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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Dekker, Thomas, John Ford, and William Rowley.

***The Witch of Edmonton*. Ed. Shelby Richardson.**

Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2022. Pp. 159. ISBN 9781554814169 (paperback) \$15.95.

This Broadview Anthology of British Literature edition of *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621)—a collaboration between Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, and others (as the quarto title page’s “&c” suggests)—presents an affordable single-volume edition of a fascinating domestic tragicomedy derived from contemporary accounts of the trial of accused witch Elizabeth Sawyer. The play has three tightly interwoven plots: Frank Thorney, an impecunious gentleman, secretly marries Winifred, the pregnant servant of Sir Arthur Clarington, not knowing that Sir Arthur is her unborn child’s father, but must also bigamously marry Susan Carter to save his family with her dowry. The abused, poverty stricken, and doomed Elizabeth Sawyer sells her soul to the devil in the form of a talking dog, who later convinces Frank to murder Susan while he attempts to abscond with the cross-dressed Winifred. Meanwhile, the attempts of the clownish Morris dancer Cuddy Banks to enlist Sawyer’s witchcraft in his pathetic amorous pursuits are foiled to comic effect.

Shelby Richardson’s edition provides a fine and generally helpful modernization and, as her introduction suggests, the play deserves the attention of scholars and theatre practitioners for a variety of reasons. As an example of the late, post-imprisonment work of Thomas Dekker, almost certainly the lead author, it offers a diverse snapshot of Jacobean audience interests, featuring the kind of middle-class morality showcased in the likes of *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (and appropriate for the Red Bull audiences for whom Dekker was accustomed to write) together with a focus on witchcraft aimed to appeal to its actual performance at the court of a king with a keen interest in demonology, and for the more upscale audiences of the Cockpit. The play places sophisticated, and ultimately unanswered, social critique in the mouths of marginalized women—the eponymous witch and her insane victim Ann Ratcliffe—with resonances that recall both the trial of Vittoria in *The White Devil* and the ravings of Lear. That the true villain of the piece is Sir Arthur, a privileged male whose punishment is a negligible fine, while Elizabeth Sawyer suffers arrest and execution, is surely meant by the playwrights to stand as a cruel and illustrative irony. And the character of Tomalin, the colour-shifting, talking, sometimes

invisible devil-dog, is an intriguingly unique example of the adventurousness of Jacobean dramaturgy.

This edition's appendices place the play in its historical context with the supplemental texts that are a hallmark of Broadview's anthologies: excerpts from King James's *Demonology* (1597), William Perkins's *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608), John Cotta's *The Trial of Witchcraft* (1616), and Henry Goodcole's 1621 account of Elizabeth Sawyer's trial, which served as one of the play's sources. They make the edition valuable in a course on the early modern literature of witchcraft, and much more affordably than the Revels anthology of Jacobean witchcraft plays (1986).

This edition might well serve as a handy script for a well-deserved revival production of the play, though scholars and teachers may have reasons to look to the five modern editions still in print. In addition to its appearance in Brian Vickers's John Ford anthology, the play appears in more expansive (and expensive) single-volume editions by Arthur Kinney (*New Mermaids*, 1998) and Lucy Munro (*Arden*, 2016). For a course on female voices in early modern drama, the inclusion of *The Witch of Edmonton* in the *New Mermaids* collection edited by Emma Smith (*Women on the Early Modern Stage*, 2014) might be more attractive; and the edition of the play in the *Oxford World's Classics* anthology edited by Martin Wiggins (*A Woman Killed with Kindness and other Domestic Plays*, 2008) offers more contextualization of the play within the subgenre of domestic drama.

The preparation of the edition seems a bit slapdash, with no textual apparatus or bibliography, spotty copy editing, and annotations that explain bawdy language and scriptural allusions in an inconsistent level of detail and leave Greek words untransliterated, provoking the question of what level of scholar the edition is aimed at. The introduction (presumably by Richardson, whose name is listed only once in the volume as a "contributing editor") provides valuable context, but is frustrating in its brevity, repeatedly raising excellent questions that it hasn't the time to answer—Why is Dekker considered the play's lead author? What is the play's relationship to city comedy and domestic tragedy?—and offering tantalizing arguments with not enough follow-up discussion: "Like actors, witches are unsettling figures because they have at once too much and not enough power" (14). I suspect that these shortcomings are due to the strictures on space imposed by the press, and not to any failings on the part of Richardson, whose as-yet unpublished dissertation explores the

fascinating association between witches and players. Her edition of *The Witch of Edmonton* for Broadview will surely find an audience, but it leaves the reader wishing that it could have been expanded into the treatment that the play and its editor deserve.

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