“Must I be . . . made a common
sink?": Witchcraft and
the Theatre in *The Witch of
Edmonton*.

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Résumé : *Les auteurs de The Witch of Edmonton (1621) se servent d'une stratégie d'ambivalence en représentant sur scène Elizabeth Sawyer, qui avait été dernièrement exécutée pour sorcellerie. L'intertissage complexe d'un scepticisme rationnel avec un traitement sensationnaliste et superstitieux à l'égard de la sorcellerie permettait à ces professionnels du théâtre de s'approprier le personnage de la sorcière afin d'explorer leur propre relation à la marginalité, la criminalisation et la transgression sociale.*

In early modern England, a substantial number of women were prosecuted in secular and ecclesiastical courts, and subsequently hanged, for malevolent magic, or *maleficium*.¹ These executions represent a significant social phenomenon, whereby a previously innocuous segment of the population — elderly, impoverished, single women — were increasingly criminalized and punished by the judiciary.² For example, in March of 1616, Joan Hunt, a mature spinster, was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged publicly for her supposed witchcraft and supernatural murder of a child:

Joan Hunt practiced certain detestible, impious and devilish arts, called witchcraftes inchauntmentes charmes and sorceries upon and against John Nuttinge, an infant aged three years, so that the said John Nuttinge sickened and languished . . . and died of the said exercise of the said devilish arts.³

Alan Macfarlane's examination of the Essex Assize records has shown that, during the period of consistent population increase in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, "growing pressure on economic resources led to increasing tension and hatred towards the old and poor."⁴ Macfarlane contends that typical witchcraft charges arose out of material and class conflict: a wealthier member of a community rejects the requests for charity

of a poorer member; the rejected party leaves while threatening or cursing; then some unexplainable accident or disease strikes the family of the one who had refused to give alms.⁵ While there was an authentic communal belief that witches caused disease in crops, killed livestock, and murdered children through the agency of devils, the impetus behind these persecutions of indigent scolds was largely economic and social; the choice of a communal and judicial victim was linked to the marginality of the accused witch, as determined by her gender, age, social position, and economic status. The execution of economically marginal women on witchcraft charges constitutes a major example of public scapegoating in England. René Girard has argued that, for scapegoating to function, the projection of criminal guilt onto the innocent is essential;⁶ this misdirection of blame appears in *maleficium* cases, as it is not the yeomen farmers who refuse charity to the impoverished, and thus transgress traditional community standards, who are punished, but the women who request charity. That these marginal women constituted a victim class is emphasized by the fact that evidentiary procedure was eased, as it was in treason cases, in court proceedings: instead, “half proofes are to be allowed, and are good causes of suspicion.”⁷

In 1621, Dekker, Ford, and Rowley collaborated on the domestic tragedy *The Witch of Edmonton* in order to exploit the current popular interest in witch trials. The playwrights were riding a tide of witchcraft sensationalism during the Jacobean period, which produced a large number of pamphlets, treatises, and several commercial dramas. The legal trial on which the play is based had occurred earlier in the same year. *The Witch of Edmonton* depicts the scapegoating of Elizabeth Sawyer, accused of and executed for *maleficium*.

The playwrights of *The Witch of Edmonton* adopt a strategy of representational ambivalence in their portrayal of witchcraft. On the one hand, this play demystifies and criticizes the early modern practice of scapegoating women accused of witchcraft; the play shows how the community of Edmonton, abetted by the English legal system, eliminates a marginal member of the community upon whom the idea of contagion is projected. On the other hand, and simultaneously, the play actively participates in the Jacobean fascination with and sensationalism surrounding witchcraft trials: this participation supports negative stereotypes of the witch and is ultimately complicit in the scapegoating ritual. Thus, the play interweaves its searching scepticism with a sensationalist and superstitious portrayal of witchcraft. This representational strategy allowed the playwrights to appropriate the marginality of an indigent woman accused of witchcraft in order to explore their own relationship to marginality and to examine wider questions of criminalization and social transgression. Such a procedure reflects the

commercial theatre's pervasive interest in social scapegoats, such as women and servants executed on petit treason charges, prostitutes, ethnic and religious outsiders, vagrants, and sexual deviants.

While witch persecution in England has been widely interpreted as a calculated effort on the part of the judiciary to enforce gender, class, and status conformity through the public execution of marginal women,⁸ there is current controversy as to whether the early modern theatre was complicit with or critical of the punishment of criminalized social marginals, such as women accused of witchcraft. In one critical tradition, *The Witch of Edmonton* has been considered the most subversively sceptical of the early modern plays on witchcraft. Robert G. Lawrence concludes that the play contains "a degree of tolerance which looks forward, however tentatively, to the twentieth century."⁹ K. M. Briggs categorizes *The Witch of Edmonton* as "the soberest and most factual of all the witch plays."¹⁰ Michael Hattaway discounts the playwrights' "sensationalism" and maintains that the play is "sceptical of the position that witches were simply malicious, possessed power of their own by which they might perform evil deeds (malefice) and as enemies of God were not only sinners but criminals whom the state must seek out and destroy."¹¹ Similarly, Viviana Comensoli maintains that the play constitutes "a subversive discourse about witchcraft."¹² Both Hattaway and Comensoli convincingly argue for the presence of radical scepticism but undervalue the play's explicit incorporation of popular, judicial, and royal beliefs in *maleficium* and thus neglect its more lurid, negative, and irrational elements. Moreover, these critics underestimate the extent to which professional playwrights appropriated the social role of moral censor in an effort to legitimize their own craft.¹³

In contrast, other critics argue that the London commercial theatre colluded with an early modern ideology of criminality positing the necessity and efficacy of the entire panoply of public disciplinary punishments: whippings, duckings, pilloryings, brandings, cartings, and executions.¹⁴ Kathleen McLuskie sees that generic concerns undermine any possible social radicalism, for the "threat which the Elizabeth Sawyer case might have offered to the stability of the rural order is contained by the dramatic form in which it is presented."¹⁵ Frances Dolan notes that the theatre, "by allying witchcraft with the festive rather than the criminal . . . participated in the cultural process that gradually marginalized and discredited belief in witchcraft."¹⁶ However, Dolan contends that *The Witch of Edmonton* constitutes a "notable exception" to the dramatic portrait of witchcraft as "trivial and humorous";¹⁷ in other words, the play's involvement with the execution of a witch on serious *maleficium* charges places it in a more reactionary ideological camp than its festive dramatic companions. Anthony Dawson

provides a more balanced approach when he contends that “the play as a whole . . . inscribes contradictory attitudes toward the points of force in the social network it uncovers.”¹⁸ While Dawson may provide the most convincing analysis of the play so far, he does not fully uncover the cultural conditions, or “points of force,” that encouraged the playwrights to produce textual ambivalence. In order to mediate the considerable critical controversy over the play’s ideological content and to establish that representational ambivalence was a conscious strategy on the part of the playwrights, this essay will examine the influence and adaptation of source material on *maleficium*, delineate how and when the dual valence of critique and obeisance is deployed in the play’s text, and then uncover the economic, social, and governmental forces that shaped this play’s representational strategies.

Henry Goodcole’s tract, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch*, provided the immediate source and intellectual context for the playwrights of *The Witch of Edmonton*. Goodcole was an Anglican minister who prepared criminals in Newgate prison for their executions. He published a series of pamphlets on criminals that combine religious admonition and populist sensationalism in an unusual way. Goodcole defends himself against charges of pandering to popular superstition by presenting himself as the purveyor of truth:

Another reason was to defend the truth of the cause, which in some measure, hath received a wound already, by most base and false ballets, which were sung at the time of our returning from the Witches execution. In these I was ashamed to see and heare such ridiculous fictions of her bewitching Corne on the Ground, of a ferret and an Owle dayly sporting before her, of the bewitched Woman braying her selfe, of the Spirits attending in the prison: all which I knew to be fitter for the Ale-bench then for a relation of proceedings in the Court of Justice.¹⁹

While Goodcole states that he meddles with “nothing but matter of fact,” he pressured Sawyer, despite her resistance, to reveal explicit details of her relations with the Devil in the form of a dog: “The place where the Divell suckt my blood was a little above my fundiment, and that place chosen by himselfe; and in that place by continuall drawing, there is a thing in the forme of a teate, at which the divell would sucke mee. And I asked the divel why hee would sucke my blood, and hee sayd it was to nourish him.”²⁰ Most commentators find that Goodcole sensationalizes Sawyer’s witcheries; Comensoli argues that the playwrights allow Sawyer to insist on her innocence, while Goodcole’s creation of Sawyer as a “compliant prisoner . . . reveals little about the personality of the woman or the social roots of witchcraft.”²¹ While sensationalist, Goodcole’s pamphlet should not be condemned too hastily, for it contains the rudiments of cultural demystifi-

cation that the playwrights transformed. For example, after her “confession verbatim” to Goodcole, she states that “I have no hope at all of my life, although I must confesse, I would live longer if I might.”²² In Goodcole’s transcription, we see why she acknowledges her participation in witchcraft; simply, she hoped that by complying she might receive judicial lenience. Goodcole also accurately depicts Sawyer as the typical victim of charges of witchcraft — an elderly, crippled and impoverished woman, who was considered a scold: “her body was crooked and deformed, even bending together,” and she was always “cursing, swearing, blaspheming and imprecating.”²³ Goodcole states that the reason for her desire for revenge and “her malicious heart” was “because her neighbours where she dwelt, would not buy broomes of her.”²⁴ Goodcole adamantly believes that Sawyer is a malevolent witch, but Dawson’s charge that Goodcole does not recognize that “witchcraft is linked to social as well as occult power” is belied by Goodcole’s inclusion of the social circumstances that produce her pathetic desperation, such as her economic failure as a broom-maker.²⁵ Despite Goodcole’s social realism, he does not ultimately recuperate Sawyer as a victim of persecution, for he uses the fact of her poverty as proof of her malice towards her neighbours.

The strategy of representational ambivalence allowed the playwrights of *The Witch of Edmonton* to develop the competing discourses implicit in Goodcole’s conflicted portrait of witchcraft. One strand of these contradictory discourses appears when the playwrights emphasize the social and economic circumstances surrounding her criminalization.²⁶ The stage directions indicate that Sawyer enters gathering sticks for firewood and lamenting her poverty. Old Banks, a prosperous local landowner, then enters and demands, “What makest thou upon my ground?”²⁷ By gathering “a few rotten sticks to warm” her, Sawyer is evidently trespassing and stealing firewood on Old Banks’s private property (2.1.21). Before enclosure laws, the rural poor could gather domestic essentials, like firewood and building thatch, from the local common. With early modern enclosure legislation, marginal members of rural communities became ever more dependant on their neighbours’ charity, and many of them were forced to become petty beggars, slipping into the criminalized class of vagabonds and the unemployed. This tended to increase community resentment, especially among property owners, towards beggarly individuals; Banks’s response to Sawyer neatly fits Macfarlane’s model of contagion being projected on the seekers of charity.²⁸ Sawyer reminds the audience that the treatment of persons of her social class and age had changed: “reverence once had wont to wait on age. Now an old woman, ill favour’d grown with yeers, if she be poor, must be call’d Bawd or Witch” (4.1.120–21). The playwrights’ involvement in

social realism counters Deborah Willis's argument that "stage witches tend to be one-dimensional . . . they are caricatures of evil, embodiments of monstrous sexual appetite."²⁹

This conflict over land usage and charity notably occurs before Sawyer has signed over her body and soul to the Devil; by showing why she is pushed to extreme measures, the playwrights expose the economic pre-conditions that transform an impoverished old woman into the social threat of the witch. This portrayal attempts to demystify the process of how economically marginal women become criminalized as witches. Dawson assumes that Sawyer willingly "turn[s] to witchcraft," dismissing the possibility that, instead of accepting "her symbolic role," Sawyer is an unwilling participant in her own victimization.³⁰ During this initial scene, Old Banks brutally beats Sawyer. Sawyer responds through the only avenue open to her, by cursing him: "Dost strike me, slave? Curmudgeon, now thy bones aches, thy joynts cramps, and convulsions stretch and crack thy sinews" (2.1.28–29). Sawyer's verbal curses threaten supernatural retribution. The playwrights show that her curses arise out of material and class confrontation rather than infernal manipulation. Sawyer threatens retribution through witchcraft in order to protect herself; more generally, she uses this threat as a psychologically coercive aid to her begging. Sawyer's use of these curses is a dangerous gambit, for once she gains the name of witch, all the evils that occur in the community come to be ascribed to her: "'Tis all one to be a witch as to be counted one" (113–14).

The major intellectual source for the economic demystification of witchcraft in the play is Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584).³¹ In the early modern debate about witchcraft, Scot's text is the most sceptical, as well as the most concerned to defend accused women. Scot describes the typical individual accused of witchcraft as "commonly old, lame, bleare-eyed, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious . . . they are leane and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces."³² Scot explains how these women come to be tried for acts they never committed and were not in fact capable of committing:

These go from house to house and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe, without the which they could hardlie live. . . . in tract of time the witch waxeth odious and tedious to hir neighbors; and they againe are despised and despited of hir: so as sometimes she cursseth one and sometimes another . . . doubtlesse (at length) some of hir neighbors die, or fall sicke; or some of their children are visited with diseases that vex them strangelie: as apoplexies, epilepsies, convulsions, hot fevers, wormes, &c. Which by ignorant parents are supposed to be the vengeance of witches. Yea and their opinions and conceits are confirmed and maintained

by unskillfull physicians . . . whereas indeed evill humors & not strange words, witches, or spirits are the causes of such diseases.³³

Scot's insight into the economic preconditions for accusations of witchcraft was, unlike tracts like the *Malleus Malificarum*,³⁴ based on scientific empiricism. The irrationality and fraudulence of the St. Osyth witch trial witnessed by Scot led him to try to uncover witchcraft as a "cozening art," rather than true demonism. While influenced by Johann Weyer's work on witchcraft, *De Praetigiis Daemonum*, Scot departed from Weyer by abandoning belief in the reality of the Devil, demons, and contemporary miracles.³⁵ The playwrights also would have been familiar with other contemporary witchcraft sceptics, such as William Perkins and George Gifford, but these writers relied more on biblical authority rather than on empirical evidence and did not break with a belief in magic.³⁶

The playwrights adopt Scot's cynical interpretation of the cultural and material conditions surrounding witchcraft accusations, for the play emphasizes the social mechanisms by which Sawyer's community constructs her as a scapegoat. Sawyer pleads, "I am shunn'd and hated like a sickness: made a scorn to all degrees and sexes" (2.1.96–97), and challenges, "Abuse me! beat me! call me Hag and Witch! What is the name? Where and by what Art learn'd" (33–34). When the community projects "sickness" onto her, this allows the villagers to scorn and act violently towards her.³⁷ She becomes largely de-humanized in the eyes of her community; here Sawyer undergoes what Girard terms "sacrificial preparation," in which the liminality of the scapegoating victim is emphasized.³⁸ Sawyer herself is entirely sensible to and critical of the social machinery that constructs her as witch:

And why on me? Why should the envious world
Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?
'Cause I am poor, deform'd and ignorant,
And like a Bow buckl'd and bent together
By some more strong in mischiefs than my self?
Must I for that be made a common sink,
For all the filth and rubbish of Men's tongues
To fall and run into? Some call me Witch;
And being ignorant of my self, they go
About to teach me how to be one. (2.1.1–10)

Sawyer explains that her marginal status as a impoverished, half-blind, aged, and uneducated woman makes her disposable and thus a potential scapegoat. As individuals dependant largely on charity, impoverished women provoked feelings of resentment among their neighbours; as women suspected of supernatural powers, they provoked fear. In this monologue, Sawyer is a

witch only because her community constructs her as such, for they “teach me how to be one.”

By being made into a “common sink,” Sawyer comes to represent all that is dangerous and polluting; her elimination through execution comes hard and fast upon the communal decision that she is the physical manifestation of contagion, the malevolent source of inexplicable disease and death. While the first charges of the mob are from the propertied Old Banks, the rest of the town quickly joins with him and accuses Sawyer of killing innocent children, murdering cattle, and destroying grain and fruit. In an irrational outburst of collective anger they demand, “beat her, kick her, set fire on her” (4.1.26), “Hang her, beat her, kill her” (28). In these charges and in the mob violence that follows, the play realistically documents the mass hysteria associated with witch trials.³⁹ Yet this collective irrationality may be an expression of how this community required a witch figure, for the other role of the scapegoat is to define gender norms through demonstrating abnormality. Using Mary Douglas’s argument that pollution functions to structure and order meaning in a community, Antonella Piazza shows that “the witch’s space is the reversal of the body of the new wife enclosed in the nuclear family”; the use of antithesis in gender construction is accompanied by visual signifiers of opposition, for “the witch’s curved back is the opposite of a mother’s (Winnifred’s) pregnant bosom.”⁴⁰

Being classified as a scold is integral to Sawyer’s conviction; her iconoclastic verbal defiance rather than *maleficium* itself becomes the major basis for her execution. Both Natalie Davis and Lynda Boose argue that the figure of the “unruly woman” threatened gender norms because these women disrupted the social precept that associates silence with feminine chastity and thus were singled out for especially gendered forms of punishment such as the scold’s bridle or brack.⁴¹ The typical scold came from a class of women who were considered “productive” in their role of wife and mother and thus were socially recoverable through public shaming, despite their linguistic unruliness. In contrast, women accused of witchcraft were not seen as recoverable by their communities because they were isolated, aged, and often physically crippled paupers; their verbal transgression often resulted in harsher punishment — to the point of execution — than was administered to their less economically and socially marginalized female counterparts.

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the community directly links Sawyer’s tongue to her demonic power. Sawyer comments that her neighbours claim that her “bad tongue . . . forespeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn, themselves, their Servants, and their Babes at Nurse” (2.1.10–12). During the trial, the Justice of the Peace becomes increasingly irritated by Sawyer’s lack of reverence in answering his questions; he tells her, “be not so furious,”

and that she is “too sawcie, and too bitter” (4.1.74, 81). Furthermore, Sir Arthur invites her to convict herself by letting “her tongue gallop on” (100). The playwrights’ representation concords with Goodcole’s account, which states that “by her swearing and cursing blended, it thus farre made against her, that both Judge and Jurie, all of them grew more and more suspitious of her.”⁴² By showing that Sawyer is persecuted not simply for *maleficium* but for gender transgression, the playwrights expose how the Stuart legal apparatus attempted to police gender and class boundaries.

As Comensoli notes, the “extensive cultural anxiety about witchcraft” is primarily rooted in fears of “female insubordination.”⁴³ While the legal system would read Sawyer’s verbal unruliness as both insubordination and gender transgression, the play’s portrait is more sympathetic to her irreverent and spirited verbal defence during the trial. In particular, Sawyer provides a lucid critique of the duplicity of the judiciary, and perhaps a direct attack against the hypocritical Sir Arthur Clarrington: “men in gay clothes, whose backs are laden with titles and Honours, are within far more crooked then I am; and if I be Witch, more Witch-like” (4.1.86–88). Kathleen McLuskie argues that the playwrights were able to turn “the smeddum of real witches into a powerful statement of individualism, an assertion of individual rights against injustice.”⁴⁴ This is partially correct, for the playwrights do expose the legal fictions that allow the state to eliminate unruly and impoverished women through the charge of witchcraft, but this exposure of legal hypocrisy does not necessarily imply the championing of individual freedoms.

While the playwrights of *The Witch of Edmonton* are concerned with demythologizing demonism and witchcraft, they also sensationalize and exploit this subject; this exaggeration perpetuates popular stereotypes of witches and thus ultimately serves to legitimate their social victimization. The play depicts Sawyer as making a pact with the Devil in the form of a large black dog capable of speech; she seals this pact by allowing this devil-dog to suck her blood directly on stage to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning (2.1.142). This sensationalism verifies the reality of witchcraft and therefore partially countermands the play’s earlier depiction of witchcraft as socially constructed. For example, Sawyer recites the “Devils Pater noster,” turning “Sanctibecetur nomen tuum” into “Contaminetur nomen Tuum” (170–80). This parody of the Lord’s Prayer constitutes another example of Sawyer’s verbal transgression, one that specifically accords with the belief that witchcraft travestied the rituals and creeds of Christianity.⁴⁵ In the final act, Sawyer admits to having carnal relations with Satan, for she gives herself over to his “black lust” (5.1.4). By linking witchcraft to Sawyer’s sexuality, the playwrights bolster the conviction that “all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable.”⁴⁶

Here, the playwrights exploit the sensational image of the lascivious woman as witch, constructing Sawyer as a scapegoat for female licentiousness. In general, linking women like Sawyer with demonism allowed the theatre to pander to the public demand for spectacle, and this entailed aligning itself with current legal fictions.

The particular circumstances of production serve to demonstrate the multiple social and commercial pressures to produce a sensationalist version of witchcraft. *The Witch of Edmonton* was performed by Prince Charles's Men at Whitehall on 29 December 1621 before James and his court. Dawson argues that the play's subplot of Cuddy Banks and his Morris dancers is a direct tribute to James's *Book of Sports*, published three years earlier, which promoted the revitalization of traditional English amusements and games.⁴⁷ If the playwrights felt a need to play up to James's personal opinions on Morris dancing, they might also have felt it necessary to appear to support the King's beliefs on witchcraft, which were widely recognized. King James's *Daemonologie* (1597) had vigorously affirmed the reality of malevolent magic:

The fearfull aboundinge at this time in this countrie, of these detestible slaves of the Devill, the Witches or enchaunters, hath moved me (beloved reader) to dispatch in post, this following treatise of mine . . . against the damnable opinions of two principally in our age, whereof the one called SCOT an Englishman, is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther can be such a thing as Witch-craft.⁴⁸

Stuart Clark argues that James's personal involvement in the witchcraft controversy was calculated to "demonstrate James's intellectual and religious *bona fides* as a ruler";⁴⁹ yet James was much more than simply a commentator, for he had been personally embroiled in the North Berwick affair. In 1590, over a hundred witches were alleged to have travelled in sieves across the ocean to dance on the Berwick kirk and pay homage to the Devil, who presided in person. James believed that this Scottish coven was directing their energies against his person by raising a typhoon to sink his fleet, infecting his personal linen with a venomous mixture of roasted toad, stale urine and adder skin, and attempting to destroy his body through sympathetic magic, using a waxen figure. Convinced of the imminent danger to his life, James supervised several Scottish witch trials and was present when suspected witches were tortured.⁵⁰ While James did little to promote witch-hunting when he became King of England and in his later life even participated in uncovering fraudulent cases of witchcraft,⁵¹ his keen interest in witchcraft had an impact on the type of entertainments presented at Court.⁵²

In pandering to James, as well as to popular belief, *The Witch of Edmonton* verifies the witch's sexual association with the Devil and her concomitant responsibility for social pollution. In England, so-called "witch marks" or "devil's teats," rather than judicial torture, were the pre-eminent evidence of witchcraft, for these were believed to constitute positive proof. Dr. William Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood, cast doubt on this procedure in the 1630s, when he persuaded several witch prosecutors that these "teats" were nothing but moles, birthing scars, or hemorrhoids. Until then, such witch's nipples were a major part of the sensationalistic physical stereotype of the witch in England. Sawyer admits to the audience the reality of these devil's teats: "I am torn in pieces by a pack of Curs clap'd all upon me, and for want of thee: comfort me: thou shalt have the Teat anon" (4.1.149–51). By staging this picture of sexually perverted nurturing, the playwrights encourage the audience to accept Sawyer's difference, easing the process of her abjection and subsequent elimination. The Devil, in the form of Sawyer's familiar, provokes Frank Thorney to stab his second wife, as well as causing Anne Ratcliff to run mad and beat her brains out. By locating the source of contagion in Sawyer, the playwrights effectively confirm that her eradication will purge pollution from the world and drive out the Devil. After abandoning Sawyer, her familiar confirms the conventional notion that Sawyer's involvement with demonism must of necessity be punished with death: "she has done killing now, but must be kill'd for what she has done" (5.1.101).

By endorsing the elimination of communal pollution in the form of the witch as "common sink," the play aligns itself with the persecution of unruly and marginalized women. The reduplication of Sawyer's execution is self-consciously handled by the playwrights. When Sawyer's familiar gloats over how his victim is doomed by the punishment demanded by contemporary criminal ideology, he connects the place of her punishment to the place where the performance was currently taking place: "Villaines are strip't naked, the Witch must be beaten out of her Cock-pit" (5.1.48). Given that the play was performed at the Cockpit theatre before the publication of the text, the authors connect, somewhat playfully, the admonitory function of their theatre and that of the public scaffold. In the final act, then, the practices of the English legal system are both naturalized and affirmed with the execution of the witch. The figure of the devil again rejoices at the inevitable consequences of his seduction of a impoverished woman: "The Glass of thy sins is full, and it must run out at Gallows" (62). Sawyer herself conforms to the norms of behaviour expected from prisoners before execution, for she publicly repents and prays for divine forgiveness: "Bear witness, I repent all former evil; there is no damned Conjuror like the Devil" (5.3.50). Goodcole

argued that the ritual of the scaffold speech was the pre-eminent admonitory show of the period: "Dying men's wordes are ever remarkable, & their last deeds memorable for succeeding posterities, by them instructed, what vertues or vices they followed and imbraced, and by them to learne to imitate that which was good and to eschew evill."⁵³ These stereotypical scaffold speeches function in a strikingly similar fashion to what Thomas Nashe pictures as the morally instructive role of the scaffold of the commercial theatres: to lay "before such [melefactors] the halter and gallows."⁵⁴ That admonitory role prescribed that "the condemned would be brought to accept the deservedness of their execution."⁵⁵ Thus, dramas, such as *The Witch of Edmonton*, that represent the condemned willingly repenting on the public scaffold could serve to validate the existing ideology of criminality.

In thereby aligning their representation with governmental and judicial notions of criminality, the playwrights may have been additionally influenced by Thomas Heywood's 1612 concept of the admonitory role of theatre in his *An Apology for Actors*, which imagines an active co-operative relationship between the judiciary and the theatre.⁵⁶ This embracing of a public admonitory role was designed to ease the well-documented tensions with city officials, who under the pressure of Puritan factions, were pressing to close or limit the commercial theatre in London. Like Sawyer, the bigamist, Frank Thorney, is made to repent: "'tis just that Law should purge the guilt of blood and lust" (5.3.140). By including "purge" in this speech, the playwrights adopt a medical metaphor, whereby the Law is portrayed as ministering to the country's health. Sawyer's and Thorney's repentant scaffold speeches allow the dramatists to align their craft with the judiciary, legitimizing execution as a social purgative.

Yet even as *The Witch of Edmonton* participates in these admonitory modes, the playwrights effectively appropriate the witch's marginality in order to address and explore their own marginality through surrogate figures. Certainly, the extreme forms of prejudice faced by indigent scolds accused of witchcraft cannot be considered equivalent to those faced by theatre professionals. However, in portraying Sawyer also as a petty cheat, the playwrights connect her to the class of travelling entertainers, who were similarly accused of cozenage. Sawyer assumes a more innocuous guise as a local cozenor/"wise woman" when she sells love charms to the infatuated Cuddy Banks; in this, she becomes affiliated to witchery as an illicit commercial practice rather than as demonism. Indeed, this presentation of her as a cozenor may be seen as problematizing her judicial persecution as a supernatural threat. There is a fundamental cultural connection between the fortune-teller and the itinerant actor in early modern England, for both were condemned for exchanging something false, a deceptive show, for

currency and thus fell into the common social category of petty cheat. Moreover, anti-theatrical writers often explicitly conflated the commercial theatre with witchcraft; Alexander Leighton compared these two classes as heretical impostors: “They abuse scripture when they rehearse it upon the stage, as conjurers and witches do in their inchauntments, charmes, sorceries, and conjurations.”⁵⁷ This conflation of categories occurs because both classes provide “cozening” shows for monies and travesty what were held as self-evident truths — parodying scripture and religious creeds and also contesting the fixed and God-ordained nature of individual subjectivity. The entire group of theatre professionals was associated in the imagination of the English Renaissance with a range of malefactors — from the petty cozeners and fraud, to the lascivious cross dresser, to the seditious traitor.⁵⁸ In 1572, Elizabeth I promulgated a statute that required theatrical players to find noble patronage or be prosecuted as masterless men.⁵⁹ While such vagabond laws were used mainly to professionalize and exert control over companies, they remained a pertinent reminder of the ambivalent social status of the theatre. In this complex cultural context, where critics of the theatre like Philip Stubbes condemned commercial drama as an infamous art that “playeth a cozeners trick,”⁶⁰ it is understandable that playwrights would attempt to address public notions of cozenage, and thus the status of theatrical enterprises, through surrogate representations of other marginal and even criminalized classes.⁶¹

The theatricality, indeed meta-dramatic nature, of Sawyer’s portrayal aids the playwrights in using the witch-figure to explore their own relationship to marginality. Sawyer is conflated with other stage versions of witches: Old Banks first calls Sawyer, “Mother Bombie,” recalling John Lyly’s 1589 comedy, and later “Gammer Gurton,” the heroine of England’s earliest surviving comedy, written by William Stevenson in 1553. When Cuddy Banks demands to have a witch in their Morris dance, another Morris dancer replies that “witches themselves are so common nowadays, that the counterfeit will not be regarded,” but still another replies that he would have Sawyer “dance her part with us” (3.1.12–14). In the topsy-turvy communal world of the Morris dance, the witch is cast as one of the “woman’s part[s]” (9) and becomes regarded as an actress on the social stage. Moreover, textual elements remind us that “she” is an actor playing at being a witch. As stated earlier, the character recognizes that she is coerced into a culturally appointed role: “Some call me Witch; And being ignorant of my self, they go about to teach me how to be one” (2.1.7). In anticipation of the role of repentant criminal that she assumes before her execution, Sawyer, as Diane Purkiss argues, “becomes increasingly absorbed in acting as a witch.”⁶² In this, she constitutes less of a realistic portrait than a self-reflexive theatrical

type. In essence, by implying that a witch is a dramatic “part,” the playwrights purposefully blur the distinction between social roles and assumed identities; this would in turn interrogate the normative belief that identity was static, which underpinned many of the critiques of the theatre.

The playwrights also appropriate the persecution of women accused of witchcraft in order to explore wider issues of social victimization; the playwrights’ professional and personal affiliations with forms of marginality and criminality may aid in explaining their realistic portrayal of social scapegoating. Thomas Dekker, in particular, had a lengthy history of conflict with the law: besides being charged with numerous petty offences, he spent seven excruciating years (1613–19) in the King’s Bench Prison for non-payment of debt.⁶³ Through this experience, Dekker had intimate knowledge of the actual workings of the judiciary, and he had an uncommon understanding of how marginal individuals become criminalized. In his prose works as well as his plays, Dekker foregrounds the constructedness of crime and criminals; moreover, he knew the commercial viability of this exposure to the London public. Dekker’s co-writer, William Rowley, was also involved in public controversy; in 1624, he signed a confession that he had acted in a play, called *The Spanish Viceroy*, that had not been licensed by the Master of the Revels. In the plays *Keep the Widow Walking*, *A Game of Chess*, and *The Spanish Viceroy*, Rowley presented material, as actor and as playwright, found to be seditious in its nature, and consequently faced physical danger, as well as financial loss and imprisonment.⁶⁴ John Ford published a book on a forbidden subject (*Sir Thomas Overburyes Ghost*). Together, these playwrights wrote for Prince Charles’s company, which was formed as James’s gift to his seven year-old son and was the least favoured and least profitable of the six acting companies in London at this time.⁶⁵ Much of the time, the company was forced into difficult and unprofitable tours outside London, where they encountered substantial prejudice against their profession; between 1621 and 1623, they had been thrown once out of Devon and Nottingham, twice out of Leicester, and were prohibited in Norwich “by reason of the want of worke for the poore & in respect of the contagion feared and for many other causes.”⁶⁶ It might be argued that the marginality of playwrights is doubtful because they wrote for companies of professional actors, who were the liveried servants of nobility, and that their fictions had considerable access to power; nevertheless, there was considerable cultural prejudice against all the elements of commercial dramatic enterprise. For Dekker, Rowley and Ford, the substantial legal and economic links between their professional lives and early modern notions of criminality may have provided an impetus to explore the social connections between marginality and illegality.

Despite their probable sympathies for criminalized individuals, the playwrights would have felt considerable social pressure to indulge official and populist tastes in dealing with witch material. For the newly-released Dekker, the neophyte Ford, and the actor Rowley, there would also have been particular incentives to provide a crowd-pleasing spectacle. Dekker must have felt that his ambition had been thwarted, for he had been contracted for the production of the Lord Mayor's show in 1612 but was subsequently imprisoned; the royal performance of *The Witch of Edmonton* would have been a singular opportunity to reverse his flagging fortunes. The play's sensationalization of witchcraft would have specifically responded to the demands of populist theatre-goers; Sandra Clark has shown that the expansion of new reading publics in this era sponsored sensationalistic pamphlets and news reportage, which included numerous accounts of witchcraft.⁶⁷ It is natural that playwrights writing for the audience of London's northern suburbs would have similarly pandered to their audience's tastes. In fact, the whole project of writing domestic tragedies, especially those linked to topical criminal cases, can be tied to the demands of the populist audience of public theatres. Simultaneously, however, Prince Charles's company was attempting to win back King James's favour with court performances of *The Witch of Edmonton* during the Christmas festivities of 1621. (James had prohibited the company's court appearances after a lost play performed by the company in 1619, which depicted the murder of a king by his son.⁶⁸) By pandering to James's fascination with demonism, the playwrights and the company would have hoped to renew his approval.⁶⁹ Prince Charles's company did not have a permanent public playhouse at this time, and was relegated to playing at the more plebeian and less profitable venues of the Curtain and the Red Bull. The court performance of *The Witch of Edmonton* occurred a few days after the first Cockpit performance in December of 1621; the play probably was originally written with the Red Bull's audience in mind rather than the Cockpit's. Success at Court may have facilitated the company's more permanent access to the up-scale clientele of Beeston's Cockpit.⁷⁰

The various cultural and discursive contexts of the play's production, then, are essential to understanding why the playwrights of *The Witch of Edmonton* adopt a consistent strategy of representational ambivalence. As individuals caught in a complex matrix of competing and often contradictory social forces, they appropriate the figure of the witch to explore criminalization and scapegoating. Hence the significant discursive thread in *The Witch of Edmonton* that traces the socio-economic causes of the persecution of elderly, impoverished, rural women as witches. However, this exploration of marginality's link to social and judicial victimization runs up against the

playwrights' desire to promote themselves by way of popular — and royal — sensationalist stereotypes of demonism. Representational ambivalence allows the playwrights simultaneously to demystify the scapegoating of social transgression and to support contemporary judicial practice. While the early modern theatre, especially in the domestic tragedies, participated in admonitory fictions in accord with those wielded by state power, theatrical representation nevertheless mediated displays of punishment through the expression and promotion of its own professional concerns. This study has attempted to counter the view that the theatre starkly reduplicated the class and gender prejudices of its culture by detailing how the material, political, and cultural conditions associated with theatrical practice influenced dramatic representations. Such an inclusively historicist approach rejects the critical model of the early modern commercial theatre as either a purely subversive or a purely orthodox social practice; neither political radicalism nor conservatism fully explains the pervasive ambivalence in the representations of the criminal “other” in *The Witch of Edmonton*.⁷¹

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Notes

1. See Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1995), and Anne Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (London: Pandora, 1994). Levack's study of the extant trial records on the charge of witchcraft estimates that the total number of English trials was around 5,000 with fewer than half of these resulting in executions (pp. 22, 200). Barstow argues that these figures should be doubled to account for executions that occurred without trials (pp. 22–24). Levack notes that misogyny played a primary role, for only 10% of the accused were men (p. 133).
2. Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study*, 2nd ed., introd. James Sharpe (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 147–62.
3. *Middlesex County Records*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson, 2 vol. (London: Greater London Council, 1972), 2: 110.
4. Macfarlane, p. 147.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 173–74.
6. René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 7.
7. Michael Dalton, *The Country Justice* (London, 1618), p. 194. Katherine Eisaman Maus stresses that “inferential proof” was acceptable in witchcraft trials, for the crime was in essence internal; any act or physical damage constituted only a symptom of this internal transgression (“Proof and Consequences: Inwardness and Its Exposure in the English Renaissance,” *Representations* 34 [1991]: 30–33).

8. See Barstow, pp. 12, 148; Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 107; and H. Sidkey, *Witchcraft, Lycanthropy, Drugs and Disease* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 8.
9. Robert Lawrence, ed., *Jacobean and Caroline Comedies* (London: Dent, 1973), p. 76.
10. K. M. Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team: The Beliefs on Witchcraft and Magic Among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and His Immediate Successors* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1962), p. 94.
11. Michael Hattaway, "Women and Witchcraft: the Case of *The Witch of Edmonton*," *Trivium* 20 (1985): 50.
12. Viviana Comensoli, "Witchcraft and Domestic Tragedy in *The Witch of Edmonton*," in *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), p. 59.
13. Henry Adams explains that the pervasive admonitory impulse in domestic tragedies was due to the authors' commitment to the moral and religious homiletics (*English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, 1575–1642* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1943]). Among the various reassessments of Adam's homiletic model, Lena Cowen Orlin sees that, while not ultimately offering a radical solution, domestic tragedies provided "a public laboratory for the testing of conventional thought on private matters" (*Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994], p. 247). While Comensoli stresses *The Witch of Edmonton*'s subversive social content, she argues that the theatre produced heterogeneous "modes of representation which sometimes promote[d] and sometimes challenge[d] dominant political, religious, and social systems" (*"Household Business": Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996], p. 11).
14. See Lynda Boose, "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): pp. 179–213. Boose argues that the theatre played a corrective social role largely in concert with the judiciary by working to inscribe gender normativity; thus, the theatre "overtly 'interpellates,' or hails, its women viewers into an imaginary relationship with the ideology of the discourse being played out onstage by their counterparts" (p. 180).
15. Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 73.
16. Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 217.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
18. Anthony Dawson, "Witchcraft/Bigamy: Cultural Conflict in *The Witch of Edmonton*," *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 78.
19. Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch* (London: William Butler, 1621), p. 2.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
21. Comensoli, "Witchcraft," p. 43.
22. Goodcole, p. 22.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

25. Dawson, p. 78. One possible source for Goodcole's inclusion of the point of view of women accused of witchcraft might have been the ecclesiastic court's treatment of witchcraft charges. See Peter Rushton, "Women, Witchcraft, and Slander in Early Modern England: Cases from the Church Courts of Durham, 1560–1675," *Northern History* 18 (1982): 116–32. Women accused of witchcraft were less often executed than in the secular courts and often counter-sued their accusers for defamation and slander (p. 129).
26. Cyrus Hoy argues that Dekker used his familiarity with prisons in his characterization of criminals, such as Mother Sawyer (*Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 3: 141). The character of Cuddy Banks and the scenes of morris dancers were written by Rowley, and Ford is credited with the Frank Thorney sub-plot, which centers around Frank's bigamous marriages with Susan Carter and Winnifride (pp. 233–35). However, there is considerable indeterminacy in authorship of collaborative plays, especially as the frontispiece states that the play was written by "divers well-esteemed Poets; William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, etc."
27. Thomas Dekker, William Rowley and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), vol. 3, 2.1.20. All subsequent citations of the play are from this edition.
28. Macfarlane, p. 174.
29. Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 161. The playwrights' commitment to uncovering social and economic forces involved in communal victimization is reiterated in the Frank Thorney bigamy plot. That Frank is coerced into marrying his second wife because of his father's exertion of economic and class pressure complicates the portrait of the bigamist acting solely out of lust; the play's opening epigraph equates "forced marriage" with "murder." This portrayal counters the demonized representation of the bigamist in sermons, legal statutes and populist pamphlets.
30. Dawson, p. 81. Larry Champion, in *Thomas Dekker and the Traditions of English Drama*, 2nd ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), similarly argues that while Sawyer is "victimized by external pressures," she "exercises free will in choosing evil" (p. 119). Both critics undervalue the playwrights' emphasis on the social constructedness of the witch.
31. Viviana Comensoli notes that Scot's scepticism is the probable source of what she views as the playwrights' pervasive "sympathetic portrayal" of Sawyer ("*Household Business*," p. 126).
32. Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 29. Barstow argues that this particular passage shows Scot's use of "venomous stereotypes" (p. 16). Nevertheless, in stating that these women were often old, poor, disfigured, and depressed, Scot concurs with the trial records of typical defendants of witchery charges (Macfarlane, p. 158).
33. Scot, p. 30.
34. See Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Malficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (London: Arrow, 1971). The highly misogynist *Malleus Malficarum* is ubiquitous in current critiques of the English witch-hunt. Its influence as a continental example has been overvalued in the English setting, where the competing discourses of Reginald Scot, George Gifford, James I, and others would have been more influential. The *Malleus* specifically attacks midwives, who in England were more often allied to the judiciary than to the women accused of witchcraft.

35. Sydney Anglo, "Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: Scepticism and Sadduceeism" in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 110.
36. Robert West, *Reginald Scot and the Renaissance Writings on Witchcraft* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), p. 108. Gifford, an Anglican divine, did emphasize the fact that witches were accused falsely, stating, in *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931): "These things taking root in the hearts of the people, and so making them afraide of Witches, and raising up suspitions and rumors of sundry innocent persons, many guiltless are uppon mens oathes condemned to death, and much innocent blood is shed" (sig. A3).
37. For Dawson, Sawyer's "malignity" is "unequivocally motivated" by these communal demands (p. 80).
38. Girard, p. 272. The play's primary commercial audience, drawn from the poorer section's of London's northern suburbs, would have been able to acknowledge the link between marginality and persecution. Girard notes that, in contrast, "persecutors believe in the guilt of their victim; they are imprisoned in the illusion of persecution that is no simple idea but a full system of representation" (p. 40).
39. The public audience's position as inhabitants of London might have made it more possible to be generally cynical about what they may have perceived to be a country practice and superstition, even if Edmonton was only a few miles north of the city walls.
40. Antonella Piazza, "The Witch of Edmonton: The Space of the Witch's Body as Formation and Critique of the Enclosed Body," *Textus* 9.1 (1996): 169.
41. See Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule" and "Women on Top" in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 124–30; Boose, pp. 184–96.
42. Goodcole, p. 5. It seems that the legal case against her was not strong enough for a clear conviction; indeed, Goodcole relates that the jury had to ask the Justice for direction with their verdict, on which the recorder replied, "Doe it as God shall put in your hearts" (p. 8). The jury then disregarded legal evidence and argumentation in order to justify a more irrational and spiritually influenced verdict.
43. Comensoli, "Household Business," p. 110.
44. McLuskie, p. 67. "Smeddum" was a term used in Scottish trials to describe the witch's violent readiness to direct abuse towards her prosecutors.
45. See Stuart Clark's investigation of the significance of inversion in early modern ideology in *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 69–80.
46. Kramer and Sprenger, p. 47. Similarly, Jean Bodin's *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* designates women's "bestial cupidity" as the basis of witchcraft. Witch hunters also stressed the sexual encounters that occurred during Sabbaths between witches and satanic minions.
47. Dawson, p. 79.
48. James I, *Daemonologie: In Forme of a Dialogue, Divided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh, 1597), p. ii.
49. Clark, p. 157.
50. The pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* (1592; rpt. London: Bodley Head, 1924) includes a woodcut of James presiding at the trial of witches (p. 10). The witches are threatened with

a club, while James looks on. The jurisprudence of Scotland more closely resembled that of the Continent than that of England: judicial torture was used to elicit confessions, and witches were burnt at the stake.

51. Clark, pp. 161–62; Dianne Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 231.
52. The most sensationalistic representation of witchcraft in this era was Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, played before James in 1609, which depicts a coven of witches routed by the figure of Virtue. As well, substantial parts of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are a transparent tribute to the newly crowned King's beliefs in malevolent magic.
53. Henry Goodcole, *The Happy Conversion, Contrition and Christian Preparation of Frances Robinson* (London, 1618), p. 4.
54. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller, and Other Works*, ed. J. B. Stone (New York: Penguin, 1972), pp. 213–14.
55. J. A. Sharpe, "Last Dying Speeches: Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 107 (1985): 152.
56. Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (1612; rpt. London: Shakespeare Society Reprints, Shoberl, 1841). Heywood described the theatre's admonitory role through his personification of the tragic muse Melpomene, who has "whipt Vice with a scourge of steele, unmaskt sterne Murther, sham'd lascivious Lust, Pluckt off the visar from Grimme Treason's face, and made the sunne point at their ugly sinnes" (p. 17). Heywood ends with several examples of murders being exposed through the agency of the commercial theatre.
57. Alexander Leighton, *A Shorte Treatise Against Stage-Players* (London, 1625), p. 12.
58. Joseph Lenz, in "Base Trade: Theatre as Prostitution," *ELH* 60 (1993), convincingly argues that the pervasive social marginality associated with the commercial theatre produced comparisons between it and the criminalized trade of prostitution in Shakespeare's age (p. 839). Steven Mullaney, in *The Place of The Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), notes that the commercial theatre's geographical liminality in London, because of its association with the so-called "Liberties," shaped both its reputation and its representations.
59. See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). This statute stipulates that "All Fencers Bearewardes Common Players in Enterludes & Minstrals, not belonging to any Baron of this realme . . . Shalbee adjudged and deemed Roges Vacabounds and Sturdy Beggars" (p. 19).
60. Phillip Stubbs, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583; ed. Frederick Furnivall, London: New Shakespeare Society, 1877), p. 146.
61. Petty conjurers, Gypsies, and soothsayers were often accused of witchcraft, if their craft was believed, or of being cozeners, if their craft was disbelieved. The soothsayer Dorothy Magike was convicted "for exercising witchcrafte upon Thomas Poole and Thomazine Heath" in 1616, and was "re-prisoned and made to stand in the four terms of the year on the pillory, and there confess her offence" (*Middlesex County Records*, ed. Jeaffreson, 2: 218). The self-styled mistress "Magike" was not hanged because her form of witchcraft was interpreted by the jury as a "cozening art." Even if the playwrights do not accept Scot's designation of accused witches as "cozeners," the practices of these itinerant diviners and spiritualists blur the social distinctions between witches and others accused of practising cozening arts.
62. Purkiss, p. 245.

63. Dekker was first imprisoned in 1598 at the Counter in the Poultry for debt, which Henslowe paid off. In 1599, he was again imprisoned for debt along with fellow playwright Henry Chettle. In 1608, he was charged with a breach of the peace against Agnes Preston; then, he was twice charged in Clerkenwell with non-attendance at the Anglican service. See E. D. Pendry, ed., *Thomas Dekker: Selected Writings* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p. 8. Dekker's problems with debt may have stemmed from the fact that playwrights were more impoverished than actors or company sharers because playwrights received only a one-time fee for their work (G. E. Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971], p. 62).
64. William Rowley's brother Samuel had borrowed money from Philip Henslowe at usurious rates and was forced by this debt into indentured and "covenanted" service to Henslowe (Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961], p. 200).
65. Three years after *The Witch of Edmonton*, the playwrights of Prince Charles's company, Ford, Dekker, Webster and Rowley, were charged with conspiracy and libel and summoned to the Star Chamber because of the lost play, *Keep the Widow Walking*; this indicates the company's desire to capitalize on the criminal trial and scandal raised by a recent matricide and seduction in London.
66. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 411.
67. Sandra Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets, 1580–1640* (London: Athlone Press, 1983), pp. 20, 35.
68. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies*, p. 405.
69. McLuskie contends that the play "constructs its audience as sceptical, upholders of the law, sympathetic to the victims, both women and men, while at the same time entertaining them with images of country life, picturesque and exotic low-life characters" (p. 73). Given James's well-known belief in *maleficium*, the playwrights would not have constructed this audience as essentially sceptical about witchcraft and sympathetic towards accused witches.
70. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies*, pp. 403–4.
71. Purkiss declares that *The Witch of Edmonton* is unique amidst the general "sensationalism of the Jacobean Stage" (p. 12). While less sceptical than *The Witch of Edmonton*, other plays contain reservations about demonism alongside their more obvious sensationalism; Middleton's *The Witch*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Marston's *Sophonisba*, and Brome's and Heywood's *The Late Lancashire Witches* all contain varying degrees of ambivalence in their representations of witchcraft.