

“A PLAGUE ‘O BOTH YOUR HOUSES”’: SHAKESPEARE AND EARLY MODERN
PLAGUE WRITING

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The English Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of

English

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
April, 2008

Abstract

This dissertation investigates what Shakespeare's drama seems to do with the anxieties and fantasies attendant upon the early modern plague experience. At times, it seems, the plague exerts its presence in its absence; at others, the plague seems to saturate every aspect of the plays' fictive worlds. Moreover, my inquiry seeks to understand what kind of cultural and psychical work Shakespeare's plays performed, both for himself and for his audience members. What was it about the plague experience that compelled Shakespeare to return to it in his works, despite how devastating it was to his creative and financial prospects to remind people of the disease? And what compelled his audience members to venture into the playhouses, despite the fact that these sites were thought to be uniquely capable of spreading the disease? I am particularly interested in how the plays provide for Shakespeare and his audiences a language to know the unknowable, or communicate the unspeakable. I read the plays in concert with the hundreds of plague sermons, poems, and medical tracts that glutted the early modern print marketplace during and between outbreaks. Special attention is given to Romeo and Juliet and Coriolanus.

To Brian
“constant in spirit”

Acknowledgements

First, I wish to thank Professor Kathy Howlett, who for the last seven years has served as a mentor and inspiration, and whose encouragement and feedback has been vital to every stage of the dissertation writing process. My two other committee members have also guided me in my writing and throughout my tenure in graduate school: I thank Professor Francis Blessington for always reminding me to ask the big questions; I thank Professor Marina Leslie for that first archival assignment, and for never allowing her students to make reductive statements about the early modern period.

I am deeply grateful for the Northeastern University Dissertation Writing Fellowship that I received during my last semester of writing: it was critical to this project's completion.

I wish to thank Professors Margaret Healy and Rebecca Totaro for organizing the Shakespeare Association of America Seminar, "A Plague On Both Your Houses," in the spring of 2008. This seminar served as both a deadline and a wonderfully productive place to investigate the plague with like-minded scholars.

My friends in the graduate program at Northeastern have provided commiseration, laughter, and insight throughout my tenure here. I especially wish to acknowledge Amy Carleton, Cory Grewell, Amy Kaufman, Jennifer Martin, Kurt Moellering, Alex Moffett.

Two early teachers, Mrs. Honey Lou Bonar and Mrs. Betty Kort, nurtured my love for literature and writing. I hope I can someday be as inspirational to my own students.

Finally, my family members have all supported me in different ways throughout this process, and I extend my love and thanks to each: to Erica, for groundedness; to Nathan, for inspiration; to Mom, for joy; to Dad, for wisdom. I also thank Linda Pezza for her encouragement.

My husband, Brian Pezza, has been a foundation—an "ever-fixed mark"—throughout my Ph.D. I dedicate this dissertation to him.

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Preface

When William Shakespeare arrived in London in the late 1580's, the plague had been endemic to England for nearly 250 years, since the Black Death of Petrarch and Chaucer had wiped out two-thirds of Europe's population. During outbreaks in London, signs of the plague were everywhere: bills of mortality plastered on every post; mountebanks peddling their plague potions in the streets. Street fires burned continuously in an attempt to purge the air of miasmas, the stinky pockets of "bad ayre" thought to transmit the disease; bunches of rosemary hung above doorways to sweeten the air that entered citizens' houses. Those who could afford to flee escaped to the cleaner air of the country. A door marked with a large red cross signaled an infected family quarantined inside; watchmen were posted outside to ensure no one entered or escaped. The plague cart, its bell ringing incessantly, lumbered by as its heap of dead bodies grew higher and higher. Since crowds spread infection, family members were not allowed to gather for funeral rituals: those attempting to follow the plague cart were arrested. When the plague wasn't actively raging—major outbreaks occurred in 1593 and from 1603-1611—the fear of its return terrorized the minds of early modern subjects. Hundreds of plague sermons, poems, and medical tracts glutted the early modern print marketplace.

This dissertation investigates what Shakespeare's drama seems to do with the anxieties and fantasies attendant upon the early modern plague experience: how the plague exerts a presence in its absence at times, or how, at others, the plague saturates every aspect of the plays' fictive worlds. Moreover, my inquiry seeks to understand what kind of cultural and psychical work Shakespeare's plays performed, both for himself and for his audience members. What was it about the plague experience that compelled Shakespeare to return to it in his works, despite

how devastating it was to his creative and financial prospects to remind people of the disease? And what compelled his audience members to venture into the playhouses, despite the fact that these sites were thought to be uniquely capable of spreading the plague? How did the plays provide for Shakespeare and his audiences a language to know the unknowable, or communicate the unspeakable? How do we begin to think about literature in a way that recognizes the demands of trauma, yet still preserves, to some extent, the artist's ability to make actively make aesthetic choices?

These questions emerged as the ones most at stake as I moved within this project. In an attempt to understand the scope and nature of this particular traumatic event—the early modern bubonic plague—I worked with a sample of over 300 archival plague texts. I defined “plague text” as any work during plague time that seemed to respond in direct ways to the epidemic: bills of mortality, verse poems, woodcuts, pamphlets, sermons, city ordinances, and medical regimens. The first plague regimen published in London, the anonymous Here begynneth a treatyse agaynst pestele[n]ce [and] of ye infirmits (1509) seemed a logical starting point; Epiloimia epe, a verse poem written by barrister and minor poet William Austin during London's Great Plague in 1666 served as my terminus a quem. Some of these plague texts, like Thomas Dekker's 1603 plague pamphlets, had received some scholarly attention; most, however, had never been included in scholarly inquiries.

I did not work with these plague texts in an effort to get at the “real” story of the plague: that doesn't exist. I don't pretend that there are any plague texts that are unmediated by their authors' particular anxieties and interests, or that, if there were, I could disentangle myself from my own historical moment for long enough to

receive them. The nature of this particular trauma, moreover, brings into relief how unrecoverable history always is: we are missing the voices, after all, of those who actually felt the ravages of the plague within their own bodies (Simon Forman is among the few who survived the plague and wrote about it). Even with these limitations, however, I was able to come to some understanding, I believe, of the way the plague affected the lives of early modern subjects in very practical, real ways; I also became familiar with the most common fears and anxieties that were attendant upon the experience.

I proceeded from the notion, then, that Shakespeare's plays would not be removed from but, rather, bear the marks of these anxieties. In my basic conviction that literary works rehearse and work out fantasies and anxieties in symbolic or displaced ways, I identify with psychoanalytic criticism. More specifically, I have found a more recent application of psychoanalytic theory, trauma theory, useful throughout this dissertation in its emphasis on the ways certain exceptional events—wars, epidemics, genocides—create a kind of knowledge so unknowable that it cannot be retrieved without displacement or distortion (Hartman 537). The nature of a traumatic event, after all, is that it cannot be experienced: theorists often describe the traumatic event “falling into the psyche” without the subject actually perceiving or experiencing it (Hartman 537). The trauma splits the psyche, and returns through what Geoffrey Hartmann calls “perpetual troping” (537): the intrusive rehearsal of the traumatic event, like a veteran or rape victim haunted by recurring nightmares. The victim and, with large-scale traumas like the plague, whole cultures, seem stuck, unable to move forward.

Because it employs symbols, and because it often relies upon the creation of aesthetically distant fictive worlds, trauma critics argue that literature is uniquely

capable of repairing the disassociation that trauma causes: it allows subjects to actually experience for the first time what “fell into” the psyche. Each of the chapters that follows investigates a different way that Shakespeare’s plays seem to work through the trauma of the experience. Chapter One looks at both the literal and metaphorical ways the plague exerts its presence throughout Romeo and Juliet; Chapter Two explores fears of miasma in the plays, and fantasies of rectified air; Chapter Three reads in the plague-saturated Coriolanus anxieties surrounding disruption of degree and bodily contamination; Chapter Four discusses the plays’ apparent desire to justify the place of theater in a plague-ridden society.

**“Where the infectious pestilence did reign”: Romeo and Juliet as Shakespeare’s
Plague Play**

Recently, The New York Times praised the Public Theater’s current production of Shakespeare in the Park, the so-called “water Romeo and Juliet,” for a quality that “most productions of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ fatally lack...a sense of infectious, instinctive urgency” (emphasis added). “The plague that the dying Mercutio will later wish on the town,” the paper’s Ben Brantley continues, “has already infected it: a contagion of high spirits and fierce mood that is usually the lot of adolescents but has here spread to all generations.” What this reporter’s review fails to note is the topic of this chapter: that Romeo and Juliet derives its “infectious” energy not from Mercutio’s curse, but from the fact that the play’s dramatic action unfolds in the midst of a plague outbreak. As we learn from Friar John in Act Five, Verona is contaminated with an “infectious pestilence”:

Going to find a bare-foot 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,
Seal’d up the doors, and would not let us forth;
So that my speed to Mantua there was stay’d. (5.2.5-12)

As I hope to prove, the plague does more than secure Romeo and Juliet’s tragic denouement: it also forms a subtext throughout the entire play, placing it alongside Ben Jonson’s The Alchemist as one of the most prominent plague texts in the canon of early modern imaginative literature.

To argue that Romeo and Juliet is a plague text goes against decades of literary tradition and, of course, begs a definition of just what a plague text is. With the exception of The Alchemist and Thomas Dekker’s plague pamphlets, critics have

largely ignored plague literature written during Shakespeare's lifetime: most move swiftly from their discussions of Boccaccio's The Decameron (1348) to Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year, written nearly four centuries later but set during London's 1666 outbreak. David Steel's survey of plague writing, "Plague Writing: From Boccaccio to Camus" (1981), for example, argues that Boccaccio, Defoe, and Camus responded to the epidemic's symbolic force, but he largely ignores early modern writers' literary confrontations with the disease; Barbara Fass Leavy's To Blight with Plague: Studies in a Literary Theme (1992) moves from Boccaccio, to Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale (1386-1400?), to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842), mentioning Shakespeare and his contemporaries only in passing. Yet the plague marks early modern literature just as vividly; moreover, an investigation of the plague's impact on the period's drama seems particularly appropriate given the contingent relationship between the public playhouses and the disease.

While I wish to expand the critical community's canon of plague literature to include Romeo and Juliet, I would, conversely, argue to narrow slightly the definition of plague literature, especially as it pertains to this dissertation. Most critics define plague literature too broadly, as "literary works whose main themes have to do with some form of contagious or pestilential physical disease, and the social or psychological consequences of the illness" (Leavy 1). Leavy includes syphilis, influenza, and AIDS alongside the bubonic plague; in Pestilence in Medieval & Early Modern English Literature (2003), Bryan Lee Grigsby investigates leprosy, syphilis, and the bubonic plague, all of which he terms plagues (a word he uses interchangeably with pestilence).

Throughout this dissertation, I will insist that the term “plague literature” should only apply to texts that respond to the bubonic plague. In doing so, I follow the lead of early modern writers who demonstrate a sophisticated knowledge of the differences among diseases: his early modern audience would have grouped all of these diseases under the term plague like current scholars seem wont to do. In keeping with the historical focus of this dissertation, I wish to restore instead a sense of the specificity of literary encounters with the bubonic plague in particular. Here, I defer to Rebecca Totaro’s definition of plague literature from her Suffering in Paradise : The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton (2005) as “works produced either in direct response to a plague visitation or those in which bubonic plague functions as an essential event or primary metaphor” (13).

The plague in Romeo and Juliet seems to fulfill all of Totaro’s criteria for plague literature: it was probably written in 1595, around the time that London was recovering from the first great visitation of Shakespeare’s professional career in 1593; the plague also is an “essential event” in the dramatic action. As this chapter hopes to prove, however, the plague infects the world created in Shakespeare’s play in even subtler ways. I will be especially interested in how Shakespeare’s version of the story differs from his sources’: while he used Arthur Brooke’s Romeus et Juliet (1562) as his direct source, most critics believe that Romeo and Juliet also bears the marks of Shakespeare’s direct interactions with Luigi da Porto’s A Tale about Two Noble Lovers (1524), Matteo Bandello’s The Unfortunate Death of Two Most Wretched Lovers (1554), and Pierre Boaistuau’s Of Two Lovers (1559).

Interestingly, a few critics have hinted at, but never pursued, the plague’s effect on Romeo and Juliet: in her discussion of Margaret Cavendish, Totaro writes “There is so little scholarly treatment of plague in The Blazing World as to suggest it

does not exist at all. A similar case can be made for examining Romeo and Juliet [which] bears within it the symptoms of an author living in plague-time” (9). Totaro, however, never engages this line of inquiry. Similarly, Lynette Hunter argues that the “cankers” in Romeo and Juliet “have the ambivalent potential to be at the same time internal contamination and external infection or contagion, a situation parallel to the often contradictory approaches to the plague that is raging throughout Verona but about which we hear so little” (171), but then chooses not to discuss the plague’s greater impact on the play. These moments serve as calls to action, and I will heed them by exploring in the play the plague’s relationship to love, the carnivalesque, the stars, the early modern medical marketplace, and, the season during which the dramatic action of Romeo and Juliet unfolds (and the season under whose sky our New York Times reporter experienced the play as “infectious”): summer.

“hanging in the stars”: Quarantine and the Trappings of Fate

The quarantined house is one of the most horrifying images in early modern plague writing. As in Romeo and Juliet, the physical confinement of quarantine reminded the infected that they were trapped by fate, that their destinies were “hanging in the stars” (1.4.107). Certainly, Friar John’s is only the most literal of Shakespeare’s various references to quarantine: Berowne says, “Write ‘Lord have mercy on us’ on those three, / They are infected” (5.2.13-14); Desdemona’s lost handkerchief “comes o’er [Othello’s] memory, / As doth the raven o’er the infected house” (4.1.51-52); Hermione is “barr’d, like one infectious” from her child (3.2.33). Yet Friar John’s quarantine feels particularly symbolic, an enclosed space that represents the enclosure of fate, because it occurs in the midst of a play that, more than any other of Shakespeare’s, seems propelled by a series of accidents: many

critics argue that Shakespeare, after the Prologue, “surrendered this drama to the astrologers” (Goddard 25).

A similar sense of one’s fate “hanging in the stars” pervades early modern plague writing, as is reflected throughout the whole of Shakespeare’s canon. The plague in Shakespeare, after all, always comes from above, from the “stars,” “heavens,” or “gods.” When Berowne is exposed as a masked Muscovite in Love’s Labor’s Lost, for example, he quips, “Thus pour the stars down plagues for perjury” (5.3.22); it is, similarly, a “planetary plague” that Timon wishes upon Athens (4.3.26). In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, King Lear, and Othello, the plague is also a product of fate: Silvia flies to Mantua since her “most unholy match [to Thurio] / ...fortune still rewards with plagues” (4.3.41-42); Lear cries, “Now, all the plagues that in the pendulous air / Hang fated o’er men’s faults light on thy daughters” (3.4.64-65)!; the plague of Desdemona’s presumed infidelity, Othello says, is his “destiny”:

Yet, ‘tis the plague of great ones;
Prerogativèd are they less than the base;
‘Tis destiny unshunnable, like death:
Even then this forked plague is fated to us
When we do quicken. (3.3.29-33)

Shakespeare’s Greek and Roman plays attribute the plague to pagan gods, as do his romances. In Coriolanus, Volumnia says to Brutus, “the hoarded plague o’ the gods / Requite your love!”; for Coriolanus’ ingratitude, she says, “the gods will plague [him]” (4.2.13-14, 5.3.81). In The Winter’s Tale, Leonatus asks “the blessed gods / [To] Purge all infection from our air whilst you [Florizel] / Do climate here” (5.1.6-8)! Unlike plague writers who inevitably attribute the plague to a Christian God—“The Plague being out of humane power, doth prove, / That there’s infallibly a God above,” William Austin writes (10)—Shakespeare only does so in his history plays, perhaps

to reinforce their providentialist agenda. For example, Queen Margaret says to her son,

stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me.
If heaven have any grievous plague in store
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace! (1.3.74-79)

In King John, God rewards Queen Elinor's sins with the plague that Arthur inherits:

CONSTANCE. I have but this to say,
That he is not only plagued for her sin,
But God hath made her sin and her the
plague
On this removed issue, plague for her
And with her plague; her sin his injury,
Her injury the beadle to her sin,
All punish'd in the person of this child,
And all for her; a plague upon her!
(2.1.19-26)

In Richard II, the usurped monarch warns, "Yet know, my master, God omnipotent, / Is mustering in his clouds on our behalf / Armies of pestilence" to punish Bolingbroke and his army (3.3.55-57).

In these passages, Shakespeare's characters reflect the prominent early modern sense that their encounters with the plague were wholly out of their control. Defeated in their attempts to understand and curb a disease that defied all attempts at medical intervention, early modern subjects looked upward, toward the sky. They read the stars in order to predict plague outbreaks, and the vast number of astrological handbooks published in London during outbreaks indicates how popular this method became (Figure 1). As the speaker of Shakespeare's Sonnet #14 says, "Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck; / And yet methinks I have astronomy, / But not to tell of good or evil luck, / Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality" (lines

1-4); in Troilus, Ulysses also associates disturbances in the cosmos with plague outbreaks:

...but when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents! what mutiny!
What raging of the sea! shaking of earth!
Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture! (1.3.9-16)

The aspect of early modern plague writing that Defoe's Journal imitates most accurately is this sense of one's fate "hanging in the stars." "In the first Place, a blazing Star or Comet appear'd for several Months before the Plague," he writes,

so very near the Houses, that it was plain, they imported something peculiar to the City alone; that the Comet before the Pestilence, was of a faint, dull, languid Colour, and its Motion very heavy, solemn and slow...[It] foretold a Judgment, slow but severe, terrible and frightful, as was the Plague...(32)

Defoe sets his novel in 1665: that same year, one anonymous plague writer describes how

In the moneth of *July* it [the plague] began to encrease considerably, especially toward the latter end thereof: there were then six oppositions of the *Erratick Stars*, and two *Eclipses*; and to add to these, *Mars*, *Venus*, and *Mercury*, then came to the Quadrante place of the *Sun*, and to the opposite point of *Saturn* by transit; and the *Sun* then came to the opposition of *Jupiter* both by transit and aspect: all which were very great arguments of its encrease. (2)

It is easy for modern readers to dismiss early modern astrology as quaint magical thinking. Yet science and astrology were not then the separate disciplines they are now: even the most elite medical practitioners in Shakespeare's London relied upon astrology to predict, diagnose, and treat illness. Plague writers Simon Kellwaye and Thomas Lodge, both members of the College of Physicians, base their astrological methods on ancient authorities: "AVicen [Avicenna] a noble Physition

saith, that when wee see the...firie impressions in the firmament, specially in the ende of sommer, as commets and such like... it sheweth the ayre to be corrupt, and the plague shortly after to follow,” Kellwaye writes (2); “An other cause of the Plague saith Auicen,” writes Lodge, “procéedeth from the celestiall formes, that is to say, the starres and their configurations and malignant aspects, which by their influences cause such sicknesses full of contagion and Pestilence, as in generall all other Astrologians testifie” (C).

Moreover, early modern physicians believed, under Galen, that the planets had very real effects on one’s body and its predisposition for certain ailments. The planet ascendant at the time of birth, for example, determined temperament: Saturn predisposed one to melancholy, as when Aaron says to Tamora, “though Venus govern your desires, / Saturn is dominator over mine: / What signifies my deadly-standing eye, / My silence and my cloudy melancholy” (2.3.38-41). The sanguine Posthumous was born under Jove; Parolles should display military courage, not cowardice, since Mars ruled during his birth. If, as F. David Hoeniger argues, Mercurio’s name indicates his birth planet, this could explain his volatile personality since Mercury’s ascendance signals a phlegmatic temperament (109). Moreover, since God created the microcosm of man to reflect the macrocosm, disturbances in the heavens could indicate diseases in the patient. The tempest is both inside and outside of King Lear, for example, when the Gentleman reports that the monarch “Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn / The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain” (3.1.14-15); Hotspur describes how the macrocosm mirrored Glendower’s birth:

O, then the earth shook to see the heavens on fire,
And not in fear of your nativity.
Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth
In strange eruptions; oft the teeming earth
Is with a kind of colic pinch’d and vex’d

By the imprisoning of unruly wind
Within her womb; which, for enlargement striving,
Shakes the old beldam earth and topples down
Steeple and moss-grown towers. At your birth
Our grandam earth, having this distemperature,
In passion shook. (3.1.24-32)

This is not to suggest that the stars always predicted or determined ones fate: many of Shakespeare's characters—usually upstarts—insist on the power of free will to trump the fate “hanging in the stars.” There is Cassius' famous insistence that destiny is “not in our stars / But in ourselves” (JC 1.2.141-42), and Edmund's criticism of his father's reliance on astrology:

...we make guilty of our
disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as
if we were villains by necessity; fools by
heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and
treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards,
liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of
planetary influence; and all that we are evil in,
by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion
of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish
disposition to the charge of a star! (Lear 1.2.89-98)

Yet in Romeo and Juliet, the characters seem constantly aware that they are “Fortune's fool[s]” (3.1.81). Critics like H. Chalton have called this play a “drama of Fate” (qtd. in Lawlor 51), and one that “stresses the accidental” (Nevo 71). Frank Kermode sees Seneca's influence in Shakespeare's emphasis on fate, and Northrype Frye writes, “Astrology, as I've said, was taken quite seriously then” (165). Indeed, the lovers are famously “star-cross'd” (Prologue, line 6). Romeo notes “some consequence yet hanging in the stars” and fears that “black fate” will prevent a happy ending (1.4.101, 3.1.93). Upon Romeo's departure to Mantua, Juliet cries,

O fortune, fortune! all men call thee fickle:
If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him.
That is renown'd for faith? Be fickle, fortune;
For then, I hope, thou wilt not keep him long,
But send him back. (3.5.37-41)

Through their deaths, the lovers attempt to “shake the yoke of inauspicious stars,” to finally defy them (5.3.77).

The various ways in which fate traps Verona’s citizens is symbolized, I have suggested, by Friar John’s “seal’d up” quarantined house (5.2.21). For of the many “misadventured piteous overthrows” that propel the plot of Romeo and Juliet (Prologue, line 7)—the lovers’ meeting, the inauspicious timing of Romeo’s entrance into Mercutio and Tybalt’s duel—it is Friar John’s quarantine that seems unrelated to any of the characters’ actions, wholly a product of Fortune. Similarly, in “A Journal of the Plague Year: Defoe and Claustrophobia,” David McNeil argues that Defoe uses detailed descriptions of quarantined houses to symbolize his emphasis on fate. “For Defoe,” writes McNeil, “this physical imprisonment stands for and accentuates—in a concrete form—the horror of being trapped by unforeseen circumstances” (372). The Journal’s quarantined houses represent for Defoe a specifically Puritan sense of “physical helplessness [which] mirrors the futility of trying to escape a spiritual fate which is part of a greater providential design” (McNeil 375).

Indeed, Defoe’s Journal again reads like an authentic early modern plague text when it describes the horror of quarantine. “People were extremely terrify’d at the Thoughts of it,” he writes, “This shutting up of houses was at first counted a very cruel and Unchristian method, and the poor People so confin’d made bitter Lamentations: Complaints of the Severity of it, were also daily brought to my Lord Mayor” (16, 67). The infected often felt like prisoners in their own homes: “as the people shut up or imprisoned so were guilty of no crime, only shut up because miserable, it was really the more intolerable to them...[they were] terrified and even

frighted to death by the sight of the condition of their dearest relations, and by the terror of being imprisoned as they were” (Defoe 77).

Yet Friar John’s quarantine is only the most pronounced example of the way images of enclosure throughout Romeo and Juliet reinforce the theme of fate. The action unfolds in an enclosed “two-hours’ traffic”; the play’s reliance on the sonnet and its conventions impart the sense of containment that is associated with the genre. Indeed, many spaces in the play feel suffocating: the “stony limits” of the orchard walls, Friar Laurence’s “close cell”, Juliet’s closet, the charnel-house. Most suffocating, of course, is Romeo’s own self-quarantine. Montague reports that the lover keeps himself “so secret and so close”:

But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
Should in the furthest east begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from the light steals home my heavy son,
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks far daylight out
And makes himself an artificial night. (1.1.29-36)

Later, Romeo is “bound more than a mad-man is; / Shut up in prison, kept without my food, / Whipp’d and tormented...” (1.2.11-13); Juliet wishes her eyes “To prison” (3.2.32); Mercutio describes the “confines of a tavern” (3.1.7); Benvolio wishes to withdraw “unto some private place” in order to prevent the feud (3.1.11); Juliet fears that Romeo’s “vile matter” is “fairly bound... / In...a gorgeous palace” (3.2.41-42). Romeo is also physically restricted throughout the play: he “sink[s] under love’s heavy burden” because his “soul of lead... / stakes [him] to the ground” (1.4.14, 16-17). His “despised life” is “closed in [his] breast” (1.4.91). Later, it will be Juliet who wishes to shackle Romeo:

‘Tis almost morning; I would have thee gone:
And yet no further than a wanton’s bird;
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,

Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty. (2.2.20-25)

These images of confinement seem all the more stifling because they rub up against the plays equally pervasive images of infinity, regeneration, and expanse. Although the “orchard walls are high and hard to climb,” Romeo is able to “o’er-perch” them: “For stony limits cannot hold love out” (2.2.31). For Juliet’s love, Romeo promises to travel “as far / As that vast shore wash’d with the farthest sea,” to which Juliet responds in kind: “My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep; the more I give to thee, / The more I have, for both are infinite” (2.2.40, 51-53). Romeo’s love for Juliet which has “grown to such excess / [He] cannot sum up sum of half [his] wealth” (2.6.33) is proportionate to the word of Romeo’s banishment which has “no end, no limit, measure, bound” (3.2.81). In the end, however, the fate that traps the lovers is represented in the play’s final image of enclosed space: the parent’s static monument.

“some new infection to thy eye”: Ocular Contagion in the Early Modern Playhouse

Because it killed over half of London’s population at least every ten years during Shakespeare’s lifetime, most historians cite the bubonic plague as one of the defining experiences of life in Tudor and Stuart England. During outbreaks, signs of the plague were everywhere: dead bodies—their skins speckled with ruptured sores—strewn in alleyways; bills of mortality plastered on every post; air-purifying fires burning throughout the city; mountebanks peddling their plague potions in the streets. Between outbreaks, the plague exerted perhaps an even larger cultural presence: the fear of its return terrorized the minds of early modern subjects, as recorded in the hundreds of plague texts—religious, medical, political, poetic—that

glutted the early modern print marketplace. City officials, church leaders, and antitheatricalist writers all exploited the fear of contagion to promote their own ideological agendas. The plague was everywhere in early modern England.

But Shakespeare never actually stages the plague. We never confront plaguey bodies, bodies like the ones Shakespeare's audience members may have avoided in the streets on the way to the playhouses. Other types of diseased bodies frequently appear on Shakespeare's stage: Othello suffers an epileptic fit; the King of France's fistula is nearly fatal in All's Well; Lear descends into madness before our eyes. Given his willingness to stage other common early modern maladies, why is Shakespeare so reluctant to stage the disease that saturated every aspect of his culture: the plague?

The most obvious answer to this question is that it would have been bad for business to remind theatergoers (and censors) about the epidemic: according to Leeds Barroll's Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater (1991), theater closings during the five major plague outbreaks of Shakespeare's lifetime (1581-82, 1592-4, 1603-4, 1608-9, and 1609-10) were economically devastating to the playhouse economy. Yet Shakespeare certainly did not avoid employing plague imagery in his plays: I will discuss in Chapter Two the various references to "stink"—reeking breath, smelly sins, foggy vapors, contagious clouds, foul dunghills, and odor-emitting corpses—that would have metonymically referred his audience back to the plague.

Significantly, while there are no plaguey bodies on Shakespeare's stage, there are plenty that suffer from lovesickness, and I believe that in staging lovesickness, Shakespeare also stages the plague. As we shall see, the similar etiologies of the two diseases allowed for easy slippage between them in the works of Shakespeare and

his contemporaries: love is contagious, like the plague; love is indiscriminate, like the plague; love is shot with an arrow by Cupid, like the plague—from the Latin plaga, “blow”—is shot with an arrow by God; love penetrates the body through the eye, like the plague.

First, an important distinction: I do not wish to suggest that when audience members gazed upon the whining Orsino, the sighing Romeo, or the disheveled Orlando, they saw only the plague. Although early modern dramatic conventions of lovesickness had become, by Shakespeare’s day, exaggerated and cliché, they were based on a very real disease. Robert Burton’s enormously popular The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) and French physician Jacques Ferrand’s Erotomania (1623) built upon a well-established medical tradition, dating from Hippocrates and Galen, and perpetuated by poets like Petrarch. The symptoms of amor hereos catalogued by Speed and Rosaline demonstrate Shakespeare’s familiarity with the disease. I am not suggesting that “love is not love” in Shakespeare. I am, however, arguing that by staging love contagion, Shakespeare also found a way to stage the plague in a way that escaped city officials and his plays’ censors.

After all, the elision of lovesickness and the plague is pervasive in early modern literature. In Philip Sidney’s poem “Dirge” (1598) for example, the speaker evokes the mournful atmosphere of plaguetime London to describe the pain inflicted by his bitter mistress: “Ring out your bells, let mourning shows be spread,” he begins the poem,

For Love is dead:
All Love is dead, infected
With plague of deep disdain:
Worth, as nought worth, rejected,
And faith fair scorn doth gain. (lines 1-7)

Throughout the rest of the poem, the mistress becomes the plague that terrorizes the city:

Weep, neighbours, weep, do you not hear it said
That Love is dead?
His death-bed, peacock's folly:
His winding-sheet is shame;
...
Let dirge be sung, and trentals rightly read,
For Love is dead:
Sir Wrong his tomb ordaineth
My mistress' marble heart;
Which epitaph containeth,
"Her eyes were once his dart." (lines 11-14, 18-23)

Sidney's speaker ends each stanza with "Good Lord, deliver us," a cry commonly heard during plaguetime.

Lovers also express their jealousy using plague metaphors. Miasma theory dictated that stinky pockets of "bad ayre" carried plague poisons through mists, fogs, and vapors (again, I'll explore this more thoroughly in Chapter Two). For lovers, these miasmas often creep in through their pores and infect their imaginations. When Kitley suspects that his wife has cuckolded him in Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humor (1598), for instance, he describes his jealousy as a "new disease"—the plague (although most editors, surprisingly, gloss it as typhoid):

A new disease! I know not, new or old
But it may well be call'd poor mortals' plague;
For, like a pestilence, it doth infect
The houses of the brain. First it begins
Solely to work upon the phantasy,
Filling her seat with such pestiferous air
As soon corrupts the judgment; and from thence,
Sends like contagion to the memory:
Still each to other giving the infection.
Which as a subtle vapour spreads itself
Confusedly through every sensitive part
Till not a thought or motion in the mind
Be free from the black poison of suspect. (2.3.68-80)

Jealousy and miasma converge again in Sidney's "Sonnet #78" from Astrophil and Stella (1580-1582?): here Astrophil, suspicious of Stella's true devotion, says, "O how the pleasant ayres of true loue be / Infected by those vapours which arise / From out that noisome gulfe, which gaping lies / Between the iawes of hellish Ielousie" (lines 1-4)!

In Shakespeare, it is the experience of falling in love that most often feels like the plague. Cupid shoots love with an arrow: Romeo is "sore enpierced with his shaft" (1.4.16). Similarly, scripture assures Christians that their faith will protect them from "the pestilent arrow that flieth by day" (Psalm 91:6), and plague writers describe the plague as "the arrow of God" (Herring A3) or as "Vnwelcome death [that] approacheth with his dart" (Muggins B2). Plague texts are often accompanied by illustrations of Death grasping an arrow (Figures 2 and 3). Plague writer William Austin concludes that "[Love's] hairy bow that is so often bent / With Cupids shafts, sends those are pestilent" (61).

Moreover, both diseases are swift and unexpected: Muggins describes how "The ioyfull Brydegroome married as to day, / Sicke, weake, and feeble before table layde, / And the next morrow dead and wrap't in clay, / Leauing his Bride, a widdow, wife and mayde" (C4). The particular strain of plague that was most prevalent during the early modern period—bubonic—had a typical incubation period of eight days, which was longer than the strain most common during the Black Death of the 14th century, septicemic plague. Septicemic plague killed within hours: in The Decameron, for example, Boccaccio's speaker observes that people "in the soundest health dined in the morning with their relatives, only to sup that very night with their dead in the other world" (Boccaccio xxx). Nevertheless, the swiftness of the early modern strain, bubonic plague, was still terrifying, and felt very much like the

force of love which wounds Romeo “on a sudden” (2.3.31) and prompts Friar Laurence to remind Romeo to “love moderately; long love doth so; / Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow” (2.6.18-19). The swiftness with which Romeo and Juliet fall in love is condensed from Romeus et Juliet’s nine months into a few days, making the process feel frenetic, “too rash, too unadvised, too sudden; / Too like the lightning” (2.2.11-12). Moreover, both lovesickness and plague are indiscriminate: Cupid is blind—so blind that he “cannot hit the mark,” according to Mercutio (2.1.23). As I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Three, the plague terrified mainly because it struck “vpon all degrees” (Muggins C4): old and young, rich and poor, Christian and heathen.

The two diseases most often merge, however, in instances of what I am calling “ocular contagion” which, as we will discuss below, must have felt very immediate due to the particularly spectacular nature of early modern theater. When Benvolio advises Romeo to “take thou some new infection to thy eye,” he refers to the idea of “eye spirits”: shining rays that emanate from the lover’s eyes, connect with the rays of the beloved’s, and penetrate to the heart (John Donne’s “The Exstasie” most famously describes this process). Galen supported Plato’s view that both the sender and receiver actively participate in this process; Aristotle, however, argued that the beloved’s eye remained passive (Hoeniger 95). Initially, Robert Burton seems to favor Aristotle’s view: in his section on love melancholy in his The Anatomy of Melancholy, he writes “the beginning of this disease is the Eye...The rays, as some think, sent from the eyes...infect the other party” (468). Finally, Burton concludes that both individuals actively participate: “the Eye...is both Active and Passive in this business; it wounds and is wounded” (463). For Neoplatonists, the sight of

beauty—a beautiful woman—kindled a fire in the heart of the lover and encouraged the contemplation of absolute Beauty.

As parodied most obviously in A Midsummer Night's Dream's love-in-idleness potion, love always comes through the eye in Shakespeare: "Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?", Phoebe asks in As You Like It (3.5.22; this line was Marlowe's first, from Hero and Leander); later in the play, Rosalind's brother and new sister-in-law "no sooner looked but they loved" (5.2.32). In Measure for Measure, Angelo "feast[s] upon [Isabella's] eyes" (2.2.178); Bassanio's "fancy" for Portia is "engend' red in the eyes, / With gazing fed" (MV 67-68). Funnily, in The Merry Wives of Windsor, Falstaff reports that "the beam of [Mistress Page's] view" has alighted upon both his foot, and "portly belly" (1.3.61).

Ocular contagion also appears frequently in contemporary plague documents. Plague writers describe how plague poison flies through the air and seeps into ones eyes: an anonymous plague tract, A Looking-glasse for city and countrey (1630), compares the plague to "a Bazaliske or Cockatrice, whose very sight and eies séemeth to cary infection" (1). In Shakespeare, too, the act of looking is described as infectious: when Richard III, that "infection of a man," first propositions Lady Anne over the bier of her dead husband, she cries, "Never hung poison on a fouler toad. / Out of my sight! thou dost infect my eyes" (1.2.13, 34-35). When Cymbeline's Queen wishes to test her "poisonous compounds" on animals, her physician Cornelius warns that "seeing these effects will be / Both noisome and infectious" (1.5.27, 29-32).

Ocular contagion was so common to both discourses of love and the plague that writers from both slipped easily between diseases: in his section on love melancholy in The Anatomy, Burton writes, "...yet most part love is a plague, a torture, a hell," and "Neither is it any wonder [that lovesickness strikes so

suddenly], if we but consider how many other diseases closely and as suddenly, are caught by infection, Plague, Itch, Scabs, Flux, &c” (470). Similarly, William Austin describes how the plague functions like “Platonick love”: “Pest in its sphere does seem to govern, move, / Act and ingender as Platonick love,” he says, and compares plague poisons to the “rayes visive” of a lover’s eye: “To gazers eyes they’re sent to carry fa[...]ons. / From thence they work farther and farther in, / Till they have made the heart their magazine” (60).

Interestingly, the theme of ocular contagion is most prevalent in Shakespeare’s dramas of the 1590’s, particularly Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love’s Labor’s Lost, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and Romeo and Juliet, plays that were written around the time of the plague outbreak of 1593. After Viola-as-Cesario departs from her house in Twelfth Night, a play written slightly later, around 1600, the suddenly smitten Olivia says,

Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth’s perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes. (1.5.26-29)

Similarly, in Love’s Labor’s Lost, Boyet tells the Princess that “Navarre is infected” with love “disclosed with [her] eyes” (2.1.229-30). For Berowne, love is “a plague / That Cupid will impose for [his] neglect” (4.1.198-99); to deflect suspicion from his own love of Rosaline, he tells her that Boyer, Navarre, and Longaville (“those three”) caught the lover’s plague:

Write, “Lord have mercy on us” on those three;
They are infected; in their hearts it lies;
They have the plague, and caught it of your eyes;
These lords are visited; you are not free,
For the Lord’s tokens on you do I see. (5.2.11-14)

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Speed also condenses the symptoms of love with contracting the plague. In his catalog of lovesick behaviors, he describes how a lover will “walk alone, like one that had the pestilence” (2.3.44).

These passages must have resonated forcefully with Shakespeare’s audience in the public theaters, a site that relied upon ocular contagion for its dramatic effect (the Greek theatron, “a place for viewing,” derives from theasthai “to gaze,” or thea “a viewing”). It was, in fact, the audience’s tendency to be “stirred” by what they saw that fueled the debate over the public theaters: antitheatricalists warned against the “contagion of theatrical sights” (Rainolds 177) and the “filthy infections” contracted at “those spectacles” (Munday 70). Defendants of theater, in turn, lauded the theater’s ability to “show the mutability of fortune” (Puttenham 142, emphasis added). The connection between imagination and sight worried antitheatricalists like John Northbrooke who, in A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes (1577) wrote, “...for our eyes are as windows of the mind, as the prophet sayeth, death entered into my windows, that is, by mine eyes” (4). It was through the eyes, not ears, that spectators became “bewitched” (a popular adjective among antitheatricalists): in A Second and Third Blast of Retreat (1580), Anthony Munday writes, “There commeth much evil in at the ears but more at the eyes; by these two open windows death breaketh into the soul. Nothing entereth in more effectually into the memory than that which commeth by seeing; things heard do lightly pass away...” (76). In 1583, Philip Stubbes echoed Munday’s sentiment in his Anatomy of Abuses: quoting Horace, he writes, “For such is our gross and dull nature, that what thing we see opposite before our eyes, do pierce futher, and print deeper into our hearts and minds, that that thing, which is heard only with the ears” (117). Stephen Gosson encourages his readers to seal off their

orifices— “close up your eyes, stop your ears, tie up your tongues”—as if from infection (The School 31).

After all, it was the spectacular nature of plays in action (drama derives from the Latin drama, dramat- or Greek dran, “to do”) that made them so much more dangerous than plays that were read, like the ones in the universities. According to antitheatricalists, the sight of plays embodied, words combined with gesture and movement, was the real danger. In his The Theatre of God’s Judgments (1597), antitheatricalist and schoolmaster of Oliver Cromwell, Thomas Beard, writes that during performed plays, his students’ “eyes are there infected with many lascivious and unchaste gestures” (167); Gosson contends that plays that are “set out in print may be read with profit, but cannot be played without a manifest breach of God’s commandment” since “the action, pronounciation, agility of body...is abominable in the sight of God” (Plays 103). Schoolmaster and Latin playwright William Gager’s answer to Rainold’s The Overthrow of Stage-Plays (1599)—Gager’s defense of playing in universities—centers upon his boys being such bad actors that their gestures wouldn’t fool anyone’s eyes:

we are base and mean, as you see; and specially for womanly behavior, we were so careless that when one of our actors should have made a congie like a woman, he made a leg like a man. In sum, our spectators could not greatly charge our actors with any such diligence in meditation and care to imprint any passions, and so neither of them could receive any hurt thereby. (186)

It was the sight of players in action that in Thomas Heywood’s defense of the theater, An Apology for Actors (1612), allows theater to become instructive:

Tully, in his book *Ad Caium Herennium*, requires five things in an orator: invention, disposition, elocution, memory, and pronounciation, yet all are imperfect without the sixth, which is action...without a comely and elegant gesture, a gracious and a bewitching kind of action, a natural and a familiar

motion of the head, the hand, the body; and a moderate and fit countenance suitable to all the rest, I hold all the rest as nothing. ("An Apology for Actors" 227-28)

If it was contaminating to gaze upon lascivious shows—"Let nothing be acceptable in your eyes that is not holy," Gosson writes (Plays 100-101)—it was also defiling to be gazed upon: Munday argues that "the filthiness of plays and spectacles is such as maketh both the actors and beholders guilty alike" (66). Playhouse plays were performed in broad daylight, with the audience just as fully illuminated as the actors on stage: Dekker assures his Gallant in The gull's horn book (1603), for example, that he will be "perfectly revealed" upon the well-lighted stage which will "bring [him] to most perfect light, and lay [him] open" (29).

It was this power of the gaze to pollute that fueled antitheatricalists' arguments against women attending public shows as well: Northbrooke condemns those who "open[ly] show themselves, openly desire to be seen" and asks, "...what safeguard of chastity can there be, where the woman is desired with so many eyes, where so many faces look upon her, and she upon so many" (5)? The piercing gaze threatens to "ravish" female spectators: "If you...join looks with an amorous gazer, you have already made yourselves assaultable, and yielded your cities to be sacked" (Gosson The School 30). Not only does the gaze "ravish" women in the audience, it emasculates men as well: Gosson writes, "...outward spectacles effeminate and soften the hearts of men; vice is learned with beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked, and those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers...(Plays 107-108). Gender categories were particularly vulnerable when the external markers of difference were muddled. Whereas "Garments are set down for signs distinctive between sex and sex" (Gosson, Plays 101) audience members gazed

upon crossdressed actors who were “transformed into that they see acted before them” (Crosse 191).

According to Hawkes’ Idols of the Marketplace (2000), antitheatricalists decry theatrical spectacle because of its association with Catholicism’s iconography; this seems to account for their condemnation of a place whose purpose it was to “so look, so gaze, so gape upon plays” (Gosson Plays 104). In addition to Hawkes’ findings, I would add that the antitheatrical theme of ocular contagion also reinforces what I see as the controlling rhetorical strategy of all antitheatrical writing: an exploitation of the anxiety that surrounded contagion in the plaguey public theaters. In Chapter Four, I will explore this strategy more thoroughly, the idea that “...they that came honest to a play may depart infected” (Gosson Plays 108). For now, I wish to conclude this section by demonstrating how present the plague would have been in the minds of audience goers leaving London for the suburbs. It was this context that, I believe, would have made remarks like Benvolio’s “take thou some new infection to thy eye” point to both lovesickness and the plague for Shakespeare’s audiences.

After all, it wasn’t love contagion that presented immediate danger in the public theaters: it was plague contagion. We know that Romeo and Juliet was first performed in the public theater: the title page of the first Quarto tells us that the play “hath been often (with great applause) plaid publicly.” And plague writers consistently associate the suburbs, the place of playing, with the plague. As the Lord Mayor notes in 1607, “The said skirts and out-parts of the city are more subject to the infection than any other places” (328-29) and most modern plague historians corroborate his observation: the suburbs’ bills of mortality and parish burial records show greater plague deaths than those of London proper during every major

outbreak of the plague (Slack 10, passim). During the 1603 outbreak James I noted that the houses in the suburbs that were “pestered with multitudes of dwellers [had] been one of the chiefest occasions of the great Plague and mortality”; he issued these houses “rased or pulled downe accordingly” (“By the King...against inmates” 1, emphasis added). The suburbs were also home to many of the city’s poor, a population that was without resources to fly from London. The poor came to be associated with the plague, partially because they performed the loathed jobs needed during outbreaks—“tending the Sick, watching Houses shut up, carrying infected Persons to the Pest-House; and which was still worse, carrying the Dead away to their Graves” (Defoe 121).

For plague writers, the suburbs’ higher incidences of plague deaths were less about overcrowding and poor sanitation: since the plague was both a natural phenomenon and a moral punishment, any physically or morally “disordered” person—most often, vagabonds or rogues—was uniquely capable of spreading the disease. In Londons mourning garment, a verse poem that memorialized London during the 1603 plague outbreak, Muggins describes the suburbs as “offending God” with their sinfulness: “offending God, and plesing Sathan well, / Like wicked SODOME, doth my Subburbs lye, / A might blemish, to fair LONDONS eye” (D2). Like the invisible “seeds” that wandered through the air and caused the plague, the suburbs’ vagabonds were thought to carry the disease: an act under James I associates “unruly people” with pestilence: “And for other wandering poore, Uagabonds, Rogues, and such like base and vnruely people, which pester the high way...” (“By the King... for restraint” 2, emphasis added).

With their vagabonds and disordered poor, then, the suburbs were seen as diseased members of the body politic. In his plague tract Londoner’s their

entertainment in the country, written during the 1603 outbreak, Henry Petowe uses a bodily metaphor to describe how the suburbs' "filthiness" actually diverted God's plague away from the "hart of the City," London. He describes

...the excessiue abomination of filthiness practiced in those places [the suburbs], more then the rest of the City. That as in a body, all the superfluity of extremities, are by the power of a vegetatue heate, wrought to the extremetie of the body: So this filthy froth of sensuall beastlinesse, being by the force of good gouernment...expelled from the inner part, and as I may say, the hart of the City, did residence in the vtmost skirts and appendent members thereunto, and became a fit metter for the first burning of Gods reuengefull wrath. (4)

The plague, then, became powerful ammunition in the war between the playhouses and city officials, the same war that had already prompted the theater owners to build their playhouses in the liberties, outside the jurisdiction of London. However, F.P. Wilson notes that these figures are provisional at best since the Counsel often issued proclamations or private letters to individual playhouses that cited fear of infection as grounds for closing their theater.

It seems, then, that the plague became a pretext for further restrictions of the public playhouses: in 1580, a letter to the Lord Chancellor encouraged the closure of the theaters because "...the assembly of term and Parliament being at hand, against which time the most honorable Lords have given us earnest charge to have care to avoid uncleanness and pestering of the City, the said plays are matter of great danger" ("Sir Nicholas Woodrose" 309, emphasis added). At other times, the Queen's health was of concern: "Also it lieth within the dutiful care for her Majesty's royal person that they be not suffered from playing in the throng of a multitude and of some infected, to press so near to the presence of her Majesty" ("Answer" 317). The morally laden rhetoric of these orders often betray city officials' ulterior motives for the theater closings. In 1593, the Lord Mayor said, "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” ([Answer](#) 317).

It is because the plague saturated every aspect of the early modern playgoing experience that representations of love contagion in Shakespeare’s plays may have felt very much like the actual, life-threatening epidemic in their midst. I have always felt that the catchy songs, infectious wit, and depictions of love—the “sickness [that] is catching” ([MND](#) 1.1.83)—in Shakespeare’s early comedies make them feel particularly contagious. Shakespeare seems to bring the same contagious energy to his first serious attempt at tragedy, [Romeo and Juliet](#): a play that, to paraphrase Romeo, has much to do with love, but perhaps more with plague.

“Here in this city”: The Early Modern Medical Marketplace During Plaguetime

So much depends upon Shakespeare’s phrase “Here in this city,” offered in his account of Friar John’s quarantine. In all of Shakespeare’s sources, the journey of Friar Laurence’s Franciscan brother is tragically interrupted by a plague outbreak outside of Verona, in Mantua (Bandello 74; Boaistuau 114; Brooke line 2487). [Romeo and Juliet](#)’s Friar John, however, never makes it to Romeo’s town of banishment: his “speed to Mantua there [in Verona] was stay’d” because of his contact with a “bare-foot brother...Here in this city visiting the sick” (5.2.10, 7-8). Shakespeare’s revision here is small but important: it means that the play’s dramatic action transpires in the midst of a plague outbreak. The city of Verona is itself infected. In this section, I will argue that Shakespeare’s audience members may have recognized their plague-infested city, London, in “this city,” Verona. Indeed, the characters who make up the medical marketplace in [Romeo and Juliet](#)

are the same who populate plague writers' accounts time and time again: the Paracelsan healer, the Nurse, the apothecary, the searcher.

After all, Italy often stood in for London in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. As Dymphna Callaghan argues, "Italy often served as a sort of fictional London, an exotic mirror of the metropolis, a place where writers could experiment with issues deemed too sensitive or too threatening to be set in the familiar surroundings of contemporary London" (160). Agostino Lombardo supports Callaghan's assessment, and emphasizes Italy's setting as "a mask behind which are hidden the features and problems of London and England" (Lombardo 144-45). Unlike Ben Jonson's The Alchemist whose Prologue tells us "Our scene is London" (line 5), Shakespeare chooses to stage the plague from a distance by retaining Romeo and Juliet's Italianate setting. But Verona is not so far removed: it certainly feels like we are thrust into early modern London's medical marketplace. As Lynette Hunter writes, "Romeo and Juliet is a play overtly about contesting models of medical discourse and the relationships between medicine and rhetoric that were preoccupying English practices in the 1590s" (171).

Indeed, perhaps more than any of Shakespeare's plays, the language of Romeo and Juliet is saturated with references to and images of early modern diseases and treatments; the characters also demonstrate a sophisticated knowledge of both humoral and miasma theories. Both peace and hate are "cankered", for example (1.1.81) and the moon is "sick and pale with grief" (2.2.4). Many passages like Romeo's "Bid a sick man in sadness make his will— / A word ill urged to one that is so ill! (1.1.189-190) and Benvolio's "...one fire burns out another's burning, / One pain is lessened by another's anguish... / One desperate grief cures with another's languish" (1.2.43-46) demonstrate familiarity with the suffering caused by

disease. References to early modern treatment options abound in the play: love and sin are “purged” with Romeo’s sighs and Juliet’s kiss (her kiss is also a “preserving sweet”) (1.1.112, 1.5.122). Romeo takes too literally Benvolio’s offer of “plantain leaf” to cure his lovesickness (1.2.53); the Nurse calls for a “poultice” and “aqua-vitae” (2.5.66, 2.2.88); Benvolio’s “fee-simple” was the price demanded by medical practitioners in Shakespeare’s London (2.1.33). Miasma theory is described accurately by Mercutio (1.4.63) and Friar Laurence (2.3.6), and the references to Romeo’s “black and portentous...humor” (1.1.132), Tybalt’s “willful cholera” and “unruly spleen” refer to humoral theory (1.5.83, 3.1.151), as does Romeo’s “dry sorrow drinks our blood” and Juliet’s belief that “cold...freezes up the heat of life” (3.5.93, 4.3.8). Beyond the plague, Shakespeare’s audience members would have recognized references to diseases like syphilis (which “constrains a man to bow in the hams,” 2.4.66) and Romeo’s “by the book” case of erotomania (1.5.122).

Yet, again, it is really the presence of the Friar, Nurse, apothecary, and searcher that makes Romeo and Juliet feel like a plaguescene play. Traditionally, early modern critics have investigated these figures mainly in relation to their dramatic stock types. Only a few have attempted to see in them what Shakespeare’s audience members probably saw: stock types endowed with characteristics that reflect Shakespeare’s particular historical moment. Shakespeare’s characterization of Friar Laurence is a good place to begin, I believe, mainly because it is the most peculiar: the Friar Laurence that we meet in Romeo and Juliet, especially compared to Shakespeare’s sources, is at once very different from and very similar to a healer practicing in plaguescene London.

Strictly speaking, there were no Friar Laurences in Shakespeare’s England. Henry VIII had expelled friars and monks from England by 1535, so it is very

possible that Shakespeare's audience members never actually laid eyes on one during their lifetimes. Moreover, during the year 1595 when Shakespeare most likely wrote Romeo and Juliet, his audience was reminded that performing sacraments like confession and marriage in early modern England was a capital crime: that year they witnessed Robert Southwell's very gruesome execution for administering these rites to recusant Catholics. This is not to say that Shakespeare's audience would have been surprised to see a Friar in an early modern play: Paul J. Voss estimates that sixty extant early modern dramas feature a friar as a major or minor player (135).

Certainly, Shakespeare drew upon familiar dramatic stock types in his depiction of Friar Laurence (and Friar Francis from Much Ado, and the Duke-as-Friar in Measure for Measure). Shakespeare's friars, however, are much more sympathetic than Marlowe's Barnadine and Jacomo from The Jew of Malta, Chapman's Friar Comolet from Bussy D'Ambois, or Robert Greene's comic but unflattering Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. And certainly, Shakespeare's Friar Laurence is much more sympathetic than in any of his sources for Romeo and Juliet. Brooke's antifraternial sentiments in the Preface to his Romeus and Juliet, for example, describe Friar Laurence as one in a long line of

superstitious friars (the naturally fit instruments of unchastity); attempting all adventures of peril for th' attaining of their wished lust; using auricular confession the key of whoredom and treason, for furtherance of their purpose; abusing the honourable name of lawful marriage to cloak the shame of stolen contracts; finally by all means of dishonest life hasting to most unhappy death.

(lxvi)

Later Brooke calls him “a gross unlearned fool,” and his accusations of the Friar’s sexual improprieties continue: his Friar Laurence’s cell has a “secret place...Where he was wont in youth his fair friends to bestow” (line 567, 1273).

Voss has argued that Shakespeare’s sympathetic portrayal of Friar Laurence betrays his pro-Catholic sentiments ("Antifraternal Tradition" 14). What feels most original about Shakespeare’s friar, however, is not his distance from the evil, friar types of his sources and contemporaries: it is how very early modern Friar Laurence’s medical theories and practices feel. Specifically, Friar Laurence seems to be invested in the medical theories proposed by radical Swiss physician Phillip von Hohenheim, or Paracelsus. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, I will discuss Paracelsus’ specific views on disease and contagion; here I will provide an overview of his general philosophies, especially those that seem pertinent to Shakespeare’s “ghostly father.”

Paracelsus was born in 1493, and the name he chose for himself (“greater than Celsus”) says it all: he was committed to doing away with traditional Greek and Roman medical models (namely, Galenic teachings) which he considered pagan. Instead, he proffered a new, Christian form of medicine that incorporated elements of herbology, alchemy, astrology, and Neoplatonic principles. Following Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, Paracelsus emphasized the prominent place of the human in the universe, and argued that the microcosm of man reflected the macrocosmic, divine principles of God (at various times in his writing the more Platonic animus). At the same time, Paracelsus emphasized the importance of natural philosophy (physican is derived from the Greek physics meaning philosophy): he writes, “physica which teaches you to know the microcosm, what it is and what you have under your hands” (231).

Only Christian physicians, according to Paracelsus, could harness the mysterious spiritus of the cosmos for the benefit of the body. His writings became available in England around 1570 and they immediately posed a challenge to the newly chartered College of Physicians, a group of classically trained practitioners who, under Linacre's leadership, had successfully petitioned King Henry VIII for a grant in 1518. Paracelsus detested what he saw as an overdependence by trained physicians on book learning and emphasized instead the need for direct experience with the patient. He relied upon the Book of Revelation as his only written source, and was once quoted as saying, "...my shoebuckles are more learned than your Galen and Avicenna, and my beard has more experience than all your high colleagues" (118).

Paracelsus subscribed to a vitalist notion of the universe in which every thing—stone, animal, planet—was alive and endowed with the same spirit. Because the various parts of the body correspond to the various parts of the cosmos, Paracelsus believed that physicians must know astrology and meteorology in order to grasp the underlying causes of disease. Moreover, because in the vitalist tradition every part of earth's creation was alive, Paracelsus turned from a medicinal system that focused solely on organic materials like herbs toward inorganic materials like metals, already familiar agents in the alchemical tradition. Paracelsus used herbs as well as mineral compounds like antimony, arsenic, and mercury. He rejected methods like bloodletting because blood carried God's "breath of life"—pneuma—through the body. He recommended a motto of "like cures like," a denial of Galen's principle of contrariety. That is, whereas Galenic practitioners would counter melancholy, a cold and dry disease, with compounds that were moist and warm,

Paracelsan physicians declared that the same poison at the root of any disease can, in the proper quantity, cure it.

It is my argument that Friar Laurence would recall for Shakespeare's audience the Paracelsan healers who populated London during plaguetime. Plague regimens, especially those written by the university elite, complain about the prevalence of Paracelsus' theories: in his 1578 A new counsell against the pestilence, Pierre Drouet warns his readers against the "most vaine trifles of Paracelsus" (31), and Herring rails against his "ridiculous and childish crakings and vantings" (A Modest Defense 33). Paracelsus himself often answered just as acrimoniously: Robert Burton describes in his Anatomy of Melancholy how "Paracelsus calcs Galen, Hippocrates, and al their adherents, Infants, Idiots, Sophisters, &c. not worthy the name of Physitions" (394).

Shakespeare's audience would have recognized the Paracelsan resonances in his characterization of Friar Laurence. Shakespeare knew of Paracelsus—Lafeu reports in All's Well That Ends Well that the King has tried the cures "Both of Galen and Paracelsus" (1.4.13). As Hoeninger notes, other passages in Shakespeare have a decidedly Paracelsan ring: in The Rape of Lucrece, for example, Lucrece notes that a certain poisonous "simple," when processed alchemically, can become "purified": "The poisonous simple sometimes is compacted / In a pure compound; being so applied, / His venom in effect is purified" (lines 530-32) (125). Friar Laurence's opening speech in Act Two, in fact, reads like a grand exposition on Paracelsan medical beliefs:

FRIAR LAURENCE. The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,
Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels:

Now, ere the sun advance his burning eye,
 The day to cheer and night's dank dew to dry,
 I must up-fill this osier cage of ours
 With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers.
 The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb;
 What is her burying grave that is her womb,
 And from her womb children of divers kind
 We sucking on her natural bosom find,
 Many for many virtues excellent,
 None but for some and yet all different.
 O, mickle is the powerful grace that lies
 In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities:
 For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
 But to the earth some special good doth give,
 Nor aught so good but strain'd from that fair use
 Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:
 Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
 And vice sometimes by action dignified.
 Within the infant rind of this small flower
 Poison hath residence and medicine power:
 For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each
 part;
 Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.
 Two such opposed kings encamp them still
 In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;
 And where the worser is predominant,
 Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.
 (2.3.1-30)

The most striking aspect of Friar Laurence's speech in terms of Paracelsan medical thought is his emphasis on the potential benefit of poisonous materials: "baleful weeds," when applied correctly, contain both poison and medicine. When its odor is "smelt," it quickens; when tasted, it stops the heart. For Friar Laurence, there is "naught so vile" that with proper application "some special good doth give." I disagree with Hoeninger who argues that in this speech Friar Laurence references merely "common knowledge," not specifically Paracelsan views (124); I also wish to qualify Hunter's assertion that this line "plac[es] him within traditional Galenic medicine" (173). While Friar Laurence may be referring generally to the Galenic

principle of humoral balance here, he is more specifically referring to Paracelsus' idea of pharmakon, of "medicine" and "poison" existing in one space.

After all, it is his facility in controlling poisons that separates Friar Laurence from, say, the apothecary, the figure sought by both Romeo and Juliet's mother for fatal poison during the play. The "distilling liquor" that Friar Laurence gives to Juliet is probably mandrake juice (mandragora), known for its soporific qualities: Iago says, "Not poppy, nor mandragora, / Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world" will allow the suspicious Othello to sleep peacefully again (Oth 3.3.81-82); Cleopatra requests mandragora so she "might sleep out this great gap of time / [Her] Antony is away" (Ant. 1.5.6-7). But mandrake juice was also potentially poisonous: for example, in 1610, John Donne describes the mandrake "whose operation is betwixt sleepe and poyson" (C3). Juliet seems suspicious of the liquor's poisonous qualities (and of the Friar's intentions): "What if it be a poison, which the friar / Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead" (4.3.33)? The difference between Friar Laurence and the apothecary who we meet in Act Five, of course, is that the Friar knows that poisonous substances, when prescribed in the correct amount, can produce non-lethal effects.

His notion in the above speech that "grace" lies in everything—"plants, herbs, stones"—is in line with Paracelsus' vitalist notion of the universe. Like Paracelsus, Friar Laurence defers to the natural world: "And nobody may make a book or a text," Paracelsus writes, "it is nature who makes the text, the physician makes but the gloss" (qtd. in Temkin 235). In his writings, Paracelsus also refers to the elements of the earth as "mothers" (Temkin 230), which corresponds to Friar Laurence's perception in this speech that earth is "nature's mother" and humans need only suck on "her natural bosom" to find answers. Moreover, Paracelsus

prescribed to the idea of “signatures,” that each plant, animal, and mineral was endowed by a certain planet with a divine “end”—the way a plant looked, for example, guided a faithful person to what kind of ailment it could cure: walnuts, for example, were prescribed for head ailments because they looked like brains; physicians suggested fuzzy apricots for baldness. In Friar Laurence’s words, the plant will tell you how it is to be used: God assigned it a “true birth” and, when “strained from that fair use” it “stumbl[es] on abuse” (2.3.18-19).

In Paracelsan thought, the practice of reading the external characteristics of plants or minerals for their inner natures extends to reading the external signs of a patient for their inner state. Of course, this is the basis of most diagnoses, but whereas Galenic physicians removed themselves to examine their patients’ blood, urine, and feces, Paracelsus insisted on direct interaction. Clinical experience was primary for Paracelsus: he writes, “Thus it is necessary that a physician have great experience, not only of what is in the book; rather, the sick should be his book; they will not fail him; in them he will not be deceived” (qtd. in Temkin 235-36). Friar Laurence’s interactions with Romeo, too, are often based upon ocular diagnosis, both of his soul and body: immediately, he suspects that Romeo “hath not been in bed tonight” because his early rising “argues a distempered head” (2.3.34). Friar Laurence insists that Romeo’s external signs remain consistent with his internal state: “Art thou a man?”, he asks, “Thy form cries out thou art; / Thy tears are womanish.” Romeo is an “Unseemly woman in a seeming man, / And ill-beseeming beast in seeming both!” (3.3.111-112, 116-117). The alchemical metaphors that Friar Laurence uses to describe the lovers’ marriage also betray a Paracelsan bent: their marriage will “incorporate two in one” (incorporate was used in alchemical discourse) and “turn [their] households’ rancor to pure love” (2.3.63-64). Moreover,

both Paracelsus and Friar Laurence advocate a more spiritual strain of Christianity, one mingled with “Adversity’s sweet milk-philosophy” (3.3.54).

Juliet’s confidante, the Nurse, also may have reminded Shakespeare’s audience members of their experiences with the plague. The most despised medical practitioner in all early modern plague writing is the nurse-for-hire. During plaguetime, wealthy households hired nurses to tend to infected family members rather than nurse their infants: these nurses were usually single and desperately poor. Moreover, from 1578 on, each parish employed two nurses to care for infected individuals whose households had been quarantined. Although Defoe suspects that some accounts of plague nurses may be exaggerated, he characterizes them in his Journal as “rash, fearless, and desperate creatures” who commit “petty thieveries” in their employers’ households (113). Moreover, Defoe accuses these nurses of actually “hastening on the fate of those they tended” (87), a common notion expressed by plague writers. “We had at this time a great many frightful stories told us of hired nurses who attended infected people,” Defoe writes, “using them barbarously, starving them, smothering them, or by other wicked means hastening their end, that is to say, murdering of them” (112). Nurses starved their patients, smothered them by pressing a “wet cloth upon the face of a dying patient” (Defoe 114).

However, unlike Hamlet’s Ghost who reports his “foul and most unnatural murder” (1.5.32), plague-nurses’ victims were usually thrown into the plague cart with the rest of the bodies, unavenged. As one plague writer puts it, “He’l [the plague victim] ne’r give out she kill’d him: for ‘tis said, / He’s to be alwayes silent when he’s dead” (Austin 27).

Certainly, Juliet’s Nurse is a wet-nurse, not a plague-nurse: twice she describes nursing and weaning her young charge (1.3.31-32; 1.5.112). Yet wet-nurses

faced similar accusations of treachery as those lodged against plague nurses. Of course, breastfeeding was an activity traditionally reserved for lower-class women: out of necessity, they nursed their own infants. Only Lady Capulet's real-life peers could choose to decrease lag times between pregnancies by procuring a nursemaid; upper-class women also avoided nursing in order to preserve their beauty. Yet some writers, usually religious ones, encouraged upper-class mothers to nurse their own, in part to avoid the "Peevishness, the Lust, the Pride, the Stubbornness of Baseness of a Nurse" that Henry Newcome describes in his The Compleat Mother (1695) (32). Wet-nurses, for Newcome, were "boorish and degenerate" and "so Negligent, that Nastiness oft breeds Disease" under their care (49, 67). Many writers accused Nurses of infanticide—"vast numbers of [infants] *undoubtedly destroyed*" (Newcome 53)—and in her diary heiress Anne Clifford describes "such dissembling nurses...most wilfull, most froward, and most slothfull, as I feare the death of one or two of my little Babes came by the default of their nurses" (112).

Like plague nurses, then, wet nurses were suspect because their services were economically driven; they were "usually not so careful how they do their Work, as to get their Stipend" (Newcome 7). In his essay, "The New Mother" (1522), Erasmus warns that a nurse "may be much more concerned about a bit of money than about a whole baby" (qtd. in Paster Embarrassed 198). Sick nurses were the lowliest of medical practitioners, as were wet-nurses who only gained some degree of power by possessing a coveted and irreplaceable commodity: breastmilk (Paster Embarrassed 201). There is also evidence that wet-nurses and sick nurses were drawn from the same population of female healers: "Because of its great digestibility, breast milk was used in feeding the sick and elderly; because of its reputation for purity, it was used as an ingredient in medicines taken internally or,

like eyewashes and burn ointments, applied topically” (Paster Embarrassed 197). In Romeo and Juliet, for example, the Nurse’s medical knowledge extends beyond nursing, weaning, and rearing: when her bones ache, she asks for a “poultice” (2.6.60); she identifies the “gore-blood” (clotted blood) in Tybalt’s wounds that confirm his death (3.2.20); and she twice calls for aqua vitae, once to revive herself and once Juliet (3.2.88; 4.5.15). Some critics argue that the Nurse’s name is Angelica (from Capulet’s “Look to the baked meats, good Angelica,” 4.4.31), an herb which, according to critics Liane Ferguson and Paul Yachin’s “The Name of Juliet’s Nurse” (1981), “was reputed to be a sovereign remedy against pestilence and poison” (95).

More generally, all women in Shakespeare’s England were expected to possess basic knowledge of medical caregiving: “Their particular talents for nurturing and healing were seen as inherent in their female nature” (Beier 241). Female medical practitioners were so common in London that, in 1602, The College of Physicians petitioned to suppress the practice of nonlicensed “men and women”: city officials denied the College’s request, responding that those “whom God hath endued with knowledge of nature, kind and operation of certain herbs, roots, and waters...for the ease, comfort, succour, help, relief, health of the King’ poor subjects, inhabitants of this his realm, now pained or diseased...” (qtd. in Hoeniger 28).

There may not be a direct parallel between Juliet’s Nurse and the ones described by plague writers; however, the feeling of being plunged into the early modern medical marketplace is certainly strengthened by her presence. A stronger case can be made for Romeo’s apothecary, a frequent figure in early modern plague accounts. During plaguetime, physicians often fled the city, leaving behind their unlicensed colleagues. As one plague writer put it during the 1665 outbreak,

The scarcity of able Physicians willing to attend that disease, the Inefficacy of common remedies...[leave us with] a vapouring Chymist with his drops, an ignorant Apothecary with his blistering plasters, a wilfull Surgeon, an impudent Mountebanke, an intruding Gossip, and a carelesse Nurse. (Garencières 2)

Apothecaries were slightly more respectable than mountebanks and quacks because physicians often called upon them to prepare herbal remedies. However, apothecaries still remained close to the bottom of the medical hierarchy which placed the university educated at the top (Doctor); Surgeons and other skilled medical practitioners (Medicus) next; then Barber-surgeons; then those who healed without formal medical training but some knowledge of natural philosophy (Physicus); and then the Apothecaries, Empirics, Mountebanks, and Quacks who relied upon folk remedies and were often illiterate. The period's investment in humanism largely influenced this hierarchy (Hoeniger 74-75).

As long as apothecaries submitted to their prescribed roles as helpmates to doctors (surgeons like the one Mercurio beckons were expected to submit as well), then they coexisted peacefully. Herring, for example, describes apothecaries and surgeons as his "kinde friends" in A modest defence (36); elsewhere, however, Herring subtly reminds these unlicensed practitioners not to deviate from their assigned places:

So that the Physician, as a great Commander, hath as subordinate to him cooks for Diet, the surgeons for manual Operation, the Apothecaries for confecting and preparing medicines...And yet how far the cunningest of them [apothecaries and physicians] are, from being able to give counsel in physic, both themselves will...freely acknowledge." (Preservatives 10)

There was not always such a hierarchy in England or in Europe more generally. Until they were separated into three discrete entities in 1392, the

Florentine guild of medici, for example, included apothecaries, grocers, and physicians. Partially due to the rise of universities in the later Middle Ages, however, different guilds became more selective, requiring examinations and, eventually, formal educations. Guilds attempted more serious regulation so dissatisfied patients had clearer avenues of recourse. Paracelsus' emphasis on experiential education, and Vesalius's insistence that Doctors actually get their hands dirty (rather than diagnose patients from afar), both seem to have boosted the general status of the apothecary; however, it would not be until 1617 that James I would sanction the Company of Apothecaries. The next year the College of Physicians published Pharmacopoeia, a book of herbals that legitimated many of the apothecary's techniques.

This is not to say that apothecaries in Shakespeare's London lived in the shadows: Lodge describes how such nonlicensed practitioners had "bestowed a new Printed liuery on euery olde post, and promised such myracles, as if they held the raine of desteny in their own hands, and were able to make old Aeson young againe" (A3). Moreover, apothecaries like John Hester who ran the largest apothecary shop in London from 1570-1593, openly published treatises of recipes and translated Paracelsus' works. If Shakespeare exaggerates the desperate conditions of his apothecary, then, it is only a slight exaggeration: most apothecaries, mountebanks, and quacks operating in London were desperately poor, and compelled to sell illegal potions to make ends meet. Shakespeare's apothecary is certainly poverty-stricken, a "caitiff wretch"

In tatter'd weeds, with overwhelming brows,
Culling of simples; meagre were his looks,
Sharp misery had worn him to the bones... (5.1.43-45)

Shakespeare makes his apothecary's straits much more dire than in any of

his sources, possibly to reflect the actual apothecaries he saw operating in London. In Salernitano and Porto, there is no apothecary (Romeo is hanged or uses his own vial of poison, respectively); in Bandello, the reference is brief: the poison is "...given in Mantua by that man in Spoleto who kept asps and other serpents" (79). Brooke's Romeus et Juliet is faithful to Pierre Boaistuau's Histoire troisieme de deux amans (a translation of Boaistuau appeared in William Painter's 1567 Palace of Pleasure which Brooke probably read (intro 7)). In Brooke, Romeus "guesse[s] [the apothecary] to be poor" by his "heavy countenance": "For needy lack is like the poor man to compel/ To sell that which the city's law forbiddeth him to sell. / Then by the hand he drew the needy man apart, / And with the sight of glittring gold inflaméd hath his heart" (lines 2568, 2573-76).

Most of the apothecary's peers throughout Shakespeare's canon, in fact, are desperately poor, as well. In The Comedy of Errors, Antipholus of Ephesus describes

...one Pinch, a hungry lean-faced villain,
A mere anatomy, a mountebank,
A threadbare juggler and a fortune-teller,
A needy, hollow-eyed, sharp-looking wretch,
A dead-looking man... (5.1.13-17)

The difference between Shakespeare's characterization of apothecaries and mountebanks, however, seems significant: it is always the mountebank in his plays that is corrupt—Antipholus' "villain" and "pernicious slave," never the apothecary. The mountebank is synonymous with corruption: Coriolanus says "I'll mountebank their loves, / Cog their hearts from them" (3.2.71-72); as evidence that Ephesus is "full of cozenage," Antipholus lists the

...nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin. (1.2.53-57)

Brabantio condenses mountebanks' techniques with witchcraft: Desdemona has been "corrupted"

By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not. (Oth. 1.3.131-34)

Both apothecaries and mountebanks engage in the illegal sale of poison in Shakespeare: the Cardinal instructs King Henry to "bid the apothecary / Bring the strong poison that [he] bought of him" (3.3.81-82), apparently to commit suicide; Laertes anoints the tip of his sword with "an unction [bought] of a mountebank" (3.2.133).

The real invention to Shakespeare's apothecary, then, is twofold: first, only Shakespeare incorporates elements from everyday London life into his lavish description of his apothecary, describing his shop where

...a tortoise hung,
An alligator stuff'd, and other skins
Of ill-shaped fishes; and about his shelves
A beggarly account of empty boxes,
Green earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds,
Remnants of packthread and old cakes of roses,
Were thinly scatter'd, to make up a show. (5.1.21-27)

Second, Shakespeare departs from his sources in portraying his apothecary sympathetically. Like Romeo, he is a victim of Fortune:

ROMEO. Art thou so bare and full of wretchedness,
And fear'st to die? famine is in thy cheeks,
Need and oppression starveth in thine eyes,
Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back;
The world is not thy friend nor the world's law;
The world affords no law to make thee rich;
Then be not poor, but break it, and take this.
(5.1.29-34)

Shakespeare, in fact, does not subject his apothecary to the fate that this character meets in other versions of the tale: in Boaistuau, the apothecary is “seized, tortured, convicted, and then hanged” (122); in Brooke, “Th’apothecary high is hangéd by the throat” and suffers a further insult: the hangman walks off with his coat (line 2993).

I wish to end this section with a discussion of the final plague figure who Shakespeare references in Romeo and Juliet, and one that is found in none of his sources: the searcher. Friar John, remember, reports that “the searchers of the town, / Suspecting that we both were in a house / Where infectious pestilence did reign / Seal’d up the doors...” (5.2.8-11). Just as with his description of the apothecary’s shop, then, Shakespeare’s description of Friar John’s quarantine references the immediate environment of London. Again, none of his sources mention searchers: in Brooke’s version (which, again, follows Boaistuau’s closely), an unspecified entity instructs the friars to “keep within their convent gate” and the townfolk to “shun” the friary:

For that a brother of the house, a day before or twain,
Died of the plague—sickness which they greatly fear and hate
So were the brethren charged to keep within their convent
gate,
Barred of their fellowship that in the town do wone;
The townfolk eke commanded are the friar’s house to shun
Till they that had the care of health their freedom should
renew;
Whereof, as you shall shortly hear, a mischief great there grew.
(lines 2494-2500)

Shakespeare, perhaps wishing to connect Friar John’s experience with his audience’s experience of the plague, needed a more active entity, the searcher, to impose his quarantine. Interestingly however, Shakespeare did not choose to

represent this scene as vividly as Bandello who, in his version, describes the buboes that had erupted on the infected friar's skin:

The friar set out and arrived in Mantua very early...he found out that one of the friars in that convent had only just died, and because there had been some talk of plague, the health officers decided that without a doubt this was the cause of the said friar's death; the more so since a bubo much larger than an egg was found in his groin, as this was an indisputable and very clear sign of that pestilential illness. (74-75)

While Shakespeare did not choose to include such a colorful description of the friar's symptoms, the searcher he describes would have felt very familiar to his audience. City officials appointed one or two new individuals as Searchers (also called examiners or surveyors), who would enter recently quarantined households, and "make due search and true report to the utmost of their knowledge whether the persons whose bodies they are appointed to search do die of the infection, or of what other diseases, as near as they can" (Defoe 57). The searchers, then, were responsible for the accuracy of the weekly Bills of Mortality, published by city officials and discussed so anxiously among citizens during outbreaks.

Searchers were also required to enter houses suspected of harboring infected family members and, as Lodge describes, "if they finde any sicke in these houses, to make a true report vnto those that haue the charge and ouerlooking the sicke" (F3). New searchers were appointed every two months and jailed if they refused the position. Understandably, this was not a coveted job: in his Journal, Defoe's narrator is appointed as examiner "which [he] was at first greatly afflicted at, and very much disturb'd about" (204). Searchers, along with the buriers and batchmen who found steady employment during outbreaks, were largely scorned due to their high rate of contact with the infected; they were required to carry red rods when they went abroad. For example, when Pepys fears that his friend Captain Coches has died of

the plague, he overhears Searchers discussing Coches' case: "...meeting yesterday the Searchers with their rods in their hands coming from his house, I did overhear them say that the fellow did not die of the plague" (283). Pepys' friend was one of the lucky ones.

"death's the end of all": Carnival and the Plague

In his poem Epiloimia epe, or, The anatomy of the pestilence, Austin describes how Death—"our fellow *skeleton*"—haunted the existence of London's citizens during the 1666 outbreak:

When we laugh much, our fellow *skeleton*
Shews us our sides we hold, from bone to bone.
When the world makes us sigh, lament & cry,
Memento mori's always in our eye. (39)

Here, as in many plague texts, the annihilating presence of Death emerges in Austin's passage alongside an equally powerful and regenerative force: laughter. Even while "*Memento mori's* always in [their] eye," their laughter is so riotous that "[their] sides [they] hold."

Many critics have noted in Romeo and Juliet the simultaneous presence of comic and tragic, regeneration and destruction, love (eros) and violence (thanatos). What we experience in Romeo and Juliet, I think, is better described as a singular, contagious energy that manifests itself at times in the regenerative power of love, and at others, the destructive power of death. Interestingly, a similar energy structures Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. The procreative, boundless function of comedy—Benedick's "the world must be peopled" (Ado 2.3.111)—is outmatched only slightly by the ultimately negating function of tragedy—the Nurse's "death's the end of all" (3.3.92). Because the comic is so strong in Romeo and

Juliet, many critics resist declaring Romeo and Juliet a tragedy. In this section, I will argue that the carnivalesque elements that critics have noted in Romeo and Juliet resemble the culture that sprung up during plaguetime: a space in which, as Friar Laurence remarks, “poison hath residence and medicine power” (2.3.18). However, as with the plague, it is Death—always Death—that prevails in Romeo and Juliet.

In his foundational Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy (1997), Michael Neill argues that “No other single phenomenon had a more decisive effect than the plague in shaping the early modern crisis of death... By exposing populations to the trauma of mass death on an unprecedented scale, the plague repeatedly activated the fantasy of universal destruction” (15). In contemporary plague documents, universal destruction is most often embodied in the character of Death who stalks the streets with his pestilent darts or scythe. As Antony says to Cleopatra, “The next time I do fight, / I’ll make death love me; for I will contend / Even with his pestilent scythe” (3.13.83). In his plague allegory A dialogue against the feuer pestilence, for example, physician William Bullein’s character Mors debates the nature of the plague with the twelve other allegorical figures in the dialogue, including Theologus, Medicus, and Civis. Mors is terrifying: “I will smite thee with this pestilent dart,” he says, “as I haue doen to many kingdomes, citées and people, bothe man and beast, yong and old” (77). Upon his exit, Mors declares, “I will cutte them doune with my sithe like grasse and kill them with my three fearfull dartes [plague, famine, war]. The paines of helle doe followe me, to swallowe vp all fleshe, that dooeth not repent them of their wickednesse” (33).

Dekker is perhaps most colorful in his descriptions of how, during plaguetime, “Death walked vp and downe this Land in strange shapes: Men, Women, and Children, fell by the Pestilence” (Blacke and White Rod 203). For Dekker, Death is an urban figure who terrorizes London, devouring everything in his path: “This hungry Plague, Cater to death, / Who eates vp all, yet famisheth” (Newes 80). Dekker even offers his own (rather bizarre) myth of the plague’s origin in The Wonderfull Yeare: the plague (Dekker’s “*Sicknesse*”) is born of a woman (“The Element”), reared by Death, and sent to murder Queen Elizabeth (there is no evidence that the monarch died of the plague):

The Element...fell in labour, and was deliuered of a pale, meager, weake childe, named *Sicknesse*, whom Death (with a pestilence) would needes take vpon him to nurse, and did so...Death made him his Herauld: attired him like a Courtier, and (in his name) charged him to goe into the Priuie Chamber of the English Queene, to sommon her to appeare in the Star-chamber of heauen. (11).

Here, in Dekker’s account, the plague is bound to Death even before it claims its first victim.

Not surprisingly, artists who have experienced the plague have consistently attempted to confront death through their cultural products. The thirteenth century Latin hymn Dies Irae, for example, and the fourteenth century Latin texts Ars moriendi are all thought to have been inspired by the epidemic. The macabre art form that is most consistently tied to the plague, however, is the iconographic Dance of Death. While some critics have questioned the commonly held belief that The Dance was a direct response to the plague, most agree that the Black Death of 1348 certainly contributed to the art form’s proliferation. The Dance of Death, known mostly in its visual medium, was originally a mid-fourteenth century allegorical drama. The allegory was usually performed in a cemetery: it began with a monk’s

sermon, after which figures masked as Death ascended from the charnel-house; after a brief dialogue, they led their victims away. The monk concluded The Dance with another brief sermon which explicated the lesson.

The first pictorial representation of The Dance of Death was painted in Paris in 1424 on a wall of The Church of the Holy Innocents. In this representation, a skeletal, antic Death figure summons individuals from all walks of life to join him in dance; there is usually text that accompanies the illustration. Examples in Germany (Totentanz) and Spain (la Danza de la Muerte) date from the fifteenth century. In England, the first example appears in 1430, in a cloister of St. Paul's Cathedral; the accompanying text is John Lydgate's translation of the original French poem. Hans Holbein produced two woodcut series of the Dance of Death, seventy-six of which were reprinted in the borders of Queen Elizabeth's Book of Common Prayer (Figures 4 and 5).

Significantly, critics have noted the relationship between Romeo and Juliet and the Dance of Death. In "The Dance of Love and Death in Romeo and Juliet," Peter L. Hays argues that Romeo, beginning with his refusal to dance in Act One, becomes, with Tybalt, a figure "in a dance of death" (537); Ronald Knowles, in turn, sees the play responding to the "death cult of the second half of the fifteenth century which persisted into the Renaissance"..."fifteenth and sixteenth-century graphic art is recalled particularly that of the Dance of Death" (70, 79). For Knowles, the Capulet feast is a "dance of life...haunted by the late medieval dance of death" (72).

Indeed, Death's presence in Romeo and Juliet is constant and, at times, suffocating. As Lloyd Davis notes, "The action of Romeo and Juliet occurs between two speeches proclaiming the lovers' deaths" (28); we hear soon enough that at least two deaths, the Nurse's husband's and daughter's, have occurred before we arrived.

Twice death suddenly invades Romeo's thoughts: after the Capulet feast, the newly smitten lover says,

I fear, too early: for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life closed in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death. (1.4.102-106)

Later, in Mantua, he confesses to Balthasar, "I dreamt my lady came and found me dead— / Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think!" (5.1.71-72). There is, throughout, a "death-marked love" (Prologue, line 9), threatened by "Love-devouring death" (2.6.68).

In these passages, Death is an abstraction, one similar to Hamlet's "undiscover'd country." More often, Death in Romeo and Juliet is an actual figure who dances through the dramatic action, a figure like the one who plague writers describe. Death is invoked as a lover: Juliet says, "And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead" (3.2.121)! Capulet tells Paris

...the night before thy wedding-day
Hath Death lain with thy wife. There she lies,
Flower as she was, deflowered by him.
Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir;
My daughter he hath wedded: I will die,
And leave him all; life, living, all is Death's. (4.5.77-82)

For Romeo, "Death is amorous / ...the lean abjured monster keeps / [Juliet] here in dark to be his paramour" (5.3.133-35).

Death is also an opponent in Romeo and Juliet: Friar Laurence observes that Juliet will "copest with Death himself to scape from it" (4.1.96); Paris protests,

Beguiled, divorced, wronged, spited, slain!
Most detestable Death, by thee beguil'd,
By cruel cruel thee quite overthrown!
O love! O life! not life, but love in death! (4.5.131-34)

Romeo tells Juliet that “Death that hath sucked the honey of they breath, / Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty. / Thou art not conquered...And death’s paleflag is not advanced there” (5.3.21-23). In these passages, we witness what Neill sees as the defining characteristic of early modern dramatic representations of Death: no longer a “mere cessation, extinction, or absence,” Death is now envisaged and embodied, “endowed with a terrifying personality, expressed in the emaciated frame, grotesque features, and monstrous appetite that identify him as one of humanity’s grand antagonists” (4, 3).

For Neill, the “discovery of death and mapping of its meanings” was part of early modern tragedy’s cultural work (1). Neill’s premise is supported by how frequently early modern plague writers used tragedies like Romeo and Juliet to frame their own experiences with Death. For preacher John Davies, plaguetime London is a “tragicke Stage / Whereon to shew Deaths power, with slaughters sore” (245); Fuller also compares God to Marlowe’s Tamburlaine:

...so doth God...as Tamberlaine was wont to doe, first hang out his white flagge to any Citie hee enuironed, his proffer of peace and mercy if they will yeeld, then the red Flagge of threatnings, yet so as if yet they would submit, there was hope, but lastly the blacke Flagge was displayed, and then no way but death and destruction if he preuailed... (31)

In his 1666 description of plaguetime London, George Wither notes how the pervasive atmosphere of “*Mourning*” makes their lives “one continuing *Tragedy*”:

For, ev’ry place with sorrowes then abounded,
And ev’ry way the cryes of *Mourning* sounded.
Yea day by day, successively till night,
And from the evening till the morning light,
Were *Scees* of Griefe, with strange variety ·
Knit up, in one continuing *Tragedy*. (18 The Wonderfull Yeare)

Not surprisingly, Dekker is also fond of “All the world’s a stage” conceits in his plague pamphlets. “These are the Tragedies,” he writes, “whose sight / With teares

blot all the lynes we write, / The Stage whereon the Scenes are plaide / Is a whole Kingdom”:

Our Mothers Wombe is the Tying-house...Euery Actor hath his Entrance, euery one his Exit. [When the] Blacke Rod, (Sickness) approaches...in this Magnificent Theater, we haue letted long on the Stage...yet, our Parts being done, we are inforced to put off, our gay borrowed garments, and wrapping our selues in poore winding-Sheets, Hasten to our owne homes.”

(Newes 96).

It was, perhaps, more than their constant confrontations with Death that made early modern plague writers feel like they were players in a grand tragedy. I believe that they also may have recognized during plaguetime the “perverting, inverting, or neglecting of the ordering, containing properties of civic and social rituals” that Naomi Conn Liebler identifies as the stuff of tragedy (9). Specifically, in Romeo and Juliet, the “secret marriage andthe fake funeral for one not dead” denies Verona “the right to witness and affirm these crucial passages from boy and girl to man and woman, and later from life to death” (Liebler 150). Liebler argues that when the rituals that normally keep the destructive forces of death in check are broken, destruction is unleashed upon the fictive community.

After all, every plague writer from every period notes that the community suffers an irreparable breach of social ritual as a result of the destructive disease.

More than any, it was burial rites that were entirely upset:

The ceremonie at their Burialls
Is Ashes but to Ashes, Dust, to Dust;
Nay not so much; for, strait the Pit-man falles
(If he can stand) to hide them as he must.
...
Cast out your Dead, the Carcasse-carrier cries
Which he, by heaps, in grou~dlesse graues interres!
...
but th'empty Graue
(Most rauenuous) deuoured so the Dead,

As scarce the dead might Christian buriall haue!
(Davis 222)

Burial orders during plague outbreaks were extremely restrictive. In 1609, for example, King James issued an order that limited the number of mourners who may follow a dead corpse to six (Slack 234); burials in Shakespeare's England were limited to after sunset and before sunrise to control the amount of mourners (Slack 210).

If plague writers associated their constant confrontation with Death as tragic, then surely the overwhelming presence of Death in Romeo and Juliet is part of what makes it a tragedy. Shakespeare and his contemporaries seemed perfectly comfortable calling Romeo and Juliet a tragedy, after all: unlike Troilus and Cressida which was variously a history (Quarto 1), comedy (Quarto 2), and tragedy (Folio), Romeo and Juliet was consistently categorized as a tragedy in both the First "Bad" Quarto of 1597 ("An EXCELLENT conceited Tragedie"), the Second Quarto of 1599 ("THE MOST Excellent and lamentable Tragedie"), and in the posthumously published Folio of 1623. Moreover, Neill writes that for Shakespeare's audiences, "[Death's] mere presence in the catastrophe of a play...was sufficient to identify it as belonging to the tragic kind..." (30).

Yet modern critics have resisted calling Romeo and Juliet a tragedy: Northrype Frye calls it a "perverted comedy" (166-67); Thomas Moisan suspects that it "either is not a tragedy or is less tragic than tragedies ought to be or than Shakespeare's later, 'greater' tragedies are" (113); Ruth Nevo deems it "less tragic than Lear...because the vision of evil in it is less deep...Here all is at a lower pitch; nearer to the commonplace and ordinary" (73); Maurice Charney dismisses it as "at best a scapegoat tragedy, if such a genre is possible" (5). Indeed, it is a tragedy that

so easily could have been a comedy, more similar to its neighbor, A Midsummer Night's Dream, than to any of Shakespeare's plays. The comic types are all here: the senex iratus; the garrulous nurse; the lover and his buddies (including Mercutio, the clown); the rival lover who has the father's approval; the young girl, just coming of age. The action takes place in a city, that most comedic of settings; it treats love, that most domestic of topics (certainly when Shakespeare set out to write about it). As Voss notes, Friar Laurence's actions are similar to Friar Francis' in Much Ado: however, one leads to a comedic resolution (marriage) and the other to a tragic one (death) ("My Ghostly Father" 134).

According to Knowles, it is this carnivalesque atmosphere—both comic and tragic—that defines the rhythm and themes of Romeo and Juliet; Francis Laroque also identifies in the play a "world upside down":

To the ebullient atmosphere of erotic drives that is released by the prospect of marriage, by music, dancing, and masquing, as well as by the flares of torches at night and the dog days of early summer in Verona, one must surely add the numerous language games, puns, innuendoes, and paradoxes whose main source is Mercutio, the play's lord of misrule...Romeo and Juliet introduces us into a world upside down where the ordinary rules...are temporarily lifted or brushed aside. (18)

Yet Knowles' analysis in "Carnival and Death in Romeo and Juliet: A Bakhtinian Reading" (1988) is perhaps more in line with Bakhtin in that it recognizes both the forces of death and life, of containment and subversion in the carnivalesque. In his application of Bakhtin's carnival as a space that "concentrates on final bodily putrefaction" as well as "bodily regeneration" (79-80), he notes that the Nurse's first narrative connects death and destruction (Susan's death, the earthquake) to birth and regeneration (Juliet's birth, sex); Juliet's wedding feast also contains in it a funeral banquet. Knowles argues that this death / life rhythm also informs the

structure of the play. In Act 4, for example, Knowles identifies Capulet's festival / funeral speech as a framing device for the act as a whole:

In 4.1 Juliet evokes the horrors of the charnel house and death-shrouds, whereas 4.2 opens with proverbial jokes about cooks licking their fingers. In 4.3 just before taking the potion the horrors of being entombed are vividly before Juliet. And then the carnivalesque world of food and the body is heard once more—"more spices", "They call for dates and quinces", "look to the bak'd meats" (4.4.1, 2, 5). The nurse as weeping Fortune discovers Juliet's body in 4.4, and the festive musicians decide to stay on for a funereal free meal...the social world vies with the medieval horrors of death. (78)

Knowles is not the first to recognize that while the Romeo and Juliet's love is regenerative—Juliet's "the more I give to thee, / The more I have, for both are infinite"—it is always already headed toward disintegration. For example, when the lovers' rhetoric attempts to disentangle love from death and violence, it always fails. The trope of ocular contagion that we discussed above is a good example here. The lovers' eyes "wound" each other in Romeo and Juliet, a Petrarchan convention found in many of Shakespeare's plays: Rosaline's eye "Wounds" Berowne like a "leaden sword" (LLL 5.2.134); Phoebe promises to "murder," "kill," and "wound" Corin with hers (AYLI 3.5.8, 11). But in Romeo and Juliet, when Romeo is "sore enpierced" with Cupid's arrow (1.4.61) or Juliet's eye has more "peril" than "twenty of [the Capulets'] swords" (2.2.77), we know that there are actual swords in Verona that literally wound as well: upon viewing Tybalt's "bloody piteous corse," the Nurse reports "I saw the wound, I saw it with mine eyes" (3.2.51, 53); the scabbard-toting Mercutio reports, "he is already dead; stabbed with a white wench's black eye" (2.4.32). Indeed, the lover's "eye-spirits" are always bound up with the destructive force of Juliet's "deathdarting eye of cockatrice" (3.2.42). Juliet's love rhetoric is tinged with violence: she would "kill [Romeo] with much cherishing" and "Take him and cut him

out in little stars” (2.2.58, 3.2.22). The play’s insistence on the interchangeability between graves and wedding beds; the salvific dove and ominous raven within one woman; the apothecary’s fee in gold as “poison to men’s souls” (5.1.101) and material for the lovers’ statue, a symbol of peace; the Nurse’s “R” standing for the lover Romeo and the rosemary they strew on Juliet’s grave: this is the essence of Bakhtin’s carnival. What Paris doesn’t quite understand is that wooing and woe-ing in Verona are never separate: they are always and everywhere bound up together.

This sense of laughing in the face of death, of comic and tragic existing in one space, was typical of plaguetime London, as well. In the midst of their own real-life tragedies—remember Austin’s “*Memento mori’s* always in our eye”—there arose a culture of hedonism, dance, and festivity. The “flight” phenomenon provided an inherently carnivalesque atmosphere in plaguetime London: kings and queens, city officials, and religious leaders fled the city for the cleaner air of the country. As a result, there was a carnivalesque atmosphere in London, defined by Bakhtin as a “temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men” (Bakhtin 89): servants like Ben Jonson’s *Subtle and Face* were left in charge while the Lovewits were away. While outbreaks of the plague did not follow the seasonal calendars of the pageants, festivals, and ritualized feasts that Bakhtin discusses, they were frequent enough to constitute a periodic “second world and a second life outside officialdom” (6).

As the few church leaders who stayed in the city constantly emphasized, this “second world” was a raucous one. Fears of contagion did not prevent some from crowding in to taverns, even on the Sabbath: “What Feastings, what Gamings and vnlawfull Recreations? what slie and secret Reuellings and haunting of Tauerns and Taphouses? what Surfetting and Drunkenesse, on that day?,” complains the

anonymous author of Lachrymae Londinenses, written in 1626 (12). Many plague writers comment on the noisiness, the polyphonic quality of these festivities: in 1611, preacher Jon Dod condemns the “iesting, and laughing, and drinking” he witnesses in the taverns (14). Preacher Mathew Mead, in the 1666 plague sermon Solomon’s prescription for the removal of the pestilence, asks, “Shall Blasphemy, and Swearing, and Cursing, be as loud as ever? Will men again to the World, and their Pleasures, as busily as ever? And make as light of his Threatnings and Promises, and laugh at the talk of death and judgment, as they were wont to do” (78)? George Wither describes the “*Musick, mirth and wine,*” how the “Hoboyes, Cornets, Drum and Trumpet sound, / To tell the neighbours how the healths [toasts] go round” (211) . Dekker describes how “In the Streets, blaspheming, selling, buying, swearing. In Tauernes, and Ale-houses, drinking, roaring, and surfetting” (Rod for Run-Awaies 151) .

The presence of laughter is especially important in these passages: Bakhtin underscores the “ever-growing, in exhaustible, ever-laughing principle” as essential to carnival (24). Moreover, descriptions of the “filthy vomitings” and “Surffettings” of these revelers align with Bahktin’s emphasis on the “degraded,” grotesque body “which exceeds its own limits [through] copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation” (106).

Of course, hedonism is not particular to the early modern plague experience: most accounts of the plague from all periods stress the presence of festivity in the face of death (The Dance of Death is, after all, a dance). In his History of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides describes how individuals “resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves... but it was settled that present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was both honorable and useful. Fear of gods or law of man

there was none to restrain them” (53). Boccaccio writes that during the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century, some held that “drinking and enjoyment, singing and free living” was “the best preventative of such a malady”:

Day and night they went from one tavern to another drinking and carousing unrestrainedly. At the least inkling of something that suited them, they ran wild in other people’s houses, and there was no one to prevent them, for everyone had abandoned all responsibility for his belongings as well as for himself, considering his days were numbered. (xxv)

As Romeo says, “How oft when men are at the point of death / Have they been merry which their keepers call / A lightning before death” (5.3.61-63)! Despite their attempts at laughter, the disintegrating forces of death always win out in these plague texts: Thucydides, in fact, is the only one to contract the plague and live to write about it. In Romeo and Juliet, too, “death’s the end of all.” Certainly, Shakespeare’s audience members, having recently lived through the first of the many horrible plague outbreaks that would strike London during their lifetimes, would recognize in the lovers’ charnel-house their experience with the epidemic. During plaguetime, London was a charnel-house: “What an vnmatchable torment were it for a man to be [b]ard vp euery night in a vast silent Charnell-house [of London]?” Dekker writes,

where all the pauement should in stead of gréene rushes, be strowde with blasted Rosemary...thickly mingled with heapes of dead mens bones: the bare ribbes of a father that begat him, lying there: here the Chaplesse hollow scull of a mother that bore him: round about him a thousand Coarses, some standing bolt vpright in their knotted winding shéetes: others halfe mouldred in rotten coffins, that should suddenly yawne wide open, filling his nostrils with noysome stench, and his eyes with the sight of nothing but crawling wormes.

(The Wonderfull Yeare 27)

Indeed, in Romeo and Juliet’s charnel-house, “worms... are [Juliet’s] chamber-maids” (5.3.75), just as the dead would “lie vtterly lost [in plague pits], rotten,

forgotten, and stincking, in a filthie pit of darkenes, inclosed and wrapped with Wormes” (Bullein, A Dialogue 38). If Hamlet is Shakespeare’s most macabre play, then here, in Romeo and Juliet’s charnel-house, Shakespeare writes his most macabre scene: a tableau of death.

“The day is hot”: The Seasonal Plague

To end this chapter, I wish to discuss a small but important change that Shakespeare makes to his source material: the season. Romeo and Juliet is set in the summer, which feels appropriate due to the fiery temper of the feuding families, their “mad blood flowing” (3.1.4). In Shakespeare’s sources, however, the lovers meet against the backdrop of snow, not sun: all of Mercutio’s antecedents, for example, are described as having hands so cold that they rival their snowy setting—more “frozen than the coldest alpine ice” (Bandello 54). In Porto’s novella, the balcony scene takes place “one evening when it was snowing heavily” and Romeo—rather suavely—asks, “Do you feel no pity for me, that every night in weather like this I wait for you here in this street” (32)? In Bandello’s novella, the Capulet feast is a Christmas celebration (51); Boastuau also places the feast at Christmas, and Mercutio’s slaying occurs a few months later on Easter morning. Shakespeare’s most direct source, Brooke’s Romeus and Juliet, depicts the feast as a remedy for the bleak midwinter: “The weary winter nights restore the Christmas games, / And now the season doth invite to banquet townish dames. / And first in Capel’s house, the chief of all the kin / Spar’th for no cost, the wonted use of banquets to begin” (lines 155-58).

In contrast, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is set during the dog days of summer: Friar Laurence anticipates the sun's "burning eye" (2.3.5). Unlike Shakespeare's sources which employ imagery of snow and ice (Bandello's lovesick Romeo wastes away "like snow in the sun," 52), images of the summer dominate Shakespeare's play: Juliet, Romeo informs us "is the sun" (2.2.32), and to Friar Laurence a lover's gait is so light it can "bestride the gossamer / That idles in the wanton summer air" (3.1.18-19). Baz Luhrmann sets his film Romeo+Juliet (1996) on the steamy, hazy modern-day Verona Beach to emphasize Shakespeare's setting. In his version, the heat makes Benvolio, played by Dash Mihok, cranky:

BENVOLIO.	I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire: The day is hot, the Capulets abroad, And, if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl; For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring.	(3.1.4)
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Because of the plague that rages in Verona, it would have made sense to Shakespeare's audience that the dramatic action takes place in summer. Every summer brought dread of an outbreak, and illustrations of plague-stricken London often included a blazing sun (Figure 6). Members of the Court retired to the country or limited contact with their subjects during summer months: in May of 1604, King James' officials prohibited the "vnlimited concourse of people of all sorts to His Court...in this season of the yeere, which growes euey day more dangerous for increasing the infection" (The Orders 2).

We now know that the summer months bred disease-carrying fleas, and every Bill of Mortality from the period reflects an increase in plague deaths during the summer months (Figure 7). Early modern writers from all genres associate the disease with summer: importantly, the sole plague reference in Edmund Spenser's

The Shepheardes Calender appears in July when “the Sonne hath reared vp his fyriefooted teme, / Making his way between the Cuppe and golden Diademe: / The rampant Lyon hunts he fast, with Dogge of noisome breath, / Whose balefull barking bringes in hast pyne, plagues and dreery death” (lines 7-10). Samuel Pepys’ June 7, 1665 entry describes an outbreak during “the hottest day that ever I felt in my life” (120); physician William Bullein recommends staying in during the “Dogge daies” of summer (A Dialogue 20, 40). The end of spring came with a certain sense of dread: Defoe describes how “terrible apprehensions were among the people, especially the weather being now changed and growing warm, and the summer being at hand” (13). Because of its association with summer months and the blistering fever that accompanied its initial onset, the plague was often described as “hot,” as in The Alchemist: Jonson’s London is infected with “The sickness hot” (Prologue 2).

It may seem surprising that I have focused so little in this chapter on Mercutio’s curse. Indeed, his “A plague ‘o both your houses” from Act Three is the most famous Shakespearean reference to the bubonic plague, and certainly the first one that individuals recall after I’ve shared my dissertation topic with them. The line seems to have been worthy of Shakespeare’s attention, too: in the two years between his 1597 foul papers (which became Quarto One) and 1599 “Newly corrected, augmented, and amended” Quarto Two, he revised Mercutio’s dying words from “A poxe on both your houses” to “A plague o’ both your houses.” Certainly, I do not intend to minimize the drama of Mercutio’s utterance or the moment that inspires it. Still, as this chapter has attempted to prove, to concentrate only on Mercutio’s curse

risks missing the various and important ways the plague infects the entirety of Shakespeare's text.

The Smell of Dover: Stink, the In(Spire)d Poet, and the Rhetoric of Filth

It has become a critical commonplace that while Shakespeare's life was greatly affected by the bubonic plague, his work remained somehow removed from it: Shakespeare and the plague have remained in the domain of biographers like Leeds Barroll who, in Plague, Politics and Shakespeare's Theater (1991), investigates how theater closings affected Shakespeare's writing habits and economic prospects. F. David Hoening, for example, specifically argues against the plague's presence in Shakespeare's plays: "Shakespeare's allusions to the plague are general, brief, and make use of familiar conceptions. The absence of any clear hints (apart from Friar John's experience of quarantine in Romeo and Juliet) at the immediate experience of the plague in London is remarkable..." (213).

A few other scholars, most notably Margaret Healy in Fictions of Disease (2001) and Rebecca Totaro in Suffering in Paradise (2005), have begun to disprove Ernest B. Gilman's observation, made in 2003, that in light of AIDS and other modern epidemics, "understanding the profound effects of disease on human culture has taken on a new urgency. In this endeavor, however, literary historians—with the exception of those medievalists who have written extensively on the literature and art of the Black Death of the fourteenth century—have for the most part lagged behind their colleagues in the social sciences" (159). To date, no book-length study on the plague and early modern drama or poetry exists, and this chapter will begin to argue what our "colleagues in the social sciences" have known for some time: that the plague was one of the defining experiences of early modern culture, and without an eye toward that experience, our readings of its cultural products are acutely myopic.

This chapter will argue that Shakespeare's plays do indeed reference the "immediate experience of the plague in London" through their encounters with what I am calling "stink": images of "bad ayre," reeking breath, smelly sins, foggy vapors, contagious clouds, foul dunghills, and odor-emitting corpses that populate his plays and, due to early modern theories of miasma, metonymically point back to the plague. In short, stink was terrifying to early modern subjects, and Shakespeare exploits this for dramatic effect: because Shakespeare's audiences, crammed into the stinking public theaters, would not have missed these references to stink, I will spend considerable time presenting them here. Perhaps more interesting, I believe, is how anxieties surrounding stink produced equally pervasive literary fantasies of countering that stink, and here I will investigate one of them: the sweet, perfumed breath of the beloved in early modern love poetry that, as Orsino says of Olivia in Twelfth Night, seems to have "purged the air of pestilence" (1.1.19).

Here I also wish to note this chapter's connection to the newly emergent "filth studies," a field that, as William Cohen writes in his introduction to Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life (2004), enters into a "critical discourse already populated with studies of dirt, waste, pollution, abjection, disgust, mess, garbage, rubbish, dust, and shit" (ix). As we shall see, the world of plague writing is a filthy, stinky one, and the world of Shakespeare's plays is no different; yet with few exceptions, we seem to be more comfortable talking about the scatological Ben Jonson or Christopher Marlowe, that "filthy play-maker." Indeed, Eric Partridge's notion, articulated sixty years ago in Shakespeare's Bawdy (1947), still seems pervasive: "Shakespeare may have had a dirty mind," he writes, "yet he certainly had not a filthy mind" (9). Perhaps Shakespeareans should not be so hasty to send Puck "with broom before / To sweep the dust behind the door" (5.1.384-85) after all, since the

ways authors represent their encounters with filth show us how they imagine the boundaries between subject and object, body and state.

“Fog and filthy air”

Shakespeare’s plays stink. Like so much other literature written during plaguetime, they confront filth most frequently through encounters with miasma: stinky pockets of “bad ayre” that carry plague poisons. Local medical knowledge, reinforced by the hundreds of plague regimens that glutted the early modern print marketplace, provided for Shakespeare and his audience a shared network of images, terrors, and repulsions attendant upon stink. The majority of Shakespeare’s audience members were London citizens and, by all accounts, early modern London was filthy: plague writers are meticulous in their descriptions of dunghills, rotting carcasses, and stinking vapors. For example, plague writer Thomas Brasbridge describes the “stinche of chanelles, of filthie dung, of carion...of common pissing places” (7). Stephen Bradwell, a member of the College of London Physicians, details in A watch-man for the pest (1625) the

...noysome vapours arising from filthy sincks, stincking sewers, channells, gutters, privies, sluttish corners, dunghils, and vncast ditches; as also the mists and fogs that commonly arise out of fens, moores, mines, and standing lakes; doe greatly corrupt the Aire: and in like manner the lying of dead rotting carrions in channels, ditches, and dunghills; cause a *contagious Aire*.
(4)

Much to the frustration of London’s citizens, surgeons let blood and emptied their basins from their shambles into alleyways (Slack 45); it is Falstaff, remember, who exclaims “Have I lived to be carried in a basket, like a barrow of butcher's offal, and

to be thrown in the Thames?” after being smuggled out of Mistress Ford’s house (Wiv. 3.5.85). As a result, the Thames overflowed with filth. And it stunk. In 1577, a report on the state of the river complained of the “dung” and “filth” that had “bestinche[d] the Thames” (Dee 50, 49). In 1515, Thomas More was elected Commissioner of the Sewers, and he appointed rakers to clean human waste from the streets (Totaro 72). The rakers were often the poorest and most destitute of London’s citizens, associated with the filth they transported; the “dunghill curs” that Pistol mentions in King Henry IV, Part 2 (5.3.63) often survived the systematic exterminations required by plague orders, rolled around in the dunghills, then ran away and spread bacteria throughout the city.

The detailed methods that plague writers suggest to combat miasmas—lighting fires, dousing oneself with perfume—read like elaborate purgation rituals, almost magical in quality. In An hospitall for the diseased (1578), physician John Edwards recommends the following precautions:

First before you enter into the house, command that a great fire be made in the chamber where the sick lieth, and that some odoriferous perfume be burnt in the midst of the chamber, and before you go to him, eat some cordiall preservative, and smother your clothes with some sweet perfume, then wet your temples, eares, nose, and mouth, with Rose-water and Vinegar mixt together, then take in your mouth a peice of the root of *Angelica*, the rind of a sower Citron, or a Clove prepared as before is shewed, and have some Nosegay, Nodule, or Pomander, appropriate in your hand, which you must alwaies smell unto... (19)

City officials strictly enforced public measures to cleanse the air of “corruption.” The building of fires to purge the air was an ancient practice that London adopted in July 1563, when fires were made on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, at 7 p.m. During the outbreak of 1603, pitch bonfires were lit twice a week between 9 o’clock in the morning and 9 o’clock at night, and in July 1625 the London College of Physicians recommended the burning of myrrh and frankincense (Wilson 31). City

officials focused their efforts on London since the plague was mostly an urban phenomenon: plague writers often described London as “the Fount” of all disease. In his regimen The charitable pestmaster (1641), Thomas Sherwood advises, “but let them shun, as much as they can, all infectious and corrupted aire: But seeing it is a thing almost impossible in the Citie of London” (3).

With each outbreak, a mass exodus occurred: the rich would fly the diseased air of London for the clearer air of the country, drawing accusations of indifference from those they left behind. Plague writers debated most fiercely about whether one should stay or go during a plague outbreak, and Shakespeare’s brief references to flight represent both sides. In Richard II, flight seems the natural response to crisis: John of Gaunt encourages the king to think of his banishment as if “Devouring pestilence hangs in our air / And thou art flying to a fresher clime” (1.3.64-65). In Antony and Cleopatra, however, flight represents cowardice: Scarus criticizes Cleopatra, saying “On our side like the token’d pestilence, / Where death is sure / Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt...The breese upon her, like a cow in June, / Hoists sails and flies” (3.10.16-19).

Because of its associations with the plague, stink was the most terrifying form of filth to early modern playgoers and, as we shall see, it proved an irresistible poetic trope to Shakespeare. There have been two scholarly investigations of smell in Shakespeare, one general and one specific. Danielle Nagler’s essay, “Towards the Smell of Mortality: Shakespeare and Ideas of Smell, 1588-1625” (1997) focuses on a few of Shakespeare’s plays, King Lear and Othello primarily, speaks generally about how “The large number of English smell-cognates originating in the sixteenth century point to the increasing importance of this sense for the age” (42), and draws upon Aristotle’s theories of olfaction. In “Hamlet and the Odor of Mortality” (1954),

Richard D. Altick argues that “The play indeed may justly be said to be enveloped in an atmosphere of stench” (167) and traces words like foul, nose, rank, and smell throughout Hamlet. Neither Nagler nor Altick focus upon the association between scent and disease. Shakespeare’s use of “bad ayre” in his plays would have signified plague to his audiences; it also places him within a long line of literary encounters with the disease.

Plague writers, after all, have always associated the disease with stink. In fact, during the first outbreak in Albert Camus’ Le Peste (1972), it is the stink that Dr. Rieux remembers from “those old pictures of the plague.” He recalls “Athens, a charnel-house reeking to heaven and deserted even by the birds...the convicts of Marseille piling rotting corpses into pits; the building of the Great Wall in Provence to fend off the furious plague-wind...” (39). Indeed, most classical and medieval plague texts describe miasma as the primary natural cause of plague. In De Rerum Natura (25-50 A.C.E?), Lucretius’ description of the plague reeks: he describes the “mortal miasma...traversing / Reaches of air,” the “noisome stink” and “virulent stench” of dead bodies (268, 270). Medieval scholar Bryon Lee Grigsby traces allusions to the southwest wind in Piers Plowman (1360-1399?) as references to miasma (201-202).

It is unclear whether Shakespeare may have read Lucretius or Langland, although Rodney Stenning Edgecombe has recently argued that Jacques’ “Seven Ages of Man” speech is based in part on De Rerum Natura and, while William Caxton did not print a copy of Langland’s allegory (perhaps due to its anticlerical sentiments), Robert Crowley’s 1550 edition may have reached Shakespeare (Samuel Pepys had a copy). We do know, however, that Shakespeare read Giovanni Boccaccio’s The Decameron (1353) for the plot of All’s Well That Ends Well and

Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's Metamorphosis (8 A.D., trans. 1567) for, among other things, the plot of the rude mechanicals' Pyramus and Thisbe and Prospero's "Ye elves of hills" soliloquy. Both Boccaccio and Ovid write extensive passages that describe miasmas and the plague. In the Seventh Book of Metamorphosis, Aeacus tells of the plague at Aegina in which "the Aire with foggie stinking reeke / Did daily overdreepe the earth...Infected were the Springs, and Ponds, and streames that ebbe and flow" (lines 678-79, 683-84); how the "filthie carions lay, whose stinche the Aire it selfe distaines" (line 702); and how he saw the "stinking corses scattred" (line 771). In his "Preface to the Ladies" from The Decameron (1353), Boccaccio describes how "the air was oppressive and full of the stench of corruption, sickness, and medicines" (xvi).

Shakespeare also had plenty of contemporary sources, in addition to plague regimens, that emphasize the plague's connection to stink. In The wonderfull yeare (1603), Dekker writes of characters who stop their noses when they pass through bad air (30, 60). As Cheryl Lynn Ross has noted, in Ben Jonson's plague-time play The Alchemist (1606), Subtle is associated with the disease through a series of bad smells: flatulence, feces, and pungent smoke (441, passim). In Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year, written over a century after Shakespeare's death but based upon 16th and 17th century plague regimens (Backscheider ix), Defoe's narrator H.F. concludes that the plague is caused "by some certain Steams, or Fumes, which the Physicians call *Effluvia*, by the Breath, or by the Sweat, or by the Stench of the Sores of sick Persons" and describes how London citizens "walk'd in the middle of the great Street, neither on one Side or other, because, as I suppose, they would not mingle with any Body that came out of Houses, or meet with Smells and Scents from Houses that might be infected" (101, 29).

In Shakespeare's plays, the air is often tainted or "sick" as well. In Much Ado, Beatrice jokes that Benedick will "hang upon [Claudio] like a disease: he / is sooner caught than the pestilence" (1.1.74); in The Winter's Tale, before the suspicion of adultery infects his own mind, Leontes asks that "The blessed gods / Purge all infection from our air whilst you [Florizel] / Do climate here!" (5.1.169-170). At times, undesirable characters actually become the plague that hangs in the air: in Richard II, Henry Bolingbroke asks, "Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son? / 'Tis full three months since I did see him last; / If any plague hang over us, 'tis he" (5.3.5). After Suffolk has been condemned for the death of Duke Humphrey in King Henry VI, Part 2, he becomes the pollution that threatens to sicken the body politic: the King says, "He shall not breathe infection in this air / But three days longer, on the pain of death" (3.2.287-88). In Timon, Alcibiades becomes a pestilence to purge Athens of decrepitude: Timon says, "Be as a planetary plague, when Jove / Will o'er some high-viced city hang his poison / In the sick air" (4.3.111-12); later, Timon rails, "What is amiss plague and infection mend" (5.1.23).

These references to stinky, contagious air would have resonated powerfully with Shakespeare's audiences, especially those who were pressed into the public playhouses. In recent years, critics have renewed attempts to recreate the "specific set of atmospheric conditions" experienced by theatergoers in early modern London (Gurr 3). More work needs to be done, I think, on the particular atmospheric condition that Gurr touches upon, and that is so very prevalent in contemporary descriptions of the playhouses: the stink. Remember, the "foul and pestilent vapors" that swirl under the "majestical roof" of Hamlet's Denmark were also the miasmas that swirled underneath the "Heavens" of the playhouse stage (2.2.244-45): a quick,

upward gesture by the actor playing Hamlet would have reinforced this familiar metatheatrical notion.

Because the plague, according to plague writer William Austin, “Strikes present death not by the *sight* but smell” (54), the early modern theater must have felt extremely dangerous. This was an aspect of playgoing not lost on Dekker, a writer who straddled both worlds of early modern playwriting and plague writing. Dekker describes “the Plaudities and the breath of the great beast” that rose from the audience during performances (Gull’s 27); he also notes how the playhouses “smoakt euerye after noone with Stinkards, who were so glewed together in crowdes with the Steames of strong breath, that when they came foorth, their faces lookt as if they had been perboylde” (Seven 25). There is also a later satire about London playhouses, written in 1689 by Restoration poet Robert Gould (Gould is now the object of scorn by feminist critics like Felicity Nussbaum who, in The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women (1660-1750) (1984) identified Gould’s Love Given O’employer as a quintessential example of “subliterary misogyny”). Gould was an avid playgoer, and writes of a time in which he had “Shakespear, Ben, and Fletcher in [his] sight” and “When e’r [he] Hamlet, or Othello read” (176, 177). He describes the theaters “Where reeking Punks like Summer Insects swarm, And stink like *Pole-cats* when they’re hunted warm: / Their very Scents cause *Apoplectick Fits*” (162). One of the selling points for the private, more exclusive London theaters, it seems, was that they stunk less than the public playhouses. In Jack Drum’s Entertainment (1599), for example, a play written by Shakespeare’s contemporary John Marston, Pasquil describes the audience at a performance by “the Children of *Powles*” as decidedly different from the public playhouses: “A man shall nor be choakte with the

stench of Garlicke, nor be pasted / To the barmy Jacket of a Beer-brewer...Tis a good gentle audience” (qtd. in Gurr 259).

The theaters also reeked of tobacco (probably to cover up other unpleasant smells), though usually only upper-classed attendees could afford it. Francis Beaumont’s The Knight of the Burning Pestle (1611) takes place in a private theater “within the compass of the city walls” (1.1.2), but even that smells like tobacco: The Citizen’s Wife complains, “Fie, this stinking tobacco kills me! / would there were none in England! / —Now, I pray, gentlemen, what good does this stinking tobacco do you? / nothing, I warrant you: make chimneys o' your faces” (1.2.233)! In the public theaters, the “stinkard has the self-same liberty to be there in his tobacco fumes which your sweet courtier hath,” according to Dekker’s The gull’s horn book (32), and in 1598 a Londonder, Henry Buttes, wrote, “It chaunced me gazing at the Theater, / To spie a Lock-Tobacco-Chevalier / Clowding the loathing ayr with foggie fume / Of Dock-Tobacco, friendly foe to rume” (qtd. in Gurr 45). The presence of tobacco in the theaters may have actually comforted Shakespeare’s audience members, as it was considered by some to be a preservative against the plague: one anonymous 1625 regimen, The Red-crosse: Or Englands Lord have mercy on us, describes it as “a most rare Antidote and Preservative, either being smelled unto, or taken fasting in the morning” (13).

We don’t know if there were even privies available at public playhouses. Gurr notes that Inigo Jones gives no evidence of any in his drawings, and points to the following passage from John Harington, the inventor of the indoor toilet, who in The Metamorphosis of Ajax (1594) described the accommodations in London: “Outside one of the doors is a hewn stone, and a standard nearby where water may be obtained, and often a vessel stands by it for passing urine, giving a pleasant odour to

the passers-by" (37). Buckets probably served as toilets, and were located in the back near the galleries (Gurr 37-38). Antitheatricalist Henry Crosse certainly associated the stink and filth of the playhouses with moral uncleanness: in his tract Virtue's Commonwealth, written during the 1603 plague outbreak, he writes, "A Play is like a sincke in a Towne, whereunto all the filth doth runne" (192-93).

Moreover, the playhouses were horribly crowded, as almost every antitheatricalist mentions, usually in contrast to the scarcity of church attendees. In A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes (1577), John Northbrooke says "Truly you many see daily what multitudes are gathered together at those plays" and laments the fact that even though "the Church is always empty and void, the playing place is replenished and full" (5, 6). Anthony Munday, in A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theaters (1580) complains that "the Church is emptied, the yard is filled" (67). In Plays Confuted in Five Actions (1582), Stephen Gosson predicts that once plays are outlawed, the churches in London will become "more frequented, more furnished, more filled" (Plays 93). Philip Stubbes says "For you shall have them flock thither [to the theaters] thick and threefold, when the church of God shall be bare and empty" in his Anatomy of Abuses (1583) (121). According to Gurr, these antitheatricalists were not exaggerating: he estimates that there were usually more than 3,000 people squeezed into the cramped 2,500 square feet of The Globe, and calls the crowding "intense" (18).

Indeed, the overcrowding of the playhouses was infamous, and became the main reason why city officials constantly shut down the theaters. In 1574, city officials closed the theaters because "in time of God's visitation by the plague, such assemblies of the people have been very dangerous for spreading of infection" ("Act

of Common Council" 305). In 1580, Lord Mayor Sir Nicholas Woodrose issued a regulation forbidding "unchaste plays" which resulted in "the pestering of the city with multitudes of people" (310). In 1607, the Lord Mayor requested the "restraining [of] such common stage plays as are daily showed and exercised, and do occasion the great assemblies of all sorts...and cannot be continued but with apparent danger of the increase of the sickness" (328). Moreover, in response to the "Petition of the Queen's Players," submitted in 1582, the Privy Council refused to reopen the public playhouses because the players, having acted among the "throng of a multitude" may risk infecting the Queen herself during private performances (Answer 317). Here, the players themselves become, by extension, contagious stinkards; perhaps Bottom responds to these anxieties when he advises his fellow actors to "eat no onions / nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath" (4.2.24-25).

Due to the immediate danger presented by stink in the public playhouses, it is not surprising that Shakespeare, too, uses images of miasma to signal danger or ominous situations: the witches' "fog and filthy air" at the beginning of Macbeth is the obvious example here (1.1.15). Shakespeare's audience would have also suspected trouble when, in King John, Philip the Bastard says "Now, by my life, this day grows wonderous hot; / Some airy devil hovers in the sky / And pours down mischief" (3.2.1-2): he then gestures to the severed head of Austria resting at his feet. These passages both fall toward the beginnings of new scenes and establish the mood for the dramatic action to come.

Moreover, Shakespeare's characters also demonstrate a sophisticated knowledge of miasma theory. They know that bad, plaguey air tends to come from the south because it is more moist: doctors instructed their patients to "kepe the southe wyndowes therof close & shyttte" (Paynell 66). Rosaline chides Touchstone,

for example, “You foolish shepherd, wherefore do you follow her, / Like foggy south puffing with wind and rain” (AYL 3.5.46-47)?; Mercutio personifies “fancy” as “Turning his face to the dew-dropping south” (Rom. 1.4.16); Marcius curses the Roman army with “All the contagion of the south light on you” (Cor.1.4.49); Cloten curses Posthumus, “The south-fog rot him” (Cym. 2.3.73). Moreover, they know that certain times of the day were more dangerous, as demonstrated in Lucrece’s apostrophe from The Rape of Lucrece, which Shakespeare most likely wrote during the first major plague outbreak of his career in 1593:

O hateful, vaporous, and foggy Night!
 Since thou art guilty of my cureless crime,
 Muster thy mists to meet the eastern light,
 Make war against proportion’d course of time;
 Or if thou wilt permit the sun to climb
 His wonted height, yet ere he go to bed,
 Knit poisonous clouds about his golden head.

With rotten damps ravish the morning air;
 Let their exhaled unwholesome breaths make sick
 The life of purity, the supreme fair,
 Ere he arrive his weary noon-tide prick;
 And let thy misty vapours march so thick,
 That in their smoky ranks his smother’d light
 May set at noon and make perpetual night. (lines 771-84)

Here, mornings are dangerous because the sun has not yet evaporated dangerous moisture; nights are dangerous because the sun has not yet risen, and the watery moon encourages moisture. In his plague tract A defensatiue against the plague, published during the outbreak of 1593, physician Simon Kellwaye instructs his readers to “Walke not into the open ayre in the morning, before the sonne hath had some power to cleanse and cleare the same” and to stay inside “in the euening after the sunne is set, for the vnsauery and vnwholesome Fogs arise out of the earth” (19). Another plague regimen, A direction for the health of magistrates and studentes,

“Englished” from the Latin in 1574, cautions against sleeping in the light of the moist moon and “not holesome” air:

But the Rayes or Beames of the Moone are a great deale more to be eschewed and taken héede vnto, that they shine not vpon vs, speciallye when we sléepe, for they cause ill diseases. For asmuche as the Moone is Ladie of moysture and moueth humours. Also the night aire is not holesome, because the Sunne géeuer of life, is gone out of our Hemisphere. (Gratarolo image 84-85)

Shakespeare’s audience, then, may have sensed a unifying element in *The Ghost of King Hamlet*’s “So lust, though to a radiant angel link’d, / Will sate itself in a celestial bed, / And prey on garbage. / But, soft! Methinks I scent the morning air...(1.5.66), since both lust and the morning air stink like garbage. In *Julius Caesar*, it worries Portia that Brutus walks in the “rheumy and unpurged” morning air:

PORTIA. Is Brutus sick? and is it physical
To walk unbraced and suck up the humours
Of the dank morning? What, is Brutus sick,
And will he steal out of his wholesome bed,
To dare the vile contagion of the night
And tempt the rheumy and unpurged air
To add unto his sickness? (2.1.281-87)

Morning air is also “loathsome” in *Romeo and Juliet* when Juliet contemplates waking early among the dead in her ancestral tomb (4.3.51).

Portia and Juliet fear the early morning air because the sun has yet to purge infection from Rome and Verona. Most plague writers welcomed the sun because it evaporated the standing water, vapors, and mists that carried miasmas; others subscribed to the belief that the sun actually bred contagion in the air. In Shakespeare, the sun often disperses harmful vapors: in *Henry VI, Part 3*, Clarence reassures King Edward IV that “The very beams [of the sun] will dry those vapours up, / For every cloud engenders not a storm” when the King reads defeat in the “black, suspicious, threatening cloud” that appears in the sky (5.3.23, 19-20). Prince

Henry imitates the sun that disperses the “base contagious clouds” and “By breaking through the foul and ugly mists / Of vapours that did seem to strangle him” becomes “more wonder’d at” (1H4 1.2.103-104, 98, 101). In the first scene of The Comedy of Errors, Aegeon reports that, while out at sea, “At length the sun, gazing upon the earth, / Dispersed those vapours that offended us” and, happily, Corinth finally stood in their view (1.1.83). At other times, the sun generates contagion: Timons says, “O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth / Rotten humidity; below thy sister’s orb / Infect the air” (4.3.93)! King Lear curses Regan, saying, “Infect her beauty / You fen-suck’d fogs, drawn by the powerful sun, / To fall and blast her pride” (2.4.53)!

Most often in Shakespeare, it is the night that terrifies because it is moist and stinks, and his contemporaries often employ similar imagery. In Christopher Marlowe’s Hero and Leander (1598), for example, Leander’s “sighs” and “tears” are rivaled only by the night’s mists:

Thus while dumb signs their yielding hearts entangled,
The air with sparks of living fire was spangled,
And night, deep drenched in misty Acheron,
Heaved up her head, and half the world upon
Breathed darkness forth (dark night is Cupid’s day). (lines 324-26)

In Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, Part 2 (1588), Bajazeth curses his captor with plague, pleading with Jove to smother day with the “pitchy clouds,” “never-fading mists,” and “liquid air” of night:

BAJAZETH.	Accursed day, infected with my griefs, Hide now thy stained face in endless night, And shut the windows of the lightsome heavens! Let ugly Darkness with her rusty coach, Engirt with tempests, wrapt in pitchy clouds, Smother the earth with never-fading mists, And let her horses from their nostrils breathe Rebellious winds and dreadful thunder-claps, That in this terror Tamburlaine may live, And my pin’d soul, resolv’d in liquid air, May still excruciate his tormented thoughts! (1.113-22)
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Shakespeare's characters invoke the contagion of night most often when they contemplate their own mortality. In King John, for example, Constance summons death with the stink of night: "Death, death; O amiable lovely death! / Thou odouriferous stench! sound rottenness! / Arise forth from the couch of lasting night" (3.4.28-30). When Melun, also in King John, has "hideous death within [his] view," he equates his own dying breath with the "black contagious breath" of night (5.4.37). It seems as though a shared understanding of miasma theory allowed Shakespeare to transport his audience to the dead of night: no small feat for plays that were mostly performed in the middle of the day, in open-air amphitheatres.

"That from my mistress reeks"

Another form of air in Shakespeare owes something to early modern miasma theory: breath. I wish to comment first on how I see breath functioning in the plays as a whole, and then move to a discussion of breath in early modern love poetry. In general, breath seems important in Shakespeare: not only does the air that his characters breathe sustain them physically, it seems to be part of what makes them human, what animates them. In King Henry VI, Part 3, King Henry asks, "Why, am I dead? do I not breathe a man" (3.1.85)?; in The Winter's Tale, when Leontes senses something alive in Hermione's statue he says, amazedly, "Still, methinks, / There is an air comes from her: what fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath (5.3.75-79)? It is the connection between life and respiration (from the Latin spirare, to breathe or spiritus, spirit) that makes Cordelia's death scene so poignant for King Lear, I think.

As he cradles Cordelia's corpse in his arms, King Lear asks for a mirror: "If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why then she lives"; and then, in his grief, "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all" (5.3.309-310, 363-64)? It is breath in Shakespeare, not a beating heart, that seems to symbolize life.

Galen's theories of the pneuma—the early modern equivalent of "human spirit," roughly—help to explain Shakespeare's emphasis on breath as a life-force. The Greek word pneuma actually translates to "soul" or "vital spirit"; the OED identifies 1559 as its earliest usage and, according to Hoeniger, pneumatic theory was a basic tenet of Galenic medicine: "This vital air is either the same as the world soul or emanates from it," Hoeniger writes, and was a "vaporous, airy substance" (91). After Hippocrates, pneuma was thought to inhabit the air; Aristotle speaks of it as the "breath of life" and the prime mover of the soul. Early modern writers often equate pneuma with the Holy Spirit: writing Dialogicall discourses of spirits and diuels in 1601, John Deacon and John Walker warn their readers against equating pneuma with a non-Christian, "supernaturall" power: "And, because the *holy spirit of God*, is that onely *essential vertue of the father, and the sonne together*: therefore, that self same speech of the sorcerers concerning this *power* [pneuma], it is by our Saviour Christ, euen purposely interpreted *Pneuma, kaidactylos theou*: that is, *the spirit and finger of God*" (234). In John Donne's "Batter my heart, three-person'd God" (1609), it is God, remember, who "knock[s]," Jesus the sun / Son who "shine[s]," and the Holy Spirit who "breathe[s]," combining to form the Trinity.

The word spirit doesn't seem to mean "Holy Spirit" in Shakespeare: Ariel and Titania are spirits, as are the many ghosts who populate his plays. Spirit does seem to mean "vital force," however, and it is often linked to breath, as when King Philip

in King John says, of Constance, “Look, who comes here! a grave unto a soul; / Holding the eternal spirit against her will, / In the vile prison of afflicted breath” (3.4.20-23). This, I think, is what happens in Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 81,” when the eternal essence of the speaker’s beloved—her virtue—will live on through the (inspired?) breath of the poet’s pen: “When all the breathers of this world are dead; / You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen— / Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men” (lines 12-14).

When breath is supposed to contain the essence of life—pneuma—then it becomes terrifying when it, instead, represents death. Most plague writers comment on this cruel irony, summarized during the 1666 outbreak by Austin in Epilomia epe: “Thus ‘tis with us, our dearest darling breath, / The air we take, is not our life but death” (6). In John Davies’ verse plague poem, Humours heau’n on earth (1609), death actually becomes breath:

Now breakes his Viall, and a Plague out-flees,
That glutts the Aire with Vapors venemous,
That puttrifie, infect, and flesh confound,
And makes the Earthes breath most contagious,
For, ere the breath of this Contagion,
Could fully touch the flesh of Man, or Beast,
They on the sodaine sinke, and strait are gone,
So, instantlie, by thousands, are decreast!

...
But vsher’d Death, where ere themselues did go;
For, they the purest Aire did so defile,
That whoso breath’d it, did his breath forgo. (230)

The general consensus among plague writers, then, is summarized by William Kemp in his 1665 A brief treatise of the nature, causes, signes, preservation from, and cure of the pestilence: “with your breath / (so in time of *Infection* your Death) may be in your Nostrils” (42).

As in plague literature, words / breath in Shakespeare have the power to

infect: Iago says, “I’ll pour this pestilence in his ear” (2.3.350) and bad news “infects the teller” in Antony and Cleopatra (1.2.101). In Timon, the one Shakespeare play that has received some attention by plague scholar Rebecca Totaro, Timon wishes to infect all of Athens with his railings: “Breath infect breath,” he says and later, rages at the sun, “For each true word a blister, and each false / Be as a cauterizing to the root of the tongue, / Consuming it with speaking” (5.1.131-133)! In The Tempest, Prospero forgives Antonio, saying: “For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother / Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive / Thy rankest fault...” (5.1.130-32); in King Henry VIII, treason “infect[s] the speech” of Lord Buckingham. The words of crowds are particularly contagious: Claudius fears that Laertes “wants not buzzers to infect his ear / With pestilent speeches of his father’s death” (4.5.91-92); in Troilus and Cressida, Nestor warns that “many are infect” with the “imperial voice” of Ulysses (1.3.187).

Amidst the putrid and infectious breath that pollutes so many of Shakespeare’s plays, the sweet-breathed, perfumed beloved emerges as someone who, in Petrarch’s description of Laura, “was born to clear the air” (Number 112, line 6). I wish to turn now to early modern love poetry, particularly the sonnet (and anti-Petrarchan sonnet) and epyllion, which seem to respond to the anxiety surrounding stink that I explored above. For in love poetry, the air is always sweet.

Generally speaking, love poetry, with all of its groaning, sighing, kissing, singing, whispering and panting seems to produce more air than any other lyric genre. Let’s look at sighing, for example. Petrarch is a champion sigher and, indeed, often marks the progression of time by how many sighs he has dedicated to Laura: the first poem of his Canzoniere (1327-1368?) begins “You who can hear in scattered rhymes the sound / of all that sighing which once fed my heart” (lines 1-2); in

Number 70, he says, “for I have sighed for such a length of time / that I can never start before due time / smiling to make up for my misery” (lines 3-5); nine poems later, it is his “fourteenth year of all [his] sighs” (line 2); then he’ll continue his “trilustral [fifteen year] sighing” in Number 145 (line 14); in the last poem of the volume he asks that God “receive [his] final breath in peace” (line 43).

Shakespeare’s stage lovers follow Petrarch’s lead. Not surprisingly, Romeo is a most dedicated groaner and sigher: “Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs,” he says (1.2.33). In fact, sighing and groaning are as common symptoms of love melancholy in Shakespeare as folded arms or disheveled clothing: the lover appears “sighing like furnace” in Jacques “Seven Ages” speech (2.7.147); in Two Gentlemen of Verona, Speed says lovers will “sigh, like a school-boy that had lost his A B C” (2.1.21); Rosalind concludes that Orlando is not sighing and groaning nearly enough to be in love (which makes it all the more ironic when she herself slinks off to “sigh ‘till [Orlando] come,” (4.1.209)); and Berowne, calls Cupid “Regent of love-rhymes, lord of folded arms, / The anointed sovereign of sighs and groans” and, upon falling in love himself finds it ironic that he, “that [has] been love’s whip; / A very beadle to a humorous sigh” (LLL 3.1.173). So obvious is the connection between sighing, groaning, and love melancholy, that characters often diagnose the disease based on the “windy suspirations” that Hamlet associates with mourning at the beginning of his play: Polonius concludes that Hamlet loves Ophelia after he, appearing in her chamber, “raised a sigh so piteous and profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk” (2.1.96-97); when Olivia asks Viola-as-Cesario, “How does he love me?”, she replies, “With groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire” (1.5.251).

It is, however, the sweet breath of the sonnet mistress—and her general, perfumed “air”—that seem most important here. Take, for example, Spenser’s

Sonnet #64 from Amoretti (1595) in which the speaker ascribes a different floral scent to not only his mistress' breath, but to all parts of her anatomy. Even her nipples smell good:

COMMING to kisse her lyps, (such grace I found)
Me seemd I smelt a gardin of sweet flowres:
That dainty odours from them threw around
For damzels fit to decke their louers bowres.
Her lips did smell lyke vnto Gillyflowers,
Her ruddy cheekes, lyke vnto Roses red:
Her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamoures
Her louely eyes lyke Pincks but newly spred,
Her goodly bosome lyke a Strawberry bed,
Her neck lyke to a bounch of Cullambynes:
Her brest lyke lillyes, ere theyr leaues be shed,
Her nipples lyke yong blossomd Iessemynes,
Such fragrant flowres doe giue most odorous smell,
But her sweet odour did them all excell.

A love poem called "To Cynthia" by Francis Kynaston, a minor English poet known for his translation of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde into Latin, is also representative here. In it, the speaker catalogues the "radiant eyes," "tresses faire," "brests...More snowe white then the Apenine", "heavenly voice," "pearly teeth with Corral lips" and, of course, her sweet breath:

Do not conceale that fragrant scent,
Thy breath, which to all flowers hath lent
Perfumes, least it being supprest,
No spices growe in all the East.

Ben Jonson's love song "To Celia" also praises his lover's sweet breath, although his description is bittersweet, as her fragrant breath comes to symbolize her rejection of him:

I sent thee, late, a rosie wreath,
Not so much honoring thee,
As giving it a hope, that there
It could not withered bee.
But thou thereon did'st onely breath,
And sent'st it back to mee:

Since when it growes, and smells, I sweare,
Not of it selfe, but thee.

The breath of Shakespeare's Dark Lady also smells good, most notably in Sonnet #99, in which the speaker says "The forward violet this did I chide: / Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells, / If not my love's breath"; later he describes how a rose "red nor white, had stol'n of both, / And to this robbery had annex'd thy breath" (lines 1-3, 10-11). Moreover, while flowers have long been a staple of love poetry, they were also distilled, mixed into pastes, and carried as nosegays to ward off the plague, as detailed in an anonymous plague pamphlet, Physicall directions in time of plague, published in 1644: the author recommends that "Oake boughs, Ashe, Willow, Bayleaves, Hysope, Marioram, Thyme, Lavander, Mints, Rosemary, Fennell, Sage, Wormwood, Meadsweet &c. may be layd in the Chimnies and Windowes" and, that when "going abroad, or talking with any, it is good to hold in the Mouth, a clove or two, a peece of Nutmeg, Zedoary, Angelica, Gentian, Tormentill, or Enulacampana root; in the hand a Sponge" (2). The types of herbs and flowers used during plaguetime were class-specific, as well: "For persons of better ranke, Pomanders made of Ladanum, Benzoin, red and white Sanders, Storax, Myrrhe, Saffron, Amber, Camphyre, Muske, &c." (3).

Shakespeare's stage lovers follow suit: to Gremio, Bianca is "sweeter than perfume itself" (TOS 1.2.151); Iachimo, in his voyeuristic blazon of Imogen, describes how her breath "Perfumes the chamber" (Cym. 2.2.18-19); Bassanio compliments Portia's "sugar breath" (3.2.119). Moreover, a lady's smell has the power to enchant: Cleopatra's barge emits a "strange, invisible perfume" (2.2.222) which, as Giuseppe Donato and Monique Seefried argue in The Fragrant Past: Perfumes of Cleopatra

and Julius Caesar (1995), ties her to the exotic East; it also locates her within a long literary tradition of love poetry.

It is Petrarch, I believe, who really introduces the lady who “purges the air of pestilence” (TN 1.1.19), which is significant in light of Petrarch’s connections to the plague. Importantly, theories of miasma were just as prevalent during Petrarch’s time, and his Laura is almost always associated with sweet, cleansing air. And Petrarch knew the plague all too well. Petrarch wrote that Laura died of the plague in the same hour and on the same day, Good Friday, April 6th, 1327, that he first saw her twenty-one years earlier (this is an impossibility, since Good Friday did not fall on this date in 1327). In a letter to his brother, the only surviving member of thirty-five in his Monrioux monastery, where the plague raged, Petrarch describes the horror that surrounds him:

On all sides is sorrow; everywhere is fear. I would, my brother, that I had never been born, or, at least, had died before these times. How will posterity believe that there has been a time when without the lightnings of heaven or the fires of earth, without wars or other visible slaughter, not this or that part of the earth, but well-nigh the whole globe, has remained without inhabitants. When has any such thing been even heard or seen; in what annals has it ever been read that houses were left vacant, cities deserted, the country neglected, the fields too small for the dead and a fearful and universal solitude over the whole earth?... Oh happy people of the future, who have not known these miseries and perchance will class our testimony with the fables. (qtd. in Gasquet 33)

In his Canzoniere, the only thing that stinks is the papacy (Number 136: “the stench of how you live goes up to God” (line 14)), but Laura’s breath is sweet: in Number 167, Petrarch describes how his “heart is stolen quite away” when “Lord Love... / gathers her loose breath inside his hand / to make a sigh, and then articulate sound, / so clear and sweet, angelic and divine” (lines 5, 1-4). In Number 286, after Laura’s death, he writes, “Now could I but describe with what sweet breath / she sighs who used to be my lady here” (line 1). When Laura becomes cruel,

as she so often does, her “sweet speech” becomes “breathing fire” (Number 205, lines 3, 4); in Number 131, he writes how “the scarlet roses in the snow / moved by her breath, revealing ivory / changing bystanders into marblestone” (lines 9-12).

Petrarch is known for his puns on Laura’s name: “laurel,” the poet’s crown; “laurel,” the tree; “L’aura,” “breeze.” Spiller writes “the breeze can stand for Laura and the inspiration of the speaker” (61). But Laura’s (l’aura’s) breeze often clears the sky, as well: in Number 194, a sonnet in which “L’aura, the gentle breeze that clears the hills, / Rousing flowers throughout the shady wood, / I know by its soft breath” and in Number 239, a ballata, Laura becomes “the mild breeze.../ in this fresh season stirs the tender flowers” (lines 1-2; see also Numbers 66, 109, 133, 157). In many poems, she becomes “The breath, the fragrance, and the cooling shade / of the dear laurel” tree (Number 327, 1-2) which, in Number 337, “in colour and in scent outdid / the odoriferous and shining East” (lines 1-2). Moreover, her breath often inspires the poet (Numbers 109, 278, 356).

The lady’s sweet breath is more than just a convention in Petrarch and his successors: it links the mistress to the heavens and, thus, to salvation. As with Marlowe’s Helen, her sweet breath can make the sonneteer “immortal with a kiss” (taken more literally, perhaps, during plaguetime). Petrarch preceded Neoplatonism, usually associated with fifteenth-century humanist Marsilio Ficino, in which the contemplation of beauty was thought to lead up to a contemplation of God. However, Spiller argues that the ideas propounded by Neoplatonism were already present in the *stilnovisti*, “and since Petrarch inherited themes and images from them, it is not surprising that his sonnets should be congenial to a courtly society influenced by Neoplatonism” (73). As Eugene O’Connor notes in his analysis of the Italian poet Antonio Beccadelli’s Hermaphroditus, a poem that utilizes good and bad smells “to

demean—or alternately elevate” its female characters (26) (and was, incidentally, written during plaguetime), typological traditions usually associated sweet smells with Mary, as a way to reclaim our place in the prelapsarian paradise, before Eve became tainted: O’Connor argues that “disease and early death was [sic] always a reminder of The Fall. The corruption of our mortal frame at death, with its attendant stench and horror, was the result of our gross physicality, the dim legacy of our first parents” (27). For Dante, Beatrice turns his selfish sighs upward, toward the Divine: Sonnet #41 from Vita Nuova begins, “Beyond the sphere that has the widest revolution / passes the sigh that issues from my heart: / a new intelligence, which Love tearfully instilled into it, / draws it ever upwards” (lines 1-4).

Above all, the airy, sweet smelling sonnet lady becomes disembodied, free from the gross physicality that is attendant upon her sex. She is airy and incorporeal. Most of the earlier sonnet mistresses of the stilnovisti (including Dante’s Beatrice) and Petrarch’s Laura have an airy quality about them: Mario Marti notes, “The Lady of the stilnovisti is attenuated, and disappears into the mist of a symbol, into the undefined sweetness of a yearning towards the ideal...One might say that in her shimmering airy lightness, almost she does not possess physical attributes...” (29). Spiller quotes an anonymous late 13th century sonnet, “Who is she coming, when all gaze upon,” in which the sighing of the sonnet lover combines with the angelic, airy Lady “who makes the air all tremulous with light” (31). As Phyllis Rackin notes, for both men and women, “fear and loathing of the body was a living legacy in the Renaissance, rationalized in medieval Christian contempt for the flesh, grounded and verified in a present material reality of stinking bodies, desperately vulnerable to disfiguring disease and early death” (75). Women, however, were most often associated with the flesh, and the man with the

spirit: for Martin Luther, “We are the woman because of the flesh, that is, we are carnal, and we are the man because of the spirit” (qtd. in Rackin 75). The woman / flesh and man / spirit binary was reiterated in medical discourse through the belief that women provided the material matter—Theseus’ “wax”—that is “imprinted” by the form or spirit carried in the father’s sperm. The sonnet mistress, with her airy breath, transcends the earthly: as Peter Stallybrass notes in his discussion of The Revenger’s Tragedy (1606), “Petrarchan and Neoplatonic discourse, of course, depend precisely upon the suppression of the digestive tract. The displacement upward from the genitals and the anus is read as the melting away of the body into the breath of the soul” (211).

In light of our discussion above, I am particularly interested in how Laura’s breath and air connect her with the heavens, as in Number 246 when “This breeze [L’aura]... takes...enraptured pilgrim souls beyond their bodies” (lines 1-4) and when, in Number 109, “The gentle breeze” of Laura’s grace likens her to “a spirit out of Paradise” (lines 8, 11). In the sestet of Number 13, Laura’s “influential air” draws Petrarch toward heaven:

From her derives that loving tendency
which, while you go with it, makes you aspire,
little desiring what most men deserve;

from her derives that influential air
leading you up to heaven the straightest way;
in hope of which I follow happily.

When she dies, Petrarch writes, “she, *l’aura mia*, my breath of life, has gone / up lively lovely naked to the skies / from where she governs me” (Number 278, lines 4-6; see also Numbers 90 and 91).

In the anti-Petrarchan sonnet, however, the sonnet mistress is returned to earthly physicality through her association with stink—mainly bad breath. I wish to

turn now to a few love poems that, in my opinion, directly respond to the “sweet breath” component of the traditional Petrarchan blazon. For, according to Ilona Bell, “Renaissance love poetry could be Petrarchan or anti-Petrarchan or pseudo-Petrarchan...but not a-Petrarchan; for Renaissance writers use Petrarchan discourse whether they endorse, challenge, parody, or exploit the Petrarchan posture” (91). An obvious starting point for this discussion is the line “That from my mistress reeks” from Shakespeare’s Sonnet #130. I wish to qualify slightly Stephen Booth’s assessment of the word reek. In his discussion of Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 130,” Booth notes that although reek “carried suggestions of evil smelling breath,” he concludes that “the narrow modern senses, ‘to stink,’ and ‘stench,’ which focus on the quality of vapor emitted, do not emerge until the late seventeenth century” (454). In plague writing, however, reek is mostly used in a specifically negative context, as in Joannes Jacobi’s regiment book Here begynneth a treatyse agaynst pestele[n]ce [and] of ye infirmits, published in England in 1509, but written earlier (Jacobi died in 1384): “I saye y^t pestylence sores be co~tagyous by cause of infect humoures of bodyes and the reeke or smoke of suche soores is venymous and corrupteth y^e ayer” (image 3, emphasis added). While, as Booth notes, reek is not equivocally negative in Shakespeare, it does sometimes translate to “producing bad air,” as in the modern sense. Booth notes the passage in Cymbeline in which the First Lord advises Cloten to “shift his shirt” because he “reek[s] as a sacrifice” (1.2.1-2), and I would add the following passage from Coriolanus in which reek refers specifically to miasma: “You common cry of curs! Whose breath I hate / As reek o’ the rotten fens, whose loves I prize / As the dead carcasses of unburied me / That do corrupt my air” (3.3.130-33). It seems to me that the reeky breath of Shakespeare’s Dark Lady specifically

parodies the beloved's perfumed breath which, I have argued, is often overlooked by critics.

Indeed, Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130" demonstrates how conscious love poets were of these generic conventions. Take Edward Philips' The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence (1658), for example. Philips was most well-known for his Theatrum poetarum (1675), in which he catalogues the principal poets of history, including English poets; he was also John Milton's nephew (Milton's only sister Anne was his mother). Philips was educated by his uncle, but The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence has none of the Puritan strictness or themes one would expect. It is, rather, a how-to guide for wooing a mistress: the full title is actually The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence, Or the Arts of Wooing and Complementing. In it, Philips offers to "young practioners of Love and Courtship set forms of expressions for imitations," and includes in it a list of adjectives to describe each part of a lady's anatomy: a do-it-yourself blazon kit, if you will. (The volume's pedagogical mission lives on: on their websites, both the Folger Shakespeare Library and PBS suggest it as a teacher's resource to teach Elizabethan love conventions). As we can see, the lady's breath and "Odours or Smels" are as important to describe as her cheeks, eyes, and "haire":

Breath. Ambrosian, sweet persumed, spicy, nectar'd, muskie, rosied, stinking, poysoned, strong, blasting.

Odours or Smels. Aromatick, luxurious, voluptuous, spicy, subtle, rich, costly, pretious, perfumed, ambrosiall, joviall, pleasant, wanton, delicious, assyrian, chased, musky, Arabian, Panonian, Indian, Sabean, melifluous, ingratefull, malevolent, loathsome, noysome, stifling, infectious, sulsome, suming, sence-stifling, sulphurous, overcomeing.

Perfume. Sweet, spicy, fragrant, Ambrosian, compounded, choice, rich, odorous, costly, sacred, ravishing, lascivious.

Smell. Sweet-breathing, delicious, pleasant, perfumed, odoriferous, fragrant, Arabian, Indian, Aromatick, spicy, senseaffecting, delightfull, balmy, geniall, musky, aire-perfuming, unwhole some, loathsome, fullsome, noisome, infectious, contagious, sence-overcoming, stinking. (110-113)

What is perhaps most instructive about Philips' catalog is not how many adjectives there are for the lady's sweet-smelling, perfumed breath ("nectar'd," "Ambrosian"), but how many adjectives there are for the sour, infected air that envelops her: "stinking," "Poysoned," "blasting," "malevolent," "loathsome," "noysome," "stifling," "infectious," "unwholesome," "loathsome," "noisome," "infectious," "contagious." The beloved, it seems, is always all or nothing: fully idealized (airy, perfumed) or wholly repulsive (grotesque, stinky). Howard R. Bloch explains that the Christian tradition, which influenced the poetry of courtly love, defines Woman as "an idea rather than a human being. It polarizes the definition of the feminine to such an extent that women are pushed to the margins, excluded from the middle..." (90).

This dichotomy is most clear in the anti-Petrarchan tradition, as demonstrated in three early modern love poems that pit the typical "sweet breath" of one lady against the infectious, stinky breath of another: Henry King's "Madam Gabrina, Or, the Ill Favor'd Choice" (1645?); John Donne's "The Comparison" (1594); and Philip Sidney's "A Remedy for Love" (1585).

The English poet and Bishop of Chichester Henry King (he also served as Donne's executor) describes the lady's putrid breath in his anti-Petrarchan "Madam Gabrina, Or, the Ill Favor'd Choice"; Henry Knight Miller includes "Madam Gabrina" in his discussion of what he calls the paradoxical encomium, the "praise of unworthy, unexpected, or trifling objects" (145). Indeed, Madam Gabrina is

unexpected, if one was hoping to find the typical sonnet lady. Instead, the speaker describes a woman “Made up, when Natures powers lay slumbering. / One, where all pregnant imperfections met / To make her sexes scandal” (lines 4-6). She is the anti-Petrarchan mistress with her “Teeth of jet” (line 6), “A lip most thin and pale” (line 9), “Eyes small” (line 15) and, most important for our study, reeking breath:

Last for her breath, 'tis somewhat like the smell
That does in Ember weeks on Fishstreet dwell;
Or as a man should fasting scent the Rose
Which in the savoury Bear-garden growes.
If a Fox cures the Paralyticall,
Had'st thou ten Palsies, she'd out-stink them all. (lines 17-22)

King's Madam Gabrina has an implicit rival against whom she is the “Ill Favor'd Choice,” or perhaps Madam Gabrina is simply up against the ideal Form of Woman. In Donne's “The Comparison,” two actual women collide within the same poem, and one of them stinks. “The Comparison,” fifty-four lines long and written in heroic couplets, is the eighth of twenty elegies published posthumously in 1635. In it, the speaker offers a scathing critique of his addressee's mistress in comparison to his own. We are not sure what compels Donne's speaker to stage such a harsh attack, but it is clear after the first sestet that his mistress smells heavenly: like the “sweet sweat of Roses in a Still,” like the “Balme of th'early East” (lines 1, 3). His rival's mistress, by contrast, emits a “Ranke sweaty froth” like the “spermatique issue of ripe menstruous boiles” (lines 7-8). She attempts to cloak her “stinke within,” but her kisses are still “filthy” like a “worme sucking an invenom'd sore” (lines 26, 43-44). In the last line the speaker concludes that “She, and comparisons are odious” (line 54) (Shakespeare's Dogberry, of course, substitutes “odorous” in this common adage).

Finally, in Sidney's "A Remedy for Love," published with The Defense of Poesy, the speaker falls in love with two women from Sidney's Arcadia (1590), Philoclea and Pamela, who are always encircled by sweet air. What cures him of his lovesickness are the smells emitted from the third woman in the poem, the grotesque country wench Mopsa, also from Arcadia, whose breath is so stinky it kills all thoughts of love. (Since this poem is not widely studied or available, I have included it as Appendix 1). The speaker's descriptions of Philoclea and Pamela are typical of love poetry: unlike Mopsa with her "lips of marble, teeth of jet," they are "sweet," "lovely," and as rare as exotic gems. Moreover, Philoclea and Pamela, typically, sweeten the air with their presence: one's breath is "of some thousand flowers" and, just when our lover thinks he has broken love's spell, he is drawn back by their "breath, that incense sweet" which is so intoxicating that "souls, to follow it, fly hence." But the cleverness of this poem relies on Sidney's inversion of miasma theory: ironically, lovesick men are the ones who "wear infection in their faces," and miasmatic Mopsa is not the source of infection, but rather the cure, "love's best medicine." When the speaker falls "sick with love," Mopsa becomes his "sovereign plaster"; when he has been "reft of sense," she has made him "healed, and cured, and made as sound, / As though [he] ne'er had a wound." When he is hypnotized by love, Mopsa comes with her "compound or electuary" (both medicine pastes) made of putrid, stinky substances: "old ling" (fish), "young canary" (ground-up bird), "bloat-herring," and "voided physic." The finale solidifies her association with stink: one whiff of her breath and "desire was slain, / And [Philoclea and Pamela] breathed forth perfumes in vain." Sidney would incorporate miasma theory into his love poetry again in "Sonnet #78" from Astrophil and Stella: here Astrophil, suspicious of Stella's true devotion, says, "O how the pleasant ayres of true loue be / Infected by

those vapours which arise / From out that noisome gulfe, which gaping lies /
Between the iawes of hellish Ielousie” (lines 1-4)!

Similarly, when love goes bad in Shakespeare, it either loses its sweet smell, or it begins to downright stink. When Ophelia returns Hamlet’s letters that with “so sweet breath [he] composed,” their “perfume was lost” (3.1.101). In Romeo and Juliet, just before their clandestine nuptials, Romeo asks Juliet to “sweeten with thy breath / This neighbor air” (2.6.26-27) of Friar Laurence’s cell; later, when Romeo glimpses Juliet’s (supposed) dead body, her sweet breath is gone: “O my love! my wife! / Death, that hath suck’d the honey of thy breath, / Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty” (5.3.90-92). To prove that they are, in fact, not in love, Benedick and Beatrice comment not on each other’s sweet breath, but on its stink: Benedick says, “She speaks poniards, and every word stabs: / If her breath were as terrible as her terminations, / there were no living near her; she would infect to / the North Star” (5.2.237-39); Beatrice quips, “Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but / foul breath, and foul breath is noisome; therefore I will depart unkissed” (5.2.150-52). Shakespeare’s fellow dramatists also found an easy metaphor between plague miasmas and the reeking breath of an unwanted female lover: in Jonson’s Volpone (1606), when Volpone says, “Before I fain’d Diseases, now I have one” he refers to the Lady Would-be and, of her incessant chattering, he says, “The bells, in time of pestilence, ne’er made / Like noise, or were in that perpetual motion! / ...All my house, / But now, steam’d like a bath with her thick breath” (4.3.56-60). In John Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi (1614), Bosola is repulsed by the thought of kissing the disgusting, haggard old witch who sells him potions: he would “sooner eat a dead pigeon, taken from the soles of the feet / Of one sick of the plague, than kiss one of

you fasting” (1.2.26-27; pigeons were often applied to the feet of patients to suck out the plague poisons).

Two early modern epyllions that owe much of their characterizations and tone to early modern notions of “bad ayre”: Marlowe’s Hero and Leander and Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis. First, Hero and Leander, for example, certainly incorporates many of the love conventions that we have discussed: of Hero’s breath, the narrator says, “Many would praise her sweet smell as she passed, / When ‘twas the odour which her breath forth cast; / And there for honey bees have sought in vain, / And, beat from thence, have lighted there again” (lines 23-26). When Hero and Leander come together, even the stars seem to exhale sweet breath: the “firmament / Glistered with breathing stars” (lines 53-54). Leander is constantly “breathless” from all that swimming; when Hero faints, Leander “breath[s] life into her lips” (line 321). When Leander dies, however, the sweet air of the poem turns miasmatic, plaguey: the narrator says, “Proceed we now with Hero’s sacrifice: / She odours burn’d, and from their smoke did rise / Unsavoury fumes, that air with plagues inspir’d” (lines 743-45). Interestingly, the forematter of Hero and Leander also has peculiar connections to breath. Intended or not, the dedication by Edward Blunt, Marlowe’s editor, touches upon the various forms of breath found in the poem proper: Blunt offers the poem in place of Marlowe’s “breathless body” and hopes that, to his patron Thomas Walsingham, “the first breath it should take might be the gentle air of your liking” (33).

Breath is also a marked presence in Venus and Adonis (perhaps it is all that panting). The ways in which Shakespeare employs breath in Venus and Adonis underscores the gender inversion at work in the poem: it is Adonis who is the object

of elaborate blazons in the poem, and Venus' description of his breath positions him, not her, within a long line of female beloveds. Venus says,

“Say, that the sense of feeling were bereft me,
And that I could not see, nor hear, nor touch,
And nothing but the very smell were left me,
Yet would my love to thee be still as much;
For from the stillitory of thy face excelling
Comes breath perfumed that breedeth love by smelling.” (lines 483-88)

The breath emitted from their kisses is so sweet that it promises to rid the world of pestilence:

Long may they kiss each other, for this cure!
O, never let their crimson liveries wear!
And as they last, their verdure still endure,
To drive infection from the dangerous year!
That the star-gazers, having writ on death,
May say, the plague is banish'd by thy breath. (lines 505-510)

After Adonis' death, it is his perfumed breath that Venus misses: she chides death, saying, “what dost thou mean / To stifle beauty and to steal his breath, / Who when he lived, his breath and beauty set / Gloss of the rose, smell to the violet” (933-36)? It is Adonis' breath that is preserved forever in the sweet smell of the anemone: “[Venus] bows her head, the new-sprung flower to smell, / Comparing it to her Adonis' breath” (1171-72).

“It stinks to heaven”: The Smell of Indistinction

In “To Double Business Bound”: Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology (1988), Rene Girard writes, “The distinctiveness of the plague is that it ultimately destroys all forms of distinctiveness” (Double Business 137). In this

section, I will argue that plague writers employed a rhetoric of filth in an effort to impose order on the chaotic experience of the plague, an experience marked by disintegration, dis-gust, and, as Girard notes, indistinction. Specifically, city officials (and the medical writers who sought their favor) labeled London's poor "filthy" or "stinky" in order to "Other" them, to target them as objects of social regulation. The charged climate of London during plaguetime seems to have made these labels all the more powerful, and I find in Shakespeare's plays a similar process of "Othering" through filth and stink. Moreover, critics have recently begun to investigate what it is about filth—dirt, stink, excrement, corpses, rubbish— that terrifies us so: most agree that it challenges our notions of subject and object, natural and unnatural (this may partially explain why Claudius' sins reek, but that will come later).

For now, I wish to begin in a seemingly unlikely place: the antipapist, antisodomy prose polemics of Protestant preacher, dramatist, and bibliographer John Bale. Bale was born in 1495 and died one year shy of Shakespeare's birth in 1563. Traditionally, literary critics have been interested in Bale's King Johan, a possible source for Shakespeare's King John, written fourteen years before Gorboduc in 1554 and considered by some to be the first English history play. More recently, critics have begun to read Bale's five-act morality play Three Laws of Nature, Moses and Christ, corrupted by the Sodomytes, Pharisees and Papystes most wicked (1547) for what it can tell us about early modern definitions of sodomy: Donald N. Mager's essay "John Bale and Early Tudor Sodomy Discourse" in Jonathan Goldberg's Queering the Renaissance (1994) is most notable here. I am interested in another of Bale's works on sodomy, a prose tract named The apology of Iohan Bale agaynste a ranke papist (1550), because I see Bale employing a rhetoric of filth for similar reasons as plague writers do.

The occasion for The apology is unknown, but it appears to be Bale's response to a priest who has recently denounced Bale's views on the sanctity of marriage. Bale followed Luther in glorifying marriage as the true Christian state, and deemed anything else sodomy. Mager's observations about Bale's "typical Reformation use of the word" sodomy in Three Lawes is true for The apology as well: sodomy in both texts includes a host of unnatural sexual behaviors such as bestiality, masturbation, adultery, and pederasty. Bale was virulent in his attacks on the monastic vow of chastity, also a form of sodomy in his view; the OED cites Bale as introducing four variants of sodomy and two of sodomitical in English (Mager 150).

The outstanding rhetorical feature of The apology is its filthiness. He calls idolatry and sodomy "execrable vices" throughout; sodomites are variously "beastly buggerers" (ix), "fylthye fornicatours" (liii), "herde[s] of swyne" (xcvii), "filthy dyrte of the beuyll" (cvii), and "ydolouse stynkyng monster[s]" (xxii). The act of sodomy, Bale writes, is a "hellyshe lake and synke of [f]ylthynesse" (xxv). One chaste monk who persists in his vow of chastity has "falleth...as a dogge, to his vomyte, and as the sowe that was washed, into his olde filthy puddell" (ciii); another is a "filthy knave, that spyghtful mocker, that tordemonger, which dysdaynyng [Bale's] precieuse precepts, presenteth [him] with his vile dirty donge" (cxii); another appears before God in "clothes stayned with meustrue" (lvii). Interestingly, Bale's rhetoric of filth is bound up with plague imagery throughout An apology. Bale himself used the plague to frame his own experience of persecution by the traditionalist Irish clergy while he served as the See of Ossory; he recounts his "flight" in another prose work, Vocacyon to the Bishopri of Ossorie (1552) (Figure 8). In An apology, Sodomites are a "plage" (x, passim). Talk of sodomy is "an infeccion" (xxiii). Sodomy will cause a "noisome wounde and sore botche" (20) and will be

rewarded with a “sore plague” (cx); the sodomitical monastery is the “chayre of pestilence” (lxxvi).

So why the filthy, plaguey sodomite in Bale’s text? Certainly, Bale’s tract participates in a genre of Protestant polemic here that utilizes what Stephen Greenblatt has described in Luther’s corpus as a “semiotic of excrement”; Luther writes such memorable passages as “I am like ripe shit, and the world is a gigantic ass-hole” (73). Moreover, as I discussed in chapter one, the notion that God may punish sin by raining down plagues is firmly grounded in scripture. Yet the juxtaposition of filth, sodomy, and the plague in Bale’s text seems to point as well to a similar and pervasive anxiety in early modern culture: the threat of social disorder and indistinction.

Sodomy in the early modern period, as Alan Bray and others have argued, did not signify a distinct homosexual class, but rather a general category of disorder: the image of the sodomite represented an “enemy not only of nature but of the order of society and the proper kinds and divisions within it” (51). The sodomite was unnatural (that most ubiquitous of early modern adjectives) and he thereby threatened the integrity of the state: “If this man was a sodomite, then was he not likely in all his doings to be the enemy of God’s good order, in society as well as nature” (Bray 41)?

The sodomite, then, was similar to Mary Douglas’ classic formulation of dirt as “matter out of place.” In Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (1967), Douglas argues that purification rituals, specifically those in Leviticus, are less about protecting cultures from physical harm—namely, disease—and more about making sense out of our chaotic existences. She writes, “Dirt offends against order...For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying,

demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience” (2-5). Moreover, Douglas writes, “Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death” (7) and, later, “Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (44).

Because the plague seemed to represent, in Douglas’ phrase, so much “matter out of place” in early modern culture, it is not surprising that the corpse emerges as the single most reoccurring symbol in all plague writing. For Julia Kristeva in Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982), the corpse represents our most direct confrontation with what she calls the “abject.” For Kristeva, the abject is represented by a filthy mother-figure and is neither subject nor object: it belongs in the pre-oedipal, and we must reject it upon entrance into the symbolic order, into subject-ness. Filth—she mentions “waste,” “dung,” “vomiting,” “defilement,” “sewage,” “muck”—both disgusts and fascinates because it draws us toward the undifferentiated world: what is abject “draws [us] toward the place where meaning collapses” (2). The corpse, the ultimate reminder of the abject, puts us “at the border of [our] condition as a living being” : “If dung signifies the other side of the border,” Kristeva writes, “the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel. I am expelled” (3). Kristeva, then, comes to a similar conclusion about the symbolic nature of filth as Douglas: for Douglas, dirt “offends against order”; for Kristeva, “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders,

positions, rule” (4).

The meticulous detail that plague writers lavish on their descriptions of dead bodies betrays a fascination with the abject; the disgust in their descriptions signifies an attempt to differentiate themselves from the pre-symbolic. As I mentioned earlier, dead bodies are as prevalent in plague writing as the stink they emit. In History of the Peloponnesian War (404 B.C.E.), Thucydides describes how “the bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other...The temples in which they took up their quarters were full of the dead bodies of people who had died inside them” (153). In the Prologue to The Decameron, Boccaccio’s narrator describes how “Everywhere the city was teeming with corpses...Alone, or with the assistance of whatever bearers they could muster, they would drag the corpses out of their homes and pile them in front of the doors, where often, of a morning, countless bodies might be seen (xxviii). In the Journal, Defoe’s H.F. writes, “These Objects [corpses] were so frequent in the Streets, that when the Plague came to be very raging, On one Side, there was scarce any passing by the Streets, but that several dead Bodies would be lying here and there upon the Ground...(107). In another passage, H.F. goes into even more detail:

...a Man dead, and on the Gate of a Field just by, was cut with his Knife in uneven Letters, and following Words, by which it may be suppos’d the other Man escap’d, or that one dying first, the other bury’d him as well as he could;

O mIsErY!
We BoTH ShaLL DyE,
WoE, WoE.

(121-22)

Later, during the 1665 outbreak, Samuel Pepys, whose own brother died of the plague, describes being surprised by a corpse after coming home late one night: “It was dark before I could get home; and so land at church-yard stairs, where to my

great trouble I met a dead Corps, of the plague, in the narrow ally, just bringing down a little pair of stairs - but I thank God I was not much disturbed at it.

However, I shall beware of being late abroad again” (192).

Because these bodies stunk, plague orders required them to be buried a certain depth: drawing upon battlefield experience, in 1625 the Privy Council insisted that

...the Graves be digged so deep as that those bodies which lie next to the superficies of the earth may be interred and covered three foot deep, at the least, the contrary whereof being generally observed to be now practiced, cannot choose but be a great occasion of increase of the Infection, by corrupting of the Air in greater measure. It having been found by often experience, that even amongst bodies slain in Battle that the not burying of them deep enough hath putrified and corrupted the Air in such sort as that Plagues have thereupon ensued. (England, Solemn Fast 3)

The many corpses that populate Shakespeare’s plays stink and infect, as well. When Lucy approaches Charles to collect the bodies of the English, including father and son Talbot, Joan la Pucelle says, “For God’s sake, let him have them! To keep them here, / They would but stink and putrefy the air” (4.7.89-90). In King Henry IV, Part 1, Hotspur describes a “popinjay” who was “perfumed like a milliner”

HOTSPUR. And ‘twixt his finger and his thumb he held
A pouncet-box, which ever and anon
He gave his nose and took’t away again;
...
And as the soldiers bore dead bodies by,
He call’d them untaught knaves, unmannerly,
To bring a slovenly unhandsome corse
Betwixt the wind and his nobility. (1.3.37-39, 42-45)

In King Henry V, King Henry says that those soldiers whose bodies must be left behind will “breed a plague in France” due to their stink:

KING HENRY. And those that leave their valiant bones in France,
Dying like men, though buried in your dunghills,
They shall be famed; for there the sun shall greet them,
And draw their honours reeking up to heaven;
Leaving their earthly parts to choke your clime,

The smell whereof shall breed a plague in France.
(4.3.97-103)

Most often, however, dead bodies infect from below, from open graves and the strange earthquakes that served as omens to ill events. A common myth in plague writing was that bystanders at the edge of graves often were killed instantly just by being there:

...upon the opening of a pit in *Campania*, there rushed forth such a poisonous breath, that presently kill'd the by-standers...in the time of *Marcus Verus* the Emperor, *Apollo's* Temple was sackt, and his Image brought to *Rome*, where some of the Souldiers of *Avidius Crassus* espied a little hole, which afterward they opened, and thereupon sallied out such a hurtful blast of Air, that kindled a most grievous *Pestilence*. (Kemp 13)

Grave diggers were particularly at risk. John Davies in his long verse poem about the plague, Humours heau'n on earth (1609), describes a "Pit-man" who positions himself downwind, and dies by the air exhaled from the mass grave he's digging; the bodies he was supposed to bury infect the air:

But, if the Pit-man haue not so much sense
To see, nor feele which way the winde doth sit
To take the same, he hardly comes from thence,
But, for himselfe (perhaps) he makes the pit:
For, the contagion was so violent,
(The wil of Heau'n ordaining so the same)
As often strooke stone-dead incontinent,
And Natures strongest forces strait orecame.
Here lieth one vpon his burning brest,
Vpon the Earths cold breast, and dies outright;
Who wanting buriall, doth the Aire infest,
That like a Basaliske he banes with sight! (239)

Similarly, in The Rape of Lucrece, the "earth's dark womb" breaks open and "blows these pitchy vapors from their bidding" (lines 547-50). Hotspur recalls how "Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth / In strange eruptions" and did so at Glendower's birth (King Henry IV, Part 1, 3.1.25-26). Before their near-fight in Henry V, Pistol says to Bardolph, "O braggart vile and damned furious wight! / The

grave doth gape, and doting death is near; / Therefore exhale” (4.3.18-19). Hamlet’s “witching time” is bathed in infected air from open graves: “Tis’ now the very witching time of night, / When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out / Contagion to this world” (3.2.387-89). In King Henry VI, Part 2, the “tragic melancholy night” awakes the jades “Who, with their drowy, slow and flagging wings, / Clip dead men’s graves and from their misty jaws / Breathe foul contagious darkness in the air” (4.1.5-7).

The stinky corpses in these texts offend against order. As I mentioned above, the plague threatened social distinction; of the mass plague pits that swallowed these bodies, Michael Neill writes, “Death stands for all those natural forces that threaten to reduce the painstakingly constructed order of society to chaos, a mere tumbled heap” (14). I will now return (finally) to what I am calling a “rhetoric of filth.” Put simply, surviving texts written by city officials, religious leaders, and medical writers label London’s poorest citizens as “stinky,” “sluttish,” and disorderly in an effort to distance themselves from them and from the undifferentiated filth they represent. As William A. Cohen writes in his introduction to Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life (2005), a collection of essays on nineteenth-century literary representations of filth,

In a sense, filth is a term of condemnation, which instantly repudiates a threatening thing, person, or idea by ascribing alterity to it. Ordinarily, that which is filthy is so fundamentally alien that it must be rejected; labeling something filthy is a viscerally powerful means of excluding it. Objects are filthy—polluting, infectious, fearful—the nearer they approach the ultimate repositories of decay and death, feces and corpses. People are denounced as filthy when they are felt to be unassimilably other, whether because perceived attributes of their identities repulse the onlooker or because physical aspects of their bodies (appearance, odor, decrepitude) do. (ix-x).

To stink in early modern England, it seems, was to be unregulated, disordered, and unnatural. In Shakespeare’s plays, this becomes an association between stink

and sin, and I believe this is why Claudius' "offense is [so] rank [that] it smells to heaven" (3.3.36). Certainly, stink is a long-time element of the iconography of hell: King Lear says, "Beneath is all the fiends'; / There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit, / Burning, scalding, stench..." (4.6.126-29). But even here, as Thomas H. Seiler writes, the smell and filth of hell signals disorder:

...it is not so difficult to imagine why, in their efforts to portray hell as the antithesis of all that was civilized, desirable, and good, apocalyptic writers should employ images of filth and stench to describe the place of eternal punishment. Again and again, the Edenic, paradisaical garden with its calm, its flowers, its light, its sweet smells is counterpoised by a chaotic and cacophonous place that is dark, dirty, and offensively smelly...the calm and order of Genesis 1.1 is counterbalanced by the disorder and babble of Genesis 11... (132)

Claudius' fratricide, after all, is unnatural: "It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, / A brother's murder" (3.3.37-38). In Othello, Desdemona's unnatural desire to marry outside of her kind smells rank, and thus fuels Othello's suspicion:

OTHELLO. Ay, there's the point! As—to be bold with you—
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends—
Foh! One may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thought unnatural. (3.3.244-49)

In King John and Julius Caesar, it is treason that stinks because it is unnatural:

Salisbury says, "Away with me, all you whose souls abhor / The uncleanly savours of a slaughter-house; / For I am stifled with this smell of sin" (4.3.110-12). To Antony, regicide—"this foul deed"—will release miasmas into the air: "Cry 'Havoc' and let slip the dogs of war; / That this foul deed shall smell above the earth / With carrion men, groaning for burial" (3.1.275-77).

In this chapter, I have argued that Shakespeare's plays do indeed allude to the "immediate experience of the plague" (Hoeniger 213), and that they do so through the many references to stink outlined above. It is true that good poetry has always played upon all of our senses: Timon is the "patron" of "the five best senses" because of his elaborate masques (1.2.132). However, I think that by locating these moments within their historical context, we can reach a more nuanced understanding of the various ways in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries employ smell in their writings (the beloved's breath, the reeking commoners). In this chapter, my scope has been very broad: I have included all of Shakespeare's plays and many works by his contemporaries. In the next chapter, "How soon confusion": The Plague, Degree, and the Body Politic in Coriolanus," I will revisit our reeking plebeians, and focus on the way the plague informs one specific play.

“How soon confusion”: The Plague, Degree, and the Body Politic in Coriolanus

What, exactly, was the plague to early modern subjects? Certainly, the plague was an actual, physical disease, one that caused them and their loved ones to suffer and die, one that dictated their daily rituals and seasonal movements. By the time Shakespeare composed his final tragedy, the plague epidemic had already transformed in very tangible ways the early modern experience itself into “one continuing Tragedy,” as plague writer George Wither recalled in his 1623 plague tract, Britain’s remembrancer: it had been endemic to England for over 250 years. In 1608, the year Coriolanus was first performed, London’s citizens were still recovering from the horrific plague outbreak of 1603; the play’s run ended, in fact, when the epidemic attacked London once again in 1609, closing the theaters for six months. The plague was very real, as quantified every week by the London Bills of Mortality.

Yet there were so many facets of the plague experience that were incomprehensible, un-real. If there is one characteristic of all early modern plague writing, in fact, it is a peculiar tone of bewildered despair. Why me? Why not him? Why us? The names and numbers printed in the Bills’ tidy lists and columns betray an attempt to impose a sense of order on what was fundamentally a chaotic experience. The plague was everything and nothing: all-encompassing yet evasive; intimate yet unknowable; specific yet mysterious. While preventative medical regimens, plague prayers, and prognostications offered some sense of control, contemporary accounts betray anxieties over their effectiveness, especially when Londoners witnessed the preacher dying alongside the prostitute, or the perfumed nobleman sharing a mass grave with the stinking vagabond.

In this chapter, I wish to investigate how Shakespeare defines the plague in Coriolanus, and how his employment of the plague works with the larger plague discourse. I will argue that Shakespeare imagines Rome's civil unrest and disorder in much the same way political writers of his day did: as a plague, infecting the body politic from the inside rather than as a foreign invader from the outside. Moreover, the play also dramatizes how labels such as diseased and healthy become rhetorical weapons: they harness many of the anxieties we have about disorder, liminality, and mortality, and are easily exploited for personal and political gain. Because issues of contagion and containment seem so fundamental to an understanding of this opaque play and its protagonist, a reading of Coriolanus with the plague in mind seems to me long overdue.

Before he turns to his oft-cited Fable of the Belly, Menenius tries many rhetorical strategies to quell the plebeians' rebellion: flattery ("masters, my good friends, mine honest neighbors" (1.1.60)); awe ("you may as well / Strike at the heaven... / as lift them / Against the Roman state" (1.1.65-67)); and fear ("You are transported by calamity / Thither where more attends you" (1.1.73-74)). His Fable articulates the political organic or body politic metaphor so common in Tudor and Stuart texts: the hungry and rebellious plebeians—"the mutinous parts"—have accused the belly

That only like a gulf it did remain
I' th' midst o' th' body, idle and unactive,
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
Like labor with the rest, where th' other instruments
Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,

And mutually participate, did minister
Unto the appetite and affection common
Of the whole body. (1.1.95-103)

Instead, Menenius assures them, the belly—“the storehouse and the shop / Of the whole body”—sends food

...through the rivers of your blood
Even to the court, the heart, to th' seat o' th' brain;
And, through the cranks and offices of man,
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins
From me receive the natural competency
Whereby they live. (1.1.133-38)

In all likelihood, neither Menenius' auditors nor Shakespeare's audience members were hearing Menenius' “pretty tale” for the first time: Menenius warns, “It may be you have heard it”; Sidney had already called the Fable “notorious” in his 1581 Apology for Poesy (39).

Shakespeare's plebeians, however, aren't buying it. The “mutinous members” interrupt Menenius repeatedly, caution him against trying to “fob off [their] disgrace with a tale” (1.1.92), and even, at one point, wrest the narrative from him (1.1.112-17). The plebeians' resistance to Menenius' tale is unique to Shakespeare's play: the Fable appears in Sidney's Apology, North's Plutarch and Holland's Livy, and also Edward Forset's Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique, all of which describe Menenius' words suppressing the rebels. In Sidney, Menenius' words “brought forth but then so sudden and so good an alteration...a perfect reconcilment ensued” (21); North's Plutarch reports that Menenius' “persuasions pacified the people” (305); and Forset describes how after hearing Menenius, they abandoned “their malignant enuy wherewith they were intraged against their rulers” and “forthwith reclaymed into their bounds of obedience” (image 3).

The political organic metaphor's ability to mystify, it seems, has already eroded by the time we enter the dramatic action in Coriolanus' Rome. The plebeians have already begun to perceive a gap between their lived experiences and what Menenius tells them is "natural." Their bellies are grumbling. Menenius' rhetorical flourishes—"There was a time", "if you do remember", "examine [and] you shall find" (1.1.94, 103, 148)—attempt but fail to make the idea of correspondence obvious, eternal, and absolute. The plebeians' demand transparency: they want to "See" how the stomach will do what Menenius promises. Menenius' bewilderment by his political organic metaphor's inability to reintegrate the plebeians—"What then? / 'Fore me, this fellow speaks!" (1.1.116-117); "Patience awhile!" (1.1.124)— suggests that, historically, his mystificatory tale has kept the plebeians "in awe" (1.1.185). Keeping them in awe, according to Coriolanus, is the only way to keep the rabble from "feed[ing] on one another" (1.1.186).

Instead, the dynamics between Menenius and the plebeians in the opening scene prepare us for what will continue throughout the rest of the play: the senators will attempt to convince the plebeians that they are the source of Rome's sickness, and the plebeians will resist being labeled as such. Although Menenius' Fable of the Belly doesn't use words like "sickness" or "infection," it does describe imbalance or dyskrasia within the body, a word which in the humoral model correlated with the state of disease. According to Menenius and the Roman senate whom he represents, the state's body politic is diseased because the "mutinous members" refuse to remain "incorporate" (1.1.147, 128). Menenius' intervention, like a physician's, is an attempt to return the body politic to its rightful, balanced state, one described by Thomas Elyot in his A Boke named the Governour: "A publike weale is a body lyuyng, compact publike weale, or made of sondry estates and degrees of men, whiche is

dysposed by the order of equity, and governed by the rule and moderation of reason” (1).

The conflict for control of Rome in Coriolanus, then, is staged through the spectrum of the human body, as the “struggle for rhetorical ownership...of illness” (Sontag 181). As we see throughout the course of the play, the senators and tribunes all realize that to be labeled as diseased is a political act. As many critics have noted, “the ailing body can be a charged political site, and the way people explain and write about it has important consequences for individuals and for social groups” (Healy 3). Especially because the humoral system relied so heavily upon ideas of equilibrium and balance, the unhealthy were coded as chaotic, unregulated, and disordered, especially in an early modern climate in which there was “an emergent ideology of bodily refinement and exquisite self-mastery” (Paster Embarrassed 14).

The bubonic plague in early modern England is a case in point. “Epidemics by their very nature,” Healy reminds us, “provide a good opportunity and rationale for intervention into the lives of others, for the reordering of bodies” (19). Religious, political, and literary writers exploited the plague for their own ends; the significance of the plague was especially open to manipulation because the origin of the disease remained so mysterious. As William Austin writes in his 1665 verse plague poem Epiloimia Epe, “What Plague is we will search in ev’ry nook, / As far as one can into mill-stone look” (44). Its lack of fixed meaning left it open to ideological appropriation: “Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious,” Sontag writes (6).

For the plague in Shakespeare’s England, the plague became a poor person’s disease, even though, according to social historian Paul Slack’s The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England, the poor did not account for enough of the total deaths

to warrant such a disproportionate amount of focus on them. Yet plague writers repeatedly addressed the poor in their tracts, as though naming them would provide the writers a level of magical protection from infection: Thomas Lodge dedicates his 1603 A treatise of the plague to his “poore country-men and afflicted brethren” (1); Thomas Kemp addresses his A brief treatise of the nature, causes, signes, preservation from, and cure of the pestilence to “Commons and inferiour people” (1); Thomas Sherwood directs his The charitable pestmaster to “the poore of this City,” adding that all the remedies that he describes “are sold by Apothecaries, who may afford them reasonably to the poore” (1).

Disease, then, becomes both a product and symptom of an overall disordered life. Writing in 1583, physician Philip Barrough explains why those dwelling in the same lodging became infected while others do not:

For they that keepe a good and heathfull diet, and be without superfluties in their bodies, they take no hurte at all, or... The first cause why some remaine vnhurt, is because they be not full of superfluous humiditie and moisture, but do vse moderate diet and exercises, and haue their bodie easie to breath out vapours. (16)

Just as for Coriolanus the plebeians are a “musty superfluity,” the infected here are full of “superfluties.” Kemp makes similar observations: “the meaner sort of people that keep little or no order in diet, and have small regard to preserve their health, but having foul bodies, and abounding with peccant humours, become most subject to this pernicious disease; from the danger whereof, others that guide themselves more orderly, for the most part live more secure” (14). Moreover, poorer, crowded sections of the city, mainly the suburbs, were to be avoided because of the stink emanating from them: writing in 1551, physician Henry Wingfield advises his readers to “flie farre from those places where the ayre is euyl, stinking, and corrupt” because of “a greate multitude of people in small rome liuyng vncleanly or

sluttishely” (83); Henry Chettle attributes the spread of infection to those from unclean, crowded houses walking abroad into the “open ayre.”

It is no doubt that the corruption of the ayre, together with vncleanly and vnwholsome kéeping of dwelling, where many are pestered together, as also the not obseruing to haue fiers priuate & publiquely made as well within houses, as without in the stréets, at times when the ayre is infected, are great occasions to increase corrupt and pestilent diseases. Neither can it be denied, that the ouer-boldnes of many preasing into infected places, and the lewdnes of others with sores vppon them, presuming into the open ayre, some of wilfulnes, but truly many of necessitie, contaminateth & corrupteth diuers. (1)

Words like corrupt, euyl, foul, order, orderly, inferiour, vncleanly, sluttishely, and vnwholsome betray a desire to regulate the moral as well as physical behaviors of their addressees. According to Galen, an individual’s overall well-being was determined by the complex interactions among his “naturals” (humors, spirits, faculties, members, sex organs), “non-naturals” (air, food and drink, exercise, venery, passions) and “contra-naturals” (diseases). To label a person or a group as diseased, then, was also to label it as that most condemning of early modern adjectives: unnatural.

The tribunes’ efforts to identify Coriolanus as the disease which infects Rome, then, becomes part of their overall strategy to assail his character and expel him from the body politic. When Coriolanus refuses to agree that “The people are the city,” Brutus says,

BRUTUS Sir, those cold ways,
 That seem like prudent helps, are very poisonous
 Where the disease is violent. Lay hands upon him,
 And bear him to the rock. (3.1.52-55)

In this scene, the senators insist that Coriolanus is “a disease that must be cut away” (3.1.295); Menenius assures them that “he’s a limb that has but a disease; / Mortal, to cut it off; to cure it, easy” (3.1.296). If the senators succeed at associating

Coriolanus with disease, Menenius warns, his people will never again revere him: “The service of the foot / Being once gangrened, is not then respected / For what before it was” (3.1.307). The tribunes, in the end, decide that “Lest his infection, being of catching nature, / Spread further,” Coriolanus must die (3.1.310-11).

Coriolanus and the senators, in turn, repeatedly attempt to associate the plebeians with disease: their fickle affections become “A sick man’s appetite, who desires most that / Which would increase his evil” (1.1.175-76). Coriolanus casts his appeal for the plebeians’ expulsion as a painful but necessary medicine—“a dangerous physic”—for the commonweal:

Therefore, beseech you,--
You that will be less fearful than discreet,
That love the fundamental part of state
More than you doubt the change on’t, that prefer
A noble life before a long, and wish
To jump a body with a dangerous physic
That’s sure of death without it, at once pluck out
The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick
The sweet which is their poison... (3.1.155-56)

After the people have condemned Coriolanus to death, his senators beg him to “mend” his relationship with them: “The violent fit o’ the time craves it as physic / For the whole state” (3.2.33-34). His words, according to them, are the only “remedy” (3.2.26).

Importantly, Coriolanus seems invested in one particular disease above all others: the plague. “All the contagion of the south light on you,” Coriolanus rails when his forces abandon him at the Volscian gates,

You shames of Rome! you herd of--Boils and plagues
Plaster you o’er, that you may be abhorr’d
Further than seen and one infect another
Against the wind a mile!— (1.4.30-34)

The “common file” is “a plague” (1.6.43); a “musty superfluity” (1.1.224) to be purged; they are “measles [that are] ...catch[ing]” (3.1.78-80) and “dissentious numbers pestering [Rome’s] streets” (4.6.7, my emphasis). The masses, the “mutable, rank-scented meiny” (3.1.66), “puff” miasmas into the air and “ma[k]e the air unwholesome” (4.6.55) “You common cry of curs!”, Coriolanus rails,

...whose breath I hate
As reek o’ the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you. (3.3.121-24)

Menenius takes his leave of the tribunes because, after conversing with the plebeians, he fears their “conversation would infect my brain, being the herdsmen of the beastly plebians” (2.1.91). Volumnia, Shakespeare’s most accomplished curser since Margaret (and, possibly, Lear), invokes the plague in her invectives: “the hoarded plague o’ the gods / Requite your love!” (4.2.11), she rails at the tribunes: “Now the red pestilence strike all the trades in Rome / And all occupations perish!” (4.1.13-14), she screams at Rome after it banishes her son. Later, Volumnia tells Coriolanus that unless he allows her to petition him, the “gods will plague thee / That thou restrain’st from me the duty which / To a mother’s part belongs” (5.3.16-18).

It is not uncommon for crowds in Shakespeare’s fictive worlds—or his actual one—to be miasmatic and infectious. Cleopatra, for example, fears that she and Iras will be paraded through the streets of Rome among the common people. She says to Iras,

Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shalt be shown
In Rome, as well as I mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers, shall
Uplift us to the view; in their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall be enclouded
And forced to drink their vapor. (5.2.208-213)

Later in Antony and Cleopatra, Octavius Caesar finds it inappropriate for Antony to “reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet / With knaves that smells of sweat” (1.4.20-21). In Julius Caesar, Casca narrates Caesar’s refusal to accept the Roman crown; the feeble Caesar swoons due to the crowd’s nasty breath:

And then he offered it the third
time; he put it the third time by: and still as he
refused it, the rabblement hooted and clapped their
chapped hands and threw up their sweaty night-caps
and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because
Caesar refused the crown that it had almost choked
Caesar; for he swooned and fell down at it: and
for mine own part, I durst not laugh, for fear of
opening my lips and receiving the bad air. (1.2.242-50)

Timon rails against the commoners’ smell: “Smells from the general weal: make curl’d-pate ruffians bald; / And let the unscarr’d braggarts of the war / Derive some pain from you: plague all” (Tim. 4.3.160-65). And the words of crowds are particularly contagious: Claudius fears that Laertes “wants not buzzers to infect his ear / With pestilent speeches of his father’s death” (4.5.91-92); in Troilus and Cressida, Nestor warns that “many are infect” with the “imperial voice” of Ulysses (1.3.187).

The difference in Coriolanus, however, is that the miasmatic, stinking breaths of the crowds threaten to infect physical bodies as well as the body politic: their “voices” are also “votes.” Infection and the plague, it seems, signify the larger themes of civil dissent and disruption of degree that lie at the heart of the play. Importantly, unlike the newer Paracelsan model which characterized disease as “an entity in its own right, whose origins lie outside the body in a foreign invader” (Harris 23), the plague was still considered by Shakespeare and his contemporaries as largely

endogenous: an internal, humoral disturbance. In contrast, syphilis, the “new” disease in Tudor and Jacobean England, was largely considered along Paracelsan lines. It was always associated with an Other, usually of foreign origin:

...the Muscovites referred to it as the Polish sickness, the Poles as the German sickness, and the Germans as the French sickness—a term of which the English also approved (French pox) as did the Italians...The Flemish and the Dutch called it ‘the Spanish sickness’. As did the inhabitants of North-West Africa. The Portuguese called it ‘the Castilian sickness’, whilst the Japanese and the people of the East Indies came to call it ‘the Portuguese sickness.’” (Quetel 16)

One of Shakespeare’s deviations from the source text for Coriolanus indicates that he, too, may have imagined the plague as a specifically internal form of bodily chaos. In his main source for the play, Plutarch’s Lives, the plague did not infect from within, but threatened from outside of Rome. In North’s translation, Rome receives visitors just as the plebeians are beginning to get unruly: “there came ambassadors to Rome from the city of Velitrae,” Plutarch writes, “[who] prayed [that Rome] would send new inhabitants...because the plague had been so extreme among them, and had killed such a number of them, as there was not left alive the tenth person of the people that had been there before” (315). A “most happy hour,” the senators of Rome think: they choose to send “many mutinous and seditious persons” to Velitrae, and quell the brimming rebellion in Rome (315). Although the tribunes petition against sending a group of plebeians “into a sore infected city and pestilent air, full of dead bodies unburied,” the senators prevail and send off enough plebeians to replenish Velitrae, with “great penalties” to those who refuse (316).

Shakespeare omits the Velitrae episode entirely from Coriolanus: the plague is not in a world elsewhere, but within. It becomes symbolic of the disintegration of degree—of “kind”— that propels the dramatic conflict of the play. If, as Naomi Conn

Liebler argues, “tragedy represents the consequences of perverting, inverting, or neglecting the ordering, containing properties of civic and social rituals, understood as required for the preservation and functioning of a community” (9-10)—what Rene Girard calls a “crisis of distinctions” (*Violence* 49, *passim*)—then *Coriolanus* is perhaps Shakespeare’s purest tragedy of all. More than any of Shakespeare’s plays, the fictive community of *Coriolanus*, as demonstrated by Menenius’ Fable, is invested in the idea of a natural order, a hierarchical society in which degree is divinely prescribed. While the failure of Menenius’ Fable to reintegrate the plebeians suggests that the senators are the only party interested in maintaining the fiction of a natural order, the plebeians too express anxiety about disturbing it: “Ingratitude is monstrous,” one says, “and for the multitude to be ingrateful, were to make a monster of the multitude: of the which we being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members” (2.3.10-11).

But most of the anxiety over social erosion is expressed by those in the play most disempowered by it: Coriolanus, his fellow senators, and his family. “Behold, the heavens do ope,” Coriolanus says to his mother, “The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at” (5.3.183-85). Unlike *Macbeth*, however, Coriolanus is not driven by a thirst for power: he is sincere when he says he would “rather be a servant in [his] way / Than sway [the plebeians] in theirs” (2.1.198-99). Coriolanus is motivated, rather, by an inability or refusal to imagine a different society, a republican Rome; in his single-mindedness, a disruption of degree equals only destruction and desolation, a land of “crows peck[ing] the eagles” (3.1.139). For this reason, in his address to the senators, he vehemently warns against “mingling”:

In soothing them [the plebeians], we nourish ‘gainst our senate
The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,
Which we ourselves have plough’d for, sow’d,

and scatter'd,
By mingling them with us, the honour'd number,
Who lack not virtue, no, nor power, but that
Which they have given to beggars. (3.1.69-74)

He can envision only “confusion”:

my soul aches
To know, when two authorities are up,
Neither supreme, how soon confusion
May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take
The one by the other. (3.1.107-111)

Cominius employs an architectural metaphor, in which “heaps and piles of ruin” result from indistinction—“bring[ing] the roof to the foundation” (3.1.208, 206). For Coriolanus, it is the word unnatural that conveys for him the consequences of a republican Rome: he, on the other hand, is always described as acting according to his “nature.”

Many critics have remarked upon the play’s particular investment in themes of disorder and disintegration, though not in relation to the plague. For them, the way language breaks down in Coriolanus signifies the breakdown of degree. “Words have become meaningless,” writes James Calderwood, “it is the logical corollary of the dissolution of a stable social order that language should become flaccid, words semantically irresolute, and truth itself hard to come by” (212). For Leonard Tennenhouse, there is a “crisis of semantic order” (328); for Carol M. Sicherman a “failure of words” (189); and for Arthur Riss a “revolt of language” (53). Some critics focus specifically on the protagonist’s refusal to communicate in public discourse: Stanley Cavell argues that Coriolanus exhibits a “disgust by language” (12). Coriolanus himself admits that he “fled from words” (2.2.73); Plutarch notes that he was “altogether unfit for any man’s conversation” (297).

If, as I have argued thus far, the plague in Coriolanus supports the play's themes of dissolution and disorder, then Shakespeare may have been drawing from his and his audience members' own lived experience with the disease. Everything about the plague broke bonds, disintegrated rituals, and dissolved social hierarchies. "The distinctiveness of the plague," Rene Girard writes, is that it "ultimately destroys all forms of distinctiveness" (137); Michael Neill notes that "in its wild assault upon difference the disease breaks all boundaries..." (21). The danse macabre tradition that grew out of the plague epidemic (Clark 66), for example, garners much of its horrifying impact because the skeletal death figure embraces everyone: men and women, rich and poor, priests and sinners, old and young. As physician Francis Herring observes in his 1604 regimen, it mattered little whether one "scorneth and refuseth Physicians and Physicke, or els sendeth to the Physician, when the bell is ready to toll for him, and when the steed is stollen [God] begins to shut the stable doore" (A Modest Defense B). In his verse poem Londons mourning garment, written during the 1603 outbreak, Henry Muggins emphasizes how the plague disregards class. Here, the plague figure says,

And to the ende, none dwelling in my Cittie
Should thinke themselues more safer then the rest...
Gods iudgement vpon all degrees are prest,
From poorest begger, to the wealthiest Squire,
From yongest infant, to the oldest Syre. (C4)

The most horrifying representation of the plague's indiscriminate nature is found in Bullein's A dialogue bothe pleasaunte and pietifull wherein is a goodly regimete against the feuer pestilence (1564). In it, Bullein's character Mors debates the nature of the plague with the twelve other allegorical figures in the dialogue, including Theologus, Medicus, and Civis. Mors is typical of many personifications of the plague used by plague writers: he is sent by Satan, he carries a bow (plague

comes from the Latin plaga, “wound” or “stroke”), and he is terrifying because he kills regardless of degree. In this passage he kills a prince, peasant, king, dancer, singer, judge, prisoner, Judge, and courtier; he also “ende[s] the miserie of the poore”:

I will make them eate their owne fleshe, and make their own children to be sodden and rosted for them. With this thirde dart, I will in battaill slaie in nomber, more then the Starres of heauen, and bathe my self in blood. I spare not one, neither Prince nor Peasant, against whom I doe cast this dart. I haue no respecte of any persone, be thei neuer so noble, riche, stro~g wise, learned, or cunning in Phisicke, thei shall neuer preuail against me: but I will ouercome them. I come into the Kynges chamber at the time appoincted, in force of Phisike, and cast my darte, that none shall se but fele. I often come into the counting house, and sodainly kille the money teller. I ouerthrowe the Daunser, and stoppe the breath of the singer, and trippe the runner in his race. I breake wedlockes, and make many widdowes. I doe sit in iudgemente with the Iudge, & vndoe the life of the prisoner: and at length kill the Iudge also him self. I doe somone the greate Bishops, and cut them through their rotchettes. I vtterlie blemishe the beautie of al Courtiers. And ende the miserie of the poore. I will neuer leaue vntill all fleshe be vtterly destioied, I am the greatest crosse and scourge of God. (14)

Notice that Mors is horrifying not only because he kills indiscriminately: he also says that he will “make them eate their owne fleshe, and make their own children to be sodden and rosted for them.”

Another unnatural aspect that many plague writers mention is the breaking of kinship bonds during plaguetime: as plague writer William Austin writes, “Sister, brother, husband not more disclaim / Their kindred, then the hearing of their name” (22). During the 1665 outbreak, Defoe’s narrator, H.F., is quick to compliment the charity he observes, he too often comments upon family members who turn their backs on their own: “self-preservation, indeed, appeared here to be the first law,” he says, and describes how “children ran away from their parents as they languished in the utmost distress...parents did the like to their children; nay, some dreadful

examples there were, and particularly two in one week, of distressed mothers, raving and distracted, killing their own children..." (153). In Coriolanus, too, crisis also threatens to disintegrate social bonds: "Making the mother, wife and child to see / The son, the husband and the father tearing / His country's bowels out" (5.3.101-103).

Even the disease itself seemed to disrespect boundaries. Most generally agreed that when the plague was raging, it morphed into other diseases, encompassing them and making them more deadly. The plague shifted shapes: Dekker calls the plague the "Protean Climacterical" (Wonderfull yeare 19) and the "Hydra-Sickness with so many Heads, The Plague" (Blacke and White Rod 204)! In Epilomia Epe, Austin says "As each Disease when the Plague rages, is / Turn'd to the Plague" (17).

The way early modern subjects imagined the plague—the great leveler, disrupter of distinctions—may account for Shakespeare's employment of it: he often uses it when situations are out-of-joint or unnatural. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, for example, Titania evokes the plague to symbolize the seasonal discord created by her feud with Oberon. She describes how it "washes the air" with "rheumatic diseases": "Therefore the winds," she says, "piping to us in vain, / As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea / Contagious fogs..." (2.1.104-5, 89-90). There is a level of irony in Titania's speech, I think, since, typically, the pattern of movement during plague outbreaks was similar to that in A Midsummer Night's Dream and other pastoral comedies: city dwellers fled the dangerous, "corrupt" city for the clear air of the country. But here, the green world is infected, and crows feed upon a "murrion flock" (2.1.29, 31). The word murrion is important here. Since the Black Death, murrion or murrain had come to refer specifically to animals that died

of the pestilence (“Murrian”); Shakespeare’s plays use it interchangeably with the plague, such as Thersites’ “a red murrain o’ thy jade’s tricks!” (Tro. 3.2.22). The Forest of Athens is infected and now the “spring, the summer, / The childing autumn, angry winter, change / Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world, / By their increase, now knows not which is which” (MND 2.1.24-27).

Timon, too, connects the plague and a lack of “Degrees, observances, customs, and laws”:

Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries,
And let confusion live! Plagues, incident to men,
Your potent and infectious fevers heap
On Athens, ripe for stroke! (Tim. 4.1.81-86)

Lear says that “nature is ashamed” of what he sees as Cordelia’s rebellion: “Thou are a boil,” he says, “A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle, / In my corrupted blood” (Lr. 2.4.62, 64-65); King Richard II believes that “God omnipotent, / Is mustering in his clouds on our behalf / Armies of pestilence” (R2 3.3.6-7, 10-12) because of his subjects’ insurrection.

It is in his reference to Jack Cade as “a pestilence / That does infect the land” in Henry VI, Part 2 (5.1.13-14), however, that Shakespeare most directly reflects how early modern writers used the plague in their texts. In general, writers in this period began imagining the political organic metaphor based on “how it didn’t work,” how it became “increasingly dysfunctional and...pathological” (Harris 1). And certain diseases, it seems, were coded in certain ways: syphilis, for example, was an obvious metaphor for sexual immorality, and plays like Measure for Measure make frequent reference to it. The plague, on the other hand, became in political and religious discourses a metaphor for civil discord and rebellion. It is in this specific

way, I believe, that Shakespeare employs the plague in Coriolanus, and I wish to turn now to a sample of texts written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that illustrate how the plague became associated with rebellion. I've chosen four, spanning from 1529 to around the time Shakespeare wrote Coriolanus in 1607. Their writers all support the monarchies of their times, and we see in them a similar struggle for the "rhetorical control of illness"; all attempt to associate rebellion with real and metaphorical plagues infecting England's body politic.

English humanist Thomas Starkey published his Dialogue between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset in 1529, a work that historian J. W. Allen has called "by far the most remarkable piece of writing concerned with politics that was produced in England under Henry VIII, with the exception of More's Utopia" (143). The speakers in his dialogue, the last Archbishop of Canterbury and kinsmen to Henry VIII, Cardinal Reginald Pole, and Thomas Lupset, a fellow at Oxford and friend of Erasmus and Thomas More, set out to discover "what ys the veray true commyn wele...the dekey of our common wele, with all the commyn fautys and mysordurys of the same...and of the remedy and mean to restore the commyn wele agayne" (15). The Dialogue assigns specific diseases to specific social problems. "Consumptyon," for example, is caused by the depopulation of England through war: "in a cuntrey, city, or towne, wher ther ys lake of pepul, ther wantyth powar to maynteyne the floryshyng state of the polytyke body" (18). Idleness, mainly in the noble classes, causes "Dropsy" in the body politic, a commonality that is "unlusty, and slo, no thing quyke to move, nother apte nor mete to any maner of exercise, but solne with yl humorys" (24). Those who spend their time with trifles like imported meats and jewelry, songs, and fashion, bring a "Palsy" to the body politic: "some partys be ever

moving and schakyng and lyke as they were besy and occupyd therewith, but to no profit nor plesure of the body” (28).

Importantly, when Starkey comes to assigning an illness to civil unrest, he chooses pestilence:

For lyke as a pestylens where so ever hyt reynyth lightly & for the most parte, destroyth a grete nombur of the pepul wyth out regard of any person had or degree, so doth thys discord & debate in a commynalty, where so ever hyt reynyth shortly destroyth al gud ordur & cyvylyte, & utturly takyth away al helth from thys polytyke body & tranquyllyte. (56)

This pestilent “polytyke body” is in contrast to what Starkey sees as the ideal state: “in a cuntrey city or towne ther ys perfayt cyvylye, ther ys the true commyn wele, where as al the partys as membrys of one body be knyt togyddur in perfayt love & unyte, every one dowyng hys office & duty...” (37).

The same ideal of a perfectly balanced commonwealth appears in classical scholar and Protestant Sir John Cheke’s The Hurt of Sediton, how greivous it is to a common-wealth. Here, however, rebellion is not an abstract concept. Written in response to Kett’s rebellion in July, 1549, The Hurt of Sediton was republished in 1569, 1576 and in 1641 with Gerard Langbaine’s life of the author. The rebellion, led by tanner and landowner Robert Kett, began when townspeople tore down enclosures in Wymondham, a small town southwest of Norwich, and gathered over 15,000 others to seize control of Norwich and surrounding areas. They issued 29 demands, most of which requested relief from poverty and hunger. The rebels refused King Edward VI’s diplomatic efforts and, although they weathered the first wave of attacks, eventually succumbed to defeat. Convicted of High Treason, Kett’s death was meant to serve as an example to other would-be rebels: executioners hung him over the side of Norwich Castle, where his death was drawn out for many days.

Cheke too presents The Hurt of Seditiō as an example to his readers: “Even as the Lacedemonians 2 for the avoiding of Drunkenesse, did cause their sonnes to behold their servants when they were drunk, that by beholding their beastilnesse, they might avoid the like vice,” he writes, “by beholding the filth of your fault, wee might justly for offence abhorre you like Rebels...” (1). Cheke is specific and topical in his work: he addresses the “rabble of Norfolk Rebels” who attempted to “change...from a King to a Ket” and “in a field stand” with “swords drawne,” referring to the rebels’ occupation of Mousehold Heath outside of Norwich (3, 4, 7, 16). Overall, however, Cheke spends more time locating the historical and biblical precedents of rebellion than addressing the Kett rebellion specifically: he addresses his tract, for example, to an archetypal “The Rebel” rather than to anyone in particular.

For Cheke, like Coriolanus, rebellion is “monstrous” and “unnatural” because it violates the position that God has ordained for each member of society: according to him, there should not be “equality in the commonwealth” but “content[ment] with your estate” and degree (14, 31). Cheke uses metaphors common to early modern political discourses, ones that characterize hierarchical government as the most perfect and natural state.

For we see that the sheep will obey the Shepheard, and the Nete be ruled by the Nete-heard, & the Horse will know his keeper, and the Dog will be in awe of his Master, and every one of them feed there, and of that, as his keeper and ruler doth appoint him; and goeth from thence, and that, as he is forbidden by his ruler. (16)

Cheke encourages his readers to follow the animals’ examples: “But yee that ought to be governed by your Magistrates, as the Herds by the Herdman, and ought to be like sheep to your King, who ought to be like a Shepheard unto you” (16). He also uses a household metaphor: “if the servant be bound to obey his master in the

familie, is not the subject bound to serve the King in his Realme? The childe is bound to the private father, and be we not all bound to the commonwealths father” (21)?

The metaphor Cheke relies upon most heavily, however, is the body politic. “If,” he writes, “the members of our naturall body all follow the head, shall not the members of the politicall body all obey the King” (30)? For Cheke, “.order must be kept in the Commonwealth like health in the body” (33). It is when “any least part is out of joint, or not duly set in his own naturall place” that the body politic becomes “diseased” with the “infections” of disorder and confusion (39, 43). The specific disease of rebellion, as in Starkey’s A dialogue, is plague: Cheke moves between blaming the rebels for the actual plague that has infected England and labeling the rebels themselves as the plague. According to Cheke, rebellion literally causes the plague: when workers stop working and rebel, as they did in Kett’s rebellion,

Hay is gone, corne is wasted, strawe is spoiled... Experience teacheth us, that after a great dearth, commeth a great death, for that when men in great want of meat eat much ill meat, they fill their bodies with ill humours, and cast them from their state of health, into a subjection of sicknesse... And so grow great and deadly plagues. (44)

The lodgings and lifestyle of rebels also breed plague infestation:

For while their minde changeth from obedience to unrulinesse, and turneth it selfe from honesty to wildnesse, and their bodies goe from labour to idlenesse...and from beds in the night to cabins, and from sweet houses to stinking camps...with corrupt ayre which infecteth the body, that there follow some grievous tempest, not onely of contagious sicknesse, but also of present death to the body. (49)

Yet plague is also a metaphor for rebellion itself. Rebellion is pestilent, and it leaves the state “spotted”:

this one deadly hurt [rebellion], where with the Commonwealth of our nation is wounded, beside all other is so pestilent, that there can be no more hurtfull thing in a wel governed state, nor more throwne into all kinde of vice and unrulinesse, and therefore this your sedition is not only most odious, but also

most horrible, that hath spotted the whole Countrey with such a staine of idlenesse. (51)

As in Coriolanus, the plague of rebellion in Cheke's tract slowly stems from inside the state, corrupting all it touches: "For even as concord is not only the health, but also the strength of the Realme, so is sedition not only the weaknesse, but also the aposteme of the Realme, which when it breaketh inwardly...corrupteth the whole Commonwealth" (53).

An Homilie against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion, written mainly by Protestant apologist Bishop John Jewel, was the final homily published in the second Anglican Book of Homilies (1571), a collection of authorized sermons on topics ranging from good works, to swearing, to dress. As articulated in the Thirty-Nine Articles, local church leaders were to read them out loud during services, further solidifying core Protestant teachings. Queen Mary repealed the Homilies during her reign; Queen Elizabeth recalled them. As the title suggests, An Homilie condemns the "confusion" caused when subjects deviate from their assigned stations, when "the foot [attempts to] judge of the head" (II.21.1-182). Rulers have divine rights, according to An Homilie:

all Kings, Queenes, and other governours are specially appointed by the ordinance of GOD. And as GOD himselfe...ruleth and governeth all things in heaven and earth...so hath hee constituted, ordeyned, and set earthly Princes over particular Kingdomes and Dominions in earth.

(II.21.1-128-II.21.1-134).

All types of disease, according to An Homilie, are results of humankind's first rebellion: the devil brought "Adam and Eve...in high displeasure with GOD [which caused] sicknesse, diseases, death of their bodies..." (II.21.1-44-II.21.1-48).

Specifically, the present plagues continue to punish rebellion, just as, in scripture, "sometime a great sort of thousands were consumed with the pestilence (Numbers

11.1, 33, 12:10, 16.32-33, 35, Psalms 78:30-31)” (II.21.4-854). “Now if such strange and horrible plagues, did fall vpon such subjects [in the Bible], what shall become of those most wicked impes of the devil that doe conspire, arme themselves, assemble great numbers of armed rebels, and leade them with them against their Prince and countrey...” (II.21.4-866-II.21.4-871)?, An Homilie asks.

As in The Hurt of Sedition, the actual, physical circumstances of rebellion are also conducive to generating the pestilence within a commonwealth.

...of the rebels, by their close lying together, and corruption of the ayre and place where they doe lie, with ordure and much filth, in the hot weather, and by vnwholesome lodging, and lying often vpon the ground...by their vnwholesome diet, and feeding at all times, and often by famine and lacke of meate and drinke...So that not onely pestilences, but also all other sickenesses, diseases, and maladies, doe follow rebellion...

(II.21.3-721- II.21.3-733)

The rebels are plagues, “maladies and disorders that can bee in the body of a common wealth” (II.21.1-207-II.21.1-208) and, even if the Prince is a tyrant, An Homilie warns that “rebels are vnmeete ministers, and rebellion an vnfit and vnwholesome medicine to reforme any small lackes in a prince, or to cure any little griefes in gouernment” (II.21.1-204-II.21.1-206). Finally, An Homilie explicitly attributes England’s current plagues to rebellious subjects within the commonwealth: “that all the miseries that all these plagues haue in them, doe wholly altogether follow rebellion” (II.21.3-715-II.21.3-716).

Nicholas Breton’s A Murmurer, written in 1607, condemns “murmurers”—those who speak against “God, the king, or any their ordeyned magistrates, in a Kingdome” (4)—and contains one of the most elaborate articulations of the political organic metaphor in Tudor and Jacobean writing. As Breton progresses through his

treaty, it becomes clear that by “murmurer” he means a general class of disordered, unnatural people, “monster[s] of nature”:

If thou be a man, and murmurest against God, thou art a Deuill; if thou bee a Subject, and murmure against thy King, thou art a Rebell; if thou bee a Sonne and murmure against they father, thou shewest a bastards nature; If though mumure against thy Brother, an unkind nature; if against thy friend, an unthankfull nature... (5)

Breton encourages obedience, writing, “...make not thy selfe a rebel, but rather learne hovv wo obey his vwill, then to murmure at his gouernment” (15).

According to Breton, murmuring causes both physical disease and disease within the body politic. It physically “disquiets the heart, distempereth the bodie...[and causes] rages, frettings, ward, death, povertie, sickness” (21). It disrupts would should be the working harmony of the human body / government:

...if in this priuate body of man, all things bee brought vnto this good order, vvhat fllame is it for a common-wealth, that men fhould bee fo out of order? and while all parts of the bodie are at the feruice of the head, to the great peace of the heart, vvhy fhould not all Subjects ioyne together in vnity of feruice to their King...? (6)

The act of murmuring provokes God to send actual plagues, much like the ones Breton’s readers had just experienced in London. The plague is spiritual as well for Breton, and murmuring becomes “a Canker eating into thy Soule worfe then any Fistula in thy flefhe” (50). Breton then provides an extensive passage of a “murmurer truly difcribed,” too long to include in its entirety here, which paints a plague victim whose gruesome physical symptoms—“breathe like impostume” (71)—body forth his spiritual disorder. The treaty ends with Breton’s prescription to cure a “diseased” commonwealth: sacrifice the “members,” the commoners, rather than the “head,” the King. “For it is written,” Breton cautions, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my Prophets no harm” (88).

Like Menenius, these writers exploit the plague as part of an ideological project, one designed to preserve the hierarchical order of the body politic. Also, as in Coriolanus, these texts employ the plague trope in similar ways: the plague is both a real, literal thing (miasma), and a metaphor for something else (civil discord). However, is there more going on in Coriolanus to inspire such heavy employment of the plague trope? After all, many of Shakespeare's works deal with civil war and rebellion: the histories should be much more plague-ridden if this were the only criterion.

The plague in Coriolanus, I believe, is there not only to support the play's themes of civil rebellion: it also allows us insights into its protagonist. For many critics, Coriolanus represents early modern fantasies of the "bounded self": a sense of himself as a discrete, enclosed individual. Many occurrences during the period, according to James Kuzner, gave rise to the possibility of the bounded self:

...the explosion of print (which afforded experiences of private reading and individual interpretation), the rising popularity of theater and theatricality, growing opportunities for property acquisition and the attendant rise of possessive individualism, expanding codes of civility that enjoined individuals to keep the body and its processes as private as possible, heightened Protestant emphasis on inwardness, state-mandated religious persecution requiring Catholics to conceal their faith, and...the rise of republicanism and its ideals of participatory government and personal liberty. (176)

For Riss, the play "establishes a correspondence between the impulse to enclose public land and Coriolanus's urge to enclose his body, a body that the dominant ideology demands be available for public use" (53). Janet Adelman reads in his attempts at bounded-ness a desire for an impenetrable masculine self, one that his relationship with his mother has denied him (108, passim). Cavell argues that Coriolanus wishes to create a "world of private signification" through his own code of language (165).

If, for Coriolanus, the enclosed self becomes the enclosed, impenetrable body, then the plague gives him a way to imagine the plebeians' threat as something capable of disintegrating his body's boundaries: infection. As Riss writes, "Coriolanus commits himself to a paranoid theater of eternal warfare in which his body is ceaselessly invaded by and must endlessly be defended from others" (56-57). His body is whole, their bodies are in parts ("toe[s]" "scabs," "fragments," "cloven,"); he is one, they are many ("many-headed," "a beast with many heads"). He is disgusted by the plebeians' disease-ridden, grotesque bodies, bodies that seem tied to the humoral system of "absorbing and being physically altered by the world around it..." (13). His many comments about their fickleness—"With every minute you do change a mind" (1.1.180)—are similar to those that associate the plebeians with disease: both demonstrate a lack of self-regulation.

Coriolanus' bounded self, then, becomes a quarantined self. Throughout the play, he is associated with images of impenetrability, wholeness, and constancy: "carbuncle entire" (1.4.55), "the rock, the oak" (5.3.105), "great sea-mark" (5.3.74), a heart "more proof [impenetrable] than shields" (1.4.25). He despises the disconnect between inner intentions and outer appearances so prevalent in Rome, like the soldiers who "bear the shapes of men" yet have "souls of geese" (1.4.34-35). He resists baring his wounds—something Plutarch's Coriolanus has no problem with—because he despises ritual, but also because to do so shows his body as ultimately penetrable. He even closes himself off from us, the audience: Coriolanus has the fewest soliloquies than any of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. He wishes to be "every man himself" (3.1.266), born of himself, by himself. A dragon in a cave.

Rome, however, demands that his body remain public property: if the city is the people then, in Coriolanus' eyes, the body politic will never return to health. The

disease will always remain inside. And, unlike Macbeth, in which Malcolm is the “med’cine of the sickly weal” (5.2.33), the ending of Coriolanus is the bleakest of any Shakespearean tragedy: order has neither been restored nor reimagined. As Jan Kott writes, “The image of the world is flawed and lacks cohesion. Contradictions have not been resolved, and there is no common system of values for the polis and for the individual” (173). W. Gordon Zeevald agrees, writing, “At the conclusion of [Coriolanus], popular representation has ceased to exist, and commonwealth as an ideal is as far away as ever” (333). For Shakespeare’s audience, the specter of the plague—unremedied, unpurged—would have contributed to the “peculiar, stark, unresolved” atmosphere of the play. By Ernest Bloch’s definition, Coriolanus’ Rome is dystopic because it is hopeless—as opposed to utopic visions, it ends unable to fulfill what is “not yet” (19). The absence of the plague, in fact, has been identified by Rebecca Totaro as one of the defining characteristics of early modern utopic fictions like Thomas More’s Utopia and Margaret Cavendish’s Blazing World (69, 143, passim). The end of Coriolanus, rather, feels apocalyptic: famine, war, and pestilence still threaten, and the “world elsewhere” remains unrealized.

I have argued in this chapter that the plague in Coriolanus supports the play’s broader themes of disintegration and rebellion, and also allows us to more fully understand the way Coriolanus imagines his body and place in Rome. Moreover, the play seems to engage the broader discourse surrounding the plague and disease in early modern England, especially in its dramatization of the way ideas of bodily chaos are appropriated for ideological purposes. In the next chapter, I will read Shakespeare’s plays not for what they say about the plague specifically,

but for what they say about the power of theater to cure, and the power of creation in the face of destruction. To do so, we will need to enter the contentious debates that surrounded the place of playing in Shakespeare's England.

“Poison hath residence and medicine power”: Early Modern Theater as pharmakon

Early on in Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard’s 1998 film Shakespeare in Love, a young William Shakespeare, suffering from writer’s block, makes his way through the busy London suburbs during the first major plague outbreak of his professional career (the insert title reads “SUMMER 1593”). While passing by the Rose Theater, Shakespeare hears a Puritan and antitheatricalist, Makepeace, condemning the corruption of the playhouses: “The Rose smells thusly rank by any name!”, he cries, “I say a plague on both their houses!” Shakespeare, of course, will later appropriate this language for his own play (working title: Romeo and Ethel the Pirate’s Daughter).

Despite the film’s many historical inaccuracies, Shakespeare in Love seems to capture something in this scene that historians and scholars of early modern culture have largely overlooked: while the actual playhouses were often shut up due to the plague, the discourse that surrounded early modern theater was never shut off from the epidemic. Antitheatricalists like Makepeace exploited the fear of physical and moral infection that surrounded the playhouses and the suburbs in which they stood. In response, apologists for theater and the playwrights themselves assured their consumers that things found at the early modern theater—shows, music, language—could benefit one’s health by providing the mirth so essential in fortifying the body against infection.

I wish to use Jacques Derrida’s analysis of the word pharmakon in Phaedrus, Plato’s discourse on speech and writing, to argue that the theater was both a “remedy [and] poison” (70). Just as Derrida attempts to move away from the

overdetermined translation of Plato's pharmakon as either "remedy" or "poison," it is my hope to reclaim the early modern playhouse as a site that possessed ambiguities, ambiguities that those interested in its moral, economic, and social meanings attempted to control.

Importantly, when antitheatricalists, defendants of theater, and dramatists sought to control how early modern subjects perceived the playhouses, they utilized the language and conventions of the most actively growing genre in the early modern print marketplace: the vernacular medical regimen. The plague, most scholars agree, was largely responsible for fueling the demand for this new genre, and cultivating what Elizabeth Lane Furdell calls the early modern "culture of medicine...that extended far beyond those teaching, learning, or practicing" (35). As we shall see, the debates over theater were indeed products of and participants in this "culture of medicine," and it seems as though the theater's associations with the plague gave the employment of medical discourse all the more impact.

This dissertation has already explored certain poisonous aspects of early modern playgoing: in my section on ocular contagion in Chapter One, I discussed the greater incidence of plague deaths in the suburbs; in Chapter Two, I discussed how the playhouse's association with "stink" made it an extremely dangerous place (as Makepeace reminds us, the Rose Theater did indeed smell "thusly rank"). Since I've already covered this ground, this chapter will spend more time discussing the theater's medicinal qualities than its poisonous ones. I will begin our discussion, however, with writers who, I suspect, would have felt perfectly comfortable participating in tirades like Makepeace's: antitheatricalists who actively campaigned between the erection of the first purpose-built theater in 1576 and the closing of the theaters in 1642.

Theater as Poison

Antitheatricalists and the Language of Contagion

Although Jean Howard devotes an entire chapter in The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England (1994) to an exploration of antitheatricalists' "dense tropology" and "rhetorical sleights of hand" (22), she overlooks the prevailing metaphor that unifies all antitheatrical polemics: contagion. My assumptions in this section are that first, while these antitheatricalists do exhibit a certain "crackpot streak" (Barish 2), they are also skilled rhetoricians; and second, that they would not have continually employed the language of contagion unless the playhouses and the suburbs were experienced as places of poison. After tracing their use of plague imagery, I will explore why contagion proved a particularly attractive metaphor to opponents of theater in Tudor and Stuart England.

Stephen Gosson's "They that came honest to a play, may depart infected" from Plays Confuted in Five Actions (1579) (108) is representative of the persistent and creative use of plague imagery in early modern antitheatrical discourse. The playhouse is the "chair of pestilence" for Anthony Munday in A Second and Third Blast of Retreat (1580) (13) (and, later, for William Prynne in Histrion-Mastix (1633), 244). Prynne calls the place of playing "that most contagious plague...that pestiferous poyson," and "a pestiferous Fish-pond" (418, 565). The players themselves emerge as contagious in antitheatrical discourse: "Players of interludes," writes John Northbrooke in A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes (1577), "...are so noisome a pestilence to infect a commonwealth" (10); in Plays Confuted in Five Actions (1582), Gosson advises that players be "cut off from the body as putrified members for infecting the rest" (11); for Prynne, players are "pestiferous miscreants" (110).

As discussed in Chapter One, because both the plague and the theater relied upon spectacular modes of transmission, throughout their tracts antitheatricalists caution against the “contagion of theatrical sights” (Rankins 177). Moreover, playgoers “shall not want contagion” at the theater since “So infectious, so vitious is the company that usually resorts to Plaies” (Rankins 128). Women, the weaker sex, were more vulnerable to the physical and moral contamination found in the theaters: “The nature of woman,” Northbrooke writes, “is much infected with this vice [of playing]” (9). The idleness that antitheatricalists so often associate with the playhouses is a “vice [that is] so contagious” (Rankins 128) throughout their treatises as well.

As we can see, most often antitheatricalists use plague metaphors explicitly: they describe the “Playes, and common Actors, and all those seuerall mischieuous, and pestiferous fruites of Hellish wickedness that issue from them” (Prynne 6). Yet even when they don’t directly reference the plague, they often use metonyms like sores and spots to evoke the disease: Northbrooke mentions the “close fistulas” and “outward sores” of vice (12); Gosson calls players “spots to our manners” (Plays 108); the title of Rankin’s A Mirrour (1587) describes the “spotted enormities” contracted at plays (125); Prynne calls the players “the greatest virulency” (13). Some remind their readers of the theater’s connection to the plague by using miasma imagery: the idleness bred by plays is a “stinke [which] was able to infecte a mortall man...with foule blacke swealth and foggy m[i]st, forming a Chaos of congered substaunce, ouer which flyeth no Foule but presently dyeth with the infectious stinck of this hidious hole” (Rankins 14). Prynne asks, “Wilt thou not therefore flie these seates of the enemies of Christ, this pestilentiall chaire, and that very aire which hangs over it” (523)? Moreover, antitheatricalists take pains to remind their readers of the

theaters' filthiness, a rhetorical strategy that, as we discussed in Chapter Two, was utilized frequently by city officials to control the suburban population: the theater is full of "filthy words and gestures...which infect the spirit" (Munday 79). Prynne warns against "running unto Play-houses...with all kinde of filth and dirt" (532).

While modern critics have not recognized contagion as the prevailing metaphor of antitheatricalists' writing, their contemporaries and immediate successors did. Philip Sidney's Apologie for Poetry (1595), written in response to Gosson's The School of Abuse, notes that "the most important imputations laid to the poor poets [is] that [poetry] is the Nurse of abuse; infecting many pestilent desires" (27). In 1704, Doctor of Divinity Josiah Woodward, in his Some thoughts concerning the stage in a letter to a lady, writes, "The Hand of God has been lifted up against us, we have seen the Terrors of the Lord, and felt the Arrows of the Almighty" (paragraph 12). Woodward rejects his opponents' proposal that the theater could be rehabilitated because the

Wound is not Gangreen'd, and must be cur'd by Excision...In the mean time, it will be every one's Duty to run from a Place of such Infection, least they contribute to the spreading a Disease which may, in time, prove Fatal to the whole Nation. (paragraph 13)

That same year, in his response to Jeremy Collier's antitheatrical tract Short View, Edward Filmer argues in A Defence of dramattick poetry against his "Cotemporaries Opinion, viz. That they [plays] were a worse Plague than what they cured" (22).

In addition to diagnosing the theaters as infectious, antitheatricalists also proffered themselves as physicians: their texts became painful but necessary medicines for the health of their readers and the body politic. Prynne in Histrionic Mastix, for example, describes how "Playes and Players...neede sharpe emplaisters, bi[nd]ing corrosives, else they will not be cured; because gentle lenitives cannot

cleanse them” (13). It is Gosson, however, who employs this technique most frequently. In The School of Abuse, for instance, Gosson is sympathetic but firm with his reader-patients: “These are harde lessons vvhich I teach you; neuerthelesse, drinke vppe the potion, though it like not your taste, and you shall be eased; resist not the Surgeon, though he strike in his knife, and you shall bee cured” (Schoole 31). In Plays Confuted, Gosson writes, “Therefore considering with my self that such kind of sores might be lanced too soon,” Gosson continues, “I chose rather to let him ripen and break of himself, that vomiting out his own disgrace, and being worn out of favor among his own friends, I might triumph in the cause and shed no blood” (Plays 88). While Gosson portrays himself as the highest in the medical hierarchy, a “Phisition,” the players become the lowest: scamming apothecaries. “Were not we so foolish to taste every drug, and buy every trifle,” he writes, “players would shut in their shops, and carry their trash to some other country” (School 28). Munday admits, “In the beginning every disease is to be stopped, and cured: but if a sore run over-long, it will grow past the cure of the physician” (73). Prynne argues, “We performe our duty who speake true things of the truth. You if you have entred into the Physicians house, that you might cure your wounds, lament your wounds. The medicines being layd on, let the corruptions be purged out” (399).

By offering themselves as physicians to the body politic, antitheatricalists appealed directly to city officials. They capitalized on the anxieties of a state attempting to control a devastating and mysterious plague outbreak with no end in sight, and often petitioned the state directly. “What State, what person then would foment such fatall plagues?”, Prynne asks (476). Munday writes, “The megistrate is therefore to provide in time a remedy to redress the mischiefs that are like to ensue by this common plague” (73). Their use of precedent from classical sources reminds

city officials that playhouses had historically been “the very fatall plagues, and ouertures of those States, and Kingdomes where they are once tolerated” (Prynne 2). Both Northbrooke and Lodge reference a passage from City of God (415 A.D.?) in which St. Augustine condemns the leaders of the Roman republic for introducing “scenic entertainments” into a city already stricken with the plague:

Where were they [the city’s leaders] when that very severe pestilence visited Rome...Nay, during this plague, they introduced a new pestilence of scenic entertainments, which spread its more fatal contagion, not to the bodies, but the morals of the Romans? Where were they when another frightful pestilence visited the city — I mean the poisonings imputed to an incredible number of noble Roman matrons, whose characters were infected with a disease more fatal than any plague? (Northbrook 81)

Prynne reminds city officials that “Pagan States and Emperours...exiled all professed Stage-players out of their Common-weales...vomited [them] out as putred, noysome and infectious members...” (411).

In my effort to identify the ways antitheatricalists exploited the fear of contagion that surrounded the suburbs and playhouses, I hope to join the growing number of scholars who, in the past twenty-five years or so, have begun to challenge the notion that despite their persistent references to Plato, Aristotle, Tertullian, and St. Augustine, Tudor and Stuart antitheatrical writing did not merely “rehearse all the objections against the stage first formulated by the Fathers” (Barish 88). Indeed, the texts of Gosson, Prynne, and their contemporaries bear the marks of their own particular historical moments: for Barish, these antitheatricalists’ texts record the early modern anxiety over the unstable and mutable nature of the self; Michael O’Connell argues that their railings against the stage’s “papist model of iconic representation” express a post-Reformation suspicion toward images (88); David Hawkes argues that “the theater [became] a metonym for the market economy” which was already threatening to destroy “the feudal order and the ‘natural’ social

relations” of early modern English life (88). Here, I have argued that antitheatricalists’ texts record and exploit fears of contagion that surrounded the early modern playhouses.

The Appeal of Contagion Imagery for Antitheatricalists

Antitheatricalists found an easy fit between plague metaphors and the scriptural foundations that supported most of their projects. It is important to note that while “antitheatricalist” has largely become synonymous with “puritan,” the two terms should not be used interchangeably: Gosson, for example, criticized puritanism, and Stubbes and Munday showed few signs of puritan sympathies (Pollard xvii). However, since most antitheatricalists were preachers, it is not surprising that their plague rhetoric has a decidedly scriptural twang: “God is just,” writes Gosson, “his bow is bent & his arrowe drawn, to send you a plague, if you stay too longe [at the playhouses]” (*Plays* 111). Prynne identifies plays as the “great occasion of those devouring Plagues [which are] greater plagues and infections to your soules, then the contagious pestilence to your bodies” (560). For Prynne, the bubonic plague was clearly a punishment for sin:

Stage-playes is a grand occasion both of the engendring and propagating these late, these present plagues which yet wee feele, and suffer. As therefore we would flie and feare this dreadfull fatall sicknesse, which hath a long time hovered over our heads, and hath almost quite depopulated some particular places of this Kingdome (and God knoweth how soone, how fast it may increase to sweepe us all away) let us henceforth cast out these our lewde pestiferous Enterludes... (420)

Through these passages, they remind their readers that disease has always been regarded as a punishment for sin, a consequence of the Fall. According to St. Augustine in The City of God, for example,

This very life, if life it can be called, pregnant with so many dire evils, bears witness that from its very beginning all the progeny of mankind was damned...In fact, from the body itself arise so many diseases that not even the books of the doctors contain them all, and in the case of most of them, or almost all of them, the treatments and drugs themselves are painful. Thus men are rescued from a penal destruction by a penal remedy. (313)

For this reason, the reward of heaven was to be free from the body's pain. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, for example, St. Paul likens the earthly body to a tabernacle under which all humans "groan" in pain:

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Antitheatricalists also pepper their texts with New Testament stories of God dramatically lifting bodily affliction from the faithful (Matt 4:23, 12:13-15; Luke 6:19; Acts 10:38).

In their treatises, antitheatricalists also capitalized upon the association between leprosy and the plague that seemed immediate to most early modern plague writers: city officials, in fact, often used the seclusion of lepers in Exodus to justify their quarantine measures. That the lesions leprosy produced recalled the plague's buboes visually reinforced the connection between the two diseases. Moreover, as

Steven Mullaney reminds us, since Roman times London's suburbs had been home to the lazar-houses that confined lepers to an existence of ritualized seclusion: it was not a far stretch for the theaters, then, to become "Leprous Play-houses" in antitheatrical discourse (33, passim).

Beyond its association with leprosy, there is also plenty of scriptural evidence specifically citing the plague as evidence of God's wrath. After the Pharaoh of Egypt refused to free the Israelites, God sent ten plagues, the last of which killed the first born son of each Egyptian family (including the Pharaoh's son). In Deuteronomy, God says, "I will heap calamities upon them and spend my arrows against them. I will send wasting famine against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague" (32:23-24); Psalm 106 reads, "Because of rebellion, God will destroy with the sword, famine, and plague"; in Jeremiah, God warns that he will "strike down those who live in this city—both men and animals—and they will die of a terrible plague" (21:6).

Moreover, the plague metaphor worked for antitheatricalists, I think, because the disease and the experience of theater were so very similar. As I discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Two, Shakespeare often evokes the plague when a situation is out-of-joint, when "degree is shak'd" (Tro. 3.1.18). The public playhouses also prompted similar anxieties over indistinction. On stage, clothing and gestures that signified gender were overlooked; lofty oratory could make any poor player sound like a king. The audience was equally diverse: as Dekker describes in his Gull's Horn Book (1603), general admission to the theaters allowed

...a stool as well to the farmer's son as to your templer; that your stinkard has the self-same liberty to be there in his tobacco fumes which your sweet courtier hath; and that your car-man and tinker claim as strong a voice in their suffrage, and fit to give judgment on

the play's life and death, as well as the proudest Momus among the tribe of critic...(28).

The most striking similarity, however, is the underlying fact that, like the plague, antitheatricalists did not know exactly why theater possessed an undefinable force, "a far-reaching power affecting mind, body, and soul" (Pollard xi). The plague, too, was ultimately mystifying, inescapably elusive; although theories abounded as to its etiology, in the end, no one knew what the epidemic was, a notion that plague writers remark upon time and time again. Most antitheatricalists identified the evasive power of theater with the devil's wiliness. Language became the devil's tempting fruit: "Because the sweete numbers of Poetrie flowing in verse, do wonderfully tickle the hearers eares," Gosson writes,

the deuill hath tyed this to most of our playes, that whatsoeuer he would haue sticke fast to our soules, might slippe downe in suger by this intisement, for that which delighteth neuer troubleth our swallow....with sweet of wordes, fitnes of Epithites, with Metaphors, Alegories, Hyperboles, Amphibologies, Similitudes, with Phrases...(Plays 99)

Henry Crosse, in his Virtue's Commonwealth (1603) describes how language creeps into audience members like a pestilence, "From whence then creepeth in this pestilence, but out of these vaine bookes...all prophane and lasciuious Poems, are as an infectious aire that brings generall plague, because they striue against honestie" (107-08). In this way, the theater actually worked upon the body in much the same way as the plague: language and spectacle penetrated every pore, creeping stealthily toward the heart.

Theater as Remedy

“Dry sorrow drinks our blood”: Dangerous Passions during Plaguetime

After refusing Adriana entry into her priory at the end of The Comedy of Errors, Aemilia the Abbess pinpoints the cause of Antipholus of Ephesus’ melancholy:

Thou say’st his sports were hindered by thy brawls:
Sweet recreation barred, what doth ensue
But moody and dull melancholy,
Kinsman to grim and comfortless despair,
And at her heels a huge infectious troop
Of pale distemperatures and foes to life. (5.1.77-81)

Here, Aemilia articulates a doctrine of early modern medicine that plague writers stress time and time again: imbalanced emotional states or “passions” like melancholy leave the body susceptible to “infectious troop[s]”. In the next section, I will argue that playwrights and their apologists offered their plays, “sweet recreation[s],” as antidotes to the melancholy so prevalent and dangerous during plaguetime. Here, I wish to discuss the early modern medical models that underpin Aemilia’s assertion, models that largely determined how early modern subjects experienced their bodies.

Melancholy was not a passion per se: it referred both to the atrabilious humor itself, and any disease stemming from an excess of it, including epilepsy and apoplexy. However, early modern writers came to use melancholy as a general term for a state of fear and sadness: in his The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621), Robert Burton writes, “fear and sorrow are the true characters and inseparable companions of melancholy” (109). While many early modern medical writers determined that melancholy occurred “without cause,” most attributed its origin to external stimuli.

And certainly, there was no shortage of melancholy-provoking sights or sounds in plaguetime London. Daniel Defoe's Journal (1721), in fact, reads most like an actual plague document when it describes the emotional anguish of London's citizens during the 1665 outbreak. "London might well be said to be all in tears" his narrator H.F. writes (28),

Others [infected with the plague], unable to contain themselves, vented their pain by incessant roarings, and such loud and lamentable cries were to be heard as we walked along the streets that would pierce the very heart to think of, especially when it was to be considered that the same dreadful scourge might be expected every moment to seize upon ourselves. (103)

Physician William Kemp, who actually lived through the 1665 outbreak, describes the "Passions, Fears, Terrors, Frights and Imaginations" that afflicted London's citizens:

...you are forsaken of Friends, and hear nothing but complaints of Neighbours, the crying of Wives and Children, the mourning of Husbands and Parents, the sorrowing of Kinsfolks and Allies, the Sickness spreading, the Pestilence raging, and the Plague encreasing from Tens to Hundreds, from Hundreds to Thousands, and now ready to seize upon your self, as it hath done already upon others. (25)

It is not surprising that plague writers consistently describe the pervasive atmosphere of melancholy during outbreaks. Physician George Thomas lists melancholy as a standard symptom of plague infection in his 1665 Loimologia: "Symptoms which appear, as Nauseousness, Anorexy, extream Thirst...tedious Watchings, Dotage, Melancholy, Madness and the like" (134). It is Speed who in The Comedy of Errors catalogues the characteristics of one suffering from melancholy—here Valentine's love melancholy—as one who will "walk alone, like one that had the pestilence" (2.1.21). Dekker describes the "Blacke, Sullen and Dogged spirits of Sadnesse, of Melancholy" (Seven 32) and the "still and melancholy streets"

(Wonderfull yeare 27) during plaguetime. Samuel Pepys attempts to avoid sights and sounds that trigger his chronic melancholy during the 1665 outbreak:

My meeting dead corpses of the plague...To see a person sick of the sores, carried close by me by Gracechurch in a hackney-coach...To hear that poor Payne, my waiter, hath buried a child, and is dying himself...do put me into great apprehensions of melancholy, and with good reason. But I put off the thoughts of sadness as much as I can, and the rather to keep my wife in good heart and family also. (225)

The melancholy described by plague writers was not merely uncomfortable to early modern subjects: it was extremely dangerous as well. According to Galen, an individual's overall well-being was determined by the complex interaction among his "naturals" (humors, spirits, faculties, members, sex organs), "non-naturals" (air, food and drink, exercise, venery, passions) and "contra-naturals" (diseases). A sudden or prolonged change in any non-natural, including the passions, upset the body's humoral eukrasia (equilibrium), resulting in an overabundance of one humor, a state called dyskrasia (imbalance). If, in response to external stimuli like the nighttime laments of plague victims, melancholic dyskrasia occurred, the cold and dry atrabilious humor that usually prevented blood from becoming too thin produced thick, sluggish blood. It is King John, remember, for whom "melancholy, / Had baked [his] blood and made it heavy-thick, / Which else runs tickling up and down the veins" (3.3.43-45); it is likely black bile that Lady Macbeth desires when she famously asks the spirits to "make thick [her] blood" (melancholy was often associated with criminality) (1.5.9-10).

It was the physician's job to rid his patient's body of this material peccans, or polluting matter, through bloodletting, enemas, and induced "vomys." Physicians preferred, however, that patients maintained eukrasia through proper regimen (diet, hygiene); early modern medicine, in fact, was one that stressed preventative

medicine above all else. The flourishing of regimen manuals published during Shakespeare's lifetime demonstrates both a thriving print culture and "Increased expectations of bodily refinement and of physical and emotional self-control... an emergent ideology of bodily refinement and exquisite self-mastery" (James 14). Bodies were subject to even more regulation during plaguetime.

Control of the passions, then, was an essential part of any regimen, the surest way to keep the body free from disease. This control, however, was not easily achieved. The passions, according to Susan James in Passion and Action (1997), "were regarded [in the early modern period] as an overbearing and inescapable element of human nature" (21). In emblem literature, the passions were represented as waters in an ocean, forever changing, forever escaping containment. Moreover, external stimuli like the corpses that Pepys describes could dramatically alter the humoral composition of the body: as Paster describes it, "...all being-in-the-body involved a turbulent interior plentitude capable of absorbing and being physically altered by the world around it..." (Body Embarrassed 14). Most historians of emotions agree that it was not until Descartes and Locke that the body began to be conceived of as physically sealed off from its environment.

What may seem most foreign to modern readers about the humoral model, then, is the extent to which the passions were able to physically alter the body. Paster calls this reciprocal nature of the body and passions "psychophysiology": "the dominant early modern understanding of the material body as phenomenologically indistinguishable from its passions, indeed as constituted by its passions" (Humoring 22). Contemporary documents support Paster's claim: Thomas Wright, author of the enormously popular The Passions of the Minde in Generall (1601) notes, "Passions engender Humors, and humours breed Passions" (77). In The

Anatomy of Melancholy, Burton writes “For as the body works upon the mind...the mind most effectually works upon the body, producing by his passions and perturbations miraculous alterations, as melancholy, despair, cruel diseases, and sometimes death itself” (157). Plague writer Kemp writes that “as the humors of the body do oftentimes work much upon the mind, in like manner the passions of the mind work no less upon the body” (23).

Shakespeare, in fact, often dramatizes the negative physical effects of melancholic emotions like fear or sorrow: many of the passages in Shakespeare that we take as purely metaphorical would have registered quite literally to his audience. For example, since for Galen the heart was the seat of the passions, it was most affected by prolonged grief. Tamora, for example, notes that the “effects of sorrow for his valiant sons [has] pierced [Titus] deep and scarr’d his heart” (4.4.24-25); Marcus describes Titus’ heart as having “more scars...Than foemen’s marks upon his batter’d shield” (4.1.33-34). Extreme fluctuations between emotions also damaged. For example, Gloucester’s heart, weakened by grief, bursts when he learns that Edgar is still alive: “But his flaw’d heart,” Edgar reports, “Alack, too weak the conflict to support! / Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, / Burst smilingly” (5.3.16). Hero’s false death in Much Ado, I suspect, is also predicated upon a similar notion: expecting Claudio to make her a happy bride, Friar Francis reports that she died “Upon the instant that she was accused” (4.1.5).

Melancholy was also thought to draw black bile from the spleen to the heart, cooling and drying it to the point of breaking: “throw my heart / Against the flint and hardness of my fault,” cries Domitius Enobarbus in Antony and Cleopatra, “Which, being dried with grief, will break to powder” (4.9.7-9) When the heart cooled, it also contracted, drawing blood away from the limbs and causing grieved individuals to

appear pale: Juliet's moon, for example, is "sick and pale with grief" (2.2.4) and Lucio is "pale at [his] heart to see [Isabella's] eyes so red" in Measure for Measure (4.3.63).

Shakespeare's characters often describe melancholic states as physically dangerous, even fatal:

BUSHY. Madam, your majesty is too much sad:
You promised, when you parted with the king,
To lay aside life-harming heaviness
And entertain a cheerful disposition. (R2 2.2.1-4)

In The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Proteus tells Valentine, "A pack of sorrows which would press you down, / Being unprevented, to your timeless grave" (3.1.17-18); upon finding Imogen, Belarius cries, "O melancholy! / Who ever yet could sound thy bottom?...Thou diedst, a most rare boy, of melancholy" (4.2.89-90, 95). Sudden emotional disturbances could prove fatal for Lady Montague, Brabantio, and (supposedly) Hermione.

The most dangerous physical ramification of melancholic passions during plaguetime, as the Abbess in The Comedy of Errors reminds us, was that they made the body more susceptible to "huge infectious troop[s] / Of pale distemperatures and foes to life" (5.1.80-81). In The Passions of the Mind in Generall, Wright observes that "...for that all paine ingendreth melancholy; which, for the moft part, nourifheth all difeafes..." and, quoting Euripides, writes, "Sorrows to men difeafes bring" (63). Physician Thomas Wharton warned against fasting in his regimen Directions for the prevention and cure of the plague (1665): "For long Fasting draws in the Pulse and Vital strength, weakens the Animal Spirits, and consequently induces Fear and Melancholy, whereby Contagion easily enters the enfeebled Body, and so spreads and continues the Plague" (3). Even Thucydides' account of the

Plague of Athens in History of the Peloponnesian War (440 B.C.-?) emphasizes the greater incidence of death among the emotionally distressed: “By far the most terrible feature in the malady,” he writes, “was the dejection which ensued when anyone felt himself sickening, for the despair into which they instantly fell took away their power of resistance, and left them a much easier prey to the disorder...This caused the greatest mortality” (65).

Early modern medical writers interpreted the greater incidence of plague deaths among the melancholic in slightly different ways. In 1593, the physician Simon Kellwaye concluded that fear and sadness opened the body’s pores, making it more soluable: “Beware of anger, feare, and pensiuenes of the minde, for by their meanes the body is made more apt to receiue the infection” (13). In his Epiloimia epe (1665), plague writer William Austin stresses that the life forces concocted in the heart that transported motion throughout the body—“spirits”—were detained when melancholy cooled the heart. This weakened the “noble parts,” the heart and brain:

There’s none will doubt but melancholly soon
Can put our bodies organs out of tune.
For cooling, and so binding heart, it stops
The spirits, and detains them from their shops.
Thus bodies trading fails. Natural heat
Parts want, and can at market get no meat.
Hence humor makes a melancholly mood,
Cardan thought fit to call the Devils food.
This passion, when it may befriend the Pest,
In mischief will be sure to do its best.
For weak’ning then the noble parts, they are
Neither condition’d to resist nor dare. (72)

Physician Stephen Bradwell, writing in 1625, describes a similar process, although he uses a military metaphor rather than Austin’s marketplace one:

Of all Passions, Feare is the most pestilently pernicious...Feare enforces the vitall Spirits to retire inward to the hart: By which retyring they leave the outward parts infirme, as appears plainly by the paleness and trembling of one in great feare. So that the walls

being forsaken (which are continually besieged by the outward ayre)
in comes the enemy boldly; the best spirits that should expelled them
having cowardly sounded retreat... (41-42)

Other medical writers speculated that fear of the plague made one not only more susceptible to contracting it, but actually caused the plague itself. Flemish physician Jean Baptiste van Helmont (1577-1664), who based his ideas on Paracelsus, argued in The Plague-Grave (1605) that the “Image of terrour” can plant itself in the intellect and destroy the body’s Archeus or “controller,” leading to a plague infection even worse than one contracted through miasma (qtd. in Barker 661). German physician Daniel Sennert (1572-1637) concluded in 1618 that “the passion of the soul affectively accelerates the plague and alters the body” (qtd. in Barker 660) after he recorded that many of his patients contracted the plague merely by passing a mass plague grave or hearing the plague cart’s bells as it passed by. In England, Paracelsus, van Helmont, and Sennert’s ideas are found in works such as The Anatomy of Melancholy in which Burton writes, “Sometimes death itself is caused by force of phantasy. I have heard of one that coming by chance in company of him that was thought to be sick of the plague (which was not so) fell down suddenly dead” (160).

Finally, melancholy was particularly dangerous during plaguetime because it could lead to mania; Hamlet’s madness, remember, stems from an initial “sadness”:

POLONIUS. [He] Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves,
And all we mourn for. (2.2.91-95)

Because the manic were most susceptible to infection, plague writers warned against the “tedious Watchings, Dotage, Melancholy, Madness” (Thomson 46) to which most victims succumbed. Defoe’s narrator describes the “melancholy madness” of victims’

relatives: "...some dying of mere grief as a passion, some of mere fright and surprise without any infection at all, others frightened into idiotism and foolish distractions, some into despair and lunacy, others into melancholy madness" (110). Elsewhere in the Journal, H.F. describes victims who had "grown stupid or melancholy by their misery"; he witnesses them "creep into a bush or hedge and die" (133).

"Sweet recreation barred": Theater as Curative

Plague writers' detailed warnings against the dangers of melancholy were accompanied by equally detailed descriptions about how to procure melancholy's surest antidote: mirth. Mirth was the surest way to keep one's body healthy: "If you read, you may happilie laugh," Thomas Dekker writes in the dedication to The wonderfull yeare, "because mirth is both Phisicall, and wholesome against the Plague..." (3). In response to antitheatricalists' claims that the playhouse was solely the "chair of pestilence" then, apologists for theater could argue that things found at the early modern playhouse—spectacle, wit, music—could actually work upon the body in beneficial ways. Also engaged in this project, I believe, are the moments in which the playwrights themselves dramatize the curative effects of theater. By fashioning themselves as player-physicians, Shakespeare and his contemporaries attempt to reclaim the space of the playhouse for their own economic and creative interests.

"Mirth," writes Burton in The Anatomy of Melancholy, "purgeth the blood, confirms health, causeth a fresh, pleasing, and fine colour, prorogues life, whets the wit, makes the body young, lively and fit for any manner of employment. The

merrier the heart the longer the life” (337). For Burton, medical intervention was useless unless accompanied by mirth: “Again and again I request you to be merry, if anything trouble your hearts, or vex your souls, neglect and contemn it...without this mirth, which is the life and quintessence of phisic, medicines, and whatsoever is used and applied to prolong the life of man, is dull, dead, and of no force” (485). In his Watch-man for the Pest, Bradwell also recommends “Mirth, Musicke, good Company, and lawfull Recreations; such as may take away all time and occasions for carefull thoughts and passionate affections” (42). “A ioyfull and quiet heart reuiueth all the parts of the body,” notes Wright (59). He continues,

Pleafure and Delight, if it be moderate, bringeth health, becaufe the purer fpirits retyre vnto the heart, and they help maruelloufly the digeftion of blood, fo that thereby the heart engendereth great abundance, and moft purified fpirits, which after being difperfed thorow the body, caufe a good concoction to be made in all parts, helping the[m] to expel the fuperfluities; they alfo cleare the braine, and confequently the vnderftanding...(53)

More specifically, plague writers emphasized mirth’s importance in bolstering the body against infection. An anonymous plague tract written during the 1665 outbreak, The plagues approved physitian, notes that “the passions of sadnesse, Anger, hatred, feare, great cares, and heauie thoughts and sighing, doe much distemper the body and make it more unfit to withstand the infection: but on the contrary it is very good to use joy and mirth with temperance” (52). For physician William Bullein in 1564, mirth is “the best companion of life, putter away of all diseases: the contrarie in plague time bringeth on the pestilence, through painefull melancholie” (The Gouernment 85). In Epilomia epe, Austin writes, “Sadness we should abandon and refrain, / As we would [f]ly from cloud for fear of rain” and advises that, to avoid infection, “Mirth should have free pu[is]sance to make the

weight: / Give met[ri]mental chyle to ev'ry part, / And be the Pertcardium to the heart" (74).

Given the positive health benefits of mirth, it is no surprise that apologists for theater emphasized the mirth and delight that could be found at the playhouses: based upon early modern medical teachings, playhouses became not solely sites of infection, but also sites of remedy and repair. George Puttenham, in The Arte of English Poesie, asserts that plays not only offer "the good amendment of man by discipline and example" but the "solace and recreation of the common people by reason of the pageants and shows" (140). Sidney also famously paraphrased Horace's claim that poetry both taught and delighted in his Defence of Poesie.

The strongest evidence that the playhouses provided health-giving mirth, however, came from antitheatricalists' texts: it especially bothered them that their sermons were considered boring when compared to plays. Munday writes that when he "Seek[s] to withdraw these fellows from the theater unto the sermon; they will say, by the preacher they may be edified, but by the player both edified and delighted" (75). Northbrooke labels the theater the "house of mirth" (8); Munday decries "cursed mirth, as is both odious in the sight of God and offensive to honest ears" (114). Gosson recognizes that playgoers frequent the theaters for mental comfort, and denounces the practice using medical terms: "Being pensive at home, if you go to theaters to drive away fancies, it is as good physic, as for the ache of your head to kno[ck] out your brains...Look for no salve at plays or theaters" (The School 31). Prynne argues that plays can stir up emotions, negatively impacting the body's health: "THEREFORE ALL PLAYES ARE TO BEE AVOYDED, THAT VVE MAY enioy a serene state of minde" (357). Of course, because Puritans comprised most—but not all—of the antitheatricalist faction, their denunciation of mirth also

stemmed from a rejection of bodily gratification and pleasure, as Prynne criticizes in Histro-Mastix: “For Christians therefore make this world a paradice of all earthly pleasures, to spend their dayes in Epicurisme, mirth and iollity, glutting themselves with sinfull Spectacles and mirth-provoking Enterludes...” (512).

Still, there was no denying the physical benefits of mirth, and this allowed apologists for theater to cast themselves as helpful physicians, administering medicine to their audience members. Although not specifically commenting on theater, the defenses of poetry written by Philip Sidney and George Puttenham seem invested in the role of the poet-physician. “Nay truly though I yeeld that Poesie may not onely be abused,” Sidney writes in The Defense of Poesy, “Do we not see skill of Phisicke the best ramper to our often assaulted bodies, being abused, teach poyson the most violent destroyer” (30)? Sidney also argues that by framing moral lessons in delightful ways, the reader feels as if he “tooke a medicine of Cheries”:

...but hee commeth to you with words set in delightfull proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for the well enchanting skill of musicke, and with a tale forsooth he commeth unto you...even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasaunt taste: which if one should begin to tell them the nature of the Alloes or Rhabarbarum they should receive, wold sooner take their physic at their eares then at their mouth...(42)

Puttenham, in his The Arte of English Poesie (1589), likens the poet’s ability to improve upon nature to the physician’s ability to improve the overall health of the body:

In some cases we say arte is an ayde and coadiutor to nature, and a furtherer of her actions to good effect, or peradventure a meane to supply her wants, by rel[in]forcing the causes wherein shee is impotent and defectiue, as doth the arte of phisicke, by helping the naturall concoction, retention, distribution, expulsion, and other vertues, in a weake and vnhealthie bodie...The Phisition by the cordials hee will geue his patient, shall be able not onely to restore the decayed spirites of man, and render him health, but also to prolong the terme of his life

many yeares ouer and aboue the stint of his first and naturall constitution. (142)

Defendants of the playhouses in particular also fashioned themselves as physicians. Plague writer and playwright Thomas Lodge, for example, traces the noble and historical place of players in ancient societies in his A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse (1579). He says, "it was necessary that they, like good physicians, should so frame their potions that they might be applicable to the queasy stomachs of their wearish patients" (41) and urges Gosson to "Recover the body, for it is sore; the appendices thereof will easily be reformed" (51). He also engages in an elaborate medical conceit in which he casts himself as the good "practicer," his text a healthy "potion or receipt":

From your foe, if you please, I will become your friend, and see what a potion or receipt I can frame fit for your diet. And herein I will prove myself a practicer: before I purge you, you shall take a preparative to disburden your heavy head of those gross follies you have conceived. But the receipt is bitter; therefore I would wish you first to taste your mouth with the sugar of perserverance: for there is a cold collop that must down your throat, yet such a one as shall change your complexion quite...And so, being prepared, thy purgation will work more easy; thy understanding will be more perfect; thou shalt blush at thy abuse, and reclaim thy self by force of argument, so will thou prove a clean recovered patient, and I a perfect practicer in framing so good a potion. (46)

Later Lodge writes "But after your discrediting of playmaking, you salve upon the sore somewhat, and among many wise works there be some that fit your vein. The practice of parasites is one, which I marvel it likes you so well, since it bites you so sore" (55). Thomas Heywood uses similar rhetoric in An Apology for Actors:

and undertaking to purify and reform the sacred bodies of the church and commonwealth (in the true use of both which they are altogether ignorant), would but like artless physicians, for experiment's sake, rather minister pills to poison the whole body than cordials to preserve any of the least part." (216)

There were good reasons for Lodge and Heywood to emphasize the healthy benefits of theater, benefits that were even more critical during plaguetime: their livelihoods depended upon it. According to city plague orders, city officials closed the playhouses whenever plague deaths reached over 50 per week in London (30 per week after 1604; 40 per week after 1608). During Shakespeare's lifetime, the theaters were definitely closed during the five major outbreaks of the plague: 1581-82, 1592-4, 1603-4, 1608-9, and 1609-10 (Barroll 17, passim). However, F.P. Wilson's survey of the London Bills of Mortality indicates that city officials often closed the theaters long before the weekly death totals reached the prohibited amount, and the Counsel often issued proclamations or private letters to individual playhouses on a whim (55). In Plague, Politics, and Shakespeare's Theater (1991), Barroll argues that continuous plague-related theater closings had a more severe impact upon the theater business than any other societal or natural phenomenon experienced during Shakespeare's lifetime.

Plague writers often complain over the lack of mirth-moving recreation during outbreaks. Dekker, who also had an economic interest in the reopening of the theaters, asks,

For (alack) what string is there (now) to bee played vpon whose tench can make vs merry? Play-houses stand empty (like Tauernes, that haue cast out their Maisters) the doores locked vp, the Flagges (like their Bushes) taken down, or rather like Houses lately infected, from whence the affrited dwellers are fled, in hope to liue better in the Country. Comodies are all turned to Tragedies, there Tragedies to Nocturnals, and the best of them all are weary of playing in those Nocturnall Tragedies. (Seven 32-33)

Defoe's narrator complains, "All the plays and interludes...were forbid to act; the gaming-tables, public dancing-rooms, and music-houses, which multiplied and began to debauch the manners of the people, were shut up and suppressed" (44). In his

“Defense of Plays” from Pierce Penniless, Thomas Nash laments that the lack of theaters leads to melancholy (here, criminal melancholy): “Where shall he haunt? Faith, when dice, lust, and drunkenness, and all, have dealt upon him, if there be never a play for him to go to for his penny, he sits melancholy in his chamber, devising upon felony or treason, and how he may best exalt himself by mischief” (26).

Burton’s Anatomy supports Lodge and Heywood’s claims. In fact, Burton actually prescribes “Dancing, singing, masking, mumming, stage plays...honest and chaste sports, scenical shows, plays, games” (316) to cure melancholy. Burton reiterates this prescription through his volume:

Let them use hunting, sports, plays, jests, merry company, as Rhasis prescribes, which will not let the mind be molested, a cup of good drink now and then, hear music, and have such companions with whom they are especially delighted: merry tales or toys, drinking, singing, dancing, and whatsoever else may procure mirth: and by no means, saith Guianerius, suffer them to be alone. Benedictus Victorius Faventinus, in his empirics, accounts it an especial remedy against melancholy, to hear and see singing, dancing, maskers, mummers, to converse with such merry fellows and fair maids...To expel grief, and procure pleasure, sweet smells, good diet, touch, taste, embracing, singing, dancing, sports, plays, and above the rest, exquisite beauties... (337)

“Frame your mind to mirth”: Shakespeare’s Player-Physicians

As we can see, early modern theater could be good for you, and its defendants often enlisted medical discourses to emphasize this. However, the strongest arguments about the power of theater’s melancholy-curing mirth come from within the plays themselves. Time and time again, Shakespeare and his contemporaries stage plays-within-plays in order to dispel their characters’ melancholy. Take, for

example, the opening scene of A Midsummer Night's Dream. While Theseus may not have an acute case of melancholy, he is certainly not in good spirits:

but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! she lingers my desires,
Like to a step-dame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue. (1.1.3-6)

Theseus promptly instructs Philostrate to “Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth; / Turn melancholy forth to funerals” (1.1.14-15). By the end of the play, when Theseus again asks Philostrate, “what masques, what dances shall we have...Is there no play, / To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?” (5.1.30, 31-32), we know that it will be the rude mechanicals’ “palpable-gross play” that “beguile[s]/ The heavy gait of night” (5.1.134-35). At the end of Henry VI, Part 3, Edward IV banishes Margaret to France and then, to lighten the mood, commands that they “spend the time / With stately triumphs, mirthful comic shows, /...farewell sour annoy! / For here, I hope, begins our lasting joy” (5.7.111-14). Shakespeare’s contemporaries follow suit.

In the Prologue to The Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare is even more explicit about theater’s ability to cure melancholy. The Lord who convinces Christopher Sly, after all, that he has a “disease,” a “malady,” also calls in a troupe of players to act as physicians:

MESSENGER. Your honor’s players, hearing your amendment,
Are come to play a pleasant comedy;
For so your doctors hold it very meet,
Seeing too much sadness hath congeal’d your
blood,
And melancholy is the nurse of frenzy:
Therefore they thought it good you hear a play
And frame your mind to mirth and merriment,
Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.
(Prologue 212-19)

Shakespeare's plays also dramatize the restorative potential of language. Just as words have the power to harm the body (I discussed in Chapter Two passages like Iago's "I'll pour this pestilence in his ear"), they also have the power to heal, an important argument in an early modern theater made on "wordes, fitnes of Epithites, with Metaphors, Alegories, Hyperboles, Amphibologies, Similitudes, with Phrases" (Gosson, Plays 99). In The Winter's Tale, Paulina says, "I / Do come with words as medicinal as true, / Honest as either, to purge him of that humor / That presses him from sleep" (2.3.18-21); Volumnia will "purge herself with words" in Coriolanus (5.6.54).

Then, of course, there are Shakespeare's most witty characters who, like the "jesters, players, and...masters of revels" who Burton recommends in The Anatomy of Melancholy, "exhilarate the heart of men" through their wordplay (339). Twelfth Night's Feste, for example, who boasts that he can turn language inside out like a "cheveril glove," is described as "mending" his audiences (3.1.22). Of Dromio, Antipholus of Syracuse says "A trusty villain, sir, that very oft, / When I am dull with care and melancholy, / Lightens my humour with his merry jests" (1.2.4-6). To chase the coldness of melancholy from Antonio in Merchant of Venice, Gratiano offers to "play the fool: / With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come, / And let my liver rather heat with wine / Than my heart cool with mortifying groans" (1.1.51-64). The Fool in King Lear is the only one able to "out-jest / [Lear's] heart-struck injuries" (3.1.18-19). After Hero's "death" in Much Ado, Claudio and Don Pedro approach Benedick, saying, "We have been up and down to seek thee; for we are / high-proof melancholy and would fain have it beaten away. / Wilt thou use thy wit" (5.1.85-88)? Benedick, in no mood for jests, threatens to draw his scabbard instead.

Love's Labor's Lost is most explicit about the curative effects of language. In fact, Berowne, whose idea it was first to "solace" the ladies with "revels, dances, masks" (4.3.89) receives an assignment to heal the sick and dying through language. "Oft have I heard of you, my Lord Berowne," Rosalind says,

You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick and still converse
With groaning wretches; and your task shall be,
With all the fierce endeavor of your wit
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.

BEROWNE. To move wild laughter in the throat of death?
It cannot be; it is impossible:
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.

ROSALINE. ...then, if sickly ears,
Deaf'd with the clamours of their own dear groans,
Will hear your idle scorns, continue then,
And I will have you and that fault withal;
But if they will not, throw away that spirit,
And I shall find you empty of that fault,
Right joyful of your reformation. (5.2.211-25)

Importantly, we have already been reminded that, for Katherine's sister, melancholy proved fatal:

KATHARINE. He [Cupid] made her melancholy, sad, and heavy;
And so she died: had she been light, like you [Rosaline],
Of such a merry, nimble, stirring spirit,
She might ha' been a grandam ere she died:
And so may you; for a light heart lives long.
(5.2.71-75)

Shakespeare's contemporaries also dramatize the healing power of theater and recreation. In Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage, Dido tries to "thinke upon some pleasing sport, / To rid [her] from these melancholly thoughts" (2.1.213-14).

When, in John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, the Duchess has become "acquainted with sad [the] misery" of prison,

SERVANT. I am come to tell you,
Your brother hath intended you some sport.
A great physician, when the pope was sick
Of a deep melancholy, presented him
With several sorts of madmen, which wild object
Being full of change and sport, forc'd him to laugh,
And so th' imposthume broke: the selfsame cure
The duke intends on you. (Jack Juggler 4.2.91.98)

In The Knight of the Burning Pestle, the Citizen's Wife approves of the Old

Merchant's song:

'Tis mirth that fills the veins with blood,
More than wine, or sleep, or food;
Let each man keep his heart at ease
No man dies of that disease.
He that would his body keep
From diseases, must not weep;
But whoever laughs and sings,
Never he his body brings
Into fevers, gouts, or rheums,
Or lingeringly his lungs consumes,
Or meets with aches in the bone,
Or catarrhs or griping stone;
But contented lives for aye;
The more he laughs, the more he may. (3.4.82-94)

The Prologue to Heywood's Jack Juggler justifies theater's existence by emphasizing how "mirth & ioye" are good for the "helth of the bodye":

vse sume time mirth & ioye
That no bodilye worke, thy wyttes breke or noye.
For the mynd (saith he) in serious matters occupied
Yf it haue not sum quiet mirthe, and recreacion
Interchaungeable admixed, must niddes be sone weries
...
Therefore intermix honest mirthe, in suche wise
That your streght may be refreshid, & to labours suffise.
For as meat and drinke, naturall rest and slepe
For the conseruacion, and helth of the bodye
Must niddes be had, soo the mynd and wittes to kepe
Pregnant, freshe industrius, quike and lustie
Honest mirthe, and pastime, is requisite and necessarie. (21-30)

As we can see, Shakespeare and his contemporaries often reminded their audiences that “scenical shows [and] plays” (Burton 316) were restorative.

— — —

It was certainly in Shakespeare’s best economic interests to emphasize the healing power of theater: counteracting the playhouses’ associations with bodily harm was a savvy business move. “Sweet recreations,” after all, were valuable commodities in a plague-stricken culture. Yet “mirth” is perhaps too simple a term to describe the ways in which Shakespeare’s plays did important cultural and psychological work for him and his audience members. On a larger scale, the plays created a symbolic language through which they could all experience and perhaps come to understand the trauma of the plague. Audience members who identified with Coriolanus, for example, may have participated in his fantasies of the quarantined, bounded body, free from infection. And the plays also created fictive worlds—Verona, Rome—in which Shakespeare and his audiences could live in the presence of the plague, yet free from its very real dangers. The many descriptions of miasma that pepper Shakespeare’s plays most likely terrified his audience members, but terrorized in a pleasurable way—a cathartic way—because they promised no actual destruction. Moreover, they could all participate in the fantasies of sweetened, clean air that Shakespeare’s plays describe: beauties like Viola (as Cesario) that “purge the air of pestilence,” or the nimble, sweet air in Macbeth’s castle.

The danger here, of course, is to impose a sense of resolution to Shakespeare’s plays that isn’t there. The struggle to name the source of disease in Coriolanus, after

all, results in one of the bleakest outcomes of any play in Shakespeare's canon; while the regenerative power ascribed to love in Romeo and Juliet promises for a while creation in the face of death, the lovers still die. And, certainly, Shakespeare's audience members were neither expected to nor capable of completely suspending their own realities: Hamlet's "foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" swirl under the roof of Denmark's castle and inside the playhouse. Shakespeare's plays did not always heal, nor do I wish to suggest that healing was their sole reason for being. But they must have performed some kind of psychical and cultural work. Perhaps, in the end, audiences risked infection to fill the Globe, the Swan, and the Blackfriar's for nothing more specific than to participate in humanity's surest attempt to defy death: creation.

Appendix 1

A Remedy for Love

Philoclea and Pamela sweet,
By chance, in one great house did meet;
And meeting, did so join in heart,
That th' one from th' other could not part:
And who indeed (not made of stones)
Would separate such lovely ones?
The one is beautiful, and fair
As orient pearls and rubies are;
And sweet as, after gentle showers,
The breath is of some thousand flowers:
For due proportion, such an air
Circles the other, and so fair,
That it her brownness beautifies,
And doth enchant the wisest eyes.

Have you not seen, on some great day,
Two goodly horses, white and bay,
Which were so beauteous in their pride,
You knew not which to choose or ride?
Such are these two; you scarce can tell,
Which is the daintier bonny belle;
And they are such, as, by my troth,

I had been sick with love of both,
And might have sadly said, "Good-night
Discretion and good fortune quite;"
But that young Cupid, my old master,
Presented me a sovereign plaster:
Mopsa! ev'n Mopsa! (precious pet)
Whose lips of marble, teeth of jet,
Are spells and charms of strong defence,
To conjure down concupiscence.

How oft have I been reft of sense,
By gazing on their excellence,
But meeting Mopsa in my way,
And looking on her face of clay,
Been healed, and cured, and made as sound,
As though I ne'er had had a wound?
And when in tables of my heart,
Love wrought such things as bred my smart,
Mopsa would come, with face of clout,
And in an instant wipe them out.
And when their faces made me sick,
Mopsa would come, with face of brick,
A little heated in the fire,
And break the neck of my desire.
Now from their face I turn mine eyes,

But (cruel panthers!) they surprise
Me with their breath, that incense sweet,
Which only for the gods is meet,
And jointly from them doth respire,
Like both the Indies set on fire:

Which so o'ercomes man's ravished sense,
That souls, to follow it, fly hence.
No such-like smell you if you range
To th' Stocks, or Cornhill's square Exchange;
There stood I still as any stock,
Till Mopsa, with her puddle dock,
Her compound or electuary,
Made of old ling and young canary,
Bloat-herring, cheese, and voided physic,
Being somewhat troubled with a phthisic,
Did cough, and fetch a sigh so deep,
As did her very bottom sweep:
Whereby to all she did impart,
How love lay rankling at her heart:
Which, when I smelt, desire was slain,
And they breathed forth perfumes in vain.
Their angel voice surprised me now;
But Mopsa, her Too-whit, Too-whoo,
Descending through her oboe nose,

Did that distemper soon compose.

And, therefore, O thou precious owl,

The wise Minerva's only fowl;

What, at thy shrine, shall I devise

To offer up a sacrifice?

Hang AEsculapius, and Apollo,

And Ovid, with his precious shallow.

Mopsa is love's best medicine,

True water to a lover's wine.

Nay, she's the yellow antidote,

Both bred and born to cut Love's throat:

Be but my second, and stand by,

Mopsa, and I'll them both defy;

And all else of those gallant races,

Who wear infection in their faces;

For thy face (that Medusa's shield!)

Will bring me safe out of the field.

Figure 1

(11.)

THE
PROPHECIES,
AND
Predictions,
FOR
London's Deliverance :
WITH

The Conjunction, Effects, and Influences
of the Superiour Planets, the Causes thereof, and the probability of the happy abatement of the present *Dismal Pestilence*, (according to Natural Causes) the *Time* when, and the *Weeks* and *Months* fore-told, when the City of *London* will be freed and acquitted from the Violent Raging of this Destructive Enemy.

The Appearance of which *Great Pest* was predicted by the Learned

Mr. LILLY.	Mr. TRIGGE,
Mr. BOOKER,	AND
Mr. GADBURY,	Mr. ANDREWS.

Printed for *Tho. Brooks*, and are to be sold near the Royal Exchange.

Title page, The Prophecies and Predictions for London's Deliverance
Source: Early English Books, 1475-1640

Figure 2

A Looking-glasse for City and Country:

Wherein is to be seene many fearfull examples in the time of this grievous Visitation, with an admonition to our Londoners flying from the City; and a perswasion Country to be more pitifull to suchas come for succor amongst them.



O London, thou Paragon of this Kingdom for beauty & luxurie bindings, how art thou now widowed of thy chiefest Inhabitants, how art thou left desolate, for lacke of the Merchants, and the husbandiers between, how art thou mourning for loss of the fowls and daughters, all the Country, that of late made thee their Sanctuary of safety hath now left thee, and with the wings of feare flies from thee as from a place of terror, by reason of this grievous visitation here laid upon thee, where in the number of 16000 of the ablest Inhabitants are departed into the Country, as they have bene lately numbered in bladders of the Parishes

It stirs the hourly ringing of dead mens knels, the bleating of graves, the fainting by of doozes, the blaying forth of kee & coo-coo, and the setting Lord have mercy upon vs, upon the forefront of infected houses, makes the countenance of thy Inhabitants hearts to tremble and quake, and for what shall we doe to save our lives.

Some flies to their tender backed Patients to be recovered, some to their widows and sisters, some to their dearest acquaintance, some to their lings and things in the Country, to their faire windows houses, to learning their goods and all they have layr behind them in this City, as it were in the keeping of Beasts.

What multitudes do we see daily passing into all Countreies and shires of this Kingdom, with their whole families, some to one place, some to another, not having once to looke backe to this desolatest City, both by Gloggon, Coash-hire, and foot, even as if were beating packs upon their backs to looke upon.

Why men of much feare, why doe you thus doe? Is not God as being here as here, both not his returne death as soone strike you in the Country, as in the City, wherefore you goe as if he can find you forth: defend into the heart of the earth, there he will follow you, if you send the cloudes he is there also, if to the sea, he will be there likewise, and at his pleasure with his pale Dart of vengeance will suddenly strike you.

There is no flying from God, for his hand, is both swift & strong, and can in the twinkling of an eye if he please destroye death, and follow upon any place wherefore we see to hide our selves: goe not away, but stay, if it be to your helping hands to restore the poore which now are that by in the time of this grievous visitation, & then

no doubt, but God in his mercy will stay his heave wrath and indignation, here visited upon vs.

Yet man I see to misdeedfull, and darre not trust God to much in the City as in the Country, else would they not flye so fast as they doe, but rather they see to combat the infection, and sooner by at home in their houses, then upon bare rocks abroad.

Great are the woes of many stricke Cittizens, that for want of lodging, are forced to lie in the fields in haycocks, and pades of straw: some in Barnes, some in Chilles, some in theyerots, some in hog-houses, yea most in simple cottages, where the feallitt Country people have hardy come since them, but ever have upon the windowe, left this doubted infection should blow upon them.

I have heard of a young man of this Citie that in this present sickness, was sent to his father in the Country to be received, who would give him no entertainment, till he had bought himselfe some naked in a pond of water, and so without content to come naked into his house, where new clothes were ready provided for him, and the old ones cast quite away, this was the fate of a father to his sonne.

Others I have knowne lodged in Barnes for a whole month together before they were suffered to come in any house, (though they next themselves) to prove if they were infected or not, and then with much feare they were received: all which is now our Cittizens' usage in many Countreies, so great is the doubt of simple people.

Some fearely can a quiten paine the high wayes without a Certificate, as the life of grants are, but must be either compassed from some with bills and cures, or kept out at the tobacco and as they have bene in times past.

Why misery, upon misery, that one English man should thus be another man to be, to strangers, that they will hardly let a Merchant have a pace of bycatt, as a case of their money, because he will care and think it by the high way, and after receiving money they will wash it in a bolle of cleane water, for feare the infection should be the infection.

Others have been travelling by the way for want of succor and towarde lodging, and being seen they have bene buried in a hole without price of Church rights belonging to a Christian buriall, most like unto Antioch, as is heard without doubt.

The winge of the Country is to have that at this present time that a fathers house have been that by for guiding his sonne, but one might looke, and not suffered to come abroad for a whole months space, though never to cleare from infection.

Great and such like are the excesses of the plague, which makes the Country-men thin as a Roshalike of Cockatrice, and some of them have fled and seeme to cry infection: some of them at a Cittizens passing by, will close by their houses, and looke out a far off their windows, to see if they passe thowen the window and not call it at any house at all.

This makes London now almost a forsaken City, for her spaces are so greatly decayed, and grow barren, for the Country-men dare not bring up her butter, cheese, eggs and such like things, but sell it them more deare by the way as the comes, and more quickly, then if they should carry one sparkets with the same, and being come better, he is in danger of getting up at her returne backe, for the very money the takes for her commodities is thought to bring the plague volume with it into the Country.

But a Carrier is scarce suffered to bring by permission for the Citie, nor bears the like volume againe, but is kept out of the volume from volume he came and directly, and himselfe and his cartle compelled to lie in the fields, and not any of them suffered to carry volume people either young or old, though their own sons, sisters, brothers or daughters, such are the forewoses of these times. God amend them when they goe to and pleasure is.

It is reported that in Greenwich a gentleman had bin coming by very sick, died in a house for which the owner thereof, had both his Barnes, and his house that up to a whole month after, and none of his household suffered to come abroad, which is a more cruell & deadly sickness.

As for the care of our Cittizens is such, that seeing the distress of the poore growing great by reason of rich mens leaving the Citie, that would supply them with relieve, and the be-awfull of the time, when poore men would looke if they had it, and having sought they cannot get money where they have need of it, all this considered they cannot get money where they have need of it, all this considered they will now are that by in the time of this grievous visitation, & then

being the poore and such as be shut up to be mercifully looke unto, and most favourably comforted by our Magistrates.

The goodness of the Lord God is greatly to be commended in requesting the Companies of the City to extend their benevolence to the poore & infected houses, by whose appointment the same is usually most charitably given: likewise his care defendeth the like commiseration in perswasion the people of civility to give their civility and lifesa to the poore that are not able to help themselves: and the poore of these distresses, that morning evening, and at all times humbly beseech God to be mercifull to this distressed City now in the hand of God, men ready to be bestowed.

And now to conclude, it is not your flying from the City, the leaving your houses, almost empty in every street, your going into feare, and a pleasant netow, nor your abiding in Country houses can keep you from this terrible stroke of death, for you there are visited as well as here, and by a visitation in the Country, as we in London.

Why could I name at this present time, that no longer feared in the Country, as they think in safety, but have been presently there, for it is prayer and true contrition of sins that must allow God to bear us wrath, and not your lurking in corners, and by places, for death can find you every where he goes before you, the following after, he bears you company, he spares none, neither justice nor favour, old nor young, he is not to noble, rich, strong, wife, learned, or ruling in justice, he comes into your counting houses and into your money tellers, he overthrowes the balace, and stays, he if one voice of the finger, he breaks windows, matters window, he if justice children, and comes in the chambers of Merchants, townsmen and families, therefore say not with the heathen Philistines that this deathline cometh by mistall chance, by comers of these infecting the ayre, corrupting and poisoning of living things, for it is the judgement of God, his strange & cruell to all flesh, good and bad, in the reward of sin, wherein we are all borne not to come: When he shall have mercy upon us according to the great goodness and loving kindnesse, to whom (Oh sweet Lord) be all our daily prayers, in this grievous time of visitation, thinking that we will most graciously beare, be for the deare Sonnes sake our Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

Printed: London for H. Gifford, and are sold by E. Wright at his Shop at Christ-Church gate.

A Looking-glasse for City and Country
Source: Early English Books, 1475-1640

Figure 3

26

God's Judgments shewn unto Mankind.

BEING

A True and Sorrowful Relation of the Sufferings of the Inhabitants of the City of Marseilles in France, now under the Dreadful Calamity of the Plagues, Pestilence and Fevers, with the manner of its infecting them by Vomiting, Pains in the Head, or Purple Bolls under their Arms Pitts, the Number of the Dead being above Fifty Thousand. And lastly the Cause of it, and from whence it came, by a strict Order from the Regent to the College of Physicians at Capentras.

Tune of, *Aim not too high.* Written by Tho. Gost.



I Amas, Oud Christian, when you hear this Thing,
 A woful Tragedy I mean to sing;
 And tho' it's happen'd in another Place,
 'Twill make you weep when you feel how their Case.

We shall not here see 'em before your View,
 The Plague of Athens, and of London too;
 Some living are ere yet we may Read,
 Tho' all most Ours, tho' they are now Dead!

Then in the Middle of the Great Night,
 The City over fill'd, O woful was the Sight!
 - No decent Mourning, and no Friendly Groom,
 - Neglecting others Fate, all wept their own.

In France there is a City I do know,
 Call'd Marseilles, most beautiful and free;
 From whom this sad Account, tho' we have,
 The Plague has thousands first unto their Grave.

Scarcely it is by a malicious Merchant came,
 Whom God did curse to suffer by the same;
 Who as some Ships were opening, he dy'd,
 And where Death with Death were then beside.

But wife Mrs Gay it is Unjustly so,
 Driven from Land to Land by Winds, that were so
 So violent, as thro' that Place it pass,
 Until at length it laid the City waste.

The twenty fourth of June it did begin,
 When for to punish Mortals for their Sin,
 Thunder and Lightning then from Heav'n did come,
 As if it was the Dreadful Day of Doom.

" Faith, some ungodly Heav'n did strike the Head,
 " The glowing Eyes with blood-red Beams had red,
 " Like blazing Stars approaching Death forthwith'd,
 " The Mouth and Jaws were fill'd with clotted Blood.

Next they'd be taken with most grievous Pains,
 By Vomiting, which all the Body strains;
 And falling down, their Speech Loose words,
 And many in this manner were destroy'd.

Lastly, sad purple Spots would soon appear,
 Under their Arm-Pits, swelling greatly there;
 A certain Sign that they should lose their Breath,
 And very soon by in the Arms of Death.

Others again, that happen'd for to break
 In purple Bolls, Death would not Victims make;
 They would revive, when they some time had laid,
 Depriv'd of Sense, as tho' they had been dead.

Also I how dismal wa't in every Street,
 Where if you walk'd, Ghosts grew beneath your Feet;
 The Country People could not bring their Food,
 Nor dur'd the Husbands go, as things then stood.

For 'twas the Regent's Order, not to come
 From thence, which they met their speedy Doom;
 However many did that Thing disdain,
 And flew from Plague and Pain into Spain.

Thus did the Plague continue, we do find,
 Death fill'd before, and Rain fell behind;
 Sad signs it was, and gave a mighty Dread,
 Physicians came, and saw, and found their Head.

In this Condition, Villains were'd down,
 And fighting Plagues, did plunder all the Town;
 Thus adding unto their Afflictions grief,
 More than, tho' what was design'd by Fate.

Some of 'em, being wack'd, did then confess,
 And Pardon begged for their Wickedness,
 Saying, That they 've sin'd too bad to live,
 That they their Souls might for ever give.

Thus every where the scatter'd Bodies lay,
 The very Curious Birds look'd such Prey;
 None were so curious, none could give Relief,
 Here was both Universal Death and Grief.

Methinks I see a woful Mother die,
 And hear her perry infants how they cry!
 Dear Mummy, do not die, and leave us here,
 And then burst out in Rhyms of full Tears.

Or else methinks I see the Children die,
 And woful Mother weeping standing by,
 Expelling every Morsure for to fall
 Into the Earth, which shall receive us all.

Here dying Parents on their Children call,
 Their Children on their Parents health'd their fall;
 Like Ravens they they die in wretched State,
 And none to pity, or to mourn their Fate.

The very Plague did seize the lolling Ox,
 And eagerly devour'd the tender Flocks;
 In walk'd thro' every Wood, and every Doon,
 Where Beasts did fly, and grass, and the like Moan.

The faithful Dogs did lie in every Street,
 And dy'd as their Expiring Masters Feet;
 The perry Birds did from the Air fall down,
 And lay in Heaps both in the Field and Town.

Some in the Street, some near the Fountain lay,
 And drinking Water, walk'd their souls away;
 No Burial w'd, no decent Order there,
 But unregard'd lay in open Air.

If any did, the People ran upon,
 As coming from some Back that's to be done;
 In short, poor Souls they could not find Relief,
 Not one but fall'd to Death, Disease or Grief.

The very Jakes, galleys, boats and beere,
 In two Days Time were first unto their Grave;
 Few do escape so fast for Days Pale,
 Which if they do, they may alive remain.

But if the Plague's too weak to reach the House,
 'Tis very rare, but what it takes a Part;
 Either a Limb is lost, or precious sight
 Depriv'd in of comfortable Light.

No less than Fifty Thousand there did die,
 Besides the Plague made Numbers for to fly;
 And still it rages, as we truly hear,
 Which strikes the Neighbouring Nations into Fear.

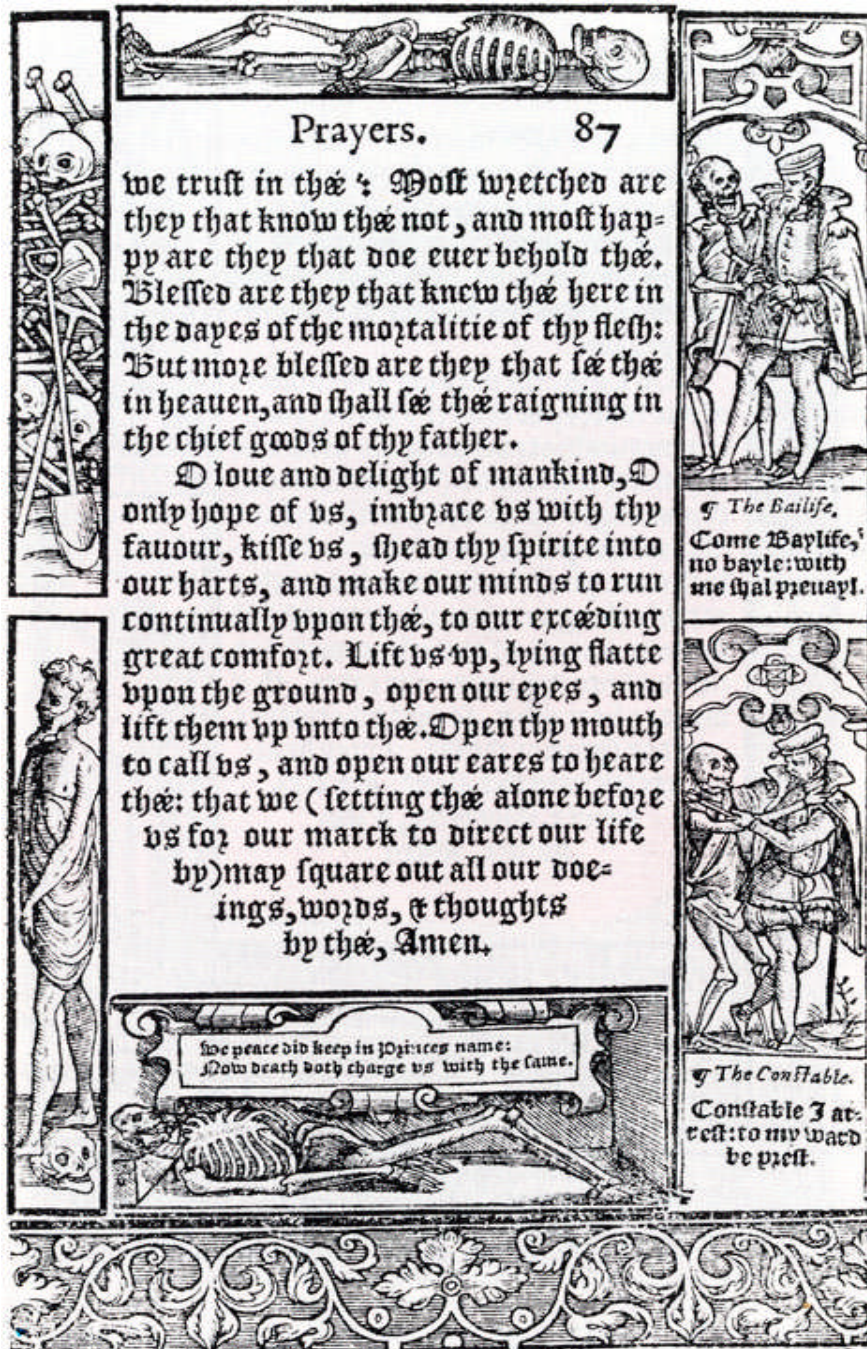
From what we've heard, Dear Christian, let us pray,
 That God may drive the fatal Plague away;
 And let their Fate more plenty be to see,
 The Thankfulness that we to Heaven do see.

How soon may be approach this fatal Land!
 How soon may be the dreadful Plague command,
 To come to London, where it rag'd before,
 And punish us, 'till we shall be no more.

Be woful then, ye poor Christian all,
 And while we do lament their woful Fall,
 Let us, according to our LITANY,
 From Plague and Cancer, pray for fast & may be.

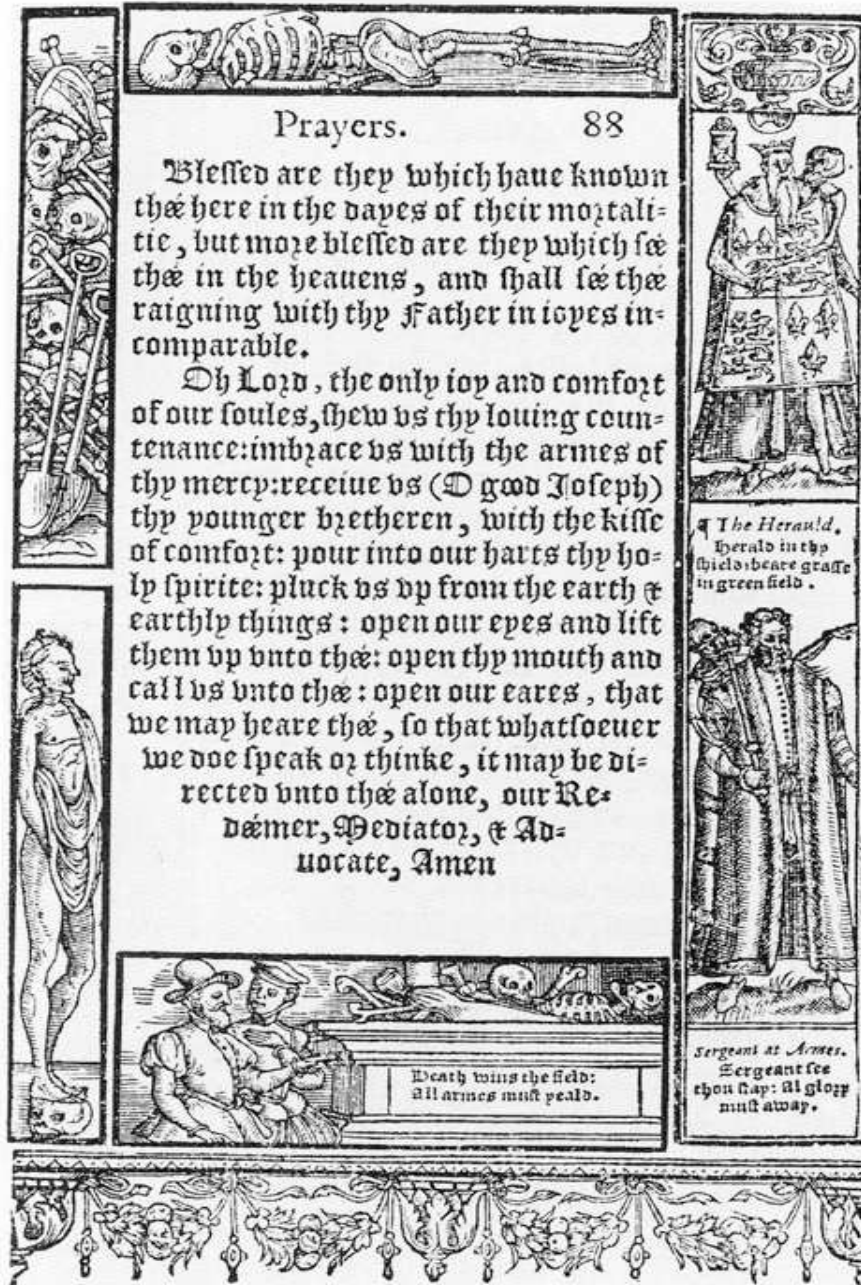
Title page, God's Judgment shewn unto Mankind
 Source: Early English Books, 1475-1640

Figure 4



Dance of Death episodes from A Booke of Christian Prayers
 Source: Michael Neill, Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 56.

Figure 5



Dance of Death episodes from A Booke of Christian Prayers
Source: Michael Neill, Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance
Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 55.

Figure 6

LONDON'S Lord have mercy upon us.

A true Relation of Seven modern *Plagues* or *Visitations* in LONDON, with the number of those that were Buried of all Diseases; viz. The first in the year of Queen ELIZABETH, Anno 1592. The second in the year 1603. The third in that never to be forgotten year, 1625. The fourth in Anno 1630. The fifth in the year 1636. The sixth in the year 1637. and 1638. The seventh this present year 1665.

An exact and true Relation of the number of those that were buried in London and the Liberties, of all Diseases, from the 17 of March 1592, to the 22 of December, 1592.

Month	total.	Pl.
March 17	351	37
March 24	219	29
March 31	207	27
April 7	204	27
April 14	290	37
April 21	310	41
April 28	310	41
May 5	339	38
May 12	300	43
May 19	410	59
May 26	410	59
June 2	441	81
June 9	399	90
June 16	401	108
June 23	810	118
June 30	1410	229
July 7	1510	323
July 14	1491	318
July 21	1107	251
July 28	1503	281
August 4	1103	257
August 11	1503	281
August 18	1503	281
August 25	1100	128
September 1	1110	153
September 8	611	81
September 15	619	119
September 22	410	117
September 29	408	127
October 6	412	133
October 13	320	128
October 20	310	101
October 27	310	101
November 3	209	209
November 10	301	107
November 17	311	95
November 24	349	95
December 1	311	86
December 8	329	71
December 15	386	29
December 22		

Buried in the Liberties, of all Diseases, this year, 1592.

Month	total.	Pl.
March 17	108	3
March 24	6	2
March 31	28	6
April 7	65	4
April 14	71	8
April 21	8	8
April 28	10	10
May 5	90	11
May 12	118	18
May 19	121	31
May 26	122	31
June 2	114	30
June 9	131	41
June 16	184	59
June 23	182	71
June 30	167	148
July 7	445	263
July 14	612	434
July 21	612	434

The On-parishes, which were joined with the City.

Month	total.	Pl.
July 28	11861	917
August 4	1748	132
August 11	1077	1743
August 18	1004	1219
August 25	1283	1535
September 1	1385	2004
September 8	1093	1278
September 15	1119	1205
September 22	1410	1892
September 29	1961	1721
October 6	1831	1649
October 13	1312	1142
October 20	756	648
October 27	621	594
November 3	717	591
November 10	585	441
November 17	284	155
November 24	198	106
December 1	222	105
December 8	163	55
December 15	200	66
December 22	168	74
Buried this year	38150	
Of the Plague,	30583	

R Eader, what ever thou art, rich or poor, Rowle up thy self, for Death stands at the II God lyes strike he mu't & will come in, (door) For death we know is the reward of sin. His very breath is so infectious grow, He poysons every one he breaths upon. He is the Rich man's terror, makes him flye, And betw' away his bags, as loath to eye. What shall the Poor do, that behind do flay? Death makes them rich, by taking them away. But what shall Poor men do that here do live? 'Tis surely fit the Rich should comfort give, And weekly Means unto them still afford: Oh such Rich men shall be rich in the Lord! Death barres all, but more the guilt of sin, Which sinful man long time hath lived in, Doth make them fearful of that punishment Due into sin for time that's evil spent. Oh why was this not thought on long agoe, When God expected our repentance? Seventeen years since, a little plague God sent, He shoke his Rod to move us to repent: Not long before that time, a dearth of Corn Was sent to us, to see if we would turn: And after that, none deny it can, The Bealls did suffer for the sin of Man: Grafs was fo thore and small, that it was told, Hay for four pound a Load was daily sold. These Judgments God hath sent even to cite us Unto Repentance, and from sin to fright us. Oh stubborn England! Childish and unwise, So heavy laden with iniquities:

Certain approved Medicines for the Plague, both to prevent that Contagion, and to expell it after it be taken, as have been approved in the year 1625, as also in this present Visitation, 1665.

To correct the Air.
T Hyme, Mints, Rosemary, Bayleaves, Balme, Pitch, Tarre, Rofem, Turpentine, Frankincense, Myrrh, Amber, one or more of these, as they are at hand, or may be readily procured, are to be cast on the coales, to perfume the house.

Perfumes.
Such as are to walk abroad, or talk with any may do well to carry Rue, Wormwood, Angelica, Gentian, Myrrhe, Scordium, Valerian or Setwall-root, or Zedary in their hands to smell to, and of those they may hold or chew a little in their mouths as they go.

Toward Medicines for the Prevention of the Plague.
Take a spoon full of quick wine vinegar, wherein Wormwood chopped hath been infused. Take good Figs thirty, Walnut kernels pilled (if to be had) twenty, green Rue picked a good

Month	total.	Pl.
March 17	164	4
March 24	26	8
March 31	243	11
April 7	210	10
April 14	256	24
April 21	320	21
April 28	395	26
May 5	590	30
May 12	331	45
May 19	379	71
May 26	401	78
June 2	395	69
June 9	431	91
June 16	510	165
June 23	640	219
June 30	942	190
July 7	1222	192
July 14	1981	1008
July 21	12850	1819
July 28	3583	2471
August 4	4517	3659
August 11	4851	4115
August 18	1501	1481
August 25	484	118

Return, return, unto thy loving father, Return I say, and to much the rather, Because his Son thy Saviour pleads thy cause, I though thou hast broken all his holy Lawes: Say to thy self, My sins are cause of all Gods judgments that upon this Land do fall, And fin's the cause that each one doth complain, They have too much, sometimes too little rain. Say to thy self, This Plague may be removed, If I repent, as plainly may be proved By *Nonish*, that City great and large, For God hath given unto his Angels charge. To strike and to forbear, as he sees fit. If it be so, then learn thou so much wit To use thy best endeavour to prevent A plague, which thou mayst do if thou repent. Let all infected Houses be thy Text, And make this Verse, that thine may be the next: The Red Crosse still is of, as it hath bin, To these thy Christians are, that are within: And *Lord have mercy on us* on the door, Put thee in mind to pray for them therefore. The *Watchman* that attends the house of sorrow, He may attend upon thy house to morrow. Oh where's the vows we to our God have made? When death and sickness came with axe & spade, And hurt'd our Brethren up in heaps apace, Even forty thousand in a little space - Because among us is not yet removed, Because that sin of us is still beloved, Each spectacle of Death and Funeral Puts thee and I in mind we must dye all.

For the Cure of the Plague.
If any person be infected, let him sweat with Carduus or Marigold poffer-drink, mingling therewith two drams of London-Treacle.
Another.
Take Sorrel-water, five or six spoonfuls, Treacle water one spoonful, London-Treacle one dram and a half, mix them well, give it warm, and so lie to sweat, not sleeping till the sweat be over. These Cordials must be repeated once in eight, ten, or twelve hours at farthest.

To break the Tumour.
Take a great Onion, hollow it, put into it a Fig, Rue cut small, and a dram of Venice Treacle, put it close flopt in a wet Paper, and rost it in the Embers, apply it hot unto the Tumour, lay three or four, one after another, let one lie 3 hours. So Scabious and Sorrel rosted in the Embers, and mixt with a little strong Leaven, and some Barrows greafe and a little salt, will draw and break it. When it is broken, take the yolk of an egg, hony of rofes one ounce, Turpentine halfe an ounce, wheat flower a little; London-Treacle a dram & half, mix these, spread it upon leather, change it twice a day.

Month	total.	Pl.
September 1	3897	3344
September 8	3157	2590
September 15	2128	1672
September 22	1094	1151
September 29	1236	853
October 6	833	538
October 13	815	511
October 20	651	331
October 27	375	234
Novem. 3	217	134
Novem. 10	319	92
Novem. 17	274	48
Nov. 24	231	27
Decem. 1	200	15
Decem. 8	181	15
Decem. 15	168	6
Decem. 22	157	1

The total of the Burials this whole year, 5402. Of the Plague, 35428.

Month	total.	Pl.
April 7	199	2
April 14	205	4

Month	total.	Pl.
April 21	287	14
April 28	259	17
May 5	251	10
May 12	308	55
May 19	299	55
May 26	350	62
June 2	359	67
June 9	345	87
June 16	381	93
June 23	394	79
June 30	352	104
July 7	215	81
July 14	372	104
July 21	195	110
July 28	432	111
August 4	461	126
August 11	528	283
August 18	638	311
August 25	707	420
September 1	1011	438
September 8	1069	610
September 15	1206	865
September 22	1219	775
September 29	1403	918
October 6	1401	918
October 13	1102	791
October 20	1002	555
October 27	900	418
Novem. 3	1300	818
Nov. 10	1104	715
Nov. 17	950	673
Nov. 24	857	476
Decem. 1	614	312
Decem. 8	459	167
Decem. 15	385	85
Decem. 22	316	66
Decem. 29	383	135
In all	27415	
Of the Plague,	12102	

Month	total.	Pl.
April 25	358	2
May 2	383	0
May 9	347	0
May 16	351	3
May 23	385	14
May 30	399	17
June 6	405	43
June 13	418	112
June 20	611	168
June 27	684	267
July 4	1006	470
July 11	1363	715
July 18	1761	1089
July 25	1785	1842
August 1	3014	2010
August 8	4010	1817
August 15	5319	3880
August 22	5968	4237
August 29	7295	5021
September 5	8212	6970
September 12	7692	5544
September 19	6297	4165
September 26	6460	5133
October 3	5710	4019
October 10	4068	4327
October 17	3219	3665
October 24	1826	1421
October 31	1388	1014

Month	total.	Pl.
January 12	314	73
January 19	268	59
January 26	289	72
February 2	351	103
February 9	315	104
February 16	285	78
February 23	254	44
March 2	262	60
March 9	332	100
March 16	403	80
March 23	260	65
March 30	343	113
April 7	301	96
April 14	288	79
April 21	300	90
April 28	219	109
May 5	292	81
May 12	300	105
May 19	251	71
May 26	314	81
June 2	269	74
June 9	272	75
June 16	268	110
June 23	304	106
June 30	371	154
July 7	6	392
July 14	325	183
July 21	325	183
July 28	325	183
August 4	275	74
August 11	228	74
August 18	209	30
August 25	200	21
September 1	184	21
September 8	197	27
September 15	166	17
September 22	158	15
September 29	128	13
October 6	128	13
October 13	128	13
October 20	128	13
October 27	128	13
November 3	128	13
November 10	128	13
November 17	128	13
November 24	128	13
December 1	128	13
December 8	128	13
December 15	128	13
December 22	128	13
December 29	128	13
The total of the Burials this year	14370	
Of the Plague,	3603	

Title page, London's Lord Have Mercy Upon Us
Source: Early English Books, 1475-1640

Figure 7

The Four Great Years of the Plague

VIZ. 1593. 1603. 1625. and 1636. Compared by the Weekly Bills of Mortality
Printed every Thursday in the said years, by which its Increase and
Decrease is plainly discerned in all those Years.

Buried of all Diseases in the Year 1593.		Buried of all Diseases in the Year 1603.		Buried of all Diseases in the Year 1625.		Buried of all Diseases in the Year 1636.	
	Plague.		Plague.		Plague.		Plague.
<i>March.</i>	17 — 230 — 3	<i>March.</i>	17 — 108 — 3	<i>March.</i>	17 — 161 — 04	<i>April.</i>	7 — 119 — 4
	24 — 251 — 31		24 — 60 — 2		24 — 216 — 08		14 — 205 — 4
	31 — 219 — 29		31 — 78 — 6		31 — 243 — 11		21 — 285 — 14
<i>April.</i>	7 — 307 — 27	<i>April.</i>	7 — 66 — 4	<i>April.</i>	7 — 239 — 10	<i>May.</i>	5 — 251 — 10
	14 — 203 — 33		14 — 79 — 4		14 — 256 — 24		12 — 208 — 55
	21 — 290 — 37		21 — 98 — 8		21 — 230 — 25		19 — 299 — 35
	28 — 310 — 41		28 — 109 — 10		28 — 305 — 26		26 — 330 — 62
<i>May.</i>	5 — 250 — 29	<i>May.</i>	5 — 90 — 11	<i>May.</i>	5 — 292 — 30	<i>June.</i>	2 — 339 — 67
	12 — 339 — 38		12 — 112 — 18		12 — 232 — 45		9 — 241 — 87
	19 — 300 — 42		19 — 122 — 22		19 — 379 — 71		16 — 381 — 103
	26 — 450 — 58		26 — 122 — 32		26 — 401 — 78		23 — 394 — 104
<i>June.</i>	2 — 410 — 62	<i>June.</i>	2 — 114 — 30	<i>June.</i>	2 — 395 — 69	<i>July.</i>	7 — 215 — 21
	9 — 441 — 81		9 — 131 — 43		9 — 401 — 71		14 — 373 — 104
	16 — 399 — 99		16 — 144 — 59		16 — 510 — 165		21 — 265 — 120
	23 — 401 — 108		23 — 182 — 72		23 — 640 — 239		28 — 443 — 151
	30 — 850 — 118		30 — 207 — 158		30 — 942 — 350	<i>August.</i>	4 — 492 — 206
<i>July.</i>	7 — 1440 — 927	<i>July.</i>	7 — 445 — 203	<i>July.</i>	7 — 1222 — 593		11 — 538 — 283
	14 — 1510 — 893		14 — 612 — 424		14 — 1741 — 1004		18 — 532 — 283
	21 — 1491 — 258		21 — 1186 — 917		21 — 2850 — 1819		25 — 797 — 459
	28 — 1507 — 852		28 — 1728 — 1396		28 — 3182 — 2471	<i>September.</i>	1 — 1011 — 638
<i>August.</i>	4 — 1503 — 983	<i>August.</i>	4 — 2256 — 1922	<i>August.</i>	4 — 4119 — 2659		8 — 1069 — 650
	11 — 1550 — 797		11 — 2077 — 1745		11 — 4855 — 4115		15 — 1306 — 865
	18 — 1532 — 651		18 — 3084 — 2713		18 — 5205 — 4462		22 — 1229 — 775
	25 — 1308 — 449		25 — 2833 — 2539		25 — 4841 — 4218		29 — 1403 — 928
<i>September.</i>	1 — 1490 — 507	<i>September.</i>	1 — 3385 — 3025	<i>September.</i>	1 — 3897 — 3344	<i>October.</i>	6 — 1405 — 921
	8 — 1210 — 563		8 — 3078 — 2724		8 — 3157 — 2590		13 — 1202 — 752
	15 — 621 — 451		15 — 3129 — 2818		15 — 2148 — 1672		20 — 1002 — 555
	22 — 629 — 349		22 — 2450 — 2195		22 — 1994 — 1561		27 — 960 — 458
	29 — 450 — 330		29 — 1961 — 1732	<i>October.</i>	6 — 818 — 538	<i>November.</i>	3 — 1300 — 838
<i>October.</i>	6 — 408 — 327	<i>October.</i>	6 — 1831 — 1641		13 — 816 — 511		10 — 1104 — 715
	13 — 422 — 323		13 — 1312 — 1149		20 — 611 — 331		17 — 950 — 573
	20 — 330 — 308		20 — 766 — 642		27 — 375 — 134		24 — 817 — 470
	27 — 320 — 302		27 — 625 — 580	<i>November.</i>	3 — 357 — 89	<i>December.</i>	1 — 614 — 322
<i>November.</i>	3 — 310 — 301	<i>November.</i>	3 — 737 — 594		10 — 349 — 92		8 — 459 — 167
	10 — 309 — 209		10 — 545 — 442		17 — 374 — 48		
	17 — 301 — 107		17 — 384 — 251		24 — 231 — 17		
	24 — 321 — 93		24 — 798 — 105	<i>December.</i>	1 — 190 — 15		
<i>December.</i>	1 — 349 — 94	<i>December.</i>	1 — 223 — 102		8 — 181 — 15		
	8 — 331 — 86		8 — 163 — 52		15 — 168 — 06		
	15 — 329 — 71		15 — 200 — 96		22 — 157 — 01		
	22 — 386 — 39		22 — 162 — 74				

The Total of all the Burials of the time above said 25886.

Whereof of the Plague 21503.

The Total of all the Burials of the time above said 37294.

Whereof of the Plague 30501.

The Total of all the Burials of the time above said 32790.

Whereof of the Plague 35402.

The Total of all the Burials of the time above said 13359. Whereof of the Plague 10400.

These Parishes here under named were not Printed in any of the Bills of Mortality in these years 1593. 1603. 1625. 1636. but were added to the Bills long since those times.

Stepney,
Redriff,
Islington,
Newington,

} Lambath,
} Elackney,
} Covent Garden,
} St. Margrets Westminster.

London: Printed for Fern Cole at the Printing-press in Cornhill near the Royal Exchange. 1665.

Title page, The Four Great Years of the Plague
Source: Early English Books, 1475-1640

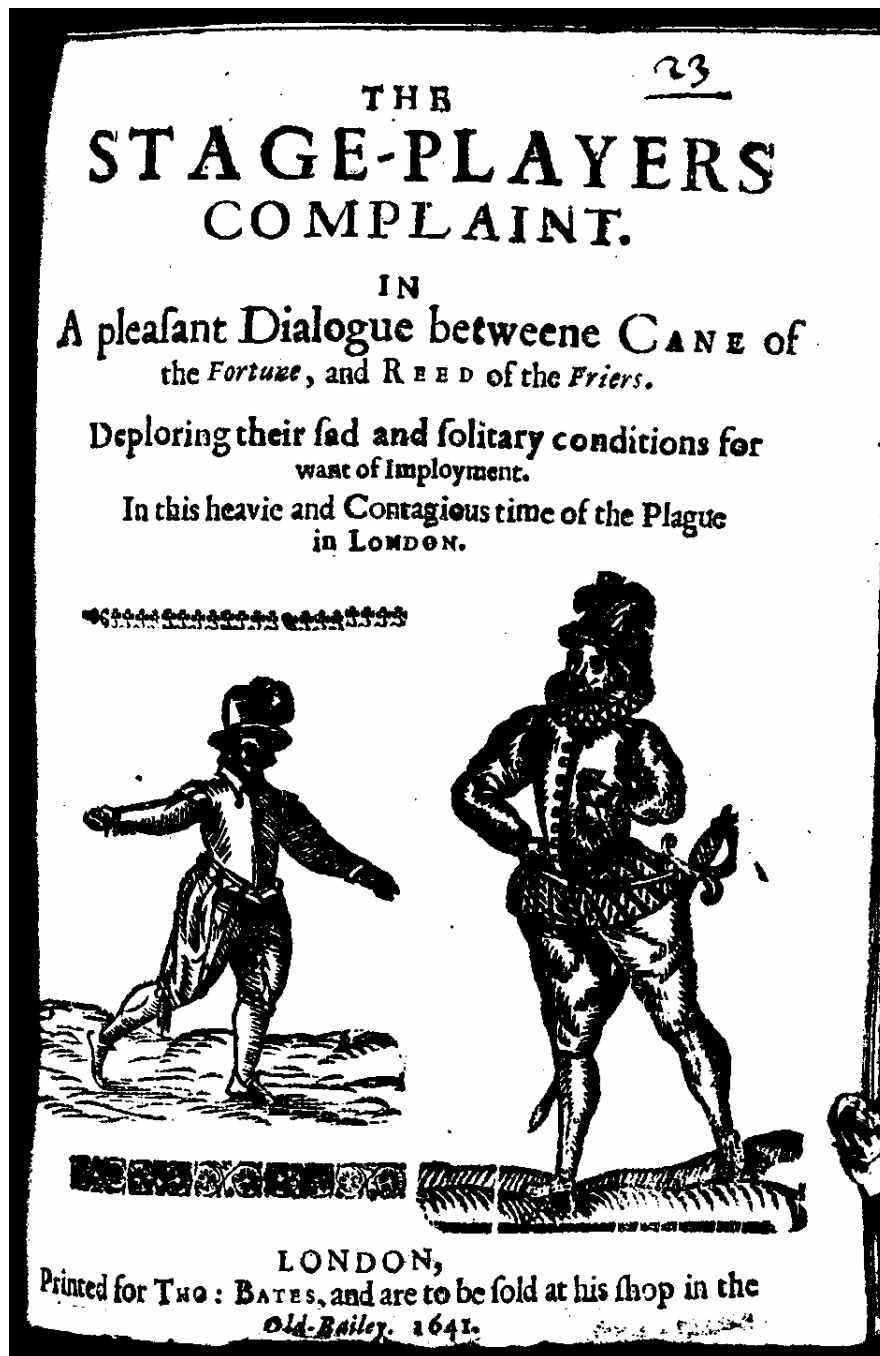
Figure 8



Title page, The vocacyon of John Bale to the bishoprick of Offorie. “God hath deliuered me from the snare of the hunter/& fro y noyfome peftilece. Pfal. xcj.”

Source: Peter Happe, John Bale (New York: Twayne, 1996) 49.

Figure 9



Title page, *The Stage-players complaint*.

Source: Early English Books Online, 1641-1700. London: Printed for Thom Bates, 1641.

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(according to natural causes the ti[m]e when, and the we[e]ks and moneths fore-told, when the city of Iondon [sic] wil[l] be freed and acquitted from the violent raging of this destructive enemy. The appearance of which great pest was predicted by the learned Mr. Lilly. Mr. Booker. Mr. Gadbury, Mr. Trigge, and Mr. Andrews. Early English Books 1467-1640. London, 1665.

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