

6-15-2019

# Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England / Rebecca Lemon

Molly Hand

Follow this and additional works at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/emc>

---

### Recommended Citation

Molly Hand (2019) "Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England / Rebecca Lemon," *Early Modern Culture*: Vol. 14 , Article 20.  
Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/emc/vol14/iss1/20>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in Early Modern Culture by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).

**Rebecca Lemon. *Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. 258+ pp.**

Reviewed by MOLLY HAND

The title of Rebecca Lemon's new book may initially take readers by surprise; after all, what has addiction to do with devotion? But such surprise derives from two associations that color modern views of addiction: one is with modernity itself; the other, with pathology, addiction as disease. One valuable contribution of this study is to dislodge these very associations by discovering addiction as disease and compulsion in anti-drinking literature in early modern culture. Even more central to Lemon's argument, however, is uncovering how other modes of addiction have been obscured by this "modern" understanding. By reading addiction "as a form of devotion at once laudable, difficult, extraordinary, even heroic" (ix), Lemon's new book elucidates the paradoxical intertwinement of addiction and devotion in early modern English culture. Addiction as surrender of the self in utter devotion to God, love, friendship, or scholarly pursuit; addiction as excessive giving over to appetites, allowing oneself to be too dominated by one's humoral disposition – in early modern culture, Lemon demonstrates, these understandings circulate concurrently and inform one another.

"*Ad-dicere*" denotes a declaring or speaking toward a desired goal or object, and the early modern use of "addiction" particularly in religious or devotional contexts reflects this etymology. As Lemon shows, post-Reformation religious texts invite readers to "addict" themselves to God, to the study of the bible. Addicting oneself to godliness demands hard work, but it also "requires a natural disposition and ability; it is not purely a matter of hard work or instruction" (9). Furthermore, in early modern Calvinist discourse, "addiction is also perceived as a form of grace" (9). Becoming a devoted addict, then, "is both a gift and an effort" (9). There is also the possibility that one might addict oneself, or become addicted to the wrong end, and each chapter in Lemon's study takes up this possibility.

Chapter 1, "Scholarly Addiction in *Doctor Faustus*," sees Faustus as a failed addict. Lemon argues that we might understand Faustus's actions (and inactions) as being driven by his addiction to scholarship and his misguided devotion to Mephistopheles and Lucifer. Of particular interest in this chapter is Lemon's extended discussion of the contract: "The contract's terms . . . illuminate the paradox of Faustus's devotion: he is choosing to give up choice; he is exercising his right to surrender himself" (40). Faustus fails in surrendering himself to Mephistopheles and Lucifer; having been ravished, yet he wavers, so the contract is an effort to addict himself yet again. By this reading, "Rather than viewing the play as hinging on the tension between faith and free will – a tension that casts Faustus as *either* predetermined in his damnation *or* capable of saving himself – the

## Reviews

study of addiction in Faustus illuminates instead the drama of his attempted devotion and his failed surrender” (49).

Chapter 2, on *Twelfth Night*, turns us to addiction as a mode of devoted service and love – as well as drinking and drunkenness, a theme sustained in the chapters that follow. Shakespeare’s comedy stages addicted love as an effortful dissolution of self-sovereignty – the kind of surrender of self Faustus doesn’t achieve – in contrast to humoral predispositions and appetitive consumption: “love is not a bodily condition, such as a humor; it is not a complexion but an inclination that has turned to what the early moderns would deem an addiction” (51). Drinking, more obviously conceived in terms of addiction for modern readers, is “a craving at odds with the vulnerability and release of devotion” (51). Thus reflexive addiction is depicted as selfless devotion, compared to habitual drunkenness as a constant adherence to self and appetite.

The following chapter, “Addicted Fellowship in *Henry IV*,” revises readings of Falstaff as the comic drunk and situates him as a character addicted not to alcohol but to his friendship with Hal. Just as Olivia, Orsino, and Viola addict themselves to their beloveds at the expense of their self-sovereignty as well as their relationships to others, so Falstaff “offers a theatrical kaleidoscope of devotion, forgoing self-sovereignty in favor of fellowship” (80). In a discussion of early modern anti-drinking literature, Lemon illuminates just how precisely Shakespeare incorporates the pathologized terms of excessive drinking around Falstaff’s character; yet, by her reading, he is recuperated as not a hopeless alcoholic but a loyally devoted friend. What undoes Falstaff in the *Henriad*, Lemon argues, is not – or not only – his alcoholism, but the character’s addicted devotion to Hal. Falstaff’s protean flexibility is transformed by his addiction, and he grows “unable to shift, change, or adapt” (100). The play, Lemon concludes, “illuminates the costs of addictive fellowship within rejection, the tenacious attachment to Hal at the expense of self” (102) as Falstaff, once a “transformative shape shifter” (101), descends into his final role as “the isolated drinker . . . the abandoned addict” (102).

The theme of addiction as potentially dangerous personal devotion continues in Chapter 4’s reading of *Othello*, but here, Lemon argues, addiction is not reflexive but imperative, externally forced, thereby complicating the questions of free will and personal responsibility. Like *Twelfth Night* and the *Henriad*, *Othello* depicts addicted love alongside excessive drinking. Invoking the 1606 Statute against Drunkenness (4 Jac. 1, c.5) Lemon considers the double bind of the alcoholic: “the drinker is at once entirely responsible, and abused and overthrown” (114). Cassio is compromised by his drinking, and Othello is similarly compromised, Lemon argues, through addiction of a different sort: possession. Reading Othello’s divided self through the lens of addiction provides fresh insight into how we might understand Othello’s motives and actions, as well as the tragedy’s outcome. Finally, Othello and Desdemona are at once selfless, heroic, vulnerable, responsible, and externally compelled in their addicted love.

Building on previous discussions of Cassio, Falstaff, and *Twelfth Night*’s festive drunks, the last chapter turns to the practice of health drinking and its representations, from cautionary depictions in Shakespeare and Jonson to

## Reviews

celebration of the practice as a bonding ritual and suspicion of those who abstain in the Anacreontic verse of the Cavalier poets. Health drinking is at once a personal choice and a compulsory act to indicate one's membership in a social group (thus drinking as addiction for the later poets demonstrates devotion not to drink but to community). This chapter effectively demonstrates that studying health drinking as its representations develop over time "illuminates as addictive – namely, as devotional, compulsory, transformative, and potentially diseased – a practice that might otherwise seem merely convivial, escapist, or customary" (162).

Lemon's study will be of interest and value to scholars of early modern drama and culture, especially those interested in Marlowe and Shakespeare, Protestant devotional texts and early modern religious habits of thought, the literature of drinking, and the humoral body. This book contributes to our understanding of early modern culture in a few ways. It offers compelling new readings of widely studied drama, from *Doctor Faustus* to *Othello*, situating the arguments with reference to a range of illuminating primary texts throughout. In emphasizing the semantic valences of addiction and/as devotion, Lemon draws out previously overlooked representations of addiction in the plays, particularly as it appears in juxtaposition to indulgence in drink. Each chapter reinforces a view of addiction as requiring a subsumption of self, a giving over of self-sovereignty, which complicates readings of free will and personal responsibility in tragedies like *Faustus* and *Othello*, and our understanding of how early moderns might have considered the question of free will more broadly. Whether reflexive or imperative, addiction simultaneously binds the addict to the object of desire while freeing her from the constraints of selfhood. This theme of surrender of versus adherence to self, of fluidity versus fixity, is complemented in the queer and feminist theory underpinning Lemon's readings, as she herself notes in her epilogue. Ultimately, the matrix of addiction that Lemon articulates offers an avenue for further research; her study will surely foreground future readings.

As I read *Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England*, I paused to consider where I had recently seen the term "addiction" invoked in my own reading. I recalled that Reginald Scot used the term several times in different contexts in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584); for instance:

AS Women in all ages have been counted most apt to conceive Witchcraft, and the Devils special instruments therein, and the only or chief practisers thereof: so also it appeareth, that *they have been the first inventers, and the greatest practisers of poysoning, and more naturally addicted and given thereunto than men . . .*" (Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book 6, ch. 3; my emphasis).

And I had more recently seen the term in James VI's *Daemonologie* (1597):

. . . that olde and craftie enemie of ours, assailes none . . . except he first finde an [entrance] reddey for him . . . he prepares the way by feeding them craftely in their humour,

## Reviews

and filling them further and further with despaire, while he finde the time proper to discouer himself vnto them. . . . Their mindes being prepared before hand, as I haue alreadie spoken, they easelie agreed vnto that demande of his . . . At which time, before he procede any further with them, *he first perswades them to addict themselues to his seruice*: which being easely obtained, he then discouers what he is vnto them: makes them to renunce their God and Baptisme directlie . . .” (James VI, *Daemonologie*, Book 2, ch. 2; my emphasis).

Lemon’s exploration of addiction as a multivalent term that stands in complex relation to devotion in early modern English culture returned me to these passages, encouraging me to take more seriously, and more literally, how “addiction” signifies in each. Scot describes witchcraft as a practice to which women’s bodies are more “naturally addicted,” while James illustrates the complex dance of devil and sorcerer, whereby the devil demands devotion – but the sorcerer is already predisposed (the entrance ready) to addict himself to the devil’s service. The body is inclined, the mind is prepared. Women are naturally addicted; the sorcerer reflexively addicts himself. These two passages seem to neatly capture the paradox and the scope of the term as Lemon elucidates it. What other areas of early modern discourse might be illuminated by this lens?

---

**Molly Hand** is Entrepreneur in Residence and Lecturer in the Department of English at Florida State University. Most recently, she co-edited *Animals, Animality, and Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), and she is currently at work on a book-length study of animals and witchcraft in early modern English literature.