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Hazlitt's philocaption: a very child in love

by [John Derbyshire](#)

On the writer's "inordinate love for another."

The great fifteenth-century treatise on witchcraft *Malleus Maleficarum* ("Hammer of the Witches") includes a lengthy discussion of this question: "Is it a Catholic view to maintain that witches can infect the minds of men with an inordinate love of strange women, and so inflame their hearts that by no shame or punishment, by no words or actions can they be forced to desist from such love?"

Later, in a section given over to remedies for various kinds of bewitchment, the horrid art is named: "*Philocaption*, or inordinate love of one person for another, can be caused in three ways. Sometimes it is due merely to a lack of control over the eyes; sometimes to the temptation of devils; sometimes to the spells of necromancers and witches, with the help of devils."

One does not need to believe in witchcraft to acknowledge that philocaption as a psychological catastrophe i ...

John Derbyshire's most recent book is *We Are Doomed: Reclaiming Conservative Pessimism* (Crown Forum).

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