Vile Vapours: Addiction and the Blood Pact in *The Witch of Edmonton*

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Abstract
The Witch of Edmonton has frequently been read as a play which exposes the social problems that led to witchcraft accusations in early modern society. This article examines another aspect of the play which has not yet been adequately discussed by literary scholars: the role of physiology, and especially the role of human blood, in the play's representation of witchcraft and the devil's manipulation of human beings. In the world of the play, the devil's ability to influence people by exercising control over the blood and its various constituents is a vital tool in his seduction of the witch, Elizabeth Sawyer. It is instrumental in her ultimate damnation, changing her both physically and temperamentally over the course of the play so that she ends up beyond salvation. The play subtly reveals the physiological roots of demonic influence and presents a new way of understanding the 'blood pact' made between witch and devil, representing witchcraft as a form of addiction that resembles a widespread but controversial present-day idea about drug abuse as a medical and a moral phenomenon, the brain disease model of addiction (BDMA).

Keywords: addiction; blood; the devil; witchcraft; *The Witch of Edmonton*; early modern drama

Dekker, Ford and Rowley's play *The Witch of Edmonton* has frequently been read as exposing the social problems in early modern society that led to witchcraft accusations.[1] According to this familiar view, the play reveals the underlying causes of witchcraft in its depiction of a poor and friendless woman, Elizabeth Sawyer. Sawyer is driven to a bargain with the devil by the harsh treatment she receives from the rest of the Edmonton

[1] To take a few examples, see the discussions of the play in Dawson (1989), Commensoli (1996), Kezar (2007), Hopkins (2002), and Garrett (2007). David Nicol, on the other hand, argues that demonic influence plays as significant a role as social influence in the play (2005: 427).

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community—in particular the unsympathetic yeoman Old Banks, who physically beats her in an early scene. It has even been suggested that the play, by representing witchcraft as a matter of social exclusion and 'othering,' subtly raises questions about the very possibility of witchcraft (Kezar 2007: 144; Comensoli 1996: 121). The idea that the play works to challenge and undermine belief in witchcraft is in my view an anachronistic reading,[2] but there is much to be said for the idea that *The Witch of Edmonton* provides a searching and critical examination of early modern society.

My purpose in this article, however, is to expand on this understanding of the play by examining an aspect of it which has received little scholarly attention: the role of contemporary medical theory in the play's representation of witchcraft. Bronwyn Johnston (2019) has recently departed from the familiar social reading of the play in making the case for Sawyer as a locus of infection in Edmonton; in the present article, I discuss the physiological aspects of Sawyer's transformation into a witch. *The Witch of Edmonton* presents a dramatic setting in which the devil is, as contemporary Protestants were fond of pointing out, 'the prince of this world' (Oldridge 2010: 38). In a world subject to the rule of the devil, all things—society included, but also the human body—are open to demonic influence. Central to the devil's attempts to gain power over human beings is blood— which, by intriguing coincidence, could be described as the 'prince' of the humours (Walkington 1607: 57). The devil's ability to influence others by manipulating or exercising control over the blood and its various constituents is a vital tool which he uses to capture human souls. The most obvious example of the devil's interest in human blood is his agreement with Elizabeth Sawyer. In return for demonic assistance, Sawyer allows the devil to suck blood from her body. However, Frank Thorney, too, may have been affected by the devil's influence over his blood and, thereby, his behaviour.

This article will also show that *The Witch of Edmonton* uses the idea of the blood pact in a novel way—one which is not explicitly discussed by English theorists of witchcraft until much later in the seventeenth century. The most famous dramatic example of a demonic pact made with blood appears in *Dr Faustus*, where the eponymous anti-hero signs a deed of gift promising his soul to Lucifer. In this play, Faustus signs the agreement

[2] I have argued this elsewhere; see the chapter on the play in Pudney (2019).

because he is already a hopeless sinner, and the pact is merely one sin among others. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, by contrast, the blood pact is central to Sawyer's recruitment as a witch. Like a drug dealer, the devil offers to satisfy Sawyer's excessive desire for revenge, but in the end only brings her to avoidable disaster. The blood pact Sawyer makes, in other words, is instrumental in her development and ultimate damnation as a witch, changing her both physically and temperamentally over the course of the play so that she ends up beyond salvation. This article begins with a brief discussion of the development of the idea of the blood pact in early modern England. It continues by highlighting *The Witch of Edmonton*'s concern with human physiology and its role in provoking extreme passions, not only in Sawyer but in the character of the bigamist and murderer Frank Thorney too, before bringing these two elements together in a new analysis of Sawyer's diabolical pact. I conclude by arguing that the play reveals the physiological roots of demonic influence and the blood pact, representing witchcraft as a form of addiction that closely resembles one prominent explanation of drug abuse in the present day, namely the brain disease model of addiction (BDMA)—a view of addiction which is still controversial among researchers (critics from a variety of disciplines include Room 2003; Heyman 2009; Reinerman and Granfield 2014; Satel and Lilienfield 2014; Lewis 2017).

The blood pact

The idea that a pact with the devil might be sealed in blood is frequently encountered in early modern writings on witchcraft. Writing just a few years after *The Witch of Edmonton* was first performed, the Puritan cleric and witchcraft theorist Richard Bernard describes the pact as follows:

> […] This league being thus made and sealed, hee hath a sacrifice offered vnto him of some, & of others some (as of their ordinary Witches), hee desireth to sucke bloud: for hee will have his Covenant sealed with bloud one way or other. (Bernard 1627: 110–111)

For Bernard, who evidently takes the story of Faustus to be non-fiction, the difference between a witch's pact and that of a magician is determined by the quality of the person making the bargain, measured in terms of class and, it is implied, gender. He even explains the appearance of the devil in different forms as a function of the dignity of the person he is appearing to. Hence he appears to male, educated magicians in human form, but to

those who are 'base, sordid, filthy, nasty and blockish'—such as the village witches described in the pamphlet literature on witchcraft—he appears in animal form (Bernard 1627: 107–08). Such animal 'familiars' were a characteristic feature of English witchcraft cases.[3] However, despite the social differences between magicians and witches, Bernard does not suggest that there is any essential difference between the two types of pact; in either case, blood is merely used to seal the bargain.

Within most demonological writings and witchcraft pamphlets, there is no indication that the drawing of the witch's blood, in and of itself, has any effect upon her. Records of witches' confessions from the second half of the sixteenth century often refer to the devil agreeing to help the witch in return for a single drop of blood. Elizabeth Francis, convicted of witchcraft at Chelmsford in 1566, for example, was required to provide a single drop of blood to her familiar spirit, a cat named Sathan, in return for each service provided (Phillips 1566: A7r). John Walsh, also interrogated in 1566, said that he gave one drop of his blood to his familiar, 'whych bloud the Sprite did take away upon hys paw'. (*The Examination of John Walsh*: A6r). Little more than a decade later, four witches from Windsor were said to have paid their spirits at the same rate—one drop of blood per job—as Elizabeth Francis had (*A Rehearsall both Straung and True*: A8r–A8v). Henry Howard, writing in the 1580s, also mentions 'one droppe of blood' as the price exacted by a spirit from a witch 'whom I saw my selfe put to death at *Cambridge*' (Howard 1620: 90). Such a small amount of blood cannot have any physiological significance; the amount required suggests that its function is ceremonial and symbolic. Offering blood to the devil seems to have been regarded by some early modern people as unforgivable. Certainly, this is the view taken by Faustus himself in the earliest printed version of the story. At the very end of his life, his friends attempt to persuade him to repent his sins and turn to God:

> This they repeated unto him, yet it could take no hold, but even as Cain he also said his sins were greater than God was able to forgive; for all his thought was on his writing: he meant that he had made it too filthy in writing it in his own blood. (Jones (ed.) 1994: ll.2906–2909)

[3] For two recent discussions of the idea of the familiar spirit, a feature of witchcraft belief more or less unique to early modern England, see Millar (2017: 48–73) and Hutton (2017: 262–278).

It is specifically the writing of an agreement in blood—ink would not have had the same effect—that traps Faustus in his despair, not because the agreement is thereby made binding but because Faustus perceives it to be too blasphemous for God to forgive. It is very doubtful that Faustus is correct in this opinion; elsewhere the text makes it clear that the pact with Mephistopheles does not rule out Faustus' repentance and forgiveness by God (Jones (ed.) 1994: 515–517); nevertheless, the use of blood is significant to Faustus.

There thus appears to be a fairly broad, if largely tacit, consensus in the late Elizabethan period that blood is used in the pact between devil and witch simply as an act of blasphemy. The tendency of familiar spirits to require only a single, symbolic drop of blood in most Elizabethan witchcraft pamphlets also rules out the possibility of any physiological effect on the witch through blood loss. However, in some pamphlets, witches' familiars are not content with a single drop of blood, but suck blood regularly from the witch. The earliest recorded instance of this occurs in 1510, although this case lies outside the period of relatively intense witchcraft persecution beginning around the 1560s (Millar 2017: 51), and the sucking of blood occurs more frequently in later cases. In 1589 Joan Prentice, a witch who refused the devil her soul, nevertheless allowed him, in animal form, to suck blood from her finger and later, regularly, from her left cheek (*The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches*: B1v–B2r). Other witches, too, were said to have allowed their spirits to suck blood, often from teats created by the devil and concealed on their bodies especially for this purpose (see, for example, *Witches Arraigned and Executed*: C1v). Greg Warburton regards this shift in the way the blood pact was described as necessary within early modern patriarchy to emphasise the subservience of female witch to male devil (2003: 100–101; see also Serpell 2002: 177–179).

However, the increase in the amount of blood taken also raises the possibility of direct, physiological effects on the witch, a possibility which was not explicitly discussed by English writers on witchcraft in the period before the English Civil War. As Julie A. Davies has argued (2012), the most explicit and sophisticated treatment of the devil's interest in sucking human blood to be produced in the early modern period is that of Joseph Glanvill, writing in the Restoration:

> some have thought that the *Genii* (whom both the *Platonical* and *Christian Antiquity* thought *embodied*) are recreated by the *reeks* and *vapours* of *humane blood*, and the

> *spirits* that proceed from them: Which supposal (if we grant them bodies) is not unlikely, every thing being *refresh'd* and *nourish'd* by its like. And that they are not perfectly *abstract* from all *body* and *matter*, besides the reverence we owe to the wisest antiquity, there are several considerable Arguments I could alledge to render it exceeding probable. Which things supposed, the Devil's *sucking* the *Sorceress* is no great wonder, nor difficult to be accounted for. […] To which I add […] [t]hat which to me seems most probable, *viz*. That the *Familiar* doth not only suck the *Witch*, but in the action infuseth some *poysonous ferment* into her, which gives her Imaginations and Spirits a *magical tincture*, whereby they become *mischievously influential* […] 'tis plain to conceive that the *evil spirit* having breath'd some vile *vapour* into the *body* of the *Witch*, it may taint her *blood* and *spirits* with a *noxious quality*, by which her *infected imagination*, heightened by *melancholy* and this worse cause, may do much hurt upon *bodies* that are impressible by such *influences*. (Glanvill 1688: 75–76)

Neither of the explanations offered by Glanvill above is entirely new. The idea that spirits could feed on the 'spirits' in the blood is dependent on the ancient Platonist view of the nature of spirits as thin, airy, but corporeal creatures that need to eat and drink, rather than as entirely incorporeal beings. Glanvill appeals to their ancient status to recommend this view. The explanation Glanvill feels to be 'most probable,' which Davies calls his 'theory of poisonous vapours' (2012: 164), is also not original, although Glanvill discusses the idea in more detail than anyone else had previously done. In fact, Johannes Weyer had proposed this possibility in print as early as 1563. Arguing that melancholy can be caused both by naturally occurring illnesses and by the devil, Weyer writes that

> the senses are corrupted in various ways by this one humour or by the sooty vapour of black bile which infects the abode of the mind […] Why then will a crafty spirit like the Devil not be able, with God's permission, to insinuate himself into the organs of sense, and stir the humours or vapours suitable for his purposes, or bring his own special air into the organs? (Mora (ed.) 1991: 186)

Weyer's 'special air' may have directly inspired Glanvill's 'vile vapours,' although, as I will show, similar ideas were present in the works of other early modern authors as well, albeit with much less clarity about the mechanics of the devil's actions in causing melancholy or other violent passions. While Weyer does not connect his theory to the sucking of witches' blood, the potential to do so is there.

Blood in The Witch of Edmonton

Prior to Glanvill's work, there is usually little indication in pamphlets describing individual cases of witchcraft of why the devil wishes to suck blood regularly from witches. One notable exception, however, is Henry Goodcole's pamphlet account of Elizabeth Sawyer's trial and her subsequent execution—the single most important source for the play about the case, which judging by Goodcole's prefatory statements attracted a degree of notoriety. Goodcole's record of Sawyer's confession, given to him after her conviction, provides an unusually detailed account of the sucking of her blood by her familiar spirit, a black dog called Tom. Sawyer states that the dog sucked her blood for 'a quarter of an howre' at a time, and mentions that this caused her 'no paine at all' (1621: C3v). The pamphlet makes no specific mention of her suffering any ill effects as a result of the devil drinking her blood. However, two of Goodcole's most significant pieces of evidence for Sawyer's supposed guilt of the crime of witchcraft are centred on her appearance and physical condition:

> 1 Her face was most pale & ghoast-like without any bloud at all, and her countenance was still deiected to the ground.
>
> 2 Her body was crooked and deformed, even bending together, which so happened but a little before her apprehension. (1621: A4v)

Goodcole's evidence for Sawyer's guilt will strike most modern readers as absurd and irrelevant. The fact that Sawyer's face is pale and that she stares at the ground seems understandable given that she has been accused of witchcraft; her physical condition, as Goodcole describes it, does not seem particularly noteworthy given her age. However, within a culture that saw the work of God and the devil everywhere, these seemingly trivial observations may have carried great significance. Reginald Scot, arguing against the power of witches and the devil to transform the bodies of human beings, wrote that 'if a witch or a divell can so alter the shape of a man, as contrarilie to make him looke downe to hell, like a beast; Gods works should [...] be defaced and disgraced' (1584: 101). Scot might have inadvertently formulated an argument in support of Sawyer's conviction here, by providing the devil with a clear motivation for deforming her body. Goodcole also suggests that Sawyer has been entirely drained of blood; she is left 'without any bloud at all', as he puts it. The draining away of Sawyer's blood might well have been understood to be the result

of the devil feeding on it; specifically, that the crookedness and deformity of her 'bent together' body could have been imagined to be the result of this loss of blood. As larger and larger quantities of blood were drained, Sawyer's body crumpled inwards.

The pamphlet account also suggests one possible reason for the dog's literal bloodthirstiness—a reason which anticipates one of Glanvill's suggestions, noted above. According to Goodcole's record of Sawyer's confession, she told him that 'I asked the Divell why hee would sucke my bloud, and hee sayd it was to nourish him' (Goodcole 1621: C3v). If he is an embodied spirit, the dog needs sustenance too, which he gains from the spirits or *pneumata*—the thin, airy particles responsible for sensory perception (Arikha 2007: 10)—in Sawyer's blood. These physiological spirits are, as Glanvill's theorising implies, not very clearly distinguished from the airy substance which supernatural spirits—perhaps including the devil himself—were thought by some to be made of. As Glanvill puts it, if 'every thing [is] *refresh'd* and *nourish'd* by its like,' then spiritual creatures like the devil would need to consume spiritual matter. However, since the source of this claim in Goodcole's pamphlet is the devil himself—the father of lies—it might be wise to treat it with caution. The play, as I will argue, hints at other possible explanations.

But before turning to Sawyer's representation in the play, it is worth considering the play's other main plot, since this reveals the devil's general interest in human blood. *The Witch of Edmonton* also tells the story of the male bigamist and murderer Frank Thorney. Frank's story, although almost entirely separate from Sawyer's, involves the devil at an early stage—and this devil is as interested in Frank's blood as he is in Sawyer's. Before the play begins, Frank has been in an extra-marital relationship with Winnifride, a fellow servant in the household of the local magnate Sir Arthur. Sir Arthur chides Frank for his sinful behaviour, saying

> If the nimble devil
> That wantoned in your blood rebelled against
> All rules of honest duty, you might, sir,
> Have found out some more fitting place then here
> To have built a stews in. (Dekker, Ford and Rowley, 1.1.78–82)

The 'nimble devil' Sir Arthur refers to might easily be assumed to be a metaphorical devil. But the possibility that Frank might have had a literal devil in his blood is one that non-dramatic works from the period take

entirely seriously. Weyer's views have already been mentioned, and Robert Burton, whose famous work on melancholy was first published in the same year as Sawyer's execution and the play's first performance, quotes the sixteenth-century physician and poet Jason Pratensis' claim

> 'that the devil, being a slender incomprehensible spirit, can easily insinuate and wind himself into human bodies, and cunningly couched in our bowels vitiate our healths, terrify our souls with fearful dreams, and shake our minds with furies'. And in another place, 'These unclean spirits settled in our bodies, and now mixed with our melancholy humours, do triumph as it were, and sport themselves as in another heaven'. Thus he argues, and that they go in and out of our bodies, as bees do in a hive, and so provoke and tempt us as they perceive our temperature inclined of itself, and most apt to be deluded. (1932: 200)

If devils and 'unclean spirits' can 'mix' themselves with the humours present in the human body, they may be able to enter into the bloodstream for this purpose, since it contains an admixture of all of the four humours (Arikha 2007: 8). Frank, a young man with a sanguine personality, would naturally be more prone to the temptations of lust, as the abundance of humoral blood was associated with a greater libido (Arikha 2007: 10)—which the 'nimble devil' responsible for tempting him will certainly have known. This makes Frank an easy target for the devil, who chooses to tempt his victims according to their natural inclinations; as Burton argues in the quotation above, devils 'provoke and tempt us as they perceive our temperature inclined of itself', exaggerating those predispositions which make us vulnerable to particular types of transgression. As I will argue, Sawyer is also singled out by the devil as peculiarly susceptible to an entirely different kind of temptation.

Other parts of the play which have usually been read as metaphorical are also open to a more literal interpretation. One of Elizabeth Sawyer's early speeches provides a striking example:

> And why on me? Why should the envious world
> Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?
> '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? (2.1.1–8)

The critic Johnston considers this speech to highlight Sawyer's status as a source of miasmic infection, but does not mention Sawyer's account of others' involvement in her corruption (2019: 65–66). Sawyer complains in these lines that her deformity is not simply the result of a natural process of ageing. Instead, she claims that she has been 'buckled and bent together' by the actions of others who are 'more strong in mischiefs than myself': the villagers in Edmonton who torment her. In contrast to Goodcole's account, where Sawyer's physical condition is said to have deteriorated immediately prior to her arrest (as a result, it seems, of the devil's abandonment of her), in the play Sawyer is 'deformed' before she has even come into contact with the devil, and other human beings appear to be responsible.

Sawyer goes on to claim that, having been victimised by these unspecified mischievous people, she is now a target for 'the filth and rubbish of men's tongues'. This appears straightforwardly metaphorical to most critics, who have read the lines as referring to the harm that can be done to an individual by slander and rumour: a social reading of the words. I do not wish to argue against this view, and my suggestion for another level of meaning to the words need not exclude it. But, as Gail Kern Paster (1993) highlighted, the human body was understood to be porous and highly susceptible to environmental influences in the early modern period, which makes it possible to understand 'the filth and rubbish of men's tongues' literally, in a medical and physiological sense.

According to the French physician Andre du Laurens (1558–1609), the brain of any human being, since it is 'of a soft substance and of a cold and moyst temperature,' naturally produces 'many excrements' (1599: 142). The brain's excrements are of two kinds: the more subtle and refined are simply breathed out 'by insensible vapours'. The 'gross' excrements, however, are drained from the brain by two natural channels which lead to the nose and the palette. Most of these gross excrements, du Laurens believed, flowed to the palette, where they can exit the body through the mouth (143). Such 'brain excrements' could, therefore, be described quite literally as the 'filth and rubbish of men's tongues'. The possibility of 'vapours' being 'breathed abroad', and as a result causing various 'accidents' is also mentioned by du Laurens (126), as of course it is by Glanvill in relation to witchcraft specifically. This raises the possibility that the excremental vapours expelled through the mouths of the villagers, as well as the accompanying hard words, might have a direct and harmful

effect on Sawyer's mental and physical health before the devil has even begun to feed on her blood. It was certainly a well-established principle that 'bad air' could cause melancholy, and that melancholy could affect the body as well as the mind (see, e.g., Bright 1613: 179–181, 237–238; Burton 1932: 237–241).

Much of the language in the play, seen in the context of contemporary medical discourse, suggests physiological influences in bringing about the downfalls of Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer, as Johnston (2019) has also argued. But the one indisputable case of diabolical influence over the blood is the pact made by Sawyer and the dog. This pact has a profound influence on Sawyer's personality and behaviour, drawing her into a downward spiral. At the start of the play, Sawyer presents herself as a victim of prejudice on the part of the wider community, and singles out Old Banks as her chief tormentor. Her claims are supported by Old Banks' subsequent behaviour in beating and abusing her, and she does not appear to deserve the opprobrium that is heaped upon her. By the end of the play, however, Sawyer has become a furious and unreasonable character, causing harm indiscriminately to anyone she can injure, including infant children and livestock. With the devil's help, she brings about the death of another woman in the village, feeling that 'that foul-tongued whore, Nan Ratcliffe' deserves to die because she hit Sawyer's pig (4.1.178).

Of course, even at the start of the play, Sawyer is an ethically ambivalent character. Her response to her victimisation is far from ideal from an early modern Christian perspective; rather than meekly accepting her suffering as ordained by God, she curses Old Banks, and later expresses a desire for the devil to take possession of the 'ruined cottage' of her body (2.1.110). Bernard states that the devil is attracted to those who display 'distempered passions' (Bernard 1627: 102), and this phrase implies a physiological understanding of the prospective witch's identity. Passions were understood since the time of Galen to be actions of the body on the rational soul; since the passions of witches are 'distempered' they have been perverted by an excess, deficiency or imbalance in their humours (Arikha: 33–36). Sawyer's response to her tormentor, Banks, together with the despair expressed in her subsequent speeches, might be understood as evidence of a medical problem with the humours in her bloodstream (corrupted, perhaps, by the brain excrements of her Edmonton neighbours) which makes her particularly susceptible to the devil.

The devil appears to Sawyer in the form of a black dog, and offers her revenge in exchange for her body and soul. She is uncertain at first, repeatedly asking if he really means what he says. Unlike Faustus, she is also well aware of the value of what she is giving away. Sawyer's initial response to the devil's demand is 'Out, alas! My soul and body?' (2.1.134) She even tries to avoid promising her soul to the devil, offering instead to give him 'as much of me as I can call mine own' (2.1.143)—a formulation suggesting the Christian belief that her soul belongs to its redeemer, Christ. Ultimately, however, Sawyer makes the bargain, and from that point on the relationship between the devil and Sawyer is characterised by her paying him in blood for harmful acts against her growing number of real and perceived enemies. During the course of this relationship, Sawyer undergoes her transformation from helpless victim to increasingly malevolent aggressor.

The immediate cause of the change in Sawyer is suggested during an important exchange between her and the dog towards the end of the play. When he enters, Sawyer greets the dog by saying

> My dear Tom-boy welcome.
> I'm torn in pieces by a pack of curs
> Clapped all upon me, and for want of thee.
> Comfort me. Thou shalt have the teat anon. (4.1.158–161)

Sawyer's reference to 'the teat' is to a supernumerary nipple on her body, from which the dog sucks blood, having created the teat specifically for this purpose. In Goodcole's pamphlet account, Sawyer's teat is located 'above the Fundiment' (1621: B3v), although in the play the dog is shown sucking blood from her arm (2.1.145SD). The dog replies by saying, 'Bow, wow! I'll have it now' (4.1.162). The devil wants to feed on Sawyer's blood, and he wants to do so repeatedly, not just once in order to seal his blasphemous bargain with her. Why this should be the case is not spelt out, but both his insistence and Sawyer's reply are revealing. She says

> I am dried up
> With cursing and with madness, and have yet
> No blood to moisten these sweet lips of thine. (4.1.162–164)

The dog has been regularly sucking Sawyer's blood for some time now. His demand for more blood is one she is physically unable to satisfy,

although she wishes to please him and seems to regard him as a lover throughout her speech.[4] The devil abandons Sawyer to her fate—execution—soon after her declaration that she has been entirely drained of blood. In the play's telling of Sawyer's story, there is no reference to the devil's supposed need for sustenance, which Sawyer told Goodcole about in her confession. The obvious influence of the Calvinist demonologist George Gifford on the play might account for this. In his demonological works, Gifford is dismissive of the idea that the devil might need to feed or sleep—unlike Glanvill, who was later to take the idea of the devil having bodily needs seriously (Gifford 1587: G3v; cf. Glanvill 1688: 75). However, while no direct explanation of the dog's feeding on Sawyer's blood is offered within the play, the dialogue between Sawyer and the dog invites speculation on the part of audience or reader. Johnston briefly theorises that the devil wishes to use Sawyer's corrupted blood to spread infection (2019: 66–67). This intriguing suggestion is based on a reading of the play that highlights Sawyer's threat to the Edmonton community. My view of the play instead emphasises the individual tragedy of Sawyer's descent into the service of the devil, which suggests other explanations of the physiological processes involved.

As Johnston (2019) also notes, the language used both in the play and in Goodcole's pamphlet suggests that Sawyer has become deranged through loss of blood. When she tells the devil, 'I am dried up with cursing and with madness', an early modern audience member who considered the statement might have concluded that she was mistaken about the direction of the causal relationship between her dryness and her madness. Sawyer is dried up not as a result of cursing and madness, but because the dog keeps sucking her blood. Sawyer's dryness, in turn, leads to her cursing and madness. According to medical theories of the time, being 'dried up' could cause a variety of problems. One writer on phlebotomy, Nicholas Gyer, points out several possible consequences of excessive bloodletting:

> with much bloud the vitall spirits are also exhaled: which beeing done too often, wasteth the whole body, making the same cold, and causing the liuely operations thereof, to waxe worse and worse. To frequent bleeding therefore bringeth on old age apace, and maketh the same subiect to many diseases (1592: 44)

[4] On familiar spirits and devils as witches' lovers, see Millar (2015).

Although he is very much in favour of the use of bloodletting as a medical treatment, Gyer stresses that the amount of blood taken from a patient must be proportionate to the patient's strength, and at one point suggests 'an vnce or half an vnce' as a suitable amount of blood to drain (145). The fifteen minutes of feeding referred to in Goodcole's pamphlet would presumably allow the devil to drain much more than this modest quantity. The symptoms of excessive bloodletting Gyer describes are clearly present in Sawyer's case: both Goodcole and the playwrights highlight Sawyer's decline in physical and mental health. The blood pact has pushed Sawyer further and further into anger and madness, until, as the dog says just before he finally abandons her, she is 'ripe to fall into hell' (5.1.60). Having left her temporarily (but completely) drained of blood, weakened in body and mind, and deranged by her excessive fury, the devil has no more interest in her or her blood—his 'feeding' has achieved its purpose, reducing her to the state in which she ends the play and ensuring her damnation.

Sawyer's mental deterioration is evident from one of her later speeches as well as from her behaviour. Pleading with the absent dog to come to her, Sawyer says

> Revenge to me is sweeter far than life;
> Thou art my raven, on whose coal-black wings
> Revenge comes flying to me. O my best love!
> I am on fire (even in the midst of ice)
> Raking my blood up, till my shrunk knees feel
> Thy curled head leaning upon them. Come then, my darling.
> If in the air thou hover'st, fall upon me
> In some dark cloud, and as I oft have seen
> Dragons and serpents in the elements,
> Appear thou now so to me. (5.1.7–16)

Sawyer's obsession with revenge is, by this point in the play, accompanied by symptoms of what would now be called mental illness. The 'dragons and serpents' that Sawyer has seen have not been seen by any of the other residents of Edmonton, or by the audience, so they seem to be hallucinations. Such visions could be brought about by melancholy, which in turn could be induced by the devil. One medical writer comments that the disease 'causeth many fearfull fancies, by abusing the braine with vgly illusions' (Bright 1613: 122). That Sawyer seems to welcome her 'ugly illusions' distinguishes her condition from natural melancholy.

Glanvill's preferred explanation of the blood pact—that the dog has corrupted Sawyer's blood by injecting her with 'vile vapours'—is another possibility, and there is a faint suggestion in the play that this might also have happened. Sawyer's hope that the devil might 'fall upon' her in 'some dark cloud' suggests the kind of dark fumes or vapours in the body which were widely understood to cause melancholy (Arikha 2007: 115–6). The precise meaning of the line is suggested by the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the demonological work that circulated most widely in early modern England (S. F. Davies 2012: 108–109). According to the *Malleus*, incubus demons are usually invisible to bystanders when having sexual intercourse with witches, but they sometimes appear in the form of a 'black vapor' (Institoris and Sprenger 2009: 313). The words therefore highlight the sexual nature of the relationship between Sawyer and the dog. Of course, the devil's desire to have sex with Sawyer cannot be the result of human libido, and requires explanation just as much as his desire to drink her blood. A strong possibility is that sexual intercourse provides the devil with another means of access to the inner workings of Sawyer's body, allowing him to further corrupt her humours and exacerbate her need for revenge. The pact that the devil offers is a very poor bargain. Rather than satisfying her illicit desire for revenge as he had promised, the devil's interference with Sawyer's blood intensifies it.

Addiction and The Witch of Edmonton

While the play provides many grounds for speculation and hints at a range of demonological and physiological beliefs of the period, the precise mechanics of how the dog's sucking of her blood affects Sawyer's physical and mental health are never made explicit. It is probably not something to which the playwrights, or many of the people in the audience, would have given much conscious thought. Nevertheless, the devil clearly wants blood for some reason that goes beyond just inciting blasphemy, and the process of regularly draining her of relatively large quantities of blood does affect Sawyer. *The Witch of Edmonton* represents the blood pact not, or not only, as a matter of predestined sin, as it is in Dr Faustus. The predisposition towards evil is a partly physiological matter which bears comparison with current medical ideas about addiction as a neurobiological disease and the popular notion of the 'addictive personality' prevalent in the present day. It is Frank's sanguine personality that makes him vulnerable to lust, induced by the 'nimble devil' in his

blood, while Sawyer's distempered passions make her the ideal candidate for a witch.

Rebecca Lemon has recently highlighted the significance of the concept of addiction in *Dr Faustus* (2016). Lemon shows that *Faustus* features both the classical idea of addiction as a laudable scholarly commitment and a more problematic version of it, pointing out that Faustus' obsession with magic 'resonates with modern notions of addiction as pathology' (866). While the full concept of drug addiction had yet to come into being in early modern England, the term 'addiction' was used to refer to compulsive and potentially transgressive behaviours as well as the notions of service and dedication derived from Roman law, as Lemon notes (867–868). What is remarkable about *The Witch of Edmonton* is how its depiction of Sawyer's 'addiction' to the devil (in one of the senses widespread in the seventeenth century)[5] is partly a matter of physiology. Sawyer's addiction is brought about by the devil draining her of blood, in what would seem to be a parody of early modern medical treatment, and perhaps even injecting dangerous 'vapours' into her bloodstream in a manner eerily prescient of the mechanics of opiate addiction.

The devil in the play selects his customer-victims from among the weak and the vulnerable, expertly matching his temptations to their flaws—biological flaws which may nevertheless have been exacerbated by social factors. He offers to satisfy Sawyer's desire for revenge on Old Banks, but demands blood in return: the draining of her blood leads to a deterioration of her mental condition and increasing levels of anger and bitterness against her neighbours, resulting in an even greater desire for revenge, which must be paid for with more blood. Sawyer is locked into a relationship of dependency upon the devil. Dealing with the devil seems to be the only way she can satisfy her visceral craving for revenge, but it is a desire that will never be sated. Sawyer's passion for revenge is not merely psychological, nor is it solely induced by a society that has rejected her—it is also physiologically induced. Sawyer's moral corruption is brought about by a prior biological corruption, and even the social rejection that Sawyer experiences cannot be separated from its physiological aspect.

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[5] *OED* s.v. *addict* v. I.2a: 'To bind or attach oneself to a person, party, or cause; to devote oneself to as a servant, adherent, or disciple. *Obsolete*'.

The idea that an addiction like Sawyer's triggers an irresistible compulsion is one familiar to us today. The brain disease model of addiction (BDMA) was first put forward in 1997 in a highly influential paper which has attracted more than 2000 citations to date. Its author, the then director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) Alan Leshner, claimed that

> A metaphorical switch in the brain seems to be thrown as a result of prolonged drug use. Initially, drug use is a voluntary behavior, but when that switch is thrown, the individual moves into the state of addiction, characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use. (Leshner 1997: 46)

Precisely such a transformation occurs in Elizabeth Sawyer, as she moves from a partly sympathetic victim who is still capable of making free decisions, and who hesitates to deal with the devil at all, to a crazed figure addicted to revenge. She declares her own madness to the audience and evidently lacks the agency required to do anything other than lash out maliciously against the other residents of Edmonton.

BDMA remains controversial and is disputed by experts in addiction across a variety of disciplines, but its appeal to the imagination can also be seen in the compelling transformation of Elizabeth Sawyer in the play. A further aspect is that BDMA was originally proposed as

> an attempt to articulate an effective response to prevailing nonscientific, moralizing, and stigmatizing attitudes to addiction. According to these attitudes, addiction was simply the result of a person's moral failing or weakness of character, rather than a 'real' disease. (Heilig et al. 2021: 1715)

The destigmatizing mission of BDMA is tied to an effort to encourage more humane and sympathetic treatment of addicts; the idea being that if a person's agency has been compromised, they cannot simply be blamed for their actions. This idea, within *The Witch of Edmonton*, can be connected to a similar move to destigmatize the witch/addict Elizabeth Sawyer, who, as has so often been remarked, is treated with unusual sympathy in the play. Although she is not blameless, her social exclusion makes her poor choices more understandable, and she is herself among the victims of her subsequent addiction to the devil's service. The characteristically Calvinist idea of the gradual 'hardening' of a sinner to the point where repentance is no longer possible is given an explanation in terms of the prevailing medical ideas of the play's time. The conflation

of moral and medical issues seen in the play continues to occur in present-day debates about addiction, which may themselves owe something to Calvinist ideas about sin, predestination, and the limitations of human agency.

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