Invisible Tokens: Staging Cultural Anxieties about the Plague in the Plays of Shakespeare and Jonson

by

Matthew Michael Thiele

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
May 9, 2011

Keywords: Shakespeare Jonson plague early modern drama

Approved by

Constance Relihan, Chair, Professor of English
Alexander Dunlop, Emeritus Professor of English
Marc Silverstein, Professor of English
Rupali Mishra, Assistant Professor of History

Abstract

My study examines the influence of plague on six plays: *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and *Timon of Athens* by William Shakespeare, and *Epicene, Volpone,* and *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson. Between 1570 and 1670, the plague killed 658,000 in England and 225,000 people in London alone, and while the impact of plague is acknowledged in early modern prose, it is hardly mentioned at all in early modern drama. Only a handful of plays are set in plague time, and none depict individuals suffering from it. Given the ubiquity of plague in the lives of early modern Londoners, one might expect it to receive more attention, and the mystery of its absence demands an explanation. My study identifies and explains the various strategies that Shakespeare and Jonson employ to hide plague references in their plays.

I continue work that was begun in the 1920s by F. P. Wilson and carried on in recent years by Paul Slack, Leeds Barroll, Ernest Gilman, Rebecca Totaro, and I attempt to show how the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson can be considered plague literature in the sense that plague serves as a meaningful subtext, whether they do so by reproducing the plague themes and systems of signification from prose plague tracts or by challenging plague-time practices recommended by or the plague orders of Elizabeth I and James I. I also apply theoretical concepts and methodologies such as those proposed by René Girard, Susan Sontag, Kai Erikson, Mikhail Bakhtin, and others that treat the relationships between plague, disease, trauma and literature. I enhance these general theories by relating them to specific early modern English practices and beliefs. Ultimately, my research adds to the understanding of the historical and

literary contexts of Shakespeare's and Jonson's plays, puts the two playwrights in dialogue with one another, and models a methodology for determining the influence of plague on a variety of early modern texts.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Constance Relihan, Alexander Dunlop, Marc Silverstein, and Rupali Mishra for their hard work and sacrifice as members of my advisory committee. Thanks to Kellye Corcoran, whose camaraderie and acuity helped me get through the trials of completing this project and improved my work, particularly on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Thanks to Craig Bertolet, Robin Bates, and Robert N. Watson for their suggestions during the long writing process. Thanks to Paula Backscheider for her continuing support. Thanks to the members of the 2008 Shakespeare Association of America seminar entitled "A Plague on Both Your Houses." This seminar's members,Rebecca Totaro, Ernest Gilman, Margaret Healy, Paula Berggren, Charles Whitney, Bill Kerwin, Kelly Stage, Erin Sullivan, Richelle Munkhoff, James Mardock, and Nichole DeWall, gave me the confidence to continue my work with plague and forced me to become a serious scholar in the field. Special thanks to Rebecca Totaro, whose continuing generosity and goodwill is remarkable in a profession that can sometimes seem competitive and indifferent. Thanks to Bruce Springsteen, whose music has provided me with spiritual nourishment since the army days. Thanks also to Bob and Shirley Schneider, who took me in when I had nowhere else to go. I owe any success I achieve to their love and generosity. I have been helped immeasurably by the entire Schneider family: Gordon, Kathy, Bob Jr., Donald, and Olga and their extended families. Thanks to my wife Natalie, whose superhuman forbearance and sharp critical eye continue to be indispensable, and thanks to her family.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction[1]

> *And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.*[2]
>
> Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Section 1. Plague Now and Then

We are all plague survivors. I do not just meant that we are all related to someone who survived the plague at some point in history, but that we live with its continual presence in our world and our lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the last rat-borne plague epidemic in the U.S. occurred in Los Angeles in 1924-5, but sporadic cases occur each year in the U.S., and the CDC report 1,000 to 2,000 cases worldwide each year.[3] A recent case demonstrates the potential that bubonic plague still has to impact our lives. On May 23, 2007 Mindy Sink reported in *The New York Times* that a hooded capuchin monkey contracted bubonic plague at the Denver Zoo. The monkey had apparently eaten an infected ground squirrel and died shortly after that. Sink tried to strike a balance between sensationalizing the event in order to make a good story and reassuring readers that there was relatively little danger that they could actually contract the disease. News of a plague infection, even in a solitary capuchin monkey, has the potential to be quite inflammatory, especially in a large urban area like Denver,

but infections have become so rare that news of them is very hard to come by, and the news that is reported treats plague more as a curiosity than a danger.

The fact is, however, that the plague is nearly *everywhere*. We simply forget from time to time. We have that luxury. Science has provided us with all the information we need to effectively fight the disease. We know that the plague is caused by the bacillus *Yersinia pestis*, which manifests as three distinct varieties depending on the bodily system affected. Septicemic plague attacks the circulatory system, infecting the blood; pneumonic plague attacks the respiratory system, infecting the lungs; bubonic plague attacks the lymphatic system, infecting the lymph glands. The most common is bubonic plague; septicemic and pneumonic plagues are much rarer but also far deadlier than bubonic plague, and they often appear as secondary infections resulting from an initial bubonic manifestation.[4] We know that humans become infected with *Yersinia pestis* most commonly from a bite by a flea which has previously fed on another infected organism, although it is also possible to catch plague from direct contact with the plague bacillus or by ingesting or inhaling it. Advances in worldwide standards of sanitation have made it very difficult for humans to become part of the bacterium's lifecycle, and a vaccine was developed to inoculate people who were considered to be at risk of contracting the disease. Antibiotics are also quite effective against bubonic plague, so even if people catch it, there is a good chance that they will survive if they are treated early enough. This is how plague affects us in the 21st Century; we believe that we have it under control. We have other things to worry about, to be sure—cancer and HIV/AIDS continue to kill at alarming rates despite advances in science and technology—but it is comforting to know that we do not have to be too concerned about bubonic plague.

It is nearly impossible to imagine what it must have been like to experience a plague epidemic. The disease arrived in England in 1348 and took up essentially permanent residency in the city for roughly 300 years. What people thought they know about plague was more fantasy than fact, since science and philosophy were barely distinguishable from one another, and medicine would not begin doing more good than harm for about 400 years. Everyone could agree that the plague had specific symptoms including lethargy, swollen lymph glands called buboes, and sores referred to as tokens, and that it killed in a matter of days.[5] The statistics give some sense of the magnitude of the problem: in the century between 1570 and 1670, Paul Slack, author of the landmark study *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*, estimates that the plague killed 658,000 English men, women and children, and 225,000 in London alone.[6] Slack identifies 1557-8, 1587, 1592, 1596-7, 1603, and 1625 as years of crisis mortality (defined as being 20% above the national trend) within the lifetimes of Shakespeare and Jonson (58). In the years between 1603 and 1611, London suffered a protracted visitation during which tens of thousands of people died of plague annually, and the city maintained a population of around 225,000. The plague was a daily reality in the lives of Shakespeare, Jonson and their audiences, but the numbers only tell part of the story. Accompanying the high mortality of the plague was a host of social problems and human tragedies.

Authorities in early modern England could not agree whether the plague was God's punishment for the wickedness of the sinners in the city or had some more mundane cause such as "bad air" or celestial phenomena. Even though empirical observation suggested that the plague was infectious, authorities could not agree whether that was true. The official position of Elizabeth I and James I, the Privy Council, the Corporation of London, and the Royal College of Physicians was that plague was infectious, and they established policy based on that assumption.

The 1578 plague orders of Elizabeth I, which serve as the basis for later orders issued in her reign and that of James I, consistently refer to the plague as an infection or contagion, which are words that are interchangeable at this time and denote infectious disease.[7]

Religious figures with and without an official relationship with the Church of England questioned whether the plague was contagious. In plague time, zealots felt that they had to assert that the plague was not contagious if they wanted to take the position that the plague represented God's judgment on individuals. Admitting that the plague was contagious was to them an admission that God's judgment was arbitrary and cruel, which to some was tantamount to professing atheism. Henry Petowe, unsung poet, chronicler, and plague writer, expresses this opinion in his 1604 plague tract *Londoners their entertainment in the countrie. Or the whipping of the runaways*. As he castigates the dwellers of the English countryside for turning away Londoners fleeing the plague, he writes, "…assure thy selfe thou Country-man, or Townes man, whosoever thou be, that if thou be visited, it is thy sinne that causeth visitation, for else thou shouldest accuse God of injustice, and improvidence."[8] Petowe seems to take the position that *individual* sins incur God's wrath and the plague, which is an extreme position, but even proponents of the more moderate position, that plague was God's punishment for the *collective* sins of the city, country, or world, took exception to the contagion theory. It would be easy to dismiss the dissenters to the contagion theory as religious crackpots, but those crackpots exerted considerable influence, and they published plague tracts espousing their challenges to the contagion theory even though doing so was outlawed by the plague orders. Elizabeth's aforementioned plague order states,

> Item, if there be any person Ecclesiastical or laye, that shall holde and publishe any opinions (as in some places report is made) that it is a vayne thing to forbeare to

> resort to the infected, or that it is not charitable to forbid the same, pretending that no person shall dye but at their tyme prefixed, such persons shalbe not onely reprehended, but by order of the Bishop, if they be ecclesiasticall, shalbe forbidden to preache, and being laye, shalbe also enjoyned to forbeare to utter such dangerous opinions, upon payne of imprisonment; which shall be executed, if they shall persever in that error…"[9]

This is less clear than it could be, but the general point is that it is dangerous to assert that the plague is not contagious, and those who do so will be punished. The order goes so far as to label the entire doctrine of predestination a pretense, implying that the crown sided with those who reckon free will and natural causes among God's means of rendering judgment. This put the crown further at odds with Protestant lay preachers, whose popularity was increasing, in part due to plague. The plague exacerbated the trouble that already existed over religious expression in early modern England. The crown appeared overeager to suppress street preaching, and extremists seemed determined to abuse their privilege to preach. Henoch Clapham is a case in point. In *Henoch Clapham his demaundes and answeres touching the pestilence*, apparently written in prison, Clapham cites the statute from the plague orders mentioned above as the reason for his imprisonment. Clapham argues, however, that his imprisonment is not called for in the statute, and that he has been treated unjustly, even if he is guilty:

> …my punishment should not have bene imprisonment, but som inhibition, to preach. But, as may appeare, by all my writings, I am cleared from all such imputation: and so no Law (that yet I can heare of) in this matter, violated of me. His Majestie commaunded, I should be proceeded withall; By the Law, intending, that there was a Law to cleare me, or condemne me: and yet (as you heare) I am kept still in bondes, only upon my L. of London commaund, (not upon any Law Civill, or Ecclesiasticall, once spoken of) others

> of the Hy-Commission united with him therein, who (I suppose) dare not, easilie, be in any thing, unto him, repugnant: and he having imprisoned me, before he truly understood the cause, doeth thus goe about to make good his imprisonment, by wincking at the truth of the cause, seeming to plague me for the contrary.[10]

Clapham questions whether the plague orders carry the weight of law, which is valid, and he questions his punishment under the statute, which carries a prohibition to preach on the first offence. Yet some equivocation on the subject of the plague's infectiousness in this same tract indicates that his views may indeed violate the statute. In a section towards the end of *his demaundes and answeres*, attributed not to Clapham but to a "P.R" (presumably a pseudonym for Clapham himself), the question "Is the Plague infectious, or no?" receives the answer "That is intricate, more then I know" (sig. E2.r). "P.R" goes on in verse to offer short anecdotes of the uninfected remaining free of plague in spite of direct contact with the infected. In addition to two stories about mothers infected with plague suckling children who never get ill, there is the story of

> A man being marked with Gods tokens,
> Looking every hour, when his heart would be broken,
> Having one child, loth to leave behind him,
> Layed it 3. dayes and 3. nights in bed by him:
> The Father dyed, the child survived,
> And hath ever since prospered and thrived. (sig. E2.r.)

The man's tokens are the visible symptoms of bubonic plague, which eventually takes the man's life. The child survives despite sharing a bed with his infected father for three days. If true, this would be a miracle. It is certainly apocryphal if not an outright fabrication, but the message is

clear: Clapham is not allowed to say directly that the plague is not infectious, but P.R.'s anecdotes are meant as evidence for just that claim.

Other plague tracts can be seen actively attempting to skirt the prohibitions to free speech set forth in the plague orders. For example, "T.C." states in his 1603 sermon upon the 91st Psalm that there are two ways men can die: *at* their appointed time and *before* their appointed time: "…death may happen to a man two manner of waies. One way after the common course of nature, according as every mans death is appointed him of God… Another way may death happen to a man before the time, by reason of his great & grievous sinnes." [11] This vision of death does not violate the statute in the plague orders and actually manages to be doctrinally more severe than the attitude that the law prohibits. T.C. goes on to say, however, that the 91st Psalm promises to free men from dying before their time, implying but not stating outright that the righteous shall indeed die at their appointed time.

Of course, not all churchmen doubted the contagion theory or condemned flight. Eminent Protestant theologian Theodore Beza, who published an influential tract affirming the plague's infectiousness and advising the godly on the spiritual consequences of fleeing it, writes, "neither will I believe this disease not to be infectious, untill some man shall teache me either out of the worde of God, or by reasons set some where else (for ther are in the verye course of nature certaine most sure groundes and proofes so long as the order of necessary causes agreeth with itselfe) more certaintie."[12] Beza's tract was originally written in Latin and published in Geneva in 1579, but John Stockwood translated it into English and published it in London in 1580. The quick turnaround shows how important it must have been for some to counteract the strictly spiritualist attitudes toward the plague's infectiousness that were being expressed in England and throughout Europe.

Even the people who believed the plague to be infectious could not agree on how exactly the disease was spread, and in the vacuum of scientific knowledge, doctors, clerics, constables and quacks invented cures and preventatives that did not necessarily have any basis in traditional medicine (for what it was worth) or empirical observation. Recipes for preventative tonics and charms abounded, from things as simple as onions to those as outlandish as arsenic amulets (the theory was that like attracted like; the plague, considered foul and poisonous, would be attracted to and bound up or neutralized by other foul or poisonous things). Otherwise sober and reasonable sources such as Simon Kellwaye's *A defensative against the plague* (1593) and Thomas Lodge's *A treatise of the plague* (1603) were promoting their use,[13] not to mention less well-intentioned sources such as Peter Turner, who publishes an *Opinion* in 1603 unreservedly recommending them. Turner seems to have been more concerned with preserving a revenue stream than healing his patients.

Other measures taken against the spread of plague were good in theory but impossible to implement perfectly. The logistical problem presented by needing to quarantine a large number of people during an epidemic must have been overwhelming during the worst epidemics, but even during less severe outbreaks of plague, separating the sick and confining them to their homes would have been a logistical nightmare, and cannot have been perfectly enforced even if there had been enough manpower to do it. Without the crucial knowledge of how the disease was transmitted, quarantines must have been largely ineffective. Thomas Lodge's learned advice on quarantine in *A treatise of the plague* inadvertently hammers home the difficulties in enforcing it. Lodge is careful to note that those quarantined should be treated "according to their quality and condition," [14] meaning that those with higher social standing should receive preferential treatment. This can only mean a shortened period of quarantine or exemption from it

entirely. Lodge also admits that the practice of quarantine does not get its authority from the ancient sources and therefore is less reliable: "in truth this custome [of quarantine] hath beene but newly brought in, and was never heard of in the ancient and authentike writings…but only by some late Practitioners" (47). It would seem that the weight of tradition was against quarantine regardless of its potential efficacy according to Lodge.

The plague was seasonally and geographically cyclical. It was worst in London in the late summer, when breeding conditions for the fleas that spread the disease were favorable. William Bullein associates summer with plague in *Dialogue against the Fever Pestilence*, first published in 1564 but reprinted through 1578 and referenced by Thomas Nashe in *Have with You to Saffron Walden* in 1596. One of the interlocutors in Bullein's *Dialogue, Medicus,* identified as one Dr. Tocrub, explains certain signs that the plague is on the way, including, "muche Southe Winde or Easte winde in the *Canicular* daies, with stormes and cloudes, and verie colde nights and extreame hotte daies, and much change of weather in a little time."[15] Later in the *Dialogue*, Uxor pleads with her husband, Civis, "Let vs take leaue of our neighbours, and retourne merely home again when the Plague is paste, and the Dogge daies ended" (56). The reference to the dog-days of summer, termed the canicular days, which are named for the appearance of the dog star on or around August 11 (OED, "canicular: *a*. (*n*.)"), treats summertime as the most common time of the year for a plague epidemic.

The plague moved through the city in a course that seemed pre-determined. The plague was more likely to flare up in densely populated neighborhoods and streets. Francis Herring, doctor and fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, notes in 1604 that neighborhoods with narrow streets were more likely than those with wide ones to offer plague a foothold:

> If we looke into the city, we shall finde that in Cheap-side and other open and large streets, and in faire, roomy, and spacious houses the Pest hath not set in such sure footing, nor made such havocke, as in narrow lanes, allies, and other pestered and noisome corners, where families of poore people are thronged together, as men use to packe woolsacks one upon another, so that one of them can scarse breathe beside his fellowes face. (sig. B.r.)[16]

Without touching the question of whether the plague is contagious or not, Herring nevertheless notes that plague is more likely to spread where people are "thronged together." There is a socio-economic distinction in addition to the geographical one: of course, as most diseases do, the plague favors the poor because of the conditions in which they live. This is borne out by the findings of Paul Slack, who correlates high and low mortality with poor and rich London parishes in the plague outbreaks of the seventeenth century (153-64).

During periods of crisis mortality, there was not much reason to stay in the city if one had the means to flee. The afflicted certainly required care, and the Mayor, Aldermen, and the Privy Council had an interest in maintaining order, meaning that they needed justices of the peace, constables, borsholders, tythingmen, church ministers, church-wardens, overseers of the poor, surveyors of highways, distributors of the provision, etc., not only to perform their normal functions, but to assist those afflicted with the plague and respond to the extraordinary challenges the plague generated. Other classes of plague responders had to be commissioned or conscripted, including searchers, watchmen, examiners, keepers, bearers, and buriers. But there were times when the problem simply became too much to handle, and the rich fled the city.

The rich were the only ones able to flee the city because of the laws governing vagrancy during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. Aside from quarantining the infected, which was

good policy even if it was largely ineffective,[17] Restrictions on liberty in early modern England were numerous, and anyone who wanted to leave the city at any time, let alone during plague time, either had to own a house outside of the city, be returning to their birthplace, or prove that they would be gainfully employed at their destination. Provision was also made for "impotent" and "diseased" persons to travel to Bath or Buxton to receive treatment, but only those with means could make such journeys, and they had to be licensed by not one but two Justices of the Peace.[18] Various royal proclamations established the various aspects of this policy, but William Lambarde's handbook *The duties of constables, borsholders, tithingmen, and such other low ministers of the peace* puts them all in context and shows how they were actually expected to be enforced. [19] Any person over the age of seven years who professed any itinerant trade who could not provide proof of employment or a testimonial from a Justice of the Peace confirming their status were subject to severe punishment and transportation. The handbook makes provisions for a wide variety of trades, including self-proclaimed scholars, fencers, bearwards, minstrels, players of interludes, jugglers, tinkers, peddlers, and those pretending to be Egyptians.[20] When caught, such rogues and vagabonds were to be stripped to the waist, publicly whipped until bloody, and then transported

> to the Parish where such *Rogue* was borne, if that may bee knowne by his or her confession or otherwise: and if that cannot be knowne, then to the Parish where he or she last dwelt before that punishment by the space of one whole yeere: and neither of them being knowne, then to the Parish through which he or she last passed without punishment.[21]

These restrictions on liberty are not explicitly cited as measures against the spread of the plague, but it is easy to understand how these restrictions could be connected to plague given that the

authorities considered the plague to be contagious. Elizabeth's plague proclamations refer to this statute again and again, presumably due to poor enforcement. Her 1592 order restricting access to the court due to that year's plague epidemic also charges

> the knight Marshal of her houshold, that he shall cause due search to be made of all vagabonds, commonly called Rogues, that shal haunt about the Court, or in any places within the verge, and them to apprehend and commit either to the Marshalsea, or to deliver them to the next Constables to be sent to the common gaoles next to the place where they shalbe apprehended, there to be ordered and punished according to the lawes provided for such offenders.[22]

This order goes a step further than the existing law in calling for an active search for vagabonds, and it indicates the anxiety generated by England's indigents during plague time. The poor had been shown to be disproportionately affected by the plague, and neither Elizabeth I nor James I wanted them wandering around spreading pestilence wherever they went. The laws were certainly also designed to reduce begging and crime, but plague was no doubt an important factor.

Aside from the socioeconomic factors governing who *could* flee the city during plague, there was a spirited debate over whether one *ought* to flee. Even assuming one had the means, flight was fraught with ethical problems: some authorities claimed it was uncharitable and downright irreligious to flee the plague and others argued that staying in the city during plague-time was tantamount to suicide, which God prohibits in His commandments: thou shalt not kill.[23] The debate seems to have boiled down to a simple question: is it or is it not morally acceptable and scripturally permissible to flee the plague?[24] Some plague tracts recommended flight. Simon Kellwaye advises his readers to "flye far off from the place infected, and as Rondoletius sayth,

not over hastely to returne there againe, for feare of an afterclap" (sig. B2.v.). However, most early-modern literature is generally against flight, and often shows it to be complicated. A representative passage comes from a 1604 sermon written by James Godskall titled *The arke of noah for the Londoners that remaine in the cittie*. Godskall reiterates the fairly standard position that whose who flee the plague are just as likely to catch it in the country as they are in the city, because of "the inward cause of the contagion, the rottennesse of our bones, which we carrie within our selves, and are more carefull to depart into the Countrey then unto the Lord; as if by the swiftnesse of our feete we could out-runne him who rideth upon the wings of the Cherubims, which causeth that the Lord hath a Pursiphant, which hee sendeth to arrest some in the pure ayre, (namely the Plague it selfe) which hath arrested some in the Countrey…"[25] Tales of plague pursuing those who flee into the country such as this one are common, and such arguments seem to enter the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson in interesting if oblique ways. In *Timon of Athens* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare enacts flights from the city that, although they are not directly associated with plague, nevertheless participate in a plague debate. Jonson delivers the same message in *The Alchemist* by showing his audience what might be going on in their houses when they flee the plague.

If a Londoner wanted to leave the city, then the only real way they would have been allowed to do so was if they could prove that they owned a house outside of London. This meant, of course, that they had to be rich enough to afford to buy and maintain at least two houses. Such people fueled London's sizeable consumer economy, and as they fled the city, England's local and national economies disintegrated. In the city, the result was that those left behind lost their best customers, could no longer support themselves, and could no longer offer their services. Inflation in certain markets soared. Thomas Dekker writes in *The wonderfull*

yeare, somewhat bitterly, that "Onely Hearbe-wives and Gardeners…were now day and nighte upon their Maribones…for the price of flowers, hearbes and garlands, rose wonderfully in so much that Rosemary which had wont to be solde for 12. pence an armefull, went now for sixe shillings a handfull."[26] Such herbs as angelica, rosemary, rue, wormwood, juniper, sage, ginger, gentian, valerian, etc., burned or taken either straight, in infusion, or by suppository, were among those medicines most commonly thought effective against the plague as a cure or preventative.

Food was scarce, and was terribly expensive when it was available. Famine and plague fed one another, worsening conditions in the city and threatening order.[27] The correspondence between famine and plague seems to have been especially acute in 1625, which is a little late for the scope of this study, but relevant nonetheless. John Taylor, the poet and royal waterman to Elizabeth, daughter of James I and Queene of Bohemia at the time, complains in his long plague poem *The fearefull sommer* that:

> All trades are dead, or almost out of breath
> But such as live by sicknes, or by death,
> The Mercers, Grocers, Silk-Men, Goldsmiths, Drapers,
> Are out of season, like noone burning Tapers,
> All functions faile almost, through want of buyers
> And every art and misterie turne Dyers.[28] (A8.r.)

In no uncertain terms Taylor indicates the trades that are hardest hit by the flight of Londoners and specifies want of buyers as the chief concern among tradesmen. Taylor's assessment is corroborated by other accounts. Although in the worst epidemics want of buyers was followed by want of labor and then want of materials, the outset of any epidemic actually signaled a glut in some markets. As demand in London evaporated, raw materials and finished products piled up

as massive unemployment crippled London and the rest of England. Henry Petowe notes that the impact of plague on England's woolen industry is felt

> not only amongst the Swaines, but the whole Countrie, and especiallie amongst Clothiers, and their poore serviceable people, for since the memorie of man, almost there hath not beene knowne the like. He that was woont to emploie manie hundreds in his worke, cannot now help twenty poore… never was cloth better cheape amongst Clothiers, yet seldome hath wooll beene known more dear unto them, and of money I dare say that most of them never knew the like want, though they have money foorth to great value, and the cause of this, saie they, is only Londons visitation. (sig. C4.r-v)

The clothiers had been caught on the wrong end of the business cycle initiated by the plague; they "have money foorth to great value," meaning that they were operating with high overhead based on the high volume of trade they could expect during normal times. During an epidemic, they could not unload their overhead unless they wanted to accept massive losses based on deflated prices. Wool, of course, had been a mainstay of the English economy in both domestic consumption and exports since the middle ages, and any disruptions in that industry impacted the national economy. Paul Slack concurs that exports were hurt just as much as domestic commerce was, at least when London was visited, and notes, "In 1603, the number of shortcloths exported from London sank by a third," which "temporarily turned the balance of payments against England, diminishing the money supply still further and leaving clothiers with unsold textiles on their hands and country weavers and spinners with no work and no wages" (189). Given the impact of the plague on England's local and national economies, and the woolen industry in particular, it will be fruitful consider whether depictions of shepherds under economic strain, as in *As You Like It*, or starveling tradesmen, among them a weaver, in *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream, are actually plague references. We might consider why Bottom et al. are so eager to become "made," or why they seem to have a good deal of free time on their hands.

Those who, through love, duty, or poverty, remained in the city during periods of high mortality witnessed horrors we can hardly imagine today. Corpses were piled up in the streets or dumped in mass graves as churches struggled to inter extraordinary numbers of the dead, and carrion birds, mostly crows and ravens, proliferated. They became such a problem that the crown actually allocated funds for a bounty on the animals and their eggs in London. William Lambarde notes in 1605 that the law requires the establishment of an "Office of Distributors of the provision for the destruction of noysome foule and Vermin," which provides "to everie person that shall bring to them any heades of old Crowes, Choughes, Pies, or Rookes, taken within the severall parishes, for the heads of every 3. of them a penny: and for the heads of every sixe young Crowes, Choughes, Pyes, or Rookes, taken, as is aforesaid a peny, & for every sixe egges of any of them unbroken a penny: and likewise for every 12. Stares heades a penie."[29] While the provision is not directly connected to worries about plague, one wonders why such a provision would be necessary if not because of plague.

There are numerous direct associations of crows and ravens with plague in early modern literature and drama. Dekker suggests in his plague tract *The wonderfull yeare* that "A Crow that had bin seene in a sunne-shine day, standing on the top of Powles would haue bin better than a Beacon on fire, to haue raizd all the townes within ten miles of *London,* for the keeping her out" (36). Dekker's hyperbole cannot obscure the real anxiety that Londoners must have felt at seeing crows and ravens feeding on the corpses of those killed by plague. This is one of the reasons that the Hostess, remarking on Falstaff's illness and impending death in *Henry V,* says, "By my troth, he'll yield the crow a pudding one of these days" (2.1.78).

Crows and ravens were so common during plague time that they became harbingers of it and bad omens in general. Barabas in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* delights in imagining himself as a harbinger of doom for the Christians who have tormented him when he says,

> Thus like the sad presaging Raven that tolls
> The sicke mans passeport in her hollow beake,
> And in the shadow of the silent night
> Doth shake contagion from her sable wings;
> Vex'd and tormented runnes poore *Barabas*
> With fatall curses towards these Christians.[30]

Barabas loads himself with early-modern plague associations by identifying with a Raven, as well as older plague associations by recalling the biblical plagues sent against the Egyptians in *Exodus*.

It will be useful to plague studies to take note even when ravens and crows are mentioned outside of a plague context. Jonson's scheme for naming the legacy hunters in *Volpone*, for example, implicitly refers to a plague-time reality: Corvino and Corbaccio both mean raven or crow, and Voltore means vulture. It is essential in understanding the logic behind assigning those names to those characters to realize that they were all considered carrion birds, that they will figuratively devour Volpone's remains once he dies. The fact that Volpone feigns illness correllates more or less directly with the typical plague-time scene of a crow or raven feeding on plague corpses.

Most of those who write about plague in early modern London treat it as a death sentence, but there are reports of survivors.[31] Simon Forman claims to have survived the plague, although he seems to have used the story of his supposed visitation primarily to promote the sale

of his own special cure; he was, by some accounts, not a very skilled physician.[32] Other more credible accounts of surviving the plague exist. Theodore Beza recounts, "When as I myself about xxvi. yeeres past was sicke of the Plague at Lausanna, and that both others of my fellow ministers, and amongst the rest, that singular man of blessed memory Peter (sic) Viret was prepared too come unto mee: and that John Calvin himself also sending a messenger with letters offered unto me all kynd of curtesie, I suffered none of them to come unto me…"[33] This is remarkable not just for the name dropping, but for the surprisingly casual admission that he caught plague and survived. Surviving plague once in a lifetime is bad enough, but there are actually reports of some contracting plague multiple times. Francis Herring writes that in 1604, "Some have had the plague twise or thrise this yeere" (*A modest defense* sig. B.r.).[34]

Section 2. The Plague in Early Modern Literature

All recent work on the impact of the plague on early modern English drama owes a great debt to Paul Slack's comprehensive and sensitive approach in *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*. In this book, Slack merges a detailed historical account of the plague in Tudor and Stuart England with an account of the social impact of the plague on England's government and its citizens. Slack also implies that this social impact is far more pervasive and hidden than has been previously acknowledged. He writes,

> Plague, the epidemic disease whose ravages in the past are the subject of this book, was both a personal affliction and a social calamity. Decimating communities, destroying families, bringing grief and pain to individuals, it deserves study in its own

> right as a fundamental part of man's experience in history. If we are to attempt a rounded understanding of our predecessors, their sufferings and misfortunes ought to command as much attention as their joys and achievements….They struggled to explain epidemic disease and to control it, and the ways in which they did so have much to tell us about the society in which they lived: its intellectual assumptions, its coherence and solidity, its political and administrative flexibility, and its capacity for change. The impact of the plague is to be found in the social response to it no less than in the problems which it brought. (3)

Slack's account of the social response to the plague suggests that we look outside of the frameworks of conventional understanding about the plague. Social response can take many forms, and only some of them can be perceived as a direct and explicit response to the material conditions the plague creates.

Surprisingly or not, there was a brisk trade in plague literature (that is, literature with plague as its explicit subject, as opposed to literature written during plague time) in early modern London. Despite the devastation visited upon the city in plague time, books, pamphlets, and broadsides explicitly treating plague and its effects were produced in and around plague epidemics, with subjects ranging from mortality figures to spiritual advice to "medical" advice on herbal and other remedies and preventatives. Whatever else it was, a plague epidemic was *news*, that is, an opportunity to package and sell information. Much of the plague literature produced in early modern London was prose with a decidedly apocalyptic bent that encouraged people to recognize the plague as evidence of God's judgment and prepare themselves spiritually for the next world. Others, perhaps taking their cue from Boccaccio, used a plague-time setting to showcase outlandish, often picaresque tales. Both of these types of plague literature often

contain graphic, overwrought descriptions of the effects of plague on individuals and the community. Consider this representative passage from *The wonderfull yeare*, which compares a plague epidemic to a military campaign.

> …the Plague is Muster-maister and Marshall of the field: Burning Feauers, Boyles, Blaines, and Carbuncles, the Leaders, Lieutenants, Serjeants, and Corporalls: the maine Army consisting (like *Dunkirke*) of a mingle-mangle, *viz*. dumpish Mourners, merry Sextons, hungry Coffin-sellers, scrubbing Bearers, and nastie Graue-makers: but indeed they are the Pioners of the Campe, that are imployed onely (like Moles) in casting up of earth and digging of trenches; Feare and Trembling (the two Catch-polles of Death) arrest euery one: No parley will be graunted, no composition stood upon, But the Allarum is strucke up, the *Toxin* ringes out for life, and no voyce heard but *Tue, Tue, Kill, Kill*. (31-2)

This is clearly something other than simple reportage, though it reports some important facts. The scene that Dekker describes is at once accurate and sensational, and he has clearly applied some art to this description of a plague scene. His comparison to a battle is apt, but it also raises some ethical concerns. One of the most useful models in understanding literature's metaphorical relationship with disease is Susan Sontag's pair of books, *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. Sontag notes that the military metaphor is one of the most common employed to describe the course of a disease, but also wishes it were not: "…the effect of the military imagery on thinking about sickness and health is far from inconsequential. It overmobilizes, it overdescribes, and it powerfully contributes to the excommunicating and stigmatizing of the ill."[35] Dekker participates in this to some extent. His military metaphor puts the sick at odds with those whose job it is to help them (sextons, bearers, grave-diggers, etc.), and puts the sick

squarely in the position of helpless victim, with no chance of aid or recovery. Dekker also creates a commodity out of a typical plague-time scene by displaying a tableau of death and disease designed not only to inform, but to entertain. F. P. Wilson, who compiled Dekker's plague pamphlets into one volume in the 1920, characterizes *The wonderfull yeare* and Dekker's other plague pamphlets as, "'scribled papers' written quickly and carelessly by an impecunious poet and dramatist at a time when the plague had shut the doors of the theatres" (v). Dekker needed work, and his plague pamphlets provided income at a desperate time. All of this is to say that certain individuals were not above taking advantage of the plague in some way to make a profit. The plague literature that survives shows us that there was certainly a market.

Dekker's tabloid sensibilities and his facility in handling the subject of plague in prose would seem to have the potential to translate well to the stage, but his own dramatic works in particular and early modern drama in general contain nothing like this scene from *The wonderfull yeare*. While the impact of plague is acknowledged in early modern prose, its existence is hardly acknowledged at all in early modern drama.

It is this relative absence of depictions of plague in the plays of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson that forms the basis of my research. Among the works of these two playwrights, only two plays—*The Alchemist* and *Romeo and Juliet*—treat the plague as a material condition and not an offhand curse.[36] Yet both plays avoid depicting actual infection, corpses, or other direct evidence of the plague's impact. Whatever plague news is announced in either play is delivered indirectly, and there is no mention of symptoms or situations that an audience might directly associate with plague. The plague is only present as a nameless dread that has the potential to disrupt lives and livelihoods. In the rest of the plays written by these two men, there is little mention of plague even though it would have been raging all around them. Given the

widespread epidemics that occur during the lifetimes of both playwrights, the relative absence of plague is conspicuous.

There are several explanations for this. If plague was a regular feature of English society and London life, it may simply have been taken for granted, as hard as that is to accept. Perhaps, on the other hand, direct treatment of the epidemic may have seemed insensitive and inappropriate. Ian Munro, writing of the plague in *Coriolanus*, explains why representing the plague on stage might seem inappropriate: "because of the sheer terror that representing plague-marked bodies in the crowded, contagious space of the theater would cause."[37] Ernest Gilman echoes this basic sentiment in *Plague Writing in Early Modern England*. In this book, Gilman compares plague literature to Holocaust literature: "One venerable way of addressing the 'unspeakable,' an enormity so great that language is said to fail in the attempt, is to speak of not speaking of it. By their sheer magnitude, urban pandemics—claiming thousands of victims in days, if not hours, and bringing social disorder and psychic trauma in their wake—are said to exceed the limits of language" (51). While Gilman's statement is not true of all early modern literature, it does seem to be true about drama (and poetry, the genre under review in Gilman's statement). Susan Sontag observes that in the case of cancer and tuberculosis, disease is euphemized, or, more commonly, not spoken of at all: "When, not so many decades ago, learning that one had TB was tantamount to hearing a sentence of death—as today, in the popular imagination, cancer equals death—it was common to conceal the identity of their disease from tuberculars and, after they died, from their children" (7). Sontag says that this is because many people have felt that catching such a disease represents a judgment on the infected person's moral character, and that has implications for the community that the infected belong to:

> The standard accounts of epidemics, however, are mainly of the devastating effect of disease upon character. The weaker the chronicler's preconception of disease as a punishment for wickedness, the more likely that the account will stress the moral corruption made manifest by the disease's spread. Even if the disease is not thought to be a judgment on the community, it becomes one—retroactively—as it sets in motion an inexorable collapse of morals and manners. (40-41)

Getting tuberculosis or cancer was something one was supposed to have the good sense to be ashamed of and have the good taste not to mention in polite company, because the immediate assumption of others would be that the afflicted somehow deserved their illness. Sontag's observations may help us make sense of early modern drama's turn away from the plague.

Whatever the reason, we are left with a body of early modern plays that do not seem to have much to do with plague, but not to look for it would be a mistake. I follow Gilman in believing that, "it will be productive to consider all literary texts written during plague times as plague texts" (48), and that as a genre, plague writing shares with pastoral a common approach to its subject:

> the conventions of genre will declare the "kind" of thing they represent by setting themselves apart from other kinds, defining themselves in terms of what they exclude. Plague offers an especially clear marker of that difference. Renaissance pastoral establishes its boundaries by just such acts of generic quarantine from the squalor and sophisticated corruption of city life. (50)

Just as pastoral has been shown to define its subject as an absence, a turning-away, and an antithesis, early modern drama, including the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson, define themselves as plague literature through the virtual absence of plague. Susan Sontag identifies

the same phenomenon when she notes the presence of anxieties about cancer in early science fiction films such as *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Incredible Shrinking Man*, *The Blob*, and *The Thing* (68). These films are at once about cancer and not about cancer; they allegorize cancer as pastoral does court life and city life and as early modern drama does plague.

Section 3. Theories of Disease and the Plague

If intuition leads one to believe that plague must be present somewhere in early modern drama, but there are no obvious indicators, a new methodology is required. If plague is not present as a material condition, then it may be present as a metaphor, either as an indirect allusion to plague-time practices and conditions or an expression of the various anxieties attendant during plague time. Sontag outlines the "popular mythology" that arises around various diseases at various points in history, both in literature and popular belief, and she offers several useful revelations in her work on disease. Perhaps the most important and useful of Sontag's revelations about the relationship between disease and metaphor is the idea that certain diseases undergo a transformation in popular conception whereby they are appropriated or co-opted for describing situations other than disease. Sontag imagines it as a linear process:

> Any important disease whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance. First, the subjects of deepest dread (corruption, decay, pollution, anomie, weakness) are identified with the disease. The disease itself becomes a metaphor. Then, in the name of the disease (that is, using it as a metaphor), that horror is imposed on other things. The disease becomes adjectival. Something is said to be

> disease-like, meaning that it is disgusting or ugly… Epidemic diseases were a common figure for social disorder. From pestilence (bubonic plague) came "pestilent," whose figurative meaning, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is "injurious to religion, morals, or public peace—1513"; and "pestilential," meaning "morally baneful or pernicious—1531." Feelings about evil are projected onto a disease. And the disease (so enriched with meanings) is projected onto the world. (58)

In an unfortunate but predictable way, the disease *becomes* the metaphor. As a result, it is evacuated of most or all of the meaning it had as a material condition. This feeds back into conceptions of the disease; at the same time cancer (or plague) becomes a synonym for corruption, pollution, etc., it takes on an emotional, judgmental characteristic not owned by the disease itself, which is emotionless and indiscriminate. Use of the word becomes charged in a way that dissociates the word for the disease from the actual disease. The problems this phenomenon poses should be readily apparent. Nobody in their right mind would actually wish plague on another person, but through the process of metaphorization the plague is diminished to just another dirty word. For example, Falstaff quite blithely throws "plague" around in response to minor slights. In the central scene of the Gadshill episode, *1 Henry IV* 2.2, Falstaff utters the word no less than four times, wishing it indiscriminately on all of his comrades for hiding his horse and asking Hal, "What a plague mean ye to colt / me thus?" (2.2.34-5): in effect, "Why the hell did you trick me that way?" Falstaff's use of the word plague has almost nothing to do with the plague as a disease, and such usage indicates the difficulty in relying solely on explicit references to plague for understanding the impact of plague on a particular piece of literature. "Plague" is no longer used as a curse, so Falstaff's use of it does reflect and reinforce attitudes

toward the disease in early modern England, but its usefulness in studying the negotiation of plague in early-modern drama is almost nil.[38]

What Sontag does not point out as another consequence of the metaphorizing of disease, but what I hope to show, is that the metaphorizing process is reciprocal. As words like "plague" lose their meaning, that meaning gets transferred to other expressions, and the material condition of plague is invoked through metaphors and allegories that point to plague-time realities and social anxieties. Something as seemingly innocuous as setting a play in summer could associate it with plague, as could mention of crows, ravens, and other carrion birds; enacting xenophobia and depicting reproduction anxiety, flight from the city, or poverty can participate in a system of signification that was built up around plague beginning in England in the middle ages and reaching maturity in 1603. For example, Margaret Healy notes that the poor became increasingly identified with plague throughout the early modern period: "Increasingly from the late sixteenth century the borders of London had been represented by the city governors as the preserves of idleness, poverty, disorder, dirt, infection, contagion, unruliness, stench, rogues, vagabonds, vice and plague: in such discourses metonymic associations elide readily into metaphors and the marginal poor tend to become synonymous with stench, filth, and plague."[39] As far as the city governors of London were concerned, at least, the poor *were* plague; to mention the poor was to invoke their relationship to plague.

To cite another example of the way the idea of plague creates meaning by inflecting seemingly innocuous associations, consider Morose's animus against sound in *Epicoene*. Is it really sound that upsets Morose, or is Jonson using that to refer to another phobia entirely? The bells, which toll ceaselessly for the plague dead, seem to bedevil Morose inordinately. Clerimont says of him,

But now, by

reason of the sickness, the perpetuity of ringing has made him

devise a room with double walls and treble ceilings; the windows

close shut, and caulked: and there he lives by candlelight."[40] (1.1.162-5).

Clerimont attributes Morose's bizarre behavior to the sound of the bells, but the ultimate cause is "the sickness," the idea of plague being so powerful a latent presence that it was referred to as "the" sickness. The steps Morose takes to alleviate his suffering do not just happen to coincide with common sense means of avoiding plague; they represent a systematic and deliberate association of Morose with plague anxieties. Jonson either uses fears about plague to enhance his audience's sense of just how much noise upsets Morose or to comment indirectly on the attitude of certain people toward plague. Whatever the case, plague is clearly an important subtext in *Epicoene*.

The other important insights of Sontag's work on disease stem from her understanding that diseases are transformed into metaphors. Out of the association of disease with evil comes the fact that most people are extremely uncomfortable speaking of it, and the more serious the disease is, the less comfortable people seem to be discussing it. People tend to euphemize and metaphorize disease precisely for this reason. Sontag notes that at the time *Illness as Metaphor* was written, saying that someone had "died after a long illness" was a common euphemism for dying of cancer (14). Although plague is different from cancer and tuberculosis in important ways, there is evidence that aside from simply not talking about it, early modern Londoners spoke of the plague in euphemisms, and that their attitude toward plague bears important resemblances to contemporary attitudes about cancer and HIV/AIDS. Individuals and locations were "visited" with or by plague. Plague was identified as "God's arrow." Plague sores were

referred to as "tokens." The word "plague" itself is derived from the Latin *plaga*, which means stripe or wound. Plague was associated with portents, signs, and symptoms, and identified through them. We ought to try to understand how those metaphors and associations work to express underlying anxieties and realities.

Sontag's work also reveals that disease metaphors are appropriated and employed toward very specific ends. Disease is often associated with aliens and minorities as a way of reinforcing dominant ideologies. One of her examples of this phenomenon comes from Wilhelm Reich's Freudian analysis of Nazism, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. Reich claims that, "the irrational fear of syphilis was one of the major sources of National Socialism's political views and its anti-Semitism. It follows, then, that racial purity, that is to say, purity of blood is something worth striving for and fighting for with every available means."[41] Sontag does not explore the reasoning behind this observation, but the logic of it should be clear enough. As a disease understood to be transmitted primarily through sexual intercourse, syphilis represented a challenge to the putative "purity" of reproduction and generation just as Nazi paranoia professed that Jews represented a genetic threat to the perfect German state. Anti-semitism became, among other things, a symptom of social anxieties surrounding syphilis, just as it had with plague in the fourteenth century during the Black Death, when Jews were accused of poisoning wells and streams to initiate plague epidemics. In a similar way it should be possible to trace certain anxieties expressed in early modern drama to plague.

Although Sontag focuses on specific diseases (TB, cancer, AIDS), she theorizes about disease in general, which is less useful for the purposes of plague studies than a theory that explains the relationship between plague and literature. Thankfully, such a theory exists. A broad thematic approach to determining the presence of plague in literature has been established

by René Girard in "The Plague in Literature and Myth" (1974). Girard explains that the influence of plague on literature is evident through what he calls a thematic cluster with three basic elements: radical reversal, undifferentiation of categories of identity that results in mimetic doubling, and sacrifice or scapegoating.

Of reversal, Girard states, "The plague will turn the honest man into a thief, the virtuous man into a lecher, the prostitute into a saint. Friends murder and enemies embrace. Wealthy men are made poor by the ruin of their business. Riches are showered upon paupers who inherit in a few days the fortunes of many distant relatives." [42] Reversal, according to Girard, is not always a part of the thematic cluster,[43] but when it is present, it is stark, absurd, and unmistakable. Sontag's views seem to coincide with Girard's on this point. She writes that, "most loyalties and loves shatter in the panic produced by epidemic disease" (41). According to Girard and Sontag, people habitually characterize epidemic disease in literature as a shattering event, one which radically destabilizes social relationships and categories of identity. While it is unavoidably true that reversals by themselves are a standard feature of drama and literature in general, Girard proposes that when they are present in combination with other themes, the plague can be identified as an influence on a text.

The best example of the connection between reversal and plague in Shakespeare is in *Timon of Athens*.[44] It is a play that treats reversal as its main mode of expression: Timon is raised up so that he can be knocked down, and the play takes every opportunity to emphasize the disparity between Timon's pre- and post-bankruptcy behaviors and attitudes, starting with the second banquet, which is a radical recasting of the details of the first banquet and corresponds with the plague's violent influence on English society at the time the play was written. The play links the idea of reversal explicitly to plague in many of Timon's speeches in exile. For

example, in the scene immediately following the second banquet, Timon invokes "Plagues incident to men" (4.1.21) [45] in response to his friends' role in his financial ruin. Timon allows his own reversal of fortune to color his perception of the value of human life and friendship, and he expresses his outrage at the betrayal of his supposed friends by associating it with plague, which is another force that has the power to call into question the value of human life and friendship.

The reversal is followed by a radical mirroring or doubling effect Girard calls undifferentiation. It is characterized by the abolition of social hierarchies and categories, and, "a destruction of specificities" (833), in which personal identity is radically leveled to represent figuratively society's abjection before the apparently indiscriminate force of the plague: "The distinctiveness of the plague is that it ultimately destroys all forms of distinctiveness. The plague overcomes all obstacles, disregards all frontiers. All life, finally, is turned to death, which is the supreme undifferentiation" (835). In other words, the moral and social collapse evident in any society that is suffering a plague epidemic is expressed in literature as a heightened and strained awareness of the artificiality or constructedness of social categories, ranks, values, etc.

Undifferentiation is found in early modern plague representations by most who study it. Michael Neill, who tracks the changing perception of death evident through its treatment in revenge tragedy in his book *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, observes the same cultural phenomenon of undifferentiation as Girard: "By exposing populations to the trauma of mass death on an unprecedented scale, the plague reportedly activated the fantasy of universal destruction. The threat of apocalyptic breakdown to a society preoccupied with the maintenance of hierarchical order was precisely to emphasize the role of death as the arbiter of indifference." [46] Neill agrees with Girard at least as far as undifferentiation

is concerned (Neill's "indifference" seems identical to Girard's "undifferentiation"), although he removes the idea from its association with plague to focus on the undifferentiating power of death in general.

That is part of the problem according to Louis F. Qualtiere and William E. Slights, who observe that death and the plague become so conflated that early modern English writers found it difficult to successfully distinguish between the two. They write that "The plague had become too generalized a scourge of God by Shakespeare's time to make effective theater."[47] The difficulty in accurately representing the plague on the early modern English stage has the effect of making dramatic representations of plague seem vague and indeterminate. Qualtiere and Slights argue that syphilis was a more common subject of early modern English dramatic representation as a result.

Shakespeare best demonstrates an awareness of this undifferentiating effect of disease in *Cymbeline*.[48] Innogen (as the boy Fidele) is sick, and Guiderius offers to forego the hunt he is accustomed to taking with Belarius and Aviragus in order to care for her. Their exchange demonstrates the effect disease can have on social relationships:

BELARIUS [*to* INNOGEN] You are not well. Remain here in the cave.
We'll come to you from hunting.

ARVIRAGUS [*to* INNOGEN] Brother, stay here.
Are we not brothers?

INNOGEN So man and man should be,
But clay and clay differs in dignity,
Whose dust is both alike. I am very sick.

GUIDERIUS [*to* BELARIUS *and* ARVIRAGUS] Go you to hunting.

I'll abide with him.

INNOGEN

So sick I am not, yet I am not well;

But not so citizen a wanton as

To seem to die ere sick. So please you, leave me.

Stick to your journal course. The breach of custom

Is breach of all. I am ill, but your being by me

Cannot amend me. Society is no comfort

To one not sociable. (4.2.1-13)

It is the fact of Innogen's sickness that prompts her to say that clays differ in dignity but the dust is both alike. Sickness has the power to bring on death, and death makes us all alike. It is no coincidence, then, that in this fantasy of death as the ultimate undifferentiator, what comes across is Innogen's fear of being exposed, which threatens to dissolve the bonds she has forged with Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius. If she dies or becomes gravely ill, her hosts will undoubtedly discover that she is a woman and not the boy she is pretending to be. Stating "The breach of custom / Is breach of all," suggests that if Guiderius allows Innogen's sickness to interfere with his everyday practices, he is in danger of breaching custom in other matters. In doing so, Innogen is acknowledging the power of illness to dissolve social bonds and distinctions. Society and camaraderie are on a slippery slope for Innogen, and one that is particularly vulnerable to the impact of disease. She seems not to consider that custom may include caring for those who are ill, and we may get a sense that she is just being stoically obstinate in saying that society is not a comfort to one who is not able to be sociable, but her

overall assumption about the potential effects of disease on human sociability and custom reinforces Girard's.[49]

The last element of Girard's thematic cluster is a sacrifice or scapegoat that resolves the chaos introduced by undifferentiation. In describing this phenomenon, Girard claims that, "Death itself appears as the purifying agent, the death of all plague victims or a few, sometimes of a single chosen victim who seems to assume the plague in its entirety and whose death or expulsion cures the society" (841).[50] Like reversal, sacrifice is a theme that is common in drama, and cannot always be a sign of plague. In connection with the other two themes, however, a pattern begins to emerge. Consider Bottom's sacrificial role in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He is at once a scapegoat (or scape-ass; his transformation into an animal is a crucial indicator of his sacrificial role) for the quarrel between Oberon and Titania, a sacrifice to the sharp wits of the celebrants at the end of the play, and a sacrifice to himself and his comrades in his role as Pyramus. I will show at length in my chapter on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* how Bottom's function as a sacrifice is part of a larger pattern of signification whereby he is invested with social anxieties about plague and purged of those anxieties by the end of the play.

Like undifferentiation, sacrifice and scapegoating are commonly identified as features of early modern plague literature outside the context of Girard's theory of the plague's impact on literature. Scapegoating has been associated with plague in western literature since the Black Death, when Jews were accused of poisoning wells to initiate an epidemic and "Turks" and "Saracens" were blamed for bringing the plague to Europe on their trade ships. In early modern England, the scapegoat was a stock character in several early Tudor interludes that addressed plague. In her analysis of the impact of plague on three Tudor interludes written ca. 1565, Melissa Smith writes, "The privileged audiences of these plays may have enjoyed the ritualized

scapegoating and punishment of the reprobate characters, who, through their positioning as objects of derision, distinguish themselves as deserving targets of the plague's painful ravages."[51] Smith goes on to describe in more detail the scapegoating mechanism in the Tudor interludes:

> In the world of the interludes, the plague's infection is not, strictly speaking, a purely communicable disease: it can be controlled by avoiding certain sin. Symbolically, the reprobate characters' suffering means that everyone else in the room, who has presumably not actively exhibited these behaviors, is safe. Their pain thus serves to reinforce the fantastic pestilential narrative; the subsequent removal of their bodies likewise removes the potentially contaminating element from the social world of the play.[52]

All of the comedies in this study present the scapegoat in a similar way. The only difference in the tragedies is that the scapegoat becomes a literal sacrifice. Smith's examination of scapegoating in Tudor interludes is particularly relevant to *Epicoene*, which will be made apparent in my chapter on that play.

Although it is clear from the work of others that undifferentiation and scapegoating are common features of early modern plague literature, Girard's theories have their critics, and in general, their criticisms are valid. Certain new historicist scholars examining the bubonic plague and early modern literature have been quick to dismiss Girard's theoretical position, seeing in his overall critical project a universalizing tendency that is insufficiently sensitive to the realities of particular phenomena in specific communities. For example, speaking of the applicability of Girard's theory of mimetic desire (quite similar to his plague theory[53]) to English Renaissance literature, Robert Weimann explains that,

> Since Girard engages in increasingly complex and eventful patterns of historical narrative, he is almost forced to displace the temporal dimension of change, transition, and event by a formula of identity and addition according to which he can lump together "a mimetic de-structuration or crisis plus mimetic re-structuration through unanimous victimage." Such a formula (note the atemporal "plus" as linking the two patterns), which effectively displaces all other sources and attributes of eventful change, is made to serve as some universally valid code by which centuries of cultural development, from prehistoric ritual to twentieth-century fiction, can easily be accounted for."[54]

Wiemann means that Girard too easily ignores local variation, rolling particular historical changes into the larger pattern of violence that he has made monolithic. Jonathan Gil Harris agrees, comparing Girard's work to other loosely unifying approaches to disease in early modern drama. Such approaches, while potentially engaging, are limited; they tend "to condense the plays' many diseases into Disease, either by interpreting illness as a generic metaphor with one symbolic valence (be it autobiographical or sociopolitical) or by implicitly regarding one disease—usually syphilis or plague—as the model for all others."[55] Weimann and Harris are half right. It is true that Girard's work deliberately does not attend to local phenomena but to trends across societies and times; his attention to the thematic cluster in the works of Dostoevsky differs little from his thinking about these themes in Shakespeare, but that is not to say that they do not work. Girard's theory about plague is weak because it does not address the unique historical context of any particular work of literature, but we can provide that context, building on the foundation he provides. That is most essential to my own work in writing about plague in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which requires this Girardian lens to provide plague perspective that opens the text up to further readings in a plague context. That is not to say that applying

Girard's plague theory is without complications, but it is the most useful tool available for detecting the traces of plague that clearly exist in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other early modern plays.

A more problematic limitation is that Girard himself claims that the relationship between plague and his thematic cluster works in one direction but not the other. What he identifies as "plague" is all cultural crisis that leads to violence, and his conception of "plague" in literature is *only* as a metaphor for social calamity; it need not refer to plague-time realities: "The plague is a transparent metaphor for a certain reciprocal violence that spreads, literally, like the plague" (836). According to Girard, the plague is a metaphor; it stands in for a more general pattern of violence, but the plague and the pattern of violence that it is supposed to stand in for are nevertheless often both present in the works Girard analyzes. He claims that "this same thematic cluster almost never fails to gather around the plague in a great many texts" (840), and cites Mercutio's curse "A plague o' both your houses" (3.1.87, 95, 101) as representing *Romeo and Juliet's* ultimate judgment on the feud between the Montagues and Capulets. Girard suggests that the feud is *compared* to plague, but he does not consider how Mercutio's curse is related to the presence of plague in Verona or in contemporaneous English history ("Plague" 849). Girard's self-imposed limitations seem to be the problem here, and the relationship between plague and the themes that are produced by it are more reciprocal than he acknowledges. The plague and the pattern of violence it represents in literature often appear in conjunction. If the thematic cluster Girard identifies in "The Plague in Literature and Myth" is to have any relevance and any real applicability, it must speak to plague-time realities and apply to literature written during plague time.

In spite of these limitations, I have found Girard's theory to be useful to plague studies. By proving that the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson exhibit this thematic cluster, we strengthen the case for the influence of plague on any given play even in the absence of explicit cues and open up to examination works of literature that are generally thought to have little or nothing to do with plague.

It is possible to relate plague themes that are more period-specific to the elements of Girard's thematic cluster. For example, the most common variety of undifferentiation in the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson is androgyny, and I will show plague anxiety to be one of the reasons that the plays of these two men are populated by Amazons, hermaphrodites, and transvestites. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* for example, Hippolyta embodies plague anxieties so that they may be contained and ameliorated by the play's end. In *Epicoene*, the titular character represents the mutability and inexorability of infection, which is unhindered by Morose's thinly-veiled hypochondria. There is a hermaphrodite and a eunuch among Volpone's retinue, as well as a dwarf. These characters and the anxieties they represent are evident not only in the plays themselves but in stage practice as well. There was a spirited debate over whether it was appropriate to have boys play women's roles and a general concern that the supposed immorality of the practice would incur God's wrath and bring plague down on the world. Rosemary Horrox shrewdly notes that sumptuary laws that originated in the middle ages and continued into the early modern period in England were connected with plague anxieties.[56] The reasoning behind the association is that men who dressed like women and women who dressed like men offended God and brought down plague on the world.

The relationship in Girard's work between undifferentiation and mimetic desire also helps us understand the relationship between plague and ambition, which appears time and again

in almost every play I have identified as showing the influence of plague. It is a main feature of *Timon of Athens*, *The Alchemist*, *Epicoene*, and *Volpone*, and is also evident in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. René Girard singles out ambition in "The Plague in Literature and Myth" as representing a crisis of degree that accompanies the undifferentiation he connects with plague. He writes, "The crisis, therefore, is a time of most frantic ambition that becomes more and more self-defeating. As these ambitions are mimetically multiplied, reciprocal violence grows and the differences dissolve; the 'degrees' leading to the object and the object itself disintegrate" (839). According to Girard, the pursuit of an object of desire in literature that has been influenced by plague has the effect of eliminating whatever social impediments to achieving the object exist and rendering the seekers indistinguishable. In order to restore difference, the seekers often seek a scapegoat or offer a sacrifice. The plays of Shakespeare and Jonson bear this out. For example, it is one of the central conceits of *The Alchemist*. The impostors, the gulls, and Lovewit, though differentiated by their personal wealth and status, are all united in their pursuit of wealth and their employment of questionable means in that pursuit. For more on what *The Alchemist* has to do with plague, see my chapter on that play.

Ambition has been identified by others as a characteristic of the plague's influence on early modern literature. In her analysis of the Tudor interlude *Inough is as good as a feast*, written by William Wager ca. 1565, Melissa Smith observes that the play "shores up the ideological connection between death by plague and sinful behavior through a metaphorical association of disease with the sin of ambition."[57] Paula S. Berggren has noticed the connection between plague and ambition in Shakespeare's history plays. Citing Falstaff's and Hotspur's invocation of plague in *1 Henry IV*, Berggren observes, "These frustrated exhortations to plague echo throughout the history plays, most often in from the mouths of ambitious climbers thwarted

in their pursuit of power" (152). Berggren notices that plague becomes a metaphor for thwarted ambition, and I hope to show how ambition can become a metaphor for the plague. Berggren notes in the same essay that Lear uses language that she calls "the most detailed image of bubonic plague that I can find in Shakespeare's work" (154), in expressing his outrage at being asked by Goneril to reduce his followers from 100 to 50. He calls her,

> …a disease within my flesh
> Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
> A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle,
> In my corrupted blood. (2.4.217-220)[58]

As Lear responds to the slight he perceives from Goneril (he also has in mind Regan and Cornwall's decision to put Kent in the stocks), he uses literal plague images to describe the effect of her and her sister's ambitious pride on his diminishing dignity, prestige, and wealth. This is not a coincidence; the two often accompany one another in the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson.

Outside of the context of Girard's plague themes, piecemeal work on identifying plague themes specific to early modern drama has already begun. By enumerating and adumbrating these, it will be possible to move beyond the work of Girard and come up with a more specific and comprehensive set of plague themes for early modern drama. For example, Ian Munro claims that the plague is somehow "hidden" within *Coriolanus*. As he explains it,

> The overdetermined association between the plague and the urban crowd…occupies a complex and contradictory relationship with the plague, figured as both antithesis and source of urban infection… Although the plague does not appear in the play, due to Shakespeare's elision of certain parts of Plutarch's narrative, plague imagery and rhetoric is pervasive, infecting all aspects of the play. (178)

Munro suggests that the plague is hidden in the way the language and action of *Coriolanus* exaggerate the qualities of the "crowd" that would typically be associated with plague. Anxieties over the crowd in *Coriolanus* are overblown because the plague has influenced how the crowd is represented. Munro takes one step toward what I consider a larger project. If we could generalize from Munro's findings concerning *Coriolanus*, we could look for anxieties about crowds in other works and correlate them to plague anxieties. Considering that it was great throngs of people (poor people in particular) that were thought by most people to generate plague, it would seem to me to be fruitful to consider whether the depiction of any crowd in an early modern play hides plague anxiety. Consider how Shakespeare represents the lability of the Plebeian crowd in *Julius Caesar* when Brutus and Antony deliver their speeches on Caesar's death. Or the perverse depiction of Jack Cade's Rebellion in *2 Henry VI*. Or the entirety of *Bartholomew Fair*, considering that the fair was canceled several times for fear of the plague.[59] If we found enough of these correlatable anxieties, we could make good progress toward determining the extent to which any given early modern play reproduces that set of plague anxieties.

Trauma theory offers another important critical perspective through which to view the plague's impact on early modern drama and the works of Shakespeare and Jonson. Cathy Caruth, following Freud, holds that the event that causes trauma is only an incomplete part of the whole traumatic experience, and that survivors of trauma are compelled unwittingly to repeat the initial traumatic experience. One explanation why people do so is to come to grips with the full historical significance of the traumatic event. Carruth writes, "Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where

immediate understanding may not."[60] Caruth believes that literature plays an important role in this negotiating of history by its participants, and I believe that this is one of literature's primary functions. By creating scenes onstage that could not have failed to elicit plague anxieties, Shakespeare and Jonson provide a safe space for their audiences to appreciate the full historical significance of the plague and its impact on their lives.

Caruth's work on trauma and most contemporary thinking about trauma are concerned with an individual's deliberate attempts to explicitly recount a traumatic experience, and so is of limited usefulness in considering the responses to and expressions of trauma by social groups. Indeed, we can understand why thinkers in trauma theory would be reluctant to believe that it was even possible or desirable to do so, but communities exist, and so must social patterns of expressing trauma. Kai Erikson takes some tentative steps toward understanding how that phenomenon works in "Notes on Trauma and Community." Erikson is a sociologist who has worked on disasters and the social response to them, and through his work he has come to believe that it is possible to

> speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons. Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body…, but even when that does not happen, traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension.[61]

I agree with Erikson, and I believe that the social dimension of trauma is observable in literature. I believe that Shakespeare and Jonson express the social dimension of plague trauma in their

plays both consciously and unwittingly, and that doing so has important restorative effects on the community.

One of the main ways that the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson express plague trauma is by enacting reproduction anxiety. This type of anxiety, usually evident as the failure to procreate, acutely permeates the drama and other literature of the early modern period. Various early modern depictions of plague put the devastation in terms of family. Plague victims are almost always identified through their position in a family collective rather than as individuals. Instead of men, women, and children, the plague takes mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, husbands and wives. Thomas Dekker writes in *The wonderfull yeare*, "In euery houfe griefe striking vp an Allarum : Seruants crying out for maisters: wiues for husbands, parents for children, children for their mothers" (28). "T.C." argues against flight by exposing the disruption it causes among families: "women also great with childe, are forsaken in their most neede, for at such times, fewe or none will come unto them: Yea, a man may heare also that the children forsake their Fathers and Mothers, and one household body keepeth himselfe away from another…" (sig. A5.v.). In most early modern plague literature, the plague has a devastating effect on the institution of the family, and anyone who abandons their family puts themselves at greater risk of contracting plague.

Given the devastation that the plague represented, especially to families, it is no surprise that survivors felt pressure to recover by restoring their families. Immediately following the Black Death in France, it was reported that "the men and women still alive married each other. Everywhere women conceived more readily than usual. None proved barren, on the contrary, there were pregnant women wherever you looked. Several gave birth to twins, and some to living triplets."[62] This account must be at least partly apocryphal, but even as a fantasy it

represents a real anxiety. This vision of hyper-fertility counteracts the out-of-control mortality during plague time and recognizes that the population needs to be restored. In early-modern England, William Bullein refers to a fertility treatment that has proven useful specifically in the aftermath of a plague epidemic. He writes in *Bulleins bulwarke of defence against all sicknesse, soarnesse, and woundes*, first printed in 1562 and reprinted in 1578:

> [It] is sayd, somtyme there was so great a pestilence in a Citty of *Aegypt*, that through the Poyson thereof few were left a lyve: but when the Plague was ceased, the younge Women were compelled to drynke the Wyne, or Juyce of Sage, through whose vertue they were conceyved wyth Chyldren, havinge the helpe of Man: that in the ende, the Citty was replenished agayne, and filled wyth People of theyr owne Generation.[63]

Again, the account may be apocryphal; no source is given. But the anxiety the account expresses is real. That such a treatment would be in demand is indisputable; the need to repopulate must have been on nearly everyone's mind.

Section 4. Tentative Steps toward a Theory of Early-Modern Plague Trauma

Important questions remain at least partially unanswered. The extent to which Shakespeare and Jonson consciously invoke plague, and to what end, can never really be known. It may be difficult to accept that on the one hand that Shakespeare and Jonson did not consciously employ plague themes at all, but their plays are suffused with such themes in a way that does not seem accidental. Shakespeare cannot have been unaware that setting a play in midsummer, whatever its other obvious associations, was setting it squarely in plague time, and

it is equally impossible that *Volpone* would have been the same play without the plague associations carried by Venice and characters named after carrion birds. The plague themes I identify accompany more overt and deliberate plague allusions, especially in Jonson's plays, and these themes and allusions can be seen as being concomitant.

As for the reasons Shakespeare and Jonson would enact plague anxieties onstage, the main end has to be containment. As I show with *Romeo and Juliet*, *Epicoene* and *The Alchemist*, the plays in this study invoke plague mainly to diminish it and to promote sociability and mirth over isolation and fear. Just as tragedy and comedy are seen to contain other unruly social impulses (revenge, incest, vanity, jealousy, love, etc.) through catharsis by safely reproducing them onstage and holding them up to scrutiny and judgment, they can be shown to do the same with plague. Catherine I. Cox expresses this point of view in an essay on the influence of plague in *Measure for Measure* when she writes, "Shakespeare surely understood the human desire to imaginatively revisit lived catastrophes in order to gain some sense of control over them,"[64] implying that Shakespeare actively encourages his audience to do the same.

What I have laid out here is the case for the possibility that the literary production of early-modern England was in part a product of the social trauma inflicted by the plague, and in important ways that have not all been recognized yet. My work, in conjunction with Sontag's and Girard's, moves toward a theory of early-modern plague trauma while tentatively attempting to draw broader conclusions about the human social response to epidemic disease and disaster in general. Ultimately, I hope to answer the call of Sharon Achinstein, who suggests that

> those concerned with early printed literature might better understand how medical and philosophical discourses give us guides for interpreting the position of that literature in society. We need to expand the kinds of contexts and preconditions we might use to

inform our studies of literary representations, as well as to encourage historians of ideas and of society to look to literature as a way to understand the diversity of cultural response that is offered by the archive.[65]

The dialogic relationship between plague and literature in early modern England will hopefully help us understand the trans-historical role of crisis in the conception of literature.

---

[1] Portions of this introduction have been printed in a different form in "Plague in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Girardian Reading of Bottom and Hippolyta," *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[2] Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Random House, 1948), 278.

[3] "Information on Plague," *Centers for Disease Control*, March 30, 2005. Accessed March 15, 2010. http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/plague/info.htm

[4] "Plague," *World Health Organization*, February 2005. Accessed April 15, 2010. http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs267/en/

[5] Rosemary Horrox points out that a distinction was drawn between bubonic and pneumonic manifestations as early as 1348 by the papal court in Avignon, but early modern English plague literature does not indicate an awareness of the distinction. Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 4, 42-3. Neither "bubonic" nor "pneumonic" were used in association with plague in early modern literature. Although the OED shows the word "bubo" to have been in use to describe a swollen area of the body as far back as 1398, "bubonic" dates no further back than 1871, and was not used to characterize plague until 1886. The OED dates the first use of "pneumonic" to characterize plague cases to 1891.

[6] Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 174. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[7] F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992). Hoeniger notes, "From early on the terms infection and contagion were often used almost interchangeably for such fevers and epidemics, without clear distinction, though their etymology suggests quite different meanings" (188). He goes on to describe the etymologies of infection and contagion and elaborate on the use of the two words in early modern texts (188-190).

[8] Henry Petowe, *Londoners their entertainment in the country. Or the whipping of the runaways* (London: 1604), sig. B2.r. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text. I have modernized the typography of all unedited early modern sources by replacing u with v and vice-versa, i with j, vv with w, and ~ with m or n as needed. I have preserved most idiosyncrasies of spelling except where it is an impediment to perceiving the correct sense of the word.

[9] Elizabeth I, *Orders thought meete by her Majestie, and her privie Councell, to be executed throughout the counties of this realme, in such townes, villages, and other places, as are, or may be hereafter infected with the plague, for the stay of further increase of the same* (London: 1578), sig. B.2.v.

[10] Henoch Clapham, *Henoch Clapham his demaundes and answeres touching the pestilence: methodically handled, as his time and meanse could permit* (Middleburg: 1604), sig. D4.r-v.

[11] T.C., *A godly and learned sermon, upon the 91. psalme* (London: 1603), sig. C4.r. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[12] Theodore Beza, *De peste auaestiones duae explicatae*, trans. John Stockwood (London: 1580), sig. A2.r. The original was published in Geneva in 1579.

[13] Simon Kellwaye, *A defensative against the plague* (London: 1593), sig. C.v to C2.r. Kellwaye provides several recipes for plague quilts or bags, although he does mention that their benefit is a matter of some dispute. Lodge also notes the controversy over plague cakes and amulets of arsenic, but also comes down in favor of them. Thomas

Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge*, vol. 4 (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), 7-8.
[14] Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge*, vol. 4 (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), 47. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[15] William Bullein, *A Dialogue against the Fever Pestilence*, ed. Mark W. Bullen and A. H. Bullen, Early English Text Society 52 (Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973), 38. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[16] Francis Herring, *A modest defence of the caveat given to the wearers of impoisoned amulets* (London: 1604), Sig. B.r. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text. I have modernized the typography of all unedited early modern sources by replacing u with v and vice-versa, i with j, vv with w, and ~ with m or n as needed. I have preserved most idiosyncrasies of spelling except where it is an impediment to perceiving the correct sense of the word.
[17] See the chapter on *Romeo and Juliet* for some of the problems with quarantine. The plague orders of Elizabeth I and James I mandated quarantine for the infected, but there is evidence that those orders were not carried out uniformly, and that the rich were given preferential treatment over the poor in how strictly they were required to adhere to the plague orders. In fact, most of the recommendations in the plague orders were useless against plague. Public perception would have required the crown to do something, and the plague orders are designed to promote the illusion of control and safety more than to practically address the problem.
[18] William Lambarde, *The duties of constables, borsholders, tithingmen, and such other low ministers of the peace* (London: 1605), sig. C4.v. On the definition of and provisions for rogues, vagabonds, and beggars, see sig. C3.v. to C8.v.
[19] This document was first published in 1582, but it was reprinted throughout early modern English history. The STC shows the last printing to have been in 1677. I take all quotations from the 1605 edition.
[20] Lambarde, *Duties*, sig. C3.v to C4.v. People pretending to be Egyptians peddled "mummy," a cure-all that was supposedly derived from actual mummies. See Louise Noble, " 'And Make Two Pasties of Your Shameful Heads': Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in *Titus Andronicus*" *ELH* 70 no. 3 (Fall 2003): 677-708.
[21] Lambarde, *Duties*, sig. C4.v to C5.r.
[22] Elizabeth I, *By the Queene. A proclamation to restraine accesse to the court, of all such as are not bound to ordinarie attendance, or that shall not be otherwise licenced by her Majestie* (London: 1592).
[23] The question of whether flight was permissible will be discussed at length below. For a comprehensive treatment of the arguments for and against flight in Early Modern England, see Theodore Beza, *De Peste*.
[24] Ernest Gilman characterizes the debate as centering around the views in early modern England as centering around the beliefs of two preachers preaching either side of the flight debate and the theological debate over plague in general. Gilman writes, "The two political poles of 1603 plague theology—and its attendant politics—are clearly exemplified in the contrasting figures of Lancelot Andrewes and Henoch Clapham." Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 146. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.
[25] James Godskall, *The arke of noah for the Londoners that remaine in the cittie* (London: 1604), sig. C3.v.
[26] Thomas Dekker, *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 34-5. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.
[27] Paul Slack acknowledges that plague and famine contributed to one another, but is reluctant to correlate them too closely in terms of mortality: "The significance of subsistence crises pure and simple in English demographic history must not be overstated therefore. It was common for infectious diseases not aggravated by malnutrition, such as plague, to follow dearth, and make the major contribution to mortality. When this happened, there may well have been important indirect connections between harvest failure and epidemic infections. The large-scale shipment of grain from country to country or locality to locality in years of famine might aid the movement of rodents carrying the disease; equally the migration of individuals, of vagrants and beggars in search of food and charity, which commonly increased when harvests failed, might serve to disseminate an epidemic" (75).
[28] John Taylor, *The fearefull sommer* (London: 1625), sig. A8.r.
[29] Lambarde, *Duties*, sig. F.r. (p. 81).
[30] Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed, vol. 1, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 281, 2.1.1-6.
[31] Slack estimates case fatality rates for bubonic plague at 60-80 percent, so at least 20 percent of those who caught the disease survived (7). The numbers for pneumonic plague, more rare but far more deadly, are estimated at nearly 100 percent (9).

[32] See Barbara Howard Traister, *The Notorious Astrological Physician of London: Works and Days of Simon Forman* (The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3, 81-96. Simon Forman ran afoul of the Royal College of Physicians several times. Although it was certainly not above persecuting blameless individuals to protect their cartel, the College seemed to have a legitimate objection to Forman's own brand of astrological medicine. Traister devotes a chapter of her book on Forman to his run-ins with the Royal College of Physicians. Traister also notes that Ben Jonson ridicules him by name in *Epicoene*, and possibly uses him as the basis for the character Subtle in *The Alchemist*.

[33] Beza, *De Peste*, D3.v. (misnumbered as D5) to D4.r..

[34] Dekker gives a similar account in *The wonderfull yeare*: "those that have bin foure times wounded by this yeares infection, have dyed of the last wound" (37).

[35] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1990) 182. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[36] One might also make a case for *Timon of Athens*, discussed below.

[37] Ian Munro, *The City and Its Double: The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 194. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[38] For a similar argument about plague as a curse, see Paula S. Berggren, "Shakespeare's Dual Lexicons of Plague: Infections of Speech and Space," in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011), esp. 150-54. Further references to this essay will appear parenthetically in the text.

[39] Margaret Healy, " 'Seeing' Contagious Bodies in Early Modern London," in *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Darryll Grantley and Nina Taunton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000), 157-167, esp. 165. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.

[40] Ben Jonson, *Epicene, or The Silent Woman*, ed. Richard Dutton, The Revels Plays (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.1.162-5.

[41] Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent R. Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970) 82.

[42] René Girard, "The Plague in Literature and Myth," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15 no. 5 (Special Classics Issue 1974): 833-850, esp. 833. Subsequent citations of this essay will appear parenthetically in the text.

[43] "The plague is universally presented as a process of undifferentiation, a destruction of specificities. This destruction is often preceded by a reversal" (833).

[44] Girard has written about *Timon of Athens* in *A Theater of Envy*, but his understanding of the play is unhelpful in terms of the thematic relationship between radical reversal and mimetic doubling. He writes, "*Timon of Athens* does not dramatize mimetic undifferentiation and conflictual desymbolization in the sense that the earlier masterpieces do." René Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 176. I contend that Girard is wrong here, and that desymbolization through radical reversal and undifferentiation are key elements of the text, at least as far as understanding its relation to the plague. Further references t this work will appear parenthetically in the text.

[45] All citations from Shakespeare's plays are from William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[46] Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.

[47] Louis F. Qualtiere and William E. Slights, "Contagion and Blame in Early Modern England: The Case of the French Pox" *Literature and Medicine* 22 no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1-24, esp. 20.

[48] Eric S. Mallin notices this phenomenon in Hamlet as well. In relating a specific theory about transmission of the plague contained in Fracaster's *De Contagione et Contagiosis Morbis et Eorum Curatione* to ideas about contagion in Hamlet, Mallin states that Girard has arrived at the same conclusion promoted by regarding the two works together: "The symbolic ramifications of biological contagion theory receive a compelling gloss from René Girard, who enlarges (with anthropological intent) the microscopic features of Fracaster's original observations… [Girard's] reading of the disease can be mapped back into Fracaster's understanding that contagion produces deadly likeness. The destructive similarity that befalls bodies in epidemics afflicts minds and motives in Denmark. Claudius obtained his brother's place, wife, and privilege through emulous fratricide, and so began the cycle of imitation and the production of the likeness—read 'contagion'—that ensnares his nephew." Eric S. Mallin, *Inscribing the Time: Shakespeare and the End of Elizabethan England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 69.

[49] See also Brutus on Cassuis' waning resolve in *Julius Caesar*: "Ever note, Lucilius, / When love begins to sicken and decay / It useth an enforced ceremony" (4.2.19-21). Brutus isn't speaking about literal sickness, of course, but

in using sickness as a metaphor, Brutus links the effect and metaphorical cause in an unambiguous way: sickness creates a heightened awareness of social conventions, ranks, slights, etc., and the reverse can be true as well.
[50] Sontag says something similar about plague and sacrifice: "The medieval experience of the plague was firmly tied to notions of moral pollution, and people invariably looked for a scapegoat external to the stricken community" (71).
[51] Melissa Smith, "Personifications of Plague in Three Tudor Interludes: *Triall of Treasure*, *The longer thou liuest, the more foole thou art*, and *Inough is as good as a feast*" Literature and Medicine 26 no. 2 (Fall 2007): 364-85, esp. 366.
[52] Smith, "Personifications," 379.
[53] On the continuity of Girard's critical endeavors, Girard claims, "My work on Shakespeare is inextricably linked to everything I ever wrote, beginning with an essay on five European novelists" (*Envy* 3). The concept that Girard's work on the plague and his work on mimetic desire share is the concept of unanimous victimage (sacrifice), and that is the concept that Weimann criticizes. Girard writes in *A Theater of Envy*, "Shakespeare identifies the force that periodically destroys the differential system of culture and brings it back into being, namely, the mimetic crisis, which he calls a crisis of *Degree*. He sees its resolution in the collective violence of scapegoating (for example, Julius Caesar). The omega of one cultural cycle is the alpha of another. It is unanimous victimage that transforms the disruptive force of mimetic rivalry into the constructive force of sacrificial mimesis periodically reenacting the original violence in order to prevent a return of the crisis" (6). Undifferentiation is one of the consequences of mimetic rivalry (*Envy* 50-56).
[54] Robert Weimann, " 'Appropriation' and Modern History in Renaissance Prose Narrative," *New Literary History* 14.3 (Spring 1983): 459-495, esp. 463.
[55] Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 87. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[56] Horrox, *Black Death*, 243, 340-2.
[57] Smith, "Personifications," 374.
[58] From the conflated text.
[59] In 1593 Elizabeth I restricted retail trade at Bartholomew Fair explicitly due to fears of spreading the plague. James I ordered Bartholomew Fair canceled in 1603 and 1625. Other fairs, such as Stourbridge Fair, Bristol Fair, and St. James's Fair were also canceled, postponed, or restricted during plague time.
[60] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[61] Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 183-99, esp. 185. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[62] Horrox, *Black Death*, 57. Ironically, it was uncontrolled reproductive behavior that was often blamed for the Black Death and subsequent aftershocks. John of Reading notes that in 1365, another epidemic year, that, "Infected by malice, cunning, deceit and evil, perverting every convention, decency and standard in their deeds, gestures and words, men considered that to deflower virgins and violate the chastity of wives and widows was doing them a favour, not an injury. Men did not have sexual intercourse with their wives, or married women with their husbands, but preferred to get bastards on strangers" (Horrox, *Black Death*, 134). This anxiety over the reproductive habits of plague survivors is one of the key features of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and other important plague texts.
[63] William Bullein, *Bulleins bulwarke of defence against all sicknesse, soarnesse, and woundes* (London: 1576), Fol. 5.
[64] Catherine I. Cox, "'Lord Have Mercy Upon Us': The King, the Pestilence, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*," *Exemplaria* 20.4 (Winter 2008), 430-457, esp. 434.
[65] Sharon Achinstein, "Plagues and Publication: Ballads and the Representation of Disease in the English Renaissance," *Criticism* 34 no. 1 (Winter 1992), 27-49, esp. 29.

Chapter 1

"Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she": Inheritance, Reproduction, and Plague in *Romeo and Juliet*

The Norton Shakespeare, following Oxford's *The Complete Works*, omits two lines from Act 1 Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*.[1] In the second quarto (1599) and first folio, as Paris and Capulet haggle over Juliet, Capulet says to Paris, "Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she, / She's the hopeful Lady of my earth," following the line, "And too soon marred are those so early made."[2] A footnote in the *Norton* explaining the omission of these lines states that they were "probably rejected by Shakespeare in the writing process,"[3] even though they appear in the second quarto but not the first (1597), which would seem to indicate that the lines are more authoritative rather than less. The explanation in the footnote is inadequate, but the editorial decision is perhaps understandable. The lines do not rhyme as the rest of the speech does, so they appear out of place formally. More importantly, they may appear to conflict with other lines that would seem to indicate that Juliet was and is Capulet's only child. In his anger over Juliet's refusal to accept the match with Paris, for example, Capulet says,

> My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest
> That God had lent us but this only child,
> But now I see this one is one too much,
> And that we have a curse in having her. (3.5.164-7)[4]

Later yet, Capulet's wife says something similar as she grieves over Juliet's apparent death:

But one, poor one, one poor and loving child,

But one thing to rejoice and solace in,

And cruel death hath catched it from my sight! (4.2.77-9)

Both of these statements suggest that Juliet was the Capulet's only child, and Capulet's lament "That God had lent us but this only child" implies that she was the only one they ever had. The line "Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she" need not refer to other offspring, but it clouds the issue and may be seen as inconsistent with the later lines. Even assuming some inherent contradiction, however, the earlier line is important, and I hope to show that it expresses a grief that would have been felt acutely by *Romeo and Juliet*'s audience because of the impact on the play's production of a particularly severe plague epidemic in 1592.[5]

Romeo and Juliet is set squarely in plague-time, which is evident from several significant details in the play. The clearest evidence is Friar John's account of his detention in a house suspected of being visited by plague in 5.2. He says,

Going to find a barefoot brother out—

One of our order—to associate me

Here in this city visiting the sick,

And finding him, the searchers of the town,

Suspecting that we both were in a house

Where the infectious pestilence did reign,

Sealed up the doors, and would not let us forth. (5.2.5-11)

It is somewhat unclear from this passage whether plague is actually raging in Verona, but the response Friar John describes represents a real anxiety, and several significant details of his account suggest that plague is a threat in the play. The most significant plague reference is that

Friar John is shut up by the searchers of the town. The plague orders of Elizabeth I and James I explicitly call for provisioning searchers among other emergency personnel. According to Richelle Munkhoff, whose essay on searchers in early-modern England is the only comprehensive study of their role, their responsibility was to "examine and codify diseased bodies."[6] Searchers examined the ill and the dead to determine plague cases, so they were only employed during plague outbreaks. That they are mobilized in the play at all would seem to indicate that there is a credible threat of plague in Verona.

Friar John's early release from quarantine has been cited as evidence that the threat of plague in Verona is not credible, but the matter is complicated. Barbara H. Traister downplays the significance of plague in Friar John's confinement, noting that he is, "released fairly quickly, without the usual period of quarantine," which suggests that "the diagnosis of plague was…inaccurate."[7] This must be correct, but to imply, as Traister does, that the plague was therefore not present in Verona, or not a serious threat, goes too far. What Friar John reports is something more than unfounded hysteria. Quarantines were evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and individuals could be released early for any number of reasons depending on their social standing or the judgment of the watchmen. Thomas Lodge advises in his learned 1603 tract, *A Treatise of the Plague*, "in regard of the time wherein the suspected and sicke, or rather those who frequented and served them, there ought some rule and moderation to be held. For whereas by ancient custome and observation they are wont to have the prefixed terme of fortie dayes given them, yet ought not this terme, equally and rigorously be observed in all."[8] Lodge's advice was not new or unique; Paul Slack notes that his treatise is a translation of a French document written 40 years earlier (24), so it is clear that there was a good deal of leeway in England and

the continent regarding how strictly to enforce quarantine. Officials were to exercise some judgment in determining who was to be shut in and for how long.

Plague is explicitly the source of Friar John's detention in Arthur Brooke's poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), Shakespeare's most immediate source for *Romeo and Juliet*, and Brooke's friar is detained in a way that is congruent with Italian practices for containing plague outbreaks.[9] Paula Berggren notes that in Shakespeare, Friar John's mention of the doors being sealed up is a reference to Elizabethan (but not Italian) plague-time practice.[10] Shakespeare alters the situation of Friar John's detention in *Romeo and Juliet* to bring it in line with Elizabethan practices that were designed to mitigate the impact of plague in England's urban areas. What this means is that there is concerted *Elizabethan* civic response to the plague underway in the entire city of Verona throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, and Elizabethan audiences could not have failed to associate mention of a civic response to plague in Verona with conditions in London ca. 1592.

The position that *Romeo and Juliet* has been altered from its source to align it with Elizabethan plague-time realities is more credible given that the play is set in the middle of summer, when the plague would have been most active. In discussing Juliet's age, the nurse asks Capulet's wife, "How long is it now to Lammastide?" to which Capulet's wife responds, "A fortnight and odd days" (1.3.15-7). Lammastide is August 1, so the play takes place in the middle of July, when breeding conditions for the flea that spread the plague were optimal. Capulet also alludes to the season when he tells Paris of Juliet's fitness to be married, "Let two more summers wither in their pride / Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride" (1.2.10). Shakespeare would no doubt have known that the plague was worst in the summer, since associations between plague

and summer have been made in literature since classical antiquity, and the 1592-3 epidemic, which must have influenced *Romeo and Juliet,* was most active in the late summer of 1592.

The history of England in the 1590s helps to explain the presence of plague in *Romeo and Juliet*. Although there is (slight) evidence that the play was written as early as 1591, most scholars agree that is was written and first produced either in 1594 or 1595. This date places the play in the aftermath of a very serious plague epidemic in England that began in 1592 and lasted into 1593. Paul Slack estimates that roughly 11,000 died in London and the liberties during that period, which he designates as a time of crisis mortality (151). In fact, even a later date for *Romeo and Juliet* places it in plague time, as 1596-7 was also an epidemic period in London during which the death rate was about 21% higher than the national trend (Slack 58).

Unfortunately, few details survive from either epidemic aside from the fact that they represented unusually high mortality that has usually been attributed to bubonic plague. Neither the 1592-93 nor 1596-97 plague visitations in London were as statistically significant with respect to mortality levels as those of 1563, 1603, or 1625, and as a result, they had less social and cultural impact. Nevertheless, royal proclamations and plague literature from that period paint the picture we might expect to see of an epidemic. The evidence that survives concerning the response of Elizabeth I to the 1592-93 epidemic treats it very seriously indeed. In 1592 the Queen issues plague orders based on her earlier 1578 orders that are designed to prevent the spread of the disease, and she issues other orders that indicate the effect that the plague was having on the day-to-day operation of the government. On September 18, 1592, the Queen orders Michaelmas Term adjourned until the fourth return (October 27),[11] then orders the remainder of the term held at Hartford Castle on October 21. She revises her position again on November 22, ordering that the remainder of Michaelmas Term be held at Westminster. She also issues an

order on October 12, 1592 from Hampton Court restricting court access in order to, "bee the better preserved from the infection of sicknesse in this time."[12] The plague abates during the winter, but is back early in 1593. On May 28, 1593, Elizabeth adjourns part of Trinity Term, and restricts court access due to the plague on June 18. On August 6, the Queen restricts Bartholomew Fair to the sale of horses and cattle, cancelling stalls and markets for other goods. She orders Michaelmas Term moved from Westminster to St. Albans on September 24, and back to Westminster on November 23. The orders make it explicit that the direct and sole cause of all this moving about was the plague, and it is clear that the plague disrupted the customary operations of the court. It may be inferred that life for individual Londoners was similarly disrupted.

The surviving plague literature indicates that that was indeed the case. Plague sermons such as William Cupper's *Certaine sermons concerning Gods late visitation in the citie of London and other parts of the land…* (1592) were published, and tracts such as *A defensatiue against the plague…* (1593) by Simon Kellwaye and *Present remedies against the plague…* (1592, 1594), attributed to a "Learned Phisition," were aimed at alleviating the impact of the plague on London's inhabitants. The Church of England published standard forms for prayer to be used to express penitence during the epidemic under Elizabeth's order (July 1593). Compiled by John Aylmer, Bishop of London at the time, the prayers are justified in a Preface, which states,

> Nowe therefore calling to minde, that God hath bene provoked by us to visite us at this present with the plague and other grievous diseases, and partly also with trouble of warres: It hath bene thought meete to excite and stirre up all godly people within this Realme, to pray earnestly and heartily to God, to turne away his deserved wrath from us,

> and to restore us as well to the health of our bodies by the wholesomnesse of the aire, as also to godly and profitable peace and quietnesse.[13]

The document goes on to lay out the elements that should be included in prayer services, recommends not only Sunday service but also Wednesday and Friday service, and includes a call-and-response psalm and three prayers to be said. The last page of the document includes requirements for Wednesday fasting by everyone between 16 and 60, excluding, "sicke folkes, and haruest labourers" (sig. B4.v).

There were few tracts dedicated solely to plague in 1596-7, but general medical tracts with sections on plague were printed or reprinted, including Jean Goeurot's *The regiment of life. Whereunto is added a treatise of the pestilence, with the book of children. Latelye corrected and enlarged by Thomas Phayre* (1596), and A.T., practitioner in physicke's *A rich store-house or treasury for the diseased…* (1596).

Much has been made of the putative impact of the 1592-93 epidemic on Shakespeare's career. J. Leeds Barroll calls the 1592-93 plague epidemic, "the first great plague visitation of Shakespeare's writing career,"[14] and reports that officials closed the theatres for over twenty months from January 1593 to October 1594 (17).[15] In *Ungentle Shakespeare*, Katherine Duncan-Jones provides a chapter entitled "1592-94: Plague and Poetry," which makes the case for her assertion that "Plague was a defining context for all Shakespeare's writing."[16] If all this is true, then we should expect to see evidence of the impact of the plague in Shakespeare's plays in general, and in *Romeo and Juliet* in particular. Aside from the significant but brief mention of the plague in Verona as a minor plot point, however, the play would seem to have little to do with plague.

Even when it was used to refer to disease, it did not necessarily refer to bubonic plague, but could refer to disease in general or even natural disaster. Two mentions of plague in *Romeo and Juliet* are not properly plague, and this reflects common usage. Mercutio mentions earlier in the play that "oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues" (1.4.75) the lips of young ladies who dream of kisses; Capulet says to the guests of his feast that, "Ladies that have their toes / Unplagued with corns will walk a bout with you" (1.5.14-5). Although any mention of specific symptoms of disease is rare in Shakespeare and justifies some scrutiny, it is hard to attribute blisters on lips or corns on feet to plague; the source of the blisters is more likely supposed to be venereal. A blister can appear at the site of infection in cases of bubonic plague, but early modern literature does not indicate knowledge of that fact. Capulet's mention of plague in connection with corns is clearly hyperbole, and possibly inappropriate unless we realize that the plague has been metaphorized to the point of insignificance.

That seems to be the point of all of these invocations of plague in *Romeo and Juliet*: to diminish it, to make light of it, to recast it as something relatively innocuous. This may seem like a pernicious form of denial, but it has an important positive social function as well. If drama provides a temporary escape or reprieve from the real anxieties outside the playhouse walls, then it is understandable that Shakespeare would make light of the plague in this way. This may help us understand why, for a tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* is surprisingly festive.[17] A graver tragedy might have seemed inappropriate in plague time and at the same time might have compromised the escape many no doubt sought in the theater.[18]

Romeo and Juliet engages with the plague more subtly but more significantly on several different levels. René Girard uses the play to demonstrate his theory of plague's ubiquitous presence in western literature. In his essay "The Plague in Literature and Myth," Girard identifies

a cluster of three themes that attend plague literature (radical reversal, undifferentiation, and sacrifice), and demonstrates how *Romeo and Juliet* exhibits the thematic cluster.[19] Girard believes that Mercutio's curse is part of a significant thematic pattern of plague in the play:

> It takes Shakespeare no more than six words to suggest our entire pattern of metaphoric and real interaction. The famous cry of the dying Mercutio, *A plague on both your houses*, is not an idle wish. It is already fulfilled in the endlessly destructive rivalry of these same two houses, Montagues and Capulets, who turn each other into perfect *doubles*, thereby bringing the plague upon themselves. At the end of the play, the Prince equates the death of the two lovers with the plague of their families: *See what a scourge is laid upon your hate*. The two statements are really the same. (849)

Girard is right to pick up on the word *scourge* as carrying plague associations, since plague was repeatedly and insistently referred to as a scourge of God. For example, Simon Kellwaye addresses the reader of his 1592 plague tract in the following way:

> When I considered with my selfe (gentle Reader) the great calamitie, miserie, and most distressed state of our Countrie, on which it hath pleased God to inflict the heavie scourge of his wrath, by imposing on them that poysonous infection the plague, I therefore…have thought it good to publish this small treatise under the title and name of a defensative against the Plague. (sig. A4.r)

The plague was commonly characterized as a scourge, and as Girard sees it, Shakespeare's audience would have perceived the Prince's use of that word at a mythic, subconscious level as relating to plague. The play uses plague as a metaphor to characterize the destructiveness of the feud and its impact on Verona.

Several critics have noted that reversal and undifferentiation are key features of the play outside of a plague context, but they may still reinforce Girard's case for the influence of plague on its imagining. Concerning reversal, Susan Snyder observes that, "*Romeo and Juliet* is different from Shakespeare's other tragedies in that it becomes, rather than is, tragic. Other tragedies have reversals, but in *Romeo and Juliet* the reversal is so radical as to constitute a change of genre: the action and the characters begin in familiar comic patterns, and are then transformed—or discarded—to compose the pattern of tragedy."[20] For Snyder, the theme of reversal is so strong in the play that it impacts not only the action of the play but also the genre. Compare this to Girard's previously cited statement that in plague literature, undifferentiation is, "often preceded by a reversal. The plague will turn the honest man into a thief, the virtuous man into a lecher, the prostitute into a saint. Friends murder and enemies embrace. Wealthy men are made poor by the ruin of their business. Riches are showered upon paupers who inherit in a few days the fortunes of many distant relatives" (833). Girard is more concerned with situation than Snyder, who is more interested in mapping the play's shift in genre, but both focus on Mercutio's death as a significant turning point in the play and an important instance of reversal. Girard sees Mercutio's statement "A plague o' both your houses" as the key to understanding the way *Romeo and Juliet* represents plague, and Snyder suggests that Mercutio's death is the moment that marks the transition in the play from comedy to tragedy.[21]

Snyder has also written on the undifferentiation in the play. In "Ideology and the Feud in *Romeo and Juliet*," she shows how the play reflects and comments on ideology through its portrayal of the feud between the Capulets and Montagues. In noting how *Romeo and Juliet* signals Shakespeare's understanding of the effects of ideology on subject formation, Snyder writes, "Shakespeare…, with his 'two households both alike in dignity', seems to be creating a

different sort of division, one that is obviously arbitrary and artificial. The members of his rival houses belong to the same culture, use the same verbal and behavioral languages."[22] Snyder suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* exposes the way that ideology drives a wedge between the Capulets and Montagues even though they are essentially similar. Shakespeare's insistence at various levels that the Capulets and Montagues are more similar than different contributes to Girard's pattern of plague themes by making the two houses less distinguishable from one another even in their attempts to assert their differences. The undifferentiating effect of the feud on the two houses is real, and it likely has something to do with Girard's plague pattern even though Snyder claims that the feud acts like ideology only to show that Shakespeare was aware of its effects centuries before Althusser.[23]

Another critic, Ronald Knowles, cites Romeo's apparently indiscriminate desire, (he describes Romeo's blithe but earnest exchange of one object of love for another as representing, "the paradox of love as both arbitrary and absolute." [24]), and the masks he and his party wear at Capulet's feast as components of the play's expression of carnivalesque qualities, but they also serve just as well as examples of reversal and undifferentiation. Romeo's shifting desire from one object to the next, from Rosaline to Juliet, suggests that Romeo is either infinitely reversible or that he is more in love with being in love than with any particular person because all the women beloved by him are stand-ins for an idea. Romeo's mask makes it difficult for prospective lovers to fall in love with anything but a costume and a bit of flattery, and he undifferentiates himself at the very moment that his identity would seem to be most relevant.

Other details that have seemingly incidental relevance to the plague begin to add up to something more substantial. For instance, the play is suffused with references to the medical philosophy of the time. Lynette Hunter shows the play to be actively involved in negotiating

between Galenic, Paracelsian, and Neoplatonic medical doctrines, which indicates a preoccupation with medical discourse that is more deliberate than in any of Shakespeare's other plays.[25] Todd H. J. Pettigrew claims that "Shakespeare employs medical practice to build the play's commentary on social order."[26] In other words, other significant thematic concerns in *Romeo and Juliet*, such as the play's interest in anatomizing social order, are expressed through medical discourse.

In fact, the apothecary is at a significant intersection of medical discourse, the play's commentary on social order, and the play's concern with expressing plague anxieties. Along with physicians, apothecaries were the main providers of treatment during plague time, but the remedies they provided were of questionable efficacy, and plague literature expresses a good deal of animosity toward them and their remedies. Dekker complains in *The wonderfull yeare* (1603) that "poore *Mithridatum* and *Dragon-water* (being both of them in all the world, scarce worth three-pence) were boxt in every corner, and yet were both drunke every houre at other mens cost" (33). Mithridatum and Dragon-water were the two main plague preventatives recommended by most physicians, and are recommended by the ultimate authority on preserving oneself from the plague, the plague orders of Elizabeth I and James I. All of their plague orders recommend Mithridatum, which they name, "Mithridates Medicine,"[27] as a preservative cordial. Regardless of the weight of authority that the plague orders carried, early modern literature is almost always skeptical of medical remedies for plague. As a comment on the efficacy of apothecaries and their treatments during plague time, it is not surprising that Shakespeare depicts a wretched one.

The apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* represents plague anxieties in two main ways, through his association with poverty and with poison. He of course supplies the poison that is

ingested at the end of the play. Most early modern plague literature refers to the plague as a kind of poison. Simon Kellwaye, for example, refers to the "poysonous infection of the plague" (sig. A4.r) in the passage cited previously in this chapter, and promotes the use of arsenic amulets because of their power to "resist venem" (sig. C.r), under the theory that one poison would repel or absorb the other.

The apothecary's poverty also associates him with plague, since it was the poor more than any other group of people who were associated with plague in early modern literature. Margaret Healy notes that the poor became increasingly identified with plague throughout the early modern period: "Increasingly from the late sixteenth century the borders of London had been represented by the city governors as the preserves of idleness, poverty, disorder, dirt, infection, contagion, unruliness, stench, rogues, vagabonds, vice and plague: in such discourses metonymic associations elide readily into metaphors and the marginal poor tend to become synonymous with stench, filth, and plague" (165). As far as the city governors of London were concerned, at least, the poor *were* a plague; to mention the poor was to invoke their association with plague.

The apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet* pleads poverty as his excuse for selling poison to Romeo, and Romeo's own description would seem to back up that detail: "Famine is in thy cheeks, / Need and oppression starveth in thy eyes, / Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back" (5.1.69-71). That most considered the poor to be the main carriers of plague is evident in the plague orders and certain other plague-time proclamations of Elizabeth I as well as most plague literature. A 1583 order prohibiting the erection of new houses makes the connection quite bluntly, justifying its necessity:

> to the preservation of her people in health, which may seeme impossible to continue, though presently by Gods goodnesse the same is perceived to be in better estate universally, then hath bene in mans memorie: yet where there are such great multitudes of people brought to inhabite in small roomes, whereof a great part are seene very poore, yea, such as must live of begging or by worse meanes, and they heaped up together, and in a sort smothered with many families of children and servantes in one house or small tenement, it must needs followe (if any plague or popular sicknes shoulde by Gods permission, enter amongst those multitudes) that the same would not onely spread it selfe and invade the whole Citie and confines, as great mortalitie should ensue to the same, where her Majesties personall presence is many times required…[28]

The order makes it clear that the plague was thought to originate among the poor and then spread throughout the city and the realm. This was not far from the truth, but it often led to prejudicial treatment and discrimination. A 1577 document issued by the Court of Common Council ordered an inquiry into "whether there hath bene any partialitie vsed, either in restreinyng the poore upon infection of plague, more then the rich. Or in sparying of the rich transgressing the good Orders taken for the stay of the infection, and punishyng the poorer sorte."[29] Given that physicians such as Lodge were in fact *recommending* that the rich be given preferential treatment in matters of quarantine, this should come as no surprise. But there is an important difference between giving the rich special treatment and persecuting the poor for their supposed role in engendering and passing on plague. Romeo's description of the apothecary participates in that persecutory rhetoric. Rather than eliciting pity, Romeo inspires revulsion borne of the associations between plague and the poor.

The play also signals early on a concern with hygiene and sanitation in a way that invokes plague anxieties. Samson's boast that he will, "take / the wall of any man or maid of Montague's" (1.1.10-11), is rooted in the fact that city streets were often open sewers. To take the wall means to take the inside of the sidewalk, typically quite narrow, forcing the passing party to risk stepping in the gutter. To help imagine what that would mean, consider J. Dover Wilson's colorful portrait of early-modern hygiene:

> Hygiene was in its infancy; the nostrums of medieval physic in their dotage. Surgery was a branch of the barber's art, and physiology was based upon the notion of humours which goes back to Hippocrates. In a word, man living in a pre-scientific age had no clue either to the prevention or to the cure of disease, with the result that the streets stank like middens, which indeed they were, and bubonic plague was an annual visitant to the city.[30]

Wilson is right to imply a connection between filthy streets and bubonic plague, since they were believed to be related in early modern England. The basic theory was that anything that smelled bad could engender plague, and plague orders and plague pamphlets consistently point to dungheaps as presenting particular danger during plague time. Simon Kellwaye notes as causes of plague, "some stincking doonghills, filthie and standing pooles of water, and unsavery smelles which are neere the places where we dwell,"[31] and a 1608 order by the Corporation of London requires, "that the sweeping and filth of houses be not suffered to be laid in heapes in the streets, but to be caried away by the Scavengers, or Rakers from the kitchin to the cart, as heretofore hath been used, to avoyd annoyance and infection, especially of visited houses."[32] Proper sanitation is not treated by city officials as a good in itself but only as a measure for reducing the spread of plague. To return to *Romeo and Juliet*, Samson may only be concerned with soiling his

apparel, but alluding to such realities in a 1595 stage play is slightly perverse because it carries not only excremental but also epidemic associations. By taking the wall he is not only trying to ensure that he is not walking in a filthy gutter but also trying to avoid infection.

Juliet's fantasy of being shut up in her family's crypt also indicates a concern with sanitation that would have special significance during plague time. As Juliet tries to imagine what the crypt will be like, she says,

> Shall I not then be stifled in the vault,
>
> To whose foul mouth no wholesome air breathes in,
>
> And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes? (4.3.32-4)

Though more nebulous than even bad smells, "bad air," the opposite of "wholesome air," was thought to engender plague as well. Lodge informs the readers of his *Treatise* that, "all pestilentiall sicknesses, as from the proper cause, are ingendred from the ayre, depraved and altered in his substance, by a certaine vicious mixture of corrupted and strange vapours" (14). He goes on to identify the various causes of these vapours, including, "the corruption & stench of dead and unburied bodyes" (15). Juliet's allusion to such beliefs would conjure up anxieties specifically related to plague for early modern audiences.

The systematic and near-total breakdown of authority in the play that is connected by Chris Fitter and Peter C. Herman to famine and riots in the 1590s may also owe some of its impact to plague, since the disorder brought on by epidemics contributed to the general sense that city and national officials were not in control. Herman sees a breakdown of authority at every level in the play: parental, civil, and ecclesiastical. He writes, "Shakespeare demonstrates, almost seriatem [*sic*], how each authority figure fails in his or her duty to Romeo and Juliet, both individually and as a couple, in ways that strikingly echo the failures of established authority in

the 1590s."[33] Chris Fitter is especially critical of Capulet for his "careless patrician feasting,"[34] and shows how the play pits the apothecary's poverty against Capulet's excess to demonstrate feasting's consequences. Capulet's feasting is insensitive not only because of the famine England suffers during the time the play was originally produced (famine hit the poor harder, as famines do), but because of the Wednesday fasting ordered by the Queen during the plague epidemic of 1592-3. The 1593 *Certaine praiers collected out of a fourme of godly meditations…*, issued by The Church of England in response to the plague epidemic, orders Englanders to fast, "observing sobrietie of diet, without superfluitie of riotous fare, respecting necessitie, and not voluptuousness… The wealthier sort," the order goes on, "are to be mooved to give of that they spare, and are besides able enough to give, to releeve the poore, considering the misery and distresse, of a number of poore miserable soules, either starving for lacke of foode, or being sicke with eating unseasonable meats" (sig. B4.r).[35] This passage shows that there was not a clear line between poverty, famine, and plague in 1593: extravagance was as incompatible with penitence as with charity, the former being necessary primarily because of plague and the latter being necessary primarily because of famine.

Plague epidemics are often characterized in early modern plague literature as apocalyptic free-for-alls during which authority, charity, family, and civic duty collapsed. The aforementioned displacements of Elizabeth I's court and the adjournment of legal terms during the 1592-93 epidemic offers just a glimpse of the disruptions plague could cause. As civil authorities evacuated the city, disorder reigned. This is a common feature of plague literature. In *The wonderfull yeare*, an anthropomorphized Plague runs through London wreaking every kind of havoc: "…the enemy taking advantage by their flight, planted his ordinance against their walls… Men, women, & children dropt downe before him: houses were rifled, streetes ransact,

beautifull maidens throwne on their beds, and ravisht by sicknes: rich-mens Cofers broken open, and shared amongst prodigall heires and unthriftie servants, poore men usde poorely, but not pittifully…" (32-3). The newly-ungoverned riot in this portrait of disorder caused by plague, and there is no civil authority in sight.

Figure 1: Plague runs rampant through the city of London. Woodcut from the title page of *A Rod for Run-awayes*. (Dekker *Plague* 135).

Dekker does mention certain sextons who were in positions of authority during the epidemic, but he recounts how the sextons of three parishes assume an authority that was not theirs by right: "the three bald Sextons of limping Saint *Gyles*, Saint *Sepulchres*, and Saint *Olaves*, rulde the roaste more hotly, than ever did the *Triumviri* of *Rome*. *Jehochanan*, *Symeon*, and *Eleazar*, never kept such a plaguy coyle in *Jerusalem* among the hunger-starved Jewes, as these three Sharkers did in their Parishes among naked Christians. Cursed they were I am sure by some to the pitte of hell, for tearing money out of their throates, that had not a crosse in their

purses" (34). In the absence of higher civil or ecclesiastical authority, the sextons (church officials in charge of maintaining church facilities, ringing the bells and sometimes burying to dead) apparently ran amok, reveling in their power to decide who could be buried on church grounds and using it as a source of income. These sextons seem to represent the highest civil or ecclesiastical authority still functioning, at least in these three plague-ravaged parishes, and they are abusing their authority rather than carrying out their responsibilities.

It is possible that Friar Laurence owes part of his characterization to officials such as Dekker's dissolute sextons, considering how he seems to represent the most ranking ecclesiastical figure in the play and is able to flout civil and church authority with apparent impunity. Juliet's suspicion of him is telling in this case; she worries that he has given her real poison to cover up his misdeeds:

> What if it be a poison which the friar
> Subtly hath ministered to have me dead,
> Lest in this marriage he should be dishonoured
> Because he married me before to Romeo? (4.3.23-6)

While some may be inclined to characterize this suspicion as groundless and point to the hysteria evident in the rest of the passage as evidence that Juliet is letting her imagination get the best of her, it shows at once a surprising lack of trust toward the friar and a clear-eyed view of her own transgressions. Juliet recognizes the friar's guilt in her own, and does not seem to think he is above murdering her to avoid being exposed. Some see this passage as a commentary on the play's position on Catholicism,[36] but it serves just as well as a commentary on the impotence and irresponsibility of the Church of England during plague time.

In the preceding ways, the plague constitutes an important subtext in *Romeo and Juliet*, some of it accidental and some deliberate. One of the uses to which we can put this new understanding is to resolve some of the play's insoluble problems. *Romeo and Juliet* is full of problems (Friar Laurence's competency among them), which is the subject of Stanley Wells's cheerfully-titled essay "The Challenges of *Romeo and Juliet*." Wells focuses on the challenges to performance of many of *Romeo and Juliet*'s formal, stylistic, and psychological inconsistencies. One of those inconsistencies is the apparent change in Capulet's attitude toward marrying Juliet to Paris between Act 1 and Act 3. He displays one attitude when we first meet Paris—he claims that Juliet is two years too young to be married, and entreats Paris either to wait or to woo Juliet and seek her approval for the match (1.2.7-17). After Tybalt's death, Capulet displays a different attitude. He seems to become desperate and tries to force Juliet to marry Paris (3.5.141-168). Wells identifies this as a challenging situation for an actor seeking "some semblance of psychological consistency."[37] Questioning the motivation behind this inconsistency in Capulet's character in Act 3, Wells asks,

> Is Shakespeare simply careless of consistency, providing his actor here with a strong set piece, regardless of what has come before? Or is he expecting his actor to lead up to this passage by making what he can of earlier signs of tetchiness in Capulet, as for instance in his harsh words to Tybalt at the dance, or even by suggesting…that Capulet is more concerned that his daughter should advance his family's social status than achieve personal happiness?" (12).

Wells is content to leave the questions open, as if there were no useful evidence from the text for a more authoritative reading, but many have tried to solve the problem by reconciling the two apparently conflicting passages.

Let us assume that Q2 and the Folio are authoritative. We know that Capulet is feeling his age, whatever his actual age may be, and therefore ought to be concerned with making provisions for his family upon his death. When talking to his cousin at his feast, he says, "you and I are past our dancing days" (1.5.29), and his cousin states that it has been thirty years since they have been in a masque. Capulet's wife also seems to think he's quite old. In the fight at the beginning of the play, she offers him "A crutch, a crutch" (1.1.69), instead of the sword he has requested.

In spite of what is probably his advanced age, however, Capulet seems surprisingly unconcerned with Juliet's inheritance. In his anger over her refusal to marry Paris, he threatens to disinherit her, saying, "what is mine shall never do thee good" (3.5.194). This aspect of the play is similar to Brooke's poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*. Brook's Capulet threatens that he will, "give all that I have away / From thee, to those that shall me love, me honour, and obey" (ll. 1976-7). He threatens to disinherit Juliet even though the poem makes it clear that Juliet is, "her father's only heir" (l. 1880). Brooke's poem offers several motives for Capulet's anger, one being that he is simply prone to anger: he is a "testy old man, wroth" (l. 1931). He also mentions the quality of the match and his effort in sealing it as causes for his anger (ll. 1962-4). The motive of Shakespeare's Capulet is less clear.

By attempting to force a match between Juliet and Paris, Capulet could effectively be disinheriting Juliet. Under the rule of coverture, Paris would control all of Juliet's wealth, perhaps even her jointure, and she was not guaranteed to get it back even after Paris died. Jennifer Munroe writes, "English legal codes seemingly protected women's interests in the property they held before their marriage, but their husbands could effectively decide how they wanted to distribute all their property that had since become jointly owned as part of the

marriage contract, and wives had little clear legal recourse to reclaim it."[38] One possible motive for Capulet's decision would be to provide for any future lineal heirs, as, for example, Shakespeare himself was careful to do in his own will.[39]

As much sense as that makes, certain details of the play seem to stack up in favor of another motive for Capulet's haste in marrying Juliet to Paris. If he does not care about the disposition of his property after his death, perhaps he realizes that Juliet is his only hope for carrying on his bloodline. Coppélia Kahn emphasizes this as an important interpretation of those two lines omitted from *The Norton Shakespeare* ("Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she, / She's the hopeful Lady of my earth,"). She notes that the phrase "lady of my earth" contains a significant pun: "*Fille de terre* is the French term for heiress, and Capulet wants to be sure that his daughter will not only survive motherhood, but produce healthy heirs for him as well." [40]

This interpretation of Capulet's haste, that it can be explained by a desire specifically for heirs, is reinforced by a comparison to the play's source. In Brooke's poem, talk of marrying Paris only comes up as a result of Tybalt's death. Juliet tells her mother that her grief actually has nothing to do with Tybalt, and in a discussion with her husband, Capulet's wife comes to the conclusion that Juliet is jealous of her friends who are getting married. Capulet agrees and decides to marry off Juliet to calm her down. He interviews suitors, Paris emerges as the front-runner, and Capulet makes the match, which Juliet refuses, inciting his ire. Shakespeare adds the earlier negotiation between Capulet and Paris, which, from a certain point of view, makes it clear very early in the play that Capulet is concerned with providing a husband for Juliet. But in doing so Shakespeare deliberately complicates the situation, obscuring rather than clarifying Capulet's motivation.

The fact remains that in the earlier negotiation between Capulet and Paris in 1.2, Capulet seems to be against marrying Juliet so young, but apparently changes his mind in 3.5. The easiest way to address the apparent contradiction is to suggest that one of the attitudes is inauthentic; in one of the two passages in which Capulet expresses an attitude about Juliet's fitness to be married, that is, *he is not telling the truth*. This is what Martin Goldstein proposes when he writes that Capulet's exasperated claim that he has been out drumming up matches for Juliet in 3.5 is, "patently false,"[41] in defense of his hypothesis that Capulet's desperate enthusiasm for marrying Juliet to Paris comes as a result of Romeo's banishment because Capulet was considering Romeo as a match for Juliet. Goldstein admits that the evidence is thin, but his hypothesis has the main advantage of resolving that insoluble problem (or challenge, if you like).

Goldstein, like most others, insists that Capulet does in fact change his mind, but the play is more economical and makes more sense if Capulet maintains a consistent frame of mind. What if it is the first passage in which Capulet is being disingenuous? This approach has the benefit of doing less violence to the text than Goldstein's, and still helps solve the insoluble problem. It is certainly possible that Capulet is only pretending to be an obstacle to Paris to inflame his desire for Juliet. Throughout his exchange with Paris in 1.2 he is careful to emphasize Juliet's value. "Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she" in this context constitutes an attempt to manipulate Paris into pitying Capulet and his family, and Capulet may also be hinting at what Juliet, and hence, Paris, stands to inherit. Capulet is, in effect, saying, "Juliet is my sole heir and stands to inherit a lot of money when I die."

In addition to the inheritance, Capulet emphasizes Juliet's youth, which seems to Paris more of an enticement than an obstacle to marriage. Capulet has enough sense not to be crass about it, but this scene could easily be played with Capulet appealing to what he knows is Paris's

desire for the young Juliet. This interpretation of 1.2 has the advantage of being consistent with Capulet's statement in 3.5 that "Day, night; work play; / Alone, in company, still my care hath been / To have her matched" (3.5.176-8), and justifies his derisive mocking of her when he says, "I'll not wed, I cannot love; / I am too young, I pray you pardon me" (3.5.185-6). Shakespeare's fathers have been known to use manipulation to promote matches for their daughters, so it is not out of the question that Capulet is trying to manipulate Paris in 1.2. Prospero's case comes immediately to mind, but it also occurs in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well* (sort of), and *Pericles*.

Whether Capulet changes his mind halfway through the play or does not, the problem of his vehement insistence on Juliet's marriage to Paris remains, and this is where an understanding of the historical impact of plague on the play can help illuminate the problem and perhaps resolve the inconsistency. Tybalt's death seems to be the most likely cause of Capulet's urgency. Kahn notes that "Capulet's sudden determination to marry Juliet to Paris comes partly from a heightened sense of mortality" (12) brought on by Tybalt's death, although the plague also contributes to that sense since it is present in Verona. Capulet does not make the causal link himself, but his mention of Tybalt's death is followed immediately by his "desperate tender" (3.4.12). He admits to Paris that, "Things have fall'n out, sir, so unluckily / That we have had no time to move our daughter," (3.4.1-2), referring to Tybalt's death, but instead of taking more time, as he himself admits might be more appropriate when he tries to decide on a wedding date, he makes that desperate tender of Juliet's assent, in the process disregarding Juliet's wishes and abbreviating the family's mourning for Tybalt. Why?

Capulet wants grandchildren; his main concern is for Juliet to reproduce, and his haste in doing so is related to plague. The anxiety over inheritance in *Romeo and Juliet* is intimately

connected to and overshadowed by anxiety over reproduction. In general, in ways that seem roundabout, the trajectory of Romeo and Juliet's story evokes parallels with the progression and/or impact of a plague epidemic. The story of the young, beautiful, chaste couple who marry only to be cut down, the purity of their love soiled by death's cruel hand, is a representational scheme generated by the plague. The story of pure love spoiled evokes in large strokes the daily shock of seeing one's loved ones succumb to plague; it stands in for the disorder and riot of plague-time; it magnifies the tragedy of all those who suffer a quick, premature death from a horrible, disfiguring disease.

At least one of Shakespeare's contemporaries presents essentially the same story in a plague context. The end of *The wonderfull yeare* contains a number of vignettes which relate explicitly to plague. They all border on the satirical, but one in particular contains striking parallels to *Romeo and Juliet*. Dekker presents the story of a young, chaste couple who fail to consummate their marriage because the young woman is stricken by plague. In setting up his vignette, Dekker presents a personified Plague supplanting death itself, running amok in London during the 1603 epidemic, and ruining the delight that lovers were wont to enjoy. He writes, "yea, so full of treacherie is [death] growne (since this Plague took his part) that no Lovers dare trust him, nor by their good wills would come neere him, for he works their downefall, even when their delights are at the highest" (44). The main thrust of the passage is a joke involving the relationship between death and orgasm, but it contains some serious commentary: it is obvious how a plague epidemic might interrupt the process of courtship and dampen erotic desires, and it is significant that Dekker imagines plague working specifically against lovers of a particular type:

> the mayd was in the pride of fresh bloud and bewty: she was that which to be now is a wonder, yong and yet chast: the gifts of her mind were great, yet those which fortune bestowed upon her (as being well descended) were not much inferior: On this lovely creature did a yong man so stedfastly fixe his eye, that her lookes kindled in his bosome a desire, whose flames burnt the more brightlie, because they were fed with sweet and modest thoughts: *Hymen* was the God to whom he prayed day and night that he might mary her: his prayers were receivd, & at length (after many tempests of her denial & the frowns of kinsfolke) the element grew cleere, & he saw the happy landing-place. (44)

Of course, on the wedding day, the woman is stricken with plague and dies shortly after, interrupting the marriage's consummation. Romeo and Juliet at least get to enjoy that benefit of marriage before they are split apart, but, minor differences aside, Dekker pretty clearly takes his cue from Shakespeare, and his appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet* is evidence that Shakespeare's contemporaries were reading plague in the play. The plague plays a central role in spoiling the beautiful and virtuous love in Dekker's vignette just as it does in *Romeo and Juliet* when Friar John gets shut in due to the plague. The overall trajectory of the stories, the pattern of representation in which something rare and beautiful becomes irreparably spoiled, is identical. Dekker seems to have recognized the situation in *Romeo and Juliet* as a plague pattern and reproduced it in *The wonderfull yeare*.

Plague is similarly alluded to in certain situations in *Romeo and Juliet*. Capulet's concern with propagating his bloodline and passing along his property has only partly to do with his age and the feud with the Montagues. Although the audience is certainly meant to feel the impact of the feud on the Montagues and Capulets, the feud alone cannot explain why each house has only one heir, and Girard would claim that the feud *is* the plague on a figurative level. Although the

play provides nothing to explain Romeo's position as solitary heir, Capulet's line, "Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she," is a crucial detail.

The plague's presence in Verona helps explain Capulet's urgency because the plague affected how people thought about the future in early modern England. Juliet could drop dead at any moment with almost no warning, which would leave Capulet without any direct descendents. Even if Juliet succeeded in giving birth, any children she had would be at risk of dying from any number of causes, plague perhaps the most pressing of them. This seems more likely given the climate in London in 1594 and 1595. The specific impact of the plague on the urgency to reproduce is suppressed in *Romeo and Juliet*, but it has left traces.

One of the central ironies of the play is that Juliet has already responded to the urgency expressed by her parents. Her exaggerated, enthusiastic eroticism, coupled with Shakespeare's deliberate lowering of her age from Brooke's poem, effectively show the signs of plague trauma; those details are unusual, and perhaps even inappropriate, because they are responding to the unusual historical circumstances under which the play was written. Juliet's plea to the night to give her her Romeo indicates the relationship between eroticism, reproduction anxiety, and plague in the play:

> Come, civil night,
> Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
> And learn me how to lose a winning match,
> Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods.
> Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
> With thy black mantle, till strange love grow bold,
> Think true love acted simple modesty.

Come, night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night;

For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night

Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.

Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night,

Give me my Romeo… (3.2.10-21)

It is hard to imagine this speech being made by a thirteen-year-old. Although she figures the night as a matron who will educate her in the ways of lovemaking, which is in line with what we must assume her sexual experience to be, the frankness of her language, the references to the physiological signs of lovemaking, and the puns on orgasms are extraordinary. Juliet's well-developed understanding of her sexuality marks her as preternaturally capable of handling the physical and emotional consequences of sex.

In the context of frank sex talk tinged with the constant threat of plague, the mention of the raven is not insignificant. Most of the imagery in the passage employs an oxymoron common to Shakespeare in giving blackness positive associations, but the raven carries the more common negative association. Romeo will lie like new snow on a raven's back, presumably appearing all the whiter for it. Romeo will essentially make the raven white, and by doing so, he will nullify any ill associations it may carry. Ravens constituted the epitome of lustrous blackness in early modern poetry, but they were also closely associated with plague.

Shakespeare actively invokes the raven's association with plague in other plays. In *Othello,* Shakespeare links ravens with plague to invoke themes that the play keeps returning to obsessively. Speaking of Cassio's possession of the handkerchief, Othello says to Iago:

Thou saidst—O, it comes o'er my memory

As doth the raven o'er the infectious house,

Boding to all!—he had my handkerchief. (4.1.20-22)

Othello uses the plague to express his anxiety over what he supposes is Desdemona's infidelity, and the mention of the raven strengthens the metaphor, foreshadows the destruction that is to follow in the play, and once again invokes that play's preoccupation with blackness. This will be explored further in the section on *Volpone*.[42]

The mention of the raven in *Romeo and Juliet* is a subtle reminder of the stakes of the lovers' liaison. If the play figures Juliet as the raven to be covered by the new snow that Romeo represents, Shakespeare may be figuring Juliet as a symbol for plague. This makes sense given her other associations with plague anxieties throughout the play. When Shakespeare (or Jonson) associates characters with plague, they are nearly always sacrificed, as Juliet is. In a way, the image of the snow-covered raven is a self-contained sacrifice. By associating Juliet with covered-over blackness, or plague averted, Shakespeare foreshadows Juliet's eventual sacrifice. By employing the plague themes of reversal and sacrifice in the image of the snow-covered raven, Shakespeare at once invokes and nullifies the specter of plague in the play. The plague that is invoked in simply mentioning the raven is figuratively dispelled, at least temporarily, by the sexual union between Romeo and Juliet, and their act of procreation counteracts the image of plague that the raven conjures up.

Romeo and Juliet is indisputably a product of plague time, and it is time that we started looking at the idiosyncrasies of the play as stemming in part from the anxieties generated by the plague. The plague serves as an important subtext and helps explain certain problems in the play.

---

[1] John Jowett has prime responsibility for *Romeo and Juliet* in Oxford's *The Complete Works*; Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor are the general editors. I have not seen an edition of the play that does not include these lines other than *The Complete Works* and *The Norton Shakespeare*. Even Jill L. Levinson's Oxford edition of the play, which we might expect to follow the editing decisions of *The Complete Works*, includes the lines.

[2] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Jill L. Levenson, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.2.13-5.
[3] William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), 911n.
[4] Unless otherwise noted, all lines from Shakespeare's plays come from William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
[5] Carl James Grindley also notes that the line is a reference to plague-time realities in "The Plague in Filmed Versions of Romeo and Juliet and Twelfth Night," in *Apocalyptic Shakespeare: Essays on Visions of Chaos and Revelation in Recent Film Adaptations*, ed. Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Melissa Croteau (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 148-65. In analyzing Capulet's line, "Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she," Grindley notes, "By having Juliet's only-child status being caused by some sort of series of unexplained deaths, Shakespeare is able not only to better justify Brooke's plague delay of Friar John, but he is also able to explain Juliet's permissive upbringing. In a way, Juliet—and a similar case could be made for Romeo—has been commoditized by the plague. Without it lurking in the background, she would have been just another disobedient child in a presumably large family" (152). Grindley's focus is on filmed version of the play, and his treatment of plague is not comprehensive.
[6] Richelle Munkhoff, "Searchers of the Dead: Authority, Marginality, and the Interpretation of Plague in England, 1574–1665," *Gender & History* 11, no. 1 (April 1999): 1-29, esp. 1.
[7] Barbara H. Traister, " 'A plague on both your houses': Sites of Comfort and terror in Early Modern Drama," *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011), 169-82, esp. 172.
[8] Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge*, vol. 4 (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), 1-86, esp. 45. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.
[9] Arthur Brooke, *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 1, *Early Comedies; Poems; Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), ll. 2488-2500. Further references to this poem will be cited parenthetically in the text by line number.
[10] Brooke's friar in *Romeus and Juliet* is detained within a convent he visits to request a companion because a brother has died of plague. The townsfolk charge the brethren to keep within their gates but are not described sealing them up. Paula Berggren cites the relevant passages from Brooke and Shakespeare (158-9).
[11] Herbert Berry, "A London Plague Bill for 1592, Crich, and Goodwyffe Hurde," *English Literary Renaissance* 25 no. 1 (Winter 1995): 3-25. Berry notes, "The plague was often bad in September, and the authorities often postponed Michaelmas term assuming that the plague would abate when the weather was colder. The usual postponement was to October 27, 'the fourth return day,' or 'Mense Michaelis,' as the proclamations have it, exactly four weeks after Michaelmas day" (13-4).
[12] Queen Elizabeth I, *By the Queene. A Proclamation to restraine accesse to the Court, of all such as are not bound to ordinarie attendance, or that shall not be otherwise licenced by her Majestie* (London, 1592).
[13] Church of England, *Certaine praiers collected out of a fourme of godly meditations, set foorth by her Maiesties authoritie in the great Mortalitie, in the fift yeere of her Highnesse raigne, and most necessarie to be used at this time in the like present visitation of Gods heauie hand for our manifold sinnes, and commended unto the ministers and people of London* (London: 1593), sig. A2.r. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.
[14] Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 90. Further references to this source will be cited parenthetically in the text.
[15] Early modern Londoners had more than just plague to worry about in these troubled years, and these additional threats to life and livelihood are discussed by Annabel Patterson in "Bottom's Up: Festive Theory in A Midsummer Night's Dream," *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 165-177; and Penry Williams, "Social Tensions Contained," *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre, and Politics in London*, 1576-1649, ed. David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55-66. An analysis of the relationship between plague and famine in literature would be enlightening, particularly given Paul Slack's discussion of their relationships (28, 73, 76).
[16] Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), 54.
[17] For an exploration of the way *Romeo and Juliet* exhibits Bakhtinian qualities of carnival or festive culture, see Ronald Knowles, "Carnival and Death in Romeo and Juliet," *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 49 (1996): 69-85.

[18] This begs the question of whether plague time generally elicits more "festive" tragedy, and I believe that the case could be made for the 1592 epidemic but not the one in 1603. The scope of the 1603 epidemic, coupled with the death of Elizabeth I, seems to have had a real impact on artistic production. It is also probably true that the regime change in 1603 resulted in a general change in tastes.
[19] For an extended examination of Girard's plague themes and their usefulness and relevance, see my Introduction and Matthew Thiele, "Plague in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Girardian Reading of Bottom and Hippolyta," in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011), 185-200.
[20] Susan Snyder, "*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy," *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 20 no. 4 (1970): 391-402, esp. 391.
[21] Snyder, "Comedy," 392-3.
[22] Susan Snyder, "Ideology and Feud in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 49 (1996): 87-96, esp. 88.
[23] Snyder writes, "Without precognizing Althusser, Shakespeare neverthless displays in Romeo and Juliet a very conscious concern with society's impact on the individual, especially in the characters' meditations on names and their power" ("Ideology" 89)
[24] Knowles, *Carnival*, 74-5.
[25] Lynette Hunter, "Cankers in *Romeo and Juliet*: Sixteenth-Century Medicine at a Figural/Literal Cusp," in *Disease, Diagnosis, and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 171-85.
[26] Todd H. J. Pettigrew, *Shakespeare and the Practice of Physic: Medical Narratives on the Early Modern Stage* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 93.
[27] Queen Elizabeth I, *Orders, Thought Meete by her Majestie, and Her Privie Counsell, to Be Executed throughout the Counties of This Realme, in Such Townes, Villages, and Other Places, as Are, or May Be hereafter Infected with the Plague*… (London, 1593), sig. B1.v.
[28] Elizabeth I, *By the Queene. The Queenes Majestie, perceiuing the state of the citie of London.*… (London, July 7, 1580).
[29] Corporation of London, Court of Common Council, *Articles to be enquired of, what orders haue bene put in execution, for the restreinyng of the infected of the plague, within the citie of London and liberties thereof* (London: 1577).
[30] J. Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press, 1932), 33-4.
[31] Kellwaye, *Defensative*, sig. B.v.
[32] Corporation of London, *Orders conceiued and thought fit, aswell by the Lord Maior of the City of London and the aldermen his brethren, as by the justices of peace in the countie of Middlesex, the borough of Southwarke, and county of Surrey to be obserued within their seuerall limits respectiuely, in the time of the infection of the plague, (if it shall so please Almighty God) for suppression and preuention of the dispersing thereof, according to the statute in that behalfe made in Parliament in the first yeare of the raigne of our soueraigne lord King Iames* (London: 1608).
[33] Peter C. Herman, "Tragedy and the Crisis of Authority in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*," *Intertexts* 12 no. 1-2 (2008): 89-109, esp. 91.
[34] Chris Fitter, " 'The quarrel is between our masters and us their men': *Romeo and Juliet*, Dearth, and the London Riots," *English Literary Renaissance* 30 no. 2 (Spring 2000): 154-83, esp. 159.
[35] No comparable document was printed during the 1596-97epidemic, though the form printed in 1593 may still have been in use. There is another form of prayer for the plague printed in 1603 that also contains orders for fasting.
[36] For a recent exploration of this topic, see Jill Kriegel, "A Case Against Natural Magic: Shakespeare's Friar Laurence as Romeo and Juliet's Near-Tragic Hero," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 13 no. 1 (Winter 2010): 132-145.
[37] Stanley Wells, "The Challenges of *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 49 (1996): 1-14, esp. 12. Further references to this essay will appear parenthetically in the text.
[38] Jennifer Munroe, *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 78.
[39] See Wilson, *Will Power*, 209-11. Wilson cites B. Roland Lewis, *The Shakespeare Documents: Facsimiles, Transliterations, Translations and Commentary* (Stanford University Press, 1940), 2:489 .
[40] Coppélia Kahn, "Coming of Age in Verona," *Modern Language Studies* 8 no.1 (Winter 1977-1978): 5-22, esp. 12. Further references to this essay will appear parenthetically in the text.

[41] Martin Goldstein, "The Tragedy of Old Capulet: A Patriarchal Reading of *Romeo and Juliet*," *English Studies* 77 no. 3 (May 1996): 227-39, esp. 235.
[42] Berggren also notes this passage in her discussion of plague in *Romeo and Juliet* (156).

Chapter 2

"That left pap where the heart doth hop": Asses, Amazons, Plague and the Sacrificial Pattern in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*[1]

Since *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were written roughly contemporaneously, their relationship to the historical condition of plague in London between 1592 and 1597 is likely to be similar. Both are set in summertime, and both use the lability and destructive potential of romantic love as a metaphor for plague. As *Romeo and Juliet* does, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* invests particular characters with plague anxieties and plague themes as a way of ritualistically containing the anxieties they represent in the play. At various points in the play, Bottom and Hippolyta both come to be associated with the type of reversal and undifferentiation René Girard identifies with plague literature, and their containment near the end of the play represents the sacrifice or scapegoating Girard identifies as the culmination of the expression of plague anxieties in literature. The ultimate goal of the sacrifice seems to be to restore the societal norms governing romantic love, marriage, and procreation that have been destabilized as a result of the plague.

Analyzing the significance of plague's influence in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is especially challenging, since the play contains almost no direct reference to the plague. There are some "contagious fogs" (2.1.90)[2] to contend with, but in context they refer to crop-killing floods. Annabel Patterson argues convincingly that the passage alludes to the disastrous weather in 1595-1596.[3] Although the fogs need not refer to the plague, their characterization as

contagious does fit one of the two popularly held theories about its transmission—the theory of miasma—which held that plague and other epidemic diseases were caused by poisonous air that could arise from foul smelling things or even fall from the heavens. The Senecan source for the contagious fogs describes the plague of Thebes at the beginning of the Oedipus story,[4] suggesting that Shakespeare actually removed the reference to plague instead of leaving it in, which suggests in turn a desire by the playwright to distance his play from plague. It is possible that Shakespeare appropriated the language of disaster in his source to characterize another kind of disaster in his own play, but it seems more likely that the omission of plague from the world of the play represents Shakespeare's efforts to erase it, as he and Jonson seem to have done throughout their plays.[5]

The most real and potentially helpful mention of plague is in this same speech by Titania, when she mentions crows feasting on "the murrion flock" (2.1.97), a reference to epidemic disease among livestock but not necessarily people. Although a murrain would have been regarded as a plague, there is no indication in early modern plague literature that instances of animal and human plagues were believed to coincide. Renaissance theories about the transmission of the plague allowed for transmission from animals to humans, but if there were plague among the human population, we would expect Titania to mention it. As it is, she only mentions plague among livestock. That is really about it for plague in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: one speech. Mentions of sickness are generally in the context of love, and the word plague does not appear once.

On the other hand, several key details of the play indicate plague anxieties. For example, the play enacts what might be described as a superfluity of flights from the city—those of Bottom and his comrades, Hermia and Lysander's, Theseus and Hippolyta's, and Pyramus and

Thisbe's. As I have discussed in the Introduction, flight from the city is one of the principal motifs of plague literature. It will be discussed at length again in the chapter on *Timon of Athens*. Since the plague mainly flared up in urban environments, those with the means fled the city in plague time. As might be imagined, this generated animosity from those who had no choice but to stay in the city during an epidemic. Tracts such as Bullein's *A Dialogue Against the Fever Pestilence* and Dekker's *The wonderfull yeare* actively and vehemently voiced criticism of the evacuees for abandoning the city, an act which ultimately deprived the working class of its customers and destroyed the city's economy. Dekker describes the situation this way:

> In this pittifull (or rather pittilesse) perplexitie stood *London*, forsaken like a Lover, forlorne like a widow, and disarmde of all comfort: disarmde I may well say, for five Rapiers were not stirring all this time, and those that were worne had never bin seene, if any money could have bene lent upon them, so hungry is the Estridge disease, that it will devoure euen Iron: let us therefore with bag & baggage march away from this dangerous sore Citie, and visit those that are fled into the Country. But alas! *Decidis in Scyllam*, you are pepperd if you visit them, for they are visited alreadie: the broad Arrow of Death, flies there up & downe, as swiftly as it doth here: they that rode on the lustiest geldings could not out-gallop the Plague, It over-tooke them, and over-turnd them too, horse and foote. (35)

Dekker here repeats the most common admonition to those who fled London during plague outbreaks: attempts to escape the city are futile because plague will pursue Londoners into the countryside. If London's citizens cannot escape the plague by fleeing the city, they might as well stay and contribute to the city's economy. Dekker's description of gallants selling or pawning their rapiers speaks to the economic impact of plague on the city: those who remained

in London had to come up with large amounts of cash to buy goods whose prices had become inflated due to plague-time scarcity. Ultimately, Dekker's admonition highlights the plague's disregard for class distinctions within the city at the same time it criticizes those who fled. The wealthy cannot win either way, so they might as well stay with their neighbors and ride out the epidemic.

A Midsummer Night's Dream enters the same debate by showing members of various classes abandoning the city. Bottom et al. ostensibly leave Athens to rehearse their interlude because they fear being observed; Peter Quince says, "if we meet in the city, we shall be dogged with / company, and our devices known" (1.2.96-7) but their ultimate goal is to become "made" and receive a pension for their labors. This is odd, because most of the men are assigned a trade: Bottom is a weaver, Snug is a joiner, etc., but they appear to have plenty of free time, and they put considerable effort, if not talent, into their theatrical endeavor. As mentioned in the Introduction, Dekker complains in *The wonderfull yeare* that the only people succeeding economically in the city during plague time are the herb-wives and gardeners, and the inactivity of Bottom and his peers makes more sense if they are responding to a particular condition such as plague time.

By equating economic success with flight from the city, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* not only dramatizes the economic dilemma of tradesmen during plague time, but addresses the frustrations of the players as well. James Mardock reminds us that "The closure of the playhouses during periodic visitations of plague, of course, was part of the theater business throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and the necessity of stripping down a cast and adapting scripts for tours of East Anglia and Oxfordshire was a common inconvenience for playing companies."[6] Some companies abandoned the city in plague time to follow their best

customers, but others had to make their own arrangements. Dekker's complaint in *The wonderfull yeare* is evidence of his own problems in this regard. As has also already been mentioned in the Introduction, F. P. Wilson implies that Dekker would not have written his plague pamphlets if he had not been in sore need of income during the plague-time playhouse closures, and he and other early modern playwrights might be expected to address the frustrations of those closures in their plays. The plight of Bottom and his comrades represents an early attempt by Shakespeare to address the frustrations of the players during plague time, and is a precursor to a more extended treatment of the subject in *Timon of Athens*. My section on that play will offer a fuller discussion of Shakespeare's decision to associate the players' frustrations with the city of Athens, but it bears mentioning at the moment that Athens was associated historically both with plague and great drama. In Shakespeare's fictional Athens, unlike early modern London, the poor seem to be able to come and go if it is in their economic interest to do so, but their efforts, just like those of the others in the play, ultimately come to confusion, necessitating a return to the city.

Although a cynic might say that the motives of Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius are also economic in that they are attempting to form a family, which can be seen as the basic economic and ideological unit, their flight is not motivated by economic *necessity*. But the stakes are high nevertheless: their romantic motives are tied to affairs of state. Egeus has made Hermia's marriage a matter of state by involving Theseus at the beginning of the play, and in fleeing the city to elope, Hermia and Lysander are defying the state. These well-heeled youths of the Athenian state fare no better than the mechanicals, however, and, falling into Scylla by trying to avoid Charybdis, must be reintegrated into the city.

In other words, the issue of flight from the city in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is overdetermined in a way that that recalls facets of the plague debate, at once engaging in the debate and masking a relevant context. All of the flights from the city explicitly take place in the summer and follow the same trajectory: flight, confusion, sacrifice, and reintegration. Bottom comes to confusion when he leaves the city to rehearse his play, and his participation in the Pyramus and Thisbe story, in which the two lovers meet their death after they flee their homes in the city, associates him again with flight. Hermia and Lysander try to escape their problems by fleeing Athens,[7] but find the forest rife with confusion and emotional trauma. They are ultimately re-integrated into Athenian society, but only after all the unruly forces of the play are contained and the status-quo in Athens is restored.

The pattern evident in the flight of the various characters in play recalls the thematic cluster René Girard identifies with plague in "The Plague in Literature and Myth," which is essential in determining the extent to which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a plague play. In his essay, Girard identifies three themes associated with plague literature: reversal, undifferentiation, and scapegoating or sacrifice, all discussed at length in the Introduction. It is useful to repeat what has already been cited regarding reversal, because it has so much to do with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Girard explains the connection between reversal and plague in this way: "The plague will turn the honest man into a thief, the virtuous man into a lecher, the prostitute into a saint. Friends murder and enemies embrace. Wealthy men are made poor by the ruin of their business. Riches are showered upon paupers who inherit in a few days the fortunes of many distant relatives" (833). Reversal is certainly one of drama's main constituents, and not all plays that contain a reversal have been influenced by plague or express plague themes, but the

reversals that Bottom and Hippolyta go through in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are connected to the other themes Girard identifies as common features of plague literature.

Nick Bottom epitomizes the kind of reversal Girard identifies, and his reversal is perhaps the most striking feature of the play. Bottom is, of course, a weaver; as the play begins, his occupation and interactions with his peers mark him as ordinary, but he clearly aspires to be extraordinary. He describes as "lofty" (1.2.35) his recitation of doggerel on the subject of none other than "Ercles" (Hercules; l.2.36), and his speech is peppered with the malapropisms characteristic of Shakespeare's clowns; he will, for example, "rehearse most obscenely and courageously" (1.2.100-101) the part of Pyramus. Though there is certainly some truth to this statement (and, of course, some comedy), Bottom almost certainly fails to express himself accurately. His ambition to rise above his station, evident in his uneven attempts to imitate lofty discourse, makes him ridiculous.

These two conflicting aspects of Bottom's nature—the lofty aspirations and his inability to transcend his ordinariness—are magnified when he is transformed. When Bottom receives the ass's head and Titania's love, he is whip-sawed in opposite directions. His ass's head marks him as less than human, and his favor in Titania's eyes elevates him to a status and a state of being that he could never hope to achieve. As he lies in Titania's bower, ordering fairies about and craving hay, his diction indicates his reversal:

> Mounsieur Cobweb, good mounsieur, get you your
> weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped
> humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and good moun-
> sieur, bring me the honey-bag. Do not fret yourself
> too much in the action, mounsieur; and good moun-

sieur, have a care the honey-bag break not; I would
be loath to have you overflowen with a honey-bag,
signior." (4.1.10-17)

This is prose, as we might expect from Bottom, but his manner has changed dramatically since his transformation. His solicitousness toward Cobweb –"do not fret yourself," repeating "good mounsieur"—is remarkable. His archaic mode of address to the fairies—"get you your weapons in your hand," "kill me a red-hipped humble-bee"—is also a new affectation that is absurdly dissonant when coming from his ass's muzzle. As Hugh Grady claims, "The running gag in all this comes from the audience's ability, seconded by Robin and Oberon, to see the ordinary, disenchanted, "material" Bottom in utter disjunction from Titania's doting vision."[8] The joke climaxes when Bottom uses his new elevated manner of speaking to describe a base appetite: "Methinks I have a great desire to a bottle of hay" (4.1.32-3).[9]

Bottom's reversal is followed by the undifferentiation Girard identifies as a plague theme. The crisis represented by plague produces a heightened and strained awareness of the artificiality or constructedness of social categories, ranks, values, etc., the very kind that Michael Neill attributes to the horrifying image of the plague pit in *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Neill writes, "in times of pestilence the burial pit gaped for everyone, rich and poor, mighty and humble alike, reducing them all to the condition of the merest carrion" (19), and cites as one example of this effect a passage from one of Dekker's plague pamphlets, *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606): "The gallant and the begger lay together; the scholler and the carter in one bed: the husband saw his wife, and his deadly enemy whom he hated, within a paire of sheetes."[10] Dekker focuses explicitly on the disparity of social roles between the pairs of corpses—gallant and beggar, scholar and carter—to

highlight his point that the plague represented a kind of democratizing force that has a specific impact on perceptions of social class.

Annabel Patterson notices undifferentiation in Bottom's very name: in addition to the common interpretation of "bottom" as indicating his status in Athenian society, it can be interpreted as "foundation": "The name 'Bottom' refers not only to the bottom of the social hierarchy as the play represents it, but also to the 'bottom' of the body when seated, literally the social ass or arse" (173).[11] In other words, the name itself may indicate an undifferentiated state that his transformation into a man/ass hybrid only accentuates. The play's purpose in making such an association according to Patterson involves "a reevaluation of those unpresentable members of society, normally mocked and burdened like asses, whose energies the social system relies on. And if laughter is necessary to mediate social tensions, Shakespeare's festive theory seems to argue, then let it be laughter as far removed as possible from social condescension" (175). Even in his role as laughing stock, Bottom is indispensable, and his character represents a meditation on the connection between good-natured festivity and the negotiation of social hierarchies.[12]

Bottom's undifferentiation is also indicated by his dual roles: as a substitute for Oberon in Titania's bed and as Pyramus in the play within the play. He is inadequate in both roles, but that leads to more uncertainty rather than less, amplifying the sense of undifferentiation he projects. As a substitute for Oberon, Bottom is inescapably mired in his own corporeality. Titania tells him she wants to "purge thy mortal grossness so, / That thou shall like an airy spirit go" (3.1.153-4) when she first meets him. It is not clear exactly what this entails, but Titania here indicates another transformation Bottom must undergo in addition to what he has already been through. The effect is a piling-on of undifferentiating forces: Titania cannot really accept

Bottom until he becomes completely unlike himself. As a substitute for Oberon, it would make sense that he would need to become more like Oberon before becoming suitable company for her, but it is significant (and funny) that even in her ensorcelled state, Titania needs Bottom to be something other than what he is. Bottom's identity is constantly being negotiated in the play, which highlights the extent to which he is supposed to be at once a representative and victim of the undifferentiating forces within it.

As Pyramus, Bottom's identity is even more obviously divided. Girard, writing of Bottom's prologue to *Pyramus and Thisbe,* argues,

> The prologue should say: 'My name is Bottom and I am merely pretending to be a certain Pyramus whose suicide is feigned.' Instead, Bottom first names Pyramus, speaking in the first person, as if it were his real identity and wishing no doubt that it were. His real name comes second and he mentions it as if it belonged to someone else, or as it appears on the title page of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He suggests that his real self is false and his false self is real. The spectators are insidiously invited to join the mimetic confusion that our universal actor is spreading. Bottom is losing his sense of identity.[13]

This confusion that Girard attributes to Bottom's own apparent confusion about who he is is characteristic of Bottom for most of the play. He is and is not an actor, a fairy queen's lover, an ass, Pyramus, and a weaver.

Bottom's attempt to understand his experience within Titania's bower is the most telling indicator of his undifferentiation. Upon his return to full human form, he has difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality, and is inclined to dismiss his transformation as a dream. As we have all experienced, dreams are often difficult to put into words. Bottom says of his dream, "Methought I was—there is no / man can tell what. Methought I was—and me- /

thought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he / will offer to say what methought I had" (4.1.206-9). Bottom only began using "methinks" and "methought" after his transformation, and his repetition of "methought" lingers after his restoration as a haunting reminder of his reversal, placing him in a state of suspense between his transformed self and his restored one.

Girard defines the third element of the thematic cluster, sacrifice or scapegoating, as a resolution of the confusion caused by undifferentiation that has the power to restore social order. Of course, Bottom is alive at the end of this comedy, but he undergoes several significant figurative sacrifices. As will become evident in the chapters on Jonson's plays, scapegoating is often carried out by piling humiliations upon a specific character. Bottom's dignity is certainly sacrificed to effect the reconciliation between Titania and Oberon, and that reconciliation is a necessary precondition for their blessing of the wedding couples at the end of the play. The reason that Oberon has forced Titania to fall in love with Bottom in the first place is her refusal to return the changeling child, which is a transgression that seems to call for redress in the form of Bottom's figurative sacrifice. When Oberon cures Titania of her love for Bottom, he speaks as if a score has been settled when he says,

> Now thou and I are new in amity,
> And will to-morrow midnight, solemnly,
> Dance in Duke Theseus' house triumphantly,
> And bless it to all fair prosperity. (4.1.84-9)

Bottom has been instrumental not only in restoring amity between Oberon and Titania, but in satisfying the requirements for all the resolutions at the end of the play. He has served to reestablish hierarchy and harmony in the world of the fairies and, consequently, in Athens.

As Pyramus, Bottom is sacrificed in a more literal performance of death. As an actor playing Pyramus, he is also sacrificed for the benefit of his comrades: he is crucial to the success of their joint endeavor to become "made men" (4.2.8). Peter Quince believes that Bottom's participation is not only important but indispensable: "You have not a man in all Athens able to discharge Pyramus but he" (4.2.7-8), the word "discharge" itself connoting the sacrifice Bottom is to undergo in the performance intended to "make" himself and his company men in Athenian society (in addition to being a subtle if ill humored joke related to Bottom's name). In the mechanicals' production of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, it is again the sacrifice of Bottom's dignity in particular on which the success of the endeavor depends. He is once again the bottom and the foundation. The absurdity of the play is appropriate to the festive occasion but does not quite completely mask the importance of Bottom's sacrifice as Pyramus. As a successful sacrifice, Bottom elicits laughter and catharsis as he discharges his role as Pyramus.

Bottom's sacrifice is also a necessary precursor to dispelling the fears of hybridity and deformity that became heightened during plague time. In characterizing the genre of monstrous birth literature in early modern England, Robert Hole reminds us that, along with monstrous births and beasts,

> Even more fanciful was the notion that some monsters might come from the cross-breeding of man and beast: the classical stories of satyrs, centaur, and minotaur persist surprisingly long. Then come various categories of human beings with differences that were regarded as monstrous, but which are clearly natural rather than fabulous, like the woman with a face like a pig and the man with a head like a horse; clearly these are ways of categorizing a snoutish nose or a long chin, and few can seriously have believed they were the product of human-bestial unions.[14]

A Midsummer Night's Dream not only presents Bottom as an exemplar of reversal, undifferentiation and sacrifice but also invokes the specter of Bottom's ass's head as the kind of deformity the couples hope to avoid producing, which constitutes a more or less direct allusion to the belief that such deformities coincided with plague time and were either signs of its presence or omens of its imminent arrival.

In the preceding ways, Bottom does seem to represent Girard's thematic cluster in a way that does not seem coincidental. As such, he can be seen as a proxy for plague anxieties: he undergoes a radical reversal, which to some degree mirrors the suddenness with which plague strikes and the trauma it leaves in its wake; he then undergoes undifferentiations that represent an anxiety about the leveling effect of plague on categories of human identity; he is then figuratively, ritually sacrificed in an effort to contain those anxieties. Through Bottom's sacrifice, the play enacts a containment of the plague and its traumatic effects.

A Midsummer Night's Dream presents Hippolyta in much the same light as Bottom. From the outset, the play casts her as a potentially disruptive outsider whose identity must be normalized to eliminate those disruptive forces that she represents, and like Bottom, the play associates her with the themes of reversal, undifferentiation and sacrifice that Girard attributes to plague. Girard says of reversal that we find it where "Friends murder and enemies embrace," and that is ostensibly the condition at the beginning of the play: Theseus and Hippolyta—once enemies—prepare to marry. The situation is complicated by the fact that Hippolyta does not speak for herself, and even though Theseus claims they fell in love on the battlefield: "Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries" (1.1.16-7), and this comparison between romance and battle could be found in other early modern sources such as Sidney's *Arcadia*, the audience cannot be sure that the love is mutual. These enemies may be

embracing, but even if Hippolyta is an unwilling paramour, her reversal of status is striking. Courtship is expressed in terms of combat, and love is expressed in terms of injury, and however much Theseus tries to romanticize their union, Hippolyta is essentially a spoil of war and a slave where she once had been a powerful, autonomous queen.

By the time Hippolyta is introduced in the play, she is the property of her husband and of Athens, as all women are. This is suggested by Theseus's exchange with Egeus and Hermia. Theseus concludes his discussion with the father and daughter by saying,

> For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
> To fit your fancies to your father's will;
> Or else the law of Athens yields you up
> (Which by no means we may extenuate)
> To death, or to a vow of single life.
> Come, my Hippolyta; what cheer, my love? (1.1.117-22)

Theseus uses the same martial terminology he did when describing how he won Hippolyta: Hermia must "arm" herself; and it is clear that this is no whim of Theseus but mandated by Athenian law. Moreover, Theseus issues his threats in front of Hippolyta, who, as it would seem from his query "what cheer, my love?", has reacted in some way. Generally, editors of the play interpret any reaction she might have as negative. The note to this line in the Arden text is, "She is downcast at the ill omen, intruding upon the joyous preparations for her wedding, of love threatened with death or a compelled celibacy" (12n). This makes sense, but there are alternative readings. Hippolyta might be downcast because she identifies with Hermia and is coming to understand that in Athens, the woman is property. This understanding, indicated by Theseus's

question to her, may mark the moment in the play when the character signals an awareness of her reversal.

Undifferentiation was one of the main characteristics of early modern representations of Amazons, and Hippolyta embodies that characteristic the moment she appears onstage. This is made clear by Kathryn Schwarz, who notes that Hippolyta is described even in the *dramatis personae* as being split between two apparently irreconcilable roles: "her entry in the dramatis personae—'Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus'—might summarize resolution out of conflict. But it might also identify a syntagmatic doubleness, asserting that 'betrothed' intersects without displacing the effects of 'Amazon.'"[15] Schwarz, perhaps optimistically, suggests that the play allows Hippolyta to continue as an Amazon even in submitting to betrothal, but it is the existence of the conflict between the two that undifferentiates Hippolyta and loads her with plague anxieties.

Even solely as an Amazon, Hippolyta is a symbol of the kind of identity problems that Girard attributes to plague. As a figure who exhibits both masculine and feminine traits, Hippolyta challenges social norms simply by being on the stage, as Kathryn Schwarz explains: "At once masculine and female, mistaken for men and looked at as women, Amazons generate desire between men, between women, between women and men. Their constant eroticism precludes hierarchical distinctions between substance and spirit, object and agent, other and self, revealing instead the extent to which identities and relationships overlap" (*Tough* 2). Schwarz sees the problems with erotic desire that Amazons represent as breaking through into other areas of representation, and this is borne out in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For example, a jealous Titania teases Oberon over his relationship with Hippolyta by attacking her femininity. In attempting to account for Oberon's presence in Athens, Titania conjectures,

…Why art thou here,

Come from the farthest step of India,

But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,

Your buskin'd mistress and your warrior love,

To Theseus must be wedded, and you come

To give their bed joy and prosperity? (2.1.69-73)

Titania's mention of Hippolyta's buskins, as well as her characterization of the Amazon as "bouncing," which has various shades of meaning but generally means big or loud (OED, "bouncing: *ppl. a.*"), characterize Hippolyta as exhibiting masculine traits. The OED definition explicitly draws out the contrast implied by the use of the word "bouncing": "big rather than elegant or graceful." In Titania's depiction at least, Hippolyta is not particularly feminine, and Oberon's relationship with her has the potential to disrupt his relationship with Titania, which is tied to the success of the other relationships in the play. The uncertainty over Hippolyta's gender thus seems to have the potential to disrupt hetero-normative relationships in general.

Like Bottom, Hippolyta becomes a sacrifice by play's end. Louis Montrose asserts that the marriage ritual and the implied coitus that sanctifies the union are at once symbolic sacrifices.[16] Montrose extends this sacrifice to all women in the play, explaining "The festive conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* depends upon the success of a process by which the female pride and power manifested in misanthropic warriors, possessive mothers, unruly wives, and willful daughters are brought under the control of lords and husbands" (83). The characterization of Hippolyta as a misanthropic warrior is apt, and, as I will show in my section on *Epicoene*, an important function of figuratively containing plague anxieties is defeating the

misanthrope and promoting sociability. Hippolyta's initiation into Athenian society performs that function.[17]

Hippolyta's missing breast also represents a significant sacrifice and has an important relationship to *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* expression of plague anxieties. The word "amazon" itself is from the Greek ἀ and μαζός (a and mazos), meaning without a breast. The OED indicates that the very first usage of the English word in 1398 emphasizes the missing breast (OED 1). Hippolyta, then, would have at some point removed one breast to prevent its interference in use of the bow during war. As a warrior, she had an advantage over other women and equality with male archers, but she has literally made a sacrifice to gain that advantage. For a woman who is going to become a wife and mother, the missing breast is a loss, a gap, and an indelible marker of a sacrifice of maternal ability for martial prowess.

The sacrifice of Hippolyta's breast is explicitly invoked at the precise moment of Bottom's own sacrifice as Pyramus. As he delivers his final lines, Bottom proclaims:

> *Come tears, confound!*
>
> *Out sword, and wound*
>
> *The pap of Pyramus;*
>
> *Ay, that left pap*
>
> *Where heart doth hop*: [*Stabs himself*]. (5.1.284-8)

Of course, this is intended to be humorous, with the hopping heart and generally stiff death-speech, but the repetition of "pap" before an audience that includes an Amazon might remind *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s audiences of Hippolyta's presence and even of the sacrifice of her breast in service of her own ideals. Through a process similar to Bottom's sacrifice, Hippolyta is led through conquest to be "made" (inscribed) through a desire, perhaps more mysterious than

Bottom's, to enter Athenian society, and entry seems to require a sacrifice. At this moment in the play the two become mimetic doubles of one another, sacrificing themselves in tacit and unwitting service of Athenian society, and fulfilling the potential of Girard's plague theory by discharging all of the plague anxieties that they have become associated with.

There may also be a direct correlation between Hippolyta's missing breast and a particular plague symptom. Sheila Barker claims that a particular image of the wounded Amazon from classical sculpture was appropriated by Renaissance artists to represent plague buboes, swollen lymph glands which often appeared in the groins or armpits of plague victims. In explaining how the Biblical plague sent against the Philistines is represented as bubonic plague in *The Plague of Ashdod* by Nicolas Poussin (1630), Barker writes,

> the raised-arm posture of the dead mother may have also brought to mind Polycleitus's sculpture of a dying Amazon, a Roman copy of which seems to have served as the painter's source. Recent scholarship has revealed that the allusion to the dying Amazon serves as an affective device, an *exemplum doloris* that renders the tragic history of *The Plague of Ashdod* more vivid. The allusion may have had a second function as well: because all known sculptures of dying Amazons are wounded beside the right breast in the area exposed by their lifted arms, precisely where plague buboes appear, the invocation of the dying-Amazon type simultaneously reinforces the association of the Philistines' malady with the bubonic plague.[18]

Figure 2: Roman version of *The Wounded Amazon*[19]

Figure 3: Detail from *The Plague of Ashdod* by Nicolas Poussin

The iconography of Amazons becomes the iconography of plague. Poussin, at least, seems to have made the association. Neither of the women in Figures 2&3 clearly is missing their right breast, nor does Poussin's plague victim bear visible signs of plague, but, as Kathryn Schwarz asserts,

> Everyone knows that the Amazon is missing a breast. This is a fact that, perhaps somewhat oddly, becomes more self-evident when it is most evidently not true: in pictorial instances ranging from Athenian black figure vases to Wonder Woman, the Amazon breast isn't missing at all. Yet its absence, even when contested, defines the Amazons of English Renaissance texts, in which physical lack provides a logic for performative excess.[20]

Schwarz believes that Renaissance depictions of Amazons exhibit a cultural will to suppress the ugly and monstrous at the same time they highlight difference and deformity. By the same logic, everyone knew that those who became infected with bubonic plague exhibited certain symptoms, but almost every early modern source on plague, even the medical tracts, omit descriptions of such symptoms. Only the boldest or most perverse authors, Thomas Dekker for example, represent the plague's physical symptoms. In "A Dialogue betweene Warre, Famine, and the Pestilence" at the beginning of *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie* (1604), a personified Pestilence boasts

> …how many Swarmes
> Of bruised and crackt people did I leave,
> Their Groines sore pier'st with pestilentiall Shot:
> Their Arme-pits digd with Blaines, and ulcerous Sores,
> Lurking like poysoned Bullets in their flesh?[21]

Dekker's writing leaves no question that groin and armpit were considered to be the locations on the human body where plague left its signs, and it is possible that those areas stood in metonymically for plague. Poussin's good taste prohibits him from including such representations of disease in his painting, but Barker is correct in identifying his reference to

Amazons as a kind of intellectual shorthand for plague in Renaissance painting. The same associations seem to be present in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

One might object at this point that if the play contains multiple proxies for plague according to Girard's pattern, the pattern may only reflect the play's aesthetic outside of a plague context. In other words, Girard's pattern may be present but does not indicate the influence of plague on the play. However, given the proximity between the writing and performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the plague visitations of 1592-93 and 1595-96, the appearance of multiple proxies for plague anxiety in the play makes sense; they speak to the tendency of trauma victims to repeat unwittingly their traumatic experiences. They also speak to the effects of the bubonic plague itself, a disease that contributed to the many troubles described in the Introduction.

I offer one last detail to suggest that all the reversal, undifferentiation, and sacrifice in the play does in fact have something to do with plague. There is no sacrifice for the young lovers in this comedy—it was never expected that Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius should do anything but marry desired equals—but they are the witnesses and beneficiaries of the play's sacrifices, which are expressed in a very peculiar way in Oberon's blessing at the very end of the play. Oberon says,

> So shall all the couples three
> Ever true in loving be;
> And the blots of Nature's hand
> Shall not in their issue stand:
> Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar,
> Nor mark prodigious, such as are

Despised in nativity

Shall upon their children be. (5.1.393-400)

In characterizing birth defects as "prodigious," Oberon refers directly to the belief common in early modern England that birth defects were ill omens, and often specifically omens of plague. While there is an ongoing debate over whether Oberon's blessing is supposed to be sung,[22] it is set apart formally from the rest of the play, which is either in prose or iambic pentameter. The blessing's metrical pattern can be seen either as iambic or trochaic trimeter, with an extra stress at the front or end of the line depending on one's point of view. Although it is not, strictly speaking, in ballad form, Oberon's blessing is similar in form to monstrous birth broadside ballads that were popular in England beginning in approximately 1560. The monstrous birth ballads carried quite a different message; for example, compare Oberon's expression of goodwill toward the married couples in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the hellfire and brimstone of John Mellys's broadside ballad entitled *The True Description of Two Monsterous Children*, printed in 1566, probably in response to the epidemic of 1563:

But England now pursues their vyle

and detestable path,

Embracing eke all mischeefs great

that moves Gods mightie wrath.

As these unnatural shapes & formes,

thus brought forth in our dayes:

Are tokens true and manifest,

how God by diverse wayes:

Doth styrre us to amendment of

our vyle and cankred lyfe:
Which to to much abused is,
in man, in chylde, and wyfe.
We wallow so in filthie sin,
and not at all regarde:
Nor wyll not feare the threats of God
tyll we for just rewarde:
Be overwhelmd with mischeefs great,
which ready bent for us
Full long ago decreed wer,
as Scriptures both discus.
Both tender babes & eke brute beastes,
in shape disfourmed bee:
Full manie wayes he plagues the earth,
(as daily we may see)
Thus mightie Jove, to pearce our hearts
these tokens straunge doth send,
To call us from our filthie lyfe
our wicked wayes t'amend.
…
But some proud boasting Pharisie,
the parents wyll detect:
And judge with heapes of uglie vice

their lyves to be infect.[23]

Figure 4: Woodcut from *The True Description of Two Monsterous Children*

In this ballad Mellys employs the finger-pointing that is typical of plague literature to describe the conditions supposed to have fostered monstrous births of the type depicted in the broadside. The ballad is accompanied by a woodcut image of two infants conjoined at the midsection, embracing one another and staring into each other's eyes (see Figure 4). The nature of the monstrosity is described as a kind of plague, and serves as a "token" of God's wrath over the sins of England, just as plague sores were described as tokens. The ballad's use of the word "infect" metaphorizes the monstrosity to bring it in line with contemporary understanding about the association between monstrous births and outbreaks of bubonic plague. Broadsides about other monstrosities and deformities also explicitly identify them with plague. Another ballad printed in 1566, this one about a monstrous fish taken off the coast of Holland, warns its readers,

These monsters therfore God doth sende,

To put us all in minde.
Such shapeles shapes for to amend,
whych now are out of kynd,
Or els the God of kind and shape
wyll shapeles us detest,
And with his plage will punishe us.
But more to speake I rest.[24]

The relationship between the two ballads quoted above and Oberon's blessing seems clear: the ballads assign blame and use the horror associated with producing one of these monstrous children to frighten people into changing their behavior, and Oberon's blessing treats such deformities as accidents that we can produce through no fault of our own and against which we are powerless. All of them arise out of the same anxiety, however. Nobody could explain why birth defects occurred, but greater attention seems to have been paid to them during times of general calamity and during plague time in particular.

Monstrous births were part of a larger system of signification that related occult phenomena to England's various disasters. Kai Erikson notes in his work on traumatized communities that

> it has been understood for a long time that deeply felt upheavals, at their worst, can act to upset the established order of things, an, in doing so, create a cultural mood in which dark but familiar old exuberances flourish—millennial movements, witchcraft, the occult, and a thousand other systems of explanation that seem to make sense of bewildering events and offer a means of coping with them. (196)

It is remarkable that the monstrous birth ballads and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* stem from the same impulse, especially because the results are so different. The play, with its king and queen of the faeries, changeling child, and beastly transformations, is no less interested in the occult and "unnatural" phenomena than the ballads, but the play offers comfort where the ballads cast blame.

Oberon's blessing represents Shakespeare's plea to put aside the recriminations and fears attendant during plague time and once more begin repopulating England. In important ways that have not been fully brought forth, the reversals, undifferentiations, and sacrifices in the play serve to reinforce this message. Although *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does seem to express some of the frustration of the players, whose enterprises were interrupted during plague time, the play's main sentiment is goodwill. For whatever reason, the bitterness that is only hinted at here comes to the forefront in *Timon of Athens*.

---

[1] An earlier version of this essay was published as "Plague in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Girardian Reading of Bottom and Hippolyta," *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011).
[2] All *AMND* quotations are from Harold F. Brooks, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1979).
[3] Annabel Paterson, "Bottom's Up: Festive Theory in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler. Shakespeare Criticism 4. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 165-178, esp. 165. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.
[4] Brooks 139. Brooks notes that Shakespeare's sources are three plays by Seneca: *Oedipus*, *Medea*, and *Hippolytus*, which were anthologized in *Seneca His Ten Tragedies* (1581). If the number of copies held by libraries in Britain and North America are any indication, the book was widely available in Shakespeare's time.
[5] There are also "rheumatic diseases" (2.1.105) in the same speech, but it is fairly clear that their mention by Titania in Act 2 is equivalent to our phrase, "cold & flu season."
[6] James Mardock, *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 68.
[7] For more on Athens as a plague city and its relationship to London, see Gilman, *Plague Writing*, 42.
[8] Hugh Grady, "Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics: The Case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.3 (Fall 2008): 274-302, esp. 297.
[9] For more on Bottom's alternating or simultaneous high and low diction, see Brooks cvx-vi; David Laird, "'If we offend, it is with our good will': Staging Dissent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Connotations* 12.1 (2002/2003): 35-51, esp. 36, 38-39, 42-44; and Patterson 172-3. Laird in particular pays attention to the high and low impulses in Bottom's speech, and sees Bottom as the focal point of anxieties about class and gender restrictions in Shakespeare's fictional Athens.
[10] Thomas Dekker, *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (London: 1606), sig. G.v.

[11] For more on the fundament as foundation, see Jeffrey Masten, "Is the Fundament a Grave?" in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 128-145.
[12] For more on festivity and the carnivalesque in plague literature and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see Leah S. Marcus, "Shakespeare and Popular Festivity," in *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture*, ed. Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 42-66.
[13] Girard, *A Theater of Envy*, 60.
[14] Robert Hole, "Incest, Consanguinity and a Monstrous Birth in Rural England, January 1600," *Social History* 25 no. 2 (May 2000): 183-199, esp. 193.
[15] Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 40. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.
[16] Louis Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representations* 2 (Spring, 1983): 61-94, esp. 82. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.
[17] For more on Hippolyta's ritual induction during the viewing of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, see Frank Nicholas Clary, "'Imagine No Worse of Them': Hippolyta on the Ritual Threshold in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Ceremony and Text in the Renaissance*, ed. Douglas F. Routledge (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 155-66.
[18] Sheila Barker, "Poussin, Plague, and Early Modern Medicine," *Art Bulletin* 86 no. 4 (December 2004): 659-89, esp. 664.
[19] James Grout, "The Amazons of Ephesus," Encyclopaedia Romana, December 3, 2009, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/greece/paganism/amazons.html
[20] Kathryn Schwarz, "Missing the Breast: Disease, Desire, and the Singular Effect of Amazons," *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 146-169, esp. 148. Schwarz goes on to state, "The question of why monomasty should be the hallmark of the genuine Amazon—rather than, for example, weaponry or sexual self-sufficiency or violence against men, all of which can apparently also be attributes of 'warlike wives'—returns to the larger question of what is at stake in the image of the absent breast" (148). Schwarz explores the significance of breasts as a symbol and asks why a culture such as early modern England would reproduce a figure bereft of that symbol. She points to the threat that the symbol of the breast and its absence represents to ideas of masculinity and maternity, and concludes that "the Amazon breast, exposed, removed, or concealed beneath armor, is a peculiar mirror for the breast as an emblem of chastity, disease, and desire. Again the mirror at once reflects and inverts, and again, as always with Amazons, the effect produced is the singular effect of double vision" (163).
[21] Thomas Dekker, *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie*, in *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*, ed. F. P. Wilson (Clarendon Press, 1925), 109.
[22] See Brooks's Introduction, cxiii n. 3.
[23] John Mellys, *The true description of two monsterous children* (London, 1566), reproduced in Aaron W. Kitch, "Printing Bastards: Monstrous Birth Broadsides in Early Modern England," in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas A Brooks (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 221-36, esp. 223.
[24] Anon., *The Discription of a Rare or Rather Most Monstrous Fishe Taken on the East Cost of Holland* (London, 1566), reproduced in *Ballads and Broadsides Chiefly of the Elizabethan Period and Printed in Black-letter*, ed. Herbert L. Collman (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 188.

Chapter 3

"Soft, take thy physic first": Playing and Plague in *Timon of Athens*

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the main question was whether plague is present at all in the way the play resolves the conflicts it creates. In *Timon of Athens*, the plague is more clearly an influence, but its relationship to the play's message is less clear. Why did the play's authors draw upon plague anxieties if not to comfort their audience by dispelling them? At one level, the playwrights use plague as a metaphor to describe the severity of Timon's break with society, his wasteful spending, his descent into penury, and his ultimate demise. At the same time, the play's use of plague as a metaphor for Timon's financial ruin encourages the audience to associate the trajectory of Timon's misfortune with the social response to outbreaks of real plague in early seventeenth century London. As in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens* associates poverty with plague and disease in a way that is consistent with contemporary understanding about how the disease was spread and who was to blame, namely the poor. As *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does, it enters the debate on the morality of fleeing the city during plague time. The plague is also thematically present in the play in several significant ways. As *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* do, *Timon of Athens* enacts the sacrificial plague pattern René Girard describes in "The Plague in Literature and Myth," but it is unique in the way it unambiguously correlates the interplay of Girard's themes of reversal, undifferentiation, and sacrifice to plague and disease in general. One of the effects of doing so is to call attention to the plight of the players during plague time.

Of all of Shakespeare's plays, *Timon of Athens* most clearly addresses plague anxieties, and its production was affected most by the exigencies and interruptions of plague time. The date of the play is uncertain, but most educated guesses date it to 1607 or 1608, which marked the midway point of a nearly decade-long outbreak of plague in England that began in 1603 and ended in 1611.[1] The playhouses were frequently shut down during periods of high mortality in the early seventeenth century, and Shakespeare and Middleton could not have been sure if the play would make it to performance. F.P. Wilson lists 2,352 plague deaths in 1607 and 2,262 in 1608,[2] so it would make sense if the play were written during this time that it did not receive significant fanfare, if it was even finished or produced. Even assuming a later date such as 1615, nearer Shakespeare's death, the severity of the plague between 1603 and 1611 must still have been fresh in every Londoner's mind, and its impact cannot be ruled out. Ian Munro supports this claim when he writes of the psychic impact of the plague: "Even after 1612, when plague deaths in London dropped to a handful a year, the psychic presence of plague did not leave the city, as reports of plague elsewhere in the country and in Europe repeatedly presaged its imminent return" (176). Especially after 1603, which saw the death of Elizabeth I and one of the deadliest epidemics in the nation's history, England's plague survivors must have dreaded the plague's return. That dread suffused England's popular culture well into the eighteenth century, when Defoe published *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), his fictional account of an outbreak of plague in England. The country's last major plague outbreak had been in 1665, but the threat of its return was enough to inspire Defoe not quite forty years later.

Athens was one of the cities in Europe that had a long history of association with the plague, and it is possible that Shakespeare and Middleton draw upon those associations in the play. One of Shakespeare's sources for *Pericles*, Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian*

War, recounts some of the plagues that Athens suffered.[3] It is tempting but premature to suggest that the setting of *Timon of Athens* draws on the plague associations with Athens in sources like Thucydides, but there have been some attempts to show that *Timon of Athens* is an Athenian play in more than name only. Robert S. Miola has called for a fuller investigation into how the play represents Athens as it was understood in Renaissance England, but the gauntlet he threw down in 1980 has, as far as I can tell, not yet been picked up. Miola writes, "*Timon*'s setting is not merely Grecian but Athenian as well. It exhibits many of the vices that Shakespeare's contemporaries, steeped in Athenian history and legend from earliest school days, associated with Athens, vices which were inextricably bound up with their conception of Athens as a democracy—a chaotic, vicious government by definition."[4] Miola argues that Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists knew enough about classical Athens to draw on in their representation of it on the English stage, and they could supposedly rely on their audiences to recognize references to it.

Those who write about the influence of plague on early modern literature have cited *Timon of Athens* as being demonstrably produced by plague as well as during plague. As Rebecca Totaro asserts, "Clearly, *Timon of Athens* is a plague play, largely driven by the themes and language of pestilence, with its revenge plot, obvious scourge, attention to the air, and consideration of exile."[5] While the actual plague is not depicted in *Timon of Athens,* it resides unambiguously in the interplay of plague themes and language, specifically in Timon's language in the latter half of the play. For example, in response to the inability and unwillingness of his friends to help him out of debt, Timon curses them during the second banquet with "the infinite malady" (3.6.85), and at the beginning of the following scene, he curses the entire city:

> Plagues incident to men,

Your potent and infectious fevers heap
On Athens ripe for stroke! Thou cold sciatica,
Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt
As lamely as their manners! Lust, and liberty,
Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth,
That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may strive,
And drown themselves in riot! Itches, blains,
Sow all th'Athenian bosoms, and their crop
Be general leprosy! Breath infect breath,
That their society, as their friendship, may
Be merely poison! (4.1.21-32)[6]

Although those in early modern England referred to bubonic plague as "plague," other diseases had equally mysterious causes, and were often considered lesser plagues. The symptoms of bubonic plague could be differentiated from those of other diseases, but in general, any disease could be referred to as plague. Paul Slack, author of *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*, notes, "For most of the period and for most writers bubonic plague was merely the most extreme form of epidemic infection—'a pernicious and contagious fever' distinguishable from others only by the exceptional pain it caused its victims and by their slim hopes of recovery" (25). Timon's first speech in self-imposed exile from Athens displays the type of sensibility that Slack describes. Timon does not mention specific symptoms of bubonic plague, but his language arises out of plague-time beliefs and anxieties.

Timon's mention of "plagues incident to men" to invoke disease in general still leaves bubonic plague atop the list of potential signified diseases. By indicating that Athens is "ripe for

stroke," Timon is invoking the etymological root of the word plague: plaga, from the Latin indicating a stroke or blow, as if from God's hand. This sense was current in Shakespeare and Middleton's time. Henoch Clapham draws out the etymology of the word as evidence that the plague is not contagious when he writes, "The word Plague, is originally a Greeke word: for Plege it is termed in Revelation 16.9. and of the Latines Plaga, in English valuing a blowe or stripe. Which, as it may have a more generall use, so, it is not applied to this particular disease of the Pest, otherwise, then because it is a blowe or stripe inflicted on mankind. By whom? By God, although mediately by spirit, or corruption, or both."[7] Clapham backs up this interpretation of plague by suggesting, "diverse so smitten, have felt and heard the noyse of a blow; and some of them have upon such a blow found the plain print of a blew hand left behind upon their flesh" (sig. B.v). Clapham's reasoning acknowledges that God can work through secondary causes ("mediately by spirit, or corruption) at the same time he attributes the blow of plague to a physical entity. Although not everyone held Clapham's beliefs, it was common to speak of infection with bubonic plague as a blow or a stroke.

By commanding that "Breath infect breath," Timon invokes the theory of infection more than just figuratively. The population of early modern England did not understand exactly how plague was transmitted, but empirical observation showed that one sick person could infect another, and the most common opinion of how that happened was through breath. Thomas Lodge, among many others, advised his readers: "First of all, therefore it behooveth every man to have speciall care that he frequent not any places of persons infected, neither that hee suffer such to breath upon him" (22). That breath was believed to transmit plague is evident from examples such as Lovewit's command to Face in *The Alchemist* to "Stand thou then farther" (5.2.5)[8] when he believes that his house has been visited by plague.

Timon's association of the betrayal of Athens with plague is part of the playwrights' efforts to compare the two. Plague is used as a metaphor to express the intensity of the emotions Timon tries to put into words, and there are certainly only several appropriate metaphors available for the kind of downfall Timon suffers in the course of the play. But the plague is a powerful one, and there is an insistence on characterizing things as diseased beyond the usefulness of disease as a metaphor. That phenomenon necessarily reflects, at some level, the actual anxieties of the real plague during the time the play was written. Timon equates the Athenians' friendship with disease because he perceives it to be as harmful, as haphazard, and as infectious as those other plagues incident to men.

In conjunction with more explicit plague cues in Timon's cursing, the presence of René Girard's thematic cluster clarifies the influence of plague on the play. Consider, for example, the reversal that Girard identifies as a plague theme. There are at least two important reversals of exactly the type Girard identifies. The first one is, of course, Timon's precipitous fall into penury. A change in finances can be a powerful metaphor in itself for all sorts of misfortune, which is why many of the examples of reversal Girard gives in "The Plague in Literature and Myth" equate plague with financial matters. The absurdity of the reversals Timon endures is highlighted by the refusal of his supposed friends to help him out of his troubles. Not only has Timon found himself without a single kind friend to relieve his financial need, but his friends are positively diabolical in avoiding his requests for help. Take the case of the third friend, Sempronius, for example. In response to the servant's request for aid to Timon, Sempronius says,

> Has Ventidius and Lucullus denied him,
>
> And does he send to me? Three? Humh?

It shows but little love or judgment in him.
Must I be his last refuge? His friends, like physicians,
Thrive, give him over; must I take th'cure upon me?
H'as much disgraced me in't, I'm angry at him
That might have known my place. I see no sense for't,
But his occasions might have wooed me first;
For, in my conscience, I was the first man
That e'er received gift from him.
And does he think so backwardly of me now,
That I'll requite it last? No! (3.3.9-21)

Sempronius effectively reverses the entire burden of friendship, placing an affected pridefulness above Timon's need. Timon expected a fair return for the value of the gifts he gave Sempronius, and finds that the friendship did not precede the gifts but followed them. Sempronius also uses the language of disease to describe Timon's condition and his own duplicitous rejection of the obligations of friendship. Sempronius complains that Timon's friends "give him over" like physicians, meaning that they give him up for dead and pass him on to a colleague to transfer the burden of responsibility for his well-being. Timon's downfall is as contagious to Sempronius as the plague to a doctor, and Sempronius feels he is being called upon to "cure" Timon's misfortune by exposing himself to the same risk. Sempronius expresses his own reversal, from friendship to enmity, in terms of disease, which suggests the influence of the plague on the representation of the situation.

When Timon leaves Athens, he expresses his disappointment in his friends by comparing their rejection of him to an infectious disease:

O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth
Rotten humidity; below thy sister's orb
Infect the air! Twinned brothers of one womb,
Whose procreation, residence, and birth
Scarce is dividant; touch them with several fortunes,
The greater scorns the lesser. Not nature,
To whom all sores lay siege, can bear great fortune
But by contempt of nature.
Raise me this beggar, and deny't that lord,
The senator shall bear contempt hereditary,
The beggar native honor. (4.3.1-11)

Timon rejects a providential, benevolent image of the world he left when he lost his fortune and imagines a new economy, devoid of the value of friendship, even between "twinned brothers of one womb," and scornful of the nature that bore it. Inequality breeds inequity, and Timon invokes the sun, which is normally associated with fecundity, to breed infection instead. Timon's mention of the theory of miasma ("rotten humidity") and "sores" in conjunction with his descriptions of social reversal ("raise me this beggar…") make explicit the thematic connection between plague and reversal.[9]

The second significant reversal in the play is evident in the similarities and differences between the first and second banquets. The banquets in *Timon of Athens* have been interpreted in various ways, but the unmistakable reversal represented by the second banquet is a standard feature of those interpretations.[10] Chris Meads interprets the banquets as a concrete representation of the changing political landscape of Athens and notes, "The two scenes are

structurally a pair; the first being a statement of the accepted Athenian hierarchy and the second depicting the breaking down of that order." Meads's focus is on Athenian order and the relevance of the banquets to the play's internal logic, but the banquets and the reversal they represent can also be seen as an expression of crisis in early modern London.

Banquets in literature can be powerful symbols not just of festivity but of the relationship between festivity and crisis, and the two banquets in *Timon of Athens* make that clear. Mikhail Bakhtin claims in *Rabelais and His World* that a certain type of festivity is often born of social crisis, and he identifies a medieval pattern of representation surrounding carnival in the writing of Rabelais. He writes, "nearly every church feast had its comic folk aspect, which was also traditionally recognized. Such, for instance, were the parish feasts, usually marked by fairs and varied open-air amusements, with the participation of giants, dwarfs, monsters, and trained animals."[11] *Timon of Athens*'s first banquet, with its good cheer and its masque of Cupid and the Amazons, fits Bakhtin's description of the medieval church feast, as does Capulet's feast in *Romeo and Juliet*. But such festivity is rarely spontaneous; Bakhtin states that "through all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world" (9). The two banquets in *Timon of Athens* are linked as Meads observes, but paradoxically, the second banquet seems to provide the cause for the first. *Timon of Athens* enacts Bakhtin's formulation in reverse by linking the carnival atmosphere in the first banquet to the crisis evident in the second.

The bonhomie in the first banquet changes to mock joviality in the second. Near the end of the second banquet, Timon taunts his guests as he drives them from his home by saying, "Soft, take thy physic first" (3.5.87), equating his punishment of his guests with their refusal to save

him from poverty, but also suggesting that the punishment is medicine intended to cure his guests of their miserliness. Timon's mock joviality, his substitution of stones for food, and his castigation of those he recently considered his friends reflect his own personal crisis and the crisis of a dissolute and thankless Athens, but they also speak to a potential crisis in the lives of Shakespeare and Middleton in particular and seventeenth century England in general. A likely crisis, one that was constantly blamed for rending families and friendships, often associated with moral dissolution, and frequently invoked as occasion for physic, fasting and austerity, was plague.

Among the play's many other reversals, the last one that stands out in its relationship with plague patterns comes when Timon digs for roots and finds gold. This moment in the play combines the thematic element of reversal with the metaphorical use of plague as a symbol of Timon's misfortune. Timon says as he digs,

What is here?

Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold?
No, gods, I am no idle votarist.
Roots, you clear heavens! Thus much of this will make
Black, white; foul, fair; wrong, right;
Base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant.
Ha, you gods! Why this? What this, you gods? Why, this
Will lug your priests and servants from your sides,
Pluck stout men's pillows from below their heads.
This yellow slave
Will knit and break religions, bless th'accursed,

> Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves,
> And give them title, knee, and approbation
> With senators on the bench. This is it
> That makes the wappened widow wed again;
> She whom the spital-house and ulcerous sores
> would cast the gorge at, this embalms and spices
> to th'April day again. (4.3.25-42)

Again, the change in fortune is conceived in terms of a radical reversal that is also expressed in terms of disease. This speech contains the most baldly stated reversals of the whole play, delivered in a litany: "Thus much of this will make / Black, white; foul, fair; wrong, right; / Base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant." Gold is ostensibly the agent of this reversal, but Timon's mention of leprosy, spital-house, and ulcerous sores renews the link between a radical mistrust in money and commerce and confusion about the value of human life in the face of plague and other diseases. In his disillusionment, Timon explicitly mentions as the "symptoms" of gold some that were commonly attributed to plague. Plague, in addition to gold, could "lug your priests and servants from your sides," and was commonly characterized in plague literature as doing just that.[12]

The association between money and plague is a common feature of plague literature; it is present not only in *Timon of Athens*, but in *Epicene*, *Volpone*, and *The Alchemist*. It is also evident in plague tracts such as *A Dialogue against the Feuer Pestilence*, in which one character tries to bribe death with 100 pounds in Angels to spare him from the pestilence (115). Money always seems to have had a bizarre and counterintuitive relationship to nature and the human body: it was invented to benefit humanity but ended up being the source of many troubles. It

was often characterized in early modern literature as unnatural and deceptive. Hence the early modern objection to usury on the grounds that is was an unnatural breeding of money. Jonathan Gil Harris notes that usury is commonly associated with the word "taint," which characterizes it as unnatural, impure, corrupt, etc. (53).

At the same time that money was being vilified as unnatural, however, gold was being recommended as a cure-all.[13] As Rebecca Totaro notices in *Timon of Athens,* the emphasis on gold's power to corrupt is meant to counteract the more generally accepted view that gold was a benefit to mankind and a cure for disease. In comparing Shakespeare and Middleton's play to other versions of Timon's story, Totaro writes, "The gold-funded plague and the plague-bearing gold in Timon's story are unique to Shakespeare. His version of the life speaks to the dangers of believing that gold can single-handedly improve one's society in plague-time" (105). *Timon of Athens* notably expresses deep skepticism about the value of gold in the context of plague-time beliefs and practices.

Money is important in thinking about the plague because of the type of value it represents: anonymous, universal, and indifferent. It can be exchanged for anything, and, paradoxically, possession of it and want of it can ruin individuals and nations. Just as money in *Timon* is the cause of the major reversals of the play, it embodies the undifferentiation that Girard connects with the plague. Undifferentiation, doubling and mirroring are ubiquitous in the play, from the painter's and poet's representations of Timon in their artwork to the pair of courtesans Timon excoriates. The formal mirroring of the play is striking, and it contributes to a sense of undifferentiation throughout the play. *Timon of Athens* is a mirror image of itself that centers on the two banquets. There are obvious parallels between pre- and post-banishment visits, such as the appearance of Cupid and the Amazon masquers before and Timon's visit by

Alcibiades's courtesans after; thieves after and parallel lords before, etc. The banishment of Alcibiades mirrors Timon's downfall and repudiation of the city (as well as revealing another important reversal). This type of formal mirroring may be a sign of the plague's influence on the text.

The appearance of Amazons in 1.2 is an early indicator of the more serious undifferentiation that occurs later in the play. Kathryn Schwarz shows convincingly in her book *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* that even though the typical representation of Amazons in Renaissance London did not, for the most part, emphasize masculine features, Amazons represented a narcissistic male fantasy. In a section of her book titled "Mirror Games," Schwarz states,

> Herodotus's Amazon encounter rewrites narcissism as a successfully generative economy. Men see men who are like themselves, and end up with women and children; if Amazon encounters synthesize identity and difference as catalysts of desire, that synthesis might endlessly reproduce idealized masculinity in its own image. This is very nearly a parthenogenetic fantasy come true: Amazons, at least in the anticipation of Herodotus's Scythians, reproduce men in the sense both of mirroring and of sexual generation. (24)

For men, at least, Amazons represented at some level a narcissistic erotic fantasy even as they were the poster-children for a disconcerting androgyny. Although Schwarz ultimately sees the appearance of Amazons in *Timon of Athens* as presaging the collapse of the male-dominated society of ancient Athens (132), there is not much distance from that idea and the imminent collapse of male-dominated society in London.

The Amazons at Timon's banquet clearly represent the undifferentiation that is a feature of plague literature. Robert C. Fulton observes about the appearance of Cupid and Amazons in the play, "Cupid and the Amazons possess an iconographic doubleness common to many Renaissance mythological representations… These masque figures are apt symbols for the radically broken world of Timon's Athens…"[14] The Amazon represents an unusually rich nexus of signification in early modern England, and their presence in *Timon of Athens* introduces ambiguity and uncertainty that require resolution and containment. John Jowett writes, "There is an elaborate interplay between threat as represented by the Amazons and containment of threat within the complimentary artifice of the masque in which they are represented."[15] Jowett goes on to claim that Timon's dismissal of the masque represents a failure to contain the unruly forces the Amazons represent, resulting in the crisis evident in the rest of the play.

The most relevant instance of undifferentiation in *Timon of Athens* is when Timon and Apemantus transform into one another during their confrontation on the outskirts of the city in 4.3. I am not the first one to connect this reversal of roles to plague anxieties. Darryl Chalk has noticed this phenomenon in his work on the ways *Timon of Athens* engages with antitheatrical anxieties about the association between plague and the theater. Chalk writes of the undifferentiation evident in the exchange between Timon and Apemantus: "In Apemantus's confrontation with Timon, the audience sees not only a dialogic exchange between fictional characters, but also a contest between theatrical figures in which the conflicting and temporal notions of role and identity are simultaneously asserted and questioned."[16] Chalk also explores how Timon of Athens expresses Girard's plague theme of undifferentiation in ways similar to what follows here.

Timon's response on seeing Apemantus in the woods nearly says it all: "More man? Plague, Plague!" (4.3.199). The whole conversation that follows Timon's ejaculation is laced with the language of disease. Shortly after meeting Timon, Apemantus says of Timon's misanthropy, "This is in thee a nature but infected, / A poor unmanly melancholy sprung / From change of future" (4.3.204-6). Apemantus probably means to say "affected" instead of "infected," but his malapropism is significant. He is picking up on Timon's cry of "Plague!" and responding with his wit, but his wit itself is exposed as being infected by Timon's utterance, and the distinction between the two men linguistically begins to blur right at the beginning of their encounter. Apemantus warns Timon, "Do not assume my likeness" (4.3.220), and Timon responds by speaking as if he were Apemantus, saying, "Were I like thee, I'd throw away myself" (4.3.221), which is, actually, what he has done, though it is meant as an insult to Apemantus.

What follows these introductory sallies is a rhetorical reversal of roles. In Athens, Apemantus had been in the position of responding to Timon's questions, and Timon set him up quite well for his attacks. During the first banquet, they spar:

TIMON: Wilt dine with me, Apemantus?

APEMANTUS: No; I eat not lords.

TIMON: And thou shouldst, thou'dst anger ladies.

APEMANTUS: O, they eat lords; so they come by great bellies.

TIMON: That's a lascivious apprehension.

APEMANTUS: So thou apprehend'st it, take it for thy labour.

TIMON: How dost thou like this jewel, Apemantus?

APEMANTUS: Not so well as plain-dealing, which will not cast a man a doit.

TIMON: What dost thou think ‘tis worth?

APEMANTUS: Not worth my thinking. (1.1.205-15)

Like a well-rehearsed comedy duo, Timon and Apemantus go through the motions. Timon plays the straight man, and Apemantus the wit. Apemantus twists Timon’s innocent (or pretend-innocent) statements into bits of bile. The situation is quite reversed at the end of the play, and Timon forces Apemantus into the position of the straight man:

APEMANTUS: Where liest a nights, Timon?

TIMON: Under that’s above me.

Where feed’st thou a days, Apemantus?

APEMANTUS: Where my stomach finds meat; or, rather, where I eat it.

TIMON: Would poison were obedient, and knew my mind!

APEMANTUS: Where wouldst thou send it?

TIMON: To sauce thy dishes. (4.3.300-6)

Timon has become the wit, and Apemantus becomes Timon’s set-up man. Timon turns the tables on Apemantus by becoming him, and this reversal of the roles of the two men precedes the complete blurring of their identities as each tries to out-curse the other:

APEMANTUS: Thou art the cap of all the fools alive.

TIMON: Would thou wert clean enough to spit upon.

APEMANTUS: A plague on thee, thou art too bad to curse.

TIMON: All villains that do stand by thee are pure.

APEMANTUS: There is no leprosy except what thou speak’st.

TIMON: If I name thee.

I’ll beat thee, but I should infect my hands.

APEMANTUS: I would my tongue could rot them off. (4.3.354-370)

The exchange degenerates into name-calling, and neither man appears to come out on top. They have reached a stalemate due to the fact that they are essentially the same person at this point in the play, although Timon puts himself in a superior position when he asks, "Where feed'st thou a days, Apemantus?", implying that Apemantus can only feed himself at the table of some superior. Their language becomes more disease-ridden as their identities wholly merge into one another, as the mirroring that Girard claims is caused by the cultural and historical impact of the plague renders the two men undistinguishable from one another. Timon's excuse for not beating Apemantus is most telling. Timon is the character most consistently associated with disease and plague throughout the play, but he attempts to transfer that association by implying that it is Apemantus who is infected.

According to Girard's theory, the undifferentiation that is displayed at the end of *Timon of Athens* should be resolved by offering a scapegoat or sacrifice. The play offers several. The Athenian Senate makes Alcibiades a scapegoat for the crimes of one of his soldiers, who himself is characterized as a scapegoat. Of the soldier, one senator says, "The fault's bloody; / 'Tis necessary he should die; / Nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy" (3.5.1-3). The senators want to make an example of the man, and he is to be sacrificed as an example to others. Alcibiades's response to the man's condemnation causes his exile, making him a scapegoat for the man's punishment, and by association, for the severity and intractability of the Athenian senate.

Timon could be considered both a scapegoat and a sacrifice; he comes to represent all the ills of Athenian society. In his success, he is a host for the parasites of the city and a witting partner in the inequities that become evident to him in his alienation; in his exile he represents

the failure of patronage and charity. In both functions he reveals the bottom line for nearly everyone else in Athens: nobody knows you when you're down and out. His removal is required for the city to restore the illusion of equity. Timon's death also allows for the return of the exiled Alcibiades and the supposed return to order in the city. To emphasize Timon's sacrificial role, Alcibiades reads Timon's epitaph at the very end of the play:

> *Here lies a wretched corse, of wretched soul bereft;*
>
> *Seek not my name; a plague consume you, wicked caitiffs left.*
>
> *Here lie I, Timon, who alive all living men did hate;*
>
> *Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass and stay not here thy gait.* (5.4.70-3)

It is as if Timon is taking it upon himself to act as a scapegoat for Athens, and in his moment of sacrifice he relates this action explicitly to the plague. At the same time, Alcibiades and the Athenian Senate have arrived at an agreement that will restore order to the city at least temporarily. It is no coincidence that Alcibiades reads Timon's epitaph at exactly this moment in the play – Timon's sacrifice and the restoration of order in Athens are intimately intertwined.

Timon of Athens has in common with other plague literature the thematic cluster that Girard identifies, but another common element they all share is a strong fantasy of escape, which manifests itself in this play as extreme misanthropy and exile. Such attempts at isolation, usually self-imposed, almost always fail. As Morose does in *Epicene*, Timon tries but fails to isolate himself. Not only do Timon's sycophantic, hypocritical friends follow him into the woods, but his wealth, the necessary precondition for their company in Athens, does as well, along with all the problems that it brings. Timon's attempt to escape the things he views as the cause of his misfortune hastens his eventual death. The point seems to be that it is better for people to stay in

the city and face the problems associated with it rather than to fly from their problems, which have a way of following them.

This turns out to be a common theme in early modern plague literature. As I have demonstrated in the introduction and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the frustrated attempt to abandon the city reflects the debate over the morality of doing so during plague time. The only way to be sure to avoid the plague was to leave the city and isolate oneself in a country home, which only the wealthy could afford to do. London's poor were left to ride out the plague in the absence of basic services of any kind, despite efforts by the city and crown to maintain order. If the plague impacted the staging of *Timon of Athens*, it would shed light on the particular way that the play participated in that debate, because the play associates Timon's exile from the city with poverty, disease, and plague.

The debate about the morality of fleeing the city in time of plague had gone on for quite a while before *Timon of Athens*, and centered on an interpretation on the nature of divine providence. Paul Slack notes that the debate dates at least as far back as the fifteenth century, when Gabriel Biel issued a sermon titled "De fugienda peste." Other well-known theologians, such as Luther and Calvin, also weighed in on the issue (Slack 41-2). Early modern English writers and thinkers for the most part supported the belief that God wanted Londoners to cast their lot in with the rest of the sufferers and rely on His will in infecting or saving them, and writers such as William Bullein and Thomas Dekker criticized the rich openly and quite bitterly for fleeing the city in desperate times. It was a common theme in Dekker's plague tracts, and he devoted whole pamphlets to excoriating "runaways," as they were pejoratively called. In *A Rod for Run-awayes* (1625), a marginal note, "The rich fly, the poore dye" (147), accompanies a lamentation on the condition of London during the 1625 plague: "Who can choose but break his

heart with sighings, to see thee (O London) the Grandame of Cities, sit mourning in thy Widdowhood? Thy rich children are runne away from thee, and thy poore ones are left in sorrow, in sicknesse, in penury, in unpitied disconsolations" (146-7). Two decades earlier, in *The Wonderfull Yeare* (1603), Dekker makes much the same argument in addressing London's runaways:

> But thou art gotten safe (out of the civill citie Calamitie) to thy Parkes and Pallaces in the Country: lading thy Asses and thy Mules with thy gold, (thy god), thy plate, and thy Jewels: and the fruites of thy wombe thriftily growing up but in one onely son, (the young Landlord of all thy carefull labours) him also hast thou rescued from the arrowes of infection; Now is thy soule jocund, and thy sences merry. But open thine eyes thou Foole! and behold that darling of thine eye, (thy sonne) turnde suddeinly into a lumpe of clay." (29-30)

Dekker brings attention to the social problem that flight from the plague can become, both for the city and the country, and sees no justification for it.

William Bullein's *A Dialogue against the Feuer Pestilence* (1564, 1573, and 1578),[17] dramatizes a similar situation in the lives of the fictional character Civis and his family. Bullein's Dialogue offers a complicated view of fleeing the city during times of plague. As the dialogue begins, Civis remains in the city after having sent his children away. He justifies staying in the city against the pleas of his servant thus: "if the citezen should depart when the Plague dooe come, then there should not onely be no Plague in the Citie, but also the Citie should be voide and emptie for lacke of the inhabitauntes therein, therefore Goddes will bee doen emong his people. I doe not intende to flee" (8). This seemingly innocent statement has far-reaching implications. The problem with fleeing the city is not that the buildings will be empty,

but that civilization itself, represented allegorically by Civis, will collapse faster than if the plague were allowed to run its course among the inhabitants of an occupied city. The city is useless without its inhabitants, and Civis envisions an apocalypse that comes from flight, not plague itself.

Civis eventually flees the city with his wife and servant, using several theological and secular examples as justification. Civis says,

> feare of Death enforced many holie men to flie: as Iacob from his cruell brother Esau, Dauid from Saule, Elias from Iesabell. The Christian men from feare of Death did flie the tyrannie of the Papistes, and although these men did not flie the Pestilence, yet thei fledde all for feare of Death; and so will we by Gods grace obserue suche wholesome meanes, and obeye his Diuine prouidence" (57).

This is just a small sample of the justifications Civis is able to give for fleeing the city. Their sheer volume may generate a comic effect, but all of his excuses are well established in other early modern plague tracts. Although his decision to flee represents a reversal of his earlier position on flight, his justification sounds perfectly reasonable, and is not presented in an overly ironic tone that might suggest satire.

Whatever the case, Civis finds himself at the end of Bullein's dialogue stricken with Death's dart of Pestilence on his way to his brother's house. In an attempt to escape his fate, Civis offers Death a bribe: "I perhaps shall perswade hym with my golde; I have an hundreth poundes in Angels" (115). Death's response to the bribe does not go in Civis's favor: "No treasure can keepe me back the twinckelyng of an eye from you; you are my subject, and I am your lorde" (115-6). Death also implies that it is Civis's absence from the city that has left him vulnerable to the dart of Pestilence. Death tells Civis, "You are well overtaken, I am glad that

wee are mette together; I have seen you since you were forne; I have threatened you in all your sicknesse, but you did never see me nor remembred me before this daie; neither had I power to have taken you with me untill nowe" (115). Civis pleads with death to allow him to return to the city to settle his affairs, saying, "Sir, I moste humbly desire you too suffer me too retourne home againe into the citie, and set my goodes in order to the use of my wife and children, to paie my debtes, and then godlie to departe this worlde" (116). The message Bullein's audience would take from this situation is that Civis was far better off remaining in the city, since it was leaving the city that allowed Death to overtake him, and dying while he is away from the city will keep him from being able to settle his affairs.

Death smites Civis with the dart of Pestilence, and Civis laments once more, "Oh, wretched man that I am; whether shall I fly for succor. Now my body is past cure, no Phisicke can prevaile; the sorrows of death doeth compasse me round about; the policie of the worlde with feare badde me flie, and use Gods meanes, as Lot did when Sodome was a fire. But now doe I see who so escapeth honger and the sword, shal be overtaken with the pestilence" (119). Civis catches the plague despite fleeing the city, or perhaps because of it. In ways that will become more apparent in the chapter on *Epicoene*, giving in to fear made people susceptible to catching plague. Even those who advocated flight in their plague pamphlets stressed that the decision had to be weighed dispassionately, and must not be affected by fear.

The story of Civis exhibits a deep ambivalence about city life, and plague is the main source. Staying in the city during plague time could be deadly, but so could trying to flee; the dilemma is made clearer by Civis's reference to Lot and Sodom. At God's command Lot abandoned Sodom because of its sinfulness, but lost his wife even after they escaped its walls. This parallels one of the central paradoxes of the plague literature on flight: the plague was

visited on London because of its sinfulness, and nobody should choose to remain in a sinful place, but some maintained that escaping the city was also a sin. Bullein's work ultimately comes down on the side of staying in the city during plague time, but it remains sensitive to the dilemma of the citizen considering flight.

The attitude Bullein's *Dialogue* expresses toward fleeing the city during plague time is also expressed in *Timon of Athens*. After Timon flees the city, those things he tried to escape keep plaguing him, and his language becomes heavy with references to plague, disease, and infection. The vehemence of Timon's repudiation of the city has only partly to do with the specific details of his financial ruin. In *A Theater of Envy*, René Girard notes a "crisis of degree" in *Timon of Athens* by which extremes of language are disproportionate to the cause for that language, which suggests an ulterior cause or set of causes at the mythic level (174-6).[18] Although he does not explain that crisis in terms of the city or plague, they are both likely contributors to the crisis. Coppélia Kahn notes a similar crisis of degree in the play, though she attempts to explain that crisis in terms of maternal rejection. She writes, "Without this fantasy of maternal bounty and maternal betrayal, the play's two disjunct halves would lack psychological coherence (as many critics maintain they do)." [19] As a footnote to this statement, Kahn includes a catalogue of work from other scholars who note a similar crisis in the severity of the play's representation of Timon's disillusionment.

Plague can help to explain the crisis of degree that Girard, Kahn, and others find in *Timon of Athens*. In one sense, the city is a scapegoat for Timon's downfall, as much of his railing is against *it* instead of the "real" sources of his problems, which are almost entirely within himself. In another sense, the fact that the plague was considered a predominantly urban problem makes it inevitable that it would be used metonymically to stand for the city's multitude of other

problems. Timon's animus against Athens is a consequence of the impact of the plague on the play's creation and the presence of the plague as a major subtext in the play. Timon at once represents the rich who flee the city during plague time and their critics; his vehement repudiation of the city is a burlesque of the attitude attributed to London's runaways and an expression of the consequences of abandoning the city.

Ultimately, this interplay of plague themes suggests that *Timon of Athens* comments on the impact of plague on the profession of playing in early modern London. That the players were affected by plague outbreaks is evident from the frequent mandated closing of London's playhouses. Leeds Barroll says of the impact of such closings on playwrights and players, "The constant presence of such a situation disturbs traditionally positioned theories of a sequential and patterned course of Shakespeare's dramatic composition even after *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Plague was a stubborn and erratic phenomenon thwarting the imposition of a logical order on all Shakespeare's Stuart production" (176). Barrol suggests that because of its probable date of creation, *Timon of Athens* was one of the plays affected by the plague's constant interruptions to business-as-usual among London's players (177).

By 1607-8, theater closings were supposed to be triggered by the weekly number of reported plague deaths in the city and liberties combined (30 deaths per week from 1604 to 1608 and 40 after that (Wilson 54)). F.P. Wilson calls such measures, which began in 1604, "automatic restraint" (54), as opposed to "prohibiting or permitting the performance of plays by proclamation or by direct letters to magistrates as occasion required" (54). However, automatic restraint never worked perfectly, as Wilson himself notes: "We must not suppose…that these regulations were strictly observed. The number 30 or 40 represented a rough-and-ready figure above or below which play-acting was to be forbidden or tolerated, but in no single year perhaps

was this method of automatic restraint carried out to the letter" (55). Leeds Barroll suggests that playhouse closings sometimes had as much to do with politics as with plague. Of the years between 1603 and 1611, Barroll writes, "political emergencies such as the Gunpowder Plot and sudden punitive closings played their part. These latter occasions, though infrequent, when operating in conjunction with the frequent return of bubonic plague, made for an incredibly patchwork series of playing seasons during Shakespeare's last ten years of production" (172). Barroll includes a table that shows that the theaters were closed on average eight months out of every year between 1603 and 1613.

During plague time, not only were the theaters closed, but they would not have been able to sustain operations because their best customers fled the city during plague time. Matthew Martin notes the economic impact of plague on playgoing by stating, "Travelling along the same routes as international capital, the plague inaugurates its own (temporary) temporal regime, putting a halt to commerce and the pleasures of consumption it offers, including playgoing."[20] If *Timon of Athens* makes the argument that it is useless to fly the city during plague time, it may do so in part to publicize and protect the economic interests of the players and playwrights. Timon's extreme bitterness outside Athens can be interpreted as expressing the bitterness of the players, whose livelihood was particularly sensitive to the exigencies of plague time. The crisis of degree that many notice in Timon's transformation may reflect the playwrights' bitterness over the constant closing of the playhouses and the evacuation from the city of their best customers; when the playhouses were closed, players and playwrights had few options: wait it out, find new work, or leave the city to tour in the country. Only the King's Men performed regularly at court and were granted an allowance during plague-related closings of the playhouses, and even though Shakespeare may have been insulated from much of the impact of

the closings, the security of Middleton's livelihood was more uncertain, and neither man would have been able to sustain the standard of living they had been accustomed to in less plague-haunted times.

In various ways, the play emphasizes Timon's theatricality. His deliberate displays of wealth in the first half of the play, his affected misanthropy in the second half, and his use of theatrical terminology to relate to those around him all contribute to the sense that Timon is putting on a show. If that is the case, it would seem to be in part a metatheatrical gesture meant to draw attention to the fact that Timon is played by an actor. For example, Timon says to Alcibiades in 4.3 "I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind. / For thy part, I do wish thou wert a dog" (4.3.54-5). Timon's identification with Misanthropos reduces him to a stock character, the misanthrope, with the trappings that accompany it. That he considers it a role is emphasized by his wish that Alcibiades play a dog, "for thy part," which suggests several things, among them the assignment of a dramatic role. In the metatheatrical confusion of assigning an actor playing a character another role to play within the character, Timon's bitterness, suffused as it is with the language and images of plague and disease, can be perceived by the audience as the actor's own bitterness at the effect that the plague has had on his livelihood.

Timon's transformation into Apemantus is a similar kind of metatheatrical gesture, and is the primary example of how plague and theatricality are linked in the play. In his discussion of how "*Timon of Athens* deliberately stages antitheatrical fears about the plague of acting even as it parodically dismantles them" (3), Darryl Chalk writes,

> The slippage of identity performed by the actor portraying Timon foregrounds a "playing within the role"—a personation within a personation is enacted, whereby the character of Timon takes on and imitates the fictional and theatrical identities of Apemantus… *Timon*

> *of Athens* offers a unique example of metatheatrical reflexivity, since the audience sees that Timon takes on an identity that they would recognize as belonging to another character in the play. (27)

Chalk reads this phenomenon as a satire of the antitheatrical fear that playing was itself contagious, but it also encourages the audience to consider the implications of the transformation and ask themselves what really differentiates the two. If Timon and Apemantus become one another, what is gained or lost in the transfer? By showing Timon transforming into one of his former parasites, the play's authors enact the moral degradation that playgoers faced in abandoning the city and its inhabitants, among them playwrights, who depended on the runaways for their livelihood. In abandoning the city, the runaways risk becoming just like the people who depend on them during plague time: aimless, hopeless, and alone. The runaways, who would have made up a good portion of the play's audience,[21] are also meant to pity Timon as an actor who is thrown irreversibly into poverty as a result of the indifference and callousness of wealthy friends. For the less wealthy patrons who remained in the city but could not attend plays during the playhouse closings, Timon's self-loathing expresses their bitterness in being abandoned to die of plague.

---

[1] On the play's date, see Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, introduction to *Timon of Athens*, 3rd ed., by William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2008), 12-18; and Karl Klein, introduction to *Timon of Athens*, by William Shakespeare. The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

[2] F. P. Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare's London* (Oxford University Press, 1927), 118. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.

[3] For the association between Athens and plague, see James Longrigg, "Epidemic, Ideas and Classical Athenian Society," in *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, ed. Terrence Ranger and Paul Slack (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 21-44.

[4] Robert S. Miola, "Timon in Shakespeare's Athens," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31 no. 1 (Spring 1980): 21-30, esp. 22.

[5] Rebecca Totaro, *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2005) 107. Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[6] All quotations from the play taken from the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Timon of Athens* edited by Karl Klein and will be cited by act, scene, and line parenthetically in the text.
[7] Henoch Clapham, *An epistle discoursing upon the present pestilence Teaching what it is, and how the people of God should carrie themselves towards God and their neighbour therein* (London: 1603), sig. A4.v. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[8] Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. F. H. Mares, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1967).
[9] Sores are the most commonly mentioned symptoms of plague in early modern literature, and are often the only symptom mentioned. For example, here is an account from Dekker's *The wonderfull yeare*: "I could in this place make your cheekes looke pale, and your hearts shake, with telling how some have had 18. sores at one time running upon them, others 10. and 12. many 4. and 5." (37).
[10] In addition to Meads's account below, see Richard Hillman, "The Anti-Spectacular in Timon of Athens," in *The Spectacular In and Around Shakespeare*, ed. Pascale Drouet (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 99-109. Hillman characterizes the second banquet as the antithesis of the first banquet and of Christian symbology. The effect is a subversion of the logic of the spectacularity typical of early modern tragedy (see esp. 103-4).
[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Indiana University Press, 1984), 5. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[12] See, for example, Dekker's *The wonderfull yeare*. In the following passage, Dekker addresses a runaway who has returned to London to bury his son, who has been killed by plague in the countryside: "and therefore to London (from whose armes thou cowardly fledst away) poast upon poast must be galloping, to fetch from thence those that may performe that Funerall office: But there are they so full of grave-matters of their owne, that they have no leisure to attend thine: doth not this cut thy very heart-strings in sunder? If that do not, the shutting up of the Tragicall Act, I am sure will: for thou must be inforced with thine owne handes, to winde up (that blasted flower of youth) in the last linnen, that ever he shall weare: upon thine owne shoulders must thou beare part of him, thy amazed servant the other: with thine owne hands must thou dig his grave… (30-1). Priests would be the ones performing the funeral office but are absent, and the man's servant has fallen to plague as well.
[13] Both aspects of this perception of gold are put to satirical use by Ben Jonson in *The Alchemist*. In addition to Subtle's various scams, Sir Epicure Mammon's obsession with gold and Tribulation Wholesome's recommendation of "*aurum potabile*" (potable gold) as "The only med'cine for the civil magistrate" (3.1.41-2) play on gold's curative powers and its power to corrupt.
[14] Robert C. Fulton, III, "Timon, Cupid, and the Amazons," *Shakespeare Studies* 9 (1976): 283-299, esp. 283.
[15] John Jowett, "From Print to Performance: Looking at the Masque in Timon of Athens," in *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 73-91, esp. 84.
[16] Darryl Chalk, "'A nature but infected': Plague and Embodied Transformation in *Timon of Athens*," *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 19 (2009) 9.1-28, esp. 3. http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-19/chalplag.html Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[17] Bullein's Dialogue was well known far after 1578. The editors of the *Early English Text Society* reprint of the *Dialogue* state that it was popular until at least 1596, when Nashe mentions it in a preface to *Have with you to Saffron Walden*. According to them, "This passage shows that the *Dialogue* was well known in 1596" (v).
[18] *A Theater of Envy* is actually quite unhelpful in leading to an understanding *Timon of Athens* in terms of undifferentiation. He writes, "*Timon of Athens* does not dramatize mimetic undifferentiation and conflictual desymbolization in the sense that the earlier masterpieces do" (176). Girard is wrong here; undifferentiation is a key element of the text, at least as far as understanding its relation to the plague. On the "crisis of degree," Girard states, "The crisis of Degree is everywhere in Shakespeare and is suggested in countless different ways" (179), but the term seems to be suggested specifically by Ulysses's speech about Degree in *Troilus and Cressida* (161), which Eric S. Mallin has connected to plague in *Inscribing the Time* (29-30). Mallin writes, "the idea of contagion afflicts the root relations of language, mind, and rule, and these relations have clear historical correlates" (2).
[19] Coppélia Kahn, "'Magic of Bounty': *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 no. 1 (Spring 1987): 34-57, esp. 35. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[20] Matthew Martin, "Wasting Time in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*," *Studies in Philology* 105 no. 1 (Winter 2008): 83-102, esp. 100.
[21] If the play was to have been produced at all, it would have to have been after the runaways had returned and the playhouses reopened.

Chapter 4

"The dwarf, the fool, the eunuch are all his": Venice, Carnival, Reproduction and Plague in *Volpone*.[1]

Very few of Ben Jonson's plays are set outside of England, so it is significant that Jonson chooses to set *Volpone* (1606) in Venice, and that he avoids directly addressing current events in England. There are several reasons he might have done so. One would be to participate in a trend during the period of setting plays in Italy; it was fashionable to do so. However, it becomes clear through the course of the play that Jonson's decision to set it in Venice is more than just a nod to the fashion of the times, but a commentary on current English realities and their parallels in Venetian culture and history. There is no doubt that Jonson depicts the mountebanks and fantastical personages of *Volpone* to free himself of the limitations of an English setting, but Jonson's focus on the *commedia dell'arte* images of Venice's famous Carnival[2] has as much to do with the expression of England's cultural anxieties about plague as with its fascination with the famous wonders of that foreign city. *Volpone* provides its audience an escape from contemporary English plague-time realities at the same time it associates Venice and Volpone with plague. This suggests to English audiences that plague is a foreign problem that can be safely ridiculed; coming as it does very shortly after one of England's worst plague outbreaks in 1603, it is no wonder that Jonson attempts to foist England's plague anxieties on Venice, but in invoking Venice's troubled associations with plague, Jonson is not quite dodging the issue so much as examining it from a safe distance.

There has been much recent work on early modern English representations of Venice. David McPherson explores how Shakespeare and Jonson participate in promulgating an English myth of what Venice was like, and links *Volpone*'s emphasis and dependence on theatricality with the myth (91-2). Leo Salingar finds that Venice was put to use to generate a particular effect among the early modern audiences of Shakespeare and Jonson: "the theater valued a sense of foreignness, either for the sake of an aesthetic distancing useful for satire, a kind of Brechtian alienation, or else for the sake of the raised emotions of romance. The idea of Venice constituted the keenest and firmest meeting between English knowledge about Europe and the English dramatic imagination."[3] Salingar's claim that Venice is employed to effect an aesthetic distancing from English realities works not just in terms of satire, but historical and cultural representation as well. Jonson does satirize plague in his plays, and that becomes more apparent in *Epicene* and *The Alchemist*, but Jonson also aesthetically distances his plays from the historical and cultural realities of plague in order to comment broadly on a social problem that requires not ridicule but concrete action.

There has also been recent work on the relationship between the Venice of *Volpone* and plague. While Richard Dutton claims that references to English plague-time realities such as the ringing of the bells "do not chime exactly with the apparent effort to produce a plausible Venice"[4] in Volpone, others have found a correspondence between the play's Venetian setting and plague anxieties. Jonathan Gil Harris notes how the play's Venetian setting expresses anxiety over "the exigencies and perils of foreign trade" (108), specifically concerning plague, for Jonson's English audience. In *Volpone*, Venice "presents a universe in which foreign trade is an economic necessity yet nonetheless exposes the members of the body politic to both moral

and physiological contamination" (109-110). Venice's greatest strength, trade, also represents its greatest potential weakness, plague.

Although Harris does mention that the play reflects long-established Venetian quarantine practices, he does not linger on the significance of Venice's long historical association with plague or the part plague plays in the English myth of Venice. Doing so is important because it provides essential context in understanding *Volpone* as a product of plague time and an expression of English plague-time anxieties and practices.

Venice's association with plague goes back to the Black Death in 1348, when the city was one of the first in Europe to experience the epidemic and one of the hardest hit. Gabriele de' Mussis reports in his *Historia de Morbo*, "In Venice, where an inquiry was held into the mortality, it was found that more than 70% of the people had died, and that within a short period 20 out of 24 excellent physicians had died."[5] More recent and informed estimates, such as the one in Frederic C. Lane's *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, place the Black Death's toll in Venice at 60% between December, 1347 and June, 1349.[6] After that horrible loss during the Black Death, Venice and other Italian cities established public health measures that became renowned throughout Europe. Robert Gottfried notes the importance of the development in Venice and other Italian cities of municipal boards of health, which originated with the Black Death. Gottfried writes,

> In March 1348, with the Black Death raging throughout the city, the Venetian Great Council appointed a Committee of Three, whose task it was 'to consider diligently all possible ways to preserve public health and avoid corruption of the environment.' The board was provisional and was terminated in 1351 when the Black Death came to an end. But it was revived in 1361 during the successive epidemics of the second plague

pandemic. Eventually, it became clear that the establishment of a permanent board of public health was necessary…, and, early in the fifteenth century, this was done.[7]

From the fifteenth century on into the eighteenth century, Venice continued to be famous, or perhaps notorious, for its quarantine measures, which involved isolating any ship and crew suspected of carrying plague in a plague colony called a *lazaretto* for a standard period of forty days. Those measures changed very little from their permanent establishment in the fifteenth century to their eventual termination in the eighteenth century. As is evident from *Volpone*, Jonson could rely on his early modern audience to know about Venice's quarantine procedures and the reason for them.

Quarantine was costly and time-consuming, and merchants must have dreaded it. This is the spirit that animates Sir Politic Would-Be's various schemes for detecting plague on merchant vessels. Jonathan Gil Harris has already analyzed the relevance of Sir Pol's schemes to the major themes of the play (130-33), but it bears mentioning in addition that Sir Pol's fantasies express an important reality: business in Venice (and England, for that matter) is imagined by Jonson as being hindered daily by the plague into 1606. Sir Pol's schemes to detect whether trade ships "Be guilty of the plague" (4.1.104) are necessitated by the costliness of Venice's quarantine measures:

> …where they use
> To lie out forty, fifty days, sometimes
> About the Lazaretto, for their trial,
> I'll save that charge and loss unto the merchant,
> And, in an hour, clear the doubt. (4.1.104-8)

The reality that Sir Pol points to is that for Venice more than any other European city, it was always plague time; since Venice was a hub of Mediterranean trade, it was constantly in danger of infection. Locating *Volpone* in Venice places the play in a city that was under constant threat of plague from without its borders, and this was a condition that Jonson's audiences could identify with intimately and immediately. In fact, Venice's plague measures remained in effect well into the eighteenth century, and the English remained fascinated with them. In 1752 *An Authentick Account of the Measures and Precautions Used at Venice by the Magistrate of the Office of Health for the Preservation of the Publick Health* was published in London. The book details Venice's plague precautions through the centuries beginning with the Black Death. Another book, John Howard's *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe*, was published in 1789. It details Howard's experiences of being quarantined in plague colonies in Venice and elsewhere. Howard politely sensationalizes his stay by stating, "the walls of my chamber, not having been cleaned probably for half a century, were saturated with infection."[8]

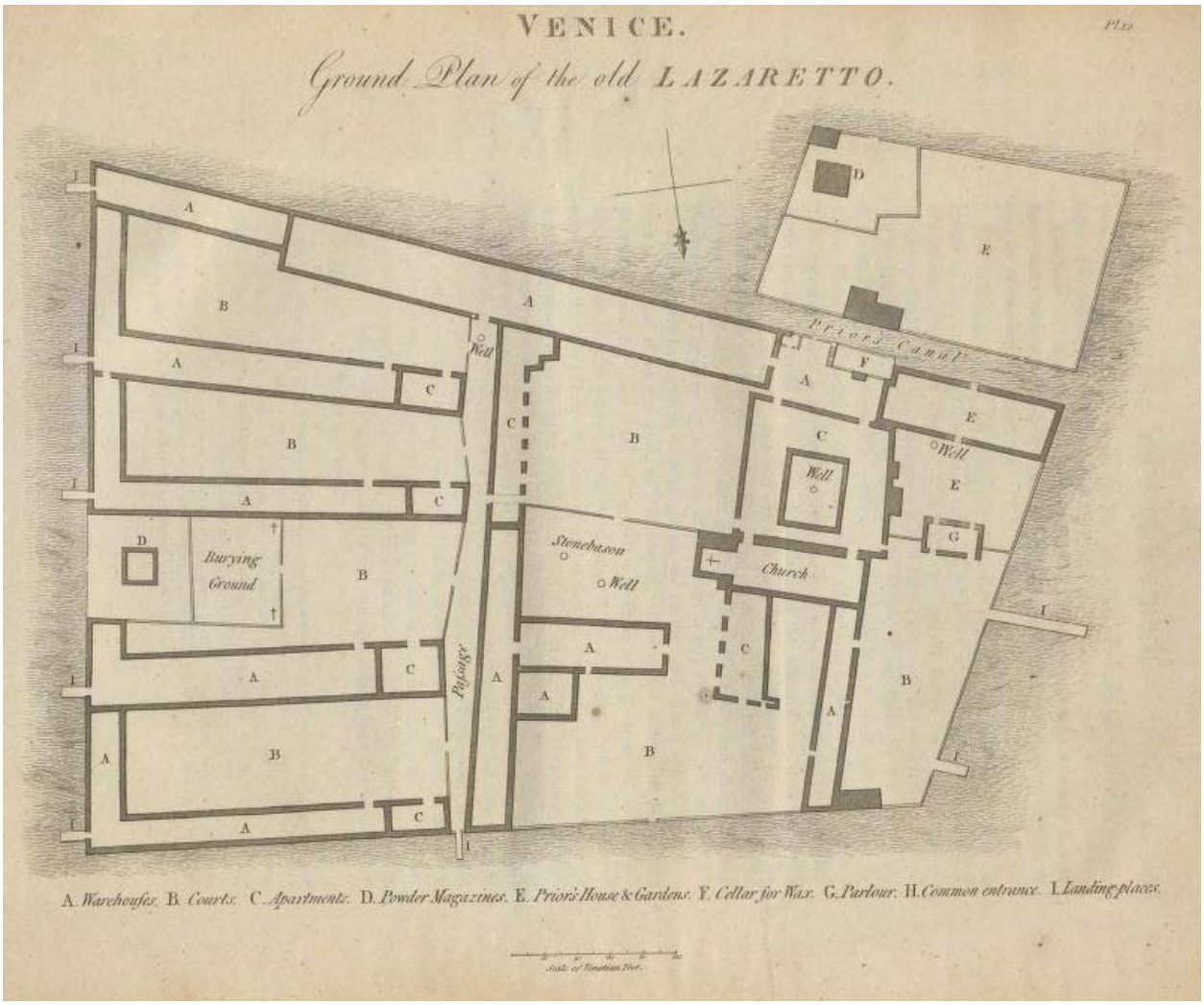

Figure 5: Etching of the ground plan of the old Lazaretto of Venice from Howard's *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe*. (33)

Despite Venice's efforts to quarantine trade ships and isolate the sick in *lazaretti*, Venice suffered a devastating outbreak of plague from 1575-7, at the end of which William Carew Hazlitt reports that "A fourth of the population had disappeared; and whereas in 1555 the city counted 159,869 inhabitants, in 1593 the numbers were only 134,871."[9] Hazlitt's account suggests that Venice was struggling to repopulate itself long after the plague had abated.

The relationship between popular culture and this struggle to recover the population from plague is an important aspect of *Volpone*, and it plays out in predictable ways that have been

outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his treatise on carnival in the works of Rabelais. Bakhtin's description of carnival applies to Venice's response to its 1575-7 epidemic and *Volpone*'s response to England's 1603 epidemic. As has been discussed in the section on *Timon of Athens*, Bakhtin writes that church feasts were marked by festivity, and the participation of the grotesque in *Volpone* carries on the various traditions of the medieval church feast just as Bakhtin claims it does in the works of Rabelais. Not only does the play itself represent a kind of festival or carnival, but it depicts carnival in details like Volpone's association with his grotesques and his Scoto of Mantua act as a way of invoking Venice's famous Carnival and various annual processions.

This festive perception is evident in *Volpone* as well as nearly all the plays in this study. Even in the tragedies, festivity is significantly presented as a counterpart to crisis. Venice has always been famous for its public festivities, and Edward Muir notes a correspondence between Venice's festivity and plague that supports Bakhtin's more general formulation of the feast as a response to crisis. Muir writes,

> Because they were so ruinous and long-lasting, plagues in particular impelled the entire community to ritual action. In desperation the Venetians were willing to go to extraordinary lengths. During the 1575-77 plague, the Senate commanded all religious houses to pray continuously, organized frequent mass processions, and, as we have seen, promised God through legislative decree that in return for his abating the pestilence, the state would finance a new church dedicated to the Redeemer and inaugurate an annual communal procession.[10]

Such communal processions led to a relaxation of standards of conduct, including sexual mores, and a carnival atmosphere even outside of carnival season. In light of the city's long-felt anxiety

over repopulating in the aftermath of plague, such events may even help connect more or less directly to plague anxieties the sexual license for which the city became famous.[11] In Venice, at least, the communal and civic responses to plague were joined, creating an unambiguous statement of the government's commitment to the social health of its citizens and the necessity of including the city's inhabitants in the ritual repudiation of plague-time anxieties.

In the absence of any similar governmental response to plague in England, local municipalities and individuals took it upon themselves to express publicly the nation's growing anxiety over plague. Jonson's decision to set *Volpone* in Venice in the wake of London's 1603 epidemic suggests that Venice is used in part to refer to plague while maintaining a safe distance from the specifics of England's own plague history. The play's recognition of Venice's real history with plague is tangential but significant. Sir Pol's schemes for detecting plague on merchant vessels is considered by Jonathan Gil Harris to be "the most vivid conflation of disease and the goods of foreign trade" (130) in the play, and it is also the clearest expression of real plague anxiety in the play.

Jonson also alludes to plague by recalling a period in Venetian history that was famous for plague when Volpone recalls being an actor "For entertainment of the great Valois."[12] Various historical accounts describe the festivities during the 1574 visit of Henry Valois, who would become King Henry III of France in 1575. Jonson's audience would also associate that historical period with the outbreak of plague from 1575-7, and, since it came right on the heels of Valois's visit, would have associated one with the other. England, of course, had also undergone a regime change in close connection with its 1603 epidemic. Richelle Munkhoff notes that the coincidence of Elizabeth's death with that 1603 epidemic had a lasting impact on England's national psyche, especially after 1625, which marked another plague year in England and another

regime change. [13] Jonson's audience would have perceived his allusion to France's regime change in 1575 as part of a plague pattern.

The most extended expression of plague anxieties in *Volpone* involves the various ways that reproduction is impoverished or frustrated. Robert N. Watson identifies this phenomenon as a general theme throughout the play, noting "how often Jonson traps this play's characters into self-aggrandizing masculine poses that can be ironically reinterpreted as signs of sterility and perversion."[14] The same could be said of other plays by Jonson and Shakespeare, but two plays, *Volpone* and *Othello* (1604), tie that sterility and perversion to plague and to the city of Venice.

Othello is not generally considered a product of plague time, but since it was written so soon after England's 1603 plague visitation and Shakespeare's post-1592 plays have a demonstrable link to contemporaneous plague epidemics, a closer consideration is warranted. In a play that seems generally to be deeply cynical about notions of parenthood, family, and reproduction, Iago characterizes the consummation of Othello and Desdemona's marriage as bestiality in the play's initial scene. Iago warns Brabantio that Desdemona has run away with Othello by saying, "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe!" (1.1.87-8),[15] and further on, "you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans!" (1.1.109-112). Both of these images are freighted with some of the most vile racist and sexist invective in early modern literature. The former conflates miscegenation with the mating of livestock, and the latter casts Othello as a horse who mounts and impregnates Desdemona, who gives birth, apparently as a human, to his beastly spawn. This is difficult to tie directly to plague anxieties, but the historical moment of the play's creation lends credence to an otherwise tenuous claim. As is evident from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, fears of hybridity and monstrosity in

early modern literature stem in part from plague and reproduction anxiety, which were surrounded by a well-known system of signification.

Shakespeare also hints at plague anxieties throughout Othello by mentioning carrion birds. When Iago offers to "wear my heart upon my sleeve / For daws to peck at" (1.1.63-4) earlier in that first scene, for example, he is nodding to a plague-time reality. Othello's mention of raven over the infectious house later in the play (4.1.21) has already been mentioned in the discussion of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Early modern audiences recognized a variety of birds, including crows, daws, rooks, and ravens as carrion birds, and they would have associated those birds with the plague for several reasons. Londoners would have been able to witness these birds feasting on the corpses of the plague dead on any given summer day, and the problem was exacerbated during periods of high mortality. In 1603, 25,000 plague burials were recorded in London and the liberties alone (Slack 151), but sextons had difficulty interring corpses fast enough, and as the backlog of burials increased, the sight of carrion birds feeding on plague victims waiting to be buried would have been more common. We might falsely assume that those who had already been buried would not have been subjected to this indignity, yet accounts of the horrors visited on exposed corpses abound. F.P. Wilson characterizes the problem this way: "Most corpses, especially in poor and overcrowded parishes, were covered simply with a winding sheet, and flung without burial rites into pest-pits" (43). Winding sheets would not have been enough to keep scavengers out.

Ravens and crows were also considered to be omens of plague and various other calamities and disasters, and *Volpone* acknowledges anxieties about ravens as omens even as it satirizes them by connecting them to the Englishman Sir Politic Would-Be. Upon meeting Peregrine, Sir Pol expresses anxiety about several omens, among them the omen "of a raven, that

should build / In a ship royal of the King's" (2.1.22-3), which Peregrine confirms, but in a way that makes it clear that he is distancing himself from the hysteria over the meaning of portents. Sir Pol's response to all of the omens he mentions is, "What should these things portend!" (2.1.44), suggesting an open-ended anxiety that is not likely to be alleviated. Peregrine, clearly bemused, gives no answer, and Sir Pol's anxieties are painted as ridiculous, but certainly not everyone in Jonson's audience would have been laughing at him. Many books, such as Thomas Twyne's *A shorte and pithie discourse, concerning the engendring, tokens, and effects of all earthquakes in generall* were published in early modern England, and the apocalyptic mindset of the average English citizen guaranteed a broad readership for such pamphlets and a common anxiety over the omens the pamphlets described.

Kai Erikson shows the kind of paranoia exhibited by Sir Pol to be a typical reaction to trauma, and *Volpone,* as a product of culture, has an interest in minimizing that paranoia by containing it or painting it as ridiculous. Erikson writes,

> One of the crucial tasks of culture, let's say, is to help people camouflage the actual risks of the world around them—to help them edit reality in such a way that it seems manageable, to help them edit it in such a way that the dangers pressing in on them from all sides are screened out of their line of vision as they go about their everyday rounds… People stripped of the ability to screen out signs of peril, naturally, are unusually vigilant and unusually anxious… They evaluate the data of everyday life differently, read signs differently, see omens that the rest of us are for the most part spared. (194-5)

The phenomenon that Erikson mentions could be a template for Sir Pol's character. Sir Pol is unusually anxious, and although he is painted as a fool, he is clearly a product of real trauma. Nevertheless, his purpose in the play seems to be to minimize the real trauma he reflects. By

playing Sir Pol's paranoia against Peregrine's canniness in rejecting and ridiculing all of the omens and portents that Sir Pol worries about, Jonson promotes Peregrine's attitude toward omens and suggests that searching for meaning in meaningless events is an activity for fools.

At the same time *Volpone* exposes omens such as crows as fruitless, however, it employs plague imagery, particularly crows and other carrion birds, in characterizing the legacy hunters hovering around Volpone. Voltore, representing a vulture, is the most obvious carrion bird among the heirs, but Corbaccio and Corvino are a raven and a small crow respectively, and would also have been considered carrion birds. The costuming of Corbaccio, Corvino, and Voltore can provide a visual cue to the kind of associations people who produce the play wish to convey. If Corbaccio, Corvino, and Voltore wear beaks, as seems to be the practice in many twentieth and twenty-first century performances (see Figures 5&6),[16] they bear a striking resemblance to another piece of plague iconography, the "beak doctor" plague mask that became a common symbol of Venice's carnival.

Figure 6: Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio in 1968[17]

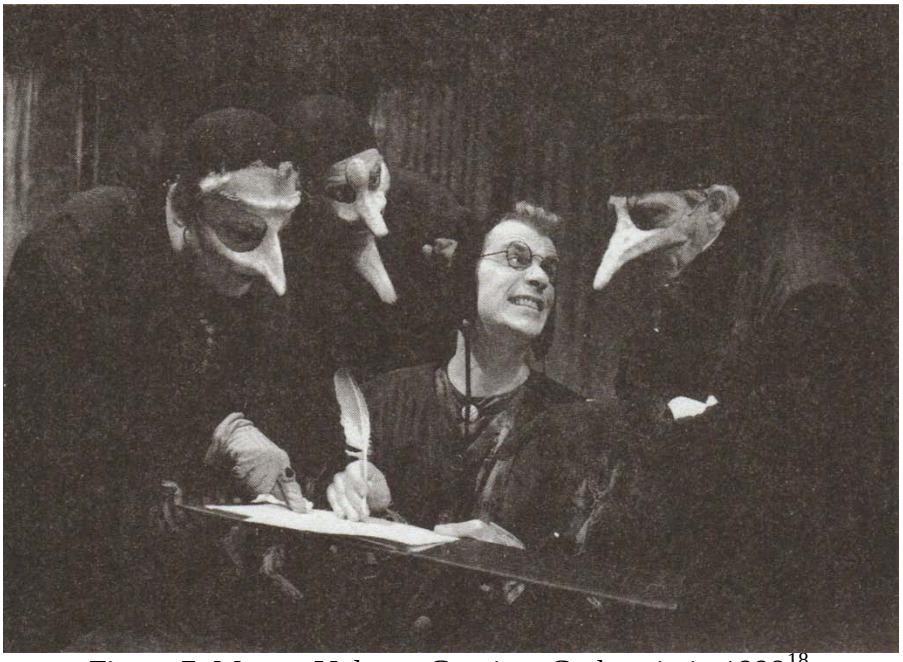

Figure 7: Mosca, Voltore, Corvino, Corbaccio in 1998[18]

Figure 8: *Beak Doctor of Rome*[19]

Figure 8 is from a 1656 engraving by Paul Fürst, but Christine M. Boeckl traces the use of such attire to 1619: "Protective garments were first invented in 1619 by Charles de L'Orme, Louis XIII's personal physician, and became customary in Paris; later they were worn more universally. Long leather or waxed-canvas gowns covered the whole body. The head was protected with a birdlike mask, its beak stuffed with fragrant herbs" (15). Even though it appears impossible for Jonson to have made the association between his bird-men and the beak doctor that became so closely associated with plague in subsequent years, they both participate in the same system of signification in associating plague and birds. The chamber in the mask may only resemble a bird's beak by accident, but if the resemblance is intentional, it might have something to do with appropriating the totemic power of carrion birds, which remained healthy even as they fed on the plague dead.

At the same time that the bird-men are representing anxieties about the plague, they are representing anxieties about reproduction. By associating Volpone and his ostensible heirs with animals, Jonson is involved in expressing the same kind of reproduction anxiety that Shakespeare uses to such chilling effect in the first scene of *Othello*. Jonas A. Barish notices this phenomenon as an important function of the characters' animal associations:

> It is not for nothing, then, that the chief characters of the play fit into one zoological classification or another. As men, they duplicate the habits of beasts; as beasts, they brutishly travesty humanity. They belong to the genus monster—half man, half brute—that order of fabulous creatures whose common denominator is their unnaturalness, their lack of adherence to whatever category of being nature has assigned them.[20]

Nearly every character in the play, and thus every potential sexual union, can be read this way. One example of this is Celia's marriage to Corvino, which is colored by Corvino's association

with crows and plague. The contrast in their natures is distinctly drawn out by their name associations: Corvino is a small crow and Celia is heavenly, suggesting a fundamental disparity between the two and amplifying the perception of their mismatch. The play emphasizes Corvino's blackness, which highlights all three connotations. At the end of 2.2 Volpone wraps up his sales pitch by touting the dental benefits of the powder he offers Celia gratis for favoring him with her handkerchief. The powder "seats your teeth, did they / dance like virginal jacks, firm as a wall; makes them white, / as ivory, that were black as–" (2.2.246-8). Volpone ends mid-sentence, and Corvino enters, cursing his wife as "Blood of the devil" (2.3.1),[21] completing the simile. Later, as Corvino berates Celia for participating in Volpone's street act, he says,

> I am a Dutchman, I!
>
> For, if you thought me an Italian,
>
> You would be damned ere you did this, you whore:
>
> Thou'dst tremble to imagine that the murder
>
> Of father, mother, brother, all thy race,
>
> Should follow, as the subject of my justice. (2.5.24-9)

Corvino is, in fact, Italian; he is saying something like, "You must think I'm a Dutchman," meaning that Celia ought to know better than to cross her Italian husband, who will murder her family for her infidelity. Corvino's nationality, along with his cruelty, jealousy, and figurative blackness, pairs him with Othello, and, taken together, the two characters seem to represent plague anxieties in essentially the same way to early modern audiences.

Corvino's threats against Celia's family are also strikingly similar to descriptions of the plague's destruction. I have already mentioned in the introduction that many early modern plague pamphlets describe the ravages of plague in terms of the damage it does to families. I

refer there to a passage from Dekker's *The Wonderfull Yeare*, but I could almost choose a plague pamphlet at random and find a useful quotation, such as this one from Thomas Lodge's 1603 plague treatise urging mercy in quarantining the sick: "it is a great amazement, and no lesse horror to separate the Child from the Father or Mother; the Husband from his Wife; the Wife from her Husband; and the Confederate and Friend from his Adherent and Friend" (44). Corvino is effectively vowing to destroy Celia's "father, mother, brother, all thy race" as the plague might.

Corvino's threats of confinement carry similar plague connotations by describing basically a quarantine when he says, "thy restraint before, was liberty, / …First, I will have this bawdy light dammed up; / And, till't be done, some two, or three yards off, / I'll chalk a line; o'er which, if thou but chance / To set thy desp'rate foot, more hell, more horror, / More wild, remorseless rage shall seize on thee, / Than on a conjurer…" (2.5.48-55). The light he proposes to dam up is, of course, Celia's window, and Corvino seems especially concerned about the air she breathes. Later in the same speech, he justifies his treatment of her by saying, "Since you will not contain your subtle nostrils / In a sweet room, but, they must snuff the air / Of rank and sweaty passengers" (2.5.64-6), before he is interrupted by Mosca's arrival. By relating Celia's confinement specifically to controlling the air she breathes, Jonson is playing on plague anxieties and associating Corvino, Venice, and the rest of the characters in the play, save Bonario, with plague.

It is no coincidence that another character with a wholesome name—Bonario, which can mean several things, among them "good air"—will come to her rescue and save her from the horrors of miscegenation, bestiality and plague. As good air, Bonario's name suggests that he will sweep clear that bad air of contagion. Barish notes that "Only Bonario and Celia, of all the

creatures in the play, never ape others, never change their shapes, never act contrary to their essential natures" (102). The two remain free of the plague associations carried by nearly every other character in the play. In Girardian terms, this pits them against the forces of plague represented by the other characters by showing their identities to be impervious to the forces of reversal, undifferentiation, and sacrifice.

Although Volpone is not associated with the plague in exactly the same way that the bird-men are, he has a strong association with the plague for other reasons. One is his association with disease and medicine in general. As Scoto of Mantua, Volpone asks his potential customers, "Would you live free from all diseases? / Do the act your mistress pleases; Yet fright all aches from your bones?" (2.2.200-02). Volpone promotes the same fantasy of freedom from disease as Mammon in *The Alchemist*, and such fantasies are borne of dearth and epidemic, as Rebecca Totaro suggests in *Suffering in Paradise*: "writers contributed to the canon of plague literature by imagining entire realms all but free from plague—a virtual paradise in which suffering is kept to a minimum" (13). It is notable that Volpone does not mention plague specifically in his sales pitch, but it is conspicuous in its absence. Earlier in the play, Mosca treats plague as the *ne plus ultra* of diseases when he curses Volpone for the benefit of Corvino by saying, "The pox approach, and add to your diseases…and the plague to boot" (1.5.52-5). The extremity of the plague speaks to the scope of Volpone's fantasy of living free from all diseases.

Volpone's various pursuits: of Celia, of wealth, etc., also rely on the same associations between plague, bestiality and sterility that attend Corvino. In his paean to gold at the beginning of the play, for example, he addresses gold as "being the best of things, and far transcending / All style of joy, in children, parents, friends, / Or any other waking dream on earth" (1.1.16-8). This

speech plays on the double association of gold mentioned in connection with *Timon of Athens*; gold is desirable and beneficial at the same time it is unnatural and corrupt. Volpone characterizes it as the "best of things," but revels in the fact that it supplants the natural joys of family, which places him in opposition to the values of the play's audience. Volpone's lust for gold involves an explicit repudiation of the joy associated with familial bonds and obligations. His lust for Celia has nothing to do with raising a family or producing heirs, but only with satisfying his limitless fantasies of copulation. Unlike the fantasies of Sir Epicure Mammon in *The Alchemist*, which will be discussed in the chapter on that play, Volpone's sexual fantasies are not connected in any way with procreation.

Volpone is, however, the father of all plague from a certain point of view. The Argument of the play indicates that Volpone is "childless," yet somewhat shockingly, Mosca, speaking to Corvino, identifies Volpone as the father of Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone:

> Bastards,
>
> Some dozen, or more, that he begot on beggars,
>
> Gypsies, and Jews, and black-moors, when he was drunk.
>
> Knew you not that, sir? 'Tis the common fable.
>
> The dwarf, the fool, the eunuch are all his:
>
> He's the true father of his family,
>
> In all, save me; but he has giv'n 'em nothing. (1.5.43-9)

The partially deaf Corvino can only reply, "That's well, that's well" (1.5.50), but this is a remarkable statement. It doesn't really matter if it is true—Volpone's association with them is enough of a judgment of his character, and the mere suggestion that Volpone is father to Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone, is enough to make some real and important connections to plague. As

Shakespeare does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Jonson employs the mythology of monstrous births in referring to plague-time reproduction anxieties. Monstrous births were considered to be omens of plague, as the broadside ballads of the late sixteenth century show. Prose accounts of the connection between monstrous births and plague were also common. In *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem*, published in 1593, Thomas Nashe has this to say about what makes a plague omen genuine:

> If we would hunt after signes and tokens, we should ominate from our hardnes of hart and want of charitie amongst brethren, that Gods justice is harde entring. No certainer conjecture is there of the ruine of any kingdom then theyr revolting from God. Certaine conjectures have we had that we are revolted from God and that our ruine is not far of. In divers places of our Land it has raigned blood, the ground hath been removed, and horrible deformed byrthes conceived. (172)

Nashe claims that deformed births, which are precursors to the scourge of the plague, are evidence of God's anger with the dissolute lives of early modern Londoners. Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone aren't exactly newborns, but they would have been considered monsters and evidence of God's wrath, which would seem to be leveled directly at Volpone in the play.

Volpone's "children" are associated with plague omens in another way as well. Schools were often closed during epidemics, as Johann von Ewich advises in a plague tract translated into English by John Stockwood and published in London in 1583. Ewich writes, "Now concerning houses of learning and schooles, in which children come together, …it seemeth very convenient, and in manner necessarie, if wee will avoyd the spreading of the infection, that those which cannot bee brought unto a place more commodious, be for a time shut up, and that the youth be rather taught at home."[22] Ewich's advice was clearly wishful thinking; it is unlikely that parents

would have had the opportunity or ability to home-school their children during a plague epidemic. It is more likely that if the schools were closed, children would be idle. It might be inferred that those idle children did not keep indoors but roamed the street from that fact that by 1592, the sight of children playing in the streets during plague time became an omen of plague. Simon Kellwaye reports in 1592 that "when we see yonge Children flocke them selves together in companyes, and then will faine some one of their company to be dead amongst them and so will solemnize the buriall in a mournefull sorte, this is a token which hath bene well observed in our age, to foreshew great mortallitie at hand." Paul Slack reports that the association between plague and children playing in the streets evolved to the point that "By the seventeenth century that belief was being transformed into the less occult suggestion that children playing in the streets spread contagion" (34).

Mosca, of course, sets Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone loose near the end of *Volpone*, and Volpone discovers them, saying, "How now! Who let you loose? Whither go you now? / What? To buy gingerbread? Or to drown kitlings?" (5.11.8-9). The note that accompanies this line in Watson's New Mermaids edition of the play is, "Volpone suggests the pastimes of naughty or cruel children" (153n9). Volpone treats them like children, in other words. Nano's response is childlike: "Sir, Master Mosca called us out of doors, / And bid us all go play, and took the keys" (5.11.10-11). The image of this group playing in the streets is troubling enough, but the three are deliberately infantilized in this scene, which may be a reference to the plague omen.

Through his depiction of Volpone's "children," Jonson attributes the relative sterility of plague time to the carnival atmosphere of Venice in a way that highlights English sobriety and moderation. Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone would all have problems reproducing. It is

uncertain what Nano's offspring would look like, Castrone would be missing some essential equipment, and even though Androgyno might consider himself blessed in his hermaphroditic surfeit, he expresses quite the opposite. When Nano suggests that Androgyno can take delight in each sex, the hermaphrodite replies, "Alas, those pleasures be stale, and forsaken" (1.2.55). That might be an expression of the general state of sexual intercourse in the play: stale and forsaken, divorced from notions of reproduction and heteronormative practice.

In general, *Volpone* is fantastically ambivalent about parenthood and family, and offers cuckoldry as the only viable solution to unproductive marriages. The play barely chooses to represent parenthood at all—a commentary in itself—and the one sure parental relationship in the play, that of Corbaccio and Bonario, is punctuated by scandal: Corbaccio disinherits Bonario in favor of Volpone out of lust for money and lies about it to conceal the fault. Volpone is in the mess he finds himself in because of his inability to produce a legitimate heir. Mosca is the closest he has to a son, but they betray each other at the end of the play. Corvino and Celia have no children, nor do Sir Politic and Lady Would-Be. The Venice of *Volpone* is essentially bereft of children.

This attitude toward reproduction and family is a constant fixture in Jonson's literature. David Riggs applies a Freudian interpretation to Jonson's apparent enthusiasm for cuckoldry: "The most plausible explanation for Jonson's preoccupation with cuckoldry lies, once again, in the tangled circumstances of his childhood. His own family life had been disrupted by his stepfather at an early age; when he reached late adolescence he exacted revenge against the heads of other households."[23] Ernest Gilman suggests another personal response by the playwright that specifically relates to plague. Discussing Jonson's poem "On my first Sonne," Gilman suggests that the poem reflects the broader themes and conventions of 1603 plague texts,

and can even "reveal the smaller textures of the common language and even the particular phrases [plague literature] evokes and transforms: the groaning of parents for children, …God's 'fatherly correction' of the afflicted, …the importance of 'fatherly care,' the acts of a 'merciful father,' the 'hopeful issue' of the royal father, the admonition to parents bereft of their children that 'too much, thy love on them were set'" (171). Gilman ultimately cites Jonson's guilt at fleeing the city without his family during the 1603 epidemic as the source of the grief Jonson expresses in the poem (173), and that same grief seems to be present in many of Jonson's comedies. It is expressed toward various ends in *Epicoene* and *The Alchemist*.

In *Volpone*, the point seems to be to foist those anxieties on a foreign culture that had a reputation both for moral laxity and for being under constant threat of a plague epidemic. By setting his play, which was written in a plague year, in Venice, Jonson distances his allusions to plague from the realities of plague time in early modern London as a way of indirectly coping with domestic plague anxieties. This dodge is one of the characteristic features of literary expressions of trauma according to Cathy Caruth. She writes, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). This haunting quality of trauma is expressed in literature as a question that "can never be asked in a straightforward way, but must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (5). In other words, trauma appears in literature in disguise, which represents an attempt to cope with an event that the subject could not fully grasp during the original experience. In *Volpone* Jonson appears unable or unwilling to address England's plague woes directly, but he may be expressing them in the very attempt to dissociate *Volpone* from them.

Another nod to the trauma associated with the plague is *Volpone*'s representation of reproduction. In 1606, the high mortality of the 1603 epidemic in England must have placed a terrible strain on families for a number of reasons. Aside from the devastation of losing a loved one to the plague, the English probably would have been apprehensive at the thought of having children again. The ambivalence over having a child only to expose it to the threat of the next plague would probably have been felt by nearly every parent who lost a child. Nevertheless, England did carry on even as it remained haunted by its lost children. Paul Slack points out that baptismal records show that families would name children after children they had previously lost to plague (285).

In the sections that follow, it appears that Jonson's representation of plague in his plays evolves. His plays gradually associate plague with London, subtly but perceptibly in *Epicoene* and then explicitly in *The Alchemist*, which is set in plague-time London. As those plays address plague anxieties more directly, it appears that Jonson is personally able to move beyond the death of his first son and publicly encourage his audience to come to terms with plague as an English problem. The relevance of trauma theory to this progression will be discussed more fully in the following sections; for now, suffice it to say that Jonson seems to be able to escape the formula that Caruth prescribes for expressing trauma in literature. Caruth's figurations may hold true for any individual text, but Jonson's plague plays offer insight as a series of texts in which the audience can witness a development of consciousness rather than a mindless, unwitting repetition of an author's, city's, and nation's trauma. In *Epicoene* and *The Alchemist*, Jonson's response to plague trauma seems far closer to Bakhtin's notion of festivity as a productive response to crisis that it is to Caruth's notion of trauma.

[1] Parts of this essay were written for a seminar at the 2009 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America. Special thanks to Robert N. Watson for his encouragement.
[2] For the English association of Venice with Carnival and *commedia dell'arte*, see David C. McPherson, *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Myth of Venice* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 40. For the correspondence between the figure of the mountebank, particularly Volpone's disguise as Scoto of Mantua, and *commedia dell'arte* figures, see Robert Henke, "The Italian Mountebank and the *Commedia dell'Arte*," *Theatre Survey* 38 no. 2 (November 1997): 1-29.
[3] Leo Salingar, "The Idea of Venice in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson," in *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, ed. Michelle Marrapodi, A. J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo, and L Falzon Stantucci (New York: Manchester University Press 1993), 171-84, esp. 182. For a more recent consideration of Shakespeare's treatment of his Venetian setting and its impact on early modern audiences, see John Drakakis, "Shakespeare and Venice," in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 169-186.
[4] Richard Dutton, *Ben Jonson, Volpone, and the Gunpowder Plot* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 105.
[5] Gabriele de' Mussis, *Historia de Morbo*, in *The Black Death*, ed. and trans. Rosemary Horrox (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 14-26, esp. 20.
[6] Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 19.
[7] Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 122-3.
[8] John Howard, *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe* (London: 1789), 11.
[9] William Carew Hazlitt, *The Venetian Republic: Its Rise, its Growth, and its Fall A.D. 409-1797*, vol. II: 1457-1797 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1915), 128.
[10] Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton University Press, 1981), 243-4.
[11] McPherson 45. For more on the association between plague and reveling, moral laxity, and abandon, consider also Boccaccio's description of the attitudes that the Black Death fostered in Medieval Florence: "Others took the opposite view, and maintained that an infallible way of warding off this appalling evil was to drink heavily, enjoy life to the full, go round singing and merrymaking, gratify all of one's cravings whenever the opportunity offered, and shrug the whole thing off as one enormous joke. Moreover, they practised what they preached to the best of their ability, for they would visit one tavern after another, drinking all day and night to immoderate excess; or alternatively (and this was their more frequent custom), they would do their drinking in various private houses, but only in the ones where the conversation was restricted to subjects that were pleasant or entertaining. Such places were easy to fine, for people behaved as though their days were numbered, and treated their belongings and their own persons with equal abandon." Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 7.
[12] 3.7.161. All citations from the play are from Robert N. Watson's New Mermaids edition of *Volpone*, and will be cited by act, scene, and line number parenthetically in the text.
[13] Richelle Munkhoff, "Contagious Figurations: Plague and the Impenetrable Nation after the Death of Elizabeth," *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011), 97-112, esp. 97-101.
[14] Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Robert N. Watson, 2nd ed., New Mermaids (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), 87n162.
[15] All passages from *Othello* are from William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, 3rd ed. The Arden Shakespeare Third Series. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004, and will be cited parenthetically by act, scene and line.
[16] "Many productions have costumed Volpone in vulpine furs, and the legacy-hunters at least partly as the birds their names suggest, giving Voltore a long vulture-like beak, Corbaccio the stooped posture and croaking voice of a raven, and making a black-robed Corvino chase, crow-like, the disguised Volpone away from the nest." Robert N. Watson, introduction to *Volpone*, by Ben Jonson, 2nd ed., New Mermaids (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), xxix.
[17] Robert Shaughnessy, "Twentieth Century Fox: Volpone's Metamorphosis," *Theater Research International* 27 no. 1 (2002): 37-48, esp. 46. Photo credited to Lewis Morley.
[18] Watson, xxviii. Photo credited to Craig Schwarz Photography.

[19] Christine M. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence: Iconography and Iconology* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000), 29. Image credited to P. Fürst with permission from Medicinsk Historisk Museum, Copenhagen. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[20] Jonas A. Barish, "The Double Plot in *Volpone*," in *Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jonas A Barish (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 93-105, esp. 98. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.
[21] Blood was often described as being black in classical, medieval, and early modern literature.
[22] Johann von Ewich, *The duetie of a faithfull and wise magistrate, in preserving and delivering of the common wealth from infection, in the time of the plague or pestilence*, trans. John Stockwood (London: 1583), sig. D5.r.
[23] David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Harvard University Press, 1989), 19.

Chapter 5

The Sociability Cure: The Impact of the Plague on Ben Jonson's *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*

On September 21, 2001, various musicians, including Bruce Springsteen, Neil Young, Celine Dion, Wyclef Jean, and Willie Nelson performed during a nationally televised concert and telethon to benefit the victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Such actors as Tom Hanks, Robert DeNiro, Will Smith, and Jim Carrey spoke in tribute to the victims of the attack, and Jack Nicholson could be seen at various moments in the background answering phones, along with many other notable entertainers and celebrities. Numerous other smaller-scale benefits were held in the following months, and New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani launched a public service campaign in November that used celebrities such as Ben Stiller, Kevin Bacon, and Billy Crystal to promote tourism to New York City.

There was a similar response to the devastation along the American Gulf Coast following several strong hurricanes, Katrina the most notable of them, in 2005. Benefit concerts were held, the most successful of which was aired by NBC on September 2. This concert boasted an impressive list of celebrities and entertainers similar to the 2001 New York concert, and is famous for Kanye West's accusation that President Bush did not care about black people. While the disaster was widespread, relief efforts focused on New Orleans as being particularly needy. In March, 2006, the state of Louisiana unveiled a tourism campaign that included many celebrities from New Orleans and elsewhere in the state. Television ads presented Emeril

Lagasse, John Goodman, and Wynton Marsalis, among others, encouraging people to "Fall in love with Louisiana all over again."

Kanye West's outburst aside, all of these responses to the 9/11 and Katrina disasters emphasize community and sociability, and they suggest that popular entertainment and tourism are the best vehicles for promoting those values. Roughly four hundred years ago, London, with a population far smaller than present day New York or New Orleans, faced an outbreak of the plague on a greater scale than either of the recent disasters in America. On December 9, 1609, London's playhouses were just reopening after being closed for a year and a half in response to a significant outbreak of plague.[1] F. P. Wilson reports that London lost 4,240 people to the plague in 1609 (118), which is more than twice the number of people lost to Hurricane Katrina,[2] and roughly 30% greater than the death toll of the September 11 attacks.[3] While the outbreak of 1609 was not a disaster on the same scale as the more serious plague epidemics in London in 1603 and 1625, it was nevertheless a heartbreaking civic and national crisis. Londoners, as we shall see, reacted to the crisis in ways that are similar to the American responses to recent disasters.

Ben Jonson can not have been insensitive to the problem that London faced, and there is evidence that his play *Epicoene* is a response to the material and spiritual condition of London in the aftermath of the plague epidemic of 1609. Scholars agree that the play was produced shortly after the theaters reopened after that year's outbreak. Recent events in America bring to light a pattern of behavior in response to national and civic crisis that appears to be quite old. We no longer levy a special tax for the relief of the afflicted or order fasting for the spiritual and economic wellbeing of the country as the plague orders of Elizabeth I and James I did, but another significant part of the early modern English civic response to plague that is still in

practice today was to use entertainment to suggest that the public resume festivity and respond to the disaster in a unanimous and unambiguous outpouring of goodwill for the survivors. If Londoners in 1609/1610 were looking for guidance about how to respond to the crisis that had just passed, and in fact was not quite over, they might have looked to the theater.

While *Epicoene* is not explicitly a play about the plague, it contains numerous direct allusions to plague-time beliefs and practices, and enacts a repudiation of the lawlessness and paranoia that reigned during plague time. Audience members would recognize in the character Morose the conventional Greek character Morosus, who values the quiet life, but they would also recognize in his extreme behavior not just extreme misanthropy, but also a type of hypochondria that could actually put his health at risk. That Jonson would have been aware of the existence of such a condition is evident from his description of it in *Volpone*, when Volpone claims that his *unguento* "cures *melancholia hypocondriaca*."[4] *Epicoene* associates Morose with various plague-time anxieties in order to contain him and anxieties he represents at the end of the play.

At the same time, *Epicoene* sets a certain tone for audiences who would have the horrors of the plague fresh in their minds. The play suggests that its audience respond to calamity with a positive attitude, and that sociability, not isolation, is the way to ensure happiness, which leads to good health in a very real way for early modern Londoners. The first prologue indicates how the play is designed to deal with the problems the plague had engendered in London. Jonson insists that there is material to delight every member of the audience:

> The poet prays you then, with better thought
> To sit; and when his cates are all in brought,
> Though there be none far fetched, there will dear-bought
> Be fit for ladies: some for lords, knights, squires,

Some for your waiting wench, and city-wires,

Some for your men, and daughters of Whitefriars.

Nor is it only while you keep your seat

Here, that this feast will last; but you shall eat

A week at ordinaries, on his broken meat. (Prologue, 19-27) [5]

This section of the first prologue provides commentary on the state of plague-ravaged London in several ways. At a basic level, characterizing his play as a feast counteracts the dearth and fasting of plague time and creates around the play a carnival atmosphere that, as we have seen in other plays by Shakespeare and Jonson, can be a response to crisis. Jonson describes his play as a communal activity that shuts its doors to no one, which represents just the type of spirit of camaraderie and bonhomie that might exist after a disaster like the plague of 1609. Herford and Simpson note in their introduction to *Epicoene* that the first prologue does not contain the usual Jonsonian invective against folly, but instead emphasizes entertainment and enjoyment. They write, "The Prologue indicates that the stern flagellant of vice and folly were, in this play, with relaxed brows deliberately seeking to amuse. He no longer hectors his audience; he hardly even instructs them."[6] This change of attitude, perhaps radical and uncharacteristic for Jonson, did not just happen on its own. One likely cause would be the desire to promote goodwill during hard times.

Jonson also describes his play in the first prologue as nourishment. While this is a pretty standard conceit, it takes on a slightly different meaning in plague-time. The theater as an institution was under constant attack as being immoral, and on top of that, was considered by some to cause plague. Wilson notes that the City wrote to the Privy Council around 1584 to complain about the playhouses: "To play in plague-time…is to increase the plague by infection:

to play out of plague-time is to draw the plague by offendings of God upon occasion of such plays'" (51). Jonson's characterization of the play as a feast suggests that the play is to be used as nourishment, which directly works against such antitheatrical notions of the dangers of playgoing. By suggesting that his audience will eat at ordinaries, Jonson uses the idea of communal eating as a metaphor for playgoing and signals an awareness of his play as a social and communal event on par with taking meals among compeers at an ordinary to counteract the plague fears associated with social gatherings. Charles Whitney notes that Middleton uses the ordinary in much the same way in *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary* (1604): "the pamphlet concerns the first stirrings of urban civility in the aftermath of the plague, as gentlemen warily return, meet at Paul's and at an ordinary (a lesser alehouse), and start putting their lives together."[7] Whitney notes how the ordinary becomes a metaphor for the social recovery of London in the wake of the deadly plague epidemic of 1603, and Jonson employs that metaphor in his prologue to *Epicoene*. While Matthew Martin characterizes this kind of metaphorization as denial,[8] it seems to me to be a subtle acknowledgement of trauma and an exhortation to carry on. *Volpone*'s metaphorization of plague trauma might more justifiably be characterized as a denial, but *Epicoene*'s references to plague-time beliefs and practices are just beneath the surface, and they would have been readily perceived by Jonson's audience.

The idea that attendance at a play could convey real health benefits is not nearly as far-fetched in Jonson's time as it has become today. Several early modern sources suggest that good humor was essential to good health. Thomas Dekker's oft-cited aside to the readers of *The wonderfull yeare* (1603) makes the connection explicitly: "If you read, you may happilie laugh; tis my desire you should, because mirth is both *Phisicall*, and wholesome against the *Plague*, with which sicknes, (to tell truth) this booke is, (though not sorely) yet somewhat infected" (3).

Although it was thought to be a source of infection because of the sinful activities going on there and the close crush of bodies in the general audience, the theater was also a place of mirth and fellowship that could be considered salubrious from a certain point of view. Regular social contact was considered essential to good health and moral conduct in early modern England, and although the playhouses had a shaky moral standing, playgoing represented an activity that could be seen as socially important, even necessary. In her study of the relationship between playgoing and plague, Nichole DeWall finds that "The healing power of laughter emphasized by so many medical writers was a corresponding benefit of the play-going experience, and contemporary documents report laughter as an integral part of the theater experience, particularly during comedies."[9] It is not out of the question to suggest that this may have been a conscious aim of early modern playwrights, and particularly of Jonson in writing *Epicoene*.

Sociability and charity were both qualities that authorities stressed as being essential to weathering and recovering from a plague epidemic, and *Epicoene* promotes both in two main ways: by associating Morose's animus against noise with plague anxieties in casting him out at the end of the play, and by presenting positive examples of the benefits of sociability, mirth and generosity. Mention of the plague in the opening scene of *Epicoene* is an early signal of Jonson's agenda of repudiating plague by promoting sociability. Truewit says to Clerimont,

> Well, sir gallant, were you struck with the
> plague this minute, or condemned to any capital punish-
> ment tomorrow, you would begin then to think, and value
> every article o' your time, esteem it at the true rate, and
> give all for't. (1.1.26-30)

The mention of plague in this speech is significant because it refers to the actual disease. This is no glancing reference, but an explicit use of the plague as a direct cause of the carpe diem attitude Truewit expresses later in the scene. Additionally, Truewit plays on the horror of someone stricken with plague; plague kills its victims remarkably quickly but not instantaneously, and Truewit's appeal invites Clerimont to imagine what it would feel like to know he was infected and have only a short time to live.[10] When Clerimont asks him what he should do in light of the impending threat of nearly instantaneous death, Truewit answers,

> Why, nothing; or that, which when 'tis done, is as
> idle. Hearken after the next horse-race, or hunting-
> match; lay wagers, praise Puppy, or Peppercorn,
> Whitefoot, Franklin (*Horses o the time*); swear upon
> Whitemane's party; spend aloud that my lords may hear
> you; visit my ladies at night and be able to give 'em the
> character of every bowler, or better o' the green. These be
> the things wherein your fashionable men exercise them-
> selves, and I for company. (1.1.32-40)

The tone is certainly satiric, and Truewit is having a little fun with Clerimont by exposing the folly inherent in the activities of fashionable gentlemen, but as he does in other parts of the play, Jonson encourages his audience to make a judgment about which is better: the hyper-social scrambling of a fashionable London gallant or the fear and isolation of an antisocial miser such as Morose. At the same moment he is mocking attending horse races and spending aloud as affectations of the privileged, Truewit is proposing them as the antithesis of Morose's bizarre behavior.

Later in the play, Jonson has Morose imagine his own cure through public exposure when he finds out that Epicoene is not as silent as he expected. Morose calls her, "Some plague above the plague---" (3.5.62), and suggests that in order to be rid of her, he would be willing to perform

> supereroga-
> tory penance, in a belfry, at Westminster Hall, I' the
> cock-pit, at the fall of a stag; the Tower Wharf (what place
> is there else?) London Bridge, Paris Garden, Billingsgate,
> when the noises are at their height and loudest. Nay, I
> would sit out a play that were nothing but fights at sea,
> drum, trumpet, and target! (4.4.12-18)

The punishments that Morose devises for himself are on one level, of course, jokes on his aversion to noise, but they also represent a cultural tour of London and suggest as a cure for Morose participation in conventional London social institutions, including, not insignificantly, a play. Morose's worst nightmare, the thing he chooses as his supererogatory penance, is, aside from hanging out in a belfry, what ordinary Londoners do every day. Morose tells Dauphine immediately prior that he would give up "an eye / (nephew), a hand, or any other member" (4.4.8-9) to be rid of Epicoene. This is clearly hyperbole, and no interlocutor would ever demand that such a commitment be discharged, but the fact that Morose seems to consider dismemberment to be less severe than the supererogatory penance of exposure to everyday social life marks him as extremely physically and spiritually unhealthy, and Jonson's message to the audience is that participation in plays, cockfights, and other forms of social gratification are, in fact, healthful and beneficial.

Morose claims that his voice is the only one he can tolerate: "all discourses but mine own afflict me" (2.1.4), but it seems impossible that noise is really the problem for a man who so clearly loves the sound of his own voice. Alexander Leggatt writes that "his dislike of noise is in fact a rejection of social life, a refusal to let other people have anything to do with him."[11] It is a strange sort of antisocial gesture to remain in the middle of a city, however. The most common-sense approach to escaping noise, and incidentally what many wealthy Londoners did to escape the plague, would have been fleeing to the country, which Richard Dutton suggests in the introduction to his 2003 Revels Plays edition of *Epicoene*: "Had he truly loved silence, he would have retired into the country. But the self love that fuels his aversion to noise still insists on being at the heart of the social world, even if it means engaging in the ever more ludicrous negotiations with the noisy elements of it…"[12] At the very least, Morose's affliction is less clear-cut than it may appear. If Morose does not truly love silence, or if his aversion to noise is a recent affectation, then it makes sense to consider whether it serves as a pretext for some other problem. This behavior certainly reflects a desire to exercise strict control over the world he views as dangerous and chaotic, but Morose's extreme efforts to control his surroundings can be seen as a direct result of the threat of the plague, which represents a fundamental danger to Morose's private order.

Morose's antisocial behavior is at the heart of Jonson's efforts to load him with plague anxieties. Morose might actually keep himself indoors for any number of reasons, including agoraphobia, hypochondria, etc., but the simple solution would be to stay home, safe from contact with the masses. If they are not near him, they are not speaking to him. Avoiding the plague would be a fine rationale for what might appear to be irrational behavior. In fact, Clerimont actually links the soundproofing of Morose's house to the plague in a way, saying,

> But now, by reason of the sickness, the perpetuity of
> ringing has made him devise a room with double walls
> and treble ceilings, the windows close shut, and caulked:
> and there he lives by candlelight. (1.1.182-5)

Clerimont states that it is the perpetuity of the ringing of church bells tolling out the plague fatalities that causes Morose to shut up his house, but it makes more sense that Morose would shut up his house to prevent infectious air from circulating through, according to a common theory of how the plague was transmitted. One of the prevailing theories in early modern England about how the plague was spread held that the air somehow became corrupted and spread infection. This belief is present in most of the plays in this study as a concern over the quality of the air in certain environments, and Morose's attempt to regulate the air in his house, evident in his efforts to seal his windows, refers to a plague-time practice. Thomas Lodge states in 1603 that "The ready and speedy chaunges, saith Galen, which happen in the ayre, through the evill corruption of the same, produce the Plague; which like a ravishing beast depopulateth and destroyeth divers men by death, yea whole cities, because men having a necessitie to sucke in the ayre, together with the same sucke in the infection and venome" (15). Physicians sometimes recommended shutting windows against bad air, particularly from the south wind. In 1569 Jan van der Noot advises that "his windowes which open toward the south, shall ever be closed or locked, for the south winde hath in him two causes of corruption."[13] Lodge recommends opening windows to the north wind but shutting them to the south wind to air out a house's wooden implements (85). Morose not only keeps his windows shut, but has caulked them shut to prevent them from ever being opened. Audiences of *Epicoene*'s first performances would recognize this measure and others as a preventative measure recommended against the plague.

Most of Morose's other efforts to protect himself from sound coincide with measures recommended against plague. Laying out his bedding is one such measure. In his first speech in the play, Morose asks Mute,

> And you have fastened on a thick quilt, or flock-bed, on
> the outside of the door, that if they knock with their
> daggers or with brickbats, they can make no noise? (2.1.11-13)

Morose's excuse for fastening his bedding to the door is to pad it against knocking, but in this gesture Jonson's audience would recognize also the recommendation of various physicians for visited households to air out their bedding. Lodge warns his readers of the possibility that plague can linger in their moveables long after the infection has left: "it is therefore necessary to know how to clense the houses of those that have beene infected, shall returne to their houses, they may not be infected anew, by reason their garments, coverlets, beds, and such like, have not beene well ayred and clensed" (83). He goes on to claim that the plague can linger in feather beds for seven years (85). Jonson knows this, and his portrayal of Morose is a satire of this plague-time practice. At the very least, Jonson refers to plague-time practices to give his audience some impression of the depth of Morose's aversion. Morose treats noise as seriously as if it were plague. On the other hand, by associating Morose with plague anxieties, Jonson makes those anxieties seem absurd and counterproductive.

Another plague joke involving Morose's noise aversion is the boy's report in the first scene of the play:

> I entreated
> a bearward one day to come down with the dogs of some
> four parishes that way, and I thank him he did, and cried

his games under Master Morose's window till he was sent
crying away with his head made a most bleeding specta-
cle to the multitude." (1.1.171-6)

The dogs would be making a good deal of noise, but that is not the only nuisance they represent. Many plague pamphlets urged Londoners not to admit dogs from the street into their homes because they were filthy. London's streets doubled as sewers, and middens were everywhere. An author known only as Learned Phisition makes the connection clear in *Present remedies against the plague* (1603):

> …suffer no dogs to come running into your houses, neither keep any (except it be backeward, in some place of open ayre, for they are verie dangerous, & not sufferable in time of sicknesse, by reason they runne from place to place, and from one house to another, feeding upon the uncleanest thinges that are cast forth into the streetes, and are a most apt cattell to take infection of any sickness, & then to bring it into the house.[14]

Early modern Londoners had no real idea how plague was spread, but they must have noticed that people became sick after visits from filthy beasts. Paul Slack notes that many early modern responses to plague were in fact based on empirical observation, and could be effective: "Against infection, it should be possible to prevent contact with infected places, to isolate the sick, and to try to restrict the movement of domestic animals—cats, dogs and pigs—who might transmit disease from house to house. A whole programme of administrative activity and regulation could be built upon commonplace assumptions about plague" (45). It seems like good practice even outside of plague time, but under such advice and in a play written during plague time, Morose's reaction to the bear-ward might not seem so excessive.

It is significant as well that the boy claims that his reason for leading the bear-ward to Morose's door is "to breathe him" (1.1.170). Jonson's focus on breath intersects in various ways with plague anxieties. I have already shown how Morose's strict control of his domestic environment seems to represent a desire to regulate the air of his home and his neighborhood, and breath, being basically expelled air, was considered to be particularly contagious. Morose seeks to silence those around him, which effectively prevents them from spreading disease. Aside from the issues surrounding breath already discussed in connection with *Timon of Athens*, Thomas Lodge cautions his readers: "if necessitie constraineth us to frequent the infected, (either to be assistant to our friends, or otherwise:) every man ought to demeane himself in such sort that the sick mans breath do not attaint him: which may very easily be done, if a man have the skill to choose & take the winde that properly bloweth towards the sicke & infected, and not from the infected to the healthfull" (23). The idea that breath can transmit sickness provides important context for several of Morose's actions. When he descends with a sword to break up the fight between Mistress Otter and her husband in 4.2, (one in which Otter claims that his wife "has a Breath worse than my Grandmothers, *profecto*," (4.2.80) and she calls him a "notorious stinkardly bearward" 4.2.104), his complaint is: "They have rent my roof, walls and all my windows / asunder, with their brazen throats" (4.2.124-5). Morose's hyperbole points to a real anxiety. He is afraid that the breath of the Otters, compared to the blast of trumpets through Morose's use of the word "brazen" and carrying associations with *Joshua* and *Revelation* (which both carry plague associations), will utterly destroy his home, exposing it fully to the outside air, noise, and everything else the air carries. A genuine anxiety about plague can help us understand this crisis of degree that Morose expresses, even though Mistress Otter and her husband do not seem to be directly associated with plague or disease. James Mardock notes how *Epicoene*

reflects plague anxieties in Morose's concern over controlling the space of his house: "The plague, and its attendant quarantine procedures, inevitably brought with it an awareness of a certain prophylactic form of spatial control."[15] Morose's attempts to regulate the traffic going through his house reflects a heightened concern with regulating private space that arises out of plague anxieties.

Jonson connects Morose's mania directly with disease by introducing a Parson with a cough. Morose immediately dismisses the Parson when Cutbeard mentions his cold, ("No more. I thank him" (3.4.11)), and even forfeits his honorarium so that the Parson can leave sooner: "Away, away with him, stop his mouth, away, I forgive / it---" (3.4.23-4). Rather than endure further coughing, Morose dismisses the Parson, and this seems too close to fears of contagion to be a coincidence. Morose's reaction to the Parson's cough seems to suggest that in addition to whatever else he suffers from, hypochondria guides his actions. The play's commentary on Morose's hypochondria is expressed shortly after by Epicoene:

> Fie, Master Morose, that you will use this violence
> to a man of the church…
> It does not become your gravity or breeding (as you
> pretend in court) to have offered this outrage on a water-
> man, or any more boist'rous creature, much less on a man
> of his civil coat." (3.4.25-31)

Morose married Epicoene to find a satisfactory way to participate in the social institution of marriage while maintaining his aversion to noise, but Epicoene's chiding suggests that it is impossible to do both when she upbraids Morose for his uncivil treatment of the Parson. If

Morose's treatment of the Parson has something to do with his illness, Jonson seems to suggest, then that illness does not excuse Morose from being civil.

In fact, most of Epicoene's utterances involve either demonstrating modest civility or encouraging Morose to be civil. When Truewit arrives at Morose's house to herald the marriage banquet, he says to Epicoene, "I wish you all joy, Mistress Epicoene, with your grave and honourable match," to which Epicoene replies, "I return you the thanks, Master Truewit, so friendly a wish deserves" (3.5.3-6). Morose responds with incredulity, exclaiming, "She has acquaintance, too!" (3.5.7), as if it were one of the worst things that could happen to him. Far from having done anything wrong, Epicoene is engaging in a conventional exchange of congratulations, something which might be expected for a bride on her wedding day. Through the rest of the scene, Epicoene does her best to encourage Morose to be civil and sociable, but he will not be instructed.

Epicoene's reversals—from silent woman to proper wife, and again from proper wife to boy—represent one of the stages of plague representation that René Girard claims is present in plague literature. Girard explains that the plague has a significant impact on how literature is written during plague-time, and his thematic cluster of reversal, undifferentiation, and sacrifice has already been discussed at length. Girard's thematic cluster applies well to other elements of *Epicoene*. The key thematic element that the plague engenders according to Girard is an inversion and confusion of categories of identity, and this presentation of identity as mutable is expressed throughout the play, beginning with the discussion between Lovewit and Clerimont concerning the artificiality of female beauty and ending with the exposure of Epicoene's preferred gender identity. It is significant that Morose characterizes Epicoene as an Amazon, (he calls her "Penthesilea" (3.4.55) and characterizes her supposed impudence as "Amazonian"

(3.5.39)), given the plague associations Amazons carry in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Timon of Athens*. However, as an Amazon, Epicene functions slightly differently than Hippolyta and those in *Timon of Athens*. Instead of requiring containment, she is the vehicle by which the more dangerous threat, Morose, is contained; nevertheless, *Epicoene* functions as a commentary on plague anxieties by explicitly emphasizing the instability of Epicoene's identity and associating her with Morose.

According to Girard, the figurative violence of contagion eliminates difference and renders subjects not exactly identical, but unsettlingly similar. Doubles are everywhere in *Epicoene*. Sir John Daw and Amorous La Foole, for example, double one another in several ways. The most significant way that characters can double one another for Girard is to desire the same thing, and Daw and La Foole, as social busybodies, both desire to keep company with a certain class of folk. Evidence of Daw's desire to fit in with a certain element of society comes from Dauphine's accusation that Daw has bought his title (1.2.76), and from his mention of great authors, none of which he has probably read. He says in conversation among Dauphine and Clerimont,

> The dor on Plutarch, and Seneca, I hate it: they are
> mine own imaginations, by that light. I wonder those
> fellows have such credit with gentlemen! (2.3.44-6)

Daw demonstrates in this speech and the following ones in the scene that he knows the names of authors, but cannot discriminate except generally to declaim them all and notice that they are fashionable among the gentlemen. At the same time he is declaiming the classics, he is expressing his desire to belong in the same social circle as the gentlemen.

Even though La Foole's class position seems a lot more solid than Daw's, he suffers from similar desires and affectations. La Foole will inflict his indiscriminate sociability on just about anyone, it seems. Clerimont says of him,

> He is one of the Braveries, though he
> be none o' the Wits. He will salute a judge upon the bench
> and a bishop in the pulpit, a lawyer when he is pleading
> at the bar, and a lady when she is dancing in a masque,
> and put her out. He does give plays and suppers, and
> invites his guests to 'em aloud out of his window as they
> ride by in coaches. (1.3.30-6)

La Foole's fault seems to be that he does not discriminate, and Clerimont suggests that his conviviality, which might not in itself be censurable, is affected, vain, and crass. La Foole demonstrates this himself when, echoing Erasmus, he speaks of his lineage:

> They all come out of our house, the La Fooles o'
> the north, the La Fooles of the west, the La Fooles of
> the east, and south—we are as ancient a family, as any is
> in Europe—but I myself am descended lineally of the
> French La Fooles… (1.4.37-41)

The repetition of the ridiculous "La Fooles" speaks for itself. La Foole's claim that there is a whole line of La Fooles and that the name is as old and ubiquitous as any in Europe is true if the name is taken literally, and the literal sense of the name and the scope of La Foole's claim mark him as an overreacher. La Foole exaggerates the ubiquity of his family name to try to fit in with Dauphine and Clerimont, just as Daw misrepresents his knowledge of classical authors.

This excessive or affected desire to be sociable (we might call it "ambition" in the Girardian sense) renders Daw and La Foole susceptible to being manipulated in the scene in which they are led to believe that the other wishes to duel. Truewit calls them a, "brace of baboons" (4.5.9), and works a trick on them as they are sequestered in symmetrically arranged studies:

> Do you
> observe this gallery, or rather lobby, indeed? Here are a
> couple of studies, at each end one: here I will act such a
> tragicomedy between the Guelphs and Ghibellines,
> Daw and La Fool. Which of 'em comes out first will I
> seize on. (4.5.27-32)

Visually and spatially, it makes no difference which knight goes into which study, because they are mirror images of one another, and the suggestion is that Daw and La Fool are basically interchangeable.

Daw and La Foole also share a ridiculous claim to have copulated with Epicoene. La Foole reports that "Sir John had her maidenhead, indeed" (5.1.86), to which Daw replies, "Oh, it pleases him to say so, sir, but Sir Amorous knows / what's what, as well" (5.1.87-8). This moment is remarkable because they report on each other's conquest instead of their own, as if they are happy to have shared the same experience and satisfied their desire for the same object. They express their rivalry by reporting knowledge of the other's affairs at the same time they express solidarity in their endeavor.

At the same time Daw and La Foole are being exposed as idiots, however, their gregariousness is being compared to Morose's misanthropy. James Mardock observes that in

important ways, Morose and La Foole are set up as opposites of one another: "Where Morose eschews guests, La Foole entraps them with food as bait; where Morose blocks coaches from his street and insulates his windows, La Foole shouts at their passengers from his open windows; and where Morose can think of no greater punishment than to "sit out a play" (4.4.16-7), La Foole turns his own home into a playhouse."(75) One of the effects of this opposition is to force a comparison. Which kind of fool is superior? The one who shuts himself in his house or the one whose house is absurdly permeable? The answer has to be La Foole, who, for all his folly, enriches the city and benefits his peers through his hospitality. Even though it turns out at the end of the play that their desire for Epicoene cannot have been consummated, and that Daw and La Foole are liars, Morose receives far worse from his nephew. *Epicoene* promotes the indiscriminate sociability of Daw and La Foole over the misanthropy of Morose. Mardock suggests a similar effect: "From that collision [of Morose and La Foole], eventually, emerges something like a Jonsonian ideal, but not before a thorough immersion in a chaos of uncontrolled individual practices of urban and domestic space" (75).

Although they are different in important ways, the most significant doubling in the play is that between Dauphine and Morose, because this pair produces the obvious scapegoat that Girard's thematic cluster describes. They are related by blood—Dauphine is Morose's nephew—and each man sets a plot in motion to disinherit the other. Their blood relation and their pursuit of the same inheritance make them doubles, and in accordance with Girard's theory, Morose becomes a scapegoat to resolve the confusion of their doubling. It is significant that Jonson's method of scapegoating Morose involves multiple frustrations of reproduction, because Girard writes that reversal and undifferentiation result in a crisis of degree that is often expressed through the dissolution of familial bonds:

> I have already suggested that the present hypothesis bears also on ritual, that a sacrificial action or immolation is generally found, frequently interpreted as the reenactment of a divine murder supposed to be the decisive event in the foundation of the culture. In the preparatory stages of a ritual immolation, symmetrically arranged antagonists hold warlike dances or real and simulated battles. Familial and social hierarchies are reversed or suppressed. These and many other features may be interpreted as traces of some "crisis of degree" climaxed by its habitual resolution, the collective transfer on a single victim.[16]

What Girard describes above is what happens at the end of *Epicoene*. Morose is Dauphine's uncle, and thus has a clear priority in receiving the inheritance as long as he can get married and produce an heir. The revelation that Epicoene is a boy completely reverses the expected outcome, and it is only through that trick that Dauphine is able to get his inheritance, to which he has lower legal priority than Morose. There is no way Morose could ever have hoped to have a positive outcome, but troubles pile upon him in a way that seems disproportionate and cruel. Morose is not even permitted to attempt consummating his marriage due to Epicoene's verbosity after their wedding. If that weren't enough, Morose is forced publicly to divorce Epicoene by claiming impotence, but not before his tormentors tease him with every other permissible reason for divorce. Morose himself complains, "O the variety and changes of my torment!" (5.4.9) as if to draw attention to the crisis of degree evident at this point in the play. It is under these extremely humiliating circumstances that Morose claims that he is "Utterly unabled in nature, by reason of frigidity, to / perform the duties or any the least office of a husband" (5.4.45-6). Only after that does Dauphine reveal that Epicoene is a boy, and that Morose's desire to produce an

heir would never have been possible. This profusion of humiliation marks Morose as the scapegoat of the play.

Soon after Epicoene is exposed, marking Morose's final humiliation, Dauphine banishes Morose from the stage, ritually excluding him from the play's mirthful ending:

> Now you may go in and rest, be
> as private as you will, sir. I'll not trouble you till you
> trouble me with your funeral, which I care not how soon
> it come. [*Exit* MOROSE.]" (5.4.210-13)[17]

Dauphine implies that his troubling of Morose, up to and including the Epicoene trick, represented a well-intentioned attempt to bring Morose forcibly into the public world and civil society. That main reason that he puts this scheme in motion is to trick Morose into transferring his inheritance, but another goal might be to reintegrate Morose into society by curing him of his unhealthy isolation. If so, Morose fails to answer Dauphine's call to sociability. Morose's pretensions are exposed as folly at least, and the audience might hope that he begins living a more sociable life after all the excitement he has been forced to endure.

Morose's withdrawal from society is strikingly similar to that of Timon of Athens. Various acquaintances try to pierce their veils of isolation, but both men are incapable of returning to society once they have separated themselves from it. In both plays this has something to do with the playwright's association of the characters with plague anxieties. For Morose, the fear that he represents is what *Epicoene* is so concerned with guarding against. Jan van der Noot cautions his readers not to give in to fear of death during plague time: "Myrth of herte is a greate comforte and helpe of health in the body. And therefore feare of death is a daungerous case in this time, but only to be mery, and set the hole hope and confidence upon

God, and to commende him to his godly pleasure" (sig. B.ii.r-v). Theodore Beza distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy fear in his writing on the permissibility of flight during plague time, and says that if the fear of death "be grounded upon good reason, & be moderat, it is not only not to be condemned, but also to be allowed as a preserver of life graffed in us by God" (sig. C3.r). Beza suggests that fear can be a reasonable response to something fearful, but warns against irrational and immoderate fear. Nichole DeWall explains in her discussion of the health benefits of playgoing that "Melancholy and fear were considered the most detrimental emotions to experience during plague-time because they were thought to make individuals more susceptible to infection" (138). In *Epicoene*, Jonson shows that Morose's flight within is just as problematic as the flight without that was practiced by those who tried to escape the plague. Both types of flight were likely to be driven by fear, which could have real detrimental effects on health.

Beza also suggests that those who flee can run into trouble when they neglect their social responsibilities, since

> no man ought to have so great regard either of his owne selfe or of his familie, that he forget, what he oweth unto his countrey and felow Citizens, to bee short, what one oweth unto another, whether they be bounde by the common band of human societie, or by any other kinde of friendship. (sig. D.r-v)

Although Beza allows for flight and spends most of his plague tract refuting the argument that the plague is not contagious, there are some circumstances under which flight is not permissible; if flight causes one to forsake the common band of human society, says Beza, it is a mistake. It is useless to flee the plague if in doing so the runaways allow themselves to be ruled by irrational

fear or to abandon their obligations to their friends, neighbors, and countrymen. Francis Herring Concurs in his 1604 plague tract:

> It remaineth, that acknowledging the pests contagion, we notwithstanding (who are Christians) carefully avoid that faithlesse and Paganish fearefulnesse, whereby we are made to breake all the bonds of Religion, Consanguinitie, Alliance, friendship and pollicie: the husband forsaking and abandoning his deare wife, the parents leaving their children to sinke or swimme, the Pastor exposing his flocke to every devouring woolfe, and the Magistrate his people under his charge to all confusion and disorder. (sig. B2.r)

Herring connects the perils of fearfulness to a person's social, parental and civic responsibilities in a way that equates the three; familial responsibilities are no more or less important than the responsibilities of a friend, comrade, pastor or magistrate.

Morose has failed the test that Beza and Herring pose; he has abandoned his family, friends, and city by giving in to fearfulness, and Jonson portrays him as unhealthy, and really quite lost, by the end of the play. His is a cautionary tale of the dangers of allowing anxiety to override sociability, and those who fare better at the end of the play are the ones who engage with the city and its inhabitants. Truewit's epilogue makes this explicit:

> Spectators, if you like this comedy, rise cheerfully, and
> now Morose is gone in, clap your hands. It may be that
> noise will cure him, at least please him. (5.4.248-250)

By suggesting that the audience's applause can cure Morose, Truewit associates the expression of goodwill and approbation that is customary at the end of a play with applause's salubrious effects. He calls for a collective, unanimous, unambiguous outburst of good cheer and a rejection of anti-social forces. Morose and the plague anxieties he represents have already been

banished, but Truewit's call to applause seals the deal and makes explicit the play's efforts to respond to the trauma of plague time. Truewit signals a return to festivity and implies that the city, having banished Morose, who carries offstage with him anxieties about the plague and the anti-social attitude it engenders, can resume its normal operations. This is in accordance with one of the effects of trauma on communities as Kai Erikson describes it. He writes, "trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can. There is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed" (186). Jonson dramatizes this communal response to trauma by drawing sides. Morose, loaded with deadened affection and numbed empathy not only through his abjuration of society but his efforts to disinherit his nephew, goes up against the forces of community and spiritual kinship and loses.

In this way, *Epicoene* represents an important shift in the way Jonson addresses plague anxieties in his plays. While *Volpone* attempts to distance London and its inhabitants from plague concerns by setting the action in Venice and focusing on the sacrifice of a morally dissolute man among other scoundrels, *Epicoene* places thinly-veiled plague references in London and promotes a sense of community by contrasting the joy of most of the characters at the end of the play with the bleak worldview exhibited by Morose.

The resumption of mirth after a disaster is often fraught. It is important to be respectful of the dead and mourn appropriately, but it is also important to begin the healing process, return to normalcy, and express joy. Jonson's plague-time comedies play an essential role in responding to the personal and civic crises represented by plague in early modern England. *Epicoene* in particular encourages Londoners to get out of their homes and inhabit the city as they were wont to do in better times. It represents a repudiation of traumatic thinking and a

resumption of festivities in a way that we still practice today. New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani presided over such a resumption of mirth after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by hosting on September 29 the first episode of *Saturday Night Live* to be aired after the attacks. The show begins with a tribute to the dead, including Paul Simon performing "The Boxer." Lorne Michaels, *Saturday Night Live*'s producer, thanks Mayor Giuliani for appearing, and Giuliani responds, "Having our city's institutions up and running sends a message that New York City is open for business. *Saturday Night Live* is one of our great New York City institutions, and that's why it's important for you to do your show tonight." Michaels, obviously anxious that it is inappropriate to tell jokes in the face of a national tragedy, asks Giuliani, "Can we be funny?" to which Giuliani replies, "Why start now? Live, from New York! It's Saturday Night!"

Thanks to Craig Bertolet and Robin Bates for inspiring significant portions of this essay.

[1] Gordon Campbell, Introduction, *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, by Ben Jonson (Oxford University Press, 1995), xv.

[2] Beven II, John L., Lixion A Avila, Eric S. Blake, Daniel P. Brown, James L. Franklin, Richard D. Knabb, Richard J. Pasch, Famie R. Rhome, and Stacy R. Stewart, *Annual Summary: Atlantic Hurricane Season 2005*, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, March 2008, http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/general/lib/lib1/nhclib/mwreviews/2005.pdf. On the death toll of Hurricane Katrina, the report states that "The total number of known fatalities, either directly or indirectly related to Katrina, is 1833, based on reports from state and local officials: 1577 in Louisiana, 238 in Mississippi, 14 in Florida, 2 in Georgia, and 2 in Alabama. The total number of fatalities directly related to the forces of Katrina is estimated to be about 1500, with about 1300 of these in Louisiana, about 200 in Mississippi, 6 in Florida, and 1 in Georgia. Especially for Louisiana and Mississippi, the number of direct fatalities is highly uncertain and the true number will probably never be known" (1140).

[3] "Executive Summary," *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, 2004, http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Exec.htm. "More than 2,600 people died at the World Trade Center; 125 died at the Pentagon; 256 died on the four planes. The death toll surpassed that at Pearl Harbor in December 1941… This immeasurable pain was inflicted by 19 young Arabs acting at the behest of Islamist extremists headquartered in distant Afghanistan."

[4] 2.2.108, from Robert N. Watson's New Mermaids edition of the play.

[5] All quotations taken from *Epicoene* are from Richard Dutton's 2003 Revels Plays edition. Citations will appear in the text by Act, scene, and line.

[6] *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, vol. 2: The Man and His work, (Clarendon Press, 1925), 69.

[7] Charles Whitney, "Plague Pamphlets as Environmental Literature," in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011), 201-218, esp. 205.

[8] Matthew Martin, "Wasting Time in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*," *Studies in Philology* 105 no. 1 (Winter 2008), 83-102. Martin writes, "The contingency and discontinuity created by the plague are much more difficult to accept. Denial is an understandable if not entirely laudable response to the plague, and denial is precisely what the play dramatizes" (101).

[9] Nichole DeWall, "'Sweet recreation barred': The Case for Playgoing in Plague-Time," *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011) 133-149, esp. 144. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.

[10] Plague was not always lethal, as mentioned in the Introduction, but it was often treated as such in literature.

[11] Alexander Leggatt, "Morose and His Tormentors," *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities* 45 (1976): 221-235, esp. 221.

[12] Richard Dutton, Introduction, *Epicene, or, The Silent Woman*, by Ben Jonson, The Revels Plays (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003) 12.

[13] Jan van der Noot, *The governance and preservation of them that feare the plage. Set forth by John Vandernote, phisicion and surgion, admitted by the kynge his highenesse. Now newly set forth at the request of William Barnard of London Draper* (London: 1569) sig. A.v.v. Firther references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.

[14] Anon., *Present remedies against the plague Shewing sundrye preservatives for the same, by wholsome fumes, drinkes, vomits and other inward receits; as also the perfect cure (by implaisture) of any that are therewith infected. Now necessary to be observed of every householder, to avoide the infection, lately begun in some places of the cittie. Written by a learned physition, for the health of his countrey* (London: 1603), sig. A4.r.

[15] James Mardock, *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 70. Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.

[16] Girard, "The Plague," 844. .

[17] There are striking parallels in William Wager's Tudor interlude *The longer thou livest, the more foole thou art* (1568), in which a foolish and dissolute character named Moros is publicly humiliated by a character named Gods Judgment before being led offstage at the end of the play, leaving the rest of the cast to revel in his absence. Melissa Smith notes, "In *The longer thou liuest* and *Inough* [*is as good as a feast*], Wager adds humiliation to the spectacle of the suffering of Worldly Man to infuse these scenes with a comic force that also underlines their function as scapegoating. The pestilence is contained. The audience can enjoy their relative superiority over the reprobate sufferers while simultaneously witnessing—and surviving—their figurative infection." Smith, "Personifications," 379.

Chapter 6

"It is become a cage of unclean birds": The Presence of Plague in *The Alchemist*

In "'You Need Not Fear the House': The Absence of Plague in *The Alchemist*," Patrick Phillips notes that *The Alchemist* does not have much to do with plague even though it is set in plague time. His general thesis, which is sound, is that *The Alchemist* comforts its audience by minimizing the representation of plague and making light of it. Phillips writes, "This study will dwell…on the surprising absence of plague from the world of the play despite its setting during an epidemic, and argue that the harmless, fictional pestilence of *The Alchemist* may constructively be read not as a metaphor but as a response to—and even a 'remedy' for—the very real and deadly epidemic of 1610."[1] Phillips notes a general "absence of actual plague" (43), which, coupled with the play's emphasis on promoting mirth and loving wit, serves as the necessary backdrop for what may initially seem an oxymoron: a plague comedy.

A critical consensus seems to be building. Kelly J. Stage cites Phillips's claims in her assertion that,

> Even Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610), a play that takes plague-time London as its setting, minimizes discussions of the literal disease… The return to business as usual at the end of *The Alchemist* does not bring justice for those who lost money or honor at the hands of the con artists, but neither does it show suffering. Jonson so fully appropriates the plague as to erase it, permitting a willful forgetfulness: all of the bad behavior we have witnessed

> in the play is irretrievably part of London, brought into relief by plague but not expunged by its departure.[2]

Stage, following Phillips, claims that the plague has been all but erased from *The Alchemist* despite the play's setting in plague-time London.[3] Barbara H. Traister claims of *The Alchemist* that "The actual plague is obvious neither in the street nor in the characters' concerns," and, "exists almost exclusively on the level of metaphor."[4] Traister also cites Phillips's essay, and opines, "The title itself could not be more aptly named" (181 n. 15).

Others go to extraordinary lengths to demonstrate how the plague is used as a metaphor for other concerns in the play. A number of critics try to demonstrate that the plague in the play is a metaphor for the occupation of Lovewit's house by the "venture tripartite,"[5] and others see the plague in *The Alchemist* as a metaphor for early modern theatrical practice.[6]

Phillips is undoubtedly correct in asserting that the state of plague in the play is a response to the 1610 epidemic (we might expand that to include 1603-9 as well), and the rest are probably right to be surprised at the relatively light treatment of plague in *The Alchemist*, but it is a mistake to assert that the plague is absent from *The Alchemist*. While *The Alchemist*'s presentation of plague may seem surprisingly light given that it is set in plague time (as opposed to a full-blown epidemic; more on that below), the play is rife with references to plague-time practices and beliefs. The plague is present in *The Alchemist* not in references to plague sores, buboes, or corpses, but in Dapper's humiliation, Drugger's incompetence, Mammon's fantasies of excess, and Ananias's zeal. Through these very pointed and unmistakable plague allusions, Jonson attempts to exorcise plague anxieties and comfort his audience and his neighbors.

On a certain level, those who find little plague in *The Alchemist* have a point. Jonson does engage in a good deal of sleight-of-hand in concealing the plague behind allusions and

comedic set-pieces, and those are relatively easy to miss. As I intend to show at length, Jonson wants to comfort his audience by promoting goodwill and repudiating the disorder that reigned in London during the fiercest months of the 1603-1611 visitation. To that end, Jonson sets *The Alchemist* in a city that is thriving and humming in the aftermath of a plague epidemic.

The Alchemist was entered into the Stationer's register on October 3, 1610, and was performed at Oxford that September. The previous year, 1609, was the deadliest plague year since 1603; F.P. Wilson reports 4,240 deaths from plague. 1610 marks a decrease in total plague deaths, with the fewest per year since 1606, and the number of plague deaths dropped dramatically in 1611 to 627 (Wilson 118). By September, 1610, it is clear that Jonson was returning to business as usual, and *The Alchemist* portrays a city that is doing the same.

Although the play's "Argument" asserts that the plague is "hot,"[7] all the evidence in the play proper suggests that things have cooled down considerably. The great throng of neighbors and the return of Lovewit himself in 5.1 should be enough to prove this point. Face says at one point of Lovewit, "O, fear not him. While there dies one a week, / O' the plague, he's safe from thinking toward London" (1.1.182-3). Face is using hyperbole here; one plague death a week would mean four per month and fifty-two per year, which is hardly any at all. In spite of the fact that the plague's intensity fluctuated with the seasons,[8] meaning that weekly death rates were lower in the winter and spring months, it is safe to say that the number of deaths attributed to plague in the city did not drop to one a week until 1613 (Wilson 122). The point of Face's hyperbole is clear: we come to learn that Face has sent for Lovewit ("I sent for him indeed" (5.4.129)), so Face must be trying to pacify Subtle until Lovewit's arrival. Face evidently intends to betray Subtle and Doll once Lovewit returns.

Phillips himself notes Face's hyperbole concerning Lovewit's return but interprets it differently, taking it as an accurate expression of Lovewit's character: "Lovewit…is a caricature of the rich man in plague-time, whose anxiety makes him such an easy mark for the cony-catchers that even a fearful audience would have recognized his hyperbolic caution as absurd. Face leaves no doubt that it is this excessive fear that enables the mischief of the play" (52). This may be true, but if so, then Lovewit's return and his apparent change in attitude in Act 5 require further explanation. The fundamental problem with Phillips' characterization of Lovewit is the contradiction it introduces into his overall argument that the plague is surprisingly absent from *The Alchemist*, namely, if Lovewit returns in high spirits in spite of an irrational and overblown fear of the plague, then the play cannot take place during an epidemic, and nobody should be surprised that plague seems absent from the play.

That is not to say that a case cannot be made for that point of view. The situation of the play appears to be that of London in general in 1610: the plague is in decline. Plague is established as an ominous presence in the first line of the argument and Lovewit has left town for fear of plague. However, there is no indication that any of the neighbors, who have remained behind either because they were less fearful or less affluent, have suffered from the plague, and by act 4 they gather in a large group without apparent fear of contagion.

Subtle's roster of gulls also yields evidence that the plague in the play is in decline. Sir Epicure Mammon tells Surly that he has been working with Subtle for ten months (2.1.5) when we are first introduced to him, and Mammon is another of those who might be expected to flee during an epidemic. He clearly has the means, and seems too self-interested to consider remaining in the city for the aid of his fellow citizens during an epidemic. Abel Drugger is apparently optimistic enough to want to open a new store (1.3.7-9), and does not seem to doubt

that he will have customers. Dapper's explanation that "I had a scurvy writ, or two, to make, / And I had lent my watch last night, to one / That dines, to day, as the sheriffs" (1.2.5-7) suggests that the lawyers, at least some of them, are working and that daily urban activity goes on as usual.[9]

The desires of Subtle's customers also seem to be out of line with plague-time realities. Dapper wants a familiar, Drugger wants a floor plan and a sign, Kastril wants to learn how to quarrel, and Mammon and the Anabaptists want power, wealth and prestige. Of all the things that his customers ask for, not a single one of them asks him for a corrective, preservative, amulet, draught, or charm against the plague. Dapper, Drugger, and Kastril have specific but minor requests that have nothing to do with the plague. Mammon might believe that the stone Subtle is contracted to provide him will cure disease, but thinks mostly of satisfying his outrageous appetites, and the Anabaptists are only concerned with raising funds. If the plague is raging in London, then at least one of these customers should be interested in having a little insurance against it. In his *Treatise of the Plague* (1603), Thomas Lodge indicates that considerable furor could arise among those desperate for protection in plague time. He complains about the legion of men posting bills for miracle plague cures, among whom

> one by fortune is become my neighbor, who because at the first he underwrit not his billes, every one that red them came flocking to me, conjuring me by great profers and perswasions to store them with my promised preservatives, and relieve their sicke with my Cordiall waters: These importunities made mee both agreeved, and amazed. (5)

Lodge reacts with pity to the great clamor among London's citizens for plague cures. We might expect to see a similar scene in *The Alchemist* if it is set in plague time, but there is none. Perhaps depicting a scene such as the one Lodge describes would have been considered

inappropriate for *The Alchemist*. Or perhaps, in line with what Ian Munro claims is an overdetermined fear of the crowd in Coriolanus, we can read such plague anxiety in the crowd of Lovewit's neighbors near the end of the play. Even at one remove from depicting the infected, directly reproducing the desperation of those seeking plague cures from charlatans may hit too close to home for much of Jonson's audience. Of all the folly Jonson reproduces on stage through the customers of Subtle, Face and Doll, that one seems off-limits.

Nevertheless, the ominous presence of the plague certainly has, if not an immediate impact on the plot, a psychic impact on the themes and characters of the play. The plot does not have to involve plague at all for a work of art to be involved thematically with plague, as *Volpone* and *Epicoene* can show, and the plague is without a doubt the most significant thematic concern in *The Alchemist*. Signs of trauma are evident in the offhand remarks many of the characters make, and certain small details emerge as suggesting a horrific recent past. Lovewit appears to have closed the house and departed following his wife's death, presumably of plague, leaving only Face behind, in the words of Subtle, "to converse with cobwebs / Here, since your mistress' death hath broke up the house" (1.1.58). There is a similar moment in 1.2 when Face tells Subtle that Dapper is, "the sole hope of his old grandmother" (1.2.53). Face is making fun of Dapper, but, as is clear in *Romeo and Juliet*, noting that someone is a sole heir has special significance during plague time, and Jonson's audience, emerging as it was from the high plague mortality of 1609, would be able to identify with Dapper through this detail. The plague did disrupt entire families or generations of families as nearly nothing else could, and that disruption is felt through Lovewit's wife and Dapper.

Other details of the play allude more directly to plague-time practices or beliefs. Nearly all the gulls in the play are used to expose as ridiculous the kind of thinking and behavior often

seen during plague time. What is interesting is that while all of their episodes allude to plague in some way, and Jonson can be seen systematically satirizing the various systems of belief surrounding plague, he also sanitizes those plague allusions of any direct reference to plague. From the apocalyptic nearsightedness of the Puritans to the out-sized fantasies of renewal and rejuvenation dreamed up by Sir Epicure Mammon and the satire of mainstream medical advice evident in the representation of Abel Drugger and Dapper's humiliation, all of these elements of the play represent a discreet section of early modern London society and intersect with plague through barely concealed allusions that Jonson's audience would have recognized.

Why would Jonson make fun of plague-time beliefs but conceal his ridicule, especially in a play that is set explicitly in plague time? One possible explanation is that Jonson is wary of upsetting certain special interest groups in London. *The Alchemist*, as *Epicoene* does, takes up the cause of helping Londoners recover from the plague, and seems to suggest that contemporary methods of coping with plague are inadequate: the spiritual remedies are tainted by the self-interest of those espousing them, and the bodily cures are likely to do more harm than good. Their principal effects are to sap Londoners of their wealth and make them look ridiculous. In promoting that message, however, Jonson risks running afoul of some very powerful groups, including the crown, which published the plague orders, and the Royal College of Physicians, which promoted specific remedies that Jonson ridicules. Jonson often got into trouble when his satire brushed too closely against important persons, so he would have had to develop the skill of steering clear of endangering himself politically. David Riggs suggests that Jonson's imprisonment in 1605 for his role in writing *Eastward Ho* marked a real and important shift in Jonson's relationship to England's power structure: "Jonson turned to Lucian at a moment when he was rethinking his entire approach to comedy. After the fiasco of *Eastward Ho*—not to

mention the three previous occasions on which he had been accused of slander—outright mockery was no longer a feasible alternative for him" (135). Riggs suggests that Jonson shifts gears later in his career, and that he has developed a strategy of avoiding "outright mockery." This seems evident from his efforts in *The Alchemist* to avoid direct criticism of several powerful groups.

The Alchemist suggests that its audience question the officially sanctioned herbal and medicinal remedies promoted by the crown and the Royal College of Physicians and look to the more holistic and less dangerous remedy of good humor. The details of Dapper's preparations to meet the Queen of Fairy amount to a parody of a particular practice that many physicians of the time were recommending as a precaution against plague. Subtle instructs Dapper:

> Sir, against one o'clock, prepare yourself.
>
> Till when you must be fasting; only, take
>
> Three drops of vinegar in, at your nose;
>
> Two at your mouth; and one, at either ear;
>
> Then, bathe your fingers' ends; and wash your eyes;
>
> To sharpen your five senses; and cry hum,
>
> Thrice; and then buzz, as often; and then, come. (1.2.164-70)

Face adds:

> And put on a clean shirt: you do not know
>
> What grace her Grace may do you in clean linen. (1.2.174-5)

Most of these details: the fasting, the vinegar, the clean linen, have plague associations, and there is evidence that Jonson added those details to a likely source for Dapper's con. Herford and Simpson report the findings of C.J. Sisson, who uncovered a real legal case parallel to Dapper's.

In the lawsuit of *Rogers* v. *Rogers*, a young man is asked to supply a sum of gold with the promise that he will be introduced to the Queen of Faerie. Herford and Simpson note that Jonson, "adds ritual touches about clean linen, fasting, drops of vinegar, and pronouncing the magic words 'hum' and 'buz'," [10] not to mention Dapper's gingerbread gag and confinement in the privy later in the play. Richard Levin casts doubt on Sisson's theory and its adoption by all modern editors of *The Alchemist*, and proposes other analogues that he believes more closely correspond to Dapper's humiliation, but Levin's proposed analogues are also missing many of the details Jonson adds, minus the clean linen.[11] To bolster his case, Levin dismisses the other details of Dapper's preparations as "gratuitous humiliations" (219). Others, such as Caroline McManus, have tried to draw some significance from the details Levin dismisses, with fair results.[12] No one has placed them specifically in a plague context even though the case for doing so is strong.

By 1610 the use of vinegar in various applications as a prophylactic against plague was well established. Jonson refers to one application in 5.2 when Face, trying to convince Lovewit that he has shut up the house because the cat died of plague, says,

> The cat, that kept the butt'ry, had it on her
> A week, before I spy'd it: but I got her
> Convey'd away i' the night. And so I shut
> The house up for a month--…Purposing then, sir,
> T' have burnt rose-vinegar, treacle, and tar,
> And ha' made it sweet…" (5.2.8-13)

This process was commonly recommended for treating a potentially infected space. The 1578 and 1593 plague orders of Elizabeth I, as well as the one issued by James I in 1603, all contain

the same "advise set downe…by the best learned in Physicke within this Realme" for "correcting the aire in houses": "Take a quantity of *Vineger* very strong, and put to it some small quantitie of *Rosewater*, ten branches of *Rosemarie*, put them all into a Basen, then take five or sixe *Flintstones*, heated in the fire till they be burning hote, cast them into the same *Vineger*, and so let the fumes be received from place to place of your house."[13] This practice was not meant simply as a palliative gesture, but was believed by some to counteract, or "correct," the bad air that was identified as one of the causes of plague.

If the fumigation Face claims to have intended to perform is not unusual in a plague context, neither is Dapper's treatment with vinegar, which was one of the chief substances recommended by the plague orders. Jonson clearly satirizes the recommendations of the plague orders concerning vinegar, but seems to deliberately remove his satire from a plague context. Under the heading, "Preservation by way of defence in open aire, and common assemblies to be used outwardly," the plague orders recommend, "in going abroad into the open aire in the streets, to hold some things of sweet savour in their hands, or in the corner of an handkerchife, as a sponge dipped in *Vineger* and *Rosewater* mixed, or in *Vineger*, wherein *Wormewood*, or *Rue* called also *Herbegrace*, hath bene boyled" (sig. B3.v).[14] If the Dapper episode is any indication, *The Alchemist* questions the value of vinegar as a plague remedy, but only risks ridiculing the application of vinegar for medical purposes outside of an explicit plague context for fear of being seen publicly criticizing the crown's plague orders.

The same danger would have resulted from any overt criticism of the Royal College of Physicians. Francis Herring, a member of the College, includes the use of vinegar in his advice for those who are visiting the sick in *Certaine Rules, Directions, or Advertisments for This Time*

of Pestilentiall Contagion… (1603), and his instructions are remarkably similar to Subtle's instructions for Dapper's visit with the Queen of Fairy:

> If any man be bound by Religion, consanguinitie, office, or anie such respect to visite the sicke parties, let him first provide, that the chamber be well perfumed with odoriferous trochiskes or such like, the windowes layd with the herbes aforenamed, the floore cleane swept, and sprinkled with rosewater and vineger: that there be a fire of sweete wood burning in the chimney, the windowes being shut for an houre, then open the casements toward the North. Then let him wash his face and hands with rosewater and rose-vineger, and enter into the chamber with a waxe candle in the one hand, & a sponge with rose-vineger and wormewood, or some other Pomander to smell unto. Let him hold in his mouth a peece of Mastic, Cinamon, Zedoarie, or Citron pill, or a Clove. Let him desire his sicke friend to speake with his face turned from him.
>
> When he goeth foorth, let him wash his handes and face with rose-vineger and water as before, especially if he have taken his friend by the hand as the maner is: and going presently to his owne house, let him change his garments, and lay those wherein he visited his friend, apart for a good time before he resume them againe.[15]

Many of these details have parallels in Dapper's humiliation. In addition to the anointing with vinegar and the emphasis on clean garments, his gag of gingerbread (first mentioned at 3.5.66) is almost certainly a parody of Herring's advice to hold something in one's mouth while visiting the infected. Herring recommends Zedoarie, which is, "The aromatic tuberous root of one or more species of Curcuma (N.O. Zingiberaceæ), of the East Indies and neighbouring countries, sold in two forms, long zedoary and round zedoary, and used as a drug, having properties

resembling those of ginger; also the plant itself" (OED). Jonson's substitute, gingerbread, appears to mock Herring's advice or the similar advice of his colleagues.

As for Dapper's confinement in the privy, privies themselves and the comments Subtle and Face make about their privy have clear plague associations.[16] As Subtle prepares to stash Dapper in "Fortune's privy lodgings," Face asks him, "Are they perfum'd? and his bath ready?" to which Subtle responds, "All. / Only the fumigation's somewhat strong" (3.5.79-81). In general, places where excrement accumulated were believed to engender plague. William Bullein writes in *A Dialogue against the Fever Pestilence* that Dr. Tocrub identifies as, "a meane to bryng the plague," several foods, behaviors, and locations such as, "Priueis, filthie houses, gutter chanilles, uncleane kept" (43). In addition, the specific language Face and Subtle use in their joke is a plague reference. Although a room may be perfumed for any number of reasons,[17] the reference to the smell of the privy as "perfume" and "fumigation" is reminiscent of the plague orders (the burning of rose-vinegar was considered a fume or fumigation) and Herring's instructions that the room of the visited be, "well perfumed with odoriferous trochiskes or such like." A trochisk is, "A medicated tablet or disk; a (round or ovate) pastille or lozenge" (OED).[18] Paulus Ægineta, a seventh-century Byzantine physician whose works were influential as late as the mid-nineteenth century,[19] offers trochisk recipes with ingredients such as frankincense, myrrh, ammoniac perfume, quicklime, burnt paper and arsenic, which, brought together with vinegar or wine, were formed into pills or lozenges the size of a coin. With such ingredients, it is clear that they could be quite caustic and odoriferous.

Trochisks have a long history of association with excrement in satirical literature. This is somewhat inevitable: they smell strong and not always pleasant; they are often green or brown in color; they are irregular in shape. To be completely clear, they look and sometimes smell like

turds. This fact is used to good effect in William Baldwin's anti-Catholic (and anti-medical, it should be said) satire *Beware the Cat* (1570). In order to clear his mind, Master Streamer devises a

> …gargaristical fume, whose subtle ascension is wonderful. I took the cat's, the fox's, and the kite's tongue and sod them in wine well near to jelly. Then I took them out of the wine and put them in a mortar and added to them of new cat's dung an ounce; of mustard seed, garlic, and pepper as much; and when they were with beating incorpored, I made lozenges and trochisks thereof.[20]

In addition to taking several of these himself, Master Streamer gives one to a "shrewd boy," who exclaims, "By God's bones, it is a cat's turd" (30). Jonson invokes the same associations between excrement and medicinal perfume for comic effect in satirizing a specific plague-time practice.

It would be a remarkable coincidence if stuffing gingerbread into Dapper's mouth and conveying him to a strongly "perfumed" room were not a parody of Herring's advice or the advice of other doctors in plague time, given that recommendations like Herrings were widely disseminated. *The Alchemist* seems to be generally skeptical of medical advice. It is hard to judge what the popular opinion of such remedies was, but the skepticism evident in *The Alchemist* indicates that it was at least conceivable to question them. Jonson dissociates Subtle's recommendation to Dapper from the realm of responsible medicine in various ways, but even though Jonson takes Subtle's instructions outside of a plague context, the plague is still an important subtext. The plague has probably been relegated to subtext because Jonson was trying to avoid being seen directly criticizing the crown's official stance on plague and the advice of the Royal College of Physicians.

It is also possible that Jonson was reluctant to lampoon too directly the practices of the late Queen. Subtle imagines Dapper's visit to the Queen of Fairy as a visit to one infected with plague, but is careful not to associate the episode directly with plague or Queen Elizabeth. The specific details of Subtle's instructions to Dapper indicate that he is lampooning Dapper's preparations rather than earnestly promoting them, but Jonson maintains plausible deniability against charges of libel or sedition. That Jonson's audience would have perceived the parody despite its concealment is evident. Caroline McManus shows that the Queen of Fairy episode in *The Alchemist* parodies a particular practice of Queen Elizabeth, that of bestowing alms on Maundy Thursday. McManus writes that *The Alchemist*'s parody of Queen Elizabeth works "a transmutation of the sacred to the secular" (191-2), with the ultimate effect of "the gradual demystification of the ritual and, quite possibly, the monarch who performed it" (192). Jonson's apparent overlay of plague time practices on Dapper's preparations to visit the Queen of Fairy may work in a similar way. Through her plague orders and various plague time proclamations, it is clear that Elizabeth went to great lengths to keep herself from the infected. For a discussion of this see the Introduction.

Plague is also a significant subtext for Abel Drugger's character and actions. Drugger is listed in "The Persons of the Play" as, "A Tobacco-man" (l. 5), but it is clear that his occupation encompasses other trades. Face mentions that he is, "Free of the Grocers" (1.3.4), meaning that he is a full member of the Grocers' Company. Herford and Simpson note that, "Grocers, apothecaries, and chandlers all sold tobacco, as well as inn-keepers and specialists like Drugger" (vol. 10, p. 64), but that assumes that Drugger specializes in tobacco. Perhaps he *intends* to specialize in tobacco, but the text makes it clear that he is primarily an apothecary and a physician. The joke, and the plague reference, is that he is not a very good one.

The strange thing is that nobody calls Drugger an apothecary even though his name is more or less an unambiguous indication that that is what he is. During his initial consultation with Drugger, Subtle says,

> There is a ship now, coming from Ormus,
> That shall yield him, such a commodity
> Of drugs…(1.3.59-61)

It is unlikely that Subtle is talking about tobacco here, since Ormus, or the kingdom of Hormuz, located on the Persian Gulf, was known as, "a wealthy entrepôt in the spice trade,"[21] and was located on the Persian Gulf. In the same exchange, Subtle says to Drugger,

> Ay, I know, you have arsenic,
> Vitriol, sal-tartar, argaile, alkali,
> Cinoper: I know all. (1.3.75-7)

Subtle goes on to say that he knows that Drugger will be,

> …a great distiller,
> And give a say (I will not say directly,
> But very fair) at the philosopher's stone. (1.3.78-80)

Subtle seems to think that Drugger is an aspiring Paracelsian, although the substances that he mentions had been common to medicine since the time of Paulus Ægineta. Subtle, if only to puff up Drugger's ego, treats him as if he is a physician. For his part, Drugger claims that he gives Dame Pliant "physic," "now and then" (2.6.34-6).

Although the evidence indicates that Drugger is, if not exclusively, at least a part-time physician or apothecary, there is every indication in the play that Drugger is terrible at his job. Face calls him,

A miserable rogue, and lives with cheese,

And has the worms. That was the cause indeed,

Why he came now. He dealt with me, in private,

To get a med'cine for 'em. (2.6.81-4)

The absurdity of Drugger seeking a remedy from Subtle can only be fully appreciated once it is established that Drugger should be competent enough to make a remedy for himself. The fact that he relies on a con-artist for his remedy only adds to the absurdity, even though it appears that Subtle claims he has a working remedy (2.6.84). That would only mean that the charlatan Subtle was better at Drugger's job than Drugger himself.

Equally absurd is Drugger's description of receiving a remedy for his indigestion from an old woman who lives in Seacoal Lane. Drugger says he paid two-pence for a remedy of, "sodden ale, and pellitory o' the wall" (3.4.120), a more or less arbitrary treatment for Drugger's symptoms. The joke, again, is that Drugger should be able to treat his own indigestion, but instead relies on someone with no bona fide credentials or expertise. Jonson's commentary here is that apothecaries and physicians were basically useless, a sentiment that had special resonance during plague time, when even the best, luckiest, and/or most skilled individuals could do very little to help their patients.

Much of the resentment expressed against physicians in early modern plague literature stems from the decision of many of them to flee the city in plague time, but they were also criticized for their arbitrary and often harmful remedies. Thomas Dekker rails against physicians in *The Guls Horne-booke* (1609), complaining that,

…phisick is *Non minus venefica, quam benefica* [no less poisonous than beneficial], it hath an ounce of gall in it, for every dram of hony. Ten *Tyburnes* cannot turne men over

> the perch so fast as one of these brewers of purgations: the very nerves of their practise being nothing but *Ars Homicidiorum* [The Art of Homicide], an Art to make poore soules kick up their heeles. In so much, that even their sicke grunting patients stand in more danger of M. Doctor and his drugs, then of all the Cannon shots which the desperate disease it selfe can discharge against them.[22]

Although Dekker does not directly associate his criticism of physicians with their actions in plague time, *The Guls Horne-booke* was written in 1609 during the worst plague outbreak since 1603, and it is safe to say that the historical conditions under which Dekker was writing colored his invective. Dekker's philippic against physicians might seem to employ a good deal of hyperbole, but the state of medicine described here by Dekker is essentially accurate. Physicians were dangerous; they employed poisons such as arsenic against disease; they drew pints of blood from their critically ill patients; they relied on medical thought that was millennia out of date. Jonson's portrayal of Drugger recalls Dekker's criticism of physicians, and Drugger's general incompetence is reflected more in his poor skills as a physician rather than his gullibility and simplemindedness in establishing his tobacco shop. It looks as if Jonson conceived Drugger as a physician but emended the text at some point to reflect a new profession, tobacconist, to avoid being criticized for directly satirizing physicians.[23] Regardless of Drugger's title, however, *The Alchemist* satirizes early modern medicine and physicians by showing him to be an ineffectual apothecary.

Although Drugger is clearly associated with plague medicine, Sir Epicure Mammon is the character in *The Alchemist* who is most directly associated with plague. Rebecca Totaro has written about how Mammon's utopian fantasies arise from plague, and she shows how Mammon's "contagious imagination" (115) is the play's chief vehicle for metaphorizing plague.

The opposite is true as well: nearly all of Mammon's fantasies of excess have their origins in specific plague anxieties, and it is the very real and pressing threat of plague that dictates their impressive scope. The first mention of Mammon's plague plans comes from Subtle, who, in anticipation of Mammon's arrival, tells Doll,

> Methinks I see him, entering ordinaries,
> Dispensing for the pox and plaguy houses,
> Reaching his dose; walking Moorfields for lepers;
> And off'ring citizens' wives pomander-bracelets,
> As his preservative, made of the elixir… (1.4.18-22)

Although the tone of this statement is mocking, it would be a mistake to characterize Subtle's description of Mammon as wholly facetious (and therefore inaccurate). Subtle has convinced Mammon that his motives for acquiring the elixir must be selfless if synthesizing it is to be successful, so what Subtle is mocking is Mammon's deception in saying that curing disease is his *sole* motive for seeking the elixir. It is safe to say that other motives command a greater share of Mammon's imagination, but there is no reason to think that his desire to cure England is not genuine. Mammon himself details his ambitions to Surly as they arrive at Lovewit's house. In describing the elixir that Subtle is making for him, he says,

> 'Tis the secret
> Of nature naturis'd 'gainst all infections,
> Cures all diseases coming of all causes,
> A month's grief, in a day; a year's, in twelve:
> And, of what age soever, in a month,
> Past all the doses of your drugging doctors.

I'll undertake, withal, to fright the plague

Out o' the kingdom, in three months. (2.1.63-70)

Even this motive is not entirely selfless—no one wants to live in a city ravaged by disease—but Mammon's desire to rid England of the plague may be read as a sincere one. Rebecca Totaro believes the play expresses "Mammon's sincere dream to improve the world, even if it was buried beneath the bolder desire to eat, drink, and fornicate beyond average ability" (118). The other aspects of Mammon's fantasy certainly do have a way of overshadowing the more noble goal of curing the sick, but his fantasies of excess are born from the dearth and suffering of plague time.

Consider Mammon's erotic fantasies. The same reproduction anxiety that Jonson expresses in *Epicene* and *Volpone* is clearly expressed in *The Alchemist* through Mammon, but Mammon is different in that he often emphasizes fertility over pleasure, as if his goal were not to please himself but to repopulate England. The autobiographical reasons for the reproduction anxiety Jonson expresses through his literature have already been discussed in the course of my chapter on *Volpone*; the two sides of this characteristic anxiety in Jonson's work—the delight in cuckoldry and the fatherly guilt Jonson repeats from the plague literature—meet in the figure of Mammon, who tells Surly,

I'll make an old man of fourscore, a child…

Restore his years, renew him like an eagle,

To the fifth age; make him get sons and daughters,

Young giants; as our Philosophers have done… (2.1.53-7)

Mammon's express goal in rejuvenating the old is so that they can reproduce. He goes so far as to suggest that he will "make" the old man he rejuvenates get sons and daughters, as if against

his will. Although the detail of the eagle is taken from Psalm 103, which also mentions a heavenly father who heals all diseases and pities his children, most of Mammon's fantasy seems completely bizarre outside of a plague context. Once it is revealed that 30, 578 Londoners died of plague in 1603 alone (Wilson 114) and 14,121 died of plague between 1604 and 1610 (Wilson 118), it is clear what interest Mammon might have had in repopulating London and what that had to do with plague.

Mammon's reproductive fantasies have a direct relationship with his fantasies of curing plague, and they invade his other fantasies of wealth and food. In addition to expressing a desire to "*concumbere* gold" (4.1.30) with Doll, Mammon tells her,

> Think therefore, thy first wish, now; let me hear it:
> And it shall rain into thy lap, no shower,
> But floods of gold, whole cataracts, a deluge,
> To get a nation on thee! (4.1.125-8)[24]

Mammon transforms his fantasy of gold into a fantasy of reproduction. His desire to singlehandedly repopulate an England ravaged by plague may reflect Jonson's efforts to express his parental guilt over losing his first son to plague, but there are also important plague associations. In addition to being an absurdly funny and unpleasant hyperbole, his use of the word "nation" to characterize the number of times he plans to impregnate Doll invokes England's national interests in replenishing its population in the wake of yearly significant plague epidemics for the better part of a decade. This may be another instance of what Richelle Munkhoff has identified as an association between representations of plague in post-1603 English literature and figurations of Elizabeth's body after her death. She claims that "At the end of her reign…Elizabeth's body—no matter how virginal—could not remain inviolate; it

became permeable to disease, subject to decay within, and thus figured as both a potential source of contagion and as a site of treason."[25] Munkhoff does not identify *The Alchemist* as an instance of such a phenomenon, but her claim that the "demand to reinvest Elizabeth with the status of Virgin Queen also signals a cultural need to rewrite the devastation caused by plague by reconstructing the disintegrated body politic" (105) applies to Mammon's inclusion of Doll in his fantasies of recovery from the plague. Jonson's depiction of Doll at once makes use of those associations and imagines their reversal into something like healing. If *The Alchemist,* through Doll, expresses disillusionment over the supposed impenetrability of the queen's body, it also imagines that as something that has the power to restore England.

A similar spirit animates Mammon's fantasies of food, which coincide with his fantasies of wealth and health. Mammon tells Face,

> We will be brave, Puff, now we ha' the med'cine.
> My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells,
> Dishes of agate, set in gold, and studded,
> With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths and rubies.
> The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels,
> Boil'd I' the spirit of Sol, and dissolv'd pearl,
> (Apicius' diet, 'gainst the epilepsy)
> And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
> Headed with diamond, and carbuncle. (2.2.71-9)

Mammon's extravagant imaginary diet signifies more than just the character's gluttony and avarice. The qualities of the particular feast that Mammon describes are medicinal as well as nourishing. The passage contains a direct allusion to a particular plague remedy. Herford and

Simpson note that the reference to camels' heels comes from Aelius Lampridius's history of the Roman emperor Heliogabalus, and they reproduce the appropriate passage in Latin (vol. 10, p. 74-5). F. H. Mares translates the passage: "In imitation of Apicius he frequently ate camels' heels and also cocks' combs taken from living birds, and the tongues of peacocks and nightingales, because he was told that one who ate them was immune from the plague" (p. 56, n.75-7). The history from which this passage comes does not portray Heliogabalus positively, and this passage, even if it is not apocryphal, is certainly intended to ridicule the man. Jonson's allusion characterizes a similar man with similarly extravagant tastes. Through Mammon, Jonson exposes such remedies as wasteful and ineffective.

As is seen in *Romeo and Juliet*, the anxiety that *The Alchemist* expresses about feasting and extravagant diet is related not just to famine but to plague as well. This is characteristic of a time when the plague orders were mandating Wednesday fasting, food was scarce and expensive, and city officials were banning feasts. F.P. Wilson reports certain orders of the London Court of Aldermen banning feasting in 1603: "On 12 July the London Companies were forbidden to hold any public feasts in their Halls, and it was suggested that a third of the money thus saved should be given towards the relief of the infected poor" (91). This was done in part because any public gathering was considered dangerous, but also because of a perceived need to conserve resources and live moderately. Mammon's immoderate desires are a direct response to the austerity promoted by city and national officials in England during a plague epidemic. They are the product of suffering and deprivation, and they express a desire to shed the shortages and anxieties of plague time and not exactly return to business as usual, but surpass in scope the horrors of the past, to counteract it with a bold, excessive, and often bizarre vision of fecundity, luxury, and plenitude.

When Mammon's elixir goes up *in fumo*, the reason he, Face, and Subtle fix on was also commonly used to explain why England was afflicted so severely with the plague. Their exchange appropriates plague discourse:

Mam. O my voluptuous mind! I am justly punish'd.

Face. And so am I, sir.

Mam. Cast from all my hopes—

Face. Nay, certainties, sir.

Mam. By mine own base affections.

Sub. O, the curst fruits of vice, and lust!

Mam. Good father,

It was my sin. Forgive it.

Sub. Hangs my roof

Over us still, and will not fall, O justice,

Upon us, for this wicked man! (4.5.74-80)

Mammon's admission of sin spurs Face to suggest that Mammon, "repent at home" (4.5.84), to try to save the labor of making the elixir. This pattern of expression, the attribution of calamity to divine justice, followed by an exhoration to admit sin and repent, is a feature of nearly every bit of plague writing in early modern England. This follows Jeremiah 18:8: "But if this nation, against whom I have pronounced, turne from their wickedness, I wil repent of the plague that I thoght to bring upon them."[26] In some early modern plague tracts, such as Anthony Anderson's *An Approved Medicine against the Deserved Plague* (1593) and Dekker's *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606), it comprises the sole subject. Various documents published by the Church of England also supported this understanding of the causes of plague in England. For

example, it issued *Certaine Praiers Collected out of a Fourme of Godly Meditations, Set Foorth by Her Maiesties Authoritie in the Great Mortalitie, in the Fift Yeere of Her Highnesse Raigne, and Most Necessarie to Be Used at This Time in the Like Present Visitation of Gods Heauie Hand for Our Manifold Sinnes, and Commended unto the Ministers and People of London* (1593), which states in its preface,

> We bee taught by many and sundry examples of holy Scriptures, that upon occasion of particular punishments, afflictions, and perils, which God of his most just judgement hath sometimes sent among his people, to shew his wrath against sinne, and to call his people to repentance, and to the redresse of their lives, the godly have bene provoked and stirred up to more fervencie & diligence in prayer, fasting, and almes deedes, to a more deepe consideration of their consciences, to ponder their unthankefulnesse and forgetfulnesse of Gods merciful benefites towards them…[27]

The "visitation of God's heavy hand" in the document's title refers to the plague epidemic of 1592-3, of course, and the recommended response to God's call to repentance by the followers of the Church of England is a deep consideration of their consciences. An unofficial form for prayer printed in broadside titled *In the time of Gods visitation by sickness, or mortality especially, may be used by governours of families* (1607) expresses the same sentiment as the Church of England's official form, but with stronger words:

> O Eternall, Almighty, and just God, merciful, loving, and holy father, wee thy humble servants humbly confesse and acknowledge here in thy presence, that all the imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts are onely evill continually, yea every man in his best estate is altogether vanitie. and we (dust and ashes) have grievously sinned, wee have transgressed thine holy lawes and ordinances, we have exceeded in measure,

number and weight, the iniquities of our forefathers, and have thereby justly deserved that thou shouldest in thy just judgement have drawne forth the sword of thy justice…[28]

Although this line of reasoning was used in response to many different types of personal and national calamity, it is significant that it appears in a play set in plague time, and it is hard not to read it as an allusion to that aspect of plague literature. Even more objective plague texts such as Thomas Lodge's tract *A Treatise of the Plague* espouse the official view of the ultimate cause of the plague by characterizing London as, "being now under the fatherly correction of Almightie God, and punished for our misdeeds by his heavy hand" (10).

Given Jonson's systematic association of Mammon with plague-time beliefs, it is likely that the failure of his endeavor to make the elixir is put in terms that audiences would have associated with plague literature. By doing so, *The Alchemist* undermines the authority of those who would claim that the plague is God's punishment for the iniquities of London, including the Church of England. He expresses through Mammon a deep skepticism of the whole line of reasoning that attributes England's calamities, plague in particular, to divine justice. Again, Jonson seems to remove the discourse from an explicit plague context, perhaps to avoid being accused of publicly criticizing the church and its doctrine.

Jonson does something similar when he makes fun of the comparison the Anabaptists make between London and the Babylon of *Revelation*, although Jonson is never very charitable to Anabaptists, and does not seem to care if he upsets them. Ananias cites *Revelation* 18:2 in remarking on the revelation of the enterprise of Subtle, Face, and Doll as a con when he says, "It is become a cage of unclean birds" (5.3.47), and the expanded passage from *Revelation* mentions plague:

> And he cryed out mightely with a loud voyce, saying, It is fallen, it is fallen, Babylon the great *citie,* & is become the habitation of devils, and the holde of all fowle spirits, and a cage of everie uncleane and hateful byrde.
>
> For all nations have dronken of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the Kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the marchants of the earth are waxed riche of the abundance of her pleasures.
>
> And I heard another voyce from heaven say, Go out of her, my people, that ye be not partetakers in her sinnes, and that ye receive not of her plagues.
>
> For her sinnes are come up unto heauen, and God hathe remembred her iniquities.[29]

This is a situation where Jonson does not have to spell out to his audience the plague allusion. Since *The Alchemist* is a product of plague time and is set in plague time, Jonson's audience would have immediately recognized the words of *Revelation* and the reference to plague. A certain segment of early modern London's population professed that the world was in its latter days and cited *Revelation* and other biblical passages as evidence. For example, Christopher Ocland's anti-Catholic tract, *The fountaine and welspring of all variance, sedition, and deadlie hate. Wherein is declared at large, the opinion of the famous divine* Hiperius, *and the consent of the doctors from* S. Peter *the Apostle his time, and the primitive Church in order to this age: expresly set downe, that Rome in Italie is signified and noted by the name of Babylon, mentioned in the 14. 17. and 18. chapters of the Revelation of S. Iohn* (1590), relies on its audience to draw the connection between plague, *Revelation*, and the state of the world in 1590 without ever referring to Revelation 18 except in the document's title. Ocland describes the state of the world under the influence of the Catholic Church as diseased, implying that the Catholic Church is to

blame for the world's disease. In doing so, Ocland invokes plague without actually mentioning it:

> Right honorable, the warres, rumors of warres, breach of brotherly love, manifold troubles and dissention growing everie where through Europe, which is the part of the worlde professing Christ, argue the dissolution of all things premonished by our Lord not to bee farre hence distant… The remedie of which mortall maladie consisteth in this, to knowe and search out the cause, and that knowen, to remove the same, and then to apply medicine for curing of it.[30]

Ocland echoes the apocalyptic rumblings that had been on the rise since the Spanish Armada, but also talks about applying medicine to the ills of the world in expressing his hope that the fulfillment of the prophecy of *Revelation* could be reversed. By running together war and disease, Ocland alludes to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse from *Revelation* 6:1-8. One of the horsemen, Death, was also commonly known as Plague. In placing the end times in an expressly medical context, Ocland alludes to the plague that is present as subtext in his own text and the plague's immanence in English and European domestic and international affairs.

History shows that such concerns were overblown, and Jonson criticizes the apocalyptic thinking that accompanied plague in his portrayal of Ananias, whose citation of *Revelation* shows his over-eagerness to place his own misfortune in a biblical context that is disproportionate to his suffering. The effect is similar to that generated by Mammon's understanding of his misfortune: a diminishment and repudiation of the vain finger-pointing of religious figures and a promotion of goodwill over fear, guilt, and recrimination.

Jonson's direct association of Mammon with plague and his just-below-the-surface allusion to plague-time beliefs through the zealot Ananias cannot have been missed by his

audience, who would have perceived the plague references and their intended effect. As Patrick Phillips puts it, "as audiences recognized with delight the characters, landmarks, and current events of their city in 1610, *The Alchemist* cast a kind of comic, mirthful sheen over the real and frightening world in which they lived" (55). I suggest that Jonson does so by referring to specific plague-time beliefs and behaviors within the play not just through the more or less overt references in the characterization of Mammon and Ananias, but more subtly in the characterization of Dapper and Drugger. Built into the comedy of the play is a satirical critique of various practices and beliefs that Jonson and his audience may have felt were preposterous and ineffective.

Jonson, having woven a dense fabric of plague alusion in *The Alchemist*, chose to avoid more explicit commentary on the issue. Perhaps he simply trusted his audience to get the joke. So much of Jonson's commentary is under the surface that we may just attribute it to his *modus operandi*. However, it is significant that behind each of these obscured plague references lies a very powerful entity. The Dapper con makes light of certain parts of the plague orders issued by James I. The Drugger con paints grocers, apothecaries, tobacconists, and perhaps physicians in a negative light, and these trades were all represented by powerful organizations. Mammon's attribution of God's judgment to his own misfortune makes fun of the Church of England's stated position on the cause of plague epidemics. Rather than tackle those entities directly, Jonson obscures the inspirations for his plague satire.

---

[1] Patrick Phillips, "'You Need Not Fear the House': The Absence of Plague in *The Alchemist*," *Ben Jonson Journal* 13 (2006): 43-62, esp. 44. Further reference to this essay will appear parenthetically in the text.
[2] Kelly J. Stage, "Plague Space and Played Space in Urban Drama, 1604," *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2010), 54-75, esp. 61.

[3] c.f. Phillips: "this article explores not the presence of plague in the play but its surprising erasure in the final act, when the 'visitation' of Lovewit's house is revealed to be only another illusion of the cony-catchers Subtle and Face" (43).
[4] Traister, "'A plague," 173.
[5] See Cheryl Lynn Ross, "The Plague of *The Alchemist*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 41 no. 3 (1988): 439-58; Neill, *Issues*, 24.
[6] See Matthew Martin, "Play and Plague in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*," *English Studies in Canada* 26 (2000): 393-408; DeWall, "'Sweet Recreation," 133-149.
[7] Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. F. H. Mares, The Revels Plays, (London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1967), p. 9, l.1. All citations of the play are taken from this volume and will appear parenthetically in the text. In the sense used here, "hot," means, "Intense, extreme, acute; severe, raging; frenetic. Originally and chiefly: *spec.* characterized by intense suffering, discomfort, or danger, esp. with reference (in early use) to disease or famine or (later) of fighting, battle, etc. (OED, "hot, adj. and n." A. adj. II. 9a.).
[8] Wilson states that from 1604-1611, "the plague was most deadly in the hot weather, and in several years its activities were confined almost entirely to the autumn" (118).
[9] For the timing of *The Alchemist*, see Charles Montgomery Hathaway, Jr., introduction to *The Alchemist*, by Ben Jonson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903). Hathaway places the time of the play on or about October 24, and writes, "this is just nine days before the beginning of Michaelmas Term (November 2-November 25), and in I. 139 the three rogues are anxious not to 'loose the beginning of a *terme*.' People would be coming to town all the week before, of course" (13). It is safe to assume that clerks were making preparations in anticipation of the beginning of the term. Since Michaelmas Term was the term most often adjourned due to plague, the fact that it appears to be proceeding as usual is another indication that the London of the play is returning to business as usual.
[10] *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, vol. 10: Commentary, (Clarendon Press, 1950), 48.
[11] Richard Levin, "Another 'Source' for *The Alchemist* and Another Look at Source Studies," *English Literary Renaissance* 28.2 (Spring 1998): 210-230. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[12] Caroline McManus, "Queen Elizabeth, Dol Common, and the Performance of the Royal Maundy," *English Literary Renaissance* 32.2 (Spring 2002): 189-213. McManus cites Katherine M. Briggs, who, "notes that the vinegar used in Dapper's rites 'was a simple form of the suffumigation used in all intercourse with spirits. In the same way fasting was an almost indispensable preliminary'" (207). McManus indicates that Briggs takes her information from a 1715 text, a little late for comparison with *The Alchemist*. The use of vinegar as a plague reference is at least as plausible and is supported by contemporaneous literature. Further references to McManus's essay will appear parenthetically in the text.
[13] James I, *Orders, thought meete by his Majestie, and his Privie Counsell, to be executed throughout the counties of this realme, in such townes, villages, and other places, as are, or may be hereafter infected with the plague, for the stay of further increase of the same. Also, an advise set downe by the best learned in physicke within this realme, containing sundry good rules and easie medicines, without charge to the meaner sort of people, aswel for the preservation of his good subjects from the plague before infection, as for the curing and ordering of them after they shalbe infected*, (London: 1603), sig. B3.r. Further references to this document will appear parenthetically in the text. Other plague texts repeat the recommendations in the plague orders nearly verbatim. See, for example, Learned Phisition, *Present remedies against the plague: shewing sundrye preservatives for the same*… (London: 1603), sig. A4.r-v, B3.r.
[14] cf. Jan van der Noot, *The governance and preservation*, sig. A.vii.v-B.r.
[15] Francis Herring, *Certaine rules, directions, or advertisments for this time of pestilentiall contagion: with a caveat to those that weare about their neckes impoisoned amulets as a preservative from the plague* (London: 1603), sig. B.v.
[16] I am not suggesting that plague is the only connection to Dapper's confinement in the privy. Others have suggested various associations. See, for example, Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. 143-162. Paster believes that Jonson's point in stashing Dapper in the privy is to allude to Bottom's humiliation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Paster claims that *The Alchemist* "focuses precisely on its anal coding" (143), and on, "the bodily cathexes of maternal nurture" (155).
[17] For example, when Mammon fantasizes about his seraglio, he tells Face, "My mists / I'll have of perfume, vapour'd 'bout the room, / To lose ourselves in" (2.2.48-50). This passage contributes to the general sense of luxury and sensuality Mammon imagines , and need not refer directly to plague.

[18] For recipes for various trochisks and their uses, see Francis Adams, ed. and trans., *The Seven Books of Paulus Ægineta*, vol. 3 (London: C. and J. Adlard, 1847), 528-536. Herring seems to be using the term in the sense of something like a sachet or a urinal cake. There is some evidence that certain trochisks were used in this application. In his commentary on *The Seven Books of Paulus Ægineta*, Francis Adams notes, "many of the ancient trochisti were used as external applications" (536).
[19] For an early modern Latin translation of Paulus Ægineta, See George Etherege, *In libros aliquot pauli Aeginetæ, hypomnemata quædam, seu obseruationes medicamentorum, quæ hac ætate in vsu sunt per Georgium Edrychum medicum pro iuuenum studijs ad praxim medicam, collecta* (London: 1588). This book contains certain of Ægineta's trochisk recipes (sig. C7.r.) as well as a section on treating plague (sig. D3.v-D5.v).
[20] William Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. and Michael Flachman (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1988), 29.
[21] *The Alchemist*, ed. F. H. Mares, 39 n59.
[22] Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Horne-booke*, in *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London: Hazell, Watson, and Viney, Ltd., 1885), 216.
[23] This begs the question of how Dekker was able to escape censure for his criticism of the physicians. Although he wrote some of his plague pamphlets anonymously, his name is on the title page of *The Guls Horne-Booke*. Perhaps Jonson was more cautious due to his previous run-ins with the authorities.
[24] Doll's response is delightful: "You are pleas'd, sir, / To work on the ambition of our sex" (4.1.128-9), she says, as if what he proposes is reasonable, attainable, and enjoyable.
[25] Richelle Munkhoff, "Contagious Figurations: Plague and the Impenetrable Nation after the Death of Elizabeth," in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011), 97-112, esp. 98. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[26] Jeremiah 18:8 (Geneva 1560)
[27] Church of England, *Certaine Praiers*, sig. A2.r.
[28] Anon., *In the time of Gods visitation by sicknesse of mortality especially may be used by governours of families* (London, 1607).
[29] Revelation 18:2-5 (Geneva 1560).
[30] Christopher Ocland, *The fountaine and welspring of all variance, sedition, and deadlie hate. Wherein is declared at large, the opinion of the famous divine Hiperius, and the consent of the doctors from S. Peter the Apostle his time, and the primitive Church in order to this age: expresly set downe, that Rome in Italie is signified and noted by the name of Babylon, mentioned in the 14. 17. and 18. chapters of the Reuelation of S. John* (London: 1590), sig. A2.r.

Conclusion

Section 1: Shakespeare and Jonson

In my comparison of Shakespeare's and Jonson's dramatic response to plague, it is tempting to assign them the roles that critics have become accustomed to doing since Jonson himself claimed that Shakespeare was "for all time." The typical differentiation between the two has fallen along the line Jonson established in his dedication in the First Folio; Shakespeare is "for all time," but Jonson is microscopically focused on skewering the fashions of his historical moment. Some are not satisfied with that distinction, however. Ian Donaldson notes that Shakespeare has been "abstracted, generalized, and de-contextualized"[1] since his death, while Jonson has been dismissed by critics and dismissed as "particularized, ephemeral, transitory" (189). Donaldson's point is that critics do a double disservice by perpetuating what he sees as an artificial distinction between Shakespeare and Jonson by ignoring the historicist elements of Shakespeare and the modes of thought and feeling in Jonson.

It is easy to see how this division has arisen between the two. We know nearly nothing about Shakespeare's life, which makes it impossible to apply the same kind of biographical scrutiny to his works as is possible with Jonson's. There are also important differences in the oeuvres of the two. Shakespeare appears at ease in any genre of play, but Jonson is clearly at his best in his comedies (and particularly in his *plague-time* comedies), and his tragedies are generally regarded as inferior. Both *Sejanus* and *Catiline* were disasters when they were first produced, and they have never been as popular among audiences and critics as his plague time

plays.[2] Much of Jonson's poetry is more overtly autobiographical than Shakespeare's poetry, as Jonson addresses the deaths of his children and refers to many friendships and acquaintances.

Differences aside, however, Shakespeare and Jonson have much more in common than anyone has recognized. The most remarkable similarity between the two playwrights is that they both lost a son in plague time, if not to plague itself. We know that Jonson's oldest son died of plague. Ernest Gilman's work on the impact of that death on Jonson's artistic expression sensitively addresses a question that is nearly impossible to answer: why is the plague missing from Jonson's epigram on the death of his first son, titled "On My First Sonne"? The answer is, of course, that it is not, but its presence is hidden. Gilman writes that it is "possible to locate the epigram within two plague frames: the outbreak of 1603 read as a moment of national crisis marked by the death of Elizabeth and the concurrent entry into the kingdom of her successor and the pestilence; and—indexed to these broader events—the death of young Benjamin as a more intimate crisis for his poet-father" (170). Gilman demonstrates successfully how the poem expresses Jonson's unwillingness to acknowledge the impact of plague on his own life and in his nation's history.

In light of the relatively clear link between Jonson's dramatic representation of plague and the death of his first son, it is tempting to conclude that the deaths of Shakespeare's sister Anne in 1579 and his son Hamnet in 1596 had a similar impact. It is possible, though unlikely, that both died of plague. There are hardly any details of Anne's death, and present-day accounts of Hamnet's death seem to point to a protracted illness and not the sudden death that plague usually brought.[3] Plague is also less likely in both cases because everyone else in the family managed not to catch it. In 1579 neither William nor his parents and siblings caught plague; in 1596 Anne, Judith, and Susanna, along with William's parents, John and Mary, were all living

together at the time of Hamnet's death (Greenblatt 46), and it would have been a minor miracle for them to remain free of plague if Hamnet had it. A 1593 letter from Philip Henslowe to his son-in-law Edward Alleyn indicates that it was common to talk of plague infecting whole families or houses rather than individuals. Henslowe writes, "we have be flytted with feare of the sycknes but thanckes be unto god we are all at this time in good health in owr howse but Rownd a bowt us yt hathe bene all moste in every howse abowt us & whole households deyed… Robart brownes wife in shordech & all her cheldren & howshowld be dead & her dores shut upe."[4] The odds were that if one member of a household caught plague, the rest of the household would as well.

In spite of these good reasons to dismiss bubonic plague as the cause of Anne's and Hamnet's deaths, it is significant that those deaths came from illness during plague time, and they may have been considered "plague" deaths even if bubonic plague had not been the culprit. The trauma of those deaths, if there was any, has been notoriously difficult to locate in Shakespeare's work. Stephen Greenblatt explores the possibility that Shakespeare's plays express trauma associated with Hamnet's death not just in *Hamlet*, which has long been interpreted as a response to Hamnet's death, but in the rest of Shakespeare's corpus. Greenblatt writes, "there is, at the very least, no reason to think that Shakespeare simply buried his son and moved on unscathed. He might have brooded inwardly and obsessively, even as he was making audiences laugh at Falstaff in love or at the wit contests of Beatrice and Benedick. Nor is it implausible that it took years for the trauma of his son's death fully to erupt" (42). This resembles what Ernest Gilman claims about the plague's presence in literature in the conclusion to his essay on Jonson's "On My First Sonne." Gilman writes that the impact of plague on early modern literature should be "registered broadly, both early and late, and by various means, in the

writing of the host culture,"[5] By the same token, Anne's and Hamnet's deaths will probably be found early and late, and by various means throughout Shakespeare's works. One possible mode of expressing grief over his sister's and his son's deaths might be to address plague anxieties in his plays. It might be fruitful to consider whether the anxieties expressed through Juliet have anything to do with Anne, for example, or whether Timon's expression of his misanthropy through the language of plague and disease has anything to do with Hamnet.

Certain other biographical similarities between Shakespeare and Jonson are obvious. They were both popular early modern playwrights living and working in plague-time London, for example. That is a fairly exclusive fraternity, however, and more should be made of that connection between the two men. Not much is made of the fact that Shakespeare's company produced *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, in addition to four other plays by Jonson, as Richard Dutton reminds us in *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism* (140), but it is tempting to ask if *Timon of Athens* would have been the same play without the trope of the contained misanthrope that is so evident in those plays by Jonson. Russ McDonald has suggested that a more thorough examination of the relationship between the works of the two men would be useful, and that not only would it be useful to consider Shakespeare's influence on Jonson, but Jonson's influence on Shakespeare.[6]

Shakespeare and Jonson were both products of their environment, and they both reproduced important aspects of their culture. More than any other phenomenon, the plague held sway over the endeavors of everyone in London, and I have shown in my chapter on *Timon of Athens* how the plague was a particular concern for players and playwrights. The plague disrupted the lives of Shakespeare and Jonson in nearly identical ways, forcing them to spend periods of time away from the playhouses and their families. It is hard to imagine that the plague

did not influence the plays of the two men in similar ways, but there are important differences that should be acknowledged. It is Jonson, not Shakespeare, who acknowledges plague as an English problem and one that should be expressly addressed in a play. Although Ian Munro is correct in his assertion that "The plague city is always plural: London under plague is haunted by Florence, Rome, Jerusalem, Athens, Thebes, Nineveh, the cities of the plain" (179), and that relationship cuts both ways—setting a play in Athens invokes that city's long history with plague—Jonson brings the plague home and faces it directly.

Perhaps surprisingly, then, it is Shakespeare, not Jonson, who invokes plague's darker realities in his plays by depicting abject poverty and lack. The class divisions evident in *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Timon of Athens* express an anxiety that has plague as one of its causes. This may be the only instance where Shakespeare is more overt in exploring a plague theme than Jonson is. The pursuit of wealth in *Volpone*, *Epicoene,* and *The Alchemist* certainly points to lack and class division, and Face and Subtle talk about being down-and-out before they partnered, but extreme poverty is not depicted in any of those plays as it is in Shakespeare's.

That has something to do with the genres of plays I've chosen; all of the Jonson plays in this study are comedies, and two of Shakespeare's plays are tragedies. The resolutions of Jonson's three comedies certainly have something to do with their genre, but it is significant that Jonson chose that genre for his play about plague time. Rather than dwelling on the horrors and abuses of plague-time London, *The Alchemist* exorcises the criminal element that ran amok during plague time and rewards the returned runaway Lovewit with the spoils of Subtle, Face, and Doll's endeavors, which suggests to Jonson's well-to-do Blackfriars audience that they will be even better off than they were before the plague hit. Tragedy might seem to us to be the more

appropriate vehicle for airing plague anxieties, but in fact the resumption of playgoing marked the abatement of any given plague epidemic, and plays, comedies in particular, performed an essential function in knitting a plague-stricken community back together. Even that had its limits, however. Despite the fact that *The Alchemist* is a comedy, its ending seems to amplify social divisions at the same time it insists to its audience that everything is alright.

Like *Volpone* and *Epicoene*, Shakespeare's plague comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, promotes the interests of the group over the desires of the individual, but the tragedies are both unusual. *Romeo and Juliet* is bizarrely festive and relies on chance to drive the tragic plot, and *Timon of Athens* has as its central figure a non-hero who is solely responsible for whatever misfortune befalls him. As most of the comedies do, *Romeo and Juliet* seems to promote group welfare over the needs of the individual. Romeo and Juliet rebel against their group but fail to succeed, with the result that all are punished, which might ultimately reinforce rather than challenge the status quo. Friar Laurence and the prince both try to use their example to restore the fractured society of Verona. Upon learning that Romeo has shifted his affections from Rosaline to Juliet, Laurence sees an opportunity: "For this alliance may so happy prove / To turn your households' rancour to pure love" (2.2.91-2). Upon their deaths, the Prince sees the same opportunity; he tells Capulet and Montague, "See what a scourge is laid upon your hate, / That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love" (5.3.291-2). Capulet and Montague are joined in grief through the sacrifice of Romeo and Juliet, which the Prince characterizes as a punishment from God. The differences they thought were so important destroyed their children and their community. The message is to try to love one another to protect those things.

Timon of Athens, on the other hand, is as stark an indictment of group ideology as exists in early modern drama, and Timon's struggle is expressly an individual and ideological one. By

removing Timon physically from the city in the middle of the play, Shakespeare and Middleton disentangle him from the bankrupt values of city and society that the play exposes. One of the effects of Timon's isolation is that the individual is placed in stark relief against the values that were commonly held to comprise subjectivity (with the curious exception of family).

Timon of Athens importantly asks what constitutes subjectivity when the individual is bereft of the trappings of society; it demands a reckoning of the respective advantages of city and social life on the one hand and autonomy on the other. In this way, the play participates in a larger examination of subjectivity and the city life throughout the literature of the period by framing a debate. Is the play's audience supposed to interpret Timon's death as a critique of the individuality that was increasingly being promoted in early modern literature, or as the unfair and tragic result of justifiably repudiating the city and society? It is difficult to say.

Other early and late Shakespeare plays such as *Titus Andronicus, Othello, Coriolanus,* and *The Tempest* pit the individual against society in interesting ways, but only *Timon of Athens* explicitly and consistently associates plague with the breakdown of civility and sociability. The fact that it is done overtly only in *Timon of Athens* raises questions that can probably be answered by considering the historical context in which the play was written, or the fact that it probably had at least two authors, but in certain ways the play represents the evolution of Shakespeare's dramatic representation of plague by methods that go back at least as far as *Romeo and Juliet*.

As Jonson does in his plague-time comedies, Shakespeare addresses plague anxieties in his plays by focusing on the containment of characters who have been associated with those anxieties. In the tragedies, those concealed plague anxieties add to the sense of the tragic demise of Mercutio, Romeo, Juliet, and Timon. Plague beliefs are alluded to directly, but they are also

used as a metaphor for the condition of being outcast, of a fatal rejection of and by society. The use of the same plague themes, motifs, and modes of expression in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* makes it clear that plague is not just a metaphor, but a material influence on the play's creation and modes of representation. The play's containment of the two characters most closely associated with plague anxieties, along with its erasure of any explicit plague reference, provides a clearer understanding of the strategy of containment and its link to the exigencies of plague in the Shakespeare tragedies in this study.

The evolution of Jonson's dramatic representation is clearer than Shakespeare's, but follows the same basic outline and emphasizes a containment motif as a means of alleviating plague anxieties. Volpone, Morose, and *The Alchemist*'s "venture tripartite" are explicitly contained after they are loaded with plague anxieties. The difference in Jonson's plays is that there appears to be a concerted effort to respond to plague for the benefit of the audience. *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, and *The Alchemist* all minimize the threat that plague represents and promote sociability in a way that seems more overtly connected to plague than any of Shakespeare's plays.

Section 2: Crisis, Plague and Print

Almost everyone who writes on plague highlights its social dimension. Paula Backscheider begins her Preface to Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* by stating, "A plague is always a moral as well as biological crisis for a community. It allows no individuals; it makes all people a community and emphasizes human relationships."[7] This is certainly true of the representation of plague in literature; for the most part literature emphasizes the role plague has in forming and strengthening communities. But historically, plague is noted more for its power

to dissolve, at least temporarily, communities and human relationships. The responses to plague evident in the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson overwhelmingly depict communities forming around disasters and rejecting or integrating any character associated with plague, but early modern plague pamphlets paint a more pessimistic picture that seems to be more in line with historical reality.

Early modern drama showed its audience what it wished were true even as it reflected the grim realities of plague time. Dekker's plague pamphlets and others like them ran in the opposite direction, sensationalizing the abandonment of London by its rich citizens and characterizing plague-time London as a Darwinian free-for-all. Reality lies somewhere between those extremes of optimism and pessimism. David Herlihy's imaginative but slim volume *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* offers useful insights into the plague's influence on the shaping of western civilization from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. In identifying the types of "social fissures" that the plague creates, Herlihy writes, "The plague caused divisions between the healthy and the sick; between those in the cultural mainstream and those at its margins, namely, strangers, travelers, beggars, lepers, and Jews; and between the mass of society and its cultural leaders, its governors, priests, and physicians. These fissures cut across society in complex and at times pernicious ways."[8] In significant ways, the plague did highlight social fissures that threatened the long-established political order of medieval Europe and early modern England. The plague clashed with and exposed ideology, and altered perceptions of subjectivity in a radically democratic way that represented a real opportunity for challenging hegemonic social order. The plague, in addition to whatever else it represents, was revolution.

Some of Herlihy's claims have been questioned. His own editor, Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., does a fine job explaining the limitations of Herlihy's specific claim about the relationship

between plague and the printing press, but the link between the two phenomena is striking.[9] Herlihy writes, "The late medieval population plunge raised labor costs, and also raised the premium to be claimed by the one who could devise a cheaper way of reproducing books. Johann Gutenberg's invention of printing on the basis of moveable metal type in 1453 was only the culmination of many experiments carried on across the previous century" (50). According to Herlihy, the plague caused the population plunge, and Gutenberg invented a machine that replaced thousands of human workers because labor was scarce. Possibly. But what is more important is whatever actual intersection plague had with print and the printing press.

The rise of print culture and the persistence of plague in early modern Europe both represented the potential for social and political upheaval, and anxieties about both were sometimes expressed in terms of the other. Consider Thomas Dekker's oft-cited mock caveat to M. Cuthbert Thurseby, Water Bailiffe of London in *The Wonderfull Yeare,* already cited in the chapter on *Epicoene*:

> If you read, you may happilie laugh; tis my desire you should, because mirth is both *Phisicall,* and wholesome against the *Plague:* with which sicknes, (to tell truth) this booke is, (though not sorely) yet somewhat infected. I pray, drive it not out of your companie for all that; for (assure your soule) I am so jealous of your health, that if you did but once imagine, there were gall in mine Incke, I would cast away the Standish, and forsweare medling with anie more *Muses.* (3)

Dekker equates sedition through print ("gall in mine Incke") with infection, and apparently wants Cuthbert Thuresby to believe that his book can transmit plague even while it has the ability to protect its readers from plague.[10] This passage demonstrates the extent to which anxieties over print and plague had coincided by 1603. The relationship had developed within the popular

imagination of the people of London to the point that Dekker uses it to harass a public official. One of the qualities shared by the two that allows the equation is undifferentiation and the increasing anxiety over things and phenomena that had the potential to undifferentiate. I have already demonstrated how plague had that power, but print also did in important ways.

In early modern England conditions were right for a significant confrontation between two ideologies with conflicting notions of the individual. Democratic undifferentiation clashed with the Feudal scheme of heirarchy, due in part to the Reformation, population density and education levels, but also due to the popularity of stage plays, the widespread mechanical reproducibility of texts, and plague. [11] With the printing and sale of plague pamphlets, mortality bills and plays by Shakespeare and Jonson essentially side-by-side, England had reached a point in its history where new ideas could be reproduced and purchased on a significant scale, and this phenomenon contributed to an important shift in subjectivity from group identification to a growing emphasis on individuality that has been traced through the literature of the early modern period.[12]

At the same time people were becoming more likely to think of themselves as individuals, the rise of the printing press was diminishing the individuality of things by inevitably excluding what Walter Benjamin describes as their "aura."[13] In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin writes,

> the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and

> renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. (1169-70)

I follow Benjamin in believing that this phenomenon nurtures revolutionary thinking, and that the rise in the availability of printed books is a significant step in the process. The practice of mechanically reproducing art devalues it, but at the same time makes it more accessible, less mystical, and less authoritative.

That plague has a similarly destabilizing effect on value is apparent in *Timon of Athens*. In the midst of a plague epidemic, the value of a human life, the value of a loaf of bread, the value of a sack of wool, the value of friendship, etc., all fluctuated wildly. The indiscriminate nature of the plague at once suggested the artificiality of social and economic difference and heightened the perception of those differences. As Backscheider asserts, the plague allowed no individuals, and as Girard asserts, the plague became a metaphor for ritualized violence that has as one of its features an undifferentiation of categories of human identity. Backscheider, Girard, and trauma theory all suggest that one of the goals of representing plague in literature is to restore the community, and we see that play out in all of the plays in this study. However, Girard also notes, along with Herlihy, that the plague heightened the perception of social and economic differences. What is perceptible in this clash between history and literature, plague and print, is a very fine balance between revolution and hegemony. The structures of power we erect ought to keep us safe if we are to accept the curbs they institute to guarantee our safety. It was especially clear during plague time that there were limits on the safety the government could provide, and it became possible for the average English citizen to weigh the costs and advantages of that social contract in a way that was unpalatable during the status quo.

While plague literature expresses anxiety about the destabilizing effect of plague on human identity and individuality, it also expresses anxiety about the rise of print, the very medium it uses to express those anxieties. This phenomenon has something to do with the relationship Ernest Gilman identifies between plague and language. Gilman writes, "in the English Reformation, the infliction of plague is to be understood fundamentally as a language event foreshadowed by, and issuing from the Word—an event, therefore, fundamentally discursive even before it becomes the subject of plague writing, an event that presents itself as a text to be read" (73). Gilman believes that the English response to plague, as opposed to the Italian response to plague (which is more visual), is based in writing, and mainly in print. Plague writing employs standard literary tropes, guiding public perception of an epidemic into preconceived moral and ideological frameworks. Early modern plague literature expresses anxieties over the two phenomena—the plague epidemic and its disappearance into cliché—in identical ways.

The beginnings of English drama and plague literature run roughly parallel, and the mortality bills in particular highlight the confluence of plague and print anxieties in early modern London. London's Parish Clerks were required to keep mortality figures as early as 1538, as Erin Sullivan notes,[14] and the earliest surviving broadside mortality bills, which appear to have been produced in great quantity for sale to the public, date to 1603. The mortality bills appear to represent the very first examples of on-demand printed news, a phenomenon that was made possible by the prevalence of printing presses and the relative affordability of print. Sullivan claims that although the mortality bills reported deaths from all causes, plague was the main motivating factor behind their production: "it was the onset of plague more than anything else

that instigated attempts at citywide record keeping" (78). Plague spurred the desire for printed news, and thus for printing presses, printers, compositors, stationers, etc.

Plague created conditions that fostered the increased prevalence of print in English society. This is clear from the recent work of Stephen Greenberg, whose "Plague, the Printing Press, and Public Health in Seventeenth-Century London" makes several important claims about the 1603 bills of mortality printed by John Windet for the Company of Parish Clerks of London.[15] By comparing the two surviving full sets of 1603 mortality bills (held by the British Library and Harvard's Houghton Library), Greenberg finds that Windet used at least two separate presses to produce some if not all of his 1603 mortality bills, which suggests a large print run (5000-6000) with an unusually brief (24 hours or less) turnaround time (517). If Greenberg is correct, and there is little reason to question his findings, then tens of thousands of mortality bills were printed and made available for public sale in 1603-4. This unprecedented scale of production suggests that relatively extensive printing could be done on-demand in response to timely information.

Demand for mortality bills seems to have been so high that they were being pirated. Greenberg also notes that two of the bills in each set are printed under a separate name, Felix Kyngston. Although there are several possible explanations for the variation, Greenberg suggests piracy: "Why was Felix Kyngston pirating John Windet's monopoly in September of 1603? For pirating is what it was. In fact, Windet complained about Kyngston to the Court of the Stationers' Company, who fined Kyngston ten shillings on 14 May 1604. Kyngston paid the fine on 25 June" (524).

Piracy of the mortality bills had implications beyond licensing disputes. The unreliability of print, along with the uncertainty of plague time, created an environment in which an official

response unquestionably existed, but nobody could be certain what it was. James Christie's 1893 account of the involvement of the Company of Parish Clerks in reporting plague deaths through weekly mortality bills cites a complaint from the 1610 minutes of the Company

> that many false and untrue bills of the number of deaths, as well as of the common sickness called the plague, have been of late times and still are, delivered and given out by members of this Fellowship, whereby the same bills, being variously delivered, can receive no certain belief or credit, neither at home nor in foreign parts beyond the seas, whither they be many times transported to the public hurt and inconvenience of sundry the King's subjects, merchants, and others in their trade and residence beyond the seas.[16]

Runaways and merchants relied on the accuracy of mortality figures, especially in plague time, to determine when it was safe to return to London. The concern of the Clerks suggests that not only could inconsistencies in mortality data inadvertently harm England, but that such inconsistencies impacted international trade and politics, and that misinformation might actually be actively employed against England by its enemies to weaken the country, its people, and its trade.

As a result of this phenomenon, print came to be considered less reliable and more dangerous. As its prominence in early modern English society increased, so did the possibility that legitimate and illegitimate printed materials could influence the English in unpredictable and dangerous ways within and without its borders. Annabel Patterson writes about the difficulty of enforcing censorship in ways that are hauntingly similar to my discussion in the Introduction of the difficulties of enforcing plague quarantine:

> It has frequently been pointed out that legislated control of the press by such mechanisms as prepublication licensing tends to be virtually impossible to enforce, given the various

> stratagems to which writers and printers could resort to evade the laws—clandestine presses, books smuggled in from abroad, not to mention the costs and difficulties of administering such a system, and the inevitable fallibility or carelessness of the licensers.[17]

In ways that are strikingly similar, the efforts to contain plague and the efforts to contain print had to contend with the impossibility of containment.

Sharon Achinstein draws parallels between that rhetoric associated with containing plague and that of containing ballads, which were often characterized as having a degenerative effect on early modern London society. Achinstein writes, "The analogy between disease and popular literature was used by civic authorities, in London especially, to control and suppress certain social groups that threatened civic order, and the association of plagues with ballads illustrates how rhetoric functioned by the use of this powerful analogy to control the powerful force of printing"[18] The rhetoric that links ballads with plague is significantly different from that linking plague to stage plays, since the printing of plays was not the main focus of the anti-theatricalists. The anxiety over the dissemination of ballads is specifically related to the increasing prominence of print in early modern London culture, and plague was an apt metaphor for the kinds of anxieties it represented.

It was this historical environment in which Shakespeare and Jonson wrote, performed, and printed their plays: one which was going through remarkable upheavals of population, identity, health, education, entertainment, literature, and nationality. Plague touched all of these to some extent, and it was a major influence on the plays of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

[1] Ian Donaldson, *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 188. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[2] See Gordon Campbell, introduction to *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, by Ben Jonson, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford University Press, 1995), vii-xxi. Campbell writes, "[Jonson's] hopes for *Sejanus* were shaken when the Globe audience hissed it off the stage, and came to grief when he was called to account by the Privy Council to answer accusations that the play was seditious" (x). Of *Catline*'s failure, Campbell writes, "[Jonson's] attempt to dramatize the conspiracy of Catiline, like those of Crébillon, Voltaire, and Ibsen that were to follow, was a failure: the portion of the audience that had survived the first three acts rebelled against Jonson's 300-line translation of Cicero's speech in Act Four, and the performance was left in ruins. Jonson was never to achieve the supremacy in tragedy that he had secured in comedy" (xi).
[3] See Stephen Greenblatt, "The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet," *The New York Review of Books* 51 no. 16 (October 21, 2004), 42-7. Greenblatt suggests that the illness was protracted: "Sometime in the spring or summer of 1596 Shakespeare must have received word that his only son Hamnet, eleven years old, was ill. Whether in London or on tour with his company he would at best have only been able to receive news intermittently from his family in Stratford, but at some point in the summer he presumably learned that Hamnet's condition had worsened and that it was necessary to drop everything and hurry home. By the time the father reached Stratford the boy—whom, apart from brief visits, Shakespeare had in effect abandoned in his infancy—may already have died" (42). Further references to this source will appear parenthetically in the text.
[4] Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, 2nd ed., ed. R. A. Foakes (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 277. The passage has been lightly emended.
[5] Ernest B. Gilman, "Plague Writing, 1603: Jonson's 'On My First Sonne,'" in *Reading the Renaissance: Ideas and Idioms from Shakespeare to Milton*, ed. Marc Berley (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 153-75, esp. 174.
[6] Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson / Jonson and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988). McDonald writes, "We must keep in mind that Shakespeare and Jonson were acquainted with each other, wrote for the same actors, had (enjoyed?) a professional connection. Any treatment of Jonson's artistic beginnings must take account of Shakespeare's inescapable presence, not only Jonson's rebellion against it but his attempts to conform to it and to adjust his own impulses to it. The middle of Shakespeare's career, specifically his progression from comedy to tragedy, is imperfectly understood without attention to the satiric model that Jonson loudly presented at the turn of the century. Worry about terms—satire, problem comedies—has diverted attention from the extent to which Jonson's satiric fulminations must have been helpful to an ideologically and formally unsettled Shakespeare" (186).
[7] Paula Backscheider, preface to *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), ix.
[8] David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. (Harvard University Press, 1997), 59. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically in the text.
[9] Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., Introduction to *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* by David Herlihy (Harvard University Press, 1997), 10-11. Cohn writes, "if the historian looks more closely at the period of the diffusion of this new technology instead of its date of invention, a different relationship between technology and population emerges. although the printing press had been invented during the trough of European population in the mid-fifteenth century, the 'takeoff' in the printing industry as marked by surviving publications (incunabula) did not occur until the 1470s—that is, when the population of Europe was no longer falling or even stagnant but was once again surging forward. Moreover, the most important centers of printing—Venice, Rome, and the southern German cities and principalities—were not places of lagging population growth but instead were experiencing the fastest demographic growth in all of Europe."
[10] For a thorough explanation of the relationship between plague and the comic and narrative structures of *The Wonderfull Yeare*, see Rick Bowers, *Radical Comedy in Early Modern England: Contexts, Cultures, Performances* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 38.
[11] On the influence of the Reformation on Jonson's writing, see Richard Dutton, *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 70-104. In a chapter titled "Poet and State," Dutton sees the intersection of two phenomena—the rise of print and the Reformation—as the main factor in altering notions of subjectivity and representation in early modern England: "The relationship between the writer and the state lies at the heart of Jonson's self-definitions and so of his criticism. 'Author' (or 'auctor') and 'authority' have a long intertwined etymology, in which questions of state power, moral leadership, the force of words, their credibility, and who takes responsibility for them, all overlap. In the sixteenth century these issues became particularly fraught, since the

wider dissemination of writing through printing coincided with the Reformation, where the ultimate question of the authority of 'the word'—the word of God—became an issue over which states wnet to war and dynasties rose and fell" (71).

[12] See, for example, Gilman, *Plague Writing*. Gilman announces, "The shift in perspective from an overarching, providential viewpoint to that of the walker in the city will be one of my concerns in what follows" (42).

[13] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al., trans. Harry Zohn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1166-86, esp. 1169. This term appears near the beginning of Benjamin's celebrated essay: "The situation into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated… One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura'…"

[14] Erin Sullivan, "Physical and Spiritual Illness: Narrative Appropriations of the Bills of Mortality," ," in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2011), 76-94, esp. 78.

[15] Stephen Greenberg, "Plague, the Printing Press, and Public Health in Seventeenth-Century London," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67 no. 4 (Dec. 2004), 508-527, esp. 517.

[16] Cited in James Christie, *Some Account of Parish Clerks* (Privately Printed, 1893), 136.

[17] Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 11.

[18] Sharon Achinstein, "Plagues and Publication: Ballads and the Representation of Disease in the English Renaissance," *Criticism* 34 no. 1 (Winter 1992), 27-49, esp. 28. Achinstein cites the same passage from Dekker that I do in her discussion of the overlap between plague anxieties and print anxieties.

Bibliography

Achinstein, Sharon. "Plagues and Publication: Ballads and the Representation of Disease in the English Renaissance." *Criticism* 34 no. 1 (Winter 1992): 27-49.

Ægineta, Paulus. *The Seven Books of Paulus Ægineta*, edited and translated by Francis Adams. London: C. and J. Adlard, 1847.

Backscheider, Paula. Preface to *A Journal of the Plague Year*, by Daniel Defoe. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992.

Ballads and Broadsides Chiefly of the Elizabethan Period and Printed in Black-letter, edited by Herbert L. Collman. New York: Burt Franklin, 1971.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky. Indiana University Press, 1984.

Baldwin, William. *Beware the Cat*, edited by William A. Ringler, Jr. and Michael Flachman. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1988.

Barish, Jonas A. "The Double Plot in *Volpone*." In *Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Jonas A Barish. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963, 93-105.

Barker, Sheila. "Poussin, Plague, and Early Modern Medicine." *Art Bulletin* 86 no. 4 (December 2004): 659-89.

Barroll, Leeds. *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater: The Stuart Years*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al., translated by Harry Zohn. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001, 1166-86.

Berggren, Paula S. "Shakespeare's Dual Lexicons of Plague: Infections of Speech and Space." In *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Berry, Herbert. "A London Plague Bill for 1592, Crich, and Goodwyffe Hurde." *English Literary Renaissance* 25 no. 1 (Winter 1995): 3-25.

Beven II, John L., Lixion A Avila, Eric S. Blake, Daniel P. Brown, James L. Franklin, Richard D. Knabb, Richard J. Pasch, Famie R. Rhome, and Stacy R. Stewart. *Annual Summary: Atlantic Hurricane Season 2005*. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. March 2008. http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/general/lib/lib1/nhclib/mwreviews/2005.pdf

Beza, Theodore. *De Peste Quaestiones Duae Explicatae*, translated by John Stockwood. London: 1580.

Boeckl, Christine M. *Images of Plague and Pestilence: Iconography and Iconology*. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000.

Bowers, Rick. *Radical Comedy in Early Modern England: Contexts, Cultures, Performances*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008.

Brooke, Arthur. *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*. In *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 1, *Early Comedies; Poems; Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Geoffrey Bullough. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, 284-363.Brooks, Harold F. Introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by William Shakespeare. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen, 1979.

Bullein, William. *Bulleins bulwarke of defence against all sicknesse, soarnesse, and woundes*. London: 1576.

---. *.A Dialogue against the Fever Pestilence*, edited by Mark W. Bullen and A. H. Bullen. Early English Text Society 52. Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973.

Campbell, Gordon. Introduction to *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, by Ben Jonson. Oxford University Press, 1995.

Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. New York: Random House. 1948.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Chalk, Darryl. "'A nature but infected': Plague and Embodied Transformation in *Timon of Athens*." *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 19 (2009) 9.1-28. http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-19/chalplag.html

Christie, James. *Some Account of Parish Clerks*. Privately Printed, 1893.

Church of England. *Certaine praiers collected out of a fourme of godly meditations, set foorth by her Maiesties authoritie in the great Mortalitie, in the fift yeere of her Highnesse raigne, and most necessarie to be used at this time in the like present visitation of Gods heauie hand for our manifold sinnes, and commended unto the ministers and people of London*. London: 1593.

Clapham, Henoch. *An epistle discoursing upon the present pestilence Teaching what it is, and how the people of God should carrie themselves towards God and their neighbour therein*. London: 1603.

---.*Henoch Clapham His Demaundes and Answeres Touching the Pestilence Methodically Handled, as His Time and Meanse Could Permit*. Middleburg: 1604.

Clary, Frank Nicholas. "'Imagine No Worse of Them': Hippolyta on the Ritual Threshold in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." In *Ceremony and Text in the Renaissance*, edited by Douglas F. Routledge. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996, 155-66.

Cohn, Jr., Samuel K. Introduction to *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, by David Herlihy. Harvard University Press, 1997.

Corporation of London. *Orders conceiued and thought fit, aswell by the Lord Maior of the City of London and the aldermen his brethren, as by the justices of peace in the countie of Middlesex, the borough of Southwarke, and county of Surrey to be obserued within their seuerall limits respectiuely, in the time of the infection of the plague, (if it shall so please Almighty God) for suppression and preuention of the dispersing thereof, according to the statute in that behalfe made in Parliament in the first yeare of the raigne of our soueraigne lord King Iames*. London: 1608.

Corporation of London, Court of Common Council. *Articles to be enquired of, what orders have bene put in execution, for the restreinyng of the infected of the plague, within the citie of London and liberties thereof*. London: 1577.

Cox, Catherine I. "'Lord Have Mercy Upon Us': The King, the Pestilence, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure.*" *Exemplaria* 20.4 (Winter 2008), 430-457.

Dawson, Anthony B. and Gretchen E. Minton. Introduction to *Timon of Athens*, 3rd ed., by William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton. London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2008.

Dekker, Thomas. *The Guls Horne-booke*. In *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 2, edited by Alexander B. Grosart. London: Hazell, Watson, and Viney, Ltd., 1885.

---. *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*. Ed. F. P. Wilson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925.

---. *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London*. London: 1606.

de' Mussis, Gabriele. *Historia de Morbo*. In *The Black Death*, edited and translated by Rosemary Horrox. New York: Manchester University Press, 1994, 14-26.

DeWall, Nichole. "'Sweet recreation barred': The Case for Playgoing in Plague-Time." In

Representing the Plague in Early Modern England, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2011, 133-149.

Donaldson, Ian. *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Drakakis, John. "Shakespeare and Venice." In *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning*, edited by Michele Marrapodi. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007, 169-186.

Duncan-Jones, Katherine. *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life*. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001.

Dutton, Richard. *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

---. *Ben Jonson, Volpone, and the Gunpowder Plot*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

---. Introduction to *Epicene, or, The Silent Woman*, by Ben Jonson. The Revels Plays. New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Elizabeth I. *Orders thought meete by her Majestie, and her privie Councell, to be executed throughout the counties of this realme, in such townes, villages, and other places, as are, or may be hereafter infected with the plague, for the stay of further increase of the same*. London: 1578.

---. *By the Queene. A proclamation to restraine accesse to the court, of all such as are not bound to ordinarie attendance, or that shall not be otherwise licenced by her Majestie*. London: 1592.

---. *By the Queene. The Queenes Majestie, perceiuing the state of the citie of London.…* London: July 7, 1580.

Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 183-99.

Etherege, George. *In libros aliquot pauli Aeginetæ, hypomnemata quædam, seu obseruationes medicamentorum, quæ hac ætate in vsu sunt per Georgium Edrychum medicum pro iuuenum studijs ad praxim medicam, collecta.* London: 1588.

"Executive Summary." In *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, 2004. http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Exec.htm

Fitter, Chris. "'The quarrel is between our masters and us their men': *Romeo and Juliet*, Dearth,

and the London Riots." *English Literary Renaissance* 30 no. 2 (Spring 2000): 154-83.

Fulton, III, Robert C. "Timon, Cupid, and the Amazons." *Shakespeare Studies* 9 (1976): 283-99.

Gilman, Ernest B. "Plague Writing, 1603: Jonson's 'On My First Sonne.'" In *Reading the Renaissance: Ideas and Idioms from Shakespeare to Milton*, edited by Marc Berley. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003, 153-75.

---.*Plague Writing in Early Modern England*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Girard, René. *A Theater of Envy*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

---. "The Plague in Literature and Myth." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15 no. 5 (Special Classics Issue 1974), 833-850.

Godskall, James. *The arke of noah for the Londoners that remaine in the cittie*. London: 1604.

Goldstein, Martin. "The Tragedy of Old Capulet: A Patriarchal Reading of *Romeo and Juliet*." *English Studies* 77 no. 3 (May 1996): 227-39.

Gottfried, Robert S. *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe*. New York: The Free Press, 1983.

Grady, Hugh. "Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics: The Case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59 no.3 (Fall 2008): 274-302.

Greenberg, Stephen. "Plague, the Printing Press, and Public Health in Seventeenth-Century London." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67 no. 4 (Dec. 2004), 508-527.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet." *The New York Review of Books* 51 no. 16 (October 21, 2004), 42-7.

Grindley, Carl James. "The Plague in Filmed Versions of Romeo and Juliet and Twelfth Night." In *Apocalyptic Shakespeare: Essays on Visions of Chaos and Revelation in Recent Film Adaptations*, edited by Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Melissa Croteau. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009, 148-65.

Grout, James. "The Amazons of Ephesus." *Encyclopaedia Romana*. December 3, 2009. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/greece/paganism/amazons.html

Harris, Jonathan Gil. *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Hathaway, Jr., Charles Montgomery. Introduction to *The Alchemist*, by Ben Jonson. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903.

Hazlitt, William Carew. *The Venetian Republic: Its Rise, its Growth, and its Fall A.D. 409-1797*, vol. II: 1457-1797. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1915.

Healy, Margaret. "'Seeing' Contagious Bodies in Early Modern London." In *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, edited by Darryll Grantley and Nina Taunton. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000 157-167.

Henke, Robert. "The Italian Mountebank and the *Commedia dell'Arte*." *Theatre Survey* 38 no. 2 (November 1997): 1-29.

Henslowe, Philip. *Henslowe's Diary*, 2nd ed., edited by R. A. Foakes. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Herford, C. H. and Percy and Evelyn Simpson. Notes and commentary for *Ben Jonson*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-1952.

Herlihy, David. *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, edited by Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. Harvard University Press, 1997.

Herman, Peter C. "Tragedy and the Crisis of Authority in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*." *Intertexts* 12 no. 1-2 (2008): 89-109.

Herring, Francis. *Certaine rules, directions, or advertisments for this time of pestilentiall contagion: with a caveat to those that weare about their neckes impoisoned amulets as a preservative from the plague*. London: 1603.

---. *A modest defence of the caveat given to the wearers of impoisoned amulets*. London: 1604.

Hillman, Richard. "The Anti-Spectacular in Timon of Athens." In *The Spectacular In and Around Shakespeare*, edited by Pascale Drouet. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, 99-109.

Hoeniger, F. David. *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992.

Hole, Robert. "Incest, Consanguinity and a Monstrous Birth in Rural England, January 1600." *Social History* 25 no. 2 (May 2000): 183-199.

Horrox, Rosemary. *The Black Death*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Howard, John. *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe*. London: 1789.

Hunter, Lynette. "Cankers in *Romeo and Juliet*: Sixteenth-Century Medicine at a Figural/Literal Cusp." In *Disease, Diagnosis, and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, edited by Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004, 171-85.

In the time of Gods visitation by sicknesse of mortality especially may be used by governours of families. (London, 1607).

"Information on Plague," *Centers for Disease Control*, March 30, 2005. Accessed March 15, 2010. http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/plague/info.htm

James I, *Orders, thought meete by his Majestie, and his Privie Counsell, to be executed throughout the counties of this realme, in such townes, villages, and other places, as are, or may be hereafter infected with the plague, for the stay of further increase of the same. Also, an advise set downe by the best learned in physicke within this realme, containing sundry good rules and easie medicines, without charge to the meaner sort of people, aswel for the preservation of his good subjects from the plague before infection, as for the curing and ordering of them after they shalbe infected*. London: 1603.

Jonson, Ben. *The Alchemist*, edited by F. H. Mares. The Revels Plays. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1967.

---.*Epicene, or The Silent Woman*, edited by Richard Dutton. The Revels Plays. New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.

---. *Volpone*, edited by Robert N. Watson, 2nd ed. New Mermaids. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003.

Jowett, John. "From Print to Performance: Looking at the Masque in *Timon of Athens*." In *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, edited by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 73-91.

Kahn, Coppélia. "Coming of Age in Verona." *Modern Language Studies* 8 no.1 (Winter 1977-1978): 5-22.

---. "'Magic of Bounty': *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 no. 1 (Spring 1987): 34-57.

Kellwaye, Simon. *A defensative against the plague*. London: 1593.

Kitch, Aaron W. "Printing Bastards: Monstrous Birth Broadsides in Early Modern England." In *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, edited by Douglas A Brooks. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005, 221-36.

Klein, Karl. Introduction to *Timon of Athens*, by William Shakespeare. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Kriegel, Jill. "A Case Against Natural Magic: Shakespeare's Friar Laurence as Romeo and Juliet's Near-Tragic Hero." *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 13 no. 1 (Winter 2010): 132-145.

Knowles, Ronald. "Carnival and Death in Romeo and Juliet." *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 49 (1996): 69-85.

Laird, David. "'If we offend, it is with our good will': Staging Dissent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Connotations* 12 no.1 (2002/2003): 35-51.

Lambarde, William. *The duties of constables, borsholders, tithingmen, and such other low ministers of the peace*. London: 1605.

Lane, Frederic C. *Venice: A Maritime Republic*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Learned Phisition. *Present Remedies Against the Plague Shewing Sundrye Preservatives for the Same*… London: 1603.

Leggatt, Alexander. "Morose and His Tormentors." *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities* 45 (1976): 221-235.

Levin, Richard. "Another 'Source' for *The Alchemist* and Another Look at Source Studies." *English Literary Renaissance* 28 no. 2 (Spring 1998): 210-230.

Lodge, Thomas. *A Treatise of the Plague*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge*, vol. 4. New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963.

Longrigg, James. "Epidemic, Ideas and Classical Athenian Society." In *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, edited by Terrence Ranger and Paul Slack. Cambridge University Press, 1992, 21-44.

Mallin, Eric S. *Inscribing the Time: Shakespeare and the End of Elizabethan England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Marcus, Leah S. "Shakespeare and Popular Festivity." In *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture*, edited by Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006, 42-66.

Mardock, James. *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Marlowe, Christopher. *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., edited by Fredson Bowers. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Martin, Matthew. "Play and Plague in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*." *English Studies in Canada*

26 (2000): 393-408.

---. "Wasting Time in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*." *Studies in Philology* 105 no. 1 (Winter 2008): 83-102.

Masten, Jeffrey. "Is the Fundament a Grave?" In *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe,* edited by David Hillman and Carla Mazzio. New York: Routledge, 1997, 128-145.

McDonald, Russ. *Shakespeare and Jonson / Jonson and Shakespeare*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

McManus, Caroline. "Queen Elizabeth, Dol Common, and the Performance of the Royal Maundy." *English Literary Renaissance* 32 no. 2 (Spring 2002): 189-213.

McPherson, David C. *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Myth of Venice*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990.

Mellys, John. *The true description of two monsterous children*. London: 1566.

Miola, Robert S. "Timon in Shakespeare's Athens." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31 no. 1 (Spring 1980): 21-30.

Montrose, Louis. "Shaping Fantasies: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture." *Representations* 2 (Spring, 1983): 61-94.

Muir, Edward. *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*. Princeton University Press, 1981.

Munkhoff, Richelle. "Contagious Figurations: Plague and the Impenetrable Nation after the Death of Elizabeth." In *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2010, 97-112.

---. "Searchers of the Dead: Authority, Marginality, and the Interpretation of Plague in England, 1574–1665." *Gender & History* 11, no. 1 (April 1999): 1-29.

Munro, Ian. *The City and Its Double: The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

Munroe, Jennifer. *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008.

Neill, Michael. *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Noble, Louise. "'And Make Two Pasties of Your Shameful Heads': Medicinal Cannibalism and

Healing the Body Politic in *Titus Andronicus*" *ELH* 70 no. 3 (Fall 2003): 677-708.

Ocland, Christopher. *The fountaine and welspring of all variance, sedition, and deadlie hate. Wherein is declared at large, the opinion of the famous divine Hiperius, and the consent of the doctors from S. Peter the Apostle his time, and the primitive Church in order to this age: expresly set downe, that Rome in Italie is signified and noted by the name of Babylon, mentioned in the 14. 17. and 18. chapters of the Reuelation of S. John*. London: 1590.

Paster, Gail Kern. *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Patterson, Annabel. "Bottom's Up: Festive Theory in A Midsummer Night's Dream." In *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, edited by Dorothea Kehler. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998, 165-177.

---. *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

Petowe, Henry. *Londoners their entertainment in the country. Or the whipping of the runaways*. London: 1604.

Pettigrew, Todd H. J. *Shakespeare and the Practice of Physic: Medical Narratives on the Early Modern Stage*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007.

Phillips, Patrick. "'You Need Not Fear the House': The Absence of Plague in *The Alchemist*." *Ben Jonson Journal* 13 (2006): 43-62.

"Plague," *World Health Organization*, February 2005. Accessed April 15, 2010. http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs267/en/

Present remedies against the plague Shewing sundrye preservatives for the same, by wholsome fumes, drinkes, vomits and other inward receits; as also the perfect cure (by implaisture) of any that are therewith infected. Now necessary to be observed of every householder, to avoide the infection, lately begun in some places of the cittie. Written by a learned physition, for the health of his countrey. London: 1603.

Qualtiere, Louis F. and William E. Slights. "Contagion and Blame in Early Modern England: The Case of the French Pox" *Literature and Medicine* 22 no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1-24.

Reich, Wilhelm. *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, translated by Vincent R. Carfagno. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970.

Riggs, David. *Ben Jonson: A Life*. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Ross, Cheryl Lynn. "The Plague of *The Alchemist*." *Renaissance Quarterly*, 41 no. 3 (1988):

439-58.

Salingar, Leo. "The Idea of Venice in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson." In *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, edited by Michelle Marrapodi, A. J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo, and L Falzon Stantucci. New York: Manchester University Press 1993, 171-84.

Schwarz, Kathryn. "Missing the Breast: Disease, Desire, and the Singular Effect of Amazons." In *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, edited by David Hillman and Carla Mazzio. New York: Routledge, 1997, 146-169.

---.*Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000.

Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.

---. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, edited by Harold F. Brooks. Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen, 1979.
---. *Othello*, edited by E.A.J. Honigmann, 3rd ed. Arden Shakespeare Third Series. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004.

---. *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Jill L. Levenson. The Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Shaughnessy, Robert. "Twentieth Century Fox: Volpone's Metamorphosis." *Theater Research International* 27 no. 1 (2002): 37-48.

Slack, Paul. *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Smith, Melissa. "Personifications of Plague in Three Tudor Interludes: *Triall of Treasure*, *The longer thou liuest, the more foole thou art*, and *Inough is as good as a feast*." *Literature and Medicine* 26 no. 2 (Fall 2007): 364-85.

Snyder, Susan. "Ideology and Feud in *Romeo and Juliet*." *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 49 (1996): 87-96.

---. "*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy." *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 20 no. 4 (1970): 391-402.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador, 1990.

Stage, Kelly J. "Plague Space and Played Space in Urban Drama, 1604." In *Representing the*

Plague in Early Modern England, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2011, 54-75.

Sullivan, Erin. "Physical and Spiritual Illness: Narrative Appropriations of the Bills of Mortality." In *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2011, 76-94.

T.C. *A godly and learned sermon, upon the 91. psalme*. London: 1603.

Taylor, John. *The fearefull sommer*. London: 1625.

Thiele, Matthew. "Plague in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Girardian Reading of Bottom and Hippolyta." In *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2011, 185-200.

Totaro, Rebecca. *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005.

Traister, Barbara Howard. *The Notorious Astrological Physician of London: Works and Days of Simon Forman*. The University of Chicago Press, 2001.

---. "'A plague on both your houses': Sites of Comfort and terror in Early Modern Drama." In *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2011, 169-82.

van der Noot, Jan. *The governance and preservation of them that feare the plage. Set forth by John Vandernote, phisicion and surgion, admitted by the kynge his highenesse. Now newly set forth at the request of William Barnard of London Draper*. London: 1569.

von Ewich, Johann. *The duetie of a faithfull and wise magistrate, in preserving and delivering of the common wealth from infection, in the time of the plague or pestilence*, translated by John Stockwood. London: 1583.

Watson, Robert N. Introduction to *Volpone*, by Ben Jonson, 2nd ed. New Mermaids. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003.

Weimann, Robert. "'Appropriation' and Modern History in Renaissance Prose Narrative." *New Literary History* 14.3 (Spring 1983): 459-495.

Wells, Stanley. "The Challenges of *Romeo and Juliet*." *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 49 (1996): 1-14.

Whitney, Charles. "Plague Pamphlets as Environmental Literature." In *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, edited by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2011, 201-218.

Williams, Penry. "Social Tensions Contained." In *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre, and Politics in London*, 1576-1649, edited by David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington. Cambridge University Press, 1995, 55-66.

Wilson, Eric. "Abel Drugger's sign and the Fetishes of Material Culture." In *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*, edited by Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor. New York: Routledge, 2000, 110-134.

Wilson, F. P. *The Plague in Shakespeare's London*. Oxford University Press, 1927.

Wilson, J. Dover. *The Essential Shakespeare*. Cambridge University Press, 1932.