

## Early Theatre

A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama



# The Devil at the Edge of this Book: Intertextual Ecologies of Early Modern Crime Narratives

Emily George

Volume 26, Number 2, 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108253ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.26.2.5528>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

McMaster University Library Press / Becker Associates

ISSN

1206-9078 (print)

2293-7609 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Article abstract

This essay uses *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer* and *The Witch of Edmonton* to examine how the multiple, conflicting agendas and intertextual relationships of crime narratives in popular print and professional drama manifest on both the space of the page and of the stage. Considering paratexts as part of the intertextual ecology of early modern crime narratives as they move between print and stage reveals materialized ambivalence about the relationships among the narratives themselves; the audiences consuming, circulating, and reproducing those narratives; and the criminals whose voices are both marginalized and authoritative in the story.

### Cite this article

George, E. (2023). The Devil at the Edge of this Book: Intertextual Ecologies of Early Modern Crime Narratives. *Early Theatre*, 26(2), 147–163.  
<https://doi.org/10.12745/et.26.2.5528>

Emily George

---

## The Devil at the Edge of this Book: Intertextual Ecologies of Early Modern Crime Narratives

*This essay uses The Wonderfull Discouerie of Elizabeth Sawyer and The Witch of Edmonton to examine how the multiple, conflicting agendas and intertextual relationships of crime narratives in popular print and professional drama manifest on both the space of the page and of the stage. Considering paratexts as part of the intertextual ecology of early modern crime narratives as they move between print and stage reveals materialized ambivalence about the relationships among the narratives themselves; the audiences consuming, circulating, and reproducing those narratives; and the criminals whose voices are both marginalized and authoritative in the story.*

In June of 1592, two years after the death of her husband John Brewen, Anne Welles was burned at the stake for his murder. The six-page pamphlet account of her crime presents an archetypal story of petty treason as early modern crime narratives commonly depicted it.<sup>1</sup> Enamoured of another man and resentful of her husband, Anne, at the urging of her lover, resorts to poison, taking advantage of her husband's trust to kill him through a gesture of wifely care: offering him a dish of sugar sops (steeped and sweetened bread). After her husband dies, her lover turns abusive, refusing to marry her. They are overheard arguing about the murder, arrested, and, after initial denial, confess, their crime discovered by the irresistible workings of Providence, since 'The Lord giue all men grace by their example to shunne the hatefull sinne of murder, for be it kept neuer so close and done neuer so secret, yet at length the Lorde will bring it out' (A4v).

*The Trueth of the Most Wicked and Secret Murthering of Iohn Brewen* is so conventional that Malcolm Gaskill uses it as an example representative of the genre, a testament to how crime pamphlets promote the ideology that criminal justice was inevitable and reflect 'a belief universal in early modern England that God exposed and punished the crime of murder'.<sup>2</sup> If anything, this brief relation of

---

Emily George ([emilycgeorge1@gmail.com](mailto:emilycgeorge1@gmail.com)) is a lecturer in English at the University of Washington and at South Seattle College.

events provides less complexity and sympathy than many similar accounts of domestic crime since it lacks the common practice of including the murderess's confession and repentance before death. This sort of cheap print corresponds to what Ken MacMillan and Melissa Glass describe as 'the common characteristics in the crime pamphlet genre, which ensured that readers would be educated about social boundaries, religious ideologies, and community expectations'.<sup>3</sup> Prescriptive and boundary-enforcing, sensational and morally edifying, the pamphlet takes a potentially disturbing tale of an upended hierarchy of marital relations and contains it in the generic body of the text — but not, perhaps, in its paratexts.

The pamphlet's stated purpose — to provide an example of how the devil works in the hearts of humans — rests uneasily within the scattered and stitched-together materiality of the crime pamphlet genre. If the story told in the main text provides a model of an early modern adulteress, a traitorous wife dominated by her lover and therefore not *really* beyond the authority of men,<sup>4</sup> the title page woodcut (Figure 1) presents readers with an incongruous rendering of Anne Welles's story. The image shows a woman bound to a stake, surrounded by flames. She is somehow both clothed and naked, breasts clearly visible beneath an otherwise modest dress. She presses her hands together in prayer, and her gaze is direct and calm. Beneath the title's announcement of John Brewen's murder 'committed by his owne wife, through the prouocation of one Iohn Parker, *whom she loued: for which she was burned*' (A1r, italics in original), the image of a devout woman burning at the stake resembles nothing so much as a martyr — because she is one. *The Trueth of the Most Wicked and Secret Murthering of Iohn Brewen* repurposes a woodcut from the most important collection of martyrdom accounts in Protestant England, John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (Figure 2). The burning woman on the cover of this crime pamphlet is a palimpsest of Anne Welles, murderess, and Cicilie Ormes, Marian martyr.<sup>5</sup> As Randall Martin suggests, the woodcut's use in a murder pamphlet may sexualize the religious image,<sup>6</sup> but it might equally sanctify Anne Welles. Before readers encounter the poisoner and adulteress dominated by another man, they encounter this image of self-possession and faith.

This essay is part of a project exploring how the multiple, sometimes conflicting agendas and intertextual relationships of crime narratives in popular print and professional drama manifest on the space of the page and the space of the stage. In studies of early modern representations of crime, scholars have often contrasted pamphlets with plays, viewing pamphlets as more simplistic accounts of sensational events that remain 'contained within certain narrative and interpretive frames'.<sup>7</sup> Pamphlets purportedly lack the moral complexity of plays like *Arden of Feversham* (1592), *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (1594), or *A Warning for Fair Women*



Figure 1: Title page of *The Trueth of the Most Wicked and Secret Murthering of Iohn Brewen*. Shelfmark [ZZ] 1594.16.11. Used with permission from the Lambeth Palace Library.

¶ The burnyng of Cicilie Ormes at Norwich.



Figure 2: Depiction of the martyrdom of Cicilie Ormes, from *Acts and Monuments* (1576 edition).

(1599), which can provide compelling characters, ambiguous guilt, and contested narratives. Even when adapting the plot and moralizing tone of the pamphlets, critics argue, plays stage narrative contradictions and moral ambivalence because drama 'must by its very nature present multiple subjectivities and voices'.<sup>8</sup> Even when scholars treat crime pamphlets as complex texts in their own right, their focus has been on how moral ambivalence emerges in the 'plot' through factors such as the inclusion of criminal biography<sup>9</sup> or the suggestion that social issues contribute to a criminal's guilt.<sup>10</sup>

But the double vision prompted by the woodcut of Anne Welles/Cicilie Ormes offers a reminder that crime pamphlets are not merely plots, and that they, too, can contain visible manifestations of polysemous and contradictory claims. Pamphlets are comprised of fragmented parts: prison letters, dedications, confessions,

scaffold speeches, margin notes, woodcuts, witness lists, and other pieces of the story are assembled and reassembled alongside the narrative provided in the body of the text, when and if that body can be meaningfully differentiated at all. I argue that considering material elements such as paratexts and typographic markings, not just plots, as part of an intertextual ecology of early modern crime narratives as they move within and between print ephemera and staged drama reframes the relationship between crime pamphlets and crime plays as one of mutual, reciprocal adaptation. Approaching these stories as composite, crowded, collaborative narratives reveals materializations of ambivalence about the relationships among the narratives themselves; the audiences consuming, circulating, and reproducing those narratives; and the convicted, whose voices are at once marginalized and authoritative in telling the story. Attentiveness to this exchange suggests ways that both crime pamphlets and plays present disputed and shifting truths, inviting readers and audiences to recognize their status as mediated, multivocal accounts of private tragedy and community violence.

For the remainder of this essay, I focus on a story that critics have primarily studied within the genre of witchcraft narratives rather than crime narratives:<sup>11</sup> that of Elizabeth Sawyer, whose trial and execution as a witch in 1621 served as fodder for ballads, a pamphlet, and a play. While the ballads and records of her trial are lost, two versions of her story are extant: prison chaplain (and semifrequent crime pamphlet author) Henry Goodcole's *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer* (1621),<sup>12</sup> which provides an account of her confession; and the domestic tragedy *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621).<sup>13</sup> Critics have long noted that *The Witch of Edmonton*, a collaboration by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford — and perhaps others unknown, acknowledged with '&c.' on the 1658 title page — offers an unusually sensitive stage portrayal of a witch, contrasting it to other witch plays as 'represent[ing] witchcraft with subtle insight into social contradictions'<sup>14</sup> and confronting how 'economic hardship, social constructions, and prejudices create witches'.<sup>15</sup> Goodcole's pamphlet, on the other hand, although dismissive toward specific folk beliefs, strains to avoid controversy about the nature of witchcraft or the justice of prosecution. Critics describe Goodcole as more focused on attempting to 'set the record straight'<sup>16</sup> and offer 'the transformation of multiple sources and testimonies into a coherent and presumptively definitive narrative'<sup>17</sup> than on writing a nuanced portrayal of witchcraft. But when studied together not as two accounts of early modern witchcraft, but as two versions of a crime narrative personating the voice of a marginalized — and already dead — woman, deeper connections emerge between pamphlet and play. The troubled multivocality inherent in telling and retelling this convicted

witch's story appears in the struggle between the authority of Sawyer's first-person voice in the body of the text and the competing, ultimately dominant voices that hedge her in; the doubt over what, exactly, Sawyer confesses to and repents; and a boundary-violating figure who can move in and out of Sawyer's narrative, and even in and out of her voice.

In the competitive environment of early modern cheap print, where audiences could consume multiple versions of crime stories, access to the imprisoned could lend authenticity to crime pamphlets. Yet this also posed a problem: the authority of the crime writer derived from the authority of the criminal, creating a vexed entanglement of subjectivities and agendas. The resulting patchwork of truth-claims appears in typographic shifts, subtitles, running headers, incongruous woodcuts, and disruptive marginalia — the kind of 'social' and 'peopled' page that Evelyn Tribble describes as characteristic of early modern print.<sup>18</sup> The dynamic between the voices attributed to the authors and the voices attributed to the convicted creates a shifting impression of contention and collaboration, a material multivocality presenting readers with 'truths' and 'discoveries' often visibly marked as morally, authoritatively, and narratively compromised. *The Wonderfull Discouerie* and *The Witch of Edmonton* highlight this compromise as they grapple with the necessity of relying on Sawyer's authority over her own story and the possible danger of giving her voice too much power — and as both suggest unease about offering up Sawyer's tragedy for public consumption. The pamphlet presents Sawyer's voice as crucial even as the margins and framing material restrict, direct, and appropriate it; her dialogue confession is simultaneously her own words and a script, disrupted by asides and contradictions. In the play, this tension manifests most dramatically in Dog, the devil that tempts and damns Sawyer as he moves between scenes with a mobility unavailable to any other character.

Although Goodcole has more words than Sawyer in the pamphlet, and although Sawyer's plot is secondary in the play, both rely on the power of her presence to distinguish themselves. As Frances Dolan explains, although many people were familiar with witch trials through their own participation, 'many more participated through print ... many witchcraft trials were published — often proclaiming themselves to be true and indeed to be correctives of inaccurate reports in circulation'.<sup>19</sup> Goodcole's complaints about 'base and false Ballets' indicate that he considered his publication to be such a corrective, but Goodcole needed a way to mark his text as credible. To do so, he needed to rely on the narrative authority of Sawyer herself. This strategy first appears in the title announcing that this wonderful discovery is not simply of a witch, but of a *named* witch,



'Elizabeth Sawyer' emblazoned on the title page.<sup>20</sup> Goodcole uses this tactic in five of his six crime pamphlets, emphasizing his unique access. These titles suggest that Goodcole is not just telling the story of the crime — he is telling the story of the criminal, providing 'the Testimony of the living and the dead, which I hope shall be Authentically for the confirmation of this Narration, and free mee from all censorious minds and mouthes' (A3r). Goodcole establishes his right to Sawyer's testimony by the closeness and frequency of their contact: 'Written by Henry Goodcole, Minister of the Word of God, and her continuall Visitor in the Gaole of Newgate' (A2r).

The play is likewise named for Sawyer. As Susan Amussen notes, 'One of the odd things about *The Witch of Edmonton* is that the title plot is the second of the two main plots of the play, subordinate to the marriage/bigamy plot'.<sup>21</sup> While there are thematic reasons for emphasizing the play's witch in the title, there are also commercial reasons. The phrase 'The Witch of Edmonton' would garner immediate recognition from London audiences in 1621 given that Edmonton's witch was so recently imprisoned in Newgate and executed at Tyburn. Goodcole describes hearing ballads 'sung at the time of our returning from the *Witches* execution' (A3v). Sawyer's imprisonment and death embeds her in London's geography, in the London soundscape through the songs Goodcole hears after watching her hang, and in London's popular print, as the sensational songs of 'Balletmongers ... creepe into the Printers presses and peoples eares' (A3v). The bigamist Frank Thorney might be the closest thing the play has to a main character, but Elizabeth Sawyer's 'known true story', as the play's 1658 title page stresses, is what draws in the audiences.

Although Sawyer's voice is the source of Goodcole's authority and the titular attraction of the play, her voice is also continuously circumscribed, at once the most compelling element in both narratives and surrounded by outside forces that seek to direct, possess, or silence it. The importance of speech in Sawyer's case has received ample critical attention.<sup>22</sup> Goodcole concludes his discovery of witchcraft and murder with this moral: 'Deare Christians, lay this to heart, namely the cause, and first time, that the Diuell came vnto her, then, euen then when she was cursing, swearing, and blaspheming' (D3r). *The Witch of Edmonton* maintains this emphasis on dangerous speech. When Sawyer longs for the power to curse her violently abusive neighbour, the devil takes her wish as his entry cue: 'Ho! Have I found thee cursing? Now thou art mine own' (2.1.136–7). The play's 1658 title page emphasizes this line as a speech ribbon unfurling from the devil-Dog. Yet although Goodcole portrays Sawyer's speech as 'the occasioning cause, of the Diuels accesse vnto her' (B1r) and an unreliable, destructive force, he insists

on the importance of conveying her words ‘*verbatim*, out of her owne mouth deliuered to me’ (B3v–B4r).

Marion Gibson cautions that ‘*verbatim*’ claims in witch pamphlets ‘can be unhelpful if taken literally’ in their attempts to construct closed narratives.<sup>23</sup> We cannot establish the degree to which the words attributed to Sawyer are actually hers, but the appearance of Sawyer’s voice on the page seems to have peculiar importance in this case — and actively works against the attempt to construct a single conclusive account. Goodcole is adamant about Sawyer’s agency in confessing and the authenticity of her words, and presents her confession as a dialogue, using section titles, typographic signals, and a question/answer format to demarcate Sawyer’s words from his own — an unusual move when most written accounts of testimonies and confessions used one consistent narrative voice.<sup>24</sup> Goodcole does not replicate this dialogue format in his other pamphlets, even though he acts as confessor to the convicted in those narratives, too. Identifying and distinguishing the body of an early modern text as distinct from its paratexts can be a dubious undertaking,<sup>25</sup> but if *The Wonderfull Discouerie* has a body, it is Sawyer. The confession dialogue takes up the bulk of the pamphlet, confined within Goodcole’s preface, his description of her trial and execution, his anti-blasphemy moral, and his margin notes.

*The Witch of Edmonton* takes up this dual approach to Sawyer’s voice, making her words both a danger to the community and her soul, and the source of the play’s most forceful speeches. Sawyer enters with an incisive critique of the society that condemns her:

’Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,  
 And like a bow buckled and bent together  
 By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,  
 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 myself they go  
 About to teach me how to be one, urging  
 That my bad tongue — by their bad usage made so —  
 Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,  
 Themselves, their servants, and their babes at nurse.  
 This they enforce on me, and in part  
 Make me credit it. (2.1.3–15)



The play's Sawyer complains that outside narratives have the power to define her — something Goodcole similarly protests in his preface, dismissing some of the same accusations that Sawyer disputes:

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 brayning her selfe, of the Spirits attending in the Prison: all which I knew to be fitter for an Ale-bench then for a relation of proceeding in Court of Iustice. (A3v)

Goodcole and Sawyer echo one another in their entrances. Goodcole may appropriate her voice, but the play's Sawyer appropriates Goodcole's. Moreover, Goodcole's dismissal of rumours that Sawyer bewitched corn, controlled animals, and drove a woman to suicide appears partly based on *Sawyer's* rejection of those claims. The translation between Sawyer's prison conversations, Goodcole's printed claims, and the play-Sawyer's performed speeches creates an impression of category collapse that extends out into audiences. Sawyer's complaint about being made a 'common sink' vulnerable to the 'filth and rubbish of men's tongues' demands an explanation from audiences that are likely made up in part by the same people circulating these rumours. The stories that trouble Goodcole and the play's Sawyer spread among the same audiences they address, and they both proceed to feed the same sensationalist stories, assuming her voice and perpetuating accusations while drawing attention to the questionable ethics of doing so.

In Goodcole's pamphlet, this conflicted awareness of who has power over Sawyer's story is most apparent in the relationship between the body of the text and the margins, where, instead of being immersed in the immediate and apparently verbatim interaction between questioner and witch, readers can actually *see* Sawyer's voice appropriated, directed, and interpreted by Goodcole. The printed proximity of their words replicates Goodcole's emphasis on his access to Sawyer, with Goodcole's margin notes nudging against and even merging with Sawyer's distinctly marked voice. Goodcole uses his margins to justify questions and provide context. These marginal comments also force a sort of double-reading, pushing readers both in-scene with the dramatized dialogue and pulling them out of the scene with Goodcole's intermediary presence, allusions to court testimonies that are withheld from the pamphlet, and the presence of other witnesses and speakers left out of the dialogue proper and intervening from the margins, such as when 'A Gentleman by name Mr. Maddox standing by, and hearing of her say the word blaspheming, did aske of her, three or foure times, whether the Diuell sayd haue I found you blaspheming, and shee confidently sayd, I' (C1v).

In addition to the unnamed and unnumbered group apparently present during the prison dialogue, the margins continuously reference corroborating and competing testimonies from Sawyer's earlier trial: reported speech from Sawyer's husband, the women who searched her body for witch's teats, and children attesting to witnessing her familiars recontextualizes, contradicts, or explains Goodcole's questions and Sawyer's replies. For instance, when Goodcole demands to know the exact location on her body where the devil suckled, the margin reveals that he seeks confirmation of the women's testimony to evidence that he could not see. When he devotes several questions to the existence of ferret familiars, the margin references multiple witness sightings — only to let Sawyer refute them unchallenged in the main dialogue. The page presents a surprisingly crowded scene of characters interrupting, disputing, and jostling one another.

Goodcole's margin notes call attention to his mobility: he references outside contexts, conflicting rumours, testimonies, and witnesses he brought with him to the prison. Sawyer remains stuck in prison and the centre of the page, but Goodcole can move in and out of both. As seen in figure 3, after Sawyer confesses that the devil was glad to find her cursing, a section that typography and layout indicate to be Sawyer's voice transforms into Goodcole's (C1v). The initial switch is indecipherable: 'when he, namely the Diuel, came to me, the first words he spake unto me were these: *Oh! haue I now found you cursing, swearing, and blaspheming? now you are mine*', (C1v). Sawyer appears to continue: 'A wonderfull warning to many whose tongues are too frequent in these abhominable sinnes, I pray God' — and only here do readers get a signal that the speaker is no longer Sawyer — 'that this her terrible example may deter them' (C1v). Despite the apparent importance of delineating Sawyer's voice from Goodcole's, those boundaries are almost instantly violated.

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, this mobility and boundary-crossing is a power granted to its most unnerving, and most theatrical, character: the demonic Dog, who wanders at will in and out of scenes, nudging characters before they commit acts of startling violence, observing and commenting on events, playing the music in the morris scene, and never clarifying how much influence he possesses. Dog, too, can slip into Sawyer's speech, catechizing her with the mangled Latin of the Lord's Prayer that she uses to curse her enemies, and even finishing her sentences:

SAWYER And I desire as little. There's an old churl,  
One Banks —

DOG That wronged thee: he lamed thee, called thee witch. (2.1.168–169)

Dog comes from the pamphlet, where Sawyer describes the devil appearing as a dog, but his 'stunning theatrical mobility'<sup>26</sup> as he moves from one plot to another, shifting between domestic companion and supernatural threat, makes him a far more disturbing figure in the play. Dog is by turns affectionate, frightening, and clownish; he is both dog and devil, bow-wowling and threatening. Dog is the most obviously dramatic element of this adaptation of Sawyer's story, plucked from the pamphlet and transformed into the malevolent centre of the play. Dog's

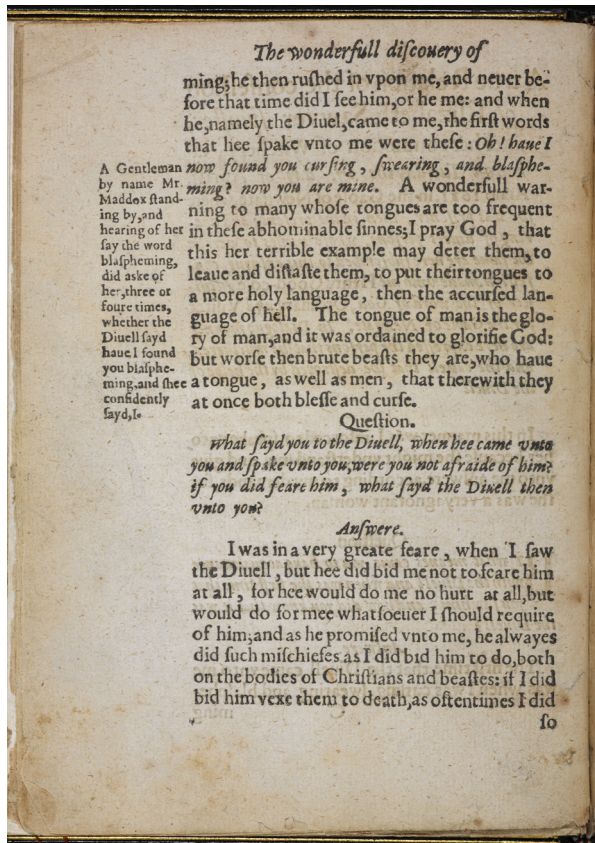


Figure 3: Detail of Goodcole's *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, © British Library Board, Shelfmark C.27.b.38, C1v.

focus-drawing presence at the edges of the action, his power over Sawyer's speech, and his ability to travel through the play's stories, however, has peculiar resonance with Goodcole — and with crime pamphlets more broadly. Within Sawyer's story, Dog is aid and antagonist, prompter and, strangest of all, confessor.

In an unexplained moment within Sawyer's confession, she mentions that the devil-dog that appeared to her was 'sometimes of blacke and sometimes of white' (C2v). The play makes this transformation a turning point rather than a random variation. Dog only turns white when Sawyer faces arrest, and the reason for this change aligns him uncannily with Goodcole: 'my whiteness puts thee in mind of thy winding-sheet' (5.1.34–5), he tells the angry and confused Sawyer; 'Whiteness is day's footboy, a forerunner to light, which shows thy old ravelled face. Villains are stripped naked; the witch must be beaten out of her cockpit' (5.1.45–48). A reminder of death, a harbinger of revelation, Dog is white because he has come for this criminal's confession, like any good chaplain. His words threaten discovery, a sinister copy of Goodcole's 'labour ... concerning her' (D2v). Taunting her in 'puritan paleness' (5.1.53), Dog, too, urges her confession: 'And ere the executioner catch thee full in's claws, thou'lt confess all' (5.1.74–5). 'Discovering' the witch, extracting and appropriating her narrative for public consumption, is the shared goal of the dramatized Edmonton community, London audiences, courts, ministers, the play itself — and the devil.

But Sawyer's narrative remains surprisingly undiscoverable. Critics disagree about whether the play's Sawyer repents.<sup>27</sup> Whether she does or not, audiences and characters are left uncertain over which of the accusations leveled against her — some absurd, some frightening, some witnessed by audiences, some unseen — are true, and which are not. The Edmonton townspeople demand further confessions from her, insisting that the town's recent violence could not occur without the presence of the devil, and Sawyer agrees: 'Who doubts it? But is every devil mine?' (5.2.46). She has confessed enough, she claims, but her confession leaves them beset by accusations and doubts. The pamphlet's Sawyer confesses — but she confesses to the murders for which she was acquitted and denies the murder for which she was convicted. Goodcole's willingness to use the margins to explain and contain Sawyer's words is strikingly absent in this instance; he presents Sawyer's rejection of the court's narrative without commentary. Rather than offering a conclusive, closed account, in both cases, confession multiplies the possible narratives available.

When Dog plays the minister, he combines the roles of Sawyer's devil and discoverer in an alarming manifestation of the boundary collapse characteristic of both pamphlet and play. But he also echoes Goodcole in his mobility. For much

of the play, Sawyer's plot seems separate from the bigamy plot. They mirror one another thematically, with their shared emphasis on poverty driving desperate characters to sin, but avoid crossover. Although Sawyer uses Dog to target those who have wronged her, she pays no attention to Frank. Frank's story, likewise, avoids awareness of Sawyer's. Characters reference metaphorical devils of 'beggary and want' (1.1.18) rather than invoking the actual devil. It is a shock when, in the middle of act 3, Dog simply walks from Sawyer's plot into Frank's and prompts the turn to violence, reaching out to touch Frank in the moment he decides on murder. Dog's influence is obvious and yet opaque: 'The mind's about it now; one touch from me / Soon sets the body forward' (3.3.2–3) he declares, suggesting he is there to encourage Frank's worst thoughts, contradicting Frank, who, calling his wife a whore and stabbing her, insists that he never thought of murder. Dog hovers near the action, there and not-there to Frank, who interacts with him without acknowledging him. For the rest of the play, Sawyer remains in her own plot, but Dog can go where he wishes, taking over the fiddle to play the community's morris dance, ignoring Sawyer when she calls for him, and, finally, leaving Edmonton for London, suggesting a move from the setting of the play to the world of the audience.

While Dog's stage mobility echoes Goodcole's pamphlet mobility, his ability to move from one crime to another, present but unacknowledged, also evokes the intertextuality of crime narratives more broadly, where plots and materials travel from one account to another. For instance, on the title page of the 1605 pamphlet *Two Most Vnnaturall and Bloodie Murthers* (Figure 4) — an account of a Yorkshire man's murder of his children and attack on his wife — a woodcut suggests an ominous relationship between the central narrative of lurid domestic violence and the pamphlet conveying that story.<sup>28</sup> This crime pamphlet reuses an earlier image of carnage: on the title page of the 1591 *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers* (Figure 5), the same image depicts the hatchet murder of three children.<sup>29</sup> In the 1591 image, the killer stands above the bodies of the children, hatchet raised above his head. Standing at his side, a man in black, with the clawed hands and feet of a devil, reaches for him, while in the background, a dog discovers a body among the stumps of felled trees. This original scene is a sensational piece of storytelling. The 1605 recycling, however, perhaps through a combination of attempts to alter the image and accidents of the printing process, creates something more unsettling. The landscape is gone, leaving the figures hovering in blank space; the dog in the background seems to bear no relationship to the scene, an observer crouching over nothing; and the devil, uncannily blurring the boundary between human and monster, no longer stands fully visible next to the murderer. Instead,



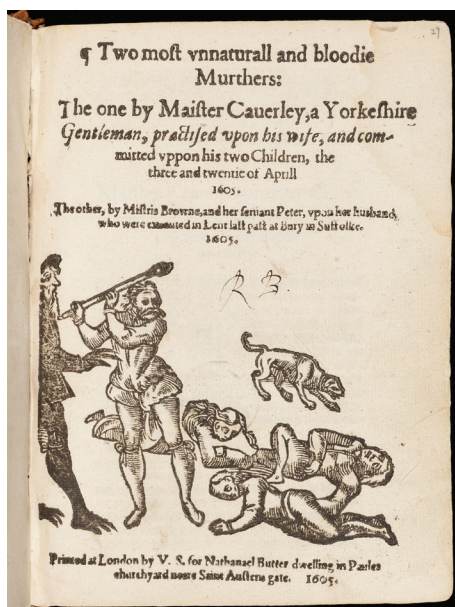


Figure 4: Title page of *Two Most Vnnaturall and Bloodie Murthers*. Used with permission from the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Shelfmark 4° C 16 (27) Art. BS.

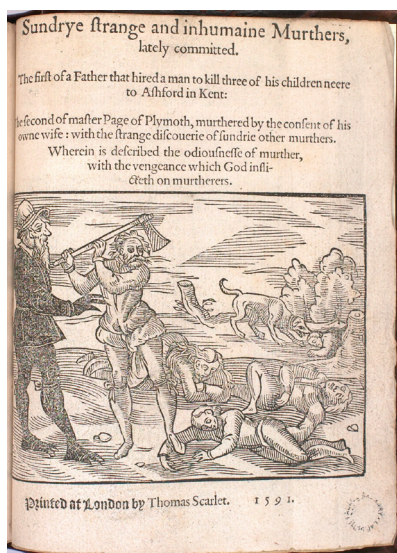


Figure 5: Title page of *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers*. Shelfmark 1594.16.10TP. Used with permission from the Lambeth Palace Library.



he reaches in from the margin, only half present, a reminder of the scene's inter-textual status within the circulation of popular crime narratives and a suggestion that something devilish might emerge from the pamphlet itself, moving between narratives of violence and horror and breaking through the boundary of the page into the scene of the murder.

Studying the interplay between the centre and the margins — the story in the body of the text or the heart of the play and the agents (commercial, moral, civil, demonic) nudging at its edges — suggests overlooked ways that crime narratives may have prompted audiences to recognize the gap between what text and performance 'discover' and what remains unknowable. Both *The Wonderfull Discouerie* and *The Witch of Edmonton* keep the witch central and yet confined, confronting audiences with how ambivalent, muddled, and ultimately inaccessible Sawyer's story remains through the margins: the paratexts of the pamphlet, where Goodcole uses his proximity to Sawyer to establish his truthfulness and struggles to assert his authority over her narrative; and the edges of the play's action, where the demonic Dog lurks, intruding everywhere with malevolent but ambiguous influence.

## Notes

I would like to thank Sarah O'Malley for organizing and editing this Issues in Review section, Alex Smith and *Early Theatre's* anonymous reviewer for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts, and the participants in the SAA's Witches in Space and Early Modern Carceral Studies seminars, whose suggestions have been invaluable in developing this ongoing project.

- 1 Thomas Kyd, *The Trueth of the Most Wicked and Secret Murthering of Iohn Brewen* (London, 1592; STC: 15095).
- 2 Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, UK, 2000), 203, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521572754>.
- 3 Ken MacMillan and Melissa Glass, 'Murder and Mutilation in Early-Stuart England: A Case Study in Crime Reporting', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de La Société Historique Du Canada* 27.2 (2016), 67, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040562ar>.
- 4 On depictions of the murderess as subject to her lover, see Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550 — 1700* (Ithaca, 1994), 38–48, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501707285>.

- 5 John Foxe, 'The Martyrdome and Suffering of Cicelie Ormes, Burnt at Norwich for the Testimonie and Witnes of Christes Gospell', in *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, 1576 edn, 2011, <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/index.php?realm=text&gototype=&edition=1576&pageid=1942>.
- 6 Randall Martin, 'Introductory Note', in *Women and Murder in Early Modern News Pamphlets and Broadside Ballads, 1573–1697*, ed. Randall Martin (Burlington, VT, 2005), xv, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203935125>.
- 7 Peter Lake, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, 2002), 29. Lake sees drama as also contained, but 'considerably more complex' (29) in its action and structures.
- 8 Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 51. See also Lake, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, 53; Melissa Rohrer, '"Lamentable and True": Remediations of True Crime in Domestic Tragedies', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 28 (2019), 1–17, <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/439>.
- 9 David Stymeist, 'Criminal Biography in Early Modern News Pamphlets', in *Taking Exception to the Law: Materializing Injustice in Early Modern English Literature*, ed. Donald Beecher, et al. (Toronto, 2011), 137–61, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442690226-008>.
- 10 David Stymeist, 'Female Criminality in Henry Goodcole's Murder Pamphlets', *Genre* 36.1–2 (2003), 29–46, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00166928-36-1-2-29>; Randall Martin, 'Henry Goodcole, Visitor of Newgate: Crime, Conversion, and Patronage', *Seventeenth Century* 20. 2 (2005), 153–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2005.10555555>. See also Frances Dolan's *True Relations: Reading, Literature, and Evidence in Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812207798>.
- 11 In *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (New York, 1999), Marion Gibson briefly but intriguingly suggests that Goodcole's pamphlet might best be read 'in the context of his stream of morality, crime, and religion pamphlets' rather than in the genre of witchcraft pamphlets (189), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203976449>.
- 12 Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Elizabeth Savvyer* (London, 1621; STC: 12014). Subsequent references cite parenthetically signature numbers in this text.
- 13 Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro (London, 2017). Subsequent references cite parenthetically act, scene, and line numbers in this edition.
- 14 Anthony B. Dawson, 'Witchcraft/Bigamy: Cultural Conflict in *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989), 77–98, 77, <https://doi.org/10.1086/rd.20.41917249>.

- 15 Sarah Johnson, 'Female Bodies, Speech, and Silence in *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Early Theatre* 12.1 (2009), 69–91, 70, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.12.1.805>.
- 16 Susan D. Amussen, 'The Witch of Edmonton: Witchcraft, Inversion, and Social Criticisms', *Early Theatre* 21.2 (2018), 167–79, 168, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.21.2.3608>.
- 17 Todd Butler, 'Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 50.1 (2010), 127–45, 140, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.0.0084>.
- 18 Evelyn B. Tribble, 'The Peopled Page: Polemic, Confutation, and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*', in *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture*, ed. George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle (Ann Arbor, 1998), 109–22, 109.
- 19 Dolan, *True Relations*, 53.
- 20 Danielle Clarke argues that female names in titles gender the text in "Signifying, but not sounding": Gender and Paratext in the Complaint Genre', *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (New York, 2011), 133–50, 135, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511842429.009>.
- 21 Amussen, 'The Witch of Edmonton', 167.
- 22 See Butler, 'Swearing Justice'; Johnson, 'Female Bodies, Speech, and Silence'; and David Dean, 'Blasphemy, Swearing, and Bad Behaviour in *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Early Theatre* 21.2 (2018), 151–65, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.21.2.3605>.
- 23 Marion Gibson, 'Becoming-Witch: Narrating Witchcraft in Early Modern English News Pamphlets', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 14.3 (2019), 317–35, 317, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mrw.2019.0030>.
- 24 Dolan, *True Relations*, 134.
- 25 See David Scott Kastan, 'The Body of the Text', *ELH* 81.2 (2014), 443–467, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2014.0018>; Evelyn B. Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville, 1993); and William W.E. Slights, *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books* (Ann Arbor, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.17226>.
- 26 Meg F. Pearson, 'A Dog, A Witch, A Play: *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Early Theatre* 11.2 (2008), 89–111, 89, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.11.2.785>.
- 27 Johnson, 'Female Bodies, Speech, and Silence', emphasizes that Sawyer evades the conventional gallows speech (85); Stymeist, on the other hand, argues that she 'conforms to the norms of behaviour expected from prisoners before execution, for she publicly repents and prays for divine forgiveness'; see David Stymeist, "'Must I Be ... Made a Common Sink?": Witchcraft and the Theatre in *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 25.2 (2001), 33–53, 43, <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i2.8689>.

- 28 Anonymous, *Two Most Vnnaturall and Bloodie Murthers* (London, 1605; STC: 18288).
- 29 Anonymous, *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers* (London, 1591; STC: 18286.5).