituals of childbirth, entered a new circle of married women and mothers.

However, the pregnancy and childbirth itself were not understood as a time of happiness and expectation. Many medieval women died during childbirth as their pregnancies were far more difficult than they are now. Malnourishment, poor hygiene, improper treatment and multiple pregnancies – all those factors contributed to the high mortality rates. Especially women from lower classes were often malnourished and consequently underdeveloped. Their pelvic region was not properly widened which made it difficult to give birth. The birthing process was very complicated as it usually lasted for many hours and as is recorded in various private journals, women after birth were so exhausted and injured, they spent the next month lying in bed. That they stay in bed was also demanded by the Church, as will be explained later. If the plentiful number of pregnancies during a woman's fertile life is taken into consideration, it is understandable that the Early Modern woman would perceive this time of her life with fear and anxiety. She would want to please her husband by giving him numerous and preferably male children but she would at the same time be risking her own life. Alice Thornton described one of her labours as an "exceeding sharpe and perilous time, being in the same condition of weaknesse after I come to bed and of my son Robert, which I escaped very narrowly the blow of death."⁵⁶ She was a very devoted woman and frequently debated in her journal whether her actions were those of a good Christian or not. Such exceeding devotion to God is not rare and such contemplations can be found in other personal journals such as the journal of Anne

⁵⁵ Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 114.

⁵⁶ Read, 86.

Bradstreet. As Ralph Houlbrooke noted, these women could be said to have viewed childbirth as a sort of rehearsal for the last act before death and to have exhibited their Christian credentials in the meek acceptance of the suffering in labour.⁵⁷ They accepted their pain and suffering as a curse brought upon them by Eve's sin. And in such a way they were also seen by the Church. After their delivery, they had to undergo "churching", which was a colloquial name for a ceremony that might be thought of as a process of purification from the pollution of birth.

It must be pointed out that while it seems that women commonly died during childbirth, it is not actually completely accurate as maternal mortality constituted up to 20% of all female deaths between the ages of 25 – 34 and 11-14% between 20 – 24, which were age groups in which women's overall mortality, like that of men, was relatively low. Compared to other causes of death, 20% mortality rate is not an alarming number.⁵⁸

After the end of a woman's purification or the end of her lochial bleeding, she had to resume her ordinary duties, which also included intimate relations with her husband. In an Early Modern "sex manual" *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal'd* it is written that the end of woman's lochial bleeding signals the time for a woman to resume sexual relations with her husband and suggests:

After Travel and Child-Bearing, the Woman forgets the
Pains that she suffer'd, her Flood being no sooner stop'd,
but she attacks her Husband afresh, and gives him an
amorous Battle, I do not doubt but she'll come off as
victoriously as before, and therefore ought to be crown'd
with Myrrh, as were anciently those that had made
Conquests in Love.⁵⁹

This idea draws on the stereotype of the oversexed female, whose sole interest was sexual gratification. It was thought that once a woman's body was purged, her mind would be again preoccupied with venery as she was by default a sexual being. Such ideas can also be found in

⁵⁷ Read, 156.

⁵⁸ Read, 158.

⁵⁹ Nicholas de Venette, *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal'd* (London), 116.

medical textbooks as was previously mentioned. However no such thing is stated in female private journals or correspondence. Many women discuss or accept in their writing that they are naturally less intelligent and inherently cursed, but never do they depict themselves as sexual beings.

3.5 Diseases

3.5.1 Green sickness

Green sickness, also known as the white fever, the disease of virgins, and from the seventeenth century onwards chlorosis, was thought to be an exclusively female sickness, which was caused by suppressed menses and seed. This theory flourished up to the beginning of the twentieth century when several essays were published, claiming that it no longer existed. According to early modern theories, when the menstrual flow was obstructed an excess of blood and seed would collect within the body and eventually rot. Illness would follow, either as a direct result of this blockage in the body, or from the toxic vapours emitted from the blood and seed. The anonymous *A Rational Account of the Natural Weaknesses of Women* states: “when the Courses do not flow at all in Maids, and the Obstruction is of long standing, it is then called the Green-sickness”.⁶⁰ Green sickness occurs solely as the result of a bodily dysfunction. When women contract this disease they display a variety of symptoms: they become pale, have swollen faces, suffer great headaches, nausea and heart palpitations. They can also have strange appetites, odd cravings or have no appetite whatsoever:

the Person becomes pale and dull, unwilling to stir about, and is afflicted with Loss of Appetite, loathing of Food, desire after things not fit to be eaten, bad Digestion, Pain in the stomach, which in some Patients is so violent by Fits, as hardly to be borne, Shortness of Breath, often swelling about the Ankles, sometimes vomiting, and universal Disorder.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *A rational account of the natural weaknesses of women: and of the secret distempers peculiarly incident to them. Plainly discovering their nature, true cause, and best method of cure, ... By a physician.* (London: Two Blue Posts, 1716) 5.

⁶¹ Read, 75.

Some of these symptoms are fairly frequent. According to the Isham's *Booke of Rememeberance*, during a period in her life, believing she had a green sickness, she described having troubled relationships with food during adolescence, which is interpreted as a sign of green sickness :“Too often I yield to eate for my tooths when my stomacke doth not require it.”⁶² She also prayed to overcome this temptation. Prayer was also understood as a kind of cure.

Nonetheless, the main symptom of this disease is the absence of menstruation. The following is written in the casebooks of Richard Napier: “women who were labelled as green sick but who subsequently menstruated were rediagnosed as having an ‘obstruction of the spleen.’”⁶³ There were many possible cures, but the most recommended one was to have intercourse. It was deemed to be the most effective as it would open up the veins of the womb and release trapped menses and seed. Thus it was advised that young women should marry as soon as possible because intercourse would only be acceptable in marriage. As Helen King writes in her study of green sickness, “the cure for the disease of virgins was to cease to be a virgin.”⁶⁴ John Pechey also wrote: “When the Disease is small, and chiefly arises from Obstructions of the Veins of the Womb, it is easily cured by Marriage in Young Virgins.”⁶⁵ Pechey also mentioned that if the woman would conceive a child the cure would become permanent.

Contemporary theorists have sometimes tried to discover the “real” malady behind green sickness. Clearly, it has some affinity to what is now called premenstrual tension, and in later periods it is increasingly associated with anaemia and eating disorders.

Green sickness is the malady most similar to lovesickness, which will be discussed later. Like lovesickness, green sickness is associated with a young woman’s emerging sexual

⁶² Read, 89.

⁶³ Lesel Dawson, “Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English Literature,” *Oxford Scholarship Online* 15.11. (2008): 57 < <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/lovesickness-and-gender-in-early-modern-english-literature-9780199266128?cc=us&lang=en&> >, Oxford University Press, 2.1.2018.

⁶⁴ Helen King, *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis and the Problems of Puberty* (London: Routledge, 2004) 68.

⁶⁵ John Pechey, *The Store-House of Physical Practice* (London: Henry Bonwicke, 1695) 314.

appetites, emphasizing a woman's readiness for marriage and providing a rationale for her contrary, unsettled emotions.

The discourse surrounding green sickness also provides an alternative and negative way in which to imagine a woman's virginity, countering medieval Petrarchan, Neoplatonic traditions and also some later traditions which grant virginity an elevated ethical and spiritual meaning. For that reason it is possible to interpret green sickness as supporting the misogynistic view that women are fundamentally incomplete without men, suggesting that a woman's virginity, rather than being the sign and source of her rational self-mastery, is an unnatural state prone to illness.⁶⁶ This also means that woman must abandon her virginity, traditionally according to the church a holy property, and marry to gain back her health. As it is prescribed as a cure, this view also perceived marriage as a means necessary to cure the affliction. There is no relevance to one's feelings or erotic desire. Marriage was a very popular cure for various other diseases. King argued that the rise of this disease during the establishment of Protestantism was not a coincidence, as the model of ideal female behaviour changed from chaste celibacy to the productive wife and mother.⁶⁷

3.5.1.1 Literary representations of green sickness

The theme of green sickness was used across a variety of plays, poems and broadstreet ballads which confirms that the disease was widely known in the Early Modern English society. One such example is the case of Juliet Capulet from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet is presented as almost fourteen in the play. Her father famously asks Paris to wait two more years to marry her, because she is not yet ripe to be a bride. Her behaviour and attitudes constantly change, she is whimsical, and he assumes that the change in her behaviour is a direct result of green sickness. Capulet's concern for his daughter is comically naive, as she cannot have green sickness; she is no longer a virgin. This kind of paternal misreading is also shown in two other

⁶⁶ Read, 80.

⁶⁷ Aughterson, 10.

Renaissance plays. In the *Wit of a Woman*, where a naive father is tricked by the lover of his greensick daughter, and in John Ford's Jacobean play "*'Tis a Pity She's a Whore*". The main protagonist, Anabella, thinks that she feels ill because of eating too many melons. Her doctor and father assume that she is green sick.

This trope of green sickness, therefore, seems to be used in dramas to show a type of female disruption of patriarchal norms and is typically present in relationships between fathers and daughters. In contrast, there is also a satirical poem written by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, which depicts a mother discussing her daughter's green sickness with other women at a spa. The girl is not given a voice, instead, her mother speaks for her. Apart from her short-breathiness, pallid lips and headaches, she also is "full sixteen and never had those." One woman responds to her troubles, advising the mother to: "Get her a husband, madam, I married at that age, and ne'er had had 'em, Was just like her."⁶⁸ The joke is that once married she may not have time to menstruate because she will be constantly pregnant. And perhaps the young girl, just like Juliet Capulet, is not a virgin anymore and may actually be pregnant. As we can see, the speaker also suggests the treatment recommended by most writers - that the woman should marry and have intercourse. Rochester highlights and mocks the type of conversations that might have taken place between women.

A lot of evidence can also be found in medical literature which shows a dynamic relationship between the father and daughter as the father is frequently the one concerned about his daughter's condition and the one to instigate a treatment. One of the reasons, apart from general care for one's own child, is also the fact that green sickness, with its main symptom being the inability to menstruate, posed a great threat for the continuity of the family's lineage and not only that, the daughter's fertility could not then be used as a commodity in profitable marriage. One must also mention that any diversion from social expectations of that time was

⁶⁸ Susan Cooper-Bridgewater, *Of Ink, Wit and Intrigue: Lord Rochester, in Chains of Quicksilver* (Troubador Publishing, 2014) 186.

definitely undesirable. However, green sickness could be also used as a way of resisting patriarchal oppression. There is a number of Early Modern works which demonstrate that some women also made themselves ill on purpose in order to convey their reluctance to conform. For example, according to the Countess of Cumberland's account of her feelings, when she was dominated by her brother who treated her badly, she responded to the abuse by becoming ill.⁶⁹

Green sickness supplied writers with various reasons why they should view virginity in a negative way. Thus most male writers portrayed overly chaste women as sickly and as a consequence virginity is viewed not as a quality that enhances a woman, but a quality that makes her sick and unnatural. In a number of instances, women who refuse to marry or to have sex are vilified as being green sick. In the above mentioned scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, when Juliet rejects Paris's offer of marriage, her father cries, "Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out you baggage | You tallow-face."⁷⁰ and in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, Pander exclaims, "Now, the pox upon her green-sickness for me!"⁷¹ when Marina refuses to become a prostitute. A similar picture is portrayed in Glapthorne's *The Ladies Priviledge* where green sickness is thought to be a fit punishment for women who are excessively chaste. Frangipan, whose friend Doria will only be released from prison if a virgin claims him as her own, hopes that if the women refuse, they will be "forc'd to keepe their maiden-heads | Till they be musty and not marchantable"; "May the green-sickness raigne in their bloods," he exclaims, "and may they be debar'd of oate-meale, and clay-wall, and fall Ratsbauc".⁷²

The theme of green sickness was deemed attractive by playwrights, as it could be used to depict the image of the deceptive female body to achieve a comedic or dramatic effect. As a result, in plays, the disease could be used as a motif of female resistance rather than as a presentation of genuine illness. As for the medical corpus linking it with women's sexuality, it

⁶⁹ Read, 81.

⁷⁰ *Romeo and Juliet*, III, v, 156-157.

⁷¹ *Pericles*, XVIII, I, 22.

⁷² Henry Glapthorne, *The Ladies Priviledge* (Kessinger Publishing, 2010) 32.

was believed that if it remained untreated, the woman would become lustful and uncontrollable. Delayed menarche also meant a delayed transition in becoming a woman. Read states the fact that failing to become menstruant at the approved time was seen at some levels as a threat to social stability and was ascribed to female duplicity.⁷³ The discourse surrounding green sickness warns of the dangerous consequences of a too rigid adherence to chastity, fostering the notion that women need sex in order to remain in physical and psychological health.

3.5.2 *Wandering womb*

This belief was founded in ancient Greece. It was originally derived from Aretaeus, a physician from Cappadocia, who was a contemporary of Galen. In his work he states that the uterus can move around in a float-like manner in a woman's body:

In the middle of the flanks of women lies the womb, a female viscus, closely resembling an animal; for it is moved of itself hither and thither in the flanks, also upwards in a direct line to below the cartilage of the thorax ... and in a word, it is altogether erratic. It delights also in fragrant smells, and advances towards them; and it has an aversion to fetid smells, and flees from them; and, on the whole, the womb is like an animal within an animal.⁷⁴

The theory of the wandering womb describes the woman's womb as having a mind of its own, which could cause many misfortunes such as that it could move around in woman's body, put pressure on various organs and consequently cause headaches or even earaches. So the womb had the ability to actually relocate to various parts of the body. There were two types of cure. The first one was quite a frequent solution to various woman diseases such as green sickness – sexual intercourse, but of course only in a lawful marriage and it was especially effective if it resulted in a conception. The other means of treatment were medication, such as vaginal suppositories, fumigation and other. The theory behind that was that the uterus could be enticed

⁷³ Read, 81.

⁷⁴ Aretaeus of Cappadocia and Francis Adams, *The extant works of Aretaeus, the Cappadocian* (London : Printed for the Sydenham Society, 1856) 285.

to move to the required position with a scent. As is evident from the passage, a woman was a rather strange creature living along with the womb in one body. Her body was viewed as having fantastical, mystic qualities which categorize her as a fragile being that is constantly in a clash with her own fertility, in this case – the womb. What was unexplainable about her body was transferred into a series of myths and misconceptions, which in most cases depicted her as subordinate to man. But it is not only that she was seen as such. The wandering womb is also one of the shaping forces through which the Early Modern woman saw herself. The thought of not being in control of her own body must have given her a sense of uncertainty and even insecurity about herself. It handicapped her in society. “The looming threat of a wandering womb was used to assert power over women”,⁷⁵ argues King. The most frequent prescription was consistent sex. But the wandering womb is not the only bodily misfortune which made women lesser beings in the eyes of men. The wandering womb moving around could also cause a quite “popular” female sickness called hysteria or in other words, the ‘madness of the womb’.

3.5.3 *Female hysteria*

Hysteria was a disease which afflicted only women. Even though it started with the theory of Wandering Womb, by 1500 this notion developed into the hysteria tradition. The disease was called hysteria or the ‘suffocation of the mother’. Wombs were no longer seen as a separate wandering organ with a mind of its own, but a sentient organ which began to be blamed for women’s irrational behaviour. The womb was not seen as an organ causing psychological dysfunctions.⁷⁶ Its desired conception, was thought to be the source of woman’s sexual appetite and if it was frustrated (the woman would be sexually frustrated), it would cause physical and psychological disorders. Such a case of frustration is depicted by Nicolas Culpeper:

⁷⁵ Helen King et al, *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (University Of California Press, 1993) 4.

⁷⁶ Matt Simon, “ Fantastically Wrong: The Theory Of The Wandering Wombs That Drove Women To Madness,” *Wired.com*, Wired, 5.7. 2014 < <https://www.wired.com/2014/05/fantastically-wrong-wandering-womb/>> 2.1.2018.

Of the Frenzy of the Womb: It is a great and foul symptom of the womb, both in virgins and widows, and such as have known men. They are mad for lust, and infinite men, and lie down to them... It is an immoderate desire of venery that makes women almost mad... The immediate cause is plenty of hot and sharp seed against Nature.... It is a little biting, swelling, and forcing Nature to let it out by lechery ... The outward causes are hot meats spiced, strong wine, and the like, that heat the privities, idleness, pleasure and dancing, and reading of bawdy histories...⁷⁷

The sickness could also be caused by the failure to discharge menstrual blood, which was a symptom that was also associated with greensickness and therefore the two diseases were seen as closely related. There were also other factors which contributed to this condition, for example emotional disturbances, or the “perturbations of the minde”⁷⁸ (extreme jealousy, love, or anger)⁷⁹. Women were said to suffer from loss of speech or delusions and frequently moved uncontrollably and violently, causing harm to themselves or others. With so many possible symptoms, hysteria was always a natural diagnosis when the ailment could not be identified. The women affected by this sickness very mostly virgins, nuns and widows.⁸⁰ Cures for this disease were again quite peculiar. The most effective one was applying scented oils to women’s sexual organs, which was supposed to release the pent-up menses and lure the womb into the right position. Next in line of cures was regular sexual intercourse which was in many cases regarded as a fundamental ingredient in a woman’s health. But the reason was not that it fulfilled woman’s desire but that it released the malicious humours gathered around the womb. The last solution for virgins or nuns was to sometimes undergo ‘pelvic massage’ - manual massage of the genitals by the doctor until the patient experienced ‘hysterical paroxysm’. Such a disease might seem quite peculiar today, but one must keep in mind that women were

⁷⁷ Nicolas Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives* (EEBO Editions, 1662) 106-7.

⁷⁸ Culpeper 107.

⁷⁹ Dawson, 21.

⁸⁰“Female Hysteria during Victorian Era: Its Symptoms, Diagnosis & Treatment/Cures,” *Victorian-era.org*, <<http://www.victorian-era.org/female-hysteria-during-victorian-era.html>>2.1.2018

understood as a different organism, based on their inherent oversexuality, lesser intelligence and the fact that they were so much more emotional. The practice was to correct any female behaviour which was considered abnormal or unrequired (such as being a single woman). In many cases, women were diagnosed just because their behaviour was not accepted by their family. Bennett Simon asserts that hysteria could be a result of woman's desire for a husband.⁸¹ Women who were unmarried were in constant danger of becoming sick. Therefore, hysteria could be seen as an instrument to compel women to assume their required social roles as productive wives and mothers.

3.5.3.1 *Hysteria in literature*

Female hysteria is often portrayed as a way in which the body reacts to excessive passion. Her body is overwhelmed by emotions which cause a hysterical attack. There is an interesting example of a hysteric attack in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Lear loses control over his emotions and presents his attack as having symptoms of hysteria: "O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!" he cries, "Histerica passio down, thou climbing sorrow; | Thy element's below".⁸² He is being described as a hysteric and borrows the discourse of female hysteria to show how much he is suffering. Janet Adelman notes that he is so suffocated by his intense emotions that he briefly thinks as a female. Suffocated by emotions, he thinks of himself as female and even states that he feels the womb near his heart. But it is unlikely that his attack is caused by hysteria. This attack is caused by anger and frustration rather than passion.

3.5.4 *Uterine fury*

Uterine fury was distinct from green sickness or hysteria, but it was connected to them. If hysteria and green sickness were left untreated, this could soon develop into a condition called "uterine fury" or "fury in the womb". Jacques Ferrand in his *Treatise on Lovesickness* describes this disease as:

⁸¹ Dawson.

⁸² Lear, II, iv, 55-60.

“a raging or madness that comes from an excessive burning desire in the womb, or from a hot intemperature communicated to the brain and to the rest of the body through the channels in the spine, or from the biting vapors arising from the corrupted seed lying stagnant around the uterus”.⁸³

Ferrand argues that the corrupted seed, which was an accumulation of malevolent and toxic fluids in a woman’s body, was what made the woman sexually overexcited. Ambroise Paré claims this disease makes women say “all things that are to be concealed”⁸⁴. The symptoms of the disease can be easily spotted because women speak and behave outrageously and like to hear about sexual matters. Galen states that the disease was especially likely among young widows, as they did not lead a sexual life which might have brought on the disease.

3.5.4.1 *Uterine fury in literature*

Richard Brome has written a comedy called *The Antipodes* (1640), which tells a story of a man named Peregrine whose obsession with travelling abroad keeps him from consummating his marriage. It drives his wife Martha, both a wife and a virgin, insane. Peregrine’s father Joyless describes his daughter-in-law in the following manner:

She's full of passion, which she utters
By the effects, as diversely, as several
Objects reflect upon her wand'ring fancy:
Sometimes in extreme weepings, and anon
In vehement laughter; now in sullen silence,
And presently in loudest exclamations.⁸⁵

As can be seen, Martha is completely overwhelmed by her bodily needs, which are described to be originating from her womb. She wishes to have a child, craves sexual intercourse and even asks her friend Barbara about the possibility of lesbian sex. Barbara sees Martha's madness as the outcome of sexual frustration:

⁸³ Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects:*

Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture (Cornell University Press, 2004) 108.

⁸⁴ Ambroise Paré, *The Workes of that Famous Chirurgion Ambrose Parey* (London: Richard Cotes, 1644) 633.

⁸⁵ Richard Brome, *The Antipodes* (Routledge, 2000) I.ii.63-65.

To keepe a maidenhead three yeares after marriage
Under wed-lock and key! Insufferable! Monstrous!
It turnes into a wolf within the flesh,
Not to be fed with chickens and tame pigeons.⁸⁶

From this short paragraph, it perhaps does not seem surprising that Peregrine is reluctant, or even scared to consummate his marriage. Women's bodies are depicted as hungry animals.

Scared of the idea of sexual intercourse with his wife he proposes:

Mandivell writes
Of people near the Antipodes, called Gadlibriens:
Where on the wedding-night the husband hires
Another man to couple with his bride,
To clear the dangerous passage of a Maidenhead.
(IV.i.464–5).⁸⁷
...
She may be of that serpentine generation
That stings oft-times to death (IV.i.467–8).⁸⁸

His obsession with travelling is seen as the same kind of disorder as Martha's. Peregrine meets Dr Hughball, who manages to cure him and his wife by making him believe that he has visited all of the places he imagines by staging a play in which Peregrine is a king of a city called Antipodes, where villagers behave in an exactly opposite manner to Londoners. Consequently, what Dr Hughball and thus Brome suggest doing, is to cure a man by the enactment of drama as a form of therapy.⁸⁹ However, it must be noted that while Peregrine is cured by a form of imaginative therapy, Martha requires genuine bodily sexual satisfaction and not a spectacle to restore her health: "The difference in the couples' illnesses thus conforms to the common critical paradigm of gender and illness, which sees men's distempers as mental and women's as

⁸⁶ Brome, I.i. 103-6.

⁸⁷ Brome, IV, i, 464-5.

⁸⁸ Brome, IV. i. 467–8.

⁸⁹ Dawson.

physical: while Peregrine goes mad from an intellectual fascination with foreign places, Martha's sickness arises from her virginity and sexual frustration.”⁹⁰

3.5.5 *Female Melancholy*

Female melancholy was a popular malady categorized under uterine disorders. It was a physical as well as mental condition. It dates back to the fifth century BC, when it was documented by Hippocrates in his *Aphorisms*. It became a popular diagnosis during the seventeenth century. As Johan Huizinga accurately noted: "at the close of the Middle Ages, a sombre melancholy weighs on people's souls"⁹¹. A sense of sadness, despair and suffering becomes fashionable during these times. Melancholy could in current terms be described as being close to clinical depression.

Melancholy and its effects differed for both genders. It could give men deep inspirations for their work, while in females it was seen as bodily and sexual. Robert Burton's lengthy piece *The Anatomy of Melancholy* describes it primarily as a disorder of men rather than that of females. The most commonly afflicted were scholars because of their solitary existence. Women were thus discouraged from trying to pursue education because it could make them sick. Burton sees the cause of melancholy in females in sexual deprivation. He suggests that:

...the best and surest remedy of all, is to see them well placed, and married to good husbands in due time, hinc illæ lachrymæ, that is the primary cause, and this the ready cure, to give them content to their desires. I write not this to patronise any wanton, idle flirt, lascivious or light housewives, which are too forward many times, unruly, and apt to cast away themselves on him that comes next...⁹²

⁹⁰ Dawson.

⁹¹ Johan Huizinga, *The Waning Of The Middle Ages* (Digital Library of India, 1922) 22.

⁹² Robert Burton, "The Anatomy of Melancholy," www.exclassics.com, Ex-classics Project, 2009 < <https://www.exclassics.com/anatomy/anatomy1.pdf> > 2.1.2017.

One can see that the cure by marriage was a popular solution to a whole array of diseases in Early Modern England. Katherine Hodgkin states that melancholy is not so much gendered as sexualized as it indicated that women can be never cured until they are married. However, this view was not wholly accepted.⁹³ An Early Modern writer Dionys Fitzherbert, named after the Greek god of fertility Dionysus, saw this cure with much hatred. It would mean for her to give up her books. She sees melancholy as an instance of spiritual crisis and abhors the idea that an illness of the soul could be cured by intercourse after marriage.⁹⁴

3.5.6 *Lovesickness*

Lovesickness was described as an illness of both the mind and body. It was believed to be caused by repressed sexual desire and the sight of beauty. It could potentially be fatal. It was believed that someone who is lovesick becomes fixated on someone because his constitution is unbalanced, usually due to suppressed menses. It was thought that this condition caused coldness which prompted melancholia. It occurred both in men and women. Women were in danger, because an untreated lovesickness could eventually develop into a full-scale madness and end with a suicide. In men such disease caused them to lose their power and consequently masculinity to their love done.

3.5.6.1 *Shakespeare's Ophelia*

In the well-known Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, one of the characters, Ophelia represents a prototypical example of a lovesick female and Hamlet is seen as the archetypal male melancholic. "Men's illnesses are constructed as cerebral, philosophical, and creative, female illnesses are seen as passionate, sexual, and destructive."⁹⁵ Ophelia is no longer considered a melancholic, as her untreated condition has developed into a madness and ended in death or possibly suicide. Her madness is mirrored in her dishevelled appearance – she wears a worn-

⁹³ Katharine Hodgkin, *Women, Madness and Sin in Early Modern England: The Autobiographical Writings of Dionys Fitzherbert* (Routledge, 2010) 4.

⁹⁴ Hodgkin, 53.

⁹⁵ Dawson.

out dress and has her hair loose. Each of the symptoms of her madness represents lovesickness. She enumerates flowers and herbs which associate her suffering with traditions of mourning. While mad she gives flowers away, drowns in a lake covered with them and is buried with flowers. Floral imagery is a frequently used motif in the play. It is for example present in the speech of her brother, Laertes, when he goes to university. He wants to advise her sister to be wary of men and especially Hamlet and uses floral imagery to suggest that she is on the verge between youth and adulthood, innocence and sexuality. He suggests:

Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
And keep you in the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.
The chariest maid is prodigal enough,
If she unmask her beauty to the moon:
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes:
The canker galls the infants of the spring,
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed,
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary then; best safety lies in fear:
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.⁹⁶

Here, Ophelia is likened to a flower-bud which is about to open; this is meant to indicate her sexual maturity. Once she is mature she will be in constant danger regarding men (“the contagious blastments”) from the outside and disease (“canker”) from the inside. As Peterson points out, “...it is the production of blood and seed within the female body upon menarche that means woman’s ir retrievable fall into pathology...”⁹⁷, explaining why it is possible for young female buds to be galled before “their buttons be disclos’d.” She discusses that the flowers that are around Ophelia when she drowns can be read as symbols because as was previously mentioned, the term “flowers” was used to refer to menstrual blood. As stated, when menstrual blood was suppressed a sickness would follow. Therefore, in this context, Ophelia

⁹⁶ Hamlet, I,iii,40-50.

⁹⁷ Kaara L. Peterson, “ Fluid Economies: Portraying Shakespeare's Hysterics,” *University of Manitoba* 3 (2001): 43, JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029908>> , 2.1.2018.

would be seen as having a uterine disorder. Her body is visualized as an internal landscape being suffocated by flowers.⁹⁸

Ophelia also sings bawdy songs, which represent her heightened sexuality. She has to obey her father and therefore has no control over her body, relationships or choices. Her suffering has a dual character as she mourns the death of her father and is rejected by Hamlet. Her malady is believed to be caused by her virginal state and sexual ripeness. Her lovesickness and womb are expressed by the play's language and imagery. Peterson suggests that the play uses agricultural and horticultural images to refer to the female body and its processes and also to link the female body with an image of a corrupt world:⁹⁹

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed

The world is here likened to an unweeded garden. In this world, it seems that one does not need to be adulterous but merely sexual to be corrupt. Women are not only in danger because of men but also because of their own nature. As Laertes says: "Youth to itself rebels, though none else near."¹⁰⁰

Ophelia's character in a way confirms the male anxieties about female sexuality, in which virginity can paradoxically lead to sexual frustration and madness. In contrast to Hamlet and his melancholy, which is philosophical, her madness is corporeal, emotional and sexual. This corresponds to the gendering of reason as masculine and passion as feminine. Early Modern men are thus portrayed as intellectually melancholic and women as madly lovesick by literary critics. Writers and painters have later portrayed Ophelia in an erotic fashion. She is even represented in the play during her madness as being sexually attractive. Her madness is seen as a kind of erotic performance which is commented upon by others. Her sexual

⁹⁸ Peterson, 44.

⁹⁹Peterson, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Hamlet, I,iii,44.

attractiveness is derived from her madness. It is not that Ophelia transforms vile things into prettiness, but rather it is the vile things themselves that make her so attractive. She sings erotically themed songs and wears her hair loose.¹⁰¹ Queen Gertrude describes her death sensuously:

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.¹⁰²

This erotic depiction of her madness encompasses almost all of the tropes that Ophelia uses and allows her to conform to the stereotype of the innocent virgin and experienced whore. Her wish for a sexual relationship with Hamlet is linked with her helpless vulnerability. She uses colourful sexual language which is met by her madness and that makes it unthreatening. It should be also noted that victims of uterine disorders were frequently reported to have drowned themselves which was seen as their way of cooling their overheated wombs.¹⁰³

Another example of lovesickness or even a case of melancholy can be seen in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a Jacobean tragicomedy by John Fletcher, written in 1634. It is a dramatic adaptation of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*. Three queens mourning for their husbands come to

¹⁰¹ Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (University of Delaware Press, 1992) 269.

¹⁰² Hamlet, IV, vii, 160-170.

¹⁰³ Read, 30.

the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. They beg Theseus to wage war on Creon. He manages to defeat him and after the battle he finds two wounded knights, Palamon and Arcite, whom he puts into prison. They manage to recover, but their friendship is destroyed when they see Emilia outside their prison cell and both fall in love with her. Both eventually manage to free themselves. Arcite is banished and Palamon is helped by the Jailer's Daughter who falls in love with him. Theseus declares a trial of strength between them and the winner will be wed to Emilia and the loser beheaded. Arcite wins the competition but he falls from his horse and dies. Therefore, Palamon weds Emilia in Arcite's place. The play contains a subplot which is focused on a love triangle between the Jailer's Daughter, her Wooer and Palamon. She frees him from prison and follows him to the woods where she becomes mad and almost drowns. Her father manages to find her and takes her to a doctor who says that she will be cured if she has intercourse with her Wooer. The Wooer has to disguise himself as Palamon and convinces her that he is her beloved. Then they exit the stage and at the end of the play, the father states that she is cured and will soon be married.

Carol Neely states that her behaviour and symptoms correspond to Burton's 'Maid's, Nun's and Widow's Melancholy'. It is arguable whether her behaviour is that of lovesickness because Burton's depiction of melancholy is quite similar.¹⁰⁴

In contrast to Ophelia, who becomes mad off-stage, we can see a progression starting from lovesick behaviour towards madness. The Jailer's Daughter loves Palamon "beyond reason | Or wit or safety"¹⁰⁵, imagining that if she is executed for her actions her death will be almost like a martyr's. She is embittered by the social gap that is between them and understands that they can never be together:

¹⁰⁴ Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Cornell University Press, 2004) 50.

¹⁰⁵ John Fletcher, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (Folger Shakespeare Library) II, vi, 11-12.

He never will affect me. I am base,
My father the mean keeper of his prison,
And he a prince. To marry him is hopeless,
To be his whore is witless. Out upon't,
What pushes are we wenches driven to
When fifteen once has found us? ...
What should I do to make him know I love him?
For I would fain enjoy him.¹⁰⁶

The first instances of lovesickness can be seen in these passages, where the Jailer's Daughter openly admits to wanting to have sexual relations with Palamon. She feels torn between two choices, both non-viable. Therefore, there is no other option for her than to become mad, as she cannot have the cure in the form of having intercourse with Palamon. The Jailer's Daughter follows Palamon to the forest where he flees from her. She becomes tired and hungry and describes herself as "moped"¹⁰⁷, which was in the lower-class an equivalent to melancholy. She wishes for a prick: "To put my breast against. I shall sleep like a top else."¹⁰⁸ The prick has double meaning – either she wants to commit suicide by stabbing herself in the chest or she desires a male sexual organ. It is very similar to Ophelia's madness in that her lovesickness is sexual, irrational, and self-destructive. As she loses her sanity she starts wearing her hair loose, sings bawdy songs and speaks like a child. She follows the conventional pattern for female lovesickness. In contrast with Ophelia, whose sexualized language is very indirect, the Jailer's daughter expresses her sexual desires openly, partly because of her lower social class. She proclaims she desires Palamon as much as any "young wench ... That ever dreamed or vowed her maidenhead | To a young handsome man"¹⁰⁹, and that she would 'fain enjoy him'. She wants a wedding gown, "For I must lose my maidenhead by cocklight"¹¹⁰. However, her madness is still aesthetically appealing and performative. Her longing to lose her maidenhead can be seen

¹⁰⁶ Fletcher, II, iv, 29-30.

¹⁰⁷ Fletcher, III, ii, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Fletcher, III, iv, 29., top = to sleep soundly.

¹⁰⁹ Fletcher, II, iv, 12-13.

¹¹⁰ Fletcher, IV, i, 112.

in contrast with Emilia's and her devotion to a single life. Emilia personifies pure virginity while the Jailer's Daughter its diseased form.

4 CONCLUSION

As my analysis has shown, the female role in society was a cultural construct that developed and changed over the course of history. It depended on the needs which the society had at that time had. If England needed more citizens, a woman's role changed from a virgin to a productive wife and mother.

This construct was partly derived from the Bible. However, the Early Modern Englishwoman was always inferior and subordinated to the man. Her rights were limited and shaped. After marriage, she lost her identity and herself and devoted her life to her husband's wishes. She was made to believe that, being the weaker gender, she needed to be under male guidance. After all, she was still the daughter of Eve and carried her guilt. Any other woman who was self-confident or did not follow the societal norms was seen as a threat to the male-governed society.

Her revolt was often labelled as a disease. She was not in control of her own body, mainly her reproductive system, which was thought to have a mind of its own. Menstruation was a punishment for Eve's sin, so menstrual blood was the embodiment of all her impurities. Feared by many, a woman had to spend her days in seclusion and then had to be formally cleansed in a church. It seems that sexuality was a key female power which had to be tamed by men as it sometimes made them irrational.

All in all, the study of what constituted femininity is an intriguing topic, which ought to be studied more thoroughly as it would permit a more detailed analysis of Early Modern female characters.

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