Madness has been known in all ages, and its symptoms have always been recognized as something different, as an abnormal behavior. In ancient times, madness was considered a punishment of the gods, but also as the distinctive characteristic of the chosen ones, being the manifestation of the symptoms the sign of a divine message.

Mental disorder was later considered by the Greeks as organic in nature (1), but this view changed in the Middle Ages after the epidemic of the Black Pest devastated half the population of Europe: about 30 million people died. Under those circumstances, disease was not seen any more as the product of natural causes but of supernatural forces and malignant spirits so that physicians were not able to deal with. At the end of the Middle Ages, and mostly during the Renaissance, the blame went to fall in witches and the devil.

All the tragedies and calamities of Humanity were witches’s fault, and they should be severely punished, because no one could be able of doing such things if it wasn’t because they were under the power of the devil. Women were blamed to be witches more frequently than men. Witch craze took place especially in northern Europe (1,2). Even in the New World this mentality was extended and witches were burned in Salem in the Seventeenth Century (1692-1693) (3).

Hysteria and epilepsy were the two illnesses most frequently confused with witchcraft or demonic possession, especially if they were accompanied by tremors, convulsions or of loss of consciousness.

Different treaties were written in order to instruct the people, but especially doctors and priests on how to recognize a witch or a possessed one. Being the “Malleus Maleficarum”, written by Sprenger and Kramer, the most famous of all, and its influence lasted for more than 200 years.

Women were more prone to diabolical possession because they were weaker and imperfect in nature than men: “woman is an imperfect animal, inferior to men”(4,5), and her reproductive system was the proof of this, being the uterus the source of evil. Women were full of venom during menstruation, so that they were contaminated and capable of contaminate others (1,7).

The uterus was also an unstable organ which could move from one place to another in the body, it could also press the diaphragm in order to impede respiration. Women, due to the uterus, were unstable human beings (1,9).

Another form to practice witchcraft was through imagination, a faculty that was believed to be able to produce physical changes in the body. Paracelsus (Seventeenth Century), thought that women’s illnesses were essentially imagined, but were not unreal.

The uterus would receive pathological images that even if they have started as immaterial images, would become real because indomitable imagination could not be submitted to will. He thought that the process had its origin in the spleen.

As there were two organs that were capable of producing pathogenic images: the uterus and the spleen, women had two sources of evil. That was why women were more powerful witches, but men could practice witchcraft through the evil of the spleen. The uterus could also make other organs to become ill by vicinity, sympathy, or vapors (10).

Many women who suffered from hysteria or epilepsy were judged and condemned to die in the stake. Witch craze finally came to an end at the end of the Eighteen Century (11). Little by little epilepsy and hysteria became better known and understood, and the rationalistic point of view about illnesses prevailed again.