

PLAGUE PREVENTION IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA AND CULTURE:
SAFEGUARDING BODIES, HOMES, AND STREETS, 1593-1625

by

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Abstract

Criticism in early modern English drama continues to expose the social-spatial anxieties generated by plague within both the plays and the playhouse space. What has yet to be considered in any detail, however, are the numerous public health measures born out of these anxieties that altered, if not more profoundly, the lived experience of space during outbreaks of the disease. This thesis offers fresh readings of six early modern plays that each offer distinct and significant insights into the early modern plague prevention experience in England. These experiences will be traced across three early modern spaces: The Body, the Home, and the Street. The first space, the Body, is interested in plague time regimens and remains. The moderated body of the affluent male is the subject of Chapter One, which reads *Love's Labour's Lost* alongside health regimens and plague treatises. In Chapter Two, I turn to *Titus Andronicus* to examine the cultural and material spaces occupied by the plague time dead both on stage and beyond the playhouse. In the Home, I attend to plague time cleansing and incarceration where, in Chapter Three, I examine how infectious sources are both introduced and removed from the plague time home in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. In Chapter Four, I consider the shut-up plague time home and the female plague workers who pass in and out of it in *The Woman's Prize*. The final space, the Street, focuses on plague time politics and pests. Chapter Five reads *Measure for Measure* as a response to the plague time public health disaster of 1603-4, and finally, in Chapter Six, I contextualise *The Witch of Edmonton's* Dog within plague prevention frameworks that only serve to increase his fearsome presence. This thesis offers the first sustained study of early modern plague prevention policy and practice in early modern drama. It will not only reveal early modern plague prevention to be a distinct and significant cultural phenomenon that generated its own discourse and anxieties, but it will also demonstrate how early modern drama is well placed to offer more nuanced insights into this phenomenon and the material and conceptual spaces that it transformed.

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A Note on the Text

Original spellings (including titles of texts and plays) have been modernised throughout. Punctuation, however, has not been standardised. Anonymous early modern works are listed first in the bibliography. All references to William Shakespeare's works are taken from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Second Edition, ed. by John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) unless otherwise stated.

Abbreviations

AUMLA	Australian Universities Language and Literature Association
LEME	Lexicons of Early Modern English
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
MLA	Modern Language Association
PMLA	Modern Language Association of America
WHO	World Health Organisation
CDC	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
<i>VA</i>	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>
<i>O</i>	<i>Othello</i>
<i>H</i>	<i>Hamlet</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>The Phoenix</i>

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Introduction

‘Experiencing’ Early Modern Plague Prevention

SIGNOR SHUTTLECOCK This makes me call to memory the strange and wonderful dressing of a coach that scudded through London the ninth of August, for I put the day in my table-book because it was worthy the registering. This fearful, pitiful coach was all hung with rue from the top to the toe of the boot, to keep the leather and the nails from infection. The very nostrils of the coach-horses were stopped with herb-grace, that I pitied the poor beasts being almost windless, and having then more grace in their noses than their master had in all his bosom, and thus they ran through Cornhill just in the middle of the street, with such a violent trample as if the Devil had been coachman.

SIGNOR KICKSHAW A very excellent folly, that the name of the plague should take the wall of the coach, and drive his worship down into the channel (ll.227-41).¹

As this exchange from Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s 1604 plague pamphlet *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary or; The Walks in Paul’s* demonstrates, early moderns experienced and responded to plague in a variety of powerful, sensory-rich ways. From the clearly excessive quantity of rue (or herb-of-grace as it was more commonly known) that ‘dress[ed]’ the ‘fearful [...] master’s coach’, to the coachman who drove straight through the city’s refuse to avoid infected houses, to Signor Kickshaw’s retort that reduces both actions to mere displays of ‘excellent folly’, the passage indicates the sheer multiplicity of contemporary attitudes towards plague time prophylaxes. Was this scene something Dekker or Middleton had themselves witnessed, or was it relayed to them by someone like Signor Shuttlecock? Or perhaps it is so ‘wonderful’ that it simply cannot be true? Whilst these are compelling

¹ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, ‘The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary; or, The Walks in Paul’s’, ed. by Paul Yachnin, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 183-94 (p. 189).

questions, what I am most interested in here is the embodied, subjective experience that brought into being the account that Shuttlecock now relays. This is an experience that he not only deems ‘worthy’ of his immediate attention, but it is also something that he would like to remember. Crucially, by ‘registering’ this ‘strange’ event and recording it in his table-book, Shuttlecock’s conscious steps to interpret, assimilate, and disseminate this experience also inevitably call forth ‘the material conditions’ of its production to which, Eric Wilson notes, it is irrevocably ‘tied’.² In other words, Shuttlecock’s ‘memory’ and Kickshaw’s response to it cannot help but grant readers a glimpse into the harrowing plague time landscape and the divisive preventive measures that conditioned it.

Through its considerations of similarly embodied and interpretive acts of theatre-making and playgoing, this thesis will examine early modern drama’s role in representing and conceiving of the contemporary plague prevention experience. It asks to what extent plays created and staged in the wake of outbreaks and their subsequent preventative measures might be alert to or in dialogue with these same measures. How might these plays have been received and understood by their audiences in the light of these often-divisive practices and the medical frameworks in which they operated? And in what ways might playwrights have been drawing on and utilising the pertinent discourse that surround plague time policies and practices within their narratives? This thesis offers fresh readings of six early modern plays that each speak to contemporary plague measures in very distinct ways. From these readings, I hope to expose the policies and practices that constitute English early modern plague prevention as significant and distinct phenomena with many subjects not limited to plague infection, which stimulated their own discourse, anxieties, and debates that impacted social

² Eric Wilson, ‘Plagues, Fairs, and Street Cries: Sounding out Society and Space in Early Modern London’, *Modern Language Studies*, 25.3 (1995), 1-42 (p. 39).

and cultural space in profound and hitherto unexamined ways. This introduction will outline the context and my approaches to this inquiry, provide a review of the existing literature, and explicate how my attempts to recover the experiences of early modern plague prevention offer engagements that are not only culturally valuable and urgent but that speak to a wide range of existing plague scholarship in new and hopefully stimulating ways.

Plague Prevention: Now and Then

Plague is still here. In February 2024, a case of bubonic plague was reported in Oregon (where it is endemic) after a cat owner contracted the disease from his pet.³ Furthermore, in 2021, eight plague deaths were reported in Miandrandra, Madagascar that led to over one thousand doses of prophylactic antibiotics being administered to close contacts of the deceased.⁴ Caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, plague occurs naturally within certain animal populations, namely wild rodents such as prairie dogs, rats, squirrels, and marmots.⁵ Human infection occurs either through the bites of fleas that have fed off infected animals, handling sick or dead animals and their bodily fluids, ingesting infected meat, or more rarely, human-to-human transmission.

Typical symptoms of bubonic plague include headaches, fever, vomiting, fatigue, bleeding, and the appearance of painful swellings near the lymph nodes, known as buboes.⁶

³ Jacqueline Howard and Mira Cheng, CNN, 'Rare case of human plague identified in Oregon, likely spread by pet cat, health officials say', *CNN Health* (February 2024) <<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/13/health/plague-oregon-cat/index.html>> [accessed 24 February 2024].

⁴ WHO, 'Disease Outbreak News: Plague – Madagascar' (2021) <<https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/plague---madagascar>> [accessed 24 February 2024].

⁵ CDC, 'Plague: Ecology and Transmission' (2019) <<https://www.cdc.gov/plague/resources/index.html>> [accessed 22 February 2024].

⁶ Kathryn A. Glatter and Paul Finkelman, 'History of the Plague: An Ancient Pandemic for the Age of COVID-19', *The American Journal of Medicine*, 134.2 (2021), 176-81 (p. 177).

However, when left untreated or identified in its later stages, bubonic plague may cause complex secondary complications leading to more serious types of the disease: septicemic, pneumonic, and the recently discovered gastrointestinal plague.⁷ Septicemic plague, for instance, can occur if the bacteria enter the victim's bloodstream, causing swift and deadly sepsis. Alternatively, pneumonic plague occurs when the bacteria enter the respiratory system, and it is this form of plague that is transmissible from person to person via airborne droplets produced when sneezing or coughing.⁸

This is plague as we now understand it, a privileged position acquired through hundreds of years of scientific advancement and accumulated medical knowledge. Clinicians today have at their disposal effective treatments, efficient prophylaxes, and even a promising vaccine that is currently in its first phase of human trials and that might one day eradicate the disease altogether.⁹ Shakespeare and his contemporaries conceived of plague very differently of course, and although the symptoms of the disease may be similar, the medical frameworks that surround them and the prophylactic responses that aimed to mitigate the disease are far

⁷ Dean Phillip Bell, 'The Bubonic Plague: Historical Overview and Scope', in *Plague in the Early Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. by Dean Phillip Bell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 13-71 (p. 16); Monica H. Green, 'Taking "Pandemic" Seriously: Making the Black Death', in *Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death*, ed. by Monica H. Green and Carol Symes (Kalamazoo: Arc Medieval Press, 2015), pp. 27-61 (p. 32).

⁸ Glatter and Finkelman, pp. 178-9.

⁹ University of Oxford News, 'Phase I trial begins of new vaccine against the Plague' (2021) <<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-07-26-phase-i-trial-begins-new-vaccine-against-plague>> [accessed 22 February 2024].

removed.¹⁰ Significantly, plague remains the only early modern disease to have commanded the stringent interventions that I now move on to discuss.¹¹

The early modern period sits alongside what has become known as the second pandemic of plague, which in its entirety spans 1347-1894.¹² Plague was endemic in London for most of the seventeenth century with major outbreaks, or what social historian Paul Slack terms ‘crisis years’, occurring in the city in 1563, 1592, 1603, 1625, 1636, and 1665.¹³ Such was the continued presence of plague in communities that literary scholar Rebecca Totaro suggests the disease ‘permanently carved out a place for itself in bodies, families, cities [...] and in imaginations’.¹⁴ As will be discussed further in the following chapter, monarchical anxieties regarding plague predate any formal or nationalised plague measures in England. Periodic outbreaks of both plague and the mysterious yet highly contagious sweating sickness meant that injunctions were placed on subjects entering the royal court with increasing frequency from the fifteenth century.¹⁵ As Euan C. Roger notes, plague regulations were implemented at St George’s College, Windsor, in 1517, and involved the fastening of ‘an

¹⁰ ‘The signs and tokens hereof are divers, as first it is perceived by the sudden weakness [...] shortness of breathing, vomiting, or at least a great desire to vomit, great pain in the head: insatiable thirst, proceeding of their great interior heat: sluggishness, and universal faintness of all the body, with a great desire to sleep, and an astonishment of the mind and vital spirits: and for the most part, they complain of a great pain which is felt in some one place or places of their bodies, where the botch or blain is by nature intended to be thrust forth, yet some at the first have them appearing: and for the most part, they are taken at the first with a sharp and rigorous fever’, Simon Kellwaye, *A defensative against the plague containing two partes or treatises* (London, 1593), STC 14917, E3^r.

¹¹ ‘With the exception of plague, and to a lesser extent the pox, English governments did not initiate any action against diseases’, Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 16.

¹² Michael W. Dols, ‘The Second Plague Pandemic and Its Recurrences in the Middle East: 1347-1894’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 22.2 (1979), 162–89.

¹³ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 151.

¹⁴ Rebecca Totaro, *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton* (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2005), p. 4.

¹⁵ Charles F. Mullett, *The Bubonic Plague and England: An essay in the History of Preventive Medicine* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1956), p. 44.

eight-foot pole [...] from the side of a quarantined house, with a wisp of hay or straw at the end, to warn the castle community' of the infection.¹⁶ This system of separating potentially diseased bodies from the healthy quickly gathered momentum and extended beyond royal palaces. In 1513, for instance, the City became anxious when they were notified that the belongings of two alleged plague victims had been carelessly thrown into the Thames.¹⁷ Not only does this tell us that debates were already under way about who or what propagated the disease, but it also indicates that ideas were starting to form around the dangerous effects of disorderly acts that might be committed by members of the community during outbreaks, a notion that will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six.

To halt the spread of plague, preventative actions were proposed by both the Privy Council and the City of London in 1543 which, as Charles Mullett states, was a 'most critical' year regarding movements towards a nationalised plague policy in England.¹⁸ Paul Slack has previously suggested that the City held what might be considered to be a miasmatic view of the disease.¹⁹ Believing it to be transmitted by 'corrupted' air, the City pushed for stricter sanitary reforms.²⁰ Conversely, the Privy Council, who were ostensibly more 'contagionist' in their understandings of plague transmission, were preoccupied with preventing the spread of infection through physical contact and touch. These measures included marking infected sites and segregating the sick, which conveyed a fundamental belief that 'men, not the elements,

¹⁶ Euan C. Roger, "'To Be Shut-up': New evidence for the development of quarantine regulations in Early-Tudor England", *Social History of Medicine*, 33.4 (2020), 1077-96 (p. 1087).

¹⁷ Mullett, p. 44.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁹ Slack, *Impact*, p. 202.

²⁰ Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague containing the nature, signs, and accidents of the same* (London, 1603), STC 16676, B3^v.

were responsible for disease’ and that people ‘should be carefully controlled’ above all else during outbreaks.²¹

However, recent scholarship has suggested that this binary outlook regarding plague transmission might not have been so clearly defined during the period. Claire Turner, for instance, suggests that:

Contemporaries of plague outbreaks understood theories of disease transmission and prevention as intertwined, indistinct, and overlapping. Despite being considered distinct theories, contagion and miasma were often perceived to work in conjunction with one another in many understandings of epidemic disease.²²

These ‘intertwined’ and, ‘intersensory’ epistemologies of plague transmission are reflected in England’s first national plague orders in 1578, as the range of prophylactic measures contained within them address both miasmatic concerns and outline measures to reduce contagious physical contact with the infected.²³ For instance, the orders’ stringent burial measures that will be examined in Chapter Two, mitigate physical contact with the corpse as well as minimising its corrupting influence upon the surrounding air.²⁴ The national orders appeared as a list of seventeen items in a seven-page document that, whilst modest in size, was influential in scale. As Slack notes, these orders were ‘innovative, far-reaching and permanent’ and were reprinted, virtually unchanged, until 1665.²⁵

The national plague orders were intended for the eyes of local officials, like the Justices of the Peace, whose job it was to ensure that these directions were upheld. Such

²¹ Slack, *Impact*, p. 203.

²² Claire Turner, ‘Intersensory Experiences of the Plague in Seventeenth-Century London’, *Social History of Medicine*, 36.1 (2023), 42–61 (p. 43).

²³ Turner, p. 42.

²⁴ *Orders Thought Meet by her Majesty and her privy Council, to be executed throughout the counties of this realm* (London, 1578), STC 9187.9, B1^v.

²⁵ Slack, *Impact*, p. 33.

directions included assigning and organising plague workers, such as the keepers and searchers that will be encountered in Chapter Four, supervising the shutting-up of infected houses, and ensuring that poor relief was collected and distributed.²⁶ Dekker and Middleton, in their plague pamphlet *News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody* (1604), praise the ‘policies’ set down in England’s plague orders, declaring them as a necessary, ‘sweet and wholesome [...] stratagem’, whose ‘onsets’ and ‘batteries’ are:

By physic cunningly applied
To beat down plagues so fortified
And of those arms defensative
To keep th’assaulted heart alive (ll.1083-1106).²⁷

The national orders received statutory support in 1604 with the arrival of James I’s Plague Act, a stringent decree whose implications are discussed in more detail in Chapters Three and Four. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, London received its own bespoke orders in 1583 and 1609, which accounted for the size and population density of a city at the epicentre of many of England’s seventeenth-century outbreaks.

As Turner notes, English early modern ‘disease prevention came in a wide variety of forms including fumigation, perfumes and pomanders, quarantine, bonfires, and a plethora of recipes’, many of which will be discussed in more detail in this thesis.²⁸ In very recent years there has been much renewed interest in plague time measures and the rich and complex socio-political history that surrounds them amongst social historians who are seeking to

²⁶ *Orders Thought Meet* (1578).

²⁷ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, ‘News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody’, ed. by Gary Taylor, annotated and introduced by Robert Maslen, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino, and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 128-48 (p. 147).

²⁸ Turner, p. 57.

understand these interventions as distinct phenomena.²⁹ Social historians have previously considered more broadly the socio-political ramifications of England's collective response to the disease, namely Charles Mullett (*The Bubonic Plague and England: An Essay in the History of Preventive Medicine*) and Slack (*The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*). Moreover, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, groundbreaking research from the fields of social and cultural history, such as Vanessa Harding's work on plague burials, Richelle Munkhoff's study on the role and contemporary perception of female plague workers, Mark Jenner's work on plague time dog culls, and Holly Dugan's pioneering study of plague time smells, revealed the cultural-historical significance and value that studies of contemporary plague prophylaxes have to offer.³⁰

Yet, despite these studies there is still so little that is known about individual plague measures as embodied experiences and about how individuals and communities may have responded to them. There are a number of possible reasons for this. J. Leeds Barroll in *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theatre* (1991) argues that critics examining plague narratives focus on 'the great epidemics, at the cost of looking away from the less sensational endemic upsurges'.³¹ Leeds Barroll notes that the 'prescientific and practical steps' of 'the

²⁹ This work most recently includes: Charles Udale, 'Evaluating Early Modern Lockdowns: Household Quarantine in Bristol, 1565–1604', *The Economic History Review*, 76 (2023), 118–44; Aaron Columbus, "'To be had for a Pesthouse for the use of this parish': Plague Pesthouses in Early Stuart London, c. 1600–1650", *Urban History*, 26 (2022), 1–21; Kathryn Welford, 'Quarantining Contagion: Providentialist Debates over Plague and Public Health in Elizabethan and Jacobean England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 84 (2021), 273–305.

³⁰ Vanessa Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead in Early Modern London', *Epidemic Disease in London*, ed. J.A.I. Champion, *Centre for Metropolitan History Working Papers Series*, 1 (1993), 53–64; Richelle Munkhoff, 'Poor Women and Parish Public Health in Sixteenth-Century London', *Renaissance Studies*, 28.4, 'Special Issue: Women and Healthcare in Early Modern Europe' (2014), 579–96; Richelle Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead: Authority, Marginality, and the Interpretation of Plague in England, 1574–1665', *Gender & History*, 11.1 (1999), 1–29; Mark S. R. Jenner, 'The Great Dog Massacre', in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, ed. by William Naphy and Penny Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011).

³¹ J. Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca:

authorities [...] trying to control these upsurges' have either been ignored or 'dismiss[ed]' as 'the futility of superstition and ignorance'.³² Twenty years later, Jane Stevens Crawshaw notes that social history, like Shakespeare scholarship, is similarly still inclined to focus on 'periods of crisis' during plague rather than the more prolonged medical and social contexts of the disease's responses.³³ Such is this tendency, particularly in the English plague narrative, that Aaron Columbus' 2022 work on London pesthouses is still addressing the lack of scholarly engagement with plague prevention measures over thirty years later.³⁴

Moreover, compared with other European countries, such as Italy, England has a shorter and less well-documented history in regard to plague response. As Kira L.S. Newman notes:

Italian urban authorities first began to use quarantine as a response to bubonic plague around 1348. However, long before then, they had implemented isolation policies for leprosy and other diseases. In England, however, it took the royal government until the late sixteenth century to include quarantine and isolation in its books of orders related to plague control.³⁵

Social history scholarship is thus rich in its considerations of the experiences that arose from the early modern Italian plague prevention systems. Both Marina Inì and Crawshaw, for instance, have recently considered (from albeit different perspectives) the specific spatio-temporal experiences within and surrounding Italian quarantine stations (*Lazzaretti*) and plague hospitals.³⁶ This thesis seeks to speak to and enrich these emergent social-historical

Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 71.

³² Ibid., pp. 71-2.

³³ Jane Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 4.

³⁴ Columbus, pp. 125-6.

³⁵ Kira L. S. Newman, "'Shutt Up': Bubonic Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern England", *Journal of Social History*, 45.3 (2012), 809-34 (p. 809-10).

³⁶ Marina Inì, 'Materiality, Quarantine and Contagion in the Early Modern Mediterranean', *Social History of Medicine*, 34.4 (2021), 1161-184; Marina Inì, 'Architecture and Plague Prevention: Lazzaretti in the Eighteenth-Century Mediterranean', in *Public Health in the Early Modern City in*

conversations surrounding the experiences of early modern plague prevention. It does so in the hopes that, like the embodied Italian plague time experience that is already being steadily brought into focus, a more detailed picture of life alongside English plague measures might also emerge with the same vividness. As theatre offers a locus for sharing the human experience, theatrical engagements with plague prevention systems may offer crucial insights into how plague-driven socio-spatial practices and policies were understood, assimilated, and experienced both on and offstage. My aim is to explore dramatic plague time space, a space delineated by the plague literature scholarship that I now turn to survey, as alert and critical models of contemporary prophylactic practice and as extant cultural records of England's plague time experience.

Early Modern Plague Literature: 'Plague Space'

The advent of the spatial turn in the early 2000s in literature and theatre studies stimulated an alertness amongst scholars to the material performance space, the conceptual spaces within drama and, crucially, the cultural and historical intersections between the two.³⁷ As Julie Sanders notes, 'drama was one of the key means by which early modern English society strove to make sense of space'.³⁸ Studies of plague literature were well-placed to draw upon

Europe, ed. by Mohammad Gharipour (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 83-123; Jane Stevens Crawshaw, 'A Sense of Time: Experiencing Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern Italy, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 'Proximities/Immobilites', 24.2 (2021), 269-90; Crawshaw, 'The Places and Spaces of Early Modern Quarantine', in *Quarantine: Local and Global Histories*, ed. by Alison Bashford (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 15-34; See also, John Henderson, *Florence Under Siege: Surviving Plague in an Early Modern City* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2019).

³⁷ Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Jean Howard, *Theatre of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Janette Dillon, *Theatre, Court and City, 1595–1610: Drama and Social Space in London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama 1620-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 10.

this spatial turn in theatre studies since early modern plague was already inherently understood as a spatial disease, one which, as Ian Munro asserts, ‘reconfigures the lived and symbolic space of the city’.³⁹ Literary scholars such as Margaret Healy, Rebecca Totaro, and Ernest B. Gilman were amongst the first to explore early modern drama’s intersections with plague. They placed writers and audiences within and alongside early modern England’s pestiferous conditions to consider how individuals ordered themselves, were ordered, how they moved through and experienced their environment, and how they responded when those environments repeatedly turned against them. In doing so, these more materially-focused inquiries of the disease shifted plague literature studies away from the more metaphorically situated readings that had dominated plague literature studies prior to the spatial turn and that repeatedly read plague as an allegory for social disorder and unrest.⁴⁰

Margaret Healy in *Fictions of Disease* (2001) explores how bubonic plague and syphilis are appropriated by early modern writers and how diseased bodies, particularly those of the poor, were transformed into charged political sites via contemporary pseudo-medical discourse.⁴¹ With her ideas and methodology firmly rooted in New Historicism, Healy’s generative work was also one of the first studies to acknowledge the potency and the cultural value of literature responding, both directly and indirectly, to contemporary diseases and established early modern drama as an important primary source ripe for exploration within discussions of plague. Continuing Healy’s work, but this time moving beyond the body, Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman’s influential essay collection *Representing the Plague*

³⁹ Ian Munro, *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London: The City and Its Double* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 179.

⁴⁰ Rene Girard, ‘The Plague in Literature and Myth’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 15.5 (1974), 833-50; Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor: And, AIDS and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 2002).

⁴¹ Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

in *Early Modern England* (2010) locates the endemic disease as an embodied experience that rippled through English society in a variety of previously unconsidered ways. Totaro and Gilman also produced significant monographs on the literary responses to plague prior to collaborating on this collection, yet it is the more socio-spatially oriented approach of *Representing the Plague* that remains the focus here as it relates more directly to the approach of this thesis.⁴² Totaro and Gilman suggest that by representing plague, early modern dramatists and pamphleteers made the ‘calamity intelligible’ with Totaro suggesting that ‘no other disease altered physical, social, religious, medical, civic behaviour and beliefs at once’, alterations that the collection suggests are palpable in the creative output that emerged during periods of plague.⁴³ What renders Totaro and Gilman’s collection so influential, however, is that it begins to trace and map more broadly some of the ways in which plague time practices ‘reshape’ England’s ‘physical and social space’, as Kelly J. Stage notes.⁴⁴

Three distinct branches of inquiry emerge from *Representing the Plague* that attend to what Stage defines as ‘plague space’, a term that denotes the material or notional manifestation of the disease and its impact upon the space in which it materializes.⁴⁵ The first branch, and one that this thesis hopes to extend significantly as it remains the least explored, examines the transformation that occurs within the domestic space during plague time. Paula S. Berggren and Barbara H. Traister focus on the sealed-up plague time home as a central site

⁴² Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. by Ernest B. Gilman and Rebecca Totaro (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); See also: Totaro, *Suffering in Paradise*; Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Kathleen Miller has also more recently explored the ‘literary culture of plague’ that emerged during and after the ‘disease’s climax’ in England in 1665, Kathleen Miller, *The Literary Culture of Plague in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 3.

⁴³ Rebecca Totaro, ‘Introduction’, *Representing the Plague*, pp. 1-33 (p. 4).

⁴⁴ Kelly J. Stage, ‘Plague Space and Played Space in Urban Drama, 1604’, in *Representing the Plague*, ed. by Totaro and Gilman, pp. 54-75 (p. 55).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

of emotive engagement for early modern writers during periods of endemic plague. Berggren suggests that the claustrophobic domestic interiors delineated in Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Winter's Tale* represent 'incubators of dangerous erotic desire', with the contaminating metaphors of plague serving as erotic signifiers.⁴⁶ In contrast, Traister's work focuses on the dramatic representations and reception of the shut-up plague time home. Traister posits that by staging these contagious and confined interior spaces in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, and John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize*, playwrights offer their audiences remedial catharsis as, unlike plague itself, 'in these comedies, the injuries suffered during quarantine lead comically to a happy ending'.⁴⁷ Traister conceives that, in rewriting the narrative of plague in regard to domestic space, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Fletcher offer their audiences the opportunity to figuratively reclaim the plague time home from the wreckage of disease, a notion which I build on in Chapter Four.

The second emerging branch of 'plague space' moves beyond the four walls of the home to consider the wider urban topography of plague time London which, Stage suggests, is 'complicated' by 'plague conditions'.⁴⁸ Stage notes that characters within Dekker and John Webster's *Westward Ho*, for instance, navigate their urban environment based on plague time spatial paradigms and anxieties that speak to the spatial practices elicited by 'official quarantine restrictions and unofficial flight' from the city 'to the countryside'.⁴⁹ In subsequent work, Stage further examines the socio-spatial patterns that emerged in the city as a result of

⁴⁶ Paula S. Berggren, 'Shakespeare's Dual Lexicons of Plague Infections in Speech and Space', in *Representing the Plague*, ed. by Totaro and Gilman, pp. 150-68 (p. 150).

⁴⁷ Barbara H. Traister, "A plague on both your houses": Sites of Comfort and Terror in Early Modern Drama', in *Representing the Plague*, ed. by Totaro and Gilman, pp. 169-82 (p. 178).

⁴⁸ Stage, 'Plague Space', p. 55.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

the presence and appropriation of the data contained within the weekly plague bills.⁵⁰

Similarly, Nina Levine offers that the weekly bills of mortality served not only as documents of control, but also established a ‘rhythm for the city’ that influenced social intercourse and city commerce.⁵¹ Furthermore, history of medicine scholars such as Margaret Pelling have cast a medically-inflected ecocritical eye on the urban environments in which plague emerged and the other public health concerns it intersected with and, like Levine and Stage, have examined how this influenced urban spatial practice. Pelling suggests, for instance, that public health concerns such as plague led to the ‘skirting’ or ‘avoidance’ of the city and its more unsavoury qualities that were engendered by overpopulation, the growth of the suburbs, and vagrancy, all of which I discuss in further detail in chapters Five and Six.⁵²

The third and by far the most extensively explored branch of ‘plague space’ is the playhouse space itself and the plague time anxieties that surround it.⁵³ Tellingly, the term ‘anxiety’ first enters the English language around 1611, and as Laurie Johnson suggests it enters at ‘precisely the moment in history’ when there is a need for such a word.⁵⁴ Nichole DeWall reveals the material space of the early modern indoor playhouse as the ideal environment in which to consider how anxieties surrounding plague may have manifested not only within the material playing space, but in the wider urban environment in which the

⁵⁰ Kelly J. Stage, *Producing Early Modern London: A Comedy of Urban Space, 1598–1616* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), pp. 102-3.

⁵¹ Nina Levine, *Practicing the City: Early Modern London on Stage* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 114; For further discussion of the bills and their impact see Erin Sullivan, ‘Physical and Spiritual Illness: Narrative Appropriations of the Bills of Mortality’, in *Representing the Plague*, ed. by Gilman and Totaro, pp. 76-94.

⁵² Margaret Pelling, ‘Skirting the city? Disease, Social Change and Divided Households in the Seventeenth Century’, in *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London*, ed. by Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 154-75 (p. 154).

⁵³ Levine, p. 263.

⁵⁴ Laurence Johnson, “Nobler in the Mind”: The Emergence of Early Modern Anxiety’, *AUMLA*, ‘Special Issue: The Human and the Humanities in Literature, Language and Culture’ (2009), 141-56.

playhouses were located.⁵⁵ This turn inwards towards theatrical space and its socio-cultural intersections with plague was no doubt originally prompted by the work of Leeds Barroll. Barroll, in his considerations of playhouse closures and the impact plague had on Shakespeare's theatrical output, was the first scholar to place the commercial theatre into conversation with the disease. This is a subject which Paul Raffield has very recently revisited and extended in his considerations of what he terms the 'outlawed actor' and the players' cultural connections with plague.⁵⁶

However, it is Jonson's city comedies, *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Epicoene* (1609), that have undeniably received the most attention regarding 'plague space' and its interactions with playing and playhouse space. What makes these plays particularly evocative is not only their prescribed plague time settings, but also the site-specific metatheatrical conversations with the plague that they stage.⁵⁷ Both James D. Mardock and Christopher D. Foley have examined the dramaturgical aspects of Jonson's comedies and how these might reflect and even play on wider plague time practices and anxieties offstage. Mardock calls attention to the dramatist's preoccupation with the control of interior space within both *The Alchemist* and *Epicoene* through its noticeable use of doors and hard boundaries. However, whilst calling forth the play's resonances with prophylactic household confinement and plague time spatial ordering, Mardock suggests that this hyper awareness of interior space is less to do with plague spatial control and more to do with Jonson executing his authorial control over the playhouse space

⁵⁵ Nichole DeWall, "'Sweet recreation barred': The Case for Playgoing in Plague-Time", in *Representing the Plague*, ed. by Gilman and Totaro, pp. 133-49.

⁵⁶ Paul Raffield, *Shakespeare's Strangers and English Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2023), p. 16.

⁵⁷ These enquiries sit in contrast to Patrick Phillip's thesis that Jonson's plague time plays, particularly *The Alchemist*, have little to do with plague despite their plague time settings; Patrick Phillips, "'You Need Not Fear the House': The Absence of Plague in *The Alchemist*", *Ben Jonson Journal*, 13 (2006), 43-62.

and his audiences.⁵⁸ Foley, however, suggests that Jonson's staging of plague anxiety and plague time spatiality in *The Alchemist* is far more deliberate. In his understanding of plague as a largely class-based phenomenon, Foley posits that Jonson exploits the tight parameters of the indoor Blackfriars' playing space, and the further encroachment of this space via the presence of stage sitters. Jonson does this to illustrate the 'hazardous proximity of other bodies as a provocation to its socially privileged audiences' who usually flee the city during outbreaks as *The Alchemist's* household demonstrates.⁵⁹ Foley also explores this concept of 'hazardous proximity', or what he later refers to as 'epidemiological anxieties', in Jonson's other plague time comedy *Epicoene*, which summons the material threat of plague into the play through Morose's acute aversion to 'noise pollution', a notion that I will return to discuss in more detail in Chapter Six.⁶⁰

Moreover, Cheryl Lynn-Ross has examined the olfactory links to suburban plague that issue from *The Alchemist's* 'stinks and smokes', and particularly from the rogue, Subtle, whose liminal social position and pungent alchemical attempts 'inscribe' him 'with the characteristics' and anxieties associated with early modern plague.⁶¹ Likewise, Matthew Thiele draws attention to the strong scents, such as vinegar and rosewater, that are referenced within *The Alchemist*, scents that given the play's plague time setting are suggestive of contemporary plague remedies that might counteract noxious sources such as Subtle and the play's other pestilentially-aligned rogues.⁶² However, both Melissa Smith and Chloe Kathleen

⁵⁸ James D. Mardock, *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), p. 68.

⁵⁹ Christopher D. Foley, "'Breathe Less, and Farther Off': The Hazardous Proximity of Other Bodies in Jonson's the Alchemist", *Studies in Philology*, 115.3 (2018), 505-23 (p. 505).

⁶⁰ Christopher D. Foley, 'Jonson's Acoustic-Oriented Dramaturgy in the First Folio Playtexts of *Epicoene* and *The Alchemist*', *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 25.1 (2018), 81-105 (p. 85).

⁶¹ Cheryl Lynn-Ross, 'The Plague in *The Alchemist*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 41.3 (1988), 439-58 (pp. 441-42).

⁶² Matthew Thiele, "'It is become a cage of unclean birds': The Presence of Plague in *The Alchemist*",

Preedy offer respite from this Jonsonian plague preoccupation in their considerations of Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, and John Ford's engagements with the 'noxious atmosphere' of the plague time playhouse.⁶³ Fundamentally, the current scholarship surrounding what Smith refers to as the 'the playhouse as plaguehouse' model illustrates the phenomenological power that plague occupies within the early modern imagination. It also demonstrates how dramatists increased this power using the materiality and locality of the suburban playhouses where audiences remain confined and contained within an already potentially corrupting playing space.

Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson discuss more widely the contemporary epistemologies and subsequent representation of contagious exchange and disease transmission in the early modern playhouse.⁶⁴ 'If the playhouse is a site of contention with regard to theories of contagious effect in the period', they argue, then 'it is also a location for representing and playing out various kinds of contagious operations'.⁶⁵ Despite Chalk and Floyd-Wilson stating that their collection 'seeks to move the discussion well beyond plague', this new body of work reinforces the complexity of the period's conceptualisations of contagion, proximity, and corporeal permeability, of which plague is certainly still a part.⁶⁶

The Ben Jonson Journal, 28.2 (2021), 163-90 (pp. 170-2).

⁶³ Chloe Kathleen Preedy, "'The wished aire": Biblical Plagues and the Early Modern Playhouse', *Etudes Anglaises*, 71.4 (2018), 491-506 (p. 491); Melissa Smith, 'The Playhouse as Plaguehouse in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy', *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, 89.1 (2003), 77-86.

⁶⁴ For further discussions regarding the contagious power of the theatre from Shakespeare to now see also: Fintan Walsh, Mark Taylor-Batty, and Enoch Brater, *Theatres of Contagion: Transmitting Early Modern to Contemporary Performance*, ed. by Fintan Walsh, Mark Taylor-Batty, and Enoch Brater (London: Methuen Drama, 2020).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson, 'Introduction': Beyond the Plague', in *Contagion and the Shakespearean Stage*, ed. by Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1-21 (p. 4).

Likewise, Eric Langley's recent work also considers the dangerously contaminating social and physical transactions that occur more widely on the Shakespearean stage.⁶⁷

Such work reflects how in recent years the discussion has moved away from plague and towards disease and contagion more generally. The arrival of COVID-19 in 2020, however, has resensitised early modern scholarship to the particular horrors of epidemic disease. In the wake of the global pandemic there have been many robust and thought-provoking scholarly conversations around COVID-19 and early modern plague, particularly regarding sensory experience, and how COVID-19 has impacted theatre and the arts where many parallels have been drawn between the 'lockdowns' and early modern plague time playing restraints.⁶⁸ And whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage sustainedly with COVID-19, particularly since the virus and early modern plague operate within their own distinct cultural and medical contexts, there is one emerging discussion from the pandemic that is of particular significance to the thinking within this thesis that I will briefly draw on. Recent neuroscience and social science studies suggest that aspects of the pandemic experience, such as exposure to widespread multimedia coverage, the constant influx of medical advice, shifting government guidance, and prolonged lockdowns have had 'far-

⁶⁷ Eric Langley, *Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶⁸ I am thinking here particularly: Lisa Smith, Holly Dugan, and Marissa Nicosia, 'Smelling Contagion: The Sensory Experience of Plague in Seventeenth Century London and the Covid-19 Pandemic', *Working Papers in Critical Disaster Studies*, Series 1: Historical Approaches to Covid-19, 8 (2021), 1-24; Pascale Aebischer, *Viral Shakespeare: Performance in the Time of Pandemic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); There were also a number of online events and seminars that examined the parallels between COVID and early modern plague: 'Early Modern Conversations: Plague, Writing, and the Legacy of Pandemics: MRST Early Modern Conversations', Guest Speakers: Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, Chaired by Kelly J. Stage, *University of Nebraska-Lincoln Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program* (5 November 2020) <<https://www.unl.edu/medren/early-modern-conversations-plague-writing-and-legacy-pandemics>> [accessed 5 November 2020]; 'Theatre in Time of Plague', Guest Speakers: Lucy Munro, James Wallace, James Shapiro, and Iqbal Khan, De Montfort University, Leicester (23 April 2021) <<https://www.dmu.ac.uk/about-dmu/events/events-calendar/2021/april/theatre-in-time-of-plague.aspx>> [accessed 23 April 2021].

reaching’ societal ‘effects’ that we cannot yet comprehend.⁶⁹ Whilst some effects such as financial insecurity, supply chain issues, mental health and wellbeing, and a lack of access to medical treatment and education were felt almost immediately, others are only just revealing themselves to scientists. For instance, post-pandemic patient studies suggest that adopted preventive measures and prolonged social isolation due to COVID-19 have contributed to the steep rise in and exacerbation of acute health anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) diagnoses.⁷⁰ There are some that even suggest that COVID-19 restrictions have fundamentally changed how we live our lives.⁷¹ And, whilst some of us were fortunate enough not to have lost anyone close to us to the virus itself, or did not feel any long-lasting effects of the virus if and when infected, COVID-19’s preventative measures were felt by us all and impacted our lives in a myriad of unprecedented ways.

With this in mind, and despite the surge of very recent interest in the early modern plague time experience and the different modes of contagion and their anxieties on stage that were emerging pre-pandemic, it is somewhat surprising that there is currently no sustained study that attends to the experiences of the plague time measures that addressed these anxieties and that aimed to mitigate this so prevalent contagion. More importantly, when such experiences have been examined in isolation, very little consideration has been given to how they might be engaged with and even represented on the early modern stage and, importantly,

⁶⁹ H. Onyeaka, CK. Anumudu, ZT. Al-Sharify, E. Egele-Godswill, P. Maegbot, ‘COVID-19 Pandemic: A review of the global lockdown and its far-reaching effects’, *Science Progress*, 104.2 (2021), 1-18.

⁷⁰ I. French and J. Lyne, ‘Acute exacerbation of OCD symptoms precipitated by media reports of COVID-19’, *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 37.4 (2020), 291-94; Peter Tyrer, ‘COVID-19 Health Anxiety’, *World Psychiatry*, 19.3 (2020), 307-30.

⁷¹ Ashley Kirk, Pamela Duncan, Georgina Quach, Miles Probyn, Pablo Gutiérrez, David Blood and Rachel Hall, ‘Lockdown Lifestyles: how has Covid changed lives in the UK?’, *The Guardian* (February 2022) <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/ng-interactive/2022/feb/25/lockdown-lifestyles-how-lives-changed-covid-pandemic>> [accessed 22 February 2024].

what these engagements might further reveal about the practice and reception of the measures themselves. Building on the rich conversations that have emerged from the explorations of ‘plague space’ in plague literature studies in recent years, this thesis hopes to address this lacuna. As I will now outline, it attempts to do so by placing a small selection of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries in conversation with plague time measures in the hopes that we might begin to understand in more detail the physical and psychological price early moderns paid to safeguard themselves, their homes, and their communities against the constant onslaught of endemic plague.

Approaching the Early Modern Plague Prevention Experience

This thesis is a series of textual readings that situate early modern play-texts in relation to contemporary primary documents and the material conditions of performance. I engage with a wide variety of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printed texts drawn from a broad range of genres and concerns. In terms of the approach to the play-texts themselves, I explore them via a combination of close reading, comparative reading, and historicist analysis. I draw on the socio-historical evidence that is available in printed plague time documents such as official Elizabethan and Jacobean plague orders and proclamations, as well as contemporary medical regimens, plague treatises, and conduct books to inform my readings of plague time policy and prescribed prophylactic practice.

I also engage with the plague pamphlets of Thomas Nashe, Dekker, and Middleton. Wilson, Charles Whitney, and more recently, Sarah Briest: all attest to the rich contextual knowledge that might be gleaned from these so-called ‘popular fictions of plague’.⁷² Whitney

⁷² Wilson, ‘Plagues, Fairs’, p. 7; Charles Whitney, ‘Dekker and Middleton’s Plague Pamphlets as Environmental Literature’, in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. by Rebecca

argues that plague time pamphlets offer ‘remarkable records’ of ‘plague’s recurrent devastation of urban habitats’ and, as such, are ‘promising subjects of ecocritical study’.⁷³ Similarly, in his considerations of the experience of sound during plague time, Wilson notes that the pamphlets function as his ‘initial sounding board through which [the] material resonances of the London soundscape might be both filtered and broadcast’, and ‘reveal telling traces of social practice and cultural ethos that have been, on the whole, historically tuned out’.⁷⁴ Although, like these previous studies, I draw from the plague pamphlets’ valuable socio-spatial insights throughout my work, this engagement is most forcibly illustrated in Chapter Five, where I consider *Measure for Measure* alongside Dekker and Middleton’s *News from Gravesend*.

To use Bruce R. Smith’s words, the ‘outer frame’ for this distinctly multidisciplinary thesis is, like Wilson and Whitney’s work above, historical phenomenology; a subfield of phenomenology and a philosophical lens that has seen a significant resurgence in Shakespeare studies in very recent years.⁷⁵ Coined by Smith in the early 2000s, historical phenomenology aims to mitigate the ‘formidable challenges’ scholars might encounter when approaching historically or culturally distant subjects (in Smith’s case sensations) via foundational

Totaro and Earnest B. Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2011) pp. 201-18; Sarah Briest, “‘The Graves When They Open, Will Be Witnesses Against Thee’: Mass Burial and the Agency of the Dead in Thomas Dekker’s Plague Pamphlets’, in *Interdisciplinary Explorations of Postmortem Interaction: Dead Bodies, Funerary Objects, and Burial Spaces Through Texts and Time*, ed. by Estella Weiss-Krejci, Sebastian Becker and Philip Schwyzer (Cham: Springer Nature, 2022), pp. 211-29.

⁷³ Whitney, p. 201.

⁷⁴ Wilson, ‘Plagues, Fairs’, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Bruce R. Smith, ‘Framing Shakespeare’s Senses’, in *Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture*, ed. by Simon Smith (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), pp. 15-39 (p. 33); For recent phenomenological readings of Shakespeare see: John Gillies, ‘Towards a Phenomenology of Shakespeare’s Sky’, *Linguaculture*, 14.1 (2023), 69-82; Katarzyna Burzynska, *Pregnant bodies from Shakespeare to Ford: A Phenomenology of Pregnancy in English Early Modern Drama* (London: Routledge, 2022); Daniel Johnston, ‘Shakespeare’s Phenomenology of Time in *Macbeth*’, *Shakespeare*, 17.4 (2021), 379-99; Susan Sachon, *Shakespeare, Objects and Phenomenology: Daggers of the Mind* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

phenomenologist models such as Edmund Husserl's that often assume the universality of experience.⁷⁶ As Kevin Curran and James Kearney have noted, historical phenomenology is well-placed to examine critically the subjective and interpretative processes at work within early modern drama and performance as 'both phenomenology and theatre are practices that offer a replica or simulacrum of human experience in an attempt to take up creatively what is given in experience'.⁷⁷ I also draw on phenomenology's intersecting disciplines. Sensory studies scholarship is instrumental to this work, and I engage with this field throughout through the work of Smith, Dugan, Simon Smith, Jackie Watson, Amy Kenny, Preedy, and Chalk. Secondly, Langley, Gail Kern Paster, and Erin Sullivan's work on the history of emotions also allow me to focus in on the structures of experience both in the world of the play and offstage. This is so that I might, in the words of psychologist and phenomenologist Susann M. Lavery, 'make the' sometimes 'invisible visible'.⁷⁸

Engaging with what Edward Soja describes as the 'extraordinary power and insight of [...] space as a primary mode for interpreting the world', I will examine how and to what extent space is physically and conceptually altered as a result of early modern plague time

⁷⁶ Smith, 'Framing Shakespeare's Senses', p. 35; Bruce R. Smith, 'Premodern Sexualities', *PMLA*, 115.3 (2000), 318-29.

⁷⁷ Kevin Curran and James Kearney, 'Introduction', in 'Shakespeare and Phenomenology', *Criticism*, 54.3 (2012), 353- 64 (p. 359).

⁷⁸ Susann M. Lavery, 'Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2.3 (2003), 21-35 (p. 27); Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011); Simon Smith, Jackie Watson and Amy Kenny, *The Senses in Early Modern England, 1558-1660* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Chloe Kathleen Preedy, *Aerial Environments on the Early Modern Stage: Theatres of the Air, 1576-1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Darryl Chalk, 'Eros and Etiology in Love's Labour's Lost', *Humanities*, 11.152 (2022), 1-14; Laura Jayne Wright, *Sound Effects: Hearing the Early Modern Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023); Gail Kern Paster, *Humouring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Eric Langley, *Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

measures and what insights this might offer as to how these altered spaces are experienced.⁷⁹ In order to attend to these processes, I look to spatial studies for a suitable approach and vocabulary. As Kim Solga attests, space is not an easy concept to navigate or examine as ‘it constantly implicates and locates us, and yet it remains consciously, critically, beyond our grasp’.⁸⁰ The very nature of studying space is somewhat paradoxical as it is limitless in terms of the discoveries that might be made, and yet the findings are sometimes difficult to articulate ‘precisely’, as Joanne Tompkins notes.⁸¹ The terms ‘space’ and ‘place’, for instance, have such perceived emotional and intellectual correlation and yet their meanings are very different.⁸² Michel Certeau describes ‘place’ as being:

Order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.⁸³

Yi-Fu Tuan also suggests that as well as implying stability, ‘place’ is a necessary centre that provides for our ‘biological needs’ such as food, sleep, and sex’.⁸⁴ ‘Space’, on the other hand, is described by Tuan as far more abstract than ‘place’ as it is ‘not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)’.⁸⁵ Tuan conceptualises space kinetically and suggests that if we think of a ‘place’ as a pause in movement, then ‘space’, on the contrary, *is* movement.⁸⁶ As I attend to active responses to plague and the structures of meaning and

⁷⁹ Edward Soja, ‘Writing the City Spatially’, *City (London, England)*, 7.3 (2003), 269-80.

⁸⁰ Kim Solga, *Theory for Theatre Studies: Space* (London: Methuen Drama, 2019), p. 2.

⁸¹ Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre’s Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 11.

⁸² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 6.

⁸³ Michel Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven F. Rendal (Berkley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117.

⁸⁴ Tuan, p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

experience generated by these responses, I will predominantly use the term ‘space’ to ‘orient’ myself within what Mike Crang describes as an ‘intangible world’ where the movement and processes within that world might become ‘graspable and useable’.⁸⁷ I will use ‘place’ when referring to the physical architecture of, for instance, the material playhouse building that I engage with in Chapter Six.

As this thesis is concerned with the plague time experience as it is represented, it has also been necessary for me to draw upon documented historical insight into this experience to inform my readings. For this I look to social history, a field that I also borrow both terminology and frameworks from. As outlined earlier, I engage with the recent work of Turner, Crawshaw, and Inì to inform my thinking of contemporary conceptualisations of plague transmission. The work of Slack, Mullett, and, more recently, Andrew Wear are the main secondary sources that I will draw from in regard to the broader historical contexts of plague prevention interventions. I borrow key terminology from the recent work of Nicholas Eckstein. ‘Plague time’, as a term, has been used interchangeably within plague studies to denote more broadly the periods in which the disease was active in communities and in early modern imaginations. However, in his explorations of Florentine and Bolognese government response during sixteenth and seventeenth-century outbreaks of plague, Eckstein redefines this term and confers upon it a specificity that is particularly advantageous to my work. In his attempts to disentangle early modern plague prevention discourse from Foucauldian theory, Eckstein describes ‘plague time’ as a ‘dynamic’ that can be used as a non-metaphorical ‘frame of reference’ to denote a ‘spatio-temporal environment in which official actions and perceptions were determined solely by the spread of contagion’.⁸⁸ Eckstein suggests that:

⁸⁷ Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 10.

⁸⁸ Nicholas Eckstein, ‘Plague Time: Space, Fear, and Emergency Statecraft in Early Modern Italy’,

Plague time was a relationship with time and place that circumstances imposed first and foremost on policy makers and executive officials whom the state had charged with the responsibility of confronting the epidemic [...] Having said this, however, it does not follow that the effects of plague time were restricted to the governing class. As [...] many of the spatio-temporal consequences, mediated by emergency government directives, were felt by large numbers of the population.⁸⁹

As such, my application of this term within this thesis is as Eckstein delineates it; a shorthand that summons the specific structures of early modern plague prevention and its ecologies.

Furthermore, the framework of this thesis is inspired by the work of social historian Ruth MacKay who explores Spanish communal life alongside bubonic plague. MacKay's rich and methodical research focuses on the quotidian rather than the assumed 'pandemonium' that often accompanies discussions of plague discourse.⁹⁰ What makes MacKay's work so influential, however, is not only this fresh perspective but rather how this work has been shaped. MacKay's research is structured around important sites within the Spanish community that are referred to as 'anchors'.⁹¹ These 'anchors' include the 'palace', the 'street', and the 'market', and allow MacKay to focus on the ebb and flow of daily life within these locations. MacKay suggests that 'following a plague through communities offers us a way of understanding the meaning and variations of each site and the conflicts around it', and in this way each site provides a unique perspective from which the inquirer might view different aspects of the plague time experience.⁹² Following MacKay's lead, I have dropped my own 'anchors' in early modern London, 'anchors' that will allow me to better understand

Renaissance and Reformation, Special Issue: 'Experiencing the Environment in the Early Modern Period: Seasons, Senses, and Health', 44.2 (2021), 87-111 (p. 90); See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*; translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 195-9.

⁸⁹ Eckstein, p. 90.

⁹⁰ Ruth MacKay, *Life in the Time of Pestilence: The Great Castilian Plague of 1596-1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹² *Ibid.*

the cultural impact of plague time spatial ordering and its ensuing discourse within each individual site. As a social historian, MacKay sustains engagement with an array of historical documentation and data throughout her study, stating that literature or creative output from the community ‘appears’ only ‘here and there’.⁹³ Whilst I also propose to engage with historical sources on an equally sustained level, this is clearly the juncture at which our approaches constructively diverge. My study engages the literary and dramatic responses that MacKay uses sparingly as crucial primary documents in their own right, as they are fundamental to understanding the cultural and lived experience within the individual sites that they directly or indirectly speak to.

The specific sites that I have chosen to engage with are the Body, the Home, and the Street. The sites themselves have also been borrowed, this time from someone who lived and wrote through plague time, Thomas Nashe. In his 1593 *Christs Tears Over Jerusalem* that was written in response to the outbreak it emerges from, Nashe writes that ‘in this time of infection, we purge our houses, our bodies and our streets and look to all but our souls’.⁹⁴ Whilst also seemingly lamenting the moral state of London, it is these three sites that Nashe identifies as being the key foci for the city’s plague time efforts. What better directions could I receive, then, in terms of where to start looking for the experiences of plague prevention than from someone who endured it and witnessed the measures within these sites first-hand? However, it is important to note that whilst I have isolated these spaces in order to examine what is happening within them more thoroughly according to MacKay’s model, such rigid frames would not have existed in the period. As the following chapters demonstrate, the Body, the Home, and the Street are not only sites that inform and speak to one another conceptually

⁹³ Ibid., p. 1

⁹⁴ Thomas Nashe, *Christs tears over Jerusalem Whereunto is annexed, a comparative admonition to London* (London, 1593), STC 18366, p. 83.

within this work, but they were also sites that were understood to flow in and out of one another materially during the period.⁹⁵ As such, when I discuss the Body, Home, and Street as distinct sites, as I now move on to do, it is with the knowledge that these are spaces that meet and cross one another and that do not nor cannot operate in complete isolation.

In my considerations of the plague time Body, I engage with bodies that are both alive and dead. These two antithetical somatic states require, then, two different approaches. In order to inform the representations of the living body in early modern drama, I turn to historical constructions of the early modern Galenic body to gain insight into its conception during the period and the attempts made to keep it healthy during plague time. In this respect, engaging with Kern Paster, Healy, and Langley's more recent work on humoral theory and its broader medical frameworks will be instrumental.⁹⁶ Healy's reading of 'the plaguy body' in *Fictions of Disease* is particularly salient and one that this thesis hopes to speak to and build upon.⁹⁷ I have also drawn from Healy's work on contemporary health regimens alongside Jennifer Richards and Joan Fitzpatrick's insights into the cultural materiality of the regimens, which will allow me to consider these primary documents from multiple

⁹⁵ 'The humoral system as it was understood in the renaissance was a coherent part of the Neoplatonic paradigm in which the matter of each human person- each microcosm- was continuous with the matter of both social and wider natural macrocosms. Individual and social bodies could be analogous because of a quite literal interpermeability of bodies across different scales in a humoral cosmology [...] Humoral bodies were to be 'soluble', the healthier a body was, the more freely its matter interacted with the environment and hence the more effectively it maintained the dynamic equilibrium of health. To be solidified and self-enclosed was to be dangerously ill', Catherine Belling, 'Infectious Rape, Therapeutic Revenge: Bloodletting and the Health of Rome's Body', in *Disease, Diagnosis, and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. by Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 113-32 (p. 123).

⁹⁶ Margaret Healy, 'Why Me? Why Now? How? The Body in Health and Disease', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance*, ed. by Linda Kalof and William Bynum (Oxford: Berg Press, 2010), pp. 37-54; Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Gail Kern Paster, *Humouring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Eric Langley, *Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁹⁷ Healy, 'Fictions of Disease', pp. 50-122.

perspectives.⁹⁸ Medical and social history inform my readings of plague time corpses. Wear and Lucinda Cole's scholarship on early modern conceptualisations of bodily decomposition and putrefaction, its medical frameworks and, crucially, its role in disease transmission will be particularly helpful to consult alongside related primary sources from plague treatises and plague orders.⁹⁹ My examinations of the early modern plague time corpse mostly, however, engage with the groundbreaking work of Vanessa Harding, Claire Gittings, and Lukas Engleman whose social historical insight into plague time burial practices intersect more broadly with the fields of history of epidemiology, bioarcheology, and paleopathology.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, I draw on Susan Zimmermann, Helga L. Duncan, and Phillip Schwyzer's engagements with the theatrical early modern corpse to frame my initial thinking in regard to my approach of this evocative site.¹⁰¹

As with the site of the body, in order for me to explore the Home as it is represented on stage and also examine how the dynamics within shifted as a result of plague time measures, I draw on relevant scholarship from cultural materialism to better acquaint myself

⁹⁸ Jennifer Richards, 'Useful Books: Reading Vernacular Regimens in Sixteenth-Century England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73.2 (2012), 247-71; Joan Fitzpatrick, *Three Sixteenth Century Dietaries*, The Revels Plays Companion Library (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

⁹⁹ Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Vanessa Harding, "'And one more may be laid there': The Location of Burials in Early Modern London", *The London Journal*, 14.2 (1989), 112-29; Vanessa Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead in Early Modern London', *Epidemic Disease in London*, ed. J.A.I. Champion, Centre for Metropolitan History Working Papers Series, 1 (1993), 53-64; Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988); Lukas Engelmann, 'The Burial Pit as Bio-Historical Archive', in *Histories of Post-Mortem Contagion: Infectious Corpses and Contested Burials*, ed. by Christos Lynteris and Nicholas H. A. Evans (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 189-211.

¹⁰¹ Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); Helga L. Duncan, "Sumptuously Re-edified": The Reformation of Sacred Space in *Titus Andronicus*', *Comparative Drama*, 43.4 (2009), 425-53; Philip Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

with the physical space of the home and its material processes. I particularly look to the work of Lena Cowen Orlin for this, whose socio-historical constructions of the domestic space will serve as an important scaffold for my inquiries.¹⁰² I am also interested in the gendered dynamics of the early modern home and how these dynamics might have been altered by plague's prescribed prophylactic practices. As such, Emma Whipday's *Shakespeare's Domestic Tragedies: Violence in the Early Modern Home* which considers Shakespeare's domestic spaces alongside external non-literary texts, such as conduct manuals that speak to this dynamic, provides an invaluable working model for my thinking around this space and how the bodies that move within this permeable site are typically constructed.¹⁰³ Moreover, alongside relevant primary sources from conduct books and plague treatises, I look to social and cultural history for contextual insight into the domestic plague time experience. Kira Newman and Kathryn Wolford's broader historical insights into the sealed-up plague time home and its responses will be joined by the more specific feminist enquiries of Richelle Munkhoff, Elizabeth Mazzola, and Deborah E. Harkness that consider female workers within the space of the plague time home and in the wider medical marketplace.¹⁰⁴

In my approach to the Street, I adopt what is primarily an ecocritical lens. As I am interested in how plague time public health threats were understood and mitigated within the

¹⁰² Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994).

¹⁰³ Emma Whipday, *Shakespeare's Domestic Tragedies: Violence in the Early Modern Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Kira L. S. Newman, 'Shutt Up: Bubonic Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern England', *Journal of Social History*, 45.3 (2012), 809–34; Kathryn Wolford, 'Quarantining Contagion: Providentialist Debates over Plague and Public Health in Elizabethan and Jacobean England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 84 (2021), 273–305; Richelle Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead: Authority, Marginality, and the Interpretation of Plague in England, 1574–1665', *Gender & History*, 11.1 (1999), 1–29; Elizabeth Mazzola, "Whoso List to Find?": Hard Facts, Soft Data, and Women Who Count', *Critical Survey*, 34.1 (2022), 1–26; Deborah E. Harkness, 'A View from the Streets: Women and Medical Work in Elizabethan London', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82.1, 'Special Issue: Women, Health, and Healing in Early Modern Europe' (2008), 52–85.

early modern urban environment, Whitney and Foley's respective work on plague as an environmental aggressor provide excellent working models for this approach particularly as they also conduct London-centric readings of their primary texts. Within this wider ecocritical lens, I draw upon a variety of different disciplines, however. For instance, as I am considering both human and animal subjects within this site, the burgeoning field of animal studies, particularly the work of Molly Hand and Andreas Höfele, will help inform my approach to the animal body on stage.¹⁰⁵ I also engage with social history scholarship, particularly Mark Jenner and Emily Cockayne's work, that I will use to contextualise the animal body both culturally and historically and more specifically within contemporary public health systems and anxieties surrounding plague.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, I am also interested in the original material performance conditions of the animal on stage, namely what the printed stage directions might be suggesting about its aural presence in performance and how this might have influenced audience response. As such, theatre history scholarship and sensory studies will play a crucial role in my thinking here, and will include amongst others Bruce R. Smith's work on urban soundscapes, and Laura Jane Wright's very recent and innovative work on sound effects and stage directions on the early modern stage.¹⁰⁷

Lastly, the sextet of plays that this thesis examines (*Love's Labour's Lost*, *Titus Andronicus*, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, *The Woman's Prize*, *Measure for Measure*, and

¹⁰⁵ Molly Hand, 'Animals, the Devil, and the Sacred in Early Modern English Culture', in *Animals, Animality, and Literature*, ed. by Bruce Boehrer, Molly Hand, and Brian Massumi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 105-20; Andreas Höfele, *Stage, Stake, and Scaffold: Humans and Animals in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Mark S. R. Jenner, 'The Great Dog Massacre', in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, ed. by William Naphy and Penny Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 44-61; Emily Cockayne, 'Who Did Let the Dogs Out?—Nuisance Dogs in Late-Medieval and Early Modern England', in *Our Dogs, Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society*, ed. by Laura D. Gelfand (Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 41-67.

¹⁰⁷ Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Laura Jayne Wright, *Sound Effects: Hearing the Early Modern Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

The Witch of Edmonton) have been chosen because of their suggestive parallels and resonances with plague prevention policies or prescribed practices as well as their first likely performance dates. Having taken on board the suggestions made by Leeds Barroll and Crawshaw, I have tried to look beyond the more significant outbreaks to consider the smaller ebbs and flows of the endemic disease. Thus, in my considerations of *The Woman's Prize* in Chapter Four, I emphasise that although the play is likely first staged after a long period of theatre closures, the outbreak that it emerges from is not considered to be a major one – in the sense that mortality is relatively low – yet the disease's presence can still be clearly felt. Whitney offers a compelling counterargument for this, however, suggesting that the texts, such as Dekker and Middleton's pamphlets that emerge from major outbreaks hold immense discursive authority. Whitney argues, for instance, that the plague pamphlets 'gained urgency and power' during the period precisely 'because they appeared during or right after the huge catastrophe they chronicled and addressed anxious, dazed, and traumatised readers'.¹⁰⁸ As such, with the exception of *The Witch of Edmonton* that I suggest anticipates an outbreak, the remaining four plays all likely premiere immediately after a major London outbreak and its preventative measures. Like Whitney, I am interested in how my chosen texts, which I now turn to outline in more detail, might have been received in this immediate aftermath, and how they speak to the measures that in all likelihood were eased just months or weeks before their first respective stagings.

¹⁰⁸ Whitney, p. 215.

Chapter Outline

Each of the three spaces outlined above contain two case studies that each focus on a single play that speaks to a specific plague time experience. I begin with the smallest and most intimate site first, the Body, and then proceed to the more expansive spaces of the Home and the Street. Chapter One reads Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594) alongside contemporary plague treatises and health regimens, whose advice I suggest motivates the retreat of the King's court and the oaths made in the beginning of the play. Whilst this chapter's focus is on the plague time male health experience, I also consider how the women, both in Shakespeare's Navarre and those invoked in the regimens and plague treatises offstage, find themselves enmeshed within this experience. This chapter argues that despite the men's preventative labours, it is their exposure to the forbidden female visitors at court that render their bodies susceptible to early modern plague, an exposure that the new queen and her ladies also attempt to allay at the end of the play.

Whilst only one death is reported in *Love's Labour's*, death is seemingly everywhere in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594). Chapter Two examines to what extent the breakdown of funerary practices and the surplus unsystematic burials that are both represented and referenced in *Titus* speak to the anxieties and anguish surrounding the treatment of the plague dead beyond the playhouse. As well as the putrefactive plague time corpse that was a source of great anxiety during the period, this chapter examines three burial sites in *Titus*: the unburied, the Andronici tomb, and the pit in Act Two. It discusses how these burial spaces serve as analogues to the plague time interment sites offstage that were either deployed as preventative measures or dismantled by them. I argue that Shakespeare's tragedy provides a lens through which we might begin to piece together the impact that plague time policy had on established burial practices and the material spaces of mortality and mourning

in England that led to a profound reorganisation and reconceptualisation of human remains, especially in its capital city.

The notion of the contagious nature of plague and a hyperawareness of the permeable body also led to a keener alertness surrounding the penetrability of domestic space. Chapter Three reads Thomas Heywood's tragedy *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1604) as a play that draws on these anxieties and the subsequent onus placed on householders to cleanse and manage the home and its peripheries during plague time. This chapter examines the ways in which Heywood exploits his audience's familiarity with plague prevention policy and prescribed practice to introduce and remove infectious sources to and from the Frankford home, namely the adulterous Anne Frankford. It suggests that Heywood utilises the cultural immediacy of plague measures to expose and explore the hazards of female adultery that, like plague, threatened the integrity and autonomy of householders and their homes.

I turn to examine a second plague time home in Chapter Four. John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize* (1610) provides rare insight into how plague time policies and practices pertaining to the home physically and socially reoriented early modern domestic space. Although Fletcher's representations of a shut-up home and an alleged plague infection are clearly intended to be humorous, I suggest that this humour is in itself derived from the more serious implications of these measures. Despite the fact that his incarceration is brief, the plague-free Petruchio gains painful insight into the socio-spatial and socio-economic consequences of plague time incarceration at the hands of his wife, Maria. This chapter suggests that domestic plague policy is appropriated by Maria as an effective counterattack against patriarchal norms, one that not only mobilises its unfavourable spatial conditions but also marshals the controversial female plague workers who seize infected patriarchs and dominate their homes.

I then step outside the home to the urban street, where I encounter public health politics and the pests of plague time. Chapter Five contextualises Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* in the 1603-4 outbreak that it emerges from and that I suggest it responds to. I read *Measure* alongside another text that emerged during this period, Dekker and Middleton's plague pamphlet *News from Gravesend*, and suggest that, like the pamphlet, Shakespeare's play engages with the socio-spatial conditions that create plague and the policies that were put in place to counteract it. In placing *Measure* alongside the politically daring *News from Gravesend*, I demonstrate what I consider to be the play's sustained engagement with the significant political discourse that emerged in the aftermath of the 1603-4 outbreak. This was discourse that disrupted and complicated the established narratives of urban plague and its contributing factors, and that shifted the blame from the vagrant poor to the negligent authorities who had failed in their duty of care.

Chapter Six momentarily delivers us from the pestilential city to the outlying parish where it is only a matter of time before plague enters in pursuit. This final chapter offers a zoocentric examination of the character of Dog in John Ford, Thomas Dekker, and William Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), which attends to the creature's widespread associations with early modern plague. It examines how and to what extent Dog typifies the cultural fears surrounding the masterless 'pest', who became an animal that was widely scapegoated and eradicated from communities during outbreaks. As well as undermining the very fabric of society by questioning and finally rejecting the contemporary ideals of domesticity, Dog in his vagrant animal form would have been impossible to separate from the disease that he was believed to spread and the brutal preventive measures that his species was subjected to. As such, exclusive of his devilish pedigree, I suggest that Dog is a

pathogenically precarious presence in Edmonton, one that London audiences would have been only too aware of.

Together, I present these plays as carefully historicised and nuanced phenomenological accounts of the urban plague time experience that demonstrate the profound impact of this experience on both material and cultural space in early modern England. This thesis offers the first sustained study of plague prevention policy and practice in early modern drama. As I hope to illustrate, these policies and practices conditioned the space of the early modern body, the home, and the street in unprecedented ways during outbreaks of plague. These are the same spaces that I suggest are also represented or referenced on the early modern stage in response to these conditions, spaces that when examined more closely might reveal more about how plague time measures were assimilated and understood within wider culture, and how they transformed lives in ways that are distinct from the disease itself. Thus, this thesis will not only further illustrate the importance of early modern drama as a store of cultural memory and emotive engagement within the field of plague studies, but it also hopes to invite new conversations between plague literature studies, theatre history, social history, public health, and medical humanities more broadly. These are conversations that in light of our own pandemic experiences may prove to be a timely and important pursuit.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ This is especially important if we are indeed entering the ‘age of pandemics’ as some experts, such as Peter Piot, suggest: Joanna Roberts, ‘How we prepare for an “age of pandemics”’, *Horizon: The EU Research and Innovation Magazine* (June 2021) <<https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/horizon-magazine/how-we-prepare-age-pandemics>> [accessed 07 February 2024].

I The Body

Regimens and Remains

Chapter One

‘Sweet health and fair desires’: Plague Time Health Regimens in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*

In Act Two, Scene One of Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, the French Princess and her attending women arrive at the gates of Navarre’s ‘silent court’ where it has been decreed that ‘no woman may approach’ (2.1.24).¹ Before she attempts to enter The King’s ‘forbidden gates’, the Princess ‘single[s]’ her attending Lord Boyet as her ‘best-moving fair solicitor’ to ascertain the conditions surrounding her ‘admittance’ into the royal residence (2.1.80). Boyet returns to the princess with this response:

Navarre had notice of your fair approach,
And he and his competitors in oath
Were all addressed to meet you, gentle lady,
Before I came. Marry, thus much I have learned:
He rather means to lodge you in the field,
Like one that comes to besiege his court,
Than seek a dispensation for his oath,
To let you enter his unpeopled house (2.1.81-8).

Boyet’s report clearly establishes the female visitors as an invading ‘force’ whose presence at the barricaded court threatens the ‘strong [...] stand’ of the remaining ‘brave conquerors’ who have sworn to ‘war against’ their ‘own affections’ (1.1.8-11).² Even after meeting with the King himself, the ‘fair Princess’ is shocked to learn that she and her ladies ‘may not come [...] within’ the ‘gates’, and are, indeed, ‘denied fair harbour in’ the royal ‘house’ (2.1.174). By denying the women admittance into the court on the basis of the oaths that will be examined in this chapter, the King believes that he is sparing himself and the remaining male

¹ All references to *Love’s Labour’s* are taken from: William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, ed. by H.R. Woudhuysen, The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 1998).

² ‘The King tries to parley with them outside as if they are an invading army’, Darryl Chalk, ‘Eros and Etiology in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*’, *Humanities*, 11.152 (2022), 1-14 (p. 9).

inhabitants from an all-out female assault, whereby the men would be forced to forswear their oaths and ‘yield unto [un]liberal reason’ (2.1.167).

However, the unsettling presence of the women at court threatens to ‘breach’ far more than just the delicate walls of masculine ‘honour’ (2.1.167-9), as the arrival of the Princess and her ladies throws both the moral and physical integrity of Navarre and his ‘bookmen’ into question (2.1.226). Even before the men have retreated back into the confines of the ‘unpeopled’ court in Act Two, Scene One, it is clear that their short conference with the women has left them physically compromised (2.1.88). Berowne is now ‘sick at the heart’ (2.1.184), Longueville, who earlier urged ‘meek’ and ‘moderate’ conduct (1.1.194), is suddenly overcome by ‘choler’ (2.1.205), and The King himself ‘is infected’ (2.1.227), the Princess uncomfortably ‘lodged in his ‘heart’ (2.1.173). Not only, then, does female company within the sequestered and systematic court weaken male resolve, but it also physiologically diminishes male bodies and undermines the strategic somatic defences that, I suggest, underpin the oaths that are made in the play’s opening scene. This chapter considers the male health experience in Shakespeare’s comedy through the lens of contemporary health regimens and plague treatises; texts that were largely intended, as Don Adriano de Armado intimates, for ‘gentleman’ or an elite, male-leaning readership (1.1.228).³ Not only do these medical texts prescribe and outline systems that aim to fortify and preserve male health but, like *Love’s Labour’s*, they also locate women as a particularly formidable enemy and, as this

³ Andrew Wear argues that it is most likely that the majority of readers of medical regimens and treatises hailed from the ‘male social elite’, a section of society which was ‘large enough to provide buyers’ and an audience, ‘but small enough to give them a sense of being special, both socially and medically’, Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 164-5; ‘Health regimens grew in size, number and form across early modern Europe and by the late seventeenth century they had been transformed from individualised regimens, largely designed for high-ranking men, into accessible and affordable handbooks of healthcare that catered for different ranks, ages and lifestyles of men and women’, Sasha Handley, *Sleep in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 22.

chapter illustrates, one that is to be especially avoided during outbreaks of plague. As such, this chapter suggests that the men's actions are not entered into wholly by choice but, as The King himself notes, through 'mere necessity' in the hopes of warding off a disease that Shakespeare constantly evokes throughout the play (1.1.146).

That Shakespeare would draw upon plague time preventative practices in *Love's Labour's* is unsurprising given the comedy's position within plague culture. Absent from the Stationers' Register, the earliest extant quarto for *Love's Labour's* was printed in 1598 and alludes to a previous Christmas performance at court. This has led scholars to date the play's composition and first likely performance from as early as 1594 to as late as 1597.⁴ As H.R. Woudhuysen notes, however, the most likely date of composition and performance for *Love's Labour's* is attributed to 1594-5, with 1594 being the most 'plausible' owing to the lengthy plague time theatre closures that only came to an end in the spring of that year, and 'the reorganisation of London's playing companies' that occurred as a result.⁵ Many companies known to be in existence prior to 1593 had disappeared by 1595.⁶ These prolonged closures, the first of many in Shakespeare's career, saw the printing of the out-of-work actor/playwright's narrative poems *Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*.⁷ As such, the accepted 1594 dating locates *Love's Labour's* in the immediate wake of a lengthy and undoubtedly traumatic plague outbreak that began in London in the autumn of 1592 and continued at low levels into the winter of 1594, and that not only claimed twelve percent of

⁴ Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, 'Love's Labours Lost', in *British Drama 1533-1642: British Drama Catalogue*, Vol. 3, 1590-1597, pp. 320-5 (p. 320).

⁵ Woudhuysen, pp. 59-61; no other outbreak was 'comparable to the violence of the pestilence that struck Shakespeare's dramatic writing career in 1592-3', J. Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Stuart Years* (London; New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 74.

⁶ E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, Vol 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 74.

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Rape of Lucrece* (London, 1594), STC 22345; *Venus and Adonis* (London, 1594), STC 22355.

London's population but also shook its commercial theatre scene.⁸ Therefore, even after it had waned, it is clear how the experience of this outbreak and its prolonged preventive measures might have loomed large in the collective cultural consciousness of playing company members and playgoers for many years to come.

Given its plague time context and the sustained textual references to disease and contagion within the comedy (both of which will be considered in this chapter), I am certainly not the first to think about *Love's Labour's* within these frameworks. However, it is the early modern conceptualisation of melancholy – a 'condition' that, as Erin Sullivan notes, in its broader sense has 'arguably become emblematic of the period' – that has dominated medical-historical approaches to the play in recent years.⁹ More specifically, it is 'erotic melancholy' or lovesickness, one of melancholy's prominent subcategories, that has attracted scholars such as Drew Daniel and, more recently, Darryl Chalk, to the play. Daniel, for instance, suggests that:

Shakespeare draws upon opposing elements from melancholy's divided intellectual history. The men of Navarre's court, in particular Armado and Biron, fashion themselves as melancholic geniuses after the Aristotelian model of 'genial melancholy.' By contrast, the account of Katherine's sister's death from 'heaviness of heart' radically refigures melancholy not as a discursive affectation but as a deadly serious kind of affect, a depressive illness more consistent with the teachings of Galenic medicine.¹⁰

Building on Daniel's work, Chalk explores this more 'serious' intellectual history of melancholy, or more precisely erotic melancholy, which he understands to be a 'material

⁸ Woudhuysen, p. 59; Charles Creighton, *A History of Epidemics in Britain*, Vol 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), pp. 351-6.

⁹ Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 4.

¹⁰ Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 69.

ailment' within the play that is 'transferred via the senses as a somatic infection' and that holds 'all the deadly import of the plague itself'.¹¹ Similarly, Eric Langley's brief explorations of *Love's Labour's* also perceive it to be a play that is highly alert to the very real risks that sensory and physical 'contact' held in plague time, suggesting that *Love's Labour's* questions 'the worth of love in a world of non-metaphorical plague'.¹²

Importantly, Langley also exposes the contemporary connection between melancholy and the body's susceptibility to prevalent diseases such as plague, in which 'a melancholy sens[ability]' was thought to 'render an otherwise innocent sufferer susceptible to the pestilence' through a process of 'pathologic sympathy'.¹³ Langley explains how:

The melancholy body becomes an ideal host to the hostile bedside visit of a companionable sickness; indeed, melancholy, literally, physically adapts the body's composition in order to make it more hospitable to its aggressive visitor, to make it feel at home.¹⁴

Langley does not explicitly explore this connection in regard to *Love's Labour's*, however, nor does he include the rich writings that speak to this connection that are present within plague time regimens and plague treatises. During the outbreak in 1603, for instance, surgeon Thomas Thayre notes that although melancholy was the humour that he considered the least 'apt to be infected', he adds that it was also the humour that was 'hardly cured being infected'.¹⁵ The general consensus outlined in plague treatises was that melancholy, regardless of its origins, was an unequivocally dangerous humoral state for the body to be in during

¹¹ Chalk, p. 2.

¹² Eric Langley, *Shakespeare's Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 13-4.

¹³ Langley, p. 63.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 63-4.

¹⁵ Thomas Thayre, *A treatise of the pestilence wherein is showed all the causes thereof, with most assured preservatives against all infection* (London, 1603), STC 23929, p. 39.

plague time. William Bullein in his *Government of Health* (1558), for example, argues that the absence of mirth ‘in plague time bringeth on the pestilence through painful melancholy’.¹⁶ Furthermore, Thomas Twyne, translating the plague treatise of Pierre Drouet in 1603, notes that ‘many are of opinion that the Pestilence is [...] a burning Fever, and judge that it proceeded from Melancholic blood, either putrefying, or boiling’.¹⁷ Similarly, Simon Kellwaye (1593) understands plague as a disease that ‘proceed[s] of adusted [scorched] and melancholic blood, which may be easily perceived by the extreme heat and inflammation which inwardly they do feel that are infected therewith, first assaulting the heart and astonishing the vital spirits’.¹⁸

Given the clear links between plague infection and melancholic blood within the health regimens and plague treatises mentioned above, it is little wonder that bodies with ‘fever[ish]’ ‘blood’ (4.3.92), and similarly ‘assaulted’ hearts, ‘haunt’ Shakespeare’s court in *Love’s Labour’s* (1.1.160).¹⁹ Importantly, this nexus refocuses the material threat of early modern plague as a distinct, dangerous, and far more likely condition to cause genuine somatic harm in Shakespeare’s Navarre. And although clearly culturally interwoven, as Daniel, Chalk, and Langley have illustrated, the plague time treatises and regimens present plague as a disease that can and does exist independently in the world of the play, and of the

¹⁶ William Bullein, *A new book entituled the government of health wherein is uttered many notable rules for mans preservation* (London, 1558), STC 4039, p. 123.

¹⁷ Pierre Drouet, *A new council against the pestilence declaring what kind of disease it is*; Alternate title: *Consilium novum de pestilential*, trans. by Thomas Twyne (London, 1578), STC 7241, D4^v.

¹⁸ Simon Kellwaye, *A defensative against the plague containing two parts or treatises* (London, 1593), STC 14917, B1^f.

¹⁹ I am thinking here particularly about Berowne’s line ‘O my little heart!’ (3.1.181).

medical conceptualisations of erotic melancholy that have preoccupied its recent scholarship.²⁰

Whilst this chapter owes a great debt to the work mentioned above, it principally speaks to and extends the work of John Kerrigan who, likewise, perceives plague to be ‘a fearsome’ and ‘overhanging threat’ in *Love’s Labour’s*.²¹ Kerrigan considers the comedy alongside university matriculation oaths, and examines more widely what it means to both swear and perjure oaths in Elizabethan plague time. Kerrigan notes that as ‘semi-rural’ colleges within the early modern period, Oxford and Cambridge were a relatively safe distance from London and its ‘contagious [...] thronging together of companies’.²² When plague did, inevitably, arrive on college doorsteps, ‘students withdrew’ even further into their surrounding rustic spaces, often with ‘their tutors to country houses kept for that purpose’.²³ And, like the sequestered Lords and their oaths in *Love’s Labour’s*, the matriculation pledges of Elizabethan college members, required as a means of ‘regulating conduct and rooting out recusants’, were ‘in principle’ stringent:

A student’s day began between 4 and 5 a.m., with prayer and preaching. Diet could be spartan—beef, pottage, oatmeal, salt—and recreation was limited: ‘No sword-playing, fencing, or dancing-school, or gaming-house, shall exist, or be frequented, within the town of Cambridge’.²⁴

²⁰ Especially since, as Daniel notes, ‘Medical theorists who describe melancholy itself as leading to death are extremely rare; melancholy was not thought of typically as a fatal illness in and of itself’ unlike plague, Daniel, p. 88.

²¹ John Kerrigan, *Shakespeare’s Binding Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 72.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

As such, life at these removed and restrained scholastic institutions, along with their plague time contexts, provide a suggestive ‘analogue for Navarre and his celibate “vowfellows” living a studious life in retreat from the plague’, as Kerrigan has argued.²⁵

Kerrigan’s compelling analogue for Shakespeare’s academic retreat is one of established educational institutions that find themselves displaced by plague. Instead, this chapter argues that the oaths that are made and the ‘little academy’ that is founded in Shakespeare’s isolated court is established *because* of plague, and are deliberate, proactive measures against it (1.1.13).²⁶ Furthermore, I argue that the narrative of *Love’s Labour’s* not only begins with but is circumscribed by actions underpinned by these same anxieties and advice. A second set of plague time inspired actions, promising far more efficacy than their predecessors, are proposed by the new Queen of France and her ladies-in-waiting at the play’s close. Juliet Mentzer notes ‘the symmetry of oaths from the onset of the imagined Academe to the penance dispensed to each male courtier by the ladies of France in the ending’, and outlines the one crucial difference between these two ‘labours’.²⁷ Mentzer suggests that in the beginning of Shakespeare’s comedy, ‘the courtiers’ are understood ‘mutually’; they ‘are grouped like schoolboys’ or ‘as fellows jesting in the state of adolescence’.²⁸ Yet, at the play’s conclusion:

Their new oaths are not mutual, the exclusionary male space that they hoped to inhabit at the start is completely disbanded as they must serve their new penances singularly [as they] are made to undertake tasks specific to their main follies.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁶ In his 1607 translation of *Regimen sanitates Salerni* (attributed to Joannes De Mediolano), John Harrington also refers to the regimen as ‘a little *academa* where every man may be a Graduate and proceed Doctor in the ordering of his own body’, Fitzpatrick, p. 2.

²⁷ Julianne Mentzer, ‘Exclusionary Male Space and the Limitations of Discursive Reasoning in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*’, *Actes des Congrès de la Société Française Shakespeare*, 32 (2015), 1-13 (p. 10).

²⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

Like Mentzer, I also believe this transition from shared to singular to be significant, especially when viewed within the context of health regimens and treatises that, as will be discussed, were understood to be effective purely because they were tailored to the individual.

Importantly, this reading also takes into account the play's setting and what is a highly socio-economically privileged royal household, within which, it can safely be assumed, no expense or time was spared to safeguard the health of the monarch and their court. Elizabeth I, for example, had doctors, surgeons, and 'several apothecaries' at her disposal which, as Elizabeth Lane Furdell notes, 'she relied on [...] for her own and her household's pharmaceutical needs'.³⁰ One of Elizabeth's apothecaries, John Hemingway, kept 'fastidious records' of the treatments and services he supplied to the royal household, which included supervising the cleansing and perfuming of apparel, rooms, 'closets, chambers, and chapels with rosewater and cloves' and other herbaceous blends that defended the court from 'deleterious smells' that could give rise to diseases 'such as plague'.³¹ As Furdell suggests, Hemingway's account book 'indicates how demanding the Elizabethan household must have been', as it shows how Hemingway made 'pills, plasters, powders, clysters, suppositories, candy lozenges[...], spiced wine, mixed cosmetics, and cold creams, and prepared aromatic, therapeutic baths' for the household.³² And whilst we cannot know to what extent plague time advice was adhered to and practiced by its non-royal readers, especially those already under the emotional and financial pressures of an epidemic, these offstage court practices provide the unique circumstances against which I read Navarre's court and its engagements with plague time bodily health.

³⁰ Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *The Royal Doctors, 1485-1714: Medical Personnel at the Tudor and Stuart Courts* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), p. 89.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

This chapter begins by briefly contextualising Navarre's court within the broader medical frameworks that inform this plague time reading. From here, I read The King's retreat and the oaths made within it alongside plague time discourse, health regimens, and plague treatises as actions that are informed by this plethora of printed plague time advice. Health regimens such as Thomas Elyot's *Castle of Health* (1537), and Thomas Cogan's *Haven of Health* (1584), and plague treatises such as Simon Kellwaye's *Defensative Against the Plague* (1593), John Vandernote's *The Governance and preservation of them that fear the plague* (1569), and Thomas Lodge's *A Treatise of the Plague* (1603), all stress the efficacy of moderation that it was particularly important to adopt and uphold during outbreaks of plague, and against which early modern treatments were typically unsuccessful.³³ The second half of this chapter will consider the ways in which plague time regimens and treatises not only urge the regular observation and moderation of one's body, but also outline the many assailants that might compromise the delicate equilibrium of that body. Within which, sexual relations – even non-intimate contact with the opposite sex – are characterised as particularly pernicious actions during outbreaks of plague. As Berowne notes, women had the capacity to 'transform' their admirer's delicate physiologies, making them more susceptible to the disease (4.3.79). I suggest in the final section that it is this susceptibility that triggers the second wave of preventative measures administered by The Queen and her ladies at the end of the play, those also drawing on printed plague time advice. The chapter begins not with an examination of *Love's Labour's*, however, but with Shakespeare's later play, *Macbeth*, which not only

³³ Thomas Elyot, 'The Castle of Health', in *Three Sixteenth Century Dietaries*, ed. by Joan Fitzpatrick, *The Revels Plays Companion Library* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 40-157; Thomas Cogan, *The haven of health, chiefly gathered for the comfort of students, and consequently of all those that have a care of their health* (London, 1584), STC 5478; John Vandernote, *The governance and preservation of them that fear the plague* (London, 1569), STC 18600; Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague containing the nature, signs, and accidents of the same* (London, 1603), STC 16676.

shows us how both the early modern body and its aggressors are conceptualised but reveals why regimens and treatises were considered to be so necessary in preserving general health during the period.

A Castle of Health?

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses (1.6.1-3).

Upon entering Macbeth's castle with Banquo, Shakespeare's King Duncan makes important connections between the fortified structure, the air that surrounds it, and its effect on his body's 'senses'. These connections are by no means arbitrary. Duncan's first impressions of the Macbeths fortified home encapsulates contemporary medical thinking surrounding disease diagnosis and prevention that, as Margaret Healy notes, conceives the early modern body as a 'fortified yet vulnerable enclosure' that was 'threatened constantly by "enemie" incursions'.³⁴ Macbeth's castle, then, when discussed in this context, clearly models the early modern body vulnerable to disease. As Emma Whipday points out, this ostensibly benign castle air sits in direct contrast to the 'filthy' and malignant 'air' that engulfs the witches and that Banquo has recently encountered himself (1.1.11).³⁵ In accordance with the Galenic teachings, which still dominated explanations of health and disease in the period, the castle/body's many assailants included '[un]nimble' and '[un]sweet' air that this open and porous system was apt to receive via its 'delicate' olfactory senses (1.6.10).³⁶ These aerial assailants, along with other

³⁴ Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 18.

³⁵ Emma Whipday, *Shakespeare's Domestic Tragedies: Violence in the Early Modern Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 179.

³⁶ For further discussion on the smellscape of *Macbeth* and its interactions with playhouse space see: Johnathan Gil Harris, 'The Smell of "*Macbeth*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58.4 (2007), 465-86.

environmental aggressors, such as improper diet and ungoverned behaviours, which will be examined in more detail in due course, were considered hazardous largely because of their ability to influence the volume and consistency of the four humours that maintained the early modern body.

Galenic humoralism, as well as providing the bedrock of early modern medicine, positioned medical thought in the natural world by separating the body and its processes from magic and superstition, and conceived of illness and disease as ‘natural process[es]’ that arose from humoral imbalance.³⁷ As Healy suggests:

According to the Galenic model, body and mind, man and the elements were intimately associated and any one of these parts of nature could become disordered, transmitting its chaos to the others.³⁸

Thus, the sensory organs, like Duncan’s nose in *Macbeth* that connects the body to its surroundings, not only enabled the body to ‘negotiate the world’, as Karen Raber suggests, but also granted ‘opportunities to invasion, corruption, or assault’, as Duncan’s subsequent murder within the very castle that he and Banquo first praise for its ‘wooing’ ‘smells’, demonstrates (1.6.7).³⁹

‘Sweet air’ and its humour-friendly qualities were in seemingly short supply during Shakespeare’s career, a period beset by endemic plague (3.1.4). During outbreaks of the disease, air was thought to harbour the malignant ‘seeds of plague’ which were carried on the wind via malodorous scents that might then be taken into the body via its orifices.⁴⁰ It was,

³⁷ Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, p. 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁹ Karen Raber, ‘The Common Body: Renaissance Popular Beliefs’, in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance*, ed. by Linda Kalof and William Bynum (Oxford: Berg Press, 2010), pp. 99-124 (p. 106).

⁴⁰ Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, p. 21.

therefore, imperative for the early modern body to take ‘wholesome air’ whenever and wherever possible in order to ‘preserve man’s body in health’.⁴¹ Like Duncan’s arrival at Macbeth’s court, Armado in *Love’s Labour’s* considers himself to be another grateful recipient of this sought-after healthful air, which allows him to ‘breathe free breath’, and that seemingly flows abundantly in and around Navarre’s court at the beginning of the play (5.2.717):

So it is, besieged with sable-coloured melancholy, I did commend the black oppressing humour to the most wholesome physic of thy health-giving air; and, as I am a gentleman, betook myself to walk (1.1.226-8).

Armado’s perception of the restorative nature of the royal court, and its resident ruler, is in many ways a conventional one. For royal subjects, being in the presence of the monarch was often conceived to be a physical and spiritual tonic; a ‘wholesome physic’(1.1.227). A ‘royal touch’ from the ruler, for instance, was thought to be effective in curing diseases such as scrofula, otherwise known as the ‘King’s Evil’, a ceremonial act that Stephen Brogan suggests ‘became grander’ during Elizabeth I’s reign.⁴² Francis Bacon also describes the similarly curative effects of James I’s breath upon his accession in 1603, which he likens to ‘good perfume’ that cleanses England’s corrupt air.⁴³

However, Armado’s elucidations regarding the ‘health-giving’ properties of Navarre’s court extend beyond these established therapeutic powers of the monarch (1.1.227). Armado perceives his Galenic castle/body to be under attack. He believes it to be ‘besieged with sable-coloured melancholy’, a state which, as discussed, renders him more susceptible to diseases such as plague. Armado, like many others in Shakespeare’s comedy both male and female is

⁴¹ Anonymous, *A brief declaration for what manner of special nuisance concerning private dwelling houses* (London, 1636), STC 6453.5, B2^r.

⁴² Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine, and Sin* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015), pp. 64-5.

⁴³ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 187.

alert to the physiological changes that occur within the body, as well as the humoural shifts that transpire, as a result of what Gail Kern Paster describes as the ‘fungibl[e]’ body’s changing environment.⁴⁴ More significantly, those residing at Navarre’s court are also conscious of the somatic consequences of such shifts. Armado first hopes to assuage these consequences by undertaking some gentle exercise near the court’s ‘curious-knotted garden’ (1.1.239). Walking was considered to be an especially beneficial ‘moderate exercise’ as it moved the body but did not often provoke a sweat, which, as will be discussed more in Chapter Three, was understood to be detrimental to plague time health.⁴⁵

As such, Thayre in his plague treatise recommends a ‘walk in gardens, or sweet and pleasant fields’ to ensure that the air that the body receives during its exertion is, as Armado suggests, ‘wholesome’.⁴⁶ Armado is clearly aware of advice such as Thayre’s, and conceives of The King’s sequestered court as the early modern equivalent of a ‘wellness retreat’ that aims to ‘balance body’ and ‘mind’ ‘in supportive contexts’ through a combination of wholesome ‘pre-prescribed activities’ and ‘practices’.⁴⁷ Armado, like the other men at The King’s ‘retreat’ (a term which by 1611 denoted ‘a house, lodging, harbour, station, place of stay, or an abode’), is clearly using this unique homosocial space, and the healing opportunities it seemingly facilitates, to take practical steps to improve and maintain the health of his plague time body.⁴⁸ The men’s bodies are brought into sharper focus through their isolation, a social-spatial hiatus which, as will now be discussed, functions as a preventative measure in and of itself.

⁴⁴ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 133.

⁴⁵ Elyot, p. 110.

⁴⁶ Thayre, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Catherine Kelly, ‘Wellness Tourism: Retreat Visitor Motivations and Experiences’, *Tourism Recreation Research*, 37.3 (2015), 205-13 (p. 205).

⁴⁸ ‘Esbergement: m’, Randle Cotgrave, ‘A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues (1611)’, *LEME* <<https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry/298/18136>> [accessed 13 February 2024].

Court's Out for Summer: A Plague Time Retreat

In June 1593, the Privy Council issued a proclamation that aimed to 'restrain access to the court' on account of the plague raging in London.⁴⁹ Just three months later, when deaths from the disease were rising rapidly, an additional decree ordered the instant dismissal of 'lodgers near court'.⁵⁰ These orders reaffirmed a significant decree given the previous year, on the 12th October 1592, which ordered the closure of the English court in response to plague, the scale of which had never been seen before.⁵¹ In order to 'preserve' the Queen and 'her court [...] from the infection of sickness in this time', this proclamation outlines a series of access restrictions that aimed to shield the sovereign and her privy council from 'the great peril and danger' of the disease:

All private suitors shall forbear to come to the court where her majesty shall reside until the 20th of November next. And if there shall be any extraordinary cause for any person to come to the court with matter to be certified to her majesty [...] who shall require to be heard presently without further delay, the same party shall not enter within the gates of her majesty's court until he have either by her majesty's porters or her gates or by some other person allowed to serve within the court given knowledge of his name and country from whence he cometh.⁵²

The stringent parameters surrounding the royal household, which by the summer of 1593 was 'in out places and a great part of the household cut off', illustrates how prevention was seen to be key.⁵³ Withdrawing the monarch from their subjects and barricading them within their

⁴⁹ *A proclamation to restrain access to the court, of all such as are not bound to Ordinarie attendance* (London, 1593), STC 8230.

⁵⁰ Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, '758: Expelling unlicensed Lodgers near court', *Tudor Royal Proclamations, 1588-1603*, Vol 3, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111; In September 1578, a proclamation issued that discouraged 'the continuance' of the 'repair and resort' to court in order to avoid the disease that 'might ensue unto her most royal person', *By the Queene. Forasmuch as the Queens Majesty our sovereign lady is credibly informed, that the infection of the plague is at this present in sundry places, in and about the city of London* (London, 1578), STC 8097.5.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Creighton, p. 352.

reduced court was understood to be the best course of action in the face of plague. That Shakespeare in *Love's Labour's*, a play that very likely premiered in the wake of this same outbreak, would choose to present a monarch who has, likewise, 'sworn out housekeeping' (2.1.104), and withdrawn from their subjects to a court whose strict access restrictions also leave 'private suitors' standing at the 'gates' (2.1.26), then, begs further consideration.

Retreat from plague, however, was not just a royal phenomenon, as Master Lovewit in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, who 'quit, for fear, his house in town' upon hearing that the plague is 'hot', demonstrates.⁵⁴ The wealthy had been fleeing plague for centuries. Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, for instance, follows a group of young Florentines in their attempts to outrun the 'deadly plague' in the fourteenth century.⁵⁵ There is also a well-documented story of plague time flight that is directly contemporaneous with *Love's Labour's*, which features a wealthy household that too formed its own very aptly named 'little academy' during the outbreak of 1592-3.⁵⁶ As Paul Whitfield White notes, in the autumn of 1592, Archbishop Whitgift 'extended his usual summer retreat' in Croydon 'due to the terrible outbreak of plague ravaging London'.⁵⁷ It is very likely that the Archbishop's palace, which during this time was filled with 'scholars, chaplains, and other clerics', provided a place of refuge for playwright and pamphleteer Thomas Nashe. Nashe's 'occasional piece' *Summer's Last Will and Testament* speaks to the desperation of plague time London, a play likely written

⁵⁴ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook; revised edition, New Mermaids (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p. 6.

⁵⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, ed. by Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 6.

⁵⁶ Paul Whitfield White, 'Archbishop Whitgift and the Plague in Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*', in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. by Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 125-36 (p. 132).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

and first performed at this retreat.⁵⁸ And whilst it is unlikely that *Love's Labour's* first audiences would have known in any great detail, if at all, the particulars of Whitgift's retreat (especially since Nashe's text was not printed in quarto until 1600) the socio-spatial similarities it shares with Navarre's secluded court are nevertheless compelling. The final song from *Summer's Last Will* below illustrates the anxious tedium that might arise for those waiting-out plague in their country 'retreats':

Gone is our sport, fled is poor *Croydon's* pleasure:
Short days, Sharp days, long nights come on a pace,
Ah who shall hide us, from the Winters face?
Cold doth increase, the sickness will not cease,
And here we lie God knows, with little ease:
From winter, plague & pestilence, good Lord deliver us.⁵⁹

As Rebecca Totaro notes, for those who could afford to do so, 'flight from infected regions was a common practice' and one that was 'advocated by doctors' who usually fled plague epicentres themselves.⁶⁰ Cogan in 1584 translates a Latin proverb that heartily recommends the action of flight during outbreaks: 'Fly quickly from the place infected, abide far off, and return not soon again'.⁶¹ Almost ten years later, Kellwaye argues that whilst he cannot fully condone the practice of flight on the grounds of it being 'a very uncharitable course', he concurs that it is best to 'fly far off from the place infected' and 'not over hastily to return there again, for fear of an afterclap'.⁶² Similarly, in the much later outbreak of 1636, physician Stephen Bradwell maintains that 'those that keep themselves private [...] are least

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 132; Thomas Nashe, *A pleasant comedy, called Summers last will and testament* (London, 1600), STC 18376.

⁵⁹ Ibid., II^v.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Totaro, *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), p. 39.

⁶¹ Cogan, p. 263.

⁶² Kellwaye, B2^v.

subject to infection'.⁶³ Like many other physicians within the period, then, prescriptions and preventative measures implemented against plague derived from Galenic doctrine which, as Khandakar Shahin Ahmed suggests, emphasise 'the necessity of hygiene, sanitation' and, importantly, 'social isolation' when fighting disease.⁶⁴

There were, however, other methods of safeguarding the body against plague in the early modern period besides isolation. English health regimens, or dietaries, first appeared in the early sixteenth century. The first was an English translation of a medieval text, *Regimen sanitates Salerni* (*The Salernitan Rule of Health*) by Thomas Paynell in 1528.⁶⁵ The second, albeit the first original regimen written in the English vernacular for 'English people', was diplomat and humanist scholar Thomas Elyot's *Castle of Health*, first printed in around 1537.⁶⁶ Elyot's title is, as Joan Fitzpatrick notes, a reference to 'the traditional' and aforementioned 'notion of the body as a fortress under siege from threatening forces, against which a strong regimen might launch a defence'.⁶⁷ Elyot's regimen was certainly the most popular of its time, with eighteen editions printed by 1610, the date of the latest extant edition.⁶⁸ As a result of its popularity, *Castle of Health* sparked a number of subsequent regimens that followed the Galenic castle/body model, such as William Bullein's *Bulwark of Defence* (1562) and James Manning's *I am for you All, Complexions Castle* (1604).⁶⁹

⁶³ Stephen Bradwell, *Physick for the sickness, commonly called the plague* (London, 1636), STC 3536, C2^r.

⁶⁴ Khandakar Shahin Ahmed, 'Dis/embodied Body: Representation of Plague in Thomas Nashe's 'A Litany in the Time of Plague' and Thomas Dekker's 'London Looke Backe'', *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 13.2 (2021), 1-8 (p. 3).

⁶⁵ Fitzpatrick, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Elyot, *The castle of health, corrected, and in some places augmented* (London, 1610), STC 7657.

⁶⁹ William Bullein, *Bulleins bulwark of defence against all sickness, soreness, and wounds that do daily assault mankind* (London, 1579), STC 4034; James Manning, *I am for you all, complexions castle* (London, 1604), STC 17257.

As Healy suggests, ‘a range of factors encouraged the production of English medical regimens’ such as Elyot’s and Bullein’s, which includes ‘humanist translation, developments in printing and distribution, the growth of literacy’ and importantly ‘anxieties about epidemics’.⁷⁰ This anxiety is demonstrated via the thirty-three ‘explanatory textbooks and regimens’, along with twenty-three plague treatises offering regimens and advice specific to plague that were, according to Paul Slack, printed between the years 1486 and 1604.⁷¹ Moreover, the numerous reprints of the general health regimens, such as Elyot’s, also tend to coincide with outbreaks of plague in London (most notably 1576, 1580, 1595, and 1610), at times when safeguarding the body against disease was crucial.⁷² And, again like Elyot’s, many of the broader regimens even contained specific helps and ‘diet[s] to be used in the time of the pestilence’.⁷³

So, what were these texts and why were they in such demand during plague time? English vernacular health regimens were, as Laura Madella suggests, aimed at laymen - non-medical professionals who, most likely, could not read Latin - and offered an ‘education of the body’ that encouraged and promised to preserve good health.⁷⁴ This typically male-centred advice usually considers, in some capacity, ‘the six non-naturals’ that are at once necessary aspects of daily life and processes in need of ‘diligent consideration’: air, diet, sleep, exercise, purging, and ‘affections of the mind’.⁷⁵ Each reader, according to their

⁷⁰ Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, p. 23.

⁷¹ Paul Slack, ‘Mortality Crises and Epidemic Disease in England, 1485-1610’, in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Charles Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 9-59 (p. 243).

⁷² Elyot (1576), STC 7652.5; (1580), STC 7653; (1595), STC 7656; Slack, *Impact*, p. 62.

⁷³ Elyot, pp. 155-7; Cogan, pp. 261-78.

⁷⁴ Laura Madella, ‘Practical Medicine as Education of the Body: Thomas Elyot’s *Castel of Health* (1539-1541)’, *Giornale di Pedagogia Critica*, 8.1 (2019), 81-104.

⁷⁵ Slack believes that women may have been the most avid readers of regimens in the period as they tended to be the individuals responsible for caring and providing for sick relatives and neighbours, Slack, ‘Mortality Crises and Epidemic Disease’, p. 260; however, as Andrew Wear notes, in terms of

individual humoural composition, required their own particular type and quantity of each non-natural in order to maintain optimum health. An excess of any one of these factors could tip the body into dyscrasia or humoural imbalance. As such, if one knew how their body should function and feel when in health, then one would know when that body was ailing and not functioning as it should and, with the help of a regimen, could take practical steps to restore it back to health. This was undoubtedly particularly vital information to be in possession of during outbreaks of plague, when feeling and falling ill could have grave implications.

In his essay, 'Of Regiment of Health', first printed in 1597, Bacon states that there is 'wisdom' in those who seek to know the inner workings of their body as they will not only maintain good health but facilitate an easier recovery should illness strike: 'In sickness, respect health principally; and in health, action. For those that put their bodies to endure in health, may in most sicknesses, which are not very sharp, be cured only with diet, and tendering'.⁷⁶ Healy suggests that Bacon's essay, like the regimens that it advocates, urges readers to 'know thyself', which is 'arguably the most important maxim of the renaissance'.⁷⁷ This maxim is expressed by Elyot, who writes that his *Castle of Health* is for 'anyone who would perfectly *know* the state of his body, being in the latitude of health or declination to sickness'.⁷⁸ Perhaps what makes this ancient maxim and the regimens that engage with its sentiment so 'important', then, is what they offer their readers during plague time. At a time when bodies were surrounded by severe epidemic disease whose 'causality is murky', as

the actual content of the regimens themselves: 'the health of women was largely overlooked' and 'the regimens were rarely explicitly addressed directly to them', Wear, p. 164; Elyot, p. 52.

⁷⁶ Francis Bacon, *The essays of Sir Francis Bacon Knight, the Kings Solicitor General* (London, 1612), STC 1141.

⁷⁷ Margaret Healy, 'Why Me? Why Now? How? The Body in Health and Disease', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance*, ed. by Linda Kalof and William Bynum (Oxford: Berg Press, 2010), pp. 37-54 (p. 38).

⁷⁸ Elyot, p. 11.

Susan Sontag suggests, knowledge of the body and its processes offers an active approach to managing health in what otherwise might be considered passive defeat.⁷⁹

Vernacular regimens are, then, what Jennifer Richards describes as ‘useful books’, that ‘were written to be read rather than simply to be used, and to be read in a thoughtful way’.⁸⁰ Located outside of specialised ‘medical books’, the vernacular regimen of the early modern period has a much broader context and audience given its ‘medico-moral’ content.⁸¹ The *French Academy* (1577), a philosophical encyclopaedia by Pierre de la Primaudaye (first printed in English in 1586 and reprinted, tellingly, in 1594) and one of the suggested sources for *Love’s Labour’s*, illustrates this medico-moral thinking that ‘concern[ed]’ itself with the moderation of both ‘the soul and body of man’:⁸²

For truly virtue purchased and gotten by practice, is of no less power against all contagion of wickedness, than preservatives well compounded are of force in a plague time to preserve in good health the inhabitants of a country, and as heretofore that famous physician Hippocrates preserved his city of Cos from a mortality that was general throughout all Grecia, by counselling his countrymen to kindle many fires in all public places, to the end thereby to purify the air: even so whosoever hath his soul possessed, and his heart well armed with brightness and power of virtue, he shall escape the dangers of corruption, and eschew all contagion of evil manners.⁸³

Primaudaye believes that the ‘bright’ and ‘power[ful]’ heart of the virtuous, like the fires that ‘purify the air’ during plague time, is able to banish ‘corruption’ and ‘contagion’, and clearly understands morality as a ‘preservative’ against mortality.

⁷⁹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor: And AIDS and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 25.

⁸⁰ Jennifer Richards, ‘Useful Books: Reading Vernacular Regimens in Sixteenth-Century England’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73.2 (2012), 247-71 (p. 249).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁸² Pierre de la Primaudaye, Alternative title: *The French academy Fully discoursed and finished in four books. 1. Institution of manners and callings of all estates. 2. Concerning the soul and body of man* (London, 1618), STC 15241; Wiggins and Richardson, p. 322.

⁸³ Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The French academy wherein is discoursed the institution of manners, and whatsoever else concerneth the good and happy life of all estates and callings* (London, 1586), STC 15233, p. 5.

It is no coincidence that Primaudaye engages with plague to demonstrate the importance of arming oneself with goodness in order to maintain ‘good health’. Almost two hundred years before *The French Academy*, it seems already to have been standard practice to moderate one’s behaviour during plague time. Like Primaudaye’s moral prescriptions that promise to ‘eschew all contagion’, Boccaccio’s writings introduce us to those who believe that by ‘eschew[ing] all extravagance’ they too could preserve themselves from plague:

There were some who inclined to the view that if they followed a temperate lifestyle they should be well able to keep such an epidemic at bay. So they would form into a group and withdraw on their own to closet themselves in a house free of all plague victims; here they would enjoy the good life, partaking of the daintiest fare and the choicest of wines – all in the strictest moderation –and shunning all debauchery [...] they did bask in music and such other pleasures as were at their disposal.⁸⁴

The socio-spatial similarities between Boccaccio’s plague time narrative and Shakespeare’s ‘remote’ and seemingly ‘austere’ – but nevertheless economically privileged – court in Navarre are obvious (5.2.790-4). However, in contrast to Boccaccio’s affluent runaways, who would not even ‘glean [...] any news from outside related’ to the sick or the dying, the first lines that are spoken in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s* concern death:⁸⁵

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live registered upon our brazen tombs,
And then grace us in the disgrace of death;
When spite of cormorant devouring time,
Th’ endeavour of this present breath may buy
That honour which shall bate his scythe’s keen edge,
And make us heirs to all eternity (1.1.1-7).

Navarre’s speech indicates that he hopes to outface his approaching death by procuring ‘fame’ that will enable his memory to ‘live’ on. This opening speech can be read in a similar, perhaps

⁸⁴ Boccaccio, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

even self-satirical vein, to that of Shakespeare's Sonnet 60 in which the narrator, keenly aware of Death's 'scythe', 'hope[s]' that his 'verse', like Navarre's 'present breath', will to 'time [...] stand'. However, there is another way in which *The King's* opening speech, where he summons forth his own mortality, might be interpreted – and that further speaks to the plague time experience that Boccaccio relates.

Kerrigan suggests that it is within these opening lines, in 'The King's fear of death and anticipation of his tomb', that the play is breached 'by the threat of the plague'; a disease that Shakespeare chooses to make known 'from the very start' of the play.⁸⁶ Anne Barton also notes that it is through Shakespeare's references to death in the play's opening and final scenes that the audience are able to glimpse 'the world outside' Navarre's court, with 'its sorrow and grim actualities, the plague-houses, desolate retreats and the mourning cities'.⁸⁷ If this is the case, if plague is threatening the doorstep of *The King's* court just as it had threatened Elizabeth's court offstage only months before the play premiered, this reframes the entire motivation for the retreat, and reorients both its scholastic aims and the oaths that are made within it, according to their plague time contexts. Firstly, as both Kerrigan and Barton suggest, *Love's Labour's* first audiences might have recognised the socio-spatial conditions of *The King's* retreat as fearful flight from plague. Secondly, given this apparent plague time framework, this audience might have also understood Navarre's opening lines as his desperate attempt to outrun 'death' by altering how he 'lives' according to the tenets outlined in contemporary plague time regimens that, I suggest, are evoked in the text just twelve lines

⁸⁶ Kerrigan, p. 72.

⁸⁷ Anne Barton, 'Love's Labour's Lost', in *Love's Labour's Lost: Critical essays*, ed. by Felicia Hardison Londré (New York; London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 125-44 (p. 125).

later (1.1.1). Crucially, these regimens and treatises were, like Navarre's oaths, intended to be 'read' by those who would be 'rescue[d]' (1.1.116-18).

As such, and in view of the comedy's manifest plague time context and the texts that were produced to mitigate the effects of this context, I suggest that Navarre has not simply retreated to indulge in traditional notions of 'intellect[ual]' study (4.2.132), and nor do the 'oaths' that 'are passed' merely facilitate this study (1.1.19). The second portion of this chapter reads the oaths that are made at Navarre's court in more detail as a series of proactive, preventative measures; a regimen that aims to fortify the men in residence against any diseases that lie 'o'er' its 'little gate' (1.1.109). Shakespeare's oaths will be examined alongside specific, corresponding plague time advice contained within vernacular regimens and plague treatises, some of which were introduced above. These key plague time texts, that Healy describes as 'keenly time-and culture-specific', provide a contextual lens through which the contemporary ideals of male health and the complex processes by which male bodies are understood and managed during plague time might be more readily exposed – processes that I suggest drive Shakespeare's comedy.⁸⁸

'Our oaths and gravities': Reading Navarre's oaths as a plague time regimen

ARMADO	Who was Sampson's love, my dear Moth?
MOTH	A woman, master.
ARMADO	Of what complexion?
MOTH	Of all the four, or the three, or the two, or one of the four.
ARMADO	Tell me precisely of what complexion?
MOTH	Of the sea-water green, sir.
ARMADO	Is that one of the four complexions?
MOTH	As I have read, sir; and the best of them too (1.2.74-82).

⁸⁸ Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, p. 19.

In the second scene of *Love's Labour's*, Armado and Moth consider 'the humour of affection' after Armado, once again, self-diagnoses himself with melancholy (1.2.58). In this discourse, Moth describes the 'complexion', or humour, of Sampson's love, Delilah, not as 'sable-coloured' like the melancholic (1.1.226), but 'sea-water green' (1.2.80). Moth's observation suggests that Delilah might be suffering from a condition known as 'green sickness', now understood as likely to be a symptom of iron deficiency.⁸⁹ As Helen King notes, this 'disease of virgins' is 'a historical condition involving lack of menstruation, dietary disturbances, altered skin colour and general weakness' that 'almost exclusively' affected 'young girls at puberty'.⁹⁰ Shakespeare references this condition again in *Romeo and Juliet* when Lord Capulet insults his daughter: 'Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage! You tallow-face' (3.5.156-7).

Yet, it is not just Shakespeare's manifest engagement with the 'humours' genre, wider humoral theory and its practical medical applications that are important within Moth and Armado's discourse, but how such information regarding the humours might have been gleaned.⁹¹ The 'well-educated' Moth, who is able to 'define' complex theories and terms (1.2.90), clearly states that his knowledge regarding the 'four complexions' has been acquired through reading: 'As I have read, sir' (1.2.82). Of course, there is one genre of text in

⁸⁹ Shahzeb Hassan, Taha Osman Mohammed, and Leonard J Hoenig, 'Bardolph's Rosacea: Skin disorders that define personality in Shakespeare's plays', *Clinics in Dermatology*, 37 (2019), 600-3 (p. 603).

⁹⁰ Helen King, *The Disease of Virgins: Green sickness, Chlorosis, and the Problems of Puberty* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

⁹¹ Shakespeare was certainly not the only playwright to engage with humoralism on the early modern stage. The 'comedy of humours' genre emerged during the late sixteenth century, established largely by Ben Jonson and George Chapman. This genre presented characters whose behaviours and actions were thoroughly driven by their humoral imbalance. Jonson, in the Induction to his 1599 comedy *Every Man out of His Humour*, for instance, briefly outlines how humoral imbalance influences both body and temperament: 'As when some one peculiar quality / Doth so possess a man that it doth draw / All his affects, his spirits, and his powers / In their confluxions all to run one way: / This may truly said to be a humour' (ll.103-7), Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of his Humour*, ed. by Helen Ostovich, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 118.

particular that Moth might have consulted in order to gather such information – the health regimen. This scene, then, not only further reveals *Love's Labour's* alertness to and preoccupation with contemporary humouralism and how the early modern body was conceived, but it also, crucially, gestures towards the comedy's engagement with the texts that disseminate this knowledge to the body politic. And whilst, importantly, Moth's explanation summons the health regimen into the audience's imagination in material terms, it also further demonstrates how readers of regimens and treatises encounter, absorb, and apply their contents in their everyday lives.⁹²

This notion is established in the play's opening scene where the audience encounter a disgruntled Lord Berowne who states that he 'swore' 'to stay [...] in court for three years' space' and only 'swore in jest' to the newly passed oaths of the court: 'Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep' (1.1.48-54). Once again, it is easy to see the parallels that Kerrigan draws between Shakespeare's oaths and the period's college matriculation oaths, particularly as the college oaths are deeply rooted in the notion of promoting academic 'study', the context in which Shakespeare's oaths are typically read (1.1.35). However, The King's quartet of oaths also resonate, both structurally and thematically, with plague time advice found in broader health regimens as well as specific plague treatises. These are texts that promote a different kind of education and tutor their readers; as John Harrington in 1607 puts it, as if they too were in 'a little Academia, where every man may be a Graduate, and proceed Doctor in the ordering of his own body'.⁹³

⁹² For further recent discussion of 'routine encounters' that were shaped by Galenic humouralism in the period see: *Humorality in Early Modern Art, Material Culture, and Performance*, ed. by Amy Kenny, Kaara L. Peterson, Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science, and Medicine (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 1-9 (p. 3.)

⁹³ Fitzpatrick, p. 2.

Like Navarre's oaths, health regimens and plague treatises typically followed a specific order that allowed their readers to navigate their contents with ease. Elyot's *Castle of Health*, for instance, is ordered according to Galen's six non-naturals, which it outlines as 'Air, Meat, and Drink, Sleep and watch, Moving and Rest, Emptiness and Repletion, and Affections of the Mind'.⁹⁴ Similarly, albeit applying the slightly more straightforward structure proposed by Hippocrates, Cogan's regimen is organised via five 'words': 'Labour, Meat, Drink, Sleep, and Venus', which, as Cogan suggests, 'is more evident for the common capacity of men, and more convenient for the diet of our English Nation'.⁹⁵ Taking my cue from Cogan, then, I have distilled Shakespeare's oaths, 'Not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep', into four simple categories: Labour, Diet, Sleep, and Venus. Each of these will be considered in sequence and alongside contemporary plague time regimens and treatises to determine, both independently and collectively, a) how they might be read within the play's plague time frameworks, and b) what this might reveal about the underlying purpose of the oaths themselves.

i. Labour

Cogan defines labour 'or exercise' as 'a vehement moving, the end whereof is alteration of the breath or wind of man'.⁹⁶ In order to ensure that such exercises were helpful and not harmful to the body, regimens such as Cogan's often outline important parameters for activities that involve bodily movement. These considerations include the location and duration of the activity, the quality of the exercise itself, and the quality and quantity of the perspiration produced by the body during these activities. The location of activities was especially

⁹⁴ Elyot, p. 52.

⁹⁵ Cogan, (Epistle Dedicatory, p. 4).

⁹⁶ Cogan, p. 1.

important and should be conducted, as Cogan suggests, ‘in a good and wholesome air’, as Armado alludes to in the opening scene.⁹⁷ However, Cogan also notes that ‘labour’ encompasses exercises not just ‘of the body’ but ‘of the mind’.⁹⁸ The exercise that was considered to provide the most ‘natural nourishment’ for the mind was, of course, ‘study’ that, as established, is seemingly an integral aspect of The King’s court in *Love’s Labour’s*.⁹⁹ Like the conditions that surround the moving body, the regimens also attempt to safeguard the exploratory mind during study so that, as the curate Nathaniel suggests, ‘intellect’ might ‘be replenished’ and the body not diminished (4.2.26). Cogan writes, for example, that ‘if it happen that we be cloyed with study then must we fall to recreation and use some honest play or pastime’.¹⁰⁰ Towards this advice, Berowne, upon signing the oaths, asks, ‘is there no quick recreation granted?’ (1.1.159). Recreation, or as Cogan describes, ‘pastimes’, is evidently something that The King has also considered as he states that he has already devised ‘an interim’ to their ‘studies’ (1.1.169). Navarre explains that he will ‘use’ Armado and his ‘fanc[iful...] high-born words’ for his ‘minstrelsy’ (1.1.168-74). Longueville concurs by adding ‘Costard the swain’ to the court’s list of entertainers, whose ‘sport’ will render their ‘study [...] short’ (1.1.177-8).

It is also interesting that The King describes Armado’s performative qualities in musical terms: ‘One who the music of his own vain tongue / Doth ravish like enchanting harmony’ (1.1.164-5). Cogan considers music, both listening to it and the learning of it, to be an especially beneficial activity, noting that ‘there is nothing more comfortable, or that more reviveth the spirits than Music’.¹⁰¹ Kellwaye also recommends the use of ‘pleasant and merry

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 20.

recreations, either with music’ or ‘pleasant company to talk with all’ during plague time to promote healthful mirth.¹⁰² Likewise, Thayre’s plague treatise advises ‘that in this time of sickness we ought to [...] avoid perturbations of the mind’ and prescribes ‘all virtuous and commendable mirth, sweet music, good company, and all laudable recreation that may delight’ instead; his image echoes Boccaccio’s descriptions of the plague time retreat.¹⁰³ Therefore, aside from studying and ‘reading some good books’, which Kellwaye advises is also very beneficial during outbreaks of plague, the labour and rest model that is proposed in Navarre’s court, like the regimens and treatises, ensures that both the body and mind are moderately exerted and, more importantly, wholesomely-rested.¹⁰⁴

ii. Diet

‘If music be the food of’ both ‘love’ and study (*TN*1.1.1), it would appear that the men at Navarre’s court are to subsist on little else during their three-year term, a period that Longueville describes as a ‘three years fast’ (1.1.24-5). Berowne later reveals the details of the alleged ‘fast’ that has been proposed: ‘One day in a week to touch no food, / And but one meal on every day beside’ (1.1.39-40). That a moderated diet should accompany scholarly endeavour, where the ‘mind [...] banquet[s]’ ‘though the ‘body pine[s]’, is not altogether unexpected, as regulated food and drink intake was typical in many European universities during the period (1.1.24-5). For example, the regulations of the Collegium Sapiential in Freilburg im Breisgau stipulated the exact quantity of meat per person (half a pound daily),

¹⁰² Kellwaye, E1^r.

¹⁰³ Thayre, p. 21; For further discussion on plague and music in the period see Remi Chiu, *Plague and Music in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ Kellwaye, E1^r.

and, as Rainer Christoph Schwinges notes, ‘the procurement of specialities or special rations was explicitly prohibited’ and ‘the kitchen and cellar were under watch’.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, a temperate diet, which as Elyot explains ‘must be tempered’ according to individual ‘complexions, and exercise, and quietness in living’, was especially important to observe during outbreaks of plague.¹⁰⁶ Elyot notes that moderating one’s diet:

Consumeth superfluities and in consuming them it clarifieth the humours, maketh the body fair coloured and not only keepeth out sickness but also, where sickness is entered, nothing more helpful.¹⁰⁷

A ‘diet’ that is, as Thayre describes, ‘sparing and frugal’ was thus considered to be the most beneficial course of action during plague time, both physically and morally.¹⁰⁸ That Costard is having to ‘fast a week with bran and water’ as atonement for breaking The King’s oath, is, therefore, significant since the notion of penitent fasting further tethers the world of the play to the plague time world off stage. Kerrigan notes that public fasts were ‘one of the pieties practiced to stave off the plague during outbreaks’ in the belief that such displays of devotion might appease a retributive God and ease the outbreak (1.2.123).¹⁰⁹ In 1563, for example, Elizabeth’s court issued ‘the order for the general fast’ which was to take place every Wednesday during outbreaks and that was accompanied by a schedule of nationwide

¹⁰⁵ Rainer Christoph Schwinges, ‘Student Education, Student Life’, in *A History of the University in Europe*, ed. by Hilde de Ridder-Symoens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 195-243 (p. 228).

¹⁰⁶ Elyot, p. 100.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁰⁸ Thayre, p. 20; ‘Bacon injects more extreme counsel, however, amid traditional warnings against extreme shifts in one’s habits: “Beware of sudden Change in any great point of Diet, and if necessity enforce it, fit the rest to it. For it is a Secret, both in Nature, and State; That it is safer to change Many Things, then one... And trie in any Thing, thou shalt judge hurtfull, to discontinue it by little and little”, Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Kerrigan, p. 72.

prayer.¹¹⁰ These same fasting orders and prayers were reissued and reprinted during the outbreak of 1593.¹¹¹ This suggests that *Love's Labour's* first audiences were likely in possession of very recent memories regarding their own penitent plague time fasts, and were thus well aware of the connections between and supposed benefits of abstinence and plague prevention both physically and spiritually.

However, although one-day religious fasts were seen by many as a necessary preventive practice, plague treatise writers such as Kellwaye also urge the importance of finding a comfortable mean, and caution against total abstinence regarding food and drink:

For our diet as Hippocrates teacheth us, we must have a care not to exceed in eating and drinking, but to keep a mean therein, and in any case to beware of surfeiting and drunkenness, which are enemies both to the body and soul, but as we may not exceed in eating and drinking, so to endure great hunger and thirst is most dangerous.¹¹²

In *Haven of Health*, Cogan similarly advises:

Air, labour, food, repletion,
Sleep, and passions of the mind
Both much and little, hurt a like,
Best is the mean to find.¹¹³

Therefore, when Constable Dull incorrectly recites Costard's punishment as a 'fast' for 'three days a week' (1.1.285), suggesting total abstinence from food for three days as opposed to The King's original order, 'fast a week *with* bran and water' (1.2.123), this is not only erroneous but also potentially damaging to Costard's Galenic body. Abstinence was also considered to be more harmful to some than it was to others. And as opposed to being

¹¹⁰ Rebecca Totaro, *The Plague in Print: Essential Elizabethan Sources, 1558-1603* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), p. 32.

¹¹¹ *Certain prayers collected out of a form of godly meditations, set forth by her Majestys authority in the great mortality* (London, 1593), STC 16524.

¹¹² Kellwaye, D3^v.

¹¹³ Cogan, pp. 271-2.

beneficial to the body, as Cogan explains, ‘maladies’ could ‘be engendered’ by overzealous fasting, particularly in bodies not humourally apt.¹¹⁴ Elyot, for instance, advises that ‘old men [who are cold and dry] may sustain fasting easily’ whilst ‘young men’ [who are typically hotter and drier] may worse bear it’.¹¹⁵ Although likely referring to abstinence of more than one kind (as will be discussed in due course) Berowne addresses this very issue in the final scene of *Love’s Labour’s* when it is clear that The King’s regimen has been abandoned:

Consider what you first did swear unto:
To fast, to study and to see no woman-
Flat treason ‘gainst the kingly state of youth.
Say, can you fast? Your stomachs are too young,
And abstinence engenders maladies (4.3.287-91).

Therefore, quoting almost verbatim the advice set down in Cogan’s plague treatise, Berowne counsels against the practice of abstinence, especially in the case of young men, ‘whose young blood doth not obey’, further evidencing Shakespeare’s heightened interest and engagement with the regimen genre and its advice in his plague time comedy (4.3.213).

Of course, what goes in must come out, and as well as methods that manage one’s diet, there are also important references to purgation within *Love’s Labour’s*, some of which have also been explored by Kerrigan in reference to the ‘binding language’ used in Ecclesiastical courts.¹¹⁶ It is interesting that all the references to scatological purgation that occur within *Love’s Labour’s* revolve around Costard, whose own name alludes to ‘costive’, meaning to be ‘affected by, predisposed to, or characterized by retention of the faeces’.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Cogan, p. 242.

¹¹⁵ Elyot, p. 115.

¹¹⁶ Kerrigan, p. 94.

¹¹⁷ ‘Costive: that hath the belly bound’, Claude Hollyband, *A Dictionary French and English* (1593), *LEME* <<https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/search/quick>> [accessed 07 February 2024]; for further discussion on scatological names in Shakespeare see: Peter J. Smith, ‘Ajax by any other name would smell as sweet: Shakespeare, Harington and onomastic scatology’, in *Between Two Stools : Scatology*

Upon being imprisoned, Costard begs, 'let me not be pent up, sir, I will fast being loose' (1.2.149-50) and, similarly, upon being released he imagines Armado as his 'purgation' that will 'let' him 'loose' (3.1.124).¹¹⁸ As Christine Sukic has suggested, "'purgation" also has a figurative meaning, that of a purification from sins or any kind of defilement, a word that is thus appropriate for Costard's situation'.¹¹⁹ Costard's understandable protestations about being 'shut-up' (1.2.147), and his subsequent relief at being 'enfranchise[d]', allude to physiological dangers that the humoural body might encounter when it too is 'bound' or constipated (3.1.117).¹²⁰ Both Thayre and Lodge in their respective plague treatises urge that, during plague outbreaks, it is best practice to keep the body 'soluble', advising that purgation should happen at least once or twice a day – as Lodge suggests, 'either by the benefit of nature or the use of the pills [...] the belly may be loosened [...] and the body', unlike Costard's, 'in no ways suffered to be bound'.¹²¹ As such, the men at court take what appears to be a holistic approach to health as prescribed in the regimens. They are aware of the importance of moderating what goes into the body as well as managing how matter exited it, something that was especially important to be mindful of during plague time.

iii. Sleep

The oath that receives the least attention throughout the play is the supposed absence of sleep that the men are to endure, as described by Berowne:

And then to sleep but three hours in the night,
And not be seen to wink of all the day,

and Its Representations in English Literature, Chaucer to Swift (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 60-104.

¹¹⁸ Christine Sukic, "I smell false Latin, dunghill for *unguem*": Odours and Aromas in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Actes des Congrès de la Société Française Shakespeare*, 32 (2015), 1-11 (p. 3).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ 'The body no ways suffered to be bound', Lodge, E4^r.

¹²¹ Lodge, E2^v; Thayre, p. 20.

When I was wont to think no harm all night
And make a dark night too of half the day (1.1.42-5).

However, Sasha Handley notes that ‘careful management of sleeping and waking habits was a core element in prescribed rules of health preservation that were key to regulating the body’s humours for people of all ages and complexions’.¹²² As Cogan suggests, the mean amount of sleep ‘cannot be certainly defined alike for all men’; indeed, more than any of the other ‘non-natural’ processes, the quantity of sleep is thoroughly dependent on ‘the natural complexions’ of the individual.¹²³ Excessive sleep was considered to be particularly harmful for all during outbreaks of plague, however. Thomas Phayer, translating Jean Goeurot’s work in 1553, for instance, states that ‘over much sleep engendereth many humours in the body specially if it be in the day time: & it dulleth the memory, and maketh a man unlusty and apt to receive the pestilence’.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Claude Fretz suggests that ‘because of its disablement of the internal and external senses, sleep was conventionally twinned with death in medical texts as well as in cultural productions’ and may, therefore, go some ways towards explaining the dangers often associated with ‘excessive sleep’ in the period, particularly during outbreaks of plague when death was a constant reminder of the disease’s presence within communities.¹²⁵

The general advice within health regimens and plague treatises regarding sleep, then, suggests that it should be ‘moderate’ in duration. For example, as Cogan notes, if sleep ‘be moderate it bringeth the whole man to good state and temperature’.¹²⁶ Elyot seconds this advice and adds that ‘to a whole man having no debility of nature and digesting perfectly the

¹²² Handley, p. 21.

¹²³ Cogan, p. 242.

¹²⁴ Jean Goeurot, *The regiment of life, whereunto is added a treatise of the pestilence*, trans. by Thomas Phayer (London, 1553), STC 11971, N8^v.

¹²⁵ Claude Fretz, *Dreams, Sleep, and Shakespeare's Genres* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 142.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

meat he eateth, a little sleep is sufficient'.¹²⁷ As The King and his Lords appear 'whole' and in seemingly good digestive health when the oaths are made, the 'little sleep' that The King has proposed – 'three hours' per night – appears more than 'sufficient' and, as such, sits in accordance with the plague time advice offered in contemporary regimens.

iv. Venus

Venus is worthily reckoned of Hippocrates one of those five things that chiefly preserve health. But in the use thereof we must have a special regard [...] for to exceed the mean in labour, in eating and drinking, in sleeping or waking doth not so greatly impair a man's health as Immoderate coitus. For upon the sudden it bringeth a man to utter weaknesses, and bereaveth him (as it were) of all his senses.¹²⁸

Venus, applied metonymically within the period to broadly denote 'lust', was like any somatic or emotional excess thought to influence the body's humoural balance.¹²⁹ Engaging in 'immoderate coitus', or put simply, having too much sex, was understood to have the capacity to physically undermine the health of the male body. Like Cogan, Andrew Boorde in his *A Compendious Regiment, or Dietary of Health* (1542) notes that a man should 'beware not to meddle too much with the venerous acts, for that will cause a man to look agedly and also causeth a man to have a brief or short life'.¹³⁰

And, despite 'writers emphasis[ing] the importance of a "mean" in conjugal relations' on the same basis as the other non-naturals during the period as Joshua Scodel notes, indulging in too much sex was considered to be especially dangerous during outbreaks of

¹²⁷ Elyot, p. 106.

¹²⁸ Cogan, p. 245.

¹²⁹ 'Venus', John Rider, 'Bibliotheca Scholastica' (1589), *LEME* <<https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry/186/3877>> [accessed 11 February 2024].

¹³⁰ Andrew Boorde, *A Compendious Regiment, or a Dietary of Health*, in *Three Sixteenth Century Dietaries*, ed. by Joan Fitzpatrick, The Revels Plays Companion Library (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 158-205 (p. 203).

plague.¹³¹ Numerous plague treatise writers, such as Lodge, argue that ‘in those times [...] all use of women is forbidden’.¹³² Lodge offers no further elaboration as to why this might be and, as such, it is hard to deduce whether his warning stems from a fear of infection via the proximity of bodies during sexual intercourse or whether the risk is more morally grounded. However, in his earlier plague treatise, Vandernote explains that ‘overmuch copulation between man and woman’ promotes ‘putrefaction’, or bodily decay, which as will be discussed in the following chapter was a great source of anxiety during outbreaks since putrefaction was thought to be one of the main ways in which the disease spread. As such, like many of his peers, Vandernote vehemently counsels against any sexual contact during plague time upon the understanding that it promotes this unnatural and unhealthful heat and physical deterioration within the male soma.¹³³ Paynell similarly notes that ‘the fleshly act between man and woman’ was considered to be harmful during plague outbreaks because it renders ‘the pores of the body’ to ‘be very open [...] whereby the water enters into the bottom of the members mortifying the natural heat. Which heat also after the fleshly act is weakened’, allowing the ‘seeds’ of plague to enter the body more readily.¹³⁴ Paynell adds that it is important that ‘in summer we [...] feed on cold moist meats to diminish the ferventness of heat and drought: and then we must abstain from carnal copulation which also dryeth’.¹³⁵

Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary or The Walks in Paul’s* (1604) illustrates the dangerous contemporary connections between sexual activity and plague. The plague time pamphlet features a tale of a young man who could not ‘avoid the temptations’ of women, and whilst plague was raging in the city decided

¹³¹ Scodel, p. 145.

¹³² Lodge, E4^r.

¹³³ Vandernote, A6^v.

¹³⁴ Paynell, N2^r.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

to give in to his desires and visit a house of ‘harlots’ (l.370).¹³⁶ However, after the sexual transaction has taken place and whilst the young man is asleep, the women play a ‘jest’ on him and claim that he has died of the plague; they even go so far as to call the city’s searchers to ‘discharge their office’ (ll.380-5).¹³⁷ However, ‘a few days after’ satiating his desires ‘the youngster danced the shaking of one sheet’ and died of plague and, this time, the ‘searchers lost not their labours’ (ll.397-8).¹³⁸ Dekker and Middleton do not divulge whether the women also contract plague as a result of their contact with the plaguey customer. However, their apparent immunity from plague as a result of their already established venereal disease is alluded to in the opening of the tale. They are ‘armed (as they term it) against all weathers of plague and pestilence, carrying always a French supersedeas about them for the sickness’ (ll.372-74).

However, it appears that it was not just the physical sexual act itself that was considered to be pernicious during plague time, but also the unsettling feelings and thoughts that simply being in the ‘company of women’ might engender.¹³⁹ As Costard describes, merely ‘hearken[ing] after the flesh’ could prove detrimental to the bodies of early modern men (1.1.213-14). To this end, Cogan advises that in order for a male body to stay healthy and maintain its humoural balance, a man should ‘keep himself out of the company of women [...] for certainly, the nature of women is such, that a man by their company shall be greatly inflamed’.¹⁴⁰ Whilst Cogan’s regimen clearly has his students or young scholars in mind,

¹³⁶ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, ‘The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary; or, The Walks in Paul’s’, ed. by Paul Yachnin, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 183-94 (p. 191).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Cogan, p. 250.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

whose studies might be diverted by such thoughts, Lodge reveals how merely sharing the company of women or even having thoughts that tended to the opposite sex was particularly hazardous for the male body, student or otherwise, during plague:

For there is not anything during this contagious season more forcible to enfeeble nature, then such unbridled desires which stir and distemper the humours and dispose the body to receive infection. Briefly, to live in repose of spirit, in all joy pleasure, sport & contention amongst a man's friends, comforted heart and vital spirits, and is in this time more requisite than any other things.¹⁴¹

Kellwaye, similarly, advises that men should also 'beware' of any unchecked emotion during plague time 'such as anger, fear, and pensiveness of the mind' that might be enkindled by, in Armado's phrase, 'a child of our grandmother eve', 'for by their means the body is made more apt to receive the infection' (1.1.273).¹⁴² This notion that a female presence could, particularly during 'contagious season[s]', 'stir and 'distemper' male humours, or as Berowne later suggests, 'fashion [...] humours', to the extent that it would make them more susceptible to plague is, then, significant in light of Navarre's oath pertaining to women (5.2.751).

Of all the oaths that I have argued aim to healthfully moderate the men's bodies and their behaviours, it is the decree regarding the lack of female contact that Berowne questions most of all, upon learning that it is forbidden to 'see a woman' in the 'three years term' (1.1.37). Moreover, Berowne's protestations also highlight the fact that, unlike The King's previous oaths that all urge moderation, the notion of a female presence at court is by contrast met with unflinching abstinence. This prompts Berowne to explain why such drastic action is not only unsustainable, but how it will also lead to them 'all' being completely 'forsworn' (1.1.147): 'For every man with his affects is born, / Not by might mastered, but by special

¹⁴¹ Lodge, E4^r.

¹⁴² Kellwaye, E1^r.

grace' (1.1.149-50). In Berowne's mind, male 'affects', in other words passions or humours, cannot be forcibly managed by abstinence; they cannot be quashed or silenced as they will just resurface. As such, parallels can once again be drawn between Navarre's homosocial boundaries with their 'Cambridge-style exclusion zone[s]' and the ostensibly celibate university communities, since women were prohibited from entering university grounds unless it was deemed absolutely necessary, such as to visit the sick.¹⁴³ However, that a female presence in Shakespeare's court clearly stands to imperil far more than just male scholarly focus and student decorum is evidenced by the severity of the penalty attached to it.

The 'dread penalty' that has been proclaimed hopes to 'fright' women 'hence' from the sequestered court (1.1.126). It has been decreed that should 'any woman' be found 'within a mile' of the 'court' she will stand to lose 'her tongue' (1.1.122). It is noteworthy that Elizabeth I's proclamation of 1592, the same proclamation that banished the majority of the royal court and prohibited visitors to shield the resident monarch from plague, also included a stringent (albeit far less violent) penalty for those who thought to trespass. The proclamation states that 'no manner of persons' other than those who 'have cause to remain at court [...] shall make their repair to her court or within two miles of the same; upon pain to be committed to prison for their contempt'.¹⁴⁴ Although Elizabeth's proclamation obviously does not only exclude women, it does offer a recognisable socio-spatial analogue that was, likewise, put in place to deter dangerous outside bodies that seek to threaten the safety of an isolated court during plague time.

There is thus a suggestive parallel between the advice of the regimens and treatises, and how the company of women should be forsworn in *Love's Labour's*, a play that is so alert

¹⁴³ Kerrigan, p. 73.

¹⁴⁴ Hughes and Larkin, p. 126.

to its plague time contexts and how the vulnerable, humoural body ought to be managed and protected within those contexts. Furthermore, it goes some way to explaining why the oath pertaining to women is accompanied by such a stringent penalty that intended to dissuade those who might compromise the court's defences. And unlike the previous oaths that comply with the plague time advice prescribed in regimens and treatises that they draw on, the oath of celibacy that renounces all forms of female contact, moves beyond merely moderating consumption of the 'world's desires' (1.1.10). It also serves to shield the men against the world's diseases that could be contracted either through direct physical contact with women, or via the men's own 'mounting mind[s]' in response to them (4.1.4).

This final oath is also the downfall of the others. As Berowne anticipated, it was a 'too hard-a-keeping oath' that is broken when The King is forced to accommodate the Princess and her ladies at court (1.1.65). Even the act of breaking an oath was considered to be dangerous in plague time. As Kerrigan notes, 'the plague was so often seen as Divine retribution for rash unnecessary oaths' and perjury was 'high among the social abuses that brought down pestilence', a notion acknowledged by Berowne: 'Thus pour the stars down plagues for perjury' (5.2.394).¹⁴⁵ More importantly, in breaking this oath, the men also directly contradict the advice given in the plague treatises, and by 'receiv[ing]' female company into their 'sight', 'thoughts', and 'hearts', the men have laid their bodies open to plague and its devastating somatic effects (2.1.165-75). It is no coincidence, then, that Berowne diagnoses his King and fellow Lords with bubonic plague in the play's final scene:

BEROWNE Yet I have a trick
 Of the old rage. Bear with me, I am sick
 I'll leave it by degrees. Soft, let us see:
 Write 'Lord have mercy on us' on those three.
 They are infected, in their hearts it lies,

¹⁴⁵ Kerrigan, p. 73.

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 (5.2.417-23).

In Berowne's speech, the men at The King's sequestered court are discovered to be profoundly 'sick'. In what Keir Elam describes as his 'confession of contagion', Berowne unambiguously diagnoses the men of Navarre with 'the plague', a disease which, as I have argued, presents itself as a very real, material threat to the male bodies throughout the comedy.¹⁴⁶ It is perhaps unsurprising that the physical markers of a disease that was only just in retreat in the spring of 1594 are also summoned vividly on stage. Berowne's allusions include both the somatic signs of bubonic plague that were observed on the bodies of the infected, and the signs that marked the disease's presence within 'visited' communities. His reference to 'the Lord's tokens', for instance, alludes to the haemorrhages, or purpura, that often appear on the skin of advanced plague victims, otherwise known in the period as 'God's tokens'.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, Berowne's call to have 'Lord have mercy on us' inscribed on the bodies of his 'infected' friends refers to the Bills of Mortality that featured the prayer and that, from 1593, were placed on infected homes alongside a red cross that was fastened or painted on the door.¹⁴⁸ As such, Berowne might be suggesting here that The King and his courtiers are just as hopelessly immobilised by their sickly condition as those residing within shut-up homes

¹⁴⁶ Keir Elam, "'I'll plague thee for that word': Language, Performance, and Communicable Disease", *Shakespeare Survey*, 50 (1997), 19-28 (p. 26).

¹⁴⁷ Totaro, *Suffering in Paradise*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁸ The practice of using the Bills alongside the red cross to mark infected houses was introduced in December of 1592, meaning that Berowne's reference to the prayer and its plague time context would still have likely been highly topical for a play that had to be written before 1598, F.P. Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare's London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 61-4; For a more detailed exploration of the phrase and its use on the Bills of Mortality see: Mark S.R. Jenner 'Plague on a Page: "Lord Have Mercy Upon Us" in Early Modern London', *The Seventeenth Century*, 27.3 (2012), 255-86.

during outbreaks of plague, an experience that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. And, whilst a modern audience may think little of the sudden somatic changes that occur within the male population in *Love's Labour's*, an early modern audience, themselves 'besieged' by endemic plague, would have recognised the potentially perilous, albeit humorous, position in which the men at court – despite their preventative 'labours' – find themselves (2.1.38).

Of course, Shakespeare is not suggesting that the men in his comedy have contracted or are exhibiting the physical symptoms of plague. What Shakespeare does do, however, is playfully pepper his narrative with the diseases' prophylaxes, and then its symptoms, to escalate and realise a threat that has been present from the very start of the comedy. This renders the appearance of the plague's infamous somatic signs, that figuratively 'deform' the Lord's bodies in the final act, inevitable (5.2.751). Crucially, Berowne's diagnosis is necessary in order for the men at court to finally, and usually fatally in the case of real early modern plague, declare and 'lose' their perjured oaths to reveal their genuinely vulnerable somatic 'selves' that are delineated so clearly in contemporary health regimens and plague treatises (4.3.335). However, even after Berowne's diagnosis, when it is clear that one has already failed, Shakespeare still does not abandon the notion of the plague-preserving regimen. In fact, it becomes more important than ever. We can now turn, finally, to examine how, as one unpopular regimen is finally discarded, another is gladly taken up.

'Some salve': An Alternative Regimen

Whilst no fatalities occur within the walls of Navarre, despite Shakespeare's humorous engagement with the signs, symptoms, and prophylaxes of plague, a death is, nevertheless, reported in the comedy's final scene. 'Welcome, Marcadé, / But that thou interruptest our

merriment', announces the Princess as she greets the man who will herald death into Navarre's court (5.2.711-12):

MARCADÉ I am sorry, Madam, for the news I bring
Is heavy on my tongue. The King your father –
PRINCESS Dead, for my life!
MARCADÉ Even so. My tale is told (5.2.713-15).

Barton states that there is 'nothing quite like this moment in the whole range of Elizabethan drama, where in the space of four lines, the entire world of the play, its delicate balance of reality and illusion is destroyed'.¹⁴⁹ Whilst the cause of the late King of France's death is not disclosed and no connections are made between his demise and plague, his 'sudden death' still serves as a reminder to those in Navarre that kings do, in fact, die (5.2.809). And, as the play is overcast by 'clouds of sorrow', The King and the lord's compromised physical conditions and their perceived susceptibility to an often-mortal disease are brought into the harsh light of day (5.2.741).

However, whilst real, 'grief'-inducing death has 'pierced' any levity that the play's ending might have had, it also spurs the new Queen and her ladies into action (5.2.747). Far from being to the men the 'qualm' or 'sickness' that they are associated with at the play's opening and that they align themselves with earlier in the scene (5.2.279-80), the women offer what Rosalind terms their 'physic'; actions that aim to preserve the men that love them in far more robust ways than any previous attempts by the men themselves (2.1.187). Before the would-be couples go their separate ways, France's new Queen outlines a series of directions to The King of Navarre that he is to execute if their 'hands' are to join in marriage (5.2.805):

This shall you do for me:
Your oath I will not trust, but go with speed

¹⁴⁹ Barton, p. 141.

To some forlorn and naked hermitage,
Remote from all the pleasures of the world.
There stay until the twelve celestial signs
Have brought about the annual reckoning.
If this austere insociable life
Change not your offer made in heat of blood;
If frosts and fasts, hard lodging, and thin weeds
Nip not the gaudy blossoms of your love,
But that it bear this trial, and last love;
Then, at the expiration of the year,
Come challenge me, challenge me by these deserts,
[*She takes his hand.*]
And by this virgin palm now kissing thine,
I will be thine (5.2.787-801).

So, what might the Queen mean by this? In light of The King's perjured oaths, it could be that she is simply testing The King's steadfastness before commencing their royal 'courtship' (5.2.774). The spatio-temporal distance that the Queen intends to place between herself and Navarre 'trials' the 'gaudy blossoms' of The King's 'love' to see if they 'last', testing the strength of both his feelings and character (5.2.796-97). Furthermore, the Queen must also observe spatio-temporal boundaries of her own as she enters a period of 'remembrance for' her 'father's death' where she will also 'shut' her 'woeful self up in a mourning house' in what Chalk describes as a 'double quarantine' (5.2.801-04).¹⁵⁰ Chalk also suggests that these sudden spatial closures allude to 'the closure of the playhouses' – to which I would add the shut-up houses of the infected during outbreaks – which 'brings the entertainment to an abrupt halt'.¹⁵¹

However, given the play's plague time context and the comedy's preoccupation with the preservation of male bodily health, what the Queen might also be offering Navarre is advice which, like the oaths made at the beginning of the play, is strategically underpinned by

¹⁵⁰ Chalk, p. 13.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 12.

ideas contained within plague treatises and health regimens. The Queen's measures, for instance, like the plague time advice beyond the playhouse, advise The King to fly fast and far away, and when he is 'remote' enough, there he is to practice 'insociable' seclusion and 'fast' penitently (5.2.73). The Queen's advice also shares textual similarities with Cogan's on how to 'abate carnal appetite' to preserve good health, which he suggests includes: 'Study and meditation, by often fasting, by much labour, by hard fare, by hard lodging', rendering the Queen's phrase, the 'heat of blood', particularly pertinent.¹⁵²

Furthermore, The King is not the only man to receive advice from their beloved. The Queen's waiting women promptly follow 'suit' and deliver their own supplementary advice to each lord in turn (5.2.827). However, it is Rosalind's directions for Berowne that, like the health regimens offstage, really take into consideration the respective 'spirits' contained within his body and prescribes accordingly (5.2.727):

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 endeavour of your wit,
To enforce the painèd impotent to smile (5.2.829-42).

Berowne is, as Nicole Dewall notes, to 'spend the year healing the sick with his "wit"'.¹⁵³

Rosalind has clearly taken Berowne's 'merry-mocking' humour into consideration when formulating her healthful plan (2.1.52). As discussed, plague time regimen and treatise writers not only considered mirth to be conducive to health, but also thought their 'merry' or mirthful patients to be among the healthiest: as Bullein notes, 'mirth is most excellent, and the best

¹⁵² Cogan, p. 251.

¹⁵³ Nichole DeWall, "'Sweet recreation barred': The Case for Playgoing in Plague time", in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 133-49 (p. 144).

companion of life, putter away of all diseases'.¹⁵⁴ Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard note that it was well established in the period that 'the purgative qualities of comic laughter could [...] temper the dangerous physical and emotional effects of excessive melancholy or black bile'.¹⁵⁵ The King engages with a similar sentiment when he tries to persuade the Queen to continue at court even after her father's death has been revealed: 'since to wail friends lost / Is not by so much so wholesome-profitable / As to rejoice at friends but newly found' (5.2.743-45). The King's plea speaks to the ideas communicated in Katherine and Rosalind's exchange that urge the importance of keeping the heart 'light and 'merry' as opposed to heavy and 'dark' (5.2.19), an outlook also recommended by Boorde who states that one should shun morbid company for merry: 'Wherefore let every man be merry and if he cannot, let him resort to merry company to break off his perplexities'.¹⁵⁶

What Rosalind recommends, however, is contrary to this, as Berowne is to seek out 'the pained impotent [...] deafed with the clamours of their own dear groans' (842-52). As Kerrigan suggests, this would have been risky advice during plague time as frequenting a hospital 'is far more than the symbolic ordeal modern audiences take it to be. Biron must re-enter the world at its most dangerous and face the imminence of every man's death'.¹⁵⁷ As 'the merry madcap Lord' (2.1.214), however, Berowne's humour and disposition offer him, according to plague time regimens and treatises, at least some form of protection against disease. As such, he is the only plague-susceptible Lord who could safely 'jest a 'twelvemonth in an hospital' and risk exposure to its 'sickly' bodies (5.2.851). Rosalind's

¹⁵⁴ Bullein, *Government of Health*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁵ Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard, 'Introduction: Imagining Audiences', in *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, ed. by Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-25 (p. 11); See also: DeWall.

¹⁵⁶ Boorde, *A Compendious Regiment*, p. 204.

¹⁵⁷ Kerrigan, p. 123.

language is also most revealing as she suggests that physical exposure to other's sickness and their mortality is the only way to 'weed this wormwood from' Berowne's 'fruitful brain' (5.2.835). The use of 'wormwood' is significant as it draws on a well-known contemporary purging treatment for those who, like Berowne, are reportedly 'replete' and 'full' of excess (5.2.831-32). Kellwaye in his plague treatise, for example, prescribes 'a draft of wormwood wine' to 'purgeth bilious matter in the melancholic'.¹⁵⁸ Rosalind, then, clearly aims to simultaneously purge Berowne of his 'fault[s]' and his plague-inducing melancholy (5.2.856), seeking both his 'reformation' and restoration (5.2.857).

So, what are the main differences between the measures posed by the women at the end of the play and those actioned by the men in its opening? And do they actually promise more efficacy and protection than the former? Crucially, the women's measures are independent from any oaths, and so altogether avoid evoking any retributive 'plagues' that were understood to strike 'men forsworn' (4.3.359). Katherine explicitly warns Dumaine not to 'swear [...] lest' he 'be forsworn again' (5.2.820). This echoes Juliet's pleas to Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*, where she implores him 'not' to 'swear at all' (2.2.154). Yet, in this instance, Katherine is not only concerned that swearing might 'prove' Dumaine's 'love [...] likewise variable', but might also induce him to commit more harmful, plague-provoking perjury (2.2.153).

Second, and most importantly of all, the women's advice is structured and tailored to each man by those that 'most his humours know' (2.1.53). Unlike the regimen established at the beginning of the play by the men themselves, the women's advice requires the males to operate in 'singularity', as Mentzer suggests.¹⁵⁹ Each man is sent away from the other; 'you

¹⁵⁸ Kellwaye, B3^v-B4^r.

¹⁵⁹ Mentzer, p. 11.

that way, we this way' (5.2.919). No longer part of a larger group, they are forced to face their labours alone. This has important implications for the prophylactic efficacy of the women's advice and illustrates why the men's former measures were doomed from the outset. In contrast to the generalised, one-size-fits-all approach of the men's regimen, which did not acknowledge or accommodate individual humours and temperaments, each male receives measures that are specific to them. This allows them to monitor and govern their own, individual bodies and their distinct 'passions' with greater 'care' than they have previously demonstrated or that their previous collective regimen would allow (5.2.28). As such, the women's advice sits alongside the typical model and principles of the advice contained within the plague time health regimen and plague treatise far more comfortably than those taken up in the first scene. And, as Katherine states – someone who understands first-hand the somatic damage that can be wreaked by humoural imbalance – these prescriptions, like the regimens and treatises they speak to beyond the stage, 'honest[ly]' and more effectively venture to keep the men that follow their guidance in 'fair health' (5.2.812).

Conclusion

Galen, the most excellent physician, feared that in writing a compendious doctrine for the curing of sickness he should lose all his labour, forasmuch as no man almost did endeavour himself to the finding of truth but that all men did so much esteem riches, possessions, authority, and pleasures that they supposed them which were studious in any part of sapience to be mad or distract of their wits.¹⁶⁰

Far from his 'labour[s]' being 'lost' and his 'fear' of public indifference towards knowledge of the body and its aggressors being realised, Galen's work, and the health regimens like Elyot's that it influenced, provide an important conceptual framework for Shakespeare's early

¹⁶⁰ Elyot, p. 40.

comedy *Love's Labour's Lost*. Endemic plague in England motivated the production of many new regimens, plague treatises, and flurries of subsequent reprints of both, and it is these which shape Shakespeare's narrative from the very beginning of the play to its conclusion. Shakespeare presents not one, but two sets of measures that speak to this plague time advice and the anxieties surrounding disease prevention and the body during outbreaks.

Furthermore, despite its courtly setting, Shakespeare's first audiences, who were themselves in recovery from the effects of a prolonged outbreak of the disease, are also presented with recognisable plague time spatial patterns. These include the monarch's withdrawal from their people, and the monitored and moderated affluent, male body that must withdraw from female company. *Love's Labour's* is an alert plague time comedy whose dramatic action draws on the experience of preventative actions and advice pertaining to the body and utilises the contemporary understandings of the disease's medical frameworks for comedic effect. It is a play whose considerable darkness bubbles beneath this comedy, where love and death court provocatively side by side, and in which many of its characters, like its first audiences offstage, are either anticipating, processing, or preventing disease and death.

Chapter Two

‘Let us give him burial as becomes’: Unearthing Plague Time Burial Practices and their Narratives in *Titus Andronicus*

In the opening of his 1593 *Defensative against the plague*, Simon Kellwaye outlines some of the phenomena that might be witnessed prior to an outbreak of plague; signs from within the community and its environment that served as ‘warnings of plague’ to come.¹ Located amongst Kellwaye’s portents is this rather macabre playground game:

When we see young children flock themselves together in companies, and then wilt feign some one of their company to be dead amongst them and so will solemnise the burial in a mournful sort, this is a token which hath been well observed in our age, to foreshow great mortality at hand.¹

This apparently prevalent notion that staged burials presaged plague then begs the question, what did it mean to an early modern audience when a professional playing company, as opposed to a ‘company’ of playing children, performed ‘solemn’ (*TA*.5.2.115) burials during a seemingly unrelenting period of endemic plague? ² Furthermore, can an examination of these ‘feign[ed]’ funerals, one that contextualises them within their epidemiological and prophylactic epistemologies, exhume latent cultural encounters with plague time corpse disposal and funerary practices? This chapter explores the burial spaces that host the multiple corpse disposals that are referenced and staged in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. It will examine how *Titus*’ dead and the physical and conceptual spaces that their decomposing

¹ Simon Kellwaye, *A defensative against the plague containing two parts or treatises* (London, 1593), STC 14917, B2^r.

¹ Ibid.

² All references to Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* are taken from *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury; Revised Edition, 2018).

remains occupy function within and alongside contemporary plague prevention measures that, above all, sought to conserve the living, not venerate the dead.

As Helga L. Duncan notes, Shakespeare's *Titus* evocatively 'opens and closes on a funeral'.³ The tragedy also stages and references several more interments in addition to these. Yet, it is not just the volume of bodies requiring burial that seems to be of concern in *Titus*, but the manner in which these bodies are organised and handled and where the remains are physically and morally situated after death. Shakespeare's awareness of human remains and the insistence upon appropriate burial in *Titus* is exemplified most forcibly in the third act, when Titus 'farcically' demands that even his severed hand be buried and memorialised (3.1.196).⁴ Both Duncan and Phillip Schwyzer, whose work I draw upon throughout this chapter, have addressed Shakespeare's alertness to bodies, interment, and space within *Titus*, and have respectively considered the dramatic and wider cultural significance of the 'funerary spaces' that are staged in his tragedy.⁵ Duncan, specifically, explores the post-reformation tensions that exist between burial space and spirituality in *Titus*, a play that, Duncan suggests, 'associates tragedy strongly with place and, more specifically, with the sacred place of burial [...] as the dramatic action unfolds, disturbing generic variations on the place of the grave shape Shakespeare's dramaturgy'.⁶

Schwyzzer, similarly, delineates disturbed or displaced burials and bodies that, like those that we see in *Titus*, are denied 'decent inhumation'.⁷ Within this framework, Schwyzer examines the various ways in which enemies of the Roman state are assailed post-mortem in

³ Helga L. Duncan, "Sumptuously Re-edified": The Reformation of Sacred Space in *Titus Andronicus*, *Comparative Drama*, 43.4 (2009), 425-53 (p. 427).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Philip Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 120-1.

Shakespeare's tragedy by illustrating how the method and location of burial is manipulated and weaponised throughout the play.⁸ Schwyzer, like Duncan, also outlines some of the major shifts in burial practices in England following the reformation. Schwyzer notes how these:

Reflect a dialectic between the need of the community to manage surplus human remains practically and without superstition, and the desperation of individuals to protect their own remains from the ensuing consequences.⁹

Whilst Duncan and Schwyzer do not explicitly engage with plague prevention culture or plague time burial practices, their work is still clearly thinking about Shakespeare's engagement with the cultural potency of human remains and the importance of their material organisation and conceptual placement within shifting attitudes towards inhumation, and so provide an important socio-historical basis for the discussion that follows.

Shakespeare's preoccupation with the 'surplus' dead and their remains that we see manifest in *Titus* could not have been presented to his audiences at a more apt time. We know this reportedly new (or as Phillip Henslowe notes it, 'ne' play) was performed at the Rose Theatre in January 1594.¹⁰ This means that *Titus*, whether it was premiering or not, was staged at the Rose just one month after the theatre had reopened following two years of nearly constant closures.¹¹ These closures were due to playing prohibitions triggered by the plague

⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰ Whether this date is actually the play's premier is still debated. For example, Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson argue that 'the reference to *Titus* in *A Knack to Know a Knave* [...] first performed in June 1592, is *prima facie* evidence that *Titus* came first. Even if we accept Bate's suggestion that the allusion might have been introduced when the surviving text of *Knack* was memorially reconstructed, rather than at the time of its original composition, this would still have taken place not later than 7 January 1594, when *Knack* was registered for publication. This was more than two weeks before the first Sussex's Men performance of *Titus* at the Rose', Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, 'Titus Andronicus', in *British Drama 1533-1642: British Drama Catalogue*, Vol. 3: 1590-1597 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 180-5 (p. 180).

¹¹ Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 87.

outbreak of 1592-3, the same outbreak that provides the bleak backdrop to Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* discussed in the previous chapter. The fact that *Titus*, a play that engages so forcefully with burials and bodies, likely premiered at a time when Shakespeare's collective London audience had themselves lately witnessed over eleven thousand burials of plague-dead bodies cannot be ignored.¹² And whilst this chapter does not suggest that the 'pile' of bodies in Shakespeare's tragedy are the result of plague, it does suggest that the subsequent treatment and disposal of these bodies forcefully engages with contemporary plague time burial practices and their narratives that were driven by exigent plague measures (1.1.100).

Despite the tragedy's compelling plague time context, this socio-historical framework has largely been overlooked in its scholarship. That said, I am certainly not the first to read *Titus* alongside contemporary medical frameworks, particularly those surrounding corporeal corruption and collapse. Catherine Belling, for instance, considers the presence and proximity of infectious Goth blood within Shakespeare's tragedy. Belling argues that the Goths are 'presented as the source of impurity in Rome, imported as prisoners of war but given power under Saturninus' corrupt rule', and that the play's numerous gory injuries and deaths, many of which provoke extensive bleeding, serve as analogues for remedial communal bloodletting.¹³ More recently, Bradley J. Irish encounters the dead and injured in *Titus* through the lens of what he terms the 'spectacle of disgust'.¹⁴ Irish is interested in the

¹² Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 151.

¹³ Catherine Belling, 'Infectious Rape, Therapeutic Revenge: Bloodletting and the Health of Rome's Body', in *Disease, Diagnosis, and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. by Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 113-32 (p. 126); See also: Louise Noble, "And Make Two Pasties of Your Shameful Heads": Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in "*Titus Andronicus*", *ELH*, 70.3 (2003), 677-708.

¹⁴ Bradley J. Irish, *Shakespeare and Disgust: The History and Science of Early Modern Revulsion* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2023), p. 35.

voyeuristic nature of early modern executions, particularly the public visibility and proximity of the dismembered and rotting corpses of the malefactors that the audience repeatedly encounter both in *Titus* and their wider culture.¹⁵ However, these previous studies do not connect Shakespeare's early tragedy and its engagements with somatic corruption – and its contiguity to the body politic – to early modern plague.

Moreover, as Jennifer Feather has recently argued in her work on the notion of 'contagious pity' in *Titus*, the language of infection and disease, and therefore plague, is remarkably absent from Shakespeare's tragedy.¹⁶ This sits in stark contrast to Shakespeare's other Roman plays, such as *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*, in which, Feather notes, 'the language of disease' is both forceful and frequent.¹⁷ So, how else might Shakespeare be engaging with plague and its broader medical frameworks in *Titus* if not through language? I argue that this void of explicitly virulent language is, instead, filled by the playwright's considered spatial engagement with contemporary notions surrounding putrefaction; a dangerous post-mortem state that is implicit in epistemologies of early modern plague and plague prevention models and, as I will discuss, is an insidious force surrounding the unburied dead in *Titus*.

Via *Titus*' legion of improperly interred dead, principally the nurse, the Andronici sons, Aaron, and Tamora, I examine how their unsound graves might be mapped onto contemporary medical frameworks and anxieties that speak to the dangerous putrefactive potency of the early modern plague time corpse and its perceived role in the disease's

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 35-61.

¹⁶ Jennifer Feather, 'Contagious Pity: Cultural Difference and the Language of Contagion in *Titus Andronicus*', in *Contagion and the Shakespearean Stage*, ed. by Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 169-87; For further discussion of pity in Shakespeare see: Toria Johnson, *Pity and Identity in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2021).

¹⁷ Feather, p. 170.

transmission (1.1.90). I then turn my attention towards the burial practices that sought to mitigate the threats posed by these dangerous corpses. I view the Andronici tomb in Act One, and the ‘loathsome pit’ in Act Two through the lens of the early modern plague time burial experience described in pamphlets and delineated in plague orders, an experience that seemingly provoked great societal anguish and permanently altered funerary practices in England (2.2.193). This chapter offers a new reading of *Titus*’ bodies and burial spaces, one that considers how the dramatist’s audiences might have encountered the staging of these graves during active periods of endemic plague, at a time when their own burial spaces and practices were being questioned and reorganised. As such, I read Shakespeare’s early tragedy as a rich cultural repository from which we might begin to recover the impact that plague prevention measures had on post-mortem bodies and space, and the wider cultural imagination surrounding plague time inhumation.

‘In the grave shall we rot’: Putrefaction and plague in Shakespeare’s *Titus*¹⁸

Before they are killed by Titus and eaten by their own unsuspecting mother, Chiron and Demetrius are employed by Aaron to be ‘gallant grooms’ in Act Four, Scene Two (4.2.166). After ‘giving her physic’, Aaron instructs Tamora’s sons to carry the slaughtered body of the nurse to the ‘fields’ and ‘bestow her funeral’ (4.2.164-6). What happens to the nurse’s body after this point is unclear. Is some sort of funerary ritual performed as per Aaron’s suggestion? Is her body actually buried, or do Chiron and Demetrius carry her corpse to the fields and simply cast it aside? It is safe to say that the nurse does not receive the ‘funeral’ that she would have hoped for in the event of her untimely death. Moreover, the

¹⁸ Thomas Nashe, *Christs Tears over Jerusalem Whereunto is annexed, a comparative admonition to London* (London, 1593), STC 18366, p. 73.

expedient disposal of the nurse's corpse, and its specific placement in the 'near' fields, is particularly interesting when it is read within the context of early modern plague culture, as the spatio-temporal conditions surrounding the rough removal of her servant body parallels numerous unsystematic burial narratives that emerged during plague outbreaks, that I now turn to examine (4.2.165).

In his *Wonderful Year*, a pamphlet that responds to the later plague outbreak of 1603-4, Dekker notes that he could 'draw forth a Catalogue of many poor wretches' who have died suddenly during plague time and whose bodies now lie 'in the open fields' having 'been buried like dogs'.¹⁹ Moreover, during the same outbreak, Dekker, this time in collaboration with Thomas Middleton, explains how householders and businesses did 'noble exploits' by:

Hiring porters and base vassals to carry their servants out in sacks to Whitechapel and such out-places, to poor men's houses that work to them, and therefore durst do no otherwise but receive them, though to their utter ruins, and detestable noisomeness, fearing to displease them for their revenge afterwards, as in putting their work from them to others for their utter undoing (ll.545-49).²⁰

It can be assumed, however, that this unsavory practice was already firmly rooted in the cultural consciousness by *Titus'* first likely performance in 1594 as it is a practice that is also censured in Thomas Nashe's *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* (1593). Nashe notes how plague-infected servants, dead and dying, would often be removed from their London households and left to 'putrefy in the open fields'.²¹ Nashe describes how:

There were them in the heat of the sickness that thought to purge and cleanse their houses by conveying their infected servants forth by night into the fields, which there starved and died for want of relief and warm keeping [...] in Gray's inn, Clerkenwell,

¹⁹ Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful year. 1603 Wherein is showed the picture of London, lying sick of the plague* (London, 1604), STC 6535.5, D3^v.

²⁰ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, 'The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary; or, The Walks in Paul's', ed. by Paul Yachnin, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 183-94 (p. 193).

²¹ Nashe, *Christ's Tears*, p. 83.

Finsbury, and Moorfields, with mine own eyes have I seen half a dozen of such lamentable outcasts.²²

As Nashe, Middleton, and Dekker articulate, accounts of wealthy householders and business owners conveying their servants to ‘the fields’ or ‘out-places’ in order to prevent an infection being identified within their houses or establishments were widespread. For, should such an infection have been reported, the inhabitants would have found themselves shut-up in their homes or seen their businesses sealed up as per the instructions listed in the national plague orders, a measure that will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.²³ Thus, the perceptions and behaviours of affluent London citizens towards their servants’ bodies reads not unlike Shakespeare’s *Titus*, where a servant’s body is, similarly, secretly conveyed to ‘the fields’ in attempts to conceal something seemingly ‘loathed’ and ‘foul’ (4.2.80-1), that the city’s elite ‘would hide from heavens eye’ (4.2.60).²⁴ The extent to which Shakespeare’s audiences might have drawn comparisons between the disposal of the nurse’s body and the removal of household servants during plague time can, of course, only be speculated upon. As Hamlet notes, there may have been ‘guilty creatures sitting’ in the audience who had participated in unsanctioned removals themselves, possibly very recently, and for whom the parallels may have been uncomfortably obvious (2.2.591). In such cases we might be reminded of the incident reported during a performance of a play in King’s Lynn, where apparently a ‘townswoman [...] of good estimation and report’, whilst watching a play

²² Ibid., p. 19.

²³ *Orders thought meet by her Majesty and her privy Council, to be executed throughout the counties of this realm* (London, 1578), STC 9187.9, A4^r.

²⁴ Of course, the ‘loathed’ and ‘foul’ subject in question here is not plague, but Aaron and Tamora’s son. It would, therefore, be remiss of me not to draw attention to the most recent critical race scholarship that engages with this moment: Megan Snell, ‘Performing Babies and the Properties of Race and Ethnicity’, *Shakespeare*, 19.1 (2023), 93-107 (pp. 95-102); Hanh Bui, “Send the midwife”: The Birth of Blackness in *Titus Andronicus*, *Renaissance Studies* (2024), 1-20 <<https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/rest.12919>>.

featuring a matricide and a subsequent haunting, ‘suddenly screeched and cried out’ and confessed to poisoning her husband seven years earlier.²⁵

What we can be more certain of, however, is the audience’s collective understanding of the epidemiological dangers posed by the nurse’s discarded body, and the shared embodied knowledge of the medical frameworks that her decomposing corpse operates within. Dekker and Middleton’s *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary* not only further suggests the frequency of illicit servant-body removal cases during outbreaks, but it also importantly relates why, aside from the more obvious moral objections, this unsanctioned practice was considered to be so repugnant and dangerous:

Wherefore to avoid all farther inconveniences, dangerous and infectious, hearken to my exploit: If you drag him along the fields, our hounds may take the scent of him, a very dangerous matter: if you bury him in the fields [...] the ground will be rotten this winter (ll.476-80).²⁶

It is these ‘dangerous [...] rotten’ plague time bodies whose unsystemised graves only intensify their noisome stench – a stench that has the capacity to lure hungry dogs and decay the very ‘fields’ that contain them – that I now turn to examine in more detail to consider the extent to which these malodorous corpses that are wreathed within plague culture might also be present in Shakespeare’s *Titus*.

Andrew Wear argues that ‘a crucial component in most accounts of disease’ in the early modern period was ‘putrefaction’.²⁷ As Veronice Deblon and Kaat Wils note:

The grave as a peaceful place of sleep stands in sharp contrast with the reality and corporeality of death—of decomposition and putrefaction.

²⁵ Thomas Heywood, *An apology for actors Containing three brief treatises* (London, 1612), STC 13309, G1^v.

²⁶ Dekker and Middleton, ‘Meeting of Gallants’, p. 192.

²⁷ Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 136-7.

The process of decay is inevitable in the body once organs stop functioning and bacteria and enzymes start decomposing bodily tissue.²⁸

In the case of early modern plague, however, the observable signs and smells of ‘external putrefaction’ could, as Wear explains, ‘create by contagion a devastating internal putrefaction’ in the bodies of others.²⁹ As introduced in the previous chapter, the main route of entry into the body for sources of external putrefaction was via the ‘draw[ing...] in of corrupt air’.³⁰ There were, as Kellwaye describes, ‘diverse causes’ for this corrupt air and the plague that it engendered, such as ‘over great and unnatural heat’, as well as ‘great rain and inundations of waters’.³¹ The understanding that heavy rainfall and flooding could trigger corrupt air, as opposed to waterborne diseases that we might identify today, is articulated in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when Titania and Oberon’s quarrel disturbs the balance of natural order. Titania states that the ‘pelting river[s]’ ‘have overborne their continents’ and, in anger, their governess, the moon, ‘washes all the air’ so ‘that rheumatic diseases do abound’ in the mortal realm (2.1.92-105).

Not unlike the environmental turmoil caused by vengeful otherworldly beings in Shakespeare’s *Dream*, early modern divine retribution (thought to be administered via God’s three arrows: pestilence, war, and famine) might also engender similarly unstable environmental conditions that generated their own sources of putrefaction. This infamous trinity and its cultural prominence during outbreaks of early modern plague is illustrated most

²⁸ Veronique Deblon and Kaat Wils, ‘Overcoming Death: Conserving the Body in Nineteenth-Century Belgium’, in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mortality and its Timings: When is Death*, ed. by Shane McCorristine, *Palgrave Historical Studies in the Criminal Corpse and its Afterlife* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp. 49-67 (p. 50).

²⁹ Wear, p. 137.

³⁰ Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague containing the nature, signs, and accidents of the same* (London, 1603), STC 16676, B4^r.

³¹ Kellwaye, B1^v.

readily in *Meeting of Gallants*. The collaborative pamphlet is prefaced by a dialogue between God's arrows, who each 'blaze' 'their several evils'(1.1).³² During a debate between Pestilence and the 'Genius of War', Pestilence asserts that she 'surpass[es] the fury' of his 'stroke', and that she alone could slay 'forty thousand in one Battle' (1.36-40).³³ Middleton and Dekker's Pestilence clearly delights in the visible somatic damage she wreaks on the battlefield, declaring that she leaves the soldiers 'Full of blue wounds, whose cold clay Bodies look / Like speckled Marble' (1.41-2).³⁴ Pestilence also appropriates the language of her adversary to describe some of her most physically destructive effects, most of which refer to symptoms that are unique to bubonic plague:

As for lame persons, and maimed Soldiers
There I outstrip thee too; how many Swarms
Of bruised and cracked people did I leave,
Their Groins sore pierc'ed with pestilential Shot:
Their Arm-pits digged with Blains, and ulcerous Sores,
Lurking like poisoned Bullets in their flesh? (1l.43-8).³⁵

However, it is not just the physical appearance of the fallen soldiers that I wish to consider here; it is also their smell. The most potent source of atmospheric corruption and plague, which is cited in numerous plague treatises, is the 'all manner of foul stinking carrion, or dead bodies: where great stink engendereth [...] great putrefaction'.³⁶ The battlefield, a site of mass death that War and Pestilence both recall in *Meeting of Gallants*, was a charged space in the early modern imagination, as it was understood to be a dangerous source of putrefaction

³² Dekker and Middelton, 'Meeting of Gallants', p. 186.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ John Vandernote, *The governance and preservation of them that fear the plague* (London, 1569), STC 18600, A6^v.

that spread great disease and even greater anxiety. Kellwaye, for instance, notes that ‘plague proceeds’:

By great store of rotten and stinking bodies, both of men and beasts, lying upon the face of the earth unburied, as in the time of wars hath been seen, which doth so corrupt the air, as that thereby our Corn, Fruits, Herbs, and waters which we daily use for our food and sustenance, are infected.³⁷

Likewise, in the subsequent outbreak of 1603, Lodge argues that:

Sometimes such a vapour is lifted up into the air, by reason of the corruption & stench of dead and unburied bodies (as in places where any great battle has been fought, it often falleth out, according as diverse Histories testify).³⁸

This firm connection between epidemics and war was seemingly well established, then, by the time of Shakespeare’s career and, as Sampson Price’s sermon from 1626 attests, persisted well beyond it. Price recalls ‘storie[s]’ of ‘a great battle’ where ‘many being slain, and the bodies unburied, there followed a great plague; and this so infected men’.³⁹ Crucially, as both plague treatises and Sampson’s sermon imply, what renders the corpses of these soldiers particularly pestilentially potent is the fact that they remain ‘unburied’. As John Vandernote in 1569 describes, these exposed bodies are left ‘lying upon the earth’ instead of dwelling safely below it, thus allowing the smells of putrefaction to freely circulate in the air around them.⁴⁰

³⁷ Kellwaye, B1^v.

³⁸ Lodge, B4^r.

³⁹ Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 59; Samson Price, *Londons remembrancer: for the staying of the contagious sickness of the plague* (London, 1626), STC 20332, p. 16; See also Rebecca M. Seaman’s edited collection *Epidemics and War: The Impact of Disease on Major Conflicts in History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

⁴⁰ Vandernote, A4^r.

Shakespeare engages with this plague time anxiety that surrounds uninterred casualties of war numerous times in his corpus. In *Coriolanus*, for instance, the eponymous Roman general, who has just returned from war, declares that he ‘prize[s] the ‘love’ of the common man as much as ‘the dead carcasses of unburied men / That do corrupt my air’ (3.3.125-7). However, it is within his 1599 *Henry V* where Shakespeare really explores the particulars of this plague-engendering phenomenon and the contemporary medical frameworks surrounding it. In Act Four, Scene Three, the victorious Henry informs the French herald that although ‘many’ of the English dead will be removed from the battlefield and ‘find native graves’ (4.3.97), those that are left behind shall continue to serve their country’s cause even in death:

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 honors reeking up to heaven,
Leaving their earthly parts to choke your clime,
The smell whereof shall breed a plague in France.
Mark, then, abounding valor in our English,
That being dead, like to the bullet’s crazing,
Break out into a second course of mischief,
Killing in relapse of mortality (4.3.99-108).

The English dead, whom Henry imagines will be ‘buried’ not in the traditional sense but in an unmannerly heap and left to decompose under the hot French sun, are deployed, in Holly Dugan’s phrase, as ‘olfactory weapon[s] of war’ whose putrefying odours will ‘break out’ and kill many more English enemies by means of ‘plague’.⁴¹ During the similarly ‘hot and dry’ plague time summer of 1603, Dekker and Middleton provide their audience with a

⁴¹ Holly Dugan, ‘The Smell of a King: Olfaction in *King Lear*’, in *Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture*, ed. by Simon Smith, Arden Shakespeare Intersections (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 133-56 (p. 139).

comparable image in *News from Gravesend*, where they outline the public health dangers associated with smelling the stink of unburied wartime bodies:

Yet must we grant that- from the veins
Of rottenness and filth that reigns
O'er heaps of bodies slain in war,
From carrion (that endangers far)[...]
The sun draws up contagious fumes
Which, falling down, burst into rheums
And thousand maladies beside,
By which our blood grows putrefied (ll.531-42).⁴²

Consequently, if the early modern understanding was that unburied bodies, especially those who had fallen as a consequence of war, engendered plague, might this then shape how we read the remaining store of unburied corpses, also casualties of war, in *Titus*?

Some of these casualties are present on stage during the very first scene of Shakespeare's tragedy: Titus enters the play following his fallen sons who are being carried 'in coffins from the field' (1.1.35). Crucially, these 'poor remains' (which as Bate suggests were likely represented by a single coffin on stage), are specifically defined by their mourning father as being 'unburied' (1.1.84-90).⁴³ It is also likely, having made their journey from the battlefield, that the corpses of the unburied Andronici sons are by this point already significantly decomposing. John Speed in 1611 notes, for example, that Richard III's 'unburied' remains which, like the Andronici sons, had been carried from 'battle' were said to be 'odious' and 'loathsome to be looked upon' in 'the space of' just 'two days'.⁴⁴ How far this

⁴² Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, 'News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody', ed. by Gary Taylor, annotated and introduced by Robert Maslen, in *Thomas Middleton Works*, ed. by Taylor, Lavagnino and Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 128-48 (p. 140).

⁴³ 'F's plural at 152SD, has "coffins", since Titus is burying more than one son, but Elizabethan staging was often more emblematic than literal', Bate, n.72, p. 172.

⁴⁴ Mary Ann Lund, 'Richard's Back: Death, Scoliosis and Myth Making', *Medical Humanities*, 41.2 (2015), 89- 94 (p. 90); John Speed, *The History of Great Britain* (London, 1611), STC 23045, p. 725.

account is referring to the rapid physical deterioration of Richard's corpse, or is simply propaganda that feeds into what Mary Ann Lund describes as Richard's objectionable 'posthumous reputation', remains to be seen.⁴⁵ Yet, given the prevalent threat of putrefaction and the apparent speed at which early modern senses might have been able to detect and discern bodily decay in the absence of refrigeration, Lucius' insistence on obtaining a Goth sacrifice to 'feed the [...] fire, / Whose smoke like incense doth perfume the sky' might actually serve a more prophylactic than spiritual purpose here (1.1.147-8).

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, cleansing, aromatic scents and smokes, which in many ways are comparable to religious 'incense', were applied in homes and streets during plague time to ward off any unsavoury smells that were understood to spread the disease. In *Titus*, I argue that the immolation of Alarbus works in a similar way. Alarbus' death provides Lucius with a fresh corpse whose cremation 'clean consumes' and offsets the putrefying aromas of the long-deceased Andronici bodies in their coffins; bodies that, as Schwyzer notes, are undergoing an 'appalling loss of physical integrity' (1.1.161).⁴⁶ This notion of the living Andronici consciously applying sensory prophylaxes against the dead is reinforced via Lucius' elucidation of how the presence and display of Alarbus' remains at the site of the Andronici tomb ensures that Rome will not be 'distracted with prodigies on earth' (1.1.104). These are, of course, the same 'signs and prodigies' that, as discussed in the opening of this chapter, were understood to herald outbreaks of plague (VA,1.926). Thus, an early modern audience may have recognised and understood Lucius's compulsion to counteract the corrupting influence of bodies and their noxious smells – in this

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Schwyzer, p. 127.

case the very real concern surrounding unburied battlefield corpses and their putrefaction – as a learned behaviour of the plague time experience that reads as an act of prevention.⁴⁷

The Andronici sons do eventually receive a full Roman burial by the end of the opening scene, an important funerary ritual that we will return to examine in more detail in due course. This customary burial sits in direct contrast to Tamora and Aaron, whose respectively dead and dying bodies deliberately remain uninterred by their triumphant enemies at the closing of the play. After he has been captured and interrogated by Lucius' forces, Aaron is 'set [...] breast-deep in earth' and starved to death (5.3.178-9). Anyone who makes any attempts to alleviate his suffering is told that they too will be put to death (5.3.180-1). Aaron endures a live, partial burial where he is incapacitated by the earth that he is 'fastened' to (5.3.182). It is likely that Aaron will remain in situ even after his eventual death, akin to 'the ravenous tiger', Tamora, whose gored corpse is cast 'forth to beasts' even more threatening than herself (5.3.197). Lucius makes clear that Tamora's grave, like Aaron's, is, in Schwyzer's terms, a 'final insult' befitting a political enemy of Rome.⁴⁸ Moreover, Feather argues that Lucius' decision to leave Tamora's corpse to the mercy of hungry carnivores not only efficiently removes an enemy body, but 'seems to be purifying the body politic of a contaminating agent'.⁴⁹

Conversely, when viewed through a plague time lens and the medical frameworks surrounding plague-related putrefaction discussed above, I argue that to Shakespeare's post-plague audiences, Tamora's exposed and decomposing body would have been 'a

⁴⁷ For further discussion of this moment in performance see: Chloe Preedy, *Aerial Environments on the Early Modern Stage: Theatres of the Air, 1576-1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 216.

⁴⁸ Schwyzer argues that 'the motif of the unburied corpse had strong political overtones' and 'the denial of burial was the final insult meted out to traitors', p. 121.

⁴⁹ Feather, p. 170.

contaminating agent' in and of itself. Since Lucius believes that Tamora's life was 'beastly and devoid of pity', her grave-less corpse is doomed to provide sustenance for scavenging animals (5.3.198). Shakespeare would employ a similar image later in *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Cleopatra mourns the 'brave Egyptians' that will 'lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile / Have buried them for prey' (3.13.169-70). This idea of unburied early modern bodies becoming prey for a variety of carnivorous animals, both large and small, recalls the conjectural canines in *Meeting of Gallants* that in plague time would frequently find unsystematically placed human remains and feast on them (1.478).⁵⁰ Moreover, there are numerous contemporary plague treatises and narratives featuring abandoned plague-dead corpses that, as Slack suggests, were 'left to the mercy' of creatures such as 'hogs and dogs'.⁵¹ Such narratives contributed to the plague time public health measures levelled against dogs, measures that will be explored in more detail in the final chapter. Unlike the corpses themselves, then, the what Dekker and Middleton note is the 'certain and substantial report' of 'the many' humans thrown 'unto highways [...] rolled into ditches, pits and hedges' would have likely been fresh in the minds of *Titus'* audiences upon hearing that Tamora's body is to be turned into food for Rome's faunae (1.597-601).⁵²

Moreover, during the plague of Athens, Greek historian and general, Thucydides, notes that both 'birds and beasts' (the very animals Lucius imagines feasting on Tamora) 'feed on human flesh' that 'lay abroad unburied' and 'tasting', 'perished'.⁵³ Of course, Tamora is stabbed by Titus and has not died as a result of plague. However, as someone who is understood as a 'beastly creature' (2.2.182), whose body and soul are 'spotted' by 'foul

⁵⁰ Dekker and Middleton, 'Meeting of Gallants', p. 192.

⁵¹ Slack, *Impact*, p. 289.

⁵² Dekker and Middleton, 'Meeting of Gallants', p. 194.

⁵³ Thomas Sprat, *The Plague of Athens, which happened in the second year of the Peloponnesian War first described in Greek by Thucydides* (London, 1665), Wing S5040, B2^r.

desire', Tamora is clearly understood as a source of moral and physical corruption in Rome (2.2.74-9).⁵⁴ From the very opening of the play, Tamora is identified as someone who is incredibly dangerous and capable of causing significant and widespread physical harm, most forcibly communicated in her pledge to 'massacre them all' in revenge of Alarbus' murder (1.1.456). Therefore, in its unburied state, Tamora's dangerous body is entered into the 'food' chain at Lucius' command to become a potent biological weapon (5.3.179). Any passing creatures that might feed on Tamora's unburied corpse can also be read as potential vectors of infection; a notion that fully engages with contemporary anxieties surrounding the 'disordered' dead and their corrupting remains in plague pamphlets (1.603).⁵⁵

Wild animals are not the only predators that 'prey' on the dead in *Titus*, however (5.3.197). In Act Five, Scene One, Aaron reveals to Lucius that he has 'oft' 'dugged up dead men from their graves' (5.1.135). Dead and buried bodies are not supposed to resurface into the land of the living. As Lady Macbeth insists, once the dead are 'buried' they 'cannot' and should not 'come out on's grave' (5.1.61). In *Titus*, Aaron makes this nightmare possible as he describes how he has not only exhumed, but how he has also 'set [...] upright' the unearthed corpses 'at their friends' door' in a manner that morbidly semi-reanimates them (5.1.136). Perhaps it was Aaron's gory curation of Rome's bodies that inspired Dekker's image in his *Wonderful Year* where he describes how, during the plague outbreak of 1603-4, he saw London's dead 'standing bolt upright in their knotted winding sheets'.⁵⁶ As Schwyzer notes, 'it is significant that Aaron's crowning piece of villainy, by his own estimation, consists not in execution but in exhumation'.⁵⁷ Aaron understands that exhumation is one of the most

⁵⁴ For further discussion on the term 'spotted' see p. 145-9.

⁵⁵ Dekker and Middleton, 'Meeting of Gallants', p. 194.

⁵⁶ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, C3^v.

⁵⁷ Schwyzer, p. 127.

effective ways that he can inflict the most anguish on his Roman captors. Not only does he achieve this by displaying their loved ones in an appalling state of decomposition, but in preparing such a display, he disturbs consecrated ground and undermines traditional burial rituals. Moreover, when considering this moment within its plague time context, Aaron's act is not only deeply disturbing and disrespectful, but also dangerous. In physically exposing Rome to its rotting dead, Aaron unleashes what Susan Zimmerman terms their 'corrosive chaos' upon the world of the play.⁵⁸ Aaron releases the dead's putrefactive stinks upon the living and unearths pestilential weapons so potentially destructive that they might just fulfill his final curse and 'rot' them 'all', just as the dead soldiers are enlisted to do in *Henry V* (5.1.58).

As Rome's dead and its conflicts erupt for a second time, Shakespeare's city is, thus, assaulted by the plague-producing 'arrows' of putrefaction that are engendered via the human remains left to rot in unsanctified graves in and around the city (4.3.1SD).⁵⁹ Shakespeare's *Titus*, like contemporary plague pamphlets and treatises, plays host to a surplus of these plague-producing, unburied corpses that lie festering in the city's streets and fields, corpses that are smelt out, pecked, and picked at by wild, wandering animals. Shakespeare's unburied bodies also map onto prevalent plague time narratives that contain their own inadequately discarded corpses, many of which have been displaced to evade plague prevention measures that, ironically, sought to curb potential sources of contagion. Although Shakespeare makes no explicit references to disease, contagion, or plague in *Titus*, the play's numerous unsound graves work to infect audience's imaginations with the images and aromas of putrefaction, creating a narrative that reeks of the darkest days of plague time. Consequently, the unmistakably putrid environment that *Titus'* many unsystematic graves produce, combined

⁵⁸ Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 134.

⁵⁹ Preedy, p. 164.

with their broader socio-spatial connections with plague beyond the stage, culturally reframe the play's more prominent staged graves; the Andronici tomb and the pit, which I now turn to examine within their plague time contexts.

'Stand gracious to the rites that we intend': Staging plague time graves in *Titus*

The extent of the epidemiological threat posed by plague-dead corpses and, therefore, the appropriate level of precautionary action that is required when handling them is still being determined today. Previously, 'direct evidence of transmission' of plague from corpses could not be proven.⁶⁰ Yet, clinical studies in 2021 concluded that 'intensive handling' of cadavers and direct contact with their 'bodily fluids' postmortem may in fact aid in the transmission of the disease between people and animals.⁶¹ The study confirms the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to be used in cases of plague, noting that 'these findings should inform precautions taken by those handling the bodies of persons, or animals that died of plague'.⁶² In contrast, and in line with the period's medical frameworks and contemporary anxieties discussed above, the early modern plague-dead corpse was understood to be unequivocally dangerous and a potent source of the disease. Physical contact with a corpse known or suspected to have died of plague was something that Shakespeare's audiences likely avoided at all costs.

The extent of this evasion is communicated, if rather farcically, in one of the Host's 'tales' in *Meeting of Gallants* (1.310).⁶³ The Host relates a plague time incident showcasing an

⁶⁰ Sophie Jullien, Nipun Lakshitha de Silva, and Paul Garner, 'Plague Transmission from Corpses and Carcasses', *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 27.8 (2021), 2033-41 (p. 2033).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 2039.

⁶³ Dekker and Middleton, 'Meeting of Gallants', p. 192.

unconscious drunk, whom the town perceives to be a ‘coward Londoner [...] who thought to fly from the sickness’, had sickened enroute, fallen off his horse, and died (ll.436-7).⁶⁴ With the inhabitants of the town far too afraid to even go near, let alone touch, the supposedly plaguey Londoner, an elaborate plan is devised to move and dispose of his dangerous ‘corpse’:

Whereupon, two or three weatherwise stinkards plucked up handfuls of grass and tossed them into the air, and then whooping and hollowing, told them the wind blew sweetly for the purpose, for it stood full on his back-part. Then all agreed to remove him with certain long instruments, sending home for hooks and strong ropes, as if they had been pulling down a house of fire (ll.455-61).⁶⁵

As Dekker and Middleton’s anecdote articulates, the unburied dead during plague time, whether they had succumbed to the disease or not, were handled (or not as the case may be) with the utmost caution. Consequently, these embedded anxieties surrounding the somatic putrefaction that was understood to be present in unburied bodies, and their firm links with plague, meant that the ‘epidemic corpse’ became what Lukas Engelmann describes as ‘a locus of social danger’ that achieved ‘near-mythic status’ during the period.⁶⁶

It was this danger that ultimately drove authorities to modify funerary and burial procedures during plague outbreaks, and implement measures which, as I now examine, significantly altered traditional interment practices in early modern England. In the last section of this chapter, I place *Titus*’ staged graves, namely the Andronici tomb and the pit, in conversation with plague orders and contemporary narrative accounts that respectively shaped and surveyed experiences surrounding early modern plague time graves beyond the stage. As

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 190.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Christos Lynteris and Nicholas H. A. Evans, ‘Introduction: The Challenge of the Epidemic Corpse’, in *Histories of Post-Mortem Contagion: Infectious Corpses and Contested Burials*, ed. by Christos Lynteris and Nicholas and H. A. Evans (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 1-25 (p. 2).

Meera Jagannathan notes, both graves have been read as ‘compelling metaphors for the interment of a culture’, and the pit, more specifically, as a ‘site’ of female ‘trauma’.⁶⁷ Duncan reads the Andronici tomb, in particular, as the seat of Titus’ ‘spiritual placement’, a notion which is expressed via his fervent commitment to it and his obligations in upholding the established practices surrounding it.⁶⁸

Like Duncan, I am also interested in the play’s ‘perpetual return to the family burial site’, which Duncan argues ‘makes obvious the limitations of a traditional culture of spatial sacrality in an age of profound religious reformation’.⁶⁹ However, the tragedy’s active engagement with what Duncan describes as the ‘modification and loss of traditional sacred sites’ also speaks to the plague time experience, and, as I will examine, informs how plague prevention practices similarly reformed early modern funerary traditions and reshaped society’s relationship with its dead.⁷⁰ The Andronici tomb represents the ideal burial site of the Roman elite, but what happens when the customary rituals attached to this ideal are disrupted? And how far are these disruptions comparable to those caused by plague prevention practices beyond the stage? Far from the ideal burial space offered by the Andronici tomb is the pit staged in Act Two, Scene Two. This site, as I will explore, serves as an analogue for the most extreme, and most feared, plague time burial measure: the mass grave. Thus, these fresh readings of Shakespeare’s graves shed light on the wider socio-cultural impact of exigent body disposal during outbreaks of plague and the conceptualisation

⁶⁷ Meera Jagannathan, ‘Trauma of Death and Decorum in *Titus Andronicus*: The Tomb as Ahistorical Reality’, *Plaza: Dialogues in Language and Literature*, 4.1 (2013), 1-18 (p. 1).

⁶⁸ Duncan, pp. 434-5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

and prevalence of these graves not only within Shakespeare's tragedy, but in the imaginations of its first audiences.

i. The Andronici tomb

Michael Neill suggests that 'the entire first act' of *Titus* 'is dominated' by the family monument of the Andronici, an 'ancestral' tomb that represents the ideal burial space for the elite of Roman society (1.1.87).⁷¹ Schwyzer notes that 'the vogue for [...] private crypts' like the Andronici monument was still relatively new in England when *Titus* premiered, with Elizabeth's reign having inaugurated 'the great period of the private vault'.⁷² Despite the novelty of its architecture, however, the sentiments behind the family vault had long been established, and the structure merely materially 'testified to the enduring bonds between the living and the dead' that already existed in early modern England.⁷³ As Sarah Briest notes, 'the good grave, the appropriate grave [...] is a cosy abode for the dead body: a room, a house, or a cabin that may be enjoyed in private or shared with family'.⁷⁴ This sentiment is communicated by Titus in the opening of the play, who understands and appears comforted by the notion of the family tomb becoming his sons' 'latest home' (1.1.86).

Moreover, beyond being a mere 'store' for his children's bodies, Titus refers to the tomb as the 'sacred receptacle of my joys' and a 'sweet cell of virtue and nobility' (1.1.95-7). The 'five hundred year' old Andronici tomb, that is both wholesome and homely, is clearly

⁷¹ Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 289.

⁷² Schwyzer, p. 124.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 125.

⁷⁴ Sarah Briest, "'The Graves When They Open, Will Be Witnesses Against Thee': Mass Burial and the Agency of the Dead in Thomas Dekker's Plague Pamphlets', in *Interdisciplinary Explorations of Postmortem Interaction: Dead Bodies, Funerary Objects, and Burial Spaces Through Texts and Time*, ed. by Estella Weiss-Krejci, Sebastian Becker, and Philip Schwyzer (Cham: Springer Nature, 2022), pp. 211-29 (p. 224).

steeped in history and tradition (1.1.355). In keeping with its past, Titus ensures that his soldier-sons receive the appropriate ‘roman rites’ of burial before they are placed within its ‘sacred’ space (1.1.388). The space is considered to be so sacred, in fact, that Titus later refuses to inter his younger son, Mutius, who has not died in battle, but has been ‘basely slain’ by Titus himself in a ‘bad quarrel’ between father and son (1.1.358). It is the conditions surrounding Mutius’ contested burial, and the family’s response to it, that I am interested in here. Particularly, I am interested in how Shakespeare’s audience’s might have engaged with the alterations that are made to the familial burial space in light of plague time measures, that, similarly, altered how and where the bodies of their loved ones were laid to ‘rest’ (1.1.154).

The surplus of dead bodies undoubtedly posed one of the biggest challenges for England’s local authorities during plague time. And, of course, the more plague deaths there were, the more bodies there were to dispose of. Vanessa Harding suggests that the issue of disposing of the plague-dead was further complicated by the uneven spread of resources and availability of burial space, as well as significant disparities in population size, which was a major concern amongst the London parishes.⁷⁵ As a result, Harding argues that ‘traditional practices were adhered to as long as possible’ and it was only when these practices were no longer adequate that exigent solutions were implemented so as to ‘avoid a backlog of unburied bodies from piling up’.⁷⁶ Once it had been determined that burials would have to be modified in efforts to curb the disease’s spread and reduce deaths, the other, perhaps bigger, challenge facing authorities was public adherence to the implemented measures. As Harding

⁷⁵ ‘The burden of disposing the dead, and the resources to do it with, were very unevenly spread across the capital. The 120-130 parishes covered in the bills of mort. Varied hugely in size, population, social character and in the space they had for burial’, Vanessa Harding, ‘Burial of the Plague Dead in Early Modern London’, *Epidemic Disease in London*, ed. J.A.I. Champion, *Centre for Metropolitan History Working Papers Series*, 1 (1993), 53-64 (p. 53).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

suggests, this is owing to the ‘strong popular attachment to traditional’ funerary ‘practices’ which included:

The individual funeral and interment, in which the family played an important role; the attendance of friends and neighbours; the desire for commemoration. These desires were in conflict with plague orders and orders of the privy council, which aimed to restrict public assemblies and processions.⁷⁷

Moreover, as Claire Gittings notes, it might well have been that ‘customary rituals’ attached to burial ‘took on an even greater significance than under normal circumstances’.⁷⁸ For instance, Gittings notes that during a significant plague outbreak in Oxford in 1644, ‘wine and cakes’ were still consumed at the burial of a known plague victim, illustrating that ‘the desire to perform the correct rituals outweighed considerations of safety and hygiene’.⁷⁹

An early modern audience might have been especially struck, then, by the plight of Lucius and the remaining Andronici brothers who, in the tragedy’s opening scene, are forced to ‘plead for’ their siblings’ ‘funeral’ (1.1.386). The compulsion to ‘perform’ (1.1.145) what Aaron refers to as ‘popish tricks and ceremonies’ is one of the driving forces in Shakespeare’s plot (5.1.74-7). It is especially apparent in this moment when the Andronici sons feel bound to uphold the customary burial rituals for their kin at any cost, even if the cost is their own lives: ‘Or him, we will accompany’ (1.1.363). In confronting their mercurial father, who could kill them just as quickly as he killed their brother, Lucius and his brothers demonstrate, like the Oxford mourners in 1644, that they are willing to submit themselves to danger to uphold their family’s funerary traditions (1.1.366). However, it is not only the act of burying ‘Mutius’ bones’ that is important to Lucius and his brothers, but where these bones are buried

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

⁷⁸ Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 78.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

(1.1.374). For Lucius, it is vital that Mutius is ‘buried with his brethren’ in the family tomb, a request that he repeats twice (1.1.362). The fact that Mutius’ body is initially ‘barred [...] entrance’ into the revered family monument is, then, significant, especially when considered alongside plague time burial restrictions that, as I now examine, similarly divided established familial burial sites (1.1.388).

One of the earliest recorded instances of plague time revisions disrupting burial and funerary practices in England occurred in 1542 via an injunction by Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London. Bonner writes that ‘in plague time no dead bodies or corpses’ are to ‘be brought into the church, except it be brought straight to the grave, and immediately buried, whereby the people may rather avoid infection’.⁸⁰ Bonner’s initial unwillingness to host the plague-dead in church, combined with the constant threat of the endemic disease from the 1560s onwards, likely paved the way for the stricter regulations surrounding church burials that arrived forty years later.⁸¹ Incidences of familial separation as a result of exigent plague time burial measures, in which whole families might find themselves physically divided in grief, undoubtedly increased upon the arrival of the national plague orders in 1578, which contain the first printed burial measures to be used during outbreaks of the disease. Item Ten of the orders is a single paragraph outlining the measures to be used when disposing of the plague-dead. It called on local authorities to:

Appoint some place apart in each parish for the burial of such persons as shall die of the plague, as also to give order that they be buried after Sun setting, and yet nevertheless by daylight, so as the Curate be present for the observation of the rites and ceremonies prescribed by the law, foreseeing as much as conveniently he may, to be distant from the danger of infection of the person dead, or of the company that shall bring the corse to the grave.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Slack, *Impact*, pp. 61-2.

⁸² *Orders Thought Meet* (1578), B1^v.

Despite the concise nature of these measures, their impact on established funerary practices was considerable. As Briest articulates, these orders ‘fundamentally affected the relationship of the living to the dead’ as ‘rituals of mourning [...] were curtailed’.⁸³ These ‘rituals’ were disturbed even further in 1583, as the London orders emphasized the dangers posed by the ‘infected’ corpse that was no longer permitted to be ‘buried or remain in the church during prayer or sermon’.⁸⁴

Moreover, other preventative measures contained within printed plague orders, such as the shutting-up of houses and prohibiting public assemblies, made organizing and attending funerals of loved ones impossible in the vast majority of cases. As an additional deterrent, punishment was also meted out to clergymen and parish clerks who challenged plague time burial regulations. In 1606, for example, William Tarlton, a sexton, was ‘put in the stocks for bringing an infected corpse into church’, and a year later the clerk at St Sepulcher was ‘committed to Newgate for allowing a funeral procession for an infected corpse’.⁸⁵ Furthermore, these concerns surrounding punishment and infection also led to the deceased of more affluent families being refused interment alongside their kin, an established practice in the period for those who could afford to do so. As Will Coster notes:

The reluctance to bury plague victims within the church meant a disruption of the normal patterns of burial. The family of Thomas Fletcher, alderman and justice of the peace, was devastated by the plague. He lost three daughters in 1605, all of whom were buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity, but when he died in 1607, he was buried, as befitted his status, in the south aisle near the alderman’s seat. Similarly, the more socially humble John Hutchens, tailor, had lost three sons in the outbreak of 1605, all of whom were placed in the churchyard, but his daughter Jane, who died in the same year, not from plague but from a long-term illness, was buried at the end of her grandmother’s form and another daughter Alice, who died in 1615 was buried at

⁸³ Briest, p. 218.

⁸⁴ Charles F. Mullett, *The Bubonic Plague and England: An Essay in the History of Preventive Medicine* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1956), p. 381.

⁸⁵ Kathryn Wolford, ‘Quarantining Contagion: Providentialist Debates over Plague and Public Health in Elizabethan and Jacobean England’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 84 (2021), 273-305 (p. 280).

the end of her mother's pew. It seems that, for those who might expect church burial, plague could create not only a separation in life, but also in death.⁸⁶

It is significant then that *Titus*' first audiences would have had very recent lived experience of these orders: they were reprinted and reinstated in the spring of 1593 in response to the ongoing outbreak, and it is likely that they were only relaxed along with the reopening of the theaters, and *Titus*' likely premiere, in 1594.⁸⁷ And, although it is clearly not explicitly a plague burial, one cannot help but read the action surrounding the Andronici tomb, and Mutius' prohibited burial, in conjunction with these divisive spatial measures that, likewise, divided households in both life and death. In particular, *Titus*' initial stance – 'bury him where you can, he comes not here' – is a demand that, like the national plague orders, physically isolates Mutius' objectionable body from his buried kin (1.1.359). Moreover, and as shall be discussed in more detail in due course, Dekker notes that due to the high demand of burial space in London during outbreaks, families might have had to, like Mutius and his brothers, 'search [...] out a sepulchre' for their kin'.⁸⁸ As such, when read within the context of the 1578 orders, Lucius' entreaty to 'give' Mutius 'burial as becomes' and not, as his father and the national plague orders prescribe, in 'some place apart', is all the more poignant (1.1.352-3).⁸⁹

Although Lucius' plea is heard, and Mutius is eventually interred within the family tomb, a post-plague audience in 1594 might have been struck by the parallels between the conditions surrounding Mutius' eventual interment and the very recent revisions made to their

⁸⁶ Will Coster, 'A Microcosm of Community: Burial, Space and Society in Chester, 1598 to 1633', in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 124-43 (pp. 141-2).

⁸⁷ *Orders Thought Meet* (London, 1593), STC 9200.3.

⁸⁸ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, D1^r.

⁸⁹ *Orders Thought Meet* (1578), B1^v.

own collective funerary practices. Akin to the plague-dead in the orders, Mutius is not only hastily buried, but he is also deprived of the ‘tributary tears’ and ‘obsequies’ that the assembled mourners would customarily ‘render’ to the dead (1.1.162-3).⁹⁰ He is also committed without the ‘trophies’ or personal memorials that would ordinarily ‘adorn’ his ‘tomb’ (1.1.393). *News from Gravesend* similarly describes how, in 1604, plague victims were swiftly placed in their graves, even without the presence of a ‘curate’ and their ‘ceremonies’ as none dared to venture near the plague-dead:

Without the balm of any tear
Or pomp of soldiers, but — O grief! —
Dragged like a traitor, or some thief,
At horses’ tails, he’s rudely thrown,
The corpse being stuck with flowers by none,
No bells (the dead man’s consort) playing,
Nor any holy churchman saying
A funeral dirge, but swift they’re gone,
As from some noisome carrion (ll.851-9).⁹¹

In line with these contemporary attitudes and anxieties towards the ‘noisome’ dead, Titus refuses to carry his ‘traitor’ son, Mutius, to the tomb (1.1.301): ‘Well bury him and bury me the next’ (1.1.391). It is thus the Andronici brothers who place Mutius in his grave. In doing so, Titus’ behaviour reflects the prevalent socio-spatial anxieties attached to the plague-dead corpse, which, like Mutius in Titus’ mind, stands to ‘stain’ the whole family with its acquired stigma (1.1.119). This notion is also articulated in Kent parish records in 1597, where it is noted that not even close family ‘would venture’ ‘to carry’ a corpse to the church

⁹⁰ Euan C. Roger suggests that the death of Elizabeth’s Woodville (Henry VIII’s grandmother) might have been as a result of plague. Woodville’s ‘secret’ funeral had ‘no bells tolling. No formal reception [...] the body was buried immediately on arrival in Edward IV’s tomb, without the usual funerary rites, masses and exequies. This was not a common procedure’, Euan C. Roger, “‘To Be Shut-up’: New evidence for the development of quarantine regulations in Early-Tudor England”, *Social History of Medicine*, 33.4 (2020), 1077-96 (p. 1082).

⁹¹ Dekker and Middleton, ‘News from Gravesend’, p. 144.

grounds for fear of infection and ‘dishonour’ (1.1.300).⁹² Thus, Mutius’ funeral, like those of the plague-dead described in the national orders, is one of ‘convenience’ that is hurried, hazardous, and inconsistent with traditional funerary practices. What is more, since Shakespeare stages these traditional practices earlier in the scene in detail, their absence would be more keenly felt. This absence would have been particularly palpable for a plague time audience who were similarly mourning not only the loss of their dead, but how and where their dead were mourned.

ii. The Pit

Mutius’ eventual place of ‘repose’ in the Andronici tomb possesses a ‘peace[ful]’ ‘silence’ (1.1.93). It is a sonic void that severs the dead from the outside world where, as described in Shakespeare’s *King John*, ‘ears are’ frequently ‘cudgell’d’ with noise (2.1.465). Titus expounds the many benefits of the sensory and physical isolation offered by the tomb:

Secure from worldly chances and mishaps.
Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells,
Here grow no damned drugs, here are no storms,
No noise, but silence and eternal sleep:
In peace and honour rest you here, my sons (1.1.155-9).

Feather suggests that this refuge, as Titus understands it, can be seen ‘not only as a sign of roman virtue but also as a figure for roman invulnerability to disease’ which ‘becomes an idealized image of bodily and civic integrity and health’.⁹³ However, I would argue that this perceived imperviousness and vigor is not only represented, but facilitated, via the physically and sensorially bounded space of the tomb. Not only are the Andronici sons in their sealed

⁹² Gittings, pp. 79-80.

⁹³ Feather, p. 175.

tomb now free from the ravages of disease, as Feather suggests, but when their placement within the monument is considered alongside the prevalent putrefactive frameworks that exist within the play, then the sanctified stronghold that the tomb provides also serves to ‘secure’ the living against any diseases, like plague, that might ‘grow’ from the inhabitants’ decomposing corpses inside.

As Susan Zimmermann notes, during the early modern period ‘the preparation of the corpse for burial functioned’ above all as a means of ‘containment’ which was:

Designed to immobilize and demystify the corpse and prevent its remigration. Thus, it was common practice to ring bells and make other kinds of noise; to stop clocks and cover mirrors; to tie the feet of the shroud and sprinkle the corpse with salt to prevent it from walking.⁹⁴

These containment practices that Zimmerman recalls – in particular the use of a winding sheet or shroud that the dead were ‘tightly sewed into’ – not only physically restrain the early modern corpse, but also function in a similar way to the ‘[en]closed’ Andronici tomb in that they contain the sights and smells of noisome putrefaction (5.3.193).⁹⁵ Thus, the clear spatial boundaries of the Andronici tomb discussed above, that shield the living from the putrefactive forces lurking inside, sits in stark contrast to what Duncan describes as ‘the all-engulfing’ pit, a ‘ragged’ grave that, as this final section examines, ‘swallows spatial distinctions’ and, unimpeded, regurgitates its putrefaction back out into the world (2.2.230).⁹⁶

In Act Two, Scene Two of *Titus*, a ‘detested blood-drinking pit’ becomes Bassianus’ grave, who upon being murdered by Tamora’s sons ‘lies’ within it ‘berayed in blood / All on a heap, like to a slaughtered lamb’ (2.2.222-4). Of course, what follows is even more harrowing

⁹⁴ Zimmermann, p. 131.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Duncan, pp. 442-3.

as Lavinia, after seeing her dead husband ‘tumble[d]’ into the pit, is dragged from his graveside and brutally assaulted (2.2.176). As such, Shakespeare’s pit is often read in conjunction with Lavinia’s assault. As Bate notes, Lavinia’s rape and mutilation ‘cannot be shown onstage’ and is, therefore, ‘evoked through the simultaneous action of the pit scene’ in which Bassianus’ bleeding body is discovered by the various characters who enter or peer into it.⁹⁷ This action and dialogue surrounding the pit, then, functions as an undeniably effective illustrative tool that, when read alongside Lavinia’s assault, provides horrific insight into the physical trauma she endures offstage:

What subtle hole is this?
Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briars
Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood
As fresh as morning dew distilled on flowers?
A very fatal place it seems to me (2.2.198-22).⁹⁸

What has yet to be examined, however, is the overwhelming material presence of Shakespeare’s ‘fatal’ pit within this scene, and the power that this seemingly terrifying space has on those who stumble across it and into it. In other words, what if the pit was simply read as the thing that it is, a grave? A grave, moreover, that fills imaginations with fear just as quickly as the space itself fills with bodies. In this chapter’s final section, I read Shakespeare’s mass burial site alongside plague time mass graves; spaces that accumulated huge numbers of plague-dead during outbreaks and that, like Shakespeare’s pit, elicited ‘uncouth fear’ from those who encountered them (2.2.234).

⁹⁷ Bate also reads the pit as a site of ‘threatening female sexuality that is embodied in Tamora’, Bate, p. 8.

⁹⁸ For further discussion of this moment in regard to Lavinia see: Tina Mohler, “What Is Thy Body but a Swallowing Grave?": Desire Underground in *Titus Andronicus*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57.1 (2006), 23-44; Deborah Willis, "The Gnawing Vulture": Revenge, Trauma Theory, and "*Titus Andronicus*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53.1 (2002), 21-52.

For modern scholarship, the ‘plague pit’ has become what Engelmann describes as a ‘portal into a time of historic plague’.⁹⁹ These mass burial sites, some of which contain remains from the first plague pandemic, have become a key ‘archive’ that have enabled archaeologists and paleopathologists to see and understand the disease’s profound impact on the bodies and communities it visited.¹⁰⁰ In practice, however, the early modern plague pit was undoubtedly a harrowing sight to behold. Driven by fears of putrefaction that the unburied dead secreted as they lay, as Dekker writes, ‘in the open streets [...] in entries and stables [...] and in common highways’, the large mass burial grounds were an expedient way for authorities to dispose of the many plague-dead.¹⁰¹ During 1592-3, for instance, there were in London alone an extra eleven thousand bodies to dispose of as a result of plague. The implementation of mass burials in the city at this time is therefore likely, particularly in the larger, poorer parishes where mortality was significantly higher.¹⁰² However, extant textual evidence of mass graves being used during outbreaks in the sixteenth and seventeenth century only emerges in the wake of the 1603-4 epidemic, ten years after *Titus*’ first likely performance, when references to mass graves begin to appear in pamphlets such as *The Wonderful Year* and *News from Gravesend*.¹⁰³ The lack of engagement with this harrowing burial site in printed material, particularly absent in the earlier and severer outbreak of 1592-3, does not mean that they were not there, however. And, as such, Shakespeare’s rendering of the plague time pit in *Titus* that I discuss here might, in fact, be the first of its kind and the dramatic blueprint upon which later descriptions are based.

⁹⁹ Lukas Engelmann, ‘The Burial Pit as Bio-Historical Archive’, in *Histories of Post-Mortem Contagion: Infectious Corpses and Contested Burials*, ed. by Christos Lynteris and Nicholas H. A. Evans (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 189- 211 (p. 195).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Dekker, *A rod for run-aways* (London, 1625), STC 6520, D2^v- D3^r.

¹⁰² For further discussion of the distribution of plague mortality see pp. 229-30.

¹⁰³ Harding, p. 54.

Mass burials were likely standard practice by at least 1578 and were reinstated whenever the orders were reprinted. As such, it is likely that the ‘place apart’ outlined in the national orders is not suggesting a separate plot for individual graves, but a mass grave that, as described in *Meeting of Gallants*, would be left ‘standing open for more dead commodities’ (l.589).¹⁰⁴ Likewise, in his 1604 pamphlet, *The Black Book*, Middleton references St Sepulcher’s churchyard, a site that, as G.B. Shand notes, was ‘heavily used during plague years’ and where the ‘sexton had left a grave open’ in readiness (ll.424-5).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, burial pits have been found in England that contain the ‘remains of between four and sixteen individuals’ that excavators believe relate to the outbreak of 1593, as Sarah Tarlow notes.¹⁰⁶ Parish records reveal, too, that during a severe outbreak of the disease in 1563, the clerk in St Bardolph’s Bishopsgate was ‘reduced to noting the burial of “two corpses” or “three corpses” without further identification’.¹⁰⁷ The clerk’s records also illustrate one of the many anxieties attached to the early modern mass grave. The fact that the clerk details the number of corpses but omits the names of the dead conveys the period’s conceptualisation of the mass grave as a space where, as Briest notes, ‘all privacy and all boundaries are lost’.¹⁰⁸ It can be assumed that the Bishopsgate dead lie ‘pestered together’ in what Dekker and Middleton describe as ‘one little hole’ (ll.219-20).¹⁰⁹ And whilst it was customary to bury families together, as we see in relation to the Andronici tomb, interring multiple strangers in one space was a different matter entirely. As Briest suggests, the plague time mass grave ‘forces together

¹⁰⁴ Dekker and Middleton, ‘Meeting of Gallants’, p. 194.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Middleton, ‘The Black Book’, ed. by G.B. Shand, in *Thomas Middleton Works*, ed. by Taylor, Lavagnino and Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 204-18 (p. 213).

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 105-6.

¹⁰⁷ Slack, *Impact*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ Briest, p. 221.

¹⁰⁹ Dekker and Middleton, ‘News from Gravesend’, p. 136.

what does not belong together [...] social hierarchies and distinctions, even bodily boundaries, all become void'.¹¹⁰

These fears surrounding the indistinction incited by mass burials were likely further increased by the conditions surrounding the material gravesite itself. Supposedly recalling events in 1665, Daniel Defoe's 1722 *A Journal of the Plague Year* describes the dimensions of the plague pit as he remembers it, or perhaps as he has been told:

They dug the great Pit in the Church-Yard of our Parish of Aldgate; a terrible Pit it was, and I could not resist my Curiosity to go and see it; as near as I may judge, it was about 40 foot in Length, and about 15 or 16 foot broad; and at the Time I first looked at it, about nine Foot deep; but it was said, they dug it near 20 Foot deep afterwards, in one part of it till they could go no deeper for the Water [...] they ordered this dreadful Gulf to be dug; for such it was rather than a pit.¹¹¹

The early modern plague pit was, in basic terms, a 'deep', wide hole in the ground into which a large volume of corpses might be disposed, usually collectively and typically at sunset when visibility was low (2.2.240).¹¹² This meant that individual funeral rites would have been virtually impossible to perform given the logistics and the hazardous conditions of the space. And so, like Tamora's body at the end of the play, the corpses within mass graves likely 'received no funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed, / No mournful bell' to mark their individual passing, as they decayed into what Dekker describes as a 'thickly mingled [...] heap' 'of dead men's bones' (5.3.195-6).¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Briest, p. 223.

¹¹¹ Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, ed. by Louis Landa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 52.

¹¹² Perhaps as a testament to the horror of the plague pit, Thomas Elyot describes melancholic dreams as: 'dreaming of darkness, *deep pits*, or death of friends or acquaintance, and of all-thing that is black', Fitzpatrick, p. 136; 'Also to give order that they be buried after sun setting', *Orders thought meet* (1578), B1^v.

¹¹³ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, C3^v.

This collapse of social and somatic space that the plague time mass grave engendered is demonstrated forcibly in *Titus*. Multiple bodies, both dead and alive, are, as Neill notes, respectively ‘dumped’ and ‘entrap[ped]’ in the play’s ‘second burial vault’.¹¹⁴ Bassianus’ body is the first to enter the pit, then followed by Martius, who ‘fall[s]’ in (2.2.198), and later, Quintus, who according to Saturninus looks to have ‘leapt in’ (2.2.245). And although Martius and Quintus do not die in the pit, their placement within it and their discovery alongside Bassianus is the rationale for their execution just two scenes later: they are, at this point, dead men walking. ‘Poor Bassianus’ grave’ is no longer his own (2.2.240), as the Andronici brothers, who would not have otherwise been buried with him under normal circumstances, encroach on his bodily boundaries and witness his ‘blood and death’ in too close proximity (2.2.216). The ‘dark’ interior of the pit (2.2.225), and the ‘subtle[ty]’ of its entrance that initially hides it from ‘sight’, renders its own spatial borders dangerously indistinct, just like the incongruous bodies that it holds (2.2.195-8). Crucially, *Titus*’ ‘gaping’ pit (2.2.249) is perceived to be an all ‘devouring receptacle’ that consumes and ‘swallow[s]’ all that it encounters (2.2.236). ‘Th’ insatiate’ mass grave featured in plague time narratives is, likewise, understood as a frighteningly animate space that possesses a wide mouth and a strong appetite (2.2.239).¹¹⁵ Dekker, for instance, describes how:

Before the Jewell of the morning be fully set in silver, hundred hungry graves stand gaping, and every one of them (as at a breakfast) hath swallowed down ten or eleven lifeless carcasses: before dinner, in the same gulf are twice so many more devoured: and before the sun takes his rest, those numbers are doubled.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Neill, p. 291.

¹¹⁵ John Davies, *The Triumph of Death :or, The Picture of the Plague: According to the Life, as it was in Anno Domini. 1603* (London, 1609), STC 6332, p. 233 (l.396).

¹¹⁶ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, C4^r.

Moreover, Davies notes in 1603 that the city's mass graves are so over-indulged that they are forced to 'vomit out their undigested dead' (1.346).¹¹⁷

However, it is the unsettling location of Shakespeare's voracious 'mouth' that presents the most salient parallel between the pit and the mass grave sites that peppered the plague time landscape (2.2.273). Middleton and Dekker note the lack of 'hallowed ground' available in London during plague time where 'no heaped gold / Can buy a grave' (11.842-3).¹¹⁸ Similarly, in his *Wonderful Year*, Dekker relates how one citizen could not 'purchase ten foot of ground for his grave' as 'the Church nor Churchyard would let none of their lands' simply because they had none left to give.¹¹⁹ Harding notes that whilst new mass burial sites built on unconsecrated ground were likely during outbreaks in order to keep up with demand, 'nearly all plague victims buried within the parish went to the lower churchyard, and this is almost certainly where the pits were dug'.¹²⁰ What Coster describes as an 'outer circle of consecrated ground', the lower churchyard was typically also the burial space for those who had existed on the margins of society and whose physical distance from the sanctity of the church building brought their liminal bodies closer to the 'profane world' outside its limits.¹²¹

As such, the plots that were assigned for mass burials, although technically still located on consecrated ground, were, nevertheless, perceived to be perilously close, both spatially and socially, to unhallowed soil. Shakespeare's pit, which is explicitly described as an 'unhallowed hole', is, like the plague pits beyond the stage, understood to be devoid of sacrality and a place that is home to 'fiends' and 'urchins' (2.2.100-1). And, akin to the

¹¹⁷ Davies, p. 231.

¹¹⁸ Dekker and Middleton, 'News from Gravesend', p. 144.

¹¹⁹ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, E1^v.

¹²⁰ Harding, p. 54.

¹²¹ Coster, p. 142.

precarious religious ground of the lower churchyard upon which mass burial pits were dug, *Titus*' pit is also understood as an 'obscure plot' (2.2.210), that is 'shadowed from heaven's eye' (1.1.630). However, it was ultimately what might be physically engendered by these unholy locations that led to the most pervasive anxieties surrounding them. Harding notes, for instance, that in 1610 Lord Dorset 'acquired a substantial plot [...] comprising of several gardens', which 'adjoined the old churchyard' at St Brides, Fleet Street.¹²² Dorset later gave this plot to the parish for a new churchyard, his motive being the 'fear of the "danger" to himself and his household from the frequent burials in the old churchyard, especially in time of plague'.¹²³ Dorset clearly wanted nothing more to do with this land and its dangerous proximity to the plague dead.

The location of *Titus*' pit elicits similar behaviours, since it is described as a 'plot' that is not only 'unfrequented' (1.1.615), but 'detested' (2.2.93). Tamora designates the 'vale' where the pit is located as a place that none would purposely venture and, like Dorset's land, the noxious grave that dwells within it is identified as the primary reason for such trepidation (2.2.93). Despite the fact that Tamora's fear surrounding the pit is disingenuous, and the distressing description of the grave a fabrication to further her own agenda, her imaginings appear unsettlingly real as she describes how:

Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds
 Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven.
 And when they showed me this abhorred pit,
 They told me here at dead time of the night
 A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
 Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,
 Would make such fearful and confused cries
 As any mortal body hearing it
 Should straight fall mad, or else die suddenly (2.2.96-104).

¹²² Vanessa Harding, "And one more may be laid there": The Location of Burials in Early Modern London', *The London Journal*, 14.2 (1989), 112-29 (p. 118).

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Ten years later, Dekker would describe a very similar scene in his *Wonderful Year*, where he imagines London as a ‘vast charnel house’, evoking the store of rotting bodies in the city’s plague pits that, like *Titus’* pit, in the ‘dead hour of gloomy midnight’ would fill with the noises of ‘toads croaking’ and ‘screech-owls howling’.¹²⁴ Like Shakespeare, Dekker also describes how these ‘infernal sounds’ would make ‘the strongest-hearted man [...] look wild and run mad [...] and die’.¹²⁵ Both texts clearly associate the mass of urban rotting bodies with the sudden appearance and ‘cries’ of the same creatures and outline the same physical and emotional effects these creatures had on those who encountered them. Perhaps Dekker drew from Shakespeare’s descriptions of *Titus’* pit as a source of inspiration when trying to capture the horrors of plague and the mass death and burial it provoked in 1604. As such, Tamora’s ‘pale[ness]’ when faced with the pit, although duplicitous, recalls what were likely to be genuine plague time anxieties attached to the mass grave that the pit becomes, and that Shakespeare’s audiences would undoubtedly have recognised.

Furthermore, Kellwaye’s plague treatise of 1593, which we first encountered at the start of this chapter, outlines why the unwholesome conditions surrounding Shakespeare’s pit that Tamora describes might have provoked such anguish:

We see great store of toads creeping on the earth having long tails, of an ashy colour on their backs, and their bellies spotted and of diverse colours, and when we see great store of gnats to swim on the waters, and flying in great companies together, or when our trees and herbs do abound with spiders, caterpillars, spiders, moths and such like, which devour the leaves on the trees, and herbs on the earth it sheweth the air to be corrupt, and the plague shortly after to follow.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, C3^v.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Kellwaye, B2^f.

Shakespeare's pit with its 'ten thousand swelling toads' and its adjacent 'trees' that 'though summer' are 'forlorn and lean' (2.2.94), conjures a space that crawls and 'hiss[es]' with Kellwaye's heralds of plague (2.2.100). The wildlife that frequents Kellwaye's treatise and that proliferate within Shakespeare's pit, namely the 'great store' of toads and snakes, are what Lucinda Cole refers to as 'imperfect creatures' that are 'ostensibly born from mud or dung'.¹²⁷ Not only do these creatures signal plague, but they were also considered to be particularly adept at spreading it. What made these creatures effective as supposed vectors of the disease was, as Francis Bacon notes, their perceived 'great disposition to putrefaction in the soil and the air'.¹²⁸ The abundance of these creatures within *Titus'* pit is, therefore, significant. For these creatures to 'swell' and spill out of a mass grave (2.2.101), one that is located within a play that sustainedly engages with notions of putrefaction, forcibly locates the pit itself as a 'store' of actively dangerous physical corruption consistent with contemporary understandings of early modern plague (1.1.97). It is a grave where 'nothing breeds' but death, which only increases when the strangely integrated bodies of Bassianus, Martius, and Quintus are introduced to it (2.2.96).

Thus, far from the enclosed, prophylactic boundaries of the Andronici tomb, Shakespeare's pit is an open 'recurring wound' within his tragedy that both physically and culturally maps onto the most radical alteration to funerary space to occur during plague time: the mass burial pit (3.1.91). Isolating *Titus'* 'abhorred pit' from its more emblematic understandings reveals, then, the unique spatio-temporal aspects of Shakespeare's material burial space and, importantly, its tangible connection to the plague time landscape beyond the

¹²⁷ Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 82.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5; Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum: Or, The Natural History in Ten Centuries*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis, and Douglas D. Heath (New York: Garrett Press, 1968), pp. 554–5.

playhouse (2.2.98). The physical space of the pit, alongside the descriptions of its precarious location, the chilling activity that surrounds it, and the creatures that inhabit it, would have likely been recognisable to an early modern audience, particularly one in 1594. Not only does Shakespeare stage the pit as a physical store of indiscriminate death that is wholly incongruous with the ideal burial practices represented by the Andronici tomb, but like the mass burial sites off stage, Shakespeare conceives of his open pit as a potent source of dangerous putrefaction and plague. And although by *Titus*' premiere, the mouths of London's pits had likely been stopped with earth, their noisome inhabitants with their unsettlingly intermingled bodies would still have been a great source of anxiety and anguish. As such, in what is likely the first sustained description and representation of an early modern plague pit on stage or in print in the sixteenth century, Shakespeare also speaks, via Tamora's ruse, to the infested imaginations of his audiences and their conceptualisations of a site that had completely revised their ideas of burial and burial space.

Conclusion

Returning once again to Kellwaye's 'warnings of plague to come' and the macabre playground game that we encountered in the opening of this chapter, it would appear that even the very youngest in early modern society were conscious of their obligations to 'solemnise' their dead, possessing what might be described as an innate compulsion to 'perform' the appropriate funerary practices that adequately 'mourn[ed]' an individual's passing.¹²⁹ Emerging at a time when audiences had recently experienced significant changes within their own collective interment practices as a result of plague, *Titus Andronicus* is a tragedy that is highly sensitive to the socio-cultural frictions caused by the physical and conceptual

¹²⁹ Kellwaye, B2^f.

displacement of the dead. Not only does Shakespeare present us with many unsystematic burials that parallel the unwholesome body disposals described in plague time narratives, he also consistently engages with contemporary attitudes to putrefaction and its cultural and medical intersections with early modern plague that help transform the play's unburied dead into dangerous munitions that are levelled against Rome.

Shakespeare also stages two graves in *Titus*; the Andronici tomb and the pit, which each speak to the plague time burial experience and that invite us to think, in very distinct ways, about how preventative burial measures not only disrupted established practices, but also created entirely new ones that were fundamentally at odds with interment ideals and moral frameworks. Thus, Shakespeare's *Titus* presents an opportunity to view with more clarity the ways in which plague time burial measures reconceptualised the dead and the spaces they inhabited in early modern England, producing levels of anxiety and anguish that were perhaps only surpassed by the threat of the disease itself. And as we leave the world of the dead behind to consider plague time life in the early modern home, we might be reminded of the Andronici tomb; a space that also housed whole families, offering them 'repose' and 'rest' (1.1.103), yet whose hospitableness was thrown into question and, ultimately, compromised by emergency plague measures (1.1.154).

II The Home

Cleansing and Incarceration

Chapter Three

‘A trouble to the whole house’: Cleansing the Frankford’s Plague Time Home in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*

To live in conscience quietly, and keep thy self from malady.
To ease thy sickness speedily, or help be past recovery.
To seek to God for remedy, for witches prove unluckily. These be the steps
unfeignedly: to climb to thrift by husbandry.¹

In his *Five Hundredth Points of Good Husbandry*, first printed in 1557, Thomas Tusser prescribes his regimen for effective household governance in which he urges his readers to maintain both the physical and moral health of their households. As the numerous reprints of Tusser’s popular work suggest, many of which coincide with the major or prolonged plague outbreaks of 1593, 1604 and 1610, English household manuals of this kind were considered to be especially pertinent in the face of the endemic disease.² It was during such outbreaks that the early modern home – a space that is described by Emma Whipday as one that is already ‘vulnerable to invasion’ from injurious external influences – was most at risk.³

However, as this chapter will examine, alongside these more established household manuals, the widespread plague outbreak of 1603-4 saw what Kathryn Welford defines as an ‘explosion’ of plague-specific treatises and remedies in England, whose advice, unlike that of those encountered in the first chapter, extended beyond the space of the body to the home.

¹ Thomas Tusser, *Five hundredth points of good husbandry as well for the champion or open country, as also for the woodland or several, mixed in every month with housewifery* (London, 1604), STC 24387, p. 15.

² See epidemic years in England from 1485-1666: Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 61-2.

³ Emma Whipday, *Shakespeare’s Domestic Tragedies: Violence in the Early Modern Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 8.

This proliferation of information that emphasised plague's communicability and only increased public alertness to the penetrability of domestic space is, however, not at all surprising when considered alongside the arrival of James I's stringent plague policy in 1604, which sanctioned the use of force in the shutting-up of infected houses and brought plague measures under penal law.⁴ Defending the domestic space against infection was now even more imperative, as any signs of plague within the home revoked the liberties and livelihoods of the whole household, an experience that will be considered in more detail in the following chapter. As such, any advice that aimed to safeguard the home and its inhabitants against plague was now all the more crucial, as the somatic and socio-economic health of the household depended on it.

Despite the wealth of printed medical advice on offer in 1603-4, the directions 'set down' by 'the best learned in physic within this realm' (most likely the Royal College of Physicians) that accompanied the national orders likely remained the most accessible source of domestic plague time advice for the majority of England's householders and tenants. This seven-page document contains inexpensive plague preservatives and treatments using ingredients that could be locally sourced. English householders are advised on how to purge potentially infectious clothing, for example, and are shown how to 'correct [...] the air' within their homes using vessels such as flint-stones that convey heady fragrances and 'fumes' to expel the miasmas of plague, a direction which I will return to explore in more detail in due course.⁵ Crucially, unlike the orders themselves, which were solely for the attention of local officials, these domestic directions were to be 'fixed in market places' and 'upon places usual

⁴ *An act for the charitable relief and ordering of persons infected with the plague* (London 1604), ed. Danby Pickering, *The statutes at large from the Magna Charta, to the end of the eleventh Parliament of Great Britain, anno 1761* (Cambridge: J. Bentham, 1762), Vol. 7, pp. 141-4.

⁵ *Orders Thought Meet by her Majesty and her privy Council, to be executed throughout the counties of this realm* (London, 1578), STC 9187.9, B4^r.

for such public matters' and were, thus, clearly compiled for mass consumption.⁶ Therefore, the fact that these 'sundry good rules and easy medicines' are repeatedly printed alongside the official legislative plague orders (that later threatened punishment or imprisonment to anyone who violated them) lends unequivocal authority to this far-reaching 'advice', as well as the many other recipes and directions that emerged during this period, many of which I will discuss in this chapter, that pertained to the space of the home.

What these prescriptions present to householders, then, is a compulsory programme that dictates the spatio-temporal and sensory experience of domestic space during plague outbreaks. It demonstrates the extent to which the early modern home, just like the early modern body encountered in the previous section, required diligent, systematic management to ensure its continued health.⁷ In stark contrast to the policed and perfumed homes of the plague orders, however, Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* presents a household that has not been diligently managed and, as a result, permits an 'infectious' source to infiltrate the space of the home (6.82).⁸ This chapter examines how Heywood's tragedy draws on contemporary conceptualisations and anxieties surrounding the domestic plague time preventative practices outlined above to both introduce and remove physical sources of corruption to and from the Frankford home. And, in doing so, it reveals the contemporary cultural connections between domestic disorder, female adultery, and plague.

Recent considerations of the first likely performance date of Heywood's tragedy invite us to read the play in relation to the significant socio-historical context of plague and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Healy's work on the 'Humoral-Paracelsan Body': Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) pp. 19-49.

⁸ All references to *Woman Killed* are taken from: Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, ed. by Margaret Jane Kidnie (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

plague prevention culture. Extant records in Henslowe's *Diary* concerning payments to Heywood for *Woman Killed*, dated February and March 1603, clearly indicate that the play was being readied for performance for the spring of that year.⁹ However, the fast decline of Elizabeth I's health by mid-March of 1603 prompted the Privy Council to prohibit all stage-plays, a closure that may well have been extended further by the steep increase in plague deaths in the city in early May, and which delayed the new King James' coronation festivities by a year.¹⁰ If these closures meant that the premiere of Heywood's tragedy occurred in 1604, as Margaret Jane Kidnie proposes, then the first London audiences engaging with *Woman Killed*, who had just witnessed over twenty-two percent of their population perish through plague in 1603 alone, are likely to have been acutely alert to the dangers that a breach in domestic order could foster, and the measures that would need to be taken to purge infectious sources from the home.¹¹ Moreover, given the spatially fraught circumstances of the outbreak that Heywood's tragedy emerges from and the narrowing perimeters of the plague time home in 1604, Heywood's audiences were likely thinking about domestic space and its pivotal role in plague prevention policy with more force and frequency than ever before; a cultural moment that I believe Heywood leverages in *Woman Killed*.

The existing scholarship surrounding *Woman Killed*, a play that, as Lena Cowen Orlin suggests, is interested in emerging notions surrounding the 'domestic ethic of keeping, protecting, and governing the persons and things of the household sphere', engages with the notions of vulnerability that surround the cultural and material space of the early modern

⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁰ James Mardock, "Thinking to Pass unknown": *Measure for Measure*, the Plague, and the Accession of James I', in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 113-29 (p. 118).

¹¹ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 151.

home.¹² These recent studies principally focus on John Frankford's liberal hosting and on how, in the early modern understanding, Frankford's hegemonic control, as both the patriarch and governor of his household, appears to be dangerously lax. Whipday notes, for instance, that it is Frankford who 'unwittingly brings about his wife's adultery and death by creating a crisis of authority in doubling the household master' by inviting Wendoll to be their permanent house guest.¹³ Moreover, Maya Mathur notes that Frankford's domestic liberality, together with the tragic outcome of Heywood's play, forcefully 'advocates for the closing rather than the opening of doors to strangers' and 'unworthy' guests who threaten the 'sanctity' of the home.¹⁴ Heywood, in presenting the dire consequences of Frankford's ostensibly negligent governance, participates in what Orlin describes as the prevalent contemporary 'fear of a house that is too open': one that is exposed to hostile external influences, such as Wendoll, who is welcomed into the home by Frankford only to commit adultery with his generous host's wife, Anne.¹⁵

This trepidation surrounding the notion of an 'open house' is also present in Ben Jonson's comedy *The Alchemist*, for example, a play explicitly set during a dwindling plague outbreak in London (5.1.17).¹⁶ Whilst the householder, Master Lovewit, is away at his country residence in the hope of evading the plague outbreak in the city, he leaves his servant, Face, in charge who takes it upon himself to open the house to all manner of 'rogues, cozeners, imposters, bawds' (5.3.11) and 'divers more' who 'pass in and out' of Lovewit's city residence

¹² Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 138.

¹³ Whipday, p. 83.

¹⁴ Maya Mathur, "Divorcing Kin and Kind": Selective Generosity in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 15.3 (2011), 1-32 (pp. 16-17).

¹⁵ Orlin, p. 8.

¹⁶ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (revised ed.), New Mermaids (London: Methuen Drama, 2010).

(5.2.24). As Whipday, Mathur, and Orlin's work all distinctly suggest, Heywood's domestic tragedy, like Jonson's comedy, seems palpably aware of the external forces that threaten the early modern home, and the duties of householders or tenants to organise and defend the interior and its boundaries against moral and physical infection, which, as this chapter argues, was particularly key during outbreaks of plague. The inherent vulnerability of what Whipday describes as the 'disrupted' Frankford household is, then, ripe for re-examination through the lens of contemporary plague prevention culture; an experience that not only increased these notions of susceptibility surrounding the early modern home, but also generated new anxieties and a new material understanding of domestic space.¹⁷

As this chapter will argue, like the plague time household, the material space of the Frankford home alters considerably over the course of the play in response to a disruptive and divisive 'infectio[n]' within its walls (13.123). After outlining more broadly the ways in which preventative plague measures reorient the space and experience of the early modern home, and the occupant's role within plague prevention systems, this chapter moves to consider how the physical corruption of the disease enters the home alongside the moral corruption of adultery that is engendered, both respectively and collectively, by Wendoll and Anne. However, it is Anne's subsequent removal from the space of the home, as a source of disease and disorder, that forms the final portion of this enquiry and maps the spatial paradigms of contemporary plague policy and preventative practice onto the conditions surrounding Anne's expulsion from the domestic space. Consequently, as well as providing an important new contextualised reading of Heywood's tragedy that builds on the work of Orlin, Mathur, and Whipday, this work also invites new ways of thinking about the plague time home, the

¹⁷ Whipday, p. 68.

contemporary conceptions surrounding the maintenance of this space, and the importance of its physical and moral cleanliness both on and off stage.

Maintaining the early modern plague time home

Catherine Richardson suggests that the early modern home is imagined not just as a series of interpersonal relationships with distinct dynamics and hierarchies, but it is also a ‘physical space [...] closed off from the community’ that was ‘controllable’.¹⁸ This notion of a space that could be isolated and managed in ways that the interconnected and permeable body could not is especially significant when considered within the context of early modern plague, a transmissible disease that spread via infected air as well as people and objects that had been exposed to that air.¹⁹ Physician Andrew Boorde articulates the defensive capabilities of early modern domestic space and highlights the broader connections between maintaining a healthy body and receiving healthy air within and around the home:

The air can not be too clean and pure considering it doth close & doth compass us round about, and we do receive it in to us, we can not be without it, for we live by it as the fish liveth by the water. Good air therefore is to be praised. For if the air be fresh pure and clean about the mansion or house, it doth conserve the life of man, it doth comfort the brain and the powers natural, & engendering and making good blood.²⁰

As Boorde demonstrates, wholesome air was considered something of a priceless commodity within early modern homes; a vital asset that ought to be preserved at all costs, particularly during outbreaks of plague as the dating of this anonymous 1636 pamphlet

¹⁸ Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England: The Material Life of the Household* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 29.

¹⁹ For contemporary anxieties regarding transmission and the ‘sympathetic’ early modern body see: Eric Langley, *Shakespeare’s Contagious Sympathies: Ill Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁰ Andrew Boorde, *The booke for to learn a man to be wise in building of his house for the health of body* (London, 1550), STC 3373, A4^r.

suggests: ‘if one who hath a horrible sicknesse be in my house, and will not depart, an action will lie against him, and yet he taketh not any air from me, but infecteth that which I have’.²¹ Maintaining healthful air within the home was considered a right of the householder and anyone, or anything, that compromised the integrity of that air was considered a threat to the household’s welfare. Resultingly, a considerable number of prescriptions and directions emerged within the period that recommended how a householder might retain healthful air and general cleanliness within the home. Somewhat paradoxically, the prophylactic advice of the period often advocated opening up homes rather than advising their closure. Considering the early modern conceptualisation of the home, Whipday draws attention to the dichotomy that exists within a site whose boundaries ‘must be selectively permeable’ in order to admit ‘all beneficial elements’, such as fresh air, whilst also protecting the interior against any ‘malignant forces outside’ that might linger in corrupted air.²²

This notion is also echoed in a number of popular plague treatises, that highlight both the desirable and detrimental properties of domestic boundaries, such as doors, windows, and chimneys, through which the dangerous miasmas of plague could enter or be expelled from the home during outbreaks, and which figure the early modern domestic space as one that simultaneously encloses and exposes. Simon Kellwaye, for instance, recommends that ‘your windows which stand toward the North and East, do you always keep open in the daytime, (if they air be clear and that no infected and unsavoury smell be near the same)’.²³ Plague treatises such as Kellwaye’s, that typically reiterate the advice given in the national plague orders, recommend that householders concentrate the burning of fragrant herbs and oils at the

²¹ *A brief declaration for what manner of special nuisance concerning private dwelling houses* (London, 1636), STC 6453.5, B2^v.

²² Whipday, p. 5.

²³ Simon Kellwaye, *A defensative against the plague containing two parts or treatises* (London, 1593), STC 14917, B4^f.

most vulnerable points of the home, commonly the windows, in order to purify any malignant air that might invade the space through these gateways. Stephen Bradwell, similarly, suggests strewing:

Windows and ledges with Rue, Wormwood, Lavender, Marjoram, Pennyroyal,
Costmary, and such like in cold weather; but in hot with Primroses, violets,
Roseleaves, Borage, and such cooling scents.²⁴

The undesirable side-effects of these pungent plague prophylaxes within the close quarters of the home are illustrated in Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of his Humour*.²⁵ Seemingly following the 'Advice of the Physicians' that accompany the national plague orders, the besotted Deliro undertakes the task to 'correct' the air in his home as a romantic gesture for his wife, Fallace (2.2.106). Unfortunately, Deliro's attempts to 'keep the air [...] sweet' have quite the opposite effect (2.2.94), as Fallace makes clear:

Here's a sweet stink indeed!
What, shall I ever be thus crossed and plagued,
And sick of husband? O, my head doth ache,
As it would cleave asunder, with these savours!
All my rooms alter'd, and but one poor walk
That I delighted in, and that is made
So fulsome with perfumes, that I am fear'd,
My brain doth sweat so, I have caught the plague! (2.2.96-103).

For Fallace, the cloying aromas arouse olfactory memories of infection rather than affection. Importantly, Fallace's response to the applied fragrances reveal traces of the undoubtedly uncomfortable sensory experiences that may have been elicited by the presence of these pungent measures within the enclosed space of the home which, as Chloe Kathleen Preedy

²⁴ Stephen Bradwell, *Physick for the sickness, commonly called the plague* (London, 1636), STC 3536, p. 15.

²⁵ Ben Jonson, *Everyman Out of his Humour*, ed. by Helen Ostovich, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 200-1.

suggests, might ‘resonate comically within a playhouse that might itself be full of perfumed smoke’.²⁶

Whilst it is not possible to ascertain for certain the extent or frequency with which such prophylactic measures were practiced within early modern homes, a document penned by actor Edward Alleyn during the outbreak of 1593 certainly indicates their prevalence and significance. In a letter to his wife, Joan, Alleyn encourages her to comply with the recommended plague time measures, which include keeping the ‘house fair and clean’ and safeguarding the boundaries of the property by ensuring that there is a ‘good store of rue and herb of grace’ located near the windows.²⁷ Moreover, Alleyn concludes his letter by reassuring Joan that in implementing these measures alongside essential prayer, he has ‘no doubt’ that ‘the Lord will mercifully defend’ her and the household.²⁸ Alleyn’s correspondence not only suggests the wider acceptance and practice of domestic plague prevention systems, but it also highlights the accountability and responsibility of householders to uphold godliness and cleanliness to ensure that the space remains free from physical and moral corruption. Alleyn’s letter, therefore, conveys the understanding that the level of defence that domestic space afforded its inhabitants hinged on the efficacy of individual household management and the proficiency of its householder.

Moreover, also implicit in Alleyn’s letter is the notion that the wife (or as Thomas Tusser terms her, ‘the housewife so named (of keeping the house)’ was the party expected to

²⁶ Chloe Kathleen Preedy, *Aerial Environments on the Early Modern Stage: Theatres of the Air, 1576-1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 213.

²⁷ R. A. Foakes, *Henslowe’s Diary: Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 276.

For further discussion of this letter in the context of plague see: Paola Pugliatti, “my good sweett mouse”: Letters in Time of Plague’, *Journal of Early Modern Studies, Special Issue: Plagues in Early Modern Europe* (2020), 1-23.

²⁸ Foakes, p. 276.

take responsibility for ensuring that these prophylactic measures were actioned and moral order and health maintained within the household, particularly in the absence of her husband.²⁹ Many conduct books of the period reflect this attitude, such as Edmund Tilney's *the Flower of Friendship*, which states that the wife should 'tarry at home, and see all be well there' and 'govern well the household'.³⁰ Likewise, Robert Cleaver's *A Godly Form of Household Government*, which was first printed in 1598 and then reprinted, tellingly, during the plague outbreak of 1603, defines the wife as the party responsible for cleaning the home, declaring that, through her efforts, God will 'bless the work of her hands, to the maintenance of the house'.³¹ Cleaver also writes that 'in her husband's absence', a wife should:

See good orders observed as he hath appointed: to watch over the manners and behaviour of such as be in her house, and to help her husband in spying out evils that are breeding, that by his wisdom they may be prevented or cured.³²

This exemplar wife that Cleaver describes in his homily, however, is far removed from the wife and householder that Heywood presents to his audiences in *Woman Killed*.

Anne Frankford is initially considered 'the perfect wife', who is described as being both 'pliant and duteous' (1.37-41). She also appears well versed in her domestic obligations as both wife and governor of the home, stating that she will 'receive' Wendoll as 'far as modesty may well extend' as it is her 'duty' (4.81-2). However, in her husband's absence, at her husband's request (although the audience never hear it from John Frankford himself), Anne installs Wendoll as 'a present Frankford' in her husband's stead (6.80). Anne encourages

²⁹ Tusser, p. 164.

³⁰ Edmund Tilney, *A brief and pleasant discourse of duties in marriage, called the flower of Friendship* (London, 1571), STC 24077, C6^v.

³¹ Robert Cleaver, *A godly form of household government for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of God's word* (London, 1598), STC 5382, p. 89.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Wendoll to ‘make bold’ in her husband’s ‘absence and command even as himself were present in the house’ (6.77-8). There is a lack of clarity to Anne’s request which, whether instructed by Frankford or not, not only leaves the household perplexed as to the status quo of the domestic space, but also renders the terms of Wendoll’s invitation, as Mathur suggests, ‘open to dangerous misinterpretation’.³³

Whilst the intent behind Anne’s invitation remains subjective, the result is clear. Wendoll ‘use[s]’ and ‘command[s]’ the Frankford household, assuming the obligations of both householder and husband, including marital sexual relations with his pseudo-wife, to which Anne, the responsible householder in her husband’s stead, submits (6.77-9). Whipday suggests that ‘Anne is caught in a position where the ostensible “duty” commanded by her temporary master involves a betrayal of her true master’.³⁴ However, as a neglectful householder by the period’s standards, Anne’s actions – whether they are read as volitional or not – condemn the domestic space to the most pernicious plague time spatiality outlined in the national plague orders: ‘disorder’.³⁵ Moreover, as an adulterer, Anne not only moves against her husband and her household, but she also exposes them to Wendoll’s ‘infectious tongues’ which, as will now be explored, leads to a catastrophic breach in the household’s defences that, like the plague time disorder described in the national orders, ‘wilfully procure the increase of [...] contagion’ (6.82).³⁶

³³ Mathur, p. 12.

³⁴ Whipday, p. 84.

³⁵ *Orders thought meet* (1578), B3^r.

³⁶ Ibid.

Plague enters the Frankford home

Heywood provides his audience with an irrefutable source for the infection that occurs within the walls of the Frankford home in the form of Anne's seducer, Wendoll, whose aptitude for domestic upheaval is signalled from the very commencement of the play. Wendoll is welcomed into the domestic space when, as Orlin explains, the 'household is at its most vulnerable', and when 'the boundaries between household and world are permeable' due to the relaxation of domestic duties during the wedding celebrations of John and Anne Frankford.³⁷ It is within this opening scene that Wendoll first sows the seeds of somatic corruption and death into the narrative and foreshadows what is to come:

CHARLES Yes, would she dance 'The Shaking of the Sheets',
 But that's the dance her husband means to lead her.

WENDOLL That's not the dance that every man must dance,
 According to the ballad (1.2-5).

Sir Charles' reference to the ballad undoubtedly alludes to the imminent marriage consummation. However, as Kidnie states, Wendoll bluntly reminds the audience of the ballad's more prominent theme of mortality: 'Make ready, then, your winding sheet, / And see how you can bestir your feet, / For Death is the man that all must meet'.³⁸ The lyrics of this popular ballad would have undoubtedly held a haunting resonance for London audiences who had just endured the worst outbreak of plague in recent memory within the city. A city which, in the spirit of the ballad, Dekker describes as resembling 'nothing but a heap of winding sheets tacked together'.³⁹

³⁷ Orlin, p. 143.

³⁸ Kidnie, p. 139.

³⁹ Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful year. 1603 Wherein is showed the picture of London, lying sick of the plague* (London, 1604), STC 6535.5, D1^r.

Yet, the conditions surrounding Wendoll's second call at the Frankford home are far more pathogenically precarious than this initial visit. In Scene Four of *Woman Killed*, the boundaries of the Frankford household are wholly compromised by Wendoll's abrupt arrival in an unwholesome physical state that Frankford's servant, Nick, describes as being 'all spotted / And stained with splashing' (4.24-5). The unseemly Wendoll whose 'spotted, dirty' clothes are likely 'loathsome to be seen', is hurried into Frankford's presence 'instantly', suggesting that he is still wearing his soiled outdoor garments when he crosses the threshold into the home (4.26).⁴⁰ This is confirmed towards the closing of the scene when Nick is assigned to 'help the young gentleman off with his boots', which are presumably just as soiled as the rest of his garments, perhaps even more so given their proximity to the ground (4.96). Whilst Nick's observations regarding Wendoll's soiled appearance might at first appear inconsequential, they are in fact highly significant, as we shall see, when considered alongside the contemporary plague prevention practices, and the accountability of householders in upholding domestic cleanliness, introduced above.

The contemporary understanding of something or someone that was 'stained' and 'spotted' like Wendoll suggests the acute presence of dirt or pollution upon the subject. This is neatly illustrated in John Taylor's witty reportage of 1624, which outlines the period's distinctions between something that was perceived to be 'clean' and 'unspotted' versus something that was not:

To the word called Clean, it is allotted,
The admirable Epithet Unspotted,
From whence all soiled pollution is exiled,
And therefore Clean is called undefiled:

⁴⁰ Richard Weste, 'The School of Vertue (1619)', in *The Babees Book*, ed. by Frederick J Furnivall (London, 1868), p. 296.

'Tis fair, 'tis clarified, 'tis mundifide,
And from impurity is purified.⁴¹

However, the term 'spotted' acquired both physical and metaphysical meanings within the period and was also used to denote something that has been specifically sexually besmirched. For example, in *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes, convinced of his wife's infidelity, argues that 'the purity and whiteness' of his marital 'sheets' have been spotted (1.2-329-30). Similarly, in *Othello*, Othello and Desdemona's marriage bed is 'lust-stain'd' and 'spotted', clearly symptomatic of the sexual corruption that has bred in Othello's mind via his thoughts of Desdemona's illusory affair (5.1.37). Additionally, in Shakespeare's description of Lucrece's sexual assault in *The Rape of Lucrece*, the attack is described as having left the victim 'spotted, spoil'd, corrupted, / Grossly engirt with daring infamy' (l.1173).

As Wendoll is the seducer of Heywood's play, the notion that his physically soiled appearance might also metaphorically herald his sexually polluting influence is certainly appropriate. However, the material corruption and somatic uncleanness that the terms also convey cannot be overlooked, especially given the tragedy's immediate plague time context. During outbreaks of plague there not only seems to have been a great emphasis placed upon maintaining the wholesomeness of the air but also the objective cleanliness of the home, particularly around the vulnerable entrances, such as the doors and paths that connected the interior to the exterior as outlined above. Bradwell identifies just some of the external dangers that were thought to lurk outside homes, such as the 'noisome vapours arising from filthy sinks, stinking sewers, channels, gutters, privies, sluttish corners, dunghills, and uncast

⁴¹ John Taylor, *The Praise of Clean Linen. With the commendable use of the laundress* (London, 1624), STC 23787, A7^v.

ditches' that could invade the domestic space without proper care or management of its peripheries.⁴²

Accordingly, homeowners and tenants are urged to pay particularly close attention to the cleanliness of their immediate exteriors during outbreaks of plague and ensure that all pathways leading to and from their property are rinsed daily and 'made clean'.⁴³ This practice is again articulated in Alleyn's letter when he instructs Joan to 'throw water before' the 'door' and 'backside' 'every evening'.⁴⁴ As such, anything, or anyone, that was conveyed from outside the household that may have been in contact with these noisome miasmas was treated with the upmost suspicion during outbreaks of plague. Kellwaye, for instance, specifically directs householders not to suffer 'any foul and filthy clothes or stinking things to remain in' the house 'nor about the same'.⁴⁵ Thus, when read within the context of early modern plague prevention, Wendoll's soiled outdoor garments serve as malignant material evidence of his exposure to the dangerous external sources that lurk beyond the home and that engender the disease. Wendoll's unkempt arrival in Scene Four, therefore, would have been perceived as much more than a mere domiciliary inconvenience to a post-plague audience who would have been acutely aware of the dangers that Wendoll's physically 'corrupted' appearance and presence posed to the general cleanliness and order of the domestic interior (6.180).

In addition to observing Wendoll's material muck, Nick also details the extent to which 'horse and man both sweat', asserting that he 'ne'er saw two in such a smoking heat' (4.24-5). Whilst the presence of 'perspiration' was considered a healthful preservative in the

⁴² Bradwell, p. 4.

⁴³ Charles F. Mullett, *The Bubonic Plague and England: An essay in the History of Preventive Medicine* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1956), p. 381.

⁴⁴ Foakes, p. 276.

⁴⁵ Kellwaye, B3^r.

period, sweat (unless medically provoked) was ‘always injurious’.⁴⁶ As an excrement, sweating was interpreted as harmful effluvia. Susan North notes that the miasmatic theory of ‘bad air’ locates sweat as an ‘infecting agent’, as it directly issued from the bodies and clothes of the sick.⁴⁷ This is particularly significant in cases of plague where patients are almost always febrile.⁴⁸ Exercise-induced sweat is no less dangerous, particularly in activities that by necessity took place outdoors. Bradwell notes that activities such as ‘hard riding’, which Wendoll has clearly engaged in since he rode ‘in haste’, were thought to be particularly dangerous during outbreaks of plague, as such activities unnaturally opened the pores of the skin and drew ‘poison’ from the noxious ‘open air [...] deep’ into the lungs (4.21).⁴⁹ Moreover, the ‘smoking heat’ that radiates from Wendoll and his steed who is, likewise, ‘booted up to the flank in mire’, transforms Wendoll’s internal body heat, raised through hazardous exercise, into a visibly external ‘steam or vapour’ (4.21-2).⁵⁰ The vapours that emanate from an already physically contaminated Wendoll once again present an evocative image that metaphorically summons the malignant air thought to harbour plague. Shakespeare employs a similar image in *King John*, when he describes night as a ‘black contagious breath’ that ‘*smokes* about the [...] day wearied Sun’ (5.4.33-5). As such, Wendoll enters the Frankford home as a mobile contaminating agent whose soiled and sweaty soma is shrouded

⁴⁶ Santorio Santorio, *Medicina Statica: Being the Aphorisms of Sanctorius, translated into English with large explanations*, trans. John Quincy (London, 1712), *Gale Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Susan North, *Sweet and Clean?: Bodies and Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 77.

⁴⁸ ‘[...] which may be easily perceived by the extreme heat and inflammation which inwardly they do feel’, Kellwaye, B1^r.

⁴⁹ Bradwell, p. 37.

⁵⁰ “smoking, adj.” *OED Online*, *Oxford University Press* <www.oed.com/6ew/Entry/182726> [Accessed 17 December 2021].

in a cloud of physical and sexual corruption that swiftly envelopes the Frankford household, as I will now examine.

The injurious ‘spotted’ and ‘stained’ infection that Wendoll carries with him soon spreads throughout Heywood’s wider narrative, and like early modern plague, even threatens to breach the defenses of neighboring households. In the tragedy’s subplot, for instance, the suggestion of Susan Mountford’s ‘spotted chastity’ is revoked via her honorable marriage to Sir Francis Acton and spares her family from the infliction of a ‘stained’ name (14.128-32). The secondary infection that seizes the Frankford home in the main plot, however, proves far more virulent, as the once ‘spotless’ Anne Frankford is irrevocably marked as a potent source of contamination as a result of her extramarital sexual encounters with the contaminating Wendoll (13.57). In Scene Thirteen, and her last scene in the marital home, Frankford declares that Anne’s now ‘spotted body / Hath stained’ their children’s ‘names with stripe of bastardy’ (13.119-20). Whilst Frankford is clearly suggesting that his wife’s conduct has irretrievably damaged their children’s socio-economic reputations, he also establishes a firm link between Anne’s body and communicable disease. Anne is understood as having directly transmitted an undesirable status, that of contested legitimacy, to their children as a direct result of her and Wendoll’s bodily transgressions. Moreover, in choosing to echo the terms ‘spotted’ and ‘stained’ in his description of Anne’s now sexually corrupt body – terms that have already been attached to Wendoll’s unclean body – Frankford lexically binds Anne and Wendoll to one another.

As such, Frankford identifies a clear sequence of infection and establishes an unquestionable route of transmission for the disease which now overwhelms his home, a disease that Frankford clearly traces directly back to Wendoll’s polluting advent in Scene Four. Frankford reinforces the broader disease-producing capabilities of Wendoll and Anne’s

transgressions in Scene Eleven, after Nick has revealed Anne and Wendoll's betrayal.

Frankford, in a pointed double entendre to Wendoll, states: 'Fie, fie, that for my private business, / I should disease my friends and be a trouble / To the whole house' (11.79-81).

Whilst 'private business' clearly intimates sexual intercourse, the notion that something which begins as 'private' that then influences, alters, and 'trouble[s]' 'the whole', correlates with the contemporary notions of contagion that pervade the play. This renders Frankford's outwardly benign employment of 'disease' within the home to be understood as something far more malignant than mere domiciliary inconvenience.⁵¹

It is in the admonishment of Anne in Scene Thirteen, however, that Heywood employs plague-specific terms that summon the well-known contemporary medical frameworks of the disease into the space of the Frankford home, and that soon begin to circulate in its already unwholesome air. Frankford's employment of 'stripe', for instance, which he uses to describe the wounded reputations of the Frankford children, is particularly significant (13.120).

Interpreted as a physical mark of divine punishment, numerous contemporaries refer to the 'botches' or 'carbuncles' associated with bubonic plague as the 'stripes' of the disease.⁵²

William Bullein, for example, asks 'by what sign or token is this perilous plague, or stripe of the Pestilence, best known among the Physicians?'.⁵³ Dekker similarly refers to the 'heaven'-sent 'black and blue stripes of the plague' often found upon the infected.⁵⁴ These plague-specific evocations, which correlate with the immediate contemporary discourse surrounding the disease, are further reinforced when Frankford locates the 'adulterous breath' and

⁵¹ Kidnie, n. 80, p. 228; For more information on this analogue see also Erin Sullivan's, 'Sadness, Selfhood, and Dis-ease', in *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 16-49.

⁵² Kellwaye, B1^r.

⁵³ William Bullein, *A Dialogue both pleasant and pitiful against the fever pestilence* (London, 1564), STC 4036, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, D4^r.

‘infectious thoughts’ that are expelled by Anne’s physically compromised body as a noxious ‘blast’ of corruption within the home (13.121-2).⁵⁵ Frankford’s description shares obvious parallels with Henri Smith’s 1591 homiletic discourse, *A preparative to marriage*, in which he suggests that ‘the disease of marriage is adultery’ and ‘as for the adulterer, and adulteress, he hath assigned death to cut them off, lest their breath should infect others’.⁵⁶ Both Smith and Heywood figure the unfaithful spouse as a dangerous source of infection who, through their unwholesome thoughts and acts, acquires figuratively polluting breath. These conceptualisations of malignant breath are very much in line with plague transmission as it was understood in the period, as those sick with plague could easily spread the ‘contagion’ to others simply ‘by breathing on them’.⁵⁷

That the Frankford children are singled out as those whose ‘spirits’ are most at risk from their mother’s noxious breathings is also congruous with the contemporary medical frameworks of plague (13.121). Upon Frankford’s order, the children are sent ‘away’ from Anne’s infectious body and its exhalations (13.119). Not unlike *Woman Killed*, there is a distempered ‘sickness’ in the air of Shakespeare’s Bohemia in *The Winter’s Tale*, which spreads through the narrative via the readily ‘caught’ ‘disease’ of adultery (1.2.384-6). However, in contrast, King Leontes’ ‘spotless’ wife, Hermione, is wrongly accused of infidelity (2.1.133). Despite her innocence, like Anne, Hermione is also prohibited from contact with her children upon her husband’s command: ‘Bear the boy hence, he shall not come about her. / Away with him!’ (2.1.61-2). Hermione later states that in being callously estranged from her son, she is mistakenly identified as a source of contamination: ‘From his

⁵⁵ ‘The *blasted* flower of youth’, *Ibid.*, D1^r.

⁵⁶ Henri Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage The sum whereof was spoken at a contract, and enlarged after* (London, 1591), STC 22686, pp. 84-5.

⁵⁷ Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague containing the nature, signs, and accidents of the same* (London, 1603), STC 16676, F2^v.

presence / I am barr'd, like one infectious' (3.2.96-7). This irresistibly calls forth images of, what Barbara H. Traister refers to as, the 'virtual prison' that is the shut-up plague time home, and shares clear resonances with Anne's plight and her supposedly infectious influence upon her own progeny.⁵⁸

Both Shakespeare and Heywood, then, engage with established medical understandings surrounding young bodies and their perceived predisposition to maladies, particularly plague, that are outlined in numerous plague treatises and medical regimens. Kellwaye, for instance, recommends that:

For children it were best to send them far off from the place, because their bodies are most apt to receive the infection, as also for that they cannot so continually use antidotes and preservatives, which by their great heat may endanger them almost so much as the disease itself.⁵⁹

Kellwaye's advice is sadly not unfounded. In his examination of the age-distribution of burials in three London parishes in 1593, Slack reveals that the age range of five to nineteen is disproportionately recorded, nearly double in most cases, and that 'children, adolescents and young adults filled the pages of burial registers in plague years'.⁶⁰ Dekker's descriptions of 'woefully distracted mothers' who 'lie kissing the insensible cold lips of [...] breathless Infants' serves as a harrowing reminder of the high child mortality rates during outbreaks.⁶¹

Therefore, when read alongside contemporary understandings that children were more susceptible to plague, Frankford's spatial ordering, that indefinitely separates the 'infected' mother from her children, can not only be read as an act of punishment which, as Joanne

⁵⁸ Barbara H. Traister, "A plague on both your houses": Sites of Comfort and Terror in Early Modern Drama', in *Representing Plague*, ed. by Totaro and Gilman, pp. 169-82 (p. 172).

⁵⁹ Kellwaye, B2^v.

⁶⁰ Slack, *Impact*, p. 181.

⁶¹ Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, C3^r.

Bailey argues, is the ‘harshest penalty incurred by an adulterous wife’, but also as one of prevention.⁶² Heywood repeatedly engages with plague’s wider medical discourse surrounding its prevention to introduce, expose, and define the dangerous extent of both Wendoll and Anne’s physically corrupting influence on the Frankford household. On the basis of his wife’s figurative infectivity as well as her definite infidelity, it is fitting, then, that Frankford should extend this engagement into the terms and conditions surrounding Anne’s urgent expulsion from the very home she has compromised, again using plague prevention practices as his model, as the next section explores.

Cleansing the Frankford home

Sarah F. Matthews-Grieco suggests that female adultery is understood as a ‘kind of plague’ within early modern culture as it was a prevalent ‘disease’ that, like plague, did not distinguish between ‘class or situation’.⁶³ However, female adultery, and the cuckoldry that it engenders, shares further and more immediate socio-cultural links with plague owing to the profoundly intrusive and damaging impact that both phenomena had upon domestic space. One of the main concerns surrounding early modern female adultery is that it indicates that the cuckolded husband has ‘failed’ in his duty to maintain control of his wife and, as Matthews-Grieco suggests, is perceived as being incapable of ‘keeping any kind of order in his household’.⁶⁴ As a householder, this is precarious position to be in under any circumstance, but it would have been particularly disastrous during outbreaks of plague when

⁶² Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 151.

⁶³ Sarah F. Matthews-Grieco, ‘Picart’s Browbeaten Husband’s in 17th Century France: Cuckoldry in Context’, in *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in Europe 15th-17th Century*, ed. by Sarah F. Matthews-Grieco (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing, 2018), pp. 249-90 (p. 267).

⁶⁴ Matthews-Grieco, p. 1; See also Susan D. Amussen, ‘The Contradictions of Patriarchy in Early Modern England’, *Gender & History*, 30.2 (2018), 343-53 (p. 347).

maintaining domestic order and integrity was paramount. These contemporary parallels between plague and a disordered domestic space are compellingly illustrated in a ‘plague time’ anecdote from Anthony Copley’s 1595 *Wits, Fits, and Fancies*, in which a Constable places ‘a red cross [...] upon his [neighbours] door’ for failing to control the behaviour of his wife who reportedly struck her husband until he was ‘sore’.⁶⁵ The red cross found upon the justifiably ‘highly offended’ neighbour’s door, signalling that a plague infection had been verified within his household, not only erroneously brands the home with the stigma of disease but also conveys the home, and the neighbour himself, directly into the hands of city authorities as outlined in the national plague orders.⁶⁶

Moreover, the constable’s act of placing such a sign upon the neighbour’s door is also highly reminiscent of traditional house-shaming customs that were locally implemented when it was thought that a man had lost control of his spouse and, by extension, his household. In this instance, the foot-long plague cross on the neighbour’s door serves as a macabre alternative to the traditional horns that were often placed on or near the boundaries of the household (usually the doors or windows) of those accused of adultery or misrule. As Jaqueline Maria Musacchio suggests, these material indicators made private marital transgressions ‘impossible to hide from the larger community’.⁶⁷ The placement of these physical markers upon the domestic peripheries, not unlike the cross used in times of plague, signals to the wider community that the home is not only disorderly, but dangerous to public

⁶⁵ ‘In a plague time a Constable passing by his neighbours house, and hearing his wife sore lamming him, that night he set up a red cross upon his door, whereat the neighbour the next morning highly offended, tore it down, and complained to the Alderman of the ward of the high injury the Constable had therein done him’, Anthony Copley, *Wits, fits and fancies Fronted and intermeddled with presidents of honour and wisdom* (London, 1595), STC 5738, p. 84.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, ‘Adultery, Cuckoldry and House-Scorning in Florence: The Case of Bianca Cappello’, in *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery*, ed. by Matthews-Grieco, pp. 11-34 (p. 19).

health. The fear of such humiliating repercussions at the hands of his own community is clearly a source of anxiety for Frankford, as he laments that it is Anne's disregard of 'honour' and her lack of 'shame' that has placed such a 'blemish' upon his 'house' (13.13). Therefore, like the neighbour in Copley's anecdote, Frankford's figuratively plague-infected home stands as a looming physical manifestation of his domestic disempowerment at the hands of his wife and further suggests the extent to which Heywood is tapping into popular plague prevention discourse within *Woman Killed*.

Furthermore, Copley's witty anecdote communicates one other significant dramatic trope that associates female insubordination and domestic disorder with plague: that of the disobedient or, in Amussen's terms, the 'unruly wife'; a figure often read as a source of proverbial plague in the period.⁶⁸ Using well-known terminology associated with plague, Copley's constable construes the authority that the neighbour's wife holds over her husband to be 'a greater plague' within the home, one that, for Copley, surpasses the magnitude and severity of the actual disease.⁶⁹ Copley implies that the behaviour of the neighbour's physically violent wife provokes the symptoms of plague to manifest physically upon her anguished husband's body through her 'sore' beating of him, evoking the sores or buboes of the disease that would appear near the lymph nodes of those infected.⁷⁰ Similarly in Dekker's *The Raven's Almanac* (1609), in the tale tellingly entitled *A Medicine to cure the Plague of a woman's tongue, experimented on a Cobbler's wife*, a cobbler complains to his doctor that he is 'sick at heart, I am struck with the Plague, I have a Plague sore upon me' which 'eats and

⁶⁸ Amussen, p. 347.

⁶⁹ Copley, p. 84.

⁷⁰ '[...] because the said sore is of a venomous nature, it ought to be driven and forced outward by medicines that draw, and are in quality hot and fit to draw the sore to ripeness and matter if it be possible', Lodge, 11^v.

spreads more and more into my flesh'.⁷¹ The cobbler then proceeds to carry in his kicking and screaming wife and proclaims:

Look you here Master Doctor, this is my plague sore that so torments me: In the night it keeps me from sleep, in the day it makes me mad: in my bed this serpent stings me, at my board she stabs me, and all with one weapon (her villainous tongue, her damnable tongue) If I reply she fights: if I say nothing she raves: if you call not this a plague Master Doctor, then such a plague light on you Master Doctor teach me therefore how to cure it, or else if you give me over I shall grow desperate and cut mine own throat.⁷²

This trope is similarly employed in later stage comedies, such as John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize* or *The Tamer Tamed*, a play that will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Petruchio, who quickly loses domestic 'control' of his new wife, Maria, directly refers to her as 'the plague', stating that 'when I chose thee to make a bedfellow [...] I took a leprosy; nay worse, the plague' (4.4.91).⁷³ Likewise, in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*, whose narrative is framed by an ongoing plague outbreak, Morose refers to his new bride, whose presence has disturbed his silent and carefully curated domestic space, as 'some plague, above the plague' (3.5.60-1).⁷⁴ Thus, these 'unruly' wives that are represented in the comedic writings of Copley, Fletcher, and Jonson can be defined, using Barbara Traister's description, as the 'proverbial shrew that "plagues" her husband'.⁷⁵ This was a ubiquitous figure during outbreaks of the disease; one that fuses together ideas of female insubordination, domestic disorder, and early modern plague.

⁷¹ Thomas Dekker, *The Ravens Almanac foretelling of a [brace] plague, famine, and civil war, that shall happen this present year 1609* (London, 1609), STC 6519.2, C3^v.

⁷² Ibid., C3^v-C4^r.

⁷³ John Fletcher, *The Tamer Tamed*, ed. Lucy Munro, New Mermaids (London: Methuen Drama, 2010).

⁷⁴ Ben Jonson, *Epicoene or The Silent Woman*, ed. by Roger Holdsworth, New Mermaids (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 79.

⁷⁵ Traister, p. 174.

Heywood, however, does something considerably different with this trope in *Woman Killed*. As *Woman Killed* is a domestic tragedy that presents the consequences of domestic transgressions, Heywood is able to pursue the darker aspects of this metaphor that align it more directly with the very real disease that it engages with. As the previous section of this chapter has revealed, Heywood raises the dramatic stakes of this prevalent idea of a ‘plaguy’ wife by not simply imbuing Anne with lighter, proverbial links to plague, but instead calling upon the clinical aspects of the disease, such as its symptoms and its perceived routes of transmission as they were understood in the period, to define and condemn Anne’s damaging domestic actions.⁷⁶ Moreover, as I will now discuss, Heywood’s most substantial departure from this trope occurs when the ‘unruly’ and ‘plaguy’ Anne, upon being identified as a source of disease, is removed from the disordered household in line with contemporary plague prevention practices.

At the closing of Scene Thirteen, Frankford, after identifying Anne’s corruptive influence, banishes her from the family home. In a heart-breaking scene, Anne is ordered to leave her husband and their children behind:

I charge thee never after this sad day
To see me, or to meet me, or to send
By word, or writing, gift, or otherwise
To move me, by thyself, or by thy friends
Nor challenge any part in my two children.
So farewell, Nan, for we will henceforth be
As we had never seen, ne’er more shall see (13.169-75).

⁷⁶ I borrow this term (‘The Plaguy body’ from Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, p. 50.

Martin Ingram argues that in cases of adultery, church courts:

Continued to be important in setting out the limits of acceptable behaviour and harassing offenders, albeit the authorities were not invariably successful in actually punishing culprits or inducing a sense of real contrition.⁷⁷

As a result, and as Jennifer Panek notes, female adultery was regarded as ‘primarily a matter of household discipline’ and it was understood to be ‘the husband's duty to restrain his wife's behaviour’.⁷⁸ The failure to do so had disastrous socio-political consequences for the family and household. Crucially, not only has Anne committed adultery but she has also branded her husband with the precarious social status of a cuckold. As Orlin states, the course of action that Frankford takes in purging Anne from the domestic space parallels Smith’s advice in his *A preparative to marriage*, in which he states that ‘the medicine’ for the dangerous ‘disease’ of adultery is ‘divorcement’; a treatment that ‘is not instituted for the carnal, but for the chaste, least they should be tied to a plague while they live’.⁷⁹

This curative parting of Frankford and Anne, that simultaneously detaches the ‘plague’ of adultery from the home and cuts ‘two hearts out of one’, was understood to be a legal separation ‘from bed and board’, meaning that married couples could live apart from one another, but could not remarry (13.180).⁸⁰ Wendoll alludes to the ruptured status of the Frankford marriage in Scene Sixteen: ‘I have divorced the truest turtles / That ever lived together, and being divided / In several places, make their several moan’ (16.49-51). This type of separation is not uncommon in cases of adultery in the period. As Matthews-Grieco states,

⁷⁷ Martin Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 423.

⁷⁸ Jennifer Panek, ‘Punishing Adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 34.2 (1994), 357-78 (p. 357).

⁷⁹ Orlin, p. 150; Smith, p. 83.

⁸⁰ Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 350.

such an arrangement was believed to be beneficial as it stimulated reconciliation and ‘marital rapprochement’ which was ‘only [...] feasible after a physical separation and legal mediation, or after an errant wife had learned her lesson during a period of incarceration’.⁸¹ This ‘period of incarceration’ that the adulteress was obligated to endure, especially when considered alongside the paradigm in which ‘unruly’ wives were frequently described within the framework of early modern plague, resonates with the shutting-up of houses during outbreaks in which infected homes would be sealed up along with their inhabitants for an average of six weeks in order for the disease to run its course within the household.⁸² However, although she is established as a locus of infection and tainted by the language of plague, Anne is not incarcerated in her home; rather, she is removed from it.

This specific reorganisation of the Frankford household parallels another contentious plague time practice that is socio-spatially pertinent to some of Heywood’s more affluent, metropolitan audiences. The first London plague orders of 1583, followed by their reprinting in 1609, were a set of bespoke measures for the city that addressed the specific demands of urban plague. They also contain a key article that permits householders within the city to relocate their infected to designated pest-houses or:

Into some such house, as the owner of the said visited house, holdeth in his own hands, and occupyeth by his own servants, from and out of the city [...] and it shall be lawful to any person that hath two houses, to remove either his sound or his infected people to his spare house (at his choice) so as if he send away first his sound he may not after send thither the sick.⁸³

⁸¹ Matthews-Grieco, p. 277.

⁸² *Orders thought meet* (1578), A4^r.

⁸³ *Orders conceived and thought fit, as well by the Lord Mayor of the City of London* (London, 1608), STC 16723, A1^r; Charles F. Mullett, *The Bubonic Plague and England: An Essay in the History of Preventive Medicine* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1956), pp. 380-3.

Having been identified as a potent source of infection, Anne is, likewise, sent ‘from and out of’ her home to a ‘manor seven mile off’ in order to preserve the moral and physical health of the wider household (13.160). Wendoll indicates the non-urban location of Anne’s residence in Scene Sixteen when he observes that ‘she in the fields laments, and he [Frankford] at home’ (16.52).⁸⁴

The London orders also state that the ‘spare house’ must be occupied by the householders’ ‘own servants’, a crucial detail which Frankford duly observes so as to mitigate exposing Anne’s transgressions to those outside of the main household: ‘choose which of all my servants thou likest best, / And they are thine to attend thee’ (13.165-6). This item within the orders clearly pertains to a very specific urban demographic. It also reads contrary to the national orders which make no mention of any circumstance in which the sick might be removed from their households. As F. P. Wilson suggests, the expediency of this measure ‘was no doubt welcome to the wealthy’, whilst those ‘who could not afford to keep up two establishments [...] were cooped up’.⁸⁵ Therefore, in his removal of Anne from the home, Frankford enacts the behaviour of the London elite who, like himself, might possess ‘three or four’ ‘manors’ or properties, by exploiting the loopholes that are available to him in plague time (16.9). Frankford’s spatial response, that parallels that of a plague time householder taking action to spare his household, thus, provides him with an expedient opportunity to spare himself from further socio-political ridicule and ruin.

Frankford continues to draw on and implement plague prevention practice models in all aspects of Anne’s expulsion. In the same way that Anne’s body is removed from the home

⁸⁴ Whilst *Woman Killed* is set in Yorkshire there are very few localising references for London audiences, and as Kidnie suggests ‘the tragedy’s regional setting [is] potentially easy to forget on the page’, Kidnie, p. 92.

⁸⁵ F.P. Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare’s London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 58.

in accordance with metropolitan plague policy, any personal or domestic items associated with that body are viewed within the same prophylactic framework. Upon discovering Anne's infidelity, Frankford becomes so profoundly aware of her personal possessions and their presence within the domestic space that he demands their thorough removal:

Take with thee all thy gowns, all thy apparel;
Leave nothing that did ever call thee mistress,
Or by whose sight being left here in the house
I may remember such a woman by (13.154-57).

Frankford's insistence can, of course, be read as an act of emotional self-preservation and a means by which he can exorcise memories or thoughts of Anne that are embedded into particular objects or garments that might be left behind to 'torment' him (16.6). However, as outlined in the national orders, purging items from the home that had 'so occupied the diseased', was common practice during outbreaks.⁸⁶ That Frankford stresses the complete removal of Anne's 'apparel' from the home is, therefore, significant (13.154).

Fabric was understood to be a particularly dangerous fomite during outbreaks of plague owing to the fact that it was, by nature, porous and 'into such things the infected Air will easily get, and hardly forsake them', as Bradwell notes.⁸⁷ This prevalent anxiety surrounding garments and their textiles is articulated in Thomas Middleton's *Your Five Gallants*, in which Frippery, a pawn-broker, refuses to accept any items of clothing from 'contagious parishes' (1.1.48).⁸⁸ As Lodge suggests, it is not only the nature of the materials

⁸⁶ *Orders thought meet* (1578), B2^r.

⁸⁷ Bradwell, C3^v.

⁸⁸ Middleton, Thomas, 'Your five Gallants', ed. by Ralph Alan Cohen and John Jowett, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 594-636 (p. 598).

that render such items dangerous, but the proximity and duration with which they have been in contact with the infected:

For where there is a pestilent sickness in a house, it continually infecteth the air where it reigneth the garments, coverlets, bedding, and sheets, and all things that are capable thereof: or either receive the breath, sweat, spittings, or vapour that issueth from the sick, and all things that are of a slender substance, and full of pores, are fit to receive, and that very easily, such infection.⁸⁹

Within this context, Frankford's pronouncement that Anne must choose, and remove, a 'bed' and 'hangings' is important (13.158). The bedchamber clearly haunts Frankford's imagination, and not only because it is the room in which he finds Anne and Wendoll 'lying / Close in each other's arms' upon discovering their affair (13.38-9). Frankford also describes how one of his many household keys leads to his now 'polluted bedchamber' and, in doing so, locates the room as a potent source of physical as well as moral corruption (13.13). Adultery has 'tainted' Frankford's marital bed, but it is his own evocation of plague fomites that render the textiles from his bed chamber as dangerous vectors of disease that must now be expelled from the home alongside Anne (13.80).

This notion that Anne's belongings harbour physical corruption is further reinforced by Frankford's command for her to 'Take with thee everything that hath thy mark' (13.161). As Kidnie suggests, 'mark' could simply mean items listed in a dower.⁹⁰ However, a 'mark' could also indicate a sure sign of plague via the 'appearance of spots or marks' as Lodge states in 1603, and extends Frankford's earlier assessment of Anne's marked and contagious body.⁹¹ In order to prevent reinfection within and beyond the home, plague policy outlined that items of small value were to be 'burnt and clean consumed with fire', or if that was not

⁸⁹ Lodge, L2^r.

⁹⁰ Kidnie, n.159, p. 245.

⁹¹ Lodge, G2^r.

possible, they should be aired ‘in frosts and sunshine, with good discretion’.⁹² Although Anne’s possessions are simply removed, and not burnt or ‘aired’, they are still clearly a source of great anxiety for Frankford who once again orders their quick but thorough removal at the end of Scene Thirteen: ‘Come, take your coach; your stuff, all, must along. / Servants and all make ready, all be gone’ (13.178-9).

Even after Anne’s expulsion, Frankford ‘seek[s]’ ‘about’ his home to confirm that everything ‘that ever was called hers’ has been conveyed away from the home, including her beloved lute, which Frankford discovers in one of the rooms after she has departed and promptly removes from the space. In doing so, Frankford performs what Orlin aptly describes as a ‘purification ritual’ where he ensures ‘nothing’s left’ of his transgressing wife within the home (16.9-11).⁹³ As Orlin suggests:

In discovering and dispatching Anne’s lute after her, Frankford un-conditionally restores a threatened integrity of space and governance. The marriage that was essential to the creation of his household is finally a threat to that household.⁹⁴

Frankford’s preventative actions, and Orlin’s interpretation of them, clearly convey his compulsion to purge the domestic space of Anne’s damaging influence. And, like plague time domestic space, Heywood’s must be expunged of anything that might call the health and integrity of the Frankford home and Frankford’s competency as a householder into question, the necessity and urgency of which would have undoubtedly been recognised by a post-plague audience in 1604.

Whilst Anne’s ‘spotted’ body is easily expunged from the confines of the domestic space, her ‘spotted sins’ cannot be so easily ‘wash’[ed] clean (16.32). No sooner is Anne’s

⁹² *Orders thought meet* (1578), D2^v.

⁹³ Orlin, p. 151.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

infective presence removed from the household, than reports reach Frankford of the very real 'sickness' that now consumes his displaced wife (17.60). Anne's illness, brought on by self-starvation, renders her pale, 'lean as a lath', and 'weak in body' and, ultimately, leads to her painful death in the play's final scene (17.33-6). As Erin Sullivan suggests:

By rendering her body increasingly weak, Anne has enacted a form of penance that minimizes the influence and importance of the material regions of the soul and highlights the active presence of will, reason, and most importantly contrition.⁹⁵

Moreover, Anne's seemingly absolving but debilitating self-starvation, as Nancy Gutierrez notes, also 'controls her sexuality' and appetites in a way that, the thinner and weaker Anne becomes, the more tangibly Frankford is able to bear witness to and quantify the extent of her contrition and control.⁹⁶

As such, given her body's prior exposure to a figurative infection that has been repeatedly aligned with plague, Anne's somatic deterioration transforms her exiled manor into a 'visited house' that echoes with anguished cries that would not be out of place in a plague time soundscape: 'sick, sick, O sick' (17.40).⁹⁷ Anne's physical state and desperation resonates with the plight of the plague-sick who were, likewise, separated from their households on the advice of the London orders, and who were consoled only by 'strangers', such as the 'gentlemen and gentlewomen of the country' who comfort Anne (17.38).⁹⁸ The

⁹⁵ Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 77.

⁹⁶ See Nancy A. Gutierrez, 'Double Standard in the Flesh: Gender, Fasting, and Power in English Renaissance Drama', in *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*, ed. by Lilian R. Furst and Peter Graham (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. 79-93 (pp. 87-8).

⁹⁷ *Orders conceived* (1608), A1^r.

⁹⁸ '[...] void of all succor, and as it were ravished out of the hands of their parents and friends, and committed to the trust of strangers', Lodge, F3^r.

spatial parallels between Anne's dwelling and one harbouring plague infection are further reinforced via Frankford's arrival at the manor prior to Anne's death:

God that hath laid this cross upon our heads
Might, had He pleased, have made our cause of meeting
On a more fair and more contented ground (17.69-71).

That Frankford places the image of a cross in audience's minds the moment he himself crosses the threshold into the house where his sick wife lies – a wife he has already figuratively aligned with plague and expelled in line with the disease's preventative measures – summons forth the emblematic red cross of domestic plague policy that is, likewise, placed on the 'foreheads of [...] doors'.⁹⁹

However, despite Frankford's ominous evocations, it is within her pestilentially-paralleled dwelling that Anne's 'repentant tears' provide the remainder of the physical testimony needed not only to release her body from the stigma of infection, but also to finally cleanse her transgressions from the domestic space (17.107). Far from home, Anne pleads with her servants to 'Gird me about and help me with your tears' (16.31-2). Anne's desperate appeal to her servants undoubtedly intersects with contemporary ideas surrounding 'devout tears' and their efficacy as a physical and quantifiable presentation of sorrow that was seen as an important act of religious penance within the period; an act that, as we have seen, is particularly pertinent in incidences of adultery where the errant wife had to demonstrate her atonement.¹⁰⁰ Yet, Anne's demand can also be interpreted as the first of many proactive attempts to manifestly purify her transgressing body and soul, and actively wash away, in the

⁹⁹ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, 'The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary; or, The Walks in Paul's', ed. by Paul Yachnin, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 183-94 (p. 193).

¹⁰⁰ Bailey, p. 150.

literal sense, any acquired ‘uncleanliness’ from her marriage and her home. The collective tears that are subsequently shed for Anne seem to acquire powerful cleansing properties. Following Anne’s prompt, the play is swiftly flooded with a deluge of tears from multiple characters, including Frankford himself, who ‘shed tears’ (17.95) and ‘melt[ed] into tears’ for Anne’s downfall and upon her eventual death (17.66).

Margery E. Lange states that the ‘purgative’ function of renaissance tears means that they are interpreted as ‘a natural product of the elimination of humoural fluid’ in the same way that urine and sweat exited the body.¹⁰¹ Therefore, in contrast to the excess humours and corporeal emissions that Wendoll conveys into the home, Anne’s excess tears conversely demonstrate how bodily secretions might also purify as well as pollute the domestic space. Anne’s own tears also seem to possess a potent cleansing agent, and as a self-confessed ‘woman made of tears’, her lachrymation is repeatedly defined as a deliberate act as opposed to a spontaneous emotional response, thus reinforcing the suggestion of their purgative function within the narrative (16.80). For example, Anne says that she will ‘yield’ her soul to God only when her ‘tears have washed’ her ‘black soul white’ (16.107-8). Anne is also described as actively having ‘watered’ her ‘coach with tears’ (16.5), and her tears are later used as physical testimony of her sorrow when she instructs Nick to inform Frankford that he has ‘seen’ her weep (16.63).

Moreover, since her expulsion, Anne’s tears have dutifully ‘watered’ her surroundings in the same way that a compliant householder might rid the peripheries and the interior of their home of material unwholesomeness; her exiled manor serving as a proxy for her compromised family home. It is Anne’s tears and their proactive attempts to physically purify

¹⁰¹ Marjory E. Lange, *Telling Tears in the English Renaissance* (New York: Brill, 1996), p. 26.

and ‘correct’ her household – considered to be the primary duties of a wife within the plague time home – that compel Frankford to ‘bestow upon’ Anne’s ‘body funeral tears’ that jointly wash away any remaining traces of domestic infection (17.132).¹⁰² It is through this second purification process that Frankford is finally able to ‘restore’ the titles of both ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ to Anne in what Orlin describes as a ‘sombre [...] death bed affirmation of the marital union’ (17.115-6).¹⁰³ However, these titles not only ‘unite’ and reconcile estranged husband and wife. They also symbolically welcome the once ‘unruly’ and plague-tainted Anne back into a sanitary and systematic home. A home whose owners, in their attempts to restore necessary order and purge their domestic space of any remaining corruption, are now not only more secure in their roles as plague time householders, but are finally demonstrating their shared compliance with plague policy practices and domestic prophylactic ‘advice’ (17.108).

Conclusion

A Woman Killed with Kindness allows us to view with more nuance the impact that plague time preventative measures had on contemporary conceptualisations of the early modern home and its maintenance. It reveals how plague time practices interacted with and were assimilated into ideas already firmly set in the cultural imagination that urged the importance of moral and physical cleanliness in the domestic space. Read through these gendered understandings of domesticity, this chapter has reaffirmed Anne Frankford’s central role in Heywood’s tragedy. It has read Anne’s perceived domestic negligence alongside her acts of adultery as actions that have disastrous consequences, not only for the sanctity of her

¹⁰² *Orders Thought Meet* (1578), B4^r.

¹⁰³ Orlin, p. 141.

marriage, but also the health and wellbeing of her home. Heywood imagines a clear route of transmission for both the physical and the moral infection that transfers from Wendoll to Anne. This infection, which is understood within and through the medical frameworks and language of early modern plague, leads to Anne's necessary removal from the domestic space in line with divisive metropolitan plague prevention policy. Anne renders her whole household vulnerable to a disorder that requires stringent prophylactic intervention to halt its spread and cleanse the stricken interior.

Yet, it is only through the combined efforts of both Anne and John Frankford, as the alert, diligent, and harmonious householders that conduct manuals such as Tusser's describe, that the home is finally purged of its corruption and healthful order established in the play's tragic conclusion. *A Woman Killed with Kindness* vigorously responds to and draws on its plague time social-historical context and explores the mutability of, and unease surrounding, domestic space in the face of endemic plague. By transforming the Frankford home into a compromised plague time home, a space that was likely at the forefront of their imaginations in 1604, Heywood shows his audiences how easily dangerous sources enter domestic space and what it takes to expel them. Moreover, Heywood's audiences also get to see what they stand to lose should they too neglect their duties as plague time householders or tenants.

Chapter Four

‘Shutting up’ the Patriarchy in *The Woman’s Prize*

Whilst Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* featured the removal of an infectious source away from the home, John Fletcher’s *The Woman’s Prize* or *The Tamer Tamed* illustrates how domestic space might also be used to contain infection during plague time.¹ Fletcher’s London-centric comedy offers a rare glimpse of the processes within and surrounding early modern household restraint, presenting what F.P. Wilson describes as a ‘slice of life’ during outbreaks.² Despite their comedic objective, Petruchio’s ‘shutting-up’, which sees him locked inside his own home upon the suspicion that he is infected with plague in Act Three, Scene Four, and its aftermath in Act Four, Scene One – a scene which has not been previously considered within plague studies until now – offer the most explicit and sustained representation of the practices pertaining to household restraint and its responses in extant early modern drama.³ As such, Fletcher’s plague time scenes provide a useful window through which we might view and examine further the experience and the effects that shutting-up had upon the material and conceptual space of the early modern home, a topic which has gathered momentum, particularly in the fields of social and economic history, in recent years.⁴ More specifically, this chapter will examine the intimate and intricate gender

¹ Unless otherwise stated all subsequent references to the text are taken from: John Fletcher, *The Tamer Tamed*, ed. by Lucy Munro, New Mermaids (London: Methuen Drama, 2010).

² ‘Fletcher’s first play with an English setting; it is certainly one of his very few located in London’: Gary Taylor, ‘*The Tamer Tamed*: Dating Fletcher’s Interactions with Shakespeare’, *Shakespeareana* (2018), 118-48 (p. 140); For further discussion of *Woman’s Prize*’s London setting see: Eleanor Hubbard, ‘I Will Be Master of What Is Mine Own’: Fortune Hunters and Shrews in Early Modern London’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 46.2 (2015), 331-58 (pp. 355-6); F.P. Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare’s London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 69.

³ Kira L. S. Newman, ‘Shutt Up: Bubonic Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern England’, *Journal of Social History*, 45.3 (2012) 809–34 (p. 812).

⁴ I am thinking particularly here about the work of Newman; Kathryn Wolford, ‘Quarantining Contagion: Providentialist Debates over Plague and Public Health in Elizabethan and Jacobean England’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 84 (2021), 273-305; Jane Stevens Crawshaw, ‘A Sense of

dynamics that are disrupted and challenged by the presence of plague policy within the space of the home, a context and experience that remains largely unexplored in Fletcher's play and in wider plague studies.

As Paul Slack notes, the persistent but low-level infection rates of plague in London throughout 1608-9, which accounted for up to ten percent of the annual deaths in the city, prompted a radical revision of the city's plague orders. These amendments, much to the dismay of Londoners and the London authorities, included tighter prophylactic controls within and surrounding infected homes in the city during outbreaks; controls that brought London's plague policy more in line with national measures.⁵ The clause that permitted one person to leave an infected home for provisions, for instance, was finally omitted from the London orders. This meant that once an infection was discovered, the house and all of its inhabitants were confined for the full duration of the restraint, typically four to six weeks.⁶ Additionally, firmer guidelines were printed and distributed regarding how and when householders should report suspected plague infections, and additional plague workers, such as surgeons and examiners, were assigned to infected parishes.⁷ Londoners had clung on to their liberties for so long that to have them revoked so suddenly and so severely must have

Time: Experiencing Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern Italy, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 'Proximities/Immobilites', 24.2 (2021), 269-90; Charles Udale, 'Evaluating Early Modern Lockdowns: Household Quarantine in Bristol, 1565-1604', *The Economic History Review*, 76 (2023), 118-44.

⁵ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 215; *Orders conceiued and thought fit, as well by the Lord Mayor of the City of London and the aldermen his brethren* (London, 1608), STC 16723; *Four statutes, specially selected and commanded by his Majesty to be carefully put in execution by all justices and other officers of the peace throughout the realm* (London, 1609), STC 9341.

⁶ The national plague orders state six weeks, whereas the 1608 London orders note 'four weeks', *Four Statutes*, pp. 53-4.

⁷ *Ibid.*; Slack, *Impact*, p. 215; *Orders for Health* (London, 1609), STC 9341, pp. 86-7.

been palpably felt in the city; a mood that, I suggest, Fletcher is attempting to capture in *Woman's Prize*.

As Gary Taylor notes, *Woman's Prize* has previously 'been dated as early as 1603 and as late as 1617'.⁸ Despite these generous limits, the play's composition and first likely performance date are usually ascribed to 1609-11, a two-year span which has already been contextualised within plague culture.⁹ The earlier 1609 date, for instance, would mean that Fletcher's comedy immediately emerges from a period of prolonged plague theatre closures, from July 1608 to December 1609, as Dailreader and Taylor delineate.¹⁰ Taylor also draws thematic and performative connections between *Woman's Prize* and Jonson's plague time comedy, *Epicoene*, suggesting that they may have been in the Whitefriars company repertory alongside one another following the reopening of the theatres in December 1609.¹¹ Taylor argues that Fletcher's [and presumably Jonson's] engagement with plague would have been 'much more plausible and piquant immediately after an outbreak of plague, when many Londoners would have experienced' a similar 'sequence of events' to the plague time experiences represented in his play that this chapter explores.¹² Furthermore, a 1609-10 dating would mean that Fletcher, in boldly staging a shutting-up scene in *Woman's Prize*, may

⁸ Taylor, 'Dating Fletcher's Interactions', p. 119; This question arises due to the fact that the first reference to Fletcher's play exists in a warrant from the Master of the Revels dated 18th October 1633 that prevented the performance the play 'at the Blackfriars playhouse, having been told that the play contained "foule and offensive matters", Munro, p. 17.

⁹ Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, 'The Woman's Prize', in *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, Vol. 6: 1609-1616, pp. 54-8 (p. 54); Dailreader and Taylor place it at 1609-1610: John Fletcher, *The Tamer Tamed or, The Woman's Prize*, ed. by Celia R. Dailreader and Gary Taylor, Revels Student Edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 3.

¹⁰ Dailreader and Taylor, p. 9.

¹¹ Taylor, 'Dating Fletcher's Interactions', p. 145.

¹² Ibid, p.128; J. Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) pp. 173-86.

deliberately have drawn on the stricter prophylactic measures that were newly actioned in the disease-stricken city.¹³

A 1611 date is equally possible, however, owing to the ‘contradictory [...] available evidence’ attached to the 1609-10 dating that relates, as Lucy Munro explains, to ‘issues such as the number and scope of the play’s female roles, the requirements of the performance space in the extant texts, known revivals, and publication patterns’.¹⁴ Moreover, in the Midlands, particularly Leicester and Lincoln, plague deaths were still being reported well into 1611.¹⁵ Thus, the effects of plague and the threat of its ensuing measures would have still been just as urgent in 1611 as they were in 1609-10. Whilst this chapter does not attempt to date *Woman’s Prize*, the plague prevention-related contextual work contained within it does serve to strengthen these previous chronological claims.

The heightened plague time regulations surrounding urban domestic space seen within this period are also thematically reflected in Fletcher’s preoccupation with prohibited and enclosed space in *Woman’s Prize*. Maria’s evasion of the marriage consummation, for instance, is initially achieved by her fortifying herself and her female faction in her father’s home in attempts to safeguard her maidenhead by, as Sarah E. Johnson articulates, ‘barring Petruchio’s physical access to her body’.¹⁶ This idea of enclosed bodies and hard domestic boundaries is evoked further through Fletcher’s language. For example, Maria ensures that all

¹³ ‘*The Tamer Tamed* occurred no earlier than the first week of December 1609 and no later than mid-May 1610’, Dailreader and Taylor, p. 9.

¹⁴ Meg Powers Livingston suggests that following year (1611) is more likely: John Fletcher, *The Woman’s Prize*, ed. by Meg Powers Livingston, The Malone Society Reprints, Vol. 172 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 13; Lucy Munro, ‘Reviewed Work(s): *The Tamer Tamed, or The Woman’s Prize* by Celia R. Dailreader and Gary Taylor’, *Early Theatre*, 11.1 (2008), 107-111 (p. 111).

¹⁵ Slack, *Impact*, p. 62.

¹⁶ Sarah E. Johnson, “‘A spirit to resist’” and Female Eloquence in *The Tamer Tamed*, *Shakespeare*, 7.3 (2011), 310-24 (p. 311).

the doors are ‘fast locked’ (1.3.59), ‘guarded’ (1.3.60), and ‘barricadoed’ against the angry Petruchio (1.3.52). Even during his last attempt to induce compassion from Maria towards the end of the play, in which he counterfeits his own death, Petruchio emerges from a presumably very restrictive coffin complete with his winding sheet still secured around his head, which he urgently shouts to be ‘unbutton[ed]’ and liberated from (5.4.39).

Aptly, given its claustrophobic spatiality that draws on the play’s plague time contexts, *Woman’s Prize* is a sickly play. Even though the illnesses within the comedy are all feigned, the galvanizing threat of disease and death are used as a device by multiple characters in both the main plot and the subplot. In the latter, Livia feigns a malady which makes her fall ill ‘o’th ‘sudden’ and ‘very sick’ in order to escape her impending marriage to her suitor and wed her true love, Roland, instead (4.3.14). Moreover, in the main plot, and before Petruchio’s contrived illness, Maria conjures the malady-making miasmas of disease in her assessment of her new home, which she describes as ‘sickly’ and one that ‘stands in an ill air’ that is ‘subject to rots and rheums’ (3.2.126-7). As discussed in the previous chapter, this was considered to be a very dangerous state for an early modern home, particularly during outbreaks of plague. Maria’s suggestion that Petruchio’s home hosts and engenders infectious disease is reinforced through her later reference to the house resembling ‘nothing / But a tiled fog’ (3.2.128). Maria’s observation here readily evokes contemporary medical ideas surrounding the ‘contagious fogs’ that pervade Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2.1.90), and the ‘filthy’ fog (1.1.10) and ‘infected’ (4.1.154) air that his witches inhabit in *Macbeth*.¹⁷ By suggesting atmospheric corruption, Maria primes Petruchio’s home – as well as Petruchio

¹⁷ For further discussion on noxious air in close-quarters see: Amy Kenny, “A Deal of Stinking Breath”: The Smell of Contagion in the Early Modern Playhouse’, in *Contagion and the Shakespearean Stage*, ed. by Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Cham: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 47-61.

himself, given his prolonged exposure and proximity to its noxious air – as a space that is ripe for infection. As such, Maria semantically prepares the way for her ‘infectious’ husband’s imminent confinement, which she herself engineers just two scenes later.

Despite the unique plague time view that *Woman’s Prize* affords us, the play has received very little attention from scholars within plague studies. The one exception to this is Barbara H. Traister’s examination of Fletcher’s sealed plague time home alongside Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Jonson’s *The Alchemist*. Traister’s chapter examines the impact that plague prevention measures had upon the conceptual space of the early modern home and the playhouses in which these plague-sensitive plays were performed and encountered. However, unlike the houses that were shut-up as a result of material plague infection, which as Traister suggests, underwent a metamorphosis from ‘places of comfort’ into ‘virtual prisons and houses of death’, the superficially infected households represented in *Woman’s Prize* and *Alchemist* are spared any actual deaths, and Petruchio’s ‘plague free’ household is revealed and reopened before any ‘real’ damage is done.¹⁸ Traister understands Petruchio’s incarceration as yet another ‘stratagem’ in Maria’s elaborate ‘husband-taming scheme’, one that is made up of ‘frantic activities dealing with plague and death’, but that ultimately achieves little more than to generate audience laughter upon Petruchio’s liberation.¹⁹

Whilst there is little doubt that Fletcher’s treatment of domestic plague prevention has the potential to be hilarious in performance and may even offer a moment of catharsis for the biologically fraught early modern audience as Traister suggests, this chapter argues that

¹⁸ Barbara H. Traister, “‘A plague on both your houses’: Sites of Comfort and Terror in Early Modern Drama”, in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, ed. by Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 169-82 (p. 172).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

beneath the remedial hilarity lurk fraught domestic tensions brought about by the disruptive presence of such measures within the space of the home.²⁰ I argue that Fletcher's creative interrogation of plague prevention policy engages with, and is sensitive to, a series of complex and overlapping socio-cultural anxieties and discourses surrounding domestic plague prophylaxes, patriarchal structures, and gender politics that would have been anything but comical to the dramatists' contemporaries. And whilst Traister highlights the seeming incongruity in what she describes as 'the most extensive and detailed treatment of plague in early modern drama', which '*ironically*' 'occurs in this husband-taming farce', this chapter suggests that there is in fact an appositeness in connecting plague prevention practices and patriarchal opposition in the period that renders Petruchio's restraint far more damaging, both personally and socio-economically, than it might first appear.²¹ As such, it confers far more credit onto Maria and her plague time 'scheme'.

This chapter aims to discover the specific mechanisms driving Maria's decision to deploy plague and its associated countermeasures, which were highly divisive and feared in the period, as part of her stratagem to outwit, undermine, and 'tame' her new husband (5.4.44-6). As I explore, the ingenuity of Maria's plan lies in the fact that it interacts with contemporary plague policy and the patriarchal ideals that these measures intersect with on multiple levels, each serving to heighten Petruchio's sense of domestic subjection. Not only does Maria engineer her husband's forced incarceration within his own home, a spatiality that, as I will discuss, moves directly against patriarchal norms, but she also summons the evocative presence of female plague workers: the keepers and searchers, who were responsible for managing domestic plague policy and whose very existence and authority

²⁰ Ibid., p. 179.

²¹ Ibid., p. 173.

challenged inherent patriarchal systems within early modern domestic space. As such, this chapter locates Fletcher's comedy in a cultural space where emergent radical feminist ideas and plague discourse collide by examining the various ways in which domestic plague policy traversed and threatened established patriarchal ideals and domestic social mores in the early modern home.

Before I begin, it is necessary to outline a couple of technical aspects of this enquiry. I have purposefully avoided using the word 'quarantine' in conjunction with early modern household confinement despite the term being widely used in plague studies. This is because the term possessed an entirely different meaning, in England at least, when the play was likely first composed and staged.²² 'Quarantine' appears in John Kersey's 1702 *A New English Dictionary* with the definition that is most recognisable today: 'the space of forty days, during which admittance is denied to persons coming or supposed to come, from an infected place'.²³ Although, it seems that this definition was in use around fifty years prior to Kersey's entry, it is likely that this term did not enter common usage in this sense until around then.²⁴ Partly a borrowing from Latin and French *quarentena* or *quarenteine* meaning 'forty', the first traceable usage of the term *querentyne* appeared in England in c. 1525, and later in 1579 (a year after the first national plague orders) as law terminology:

Where a man dieth seized of a manor, place, and other lands whereof his wife ought to be endowed, then the woman shall hold the manor place xl. days, within

²² "Quarantine, a word derived from *quarantena*", a forty-day period, was first mentioned with regard to disease in 1127 in Venice', Newman, p. 809.

²³ "Quarantine", John Kersey, 'A New English Dictionary (1702)', *LEME*, ed. Ian Lancashire (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018) <<https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry/151/238>> [accessed 16 January 2024].

²⁴ "Quarantine, N." *OED*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4320106473>>. From 1470-1500 it seems that the term also held biblical associations, specifically the forty-day fast of Jesus.

which time her dower shall be assigned. But if she marry within the xl. days, she shall lose her quarantine.²⁵

‘Quarantine’ was defined as a period of forty days during which a widow had the legal right to stay in her deceased husband's home, and should she be entitled to a dower she should receive this sum at the end of this period. The term clearly held no firm connections to plague or wider contagion until the eighteenth century; therefore, to use it in reference to English plague prevention practices pre-1700 is somewhat anachronistic. Instead, the visited houses that are isolated are typically referred to within the orders and statutes as being ‘sealed’, ‘closed up’ and ‘shut(t) up’, whilst the people within are in their time of ‘restraint/restraintment’, and it is these terms that I use within this chapter.

It is also important to note that *Woman's Prize* uniquely exists in three ‘distinct texts’: the Lambard Manuscript, which is undated; its first printing in the folio edition of Fletcher and Francis Beaumont's *Comedies and Tragedies* in 1647 (F1); and the slightly amended second folio in 1679 (F2).²⁶ Livingston suggests that MS ‘clearly descends from a copy-text that predates’ the play's censorship in 1633.²⁷ As such, the MS is favoured by modern editors, such as Dailreader and Taylor and, more recently, Munro.²⁸ This textual history is important to outline as I will be engaging with passages that are omitted from MS, but are present in both folio texts, such as the doctor and apothecary (the doctor being a speaking part) who

²⁵ William Rastell, ‘An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Words, and Terms of the Laws of this Realm (1579)’, *LEME*. <<https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/lexicon/entry/151/238>> [accessed 16 January 2024].

²⁶ Livingston, p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁸ Primarily using MS but incorporating F material and ‘conjecturally’ adding in ‘Fletcherian oaths’, Dailreader and Taylor present what they suggest is a ‘more “offensive” text’, Dailreader and Taylor, p. 5; Munro notes that her edition does ‘not draw on the folio texts unless material is clearly missing from MS’, Munro, p. 23.

appear on stage during Petruchio's restraint.²⁹ These omissions from the MS are most likely 'theatrical cuts' which, as Livingston suggests, aimed to 'reduce casting demands [...] removing the need for two costumes', something that would be especially important if it was a touring production.³⁰ I will, therefore, indicate when I move between discussing MS and the absent F passages, the latter being provided in Munro's appendices.³¹

'I must be shut-up?': Restricting male space during plague outbreaks

Despite previous scholarship characterising Fletcher's comedy as little more than, in Todd Lidh's words, a 'second-class follow-up' to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, more recent work argues that *Woman's Prize* moves significantly beyond Shakespeare's, particularly in its 'revisions' of the 'shrew-taming' narrative.³² Lidh draws on the work of Linda Woodbridge who suggests that by 1610, dramatists had 'finally recognised the economic importance of female playgoers', who could no longer endure watching their sex being 'abused' on stage and wanted to see the 'assertive female characters' that existed off it represented more widely.³³ Lidh argues that Fletcher's 'reworking' of Shakespeare's play speaks to and 'emphasises' Fletcher's anticipated audience that, importantly, now included more women who were ready to confront something different to what Shakespeare's *Shrew* offered them. Lidh suggests that London audiences were now:

Far more receptive to a 'new London woman', such as those who appear in his play, and he emphasises the difference between his audience and earlier ones by using

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 170-1

³⁰ Livingston, p. 18.

³¹ Munro, pp. 170-1.

³² 'The Woman's Prize has been called a "sequel", a "counterblast", a "continuation", an "adaptation", a "spin-off" a "burlesque" and even a "calculated intertextual glance", Todd Lidh, 'John Fletcher's Taming of Shakespeare: *The Tamer Tam'd*', *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, 4 (2004), 58-72 (p. 59).

³³ Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), pp. 251-2.

Shakespeare's well-known play and characters. By revising some of those characters (but not all), Fletcher maximises the effect and importance of the ongoing gender debate.³⁴

As such, Molly Easo Smith suggests that Fletcher's *Woman's Prize*, unlike Shakespeare's *Shrew*, presents 'subversive power as a realizable goal rather than as an idea to be debated and then contained'.³⁵

Furthermore, David M. Bergeron argues that the forceful political discourse that is clearly evident within *Woman's Prize* locates Fletcher's comedy as his stake in the *querelle des femmes*, a literary genre whose polemics are aligned with early feminist movements.³⁶ This genre, as Joan Kelly notes, became 'the vehicle through which most early feminist thinking evolved'.³⁷ In line with the protofeminist theories in the *querelle des femmes* that Bergeron suggests are at work in the play, Maria, 'Colonel Bianca' (1.3.70), Livia, and the 'auxiliary regiment' (2.5.39) of women that make up the female perspective of *Woman's Prize* unite and 'war' against their society's systemic misogyny (2.5.117). In Fletcher's comedy, the women's conventional subservience gives way to rebellion and independence as they display what are perceivedly masculine behaviours that threaten social and domestic order and that, as Bergeron notes, 'simultaneously mystifies the men and demystifies their dominant position'.³⁸ Bergeron suggests that:

³⁴ Lidh, p. 59.

³⁵ Molly Easo Smith, 'John Fletcher's Response to the Gender Debate: *The Woman's Prize* and the *Taming of the Shrew*', *Papers on Language & Literature*, 31.1 (1995), 38-60 (p. 44).

³⁶ 'The genre is defined by Joan Kelly as a collection of ideas that 'arose as a dialectical opposition to misogyny' within the early modern period that can be traced back as far as c.1400', David M. Bergeron, 'Fletcher's "*The Woman's Prize*", Transgression, and "Querelle des Femmes"', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 8 (1996), 146-64 (pp. 148-9); See also Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the "Querelle des Femmes", 1400-1789', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 8.1 (1982), 4-28.

³⁷ Kelly, p. 5.

³⁸ Bergeron, p. 155.

Fletcher's play effectively illustrates male anxieties about what would happen if women turned the tables, gained control, and dominated men. If in Shakespeare's play Petruchio succeeded in the male dream-fulfilment of control, in Fletcher's play he experiences the nightmare of being overthrown by women.³⁹

As this section argues, the most extreme attempt by Maria and her militia in their campaign against patriarchal oppression occurs when Maria summons plague within the walls of her new home and upon her new husband, Petruchio; a move that is, in part, facilitated by Petruchio himself. As part of yet another strategy to 'tame' the defiant Maria into compliance, the newly wedded Petruchio chooses to feign illness:

Something I must do speedily. I'll die
If I can handsomely, for that's the way
To make a rascal of her. I am sick,
And I'll go very near it, but I'll perish (3.2.217-20).

Petruchio's pretense, however, plays straight into Maria's skillful hands, as she deftly transforms her husband's ambiguous 'sick'-ness into the plague, a disease which, owing to its strict preventive measures, creates the ideal conditions whereby she can finally overthrow her husband's domestic domination fully (3.2.219). In Act Three, Scene Four, in line with metropolitan plague policy, Maria calls for the city authorities to restrain the apparently infected Petruchio. In doing so, Emma Whipday suggests that Maria cleverly engineers an 'onstage role reversal' that uses 'sickness as a pretext to force [Petruchio] to inhabit the female experience of spatial boundaries'.⁴⁰ Building on Whipday's argument, I argue that the specific measures that were put in place to mitigate Petruchio's particular 'sickness' serve to

³⁹ Bergeron, pp. 147-8.

⁴⁰ Emma Whipday, *Shakespeare's Domestic Tragedies: Violence in the Early Modern Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 56-7.

significantly augment this ‘role-reversal’; indeed, they are measures that revise the space of the home and its gender dynamics in ways that no other malady could.

Maria’s decision to brand Petruchio with plague presents her with a series of opportunities to teach him a lesson in tractability and throw his patriarchal authority into question. Firstly, national plague policy dictated that an infected house must be sealed and its inhabitants, whether sick or healthy, must remain within the house until six weeks after the last person had fallen ill. However, as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to *Woman Killed*, an amendment to the London orders made it lawful for householders who were in possession of two properties within the city to separate the infected from the healthy.⁴¹ Maria, like Frankford, takes full advantage of this loophole, as upon Petruchio’s residence being sealed by the watchmen, she proclaims that she will move ‘to the lodge; some that are kind, and love me, / I know will visit me’ (3.4.37). The ‘lodge’ where Maria plans to reside away from her supposedly plague-ridden husband most likely refers to a smaller, separate building located within the grounds of Petruchio’s main residence.⁴² Of course, this permitted spatial separation of the ‘sick’ husband and the healthy wife allows Maria to continue to avoid Petruchio’s company and, importantly, the marriage consummation, all under the guise of lawful plague practice.

The second opportunity provided by plague prevention measures that Maria takes advantage of is the removal of Petruchio’s prized household goods, an act which Traister describes as ‘yet another blow to his manhood’.⁴³ At the beginning of Act Three, Scene Four, there is a flurry of activity as Maria and Servants enter ‘carrying out household stuff and

⁴¹ *Orders conceived and thought fit, as well by the Lord Mayor of the City of London and the aldermen his brethren* (London, 1608), STC 16723, A1^r.

⁴² "lodge, n." *OED* <www.oed.com/view/Entry/109702> [accessed 4 December 2021].

⁴³ Traister, p. 175.

trunks' (3.4.11). Just moments later, Maria can be heard shouting orders to her servants: 'Save all ye can, for heaven's sake!' (3.4.24), and 'Alas, we are undone else!' (3.4.17). As Huey-ling Lee notes, in removing the 'household stuff', in particular 'the armour' (3.4.18):

Which is supposed to represent his gentle background [it] deprives Petruchio of the means or props to perform his role as a gentleman. Left with nothing to 'trim the house up' (4.2.10), he is alienated not only from the space that he used to call home but also from his identity as a member of the gentry.⁴⁴

As Traister duly notes, Maria is able to strip Petruchio's home of its precious contents 'under the pretense that such goods would otherwise become tainted by plague carrying vapours and rendered useless'.⁴⁵ As we have just seen in *Woman Killed*, there was a great deal of anxiety about household objects during outbreaks of plague, as everyday items, fabrics, and garments were transformed into dangerous fomites or carriers of the disease within infected homes.⁴⁶ Consequently, during 'the time of the plague', Thomas Lodge prudently advises householders 'to shut-up his best movables in a place apart, that is clean & neat, and to forbear the use thereof'.⁴⁷ This would ensure that particular items of value were protected against dangerous miasmas that might necessitate their removal should the home become infected. This is advice that Maria diligently follows, wholly at Petruchio's expense.

Moreover, akin to the aforementioned 'polluted' linens and hangings that adorn the Frankford bedchamber in *Woman Killed*, the treatment and subsequent removal of Petruchio's bedding and dressings are also particularly noteworthy in *Woman's Prize* (13.13). During the

⁴⁴ Huey-ling Lee, 'Women, Household Stuff and the Making of a Gentleman in John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*', *Journal of Theatre Studies*, 7.2 (2008), 237-58 (p. 250); See also Natasha Korda, 'Household Kates: Domesticating Commodities in *The Taming of the Shrew*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47.2 (1996), 109-31; Orlin, p. 141.

⁴⁵ Traister, p. 175.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁷ Thomas Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague containing the nature, signs, and accidents of the same* (London, 1603), STC 16676, L2^r.

frantic expungement of various household items such as ‘chests of plate’ and ‘the wardrobe’ (3.4.16), Maria commands the servants to go ‘up to the chamber, / And take the hangings down, and see the linen / Packed up and sent away within this half hour’ (3.4.13-4). It is very possible that these are the same ‘hangings’ that Maria describes just two scenes earlier as ‘too base for her use’ (3.2.104-5). These apparently crude fabrics are now conveniently converted into dangerous fomites that harbour Petruchio’s ‘infection’. As per the national orders, and where the householders could afford to do so (as Petruchio surely could), items of ‘small value’ were burnt to ensure that they could not ‘increase’ ‘the contagion of the plague’ further.⁴⁸ Therefore, as well as removing her husband’s larger, status-defining valuables from his own home, Maria exploits stringent plague prevention measures as a means of shaping her new home to her liking by having the undesirable items, like Petruchio’s ‘poor’ textiles, carried away from the home and speculatively destroyed (3.2.99).

Unfortunately for Petruchio, his material losses during his household restraint do not end there. One of the main detrimental factors of shutting-up infected houses were the costs involved in doing so. If households were not dependent on public funds, plague charges were payable by the householders themselves.⁴⁹ Maria emphasizes the fact that Petruchio will receive the best, and therefore the most expensive, care during his restraint when she proclaims that ‘meat nor money / He shall not want’ (3.4.31-2). Likewise, Maria’s father, Petronius, later urges ‘what he wants – if money, love, or labour / Or any way may win it, let him have it’ (3.4.66-7). As outlined in the national orders, individual parishes were assigned their own plague workers, such as watchmen – who appear halfway through the scene – and keepers (who Maria has allegedly summoned) and who were responsible for keeping ‘such as

⁴⁸ *Orders Thought meet* (1578), D2^v.

⁴⁹ For further information on ‘monetary barriers’, maintaining household quarantine and the impact of shutting-up on middling artisans see: Newman, pp. 826-7.

are of good wealth being restrained, at their own proper charges, and the poor at the common charges'.⁵⁰ These costs include the charges payable to the householder for any care provided during the time of their restraint, such as plague workers' wages and basic treatments. For example, in *Woman's Prize*, the watchmen inform Petruchio that 'onions', a popular plague remedy, are 'roasting' for his non-existent plague 'sore' (3.4.80).⁵¹ There would also be general charges pertaining to locking up an infected house, which in 1636 cost around fourpence per day.⁵²

Moreover, in a passage that is omitted from MS but present in both F1 and F2, a doctor and an apothecary arrive on stage to give their 'opinion' regarding Petruchio's condition (F3.4.3).⁵³ This in itself would have been a rare sight during plague time as physicians typically refused to visit suspected plague victims for fear of infection. In the documented cases that suggest that a medical practitioner did visit someone with plague, it was because the patient was influential or wealthy, like Petruchio.⁵⁴ The high fees of the very few early modern doctors who tended to plague sufferers reflects, then, the high risk that they undertook in treating the afflicted. For an affluent household such as Petruchio's and its inhabitants who were displaying the tell-tale symptoms of 'a pestilent fever' (F3.4.7), the visit and treatments from both the doctor and the apothecary would have likely cost the householder around four pounds, five shillings, the equivalent of just under four hundred and

⁵⁰ *Orders Thought Meet* (1578), B1^r.

⁵¹ 'Take a great white Onion, and pick out the core or middle of him, then fill the hole with good Venice treacle or Andromachus treacle, and Aqua vita, then stop or cover the hole of the Onion again, and roast him in the hot ashes until he be soft, then strain it strongly, throw a cloth and give it the sick to drink and the rest that remains pound it small, and apply it to the soar, and sweat upon it', Kellwaye, F4^r.

⁵² Newman, p. 817.

⁵³ Munro, p. 170.

⁵⁴ Mortimer, p. 196.

fifty pounds today.⁵⁵ Consequently, Maria's masterful scheme ensures that Petruchio is quite literally paying the price for his decision to assume a feigned illness by forcing him to finance his own unnecessary treatment and internment for plague.

These 'flourish[es]' pale in comparison, however, to the perceived socio-spatial ramifications of Petruchio's shutting-up, an experience that Fletcher's audiences had either lived through themselves or had undoubtedly heard or read about. The ethics of interning those infected with plague was a highly contentious issue throughout the period, with many, both ecclesiastical and lay, not only questioning the communicability of plague, but also the use of shutting-up; a measure that was understood by many as simply 'not charitable'.⁵⁶ Writer Thomas Brewer, during the later plague outbreak of 1625, for example, aligns plague time household confinement with imprisonment, noting that in London he has seen 'Houses' that have become 'their Masters Prison':

O See my Sons and Daughters, that survive
Their Household massacre, (half dead) alive,
In their own Houses buried; or as bad,
Enjail'd, imprisoned; [...]
See them debard all meetings of delight,
See them debard society, and sight
Of Kindred, and Familiars; See them there
Bard the best pleasure, that doth Passion cheer,
Their Recreative walks, losing their share
Of what all taste, the sweet and wholesome Air,
A poor man's only physick. See them lose
The benefits of those poor Trades they use:
To sum up all their miseries in one,
See them I' th' Dungeon, of laments and moan.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Based on a 1668 account: 'unto two doctors for their fees in coming to visit the said deceased (he dying of the distemper commonly called the plague) and for physick by them administered to him and the rest of the family, in all £4.5s', Ibid.; The National Archives, 'Currency Converter 1270-2017', <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result>> [accessed 19 January 2024].

⁵⁶ *Orders thought meet* (1578), B2v.

⁵⁷ Thomas Brewer, *The Weeping Lady: Or, London Like Ninivie in Sack-cloth* (London 1625) , STC 3722 , B2^r -B2^v.

In Brewer's mind, the houses that are sealed due to plague are seen as little more than a jail for their stricken inmates, in which they are denied even the most basic forms of relief or care.

Not unlike Brewer's harrowing image of detained Londoners in their 'dungeons', Petruchio likens his sudden detention to a method of punishment reserved only for the most heinous of crimes, comparing those that are locked up because they are 'infectious' with 'heretic[s]' and 'traitor[s]' (3.4.42-3). Petruchio's elision of criminals and plague victims highlights an important contemporary view regarding the stigma of plague infection upon the home. This stigmatisation is, of course, foregrounded in *Woman Killed* in which the connections between improper husbandry and plague meant that an infected household might also be seen as one that had been poorly managed and maintained, and one that God had chosen to retributively visit. Plague, then, had the capacity to tarnish an early modern householder with the reputation of, at best, negligence, as discussed in the previous chapter, and, at worst, iniquity, as Petruchio implies. The latter view is reinforced in Thomas Nashe's 1594 *Christ's Tears*, where he notes that whilst there are still those that are 'godly and wise' in the city, there are certainly other 'wicked livers' who 'had plague bills set upon their doors, to make them more noted and detestable'.⁵⁸ Thus, Maria's scheme to undermine Petruchio not only has material and financial ramifications, but also exposes him to public scrutiny.

However, it was the efficacy of shutting-up that was undoubtedly the most prominent debate surrounding domestic incarceration during plague time, with many suggesting that the stringent measure harmed or killed just as many as it spared. Contemporaries believed that the

⁵⁸ Thomas Nashe, *Christs tears over Jerusalem Whereunto is annexed, a comparative admonition to London* (London, 1593), STC 18366, p. 101; For further historical discussion of plague time markings on household boundaries see: Edward Brookes, 'Plague Markings: Doors and Disease', *Cultural History*, 12.2 (2023), 145-67.

‘very thought of a sad and dismal restraint’ and the mere ‘locking of [a] pew door’ could be damaging, as:

Some spirits are so averse to the very least restraint [...] This shutting-up would breed a Plague if there were none: Infection may have killed its thousands, but shutting-up hath killed its ten thousands.⁵⁹

As Charles Udale notes, this view was not exactly misplaced, as his research into household mortality in Bristol from 1565-1603 reveals. Udale notes that ‘where implemented most forcefully, household quarantine doubled the proportion of burials occurring in groups of three or more’.⁶⁰ This is likely due to the fact that household confinement, as Udale suggests, ‘created incentives for hiding infection, fleeing (and thus spreading disease), and crucially [...] endangered healthy people who were locked up alongside the sick’.⁶¹

And if those shut-up didn’t succumb to the disease itself whilst sealed in with the dead and dying, they could find themselves weakened, even starved to death, as a result of the stringent rules surrounding plague time restraint. Physician and astrologer Simon Forman, reflecting on his own experiences of restraint in 1592, laments the ‘abuse’ of being shut-up and ‘left destitute’, noting that communal aid was seemingly non-existent and ‘it was [deemed] better that I and my household should starve and die’ than risk infecting his ‘neighbours’.⁶² This is a perspective that Fletcher reflects upon in *Woman’s Prize* through Petruchio’s comment: ‘What will ye starve me here?’ as he cries for his ‘friends! Gentleman! [...] none hear me?’ (3.4.68-9) upon realising that, as Traister suggests, he has been abandoned by his male

⁵⁹ Anonymous, *The Shutting-up of infected houses as it is practised in England soberly debated* (London, 1665), Wing S3717, A4^v.

⁶⁰ Udale, pp. 136-7.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 119.

⁶² Robert O. Bucholz and Joseph P. Ward, *London: A Social and Cultural History, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 315.

friends for fears they too would be confined by association (3.3.42).⁶³ If such events were happening offstage, Petruchio's friends are likely to have been perceived by authorities as those who were wont to 'sit at the doors' of infected houses; individuals who were also often incarcerated themselves, as Newman notes, for 'having crossed the line that separated infected homes from safe surroundings'.⁶⁴

As Bergeron notes, Petruchio's spatial hiatus, that separates him from his homosocial network, renders him momentarily 'isolated and frustrated' and, crucially, 'powerless'.⁶⁵ This is a huge departure from Petruchio the infamous 'breaker of wild women' (1.1.170), described by Tranio at the start of the play:

His very frown, if she but say her prayers,
Louder than men talk treason, makes him tinder;
The motion of a dial when he's testy
Is the same trouble to him as a waterwork.
She must do nothing of herself, not eat,
Sleep, say 'Sir, how do ye', make her ready, piss,
Unless he bid her (1.1.41-7).

Of course, under plague measures, Petruchio is not only spatially, but temporally bound. As Jane Stevens Crawshaw suggests, 'time was central to the purpose and success of all forms of quarantine'.⁶⁶ Crawshaw notes that 'the disruption caused by epidemics and quarantine removed individuals from [...] communities and activities that structured their days, weeks, and years'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, mid seventeenth-century polemic treatises condemn household restraint by stressing the potentially damaging physical effects of 'mewing' 'men up' in their

⁶³ Traister, p. 171.

⁶⁴ Newman, p. 828.

⁶⁵ Bergeron, pp. 158-9.

⁶⁶ Jane Stevens Crawshaw, 'A Sense of Time: Experiencing Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern Italy, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 'Proximities/Immobilites', 24.2 (2021), 269-90 (p. 273).

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 271.

own domestic space, where they suggest that ‘even a days imprisonment’ could be ‘mortal [...] to them’.⁶⁸ This anonymous discourse that details the experience of the ‘sad and dismal restraint’ brought about by shutting-up, speaks to the popular contemporary conceptions surrounding the physiological and psychological impact of the restrained early modern male, who is protractedly forced to inhabit domestic space during outbreaks. As the polemicist argues, the despair of being physically locked in their own home for days on end was believed by some to be enough to actually trigger epidemic diseases, such as plague, even in the ‘healthiest of ‘men’.⁶⁹ The argument that is implicit in this text, then, is the seemingly physically destructive withdrawal of masculine autonomy and liberty that plague time shutting-up engendered, a notion that Fletcher is likely tapping into via Petruchio’s apparent fear of confinement in *Woman’s Prize*, as I will now discuss.

The scope of early modern male liberty is a subject that is also discussed extensively in Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* (1594), yet another plague time play that, in its preoccupation with restraint and liberation, is likely to have been shaped by the cultural impact of contemporary plague-prevention measures. Thus, when Adriana’s husband, Antipholus, has not returned for dinner at the anticipated time, her sister offers this explanation:

LUCIANA	A man is master of his liberty: Time is their master, and, when they see time, They’ll go or come: If so. Be patient, sister.
ADRIANA	Why should their liberty than ours be more
LUCIANA	Because their business still lies out o’ door (2.1.7-11).

⁶⁸ *The Shutting-up of infected houses*, A4^v.

⁶⁹ Ibid; see also Kathryn Welford who contextualises these debates in the much earlier outbreak of 1603-4, Kathryn Welford, ‘Quarantining Contagion: Providentialist Debates over Plague and Public Health in Elizabethan and Jacobean England’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 84 (2021), 273-305.

Shakespeare's elucidation provides a useful contemporary perspective that explores the cultural disparities between established ideals of male versus female autonomy. The married woman's role as the main caregiver of the household culturally locates her within the interior domestic space, as previously encountered in *Woman Killed*.⁷⁰ Petruchio regurgitates this conventional view in *Woman's Prize* when he states that 'an honest woman' is one that 'keeps her house and loves her husband' (1.3.144). Conversely, as Ann C. Christensen notes, the various 'business' endeavours stimulated by 'commercial expansion [...] and global trade' required men of nearly all social classes to 'leave the homes they were to head' and often for long periods of time.⁷¹ As such, the socially accepted autonomies and mobility of early modern men culturally detached them from the confines of domesticity and imbued them with far greater freedom of movement than their female family members. Clearly, the notion of immobility and protractedly inhabiting the domestic space – one that is conceptualised as a decidedly female space – for four to six weeks is too much for Petruchio, who resolves to break his restraint, threatening to 'shoot' his watchmen if they stand in his way (3.4.89). Fearing for their lives, the watchmen 'quit him' and their office (3.4.92).⁷² Petruchio, then forces the door open and is freed.

In escaping his restraint, however, Petruchio not only breaks plague policy, but he is also actively questioning its methods. Questioning plague policy and the rationale that lay be-

⁷⁰ Edmund Tilney, *A brief and pleasant discourse of duties in marriage, called the flower of Friendship* (London, 1571), STC 24077, C6^v; Robert Cleaver, *A godly form of household government for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of God's word* (London, 1598), STC 5382, p. 89.

⁷¹ Ann C. Christensen, *Separation Scenes: Domestic Drama in Early Modern England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 2.

⁷² F.P. Wilson notes that some watchmen, like Petruchio's, were punished for 'neglecting their duties', F.P. Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare's London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 69.

hind it was a very dangerous thing for anyone in the period to do. Clergyman Henoah Clapham, in his 'Letter to a Friend', which was written from his prison cell in 1604, illustrates just how dangerous this was and, as such, is worth quoting at length:

You desire to hear by what Law, I was committed, and so am still continued in prison? I protest, in the presence of God, I know not, by what Law, all this is done, There is a Law, that toucheth some, concerning judgment and doctrine of the Pestilence. It is laid down in the book called the Queens Orders for the Pestilence: I speak of our late sweet Sovereign, now gone unto God. The same book since (as I take it) was published last pest-time, in his Majesties name, and this is it verbatim:

Order 16. Item if there be any person, Ecclesiastical or Lay, that should hold, and publish any opinions, (as in some places report is made) that it is a vain thing, to forbear, to resort to the infected: or that it is not charitable, to forbid the same; pretending that no person shall die but at their time prefixed, such persons shall not only be reprehended, but by order of the Bishop, (If they be Ecclesiastical,) shalbe forbidden to preach: and being Lay, shalbe also enjoined to forbear, to utter such dangerous opinions, upon Pain of imprisonment; which shalbe executed, if they shall persevere in that error. And yet it shall appear manifestly, by these Orders, that according to Christian charity, no persons of the meanest degree, shalbe left without succour and relief.

Admit now, I had been culpable, of such doctrine: my punishment should not have been imprisonment, but some inhibition to preach. But as may appear, by all my writings, I am cleared from all such imputation: and so no Law (that yet I can hear of) in this matter, violated of me.⁷³

Thus, not only does Clapham's letter provide a very rare example of first-hand, intellectual engagement with the printed plague orders, but the lengthy and unpleasant imprisonment that Clapham describes also demonstrates the punishments that awaited those who spoke out against plague policy and the diseases' contagionist frameworks that had led to England's adoption of household restraint in the first place.

However, far worse punishments awaited those who, like Petruchio, broke household restraint. Early modern citizens who violated their captivity and who harmed or even

⁷³ Henoah Clapham, *Henoah Clapham his demands and answers touching the pestilence methodically handled, as his time and means could permit* (London, 1604), STC 5343, p. 31-2.

threatened their watchmen, as Petruchio does, faced severe consequences that undoubtedly damaged reputations far beyond the indignity of being shut-up. The most severe punishments were meted out to those who ‘willfully and contemptuously’ went ‘abroad’ with a plague sore upon them and, who, as the 1609 orders outline, would be promptly charged with felony and put to death.⁷⁴ And whilst Petruchio does not actually have a sore upon him, contrary to Maria’s reports, he still breaks his restraint and, as such, stands to be punished in the following manner:

If such person shall not have any such sore found about him, Then for this said Offence, to be punished as a vagabond in all respects should, or ought to be, by the Statute made in the nine and thirteenth year of the reign of our late Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth, for the punishment of Rogues and Vagabonds, And further to be bound to his or their good behavior for one whole year.⁷⁵

Evidence suggests that those who broke plague policy were usually apprehended and carried back to their homes. For instance, in 1636, Stephen Smyth, a fishmonger in St Martin’s, London, broke his household’s incarceration to sell his produce only to be confined in his home again alongside his remaining fish that were deemed ‘an additional hazard’.⁷⁶ Additionally, in 1607, Nicholas Kingham was publicly whipped for repeatedly leaving his shut-up home.⁷⁷ And whilst it seems that Petruchio manages to evade any legal repercussions that his escape might have provoked, the threat of punishment alone adds to the sheer complexity of Maria’s plague-dependent plot. Surely Maria knows that Petruchio will attempt to escape his bounded space? Surely, she knows too, that such an action would place him at risk of being ‘bound’ by the law as a result? Maria’s shrewdness coupled with the unique spatiotemporal properties of domestic plague time restraint, thus, enables her to temporarily

⁷⁴ *Four Statutes* (1609), p. 54.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Newman, p. 823

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 280

relocate Petruchio within feminocentric domestic space; a space that has been carved out by plague policy and one that is wholly socio-culturally incongruous with the conceptions of early modern masculinity, health, and patriarchal authority.

However, as Maria suggests in Act Four, Scene One, which explores the immediate aftermath of Petruchio's confinement, the success of her plan hinges on the fact that it must appear that she is the injured party who acted with pure intent and truly believed that her husband had contracted plague. Immediately after his escape, Maria urges Petruchio to claim that feigning plague was in fact his 'plot', and that he must now 'undo' himself in order to end the couple's feud (5.1.138). As a result, Maria and, more importantly, her sex, cannot take any credit for the scheme or revel in the momentary feminine retribution that it brings about. The next section of this chapter, however, reveals yet another crucial layer within Maria's plague-related schemes that publicly and, therefore, undisputedly places Petruchio under the jurisdiction of women, allowing Maria and her female collective to unequivocally claim their victory. I now move on to examine the female plague workers who lurk in the margins of Fletcher's comedy, and whose unnerving occupations are not only culturally enmeshed with the unpopular plague time practice of shutting-up, but whose bodies also challenge and destabilise entrenched domestic ideals and patriarchal values within the homes they visit. As such, the women taking on these evocative roles, who in plague time continually pass into 'places of death', are read as integral figures in *Woman's Prize* who assist Maria in bringing her stratagem to life.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Mazzola, "Whoso List to Find?": Hard Facts, Soft Data, and Women Who Count', *Critical Survey*, 34.1 (2022), 1-26 (p. 8).

Fletcher's Female Plague Workers

In Act One, Scene Two of *Woman's Prize*, after spirited encouragement from Bianca, Maria reveals her intent to 'work upon' Petruchio and quickly puts the plans that are to bring about her new husband's downfall into motion (1.2.186). However, as well as laying the foundations for her schemes, Maria also establishes a marker against which her defiant acts might be measured and 'chronicled' and, importantly, by which others might readily observe her victory (1.2.176). Maria declares that:

I would undertake this man, thus single,
And spite of all the freedom he has reached to,
Turn him, and bend him as I list, and mould him
Into a babe again, that aged women
Wanting both teeth and spleen may master him (1.2.171-5).

As Maria's above statement indicates, her aim is to manipulate and suppress Petruchio's patriarchal influence to the extent that he is forced to relinquish his privilege and power into the hands of what was considered one of the most powerless demographics within early modern society: poor, elderly women (1.2.172). Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford note that 'for some women, authority may have increased in old age', however this was highly dependent upon 'a woman's social status, health, wealth, power of patronage, and character'.⁷⁹

In practice, many elderly women within the early modern period were, as Mendelson and Crawford suggest, 'scorned and neglected', especially those who were poor, and whose age-conferred 'authority' and experience was often interpreted by their contemporaries as 'threatening' and supernatural.⁸⁰ This is forcibly demonstrated in *The Witch of Edmonton*'s portrayal of Elizabeth Sawyer, a figure who I discuss in more detail in the final chapter. That

⁷⁹ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550–1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 193.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

the autonomous adult male Petruchio might, then, find himself at the mercy of such apparently impotent and socially liminal individuals, as he had once depended on his wetnurse as a vulnerable ‘babe’, is clearly an alluring prospect for Maria (1.2.174). It is a prospect that also promises the sweetest victory for her ‘cross-class alliance’, which comprises the many women, young, old, rich, and poor, who rise up in defence of Maria’s cause throughout the course of the play.⁸¹

Nevertheless, as a wealthy, married, and prominent patriarch at the helm of his own household, the real-world conditions and circumstances in which Petruchio might see himself thrown from power by his female social inferiors are exceedingly limited, if not almost non-existent. The absurdity, to early modern sensibilities, of such conjectured societal disorder is explored in the retrograde dynamics that occur in the domestic spaces of plays such as Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), in which the servant rules the master and the son overrules the father in the topsy-turvy Seely household.⁸² The hierarchical shifts that ensue within Heywood and Brome’s play are, crucially, only achieved via non-natural means, in this instance witchcraft, a prevalent phenomenon within the period that was perceived to be engendered predominantly by elderly, poverty-stricken women.

Although they are certainly part of the wider discourse surrounding witchcraft, as this next section will reveal, the elderly women Maria conjures and implicates within her strategy in Act One who are to ‘master’ Petruchio most clearly align not with witches, but female

⁸¹ Lee, p. 252. It is important to note that Lee’s material culture approach reads Fletcher’s comedy in an inversion of the typical protofeminist reading that Lee suggests often ignores the fact ‘that the triumph of its upper-class heroine is as contingent on her alliance with other women, particularly those inferior in economic and social powers, as on her subjection of and distinction from them’, *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁸² Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, *The Witches of Lancashire*, Globe Quartos (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002).

plague workers. Like their supernatural counterparts, female plague workers not only fit the demographic that Maria describes but, as I will discuss, wield the power to significantly alter and ‘shape’ the early modern domestic experience during outbreaks (1.2.175).⁸³ It could be argued that Maria’s hypothetical ‘aged women’ simply refers to any mature woman living in the city (1.2.174-5). Yet, just as the spectre of illness, incarceration, and plague darkens the lightness of Fletcher’s comedy, so do the female plague workers who were responsible for executing and facilitating these prevention policies within early modern homes. These policies are integral to Fletcher’s plot, and are represented on stage in Act Three, Scene Four. Thus, revealing the dramatic presence of female plague workers and their divisive roles within Fletcher’s comedy not only emphasises just how central plague prevention measures are to Maria’s plans from the very beginning of the play, but also further suggests the extent to which Fletcher is drawing on contemporary conversations surrounding domestic plague policy and gender politics in *Woman’s Prize*.

The two female plague time roles that this study considers are those of the keeper and the searcher. Margaret Pelling describes both as members of the ‘small army’ conscripted during plague time to help manage the shutting-up of infected houses, especially in dense urban areas like London.⁸⁴ These women, whose roles made them synonymous with the harrowing experience of early modern plague prevention, are largely absent from extant early modern drama despite their regular and disturbing presence in Dekker’s single-authored and collaborative plague pamphlets alike.⁸⁵ One notable exception to this is Shakespeare’s fleeting but

⁸³ Richelle Munkhoff, ‘Searchers of the Dead: Authority, Marginality, and the Interpretation of Plague in England, 1574–1665’, *Gender & History*, 11.1 (1999), 1-29 (p. 21).

⁸⁴ Margaret Pelling, *The Common lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations, and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), p. 186.

⁸⁵ Dekker, *English Villainies*, K2^r-K3^r; Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, ‘The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinary; or, The Walks in Paul’s’, ed. by Paul Yachnin, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University

significant reference to the searchers in Act Five, Scene Two of *Romeo and Juliet*, when Friar Laurence's urgent letter to Romeo fails to reach him due to the messenger being intercepted by the 'searchers of the town' (5.2.5). Believing the messenger to be from an infected house, the searcher's word 'sealed up the doors and would not let us forth', preventing the letter from reaching Romeo in Mantua (5.2.5-12). The office of the searcher predates the first national plague measures and there is evidence that the role was active from as early as the 1570s.⁸⁶ The role is later outlined in the national orders which states that the searchers, or 'viewers' as they were sometimes known, were expected to visit 'the bodies of such as shall die in time of Infection'.⁸⁷ As Elizabeth Mazzola notes, the searchers could be seen 'freely walking the streets' in plague time 'rather than hidden inside the home', and were women that 'were entrusted with substantial responsibilities for public health' as they went about searching their parishes for signs of plague.⁸⁸

The keeper, or nurse-keeper, likewise appears in the first national plague orders where the role is described as one that is expected 'to provide and deliver all necessities of victuals, or any matter of watching or other attendance'.⁸⁹ In the absence of qualified physicians, who fled the epicenters of plague for fear of infection, the keeper stepped in to provide basic nursing and palliative care, such as offering food and rudimentary prescriptions like purgatives to the sick.⁹⁰ Importantly, Slack notes evidence that keepers were employed in some of the more

Press, 2007), pp. 183-94 (p. 191, l.386); Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful year. 1603 Wherein is showed the picture of London, lying sick of the plague* (London, 1604), STC 6535, F4^r.

⁸⁶ Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', p. 2; For discussion of the searcher role in eighteenth and nineteenth century London see: Wanda S. Henry, 'Women Searchers of the Dead in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century London', *Social History of Medicine*, 29.3 (2015), 445-66.

⁸⁷ *Orders Thought Meet* (1578), A4^r.

⁸⁸ Mazzola, p. 6.

⁸⁹ *Orders Thought Meet* (1578), B1^r.

⁹⁰ Mortimer, p. 135-89.

affluent parishes in London by around 1608.⁹¹ This suggests that the role would still have been a relatively new, and perhaps intriguing, addition to metropolitan plague policy for the first audiences of *Woman's Prize*; intrigue that Fletcher seems eager to exploit within his comedy.

Whilst the roles of the keeper and the searcher entailed distinct duties, discussed in greater detail in due course, the women that were called on to perform each role were socio-economically alike. The searchers are described as 'Ancient Women' who are mostly poor, single, or widowed.⁹² Likewise, as Lara Thorpe notes, plague keepers are typically documented as poor, single, or widowed elderly women, pulled from the very fringes of society.⁹³ When describing Petruchio's keepers, Maria makes several references to the physical bodies of the women, identifying them as 'old' and blighted by decay (4.1.31). Regarding the keeper's ages, Maria declares that Petruchio has been confined with a keeper 'of fourscore' (4.1.51), and then later refers to a pair of keepers as 'Pieces of five and fifty', suggesting that the aging process has stripped the women of all traces of femininity and that they are mere remnants of the women they once were (4.1.31).⁹⁴ Maria continues her imagery of age-related erosion through her reference to the keepers as two outdated coins, or 'Harrygroats' who have 'had their faces worn, / Almost their names too' (4.1.91-2). Whilst teasing Petruchio, Maria also states that at least one of his keepers has lost 'all her teeth' (4.1.53), an

⁹¹ Slack, *Impact*, p. 271.

⁹² F. R. Forbes, 'The Searchers', *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 50.9 (1974), 1031-8 (p. 1032).

⁹³ Lara Thorpe, "At the mercy of a strange woman": Plague Nurses, Marginality, and Fear during the Great Plague of 1665', in *Women on the Edge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Aidan Norrie and Lisa Hopkins (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), pp. 29- 44 (p. 37).

⁹⁴ 'The difference in the number of women hired possibly reflected the varying magnitude of plague in a parish in any given year, but it also seems to be a cultural trope that the searchers worked in pairs', Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', p. 4.

image directly recalling the old women ‘wanting teeth’ whom Maria envisions conquering Petruchio in Act One (1.2.175).

There are many possible reasons why poor, elderly women might have been chosen specifically for these plague time roles, including the widespread contemporary assumption that the elderly, ‘whose bodies are cold and dry’, were less predisposed to epidemic diseases, such as plague.⁹⁵ Moreover, elderly women were also the demographic within society that were most practiced and familiar with the duties of ‘keeping’, as they were often the individuals called upon to perform poor relief duties or administer basic health care within their own families and neighbourhoods.⁹⁶ Mendelson and Crawford note that ‘at all social levels, elderly women were nurses of the sick’.⁹⁷ The marginal social status of impoverished, aging females was also undoubtedly a deciding factor in their appointments as either searchers or keepers, especially given that nursing victims of plague was understood to be a hazardous commission. As Munkhoff suggests, once their duties had been performed, these women were, yet again, seen as ‘physically, symbolically and historically’ expendable to their communities.⁹⁸ Yet, despite their disadvantaged state, these women held considerable power and provoked great fear during outbreaks of plague, a ‘paradox’ that, I suggest, Fletcher is keen to explore in *Woman’s Prize* (4.1.30). And although Fletcher does not physically represent the keepers or the searchers onstage in his comedy, their cultural presence and authority within the text is palpable. I will first consider the role of the plague time keeper.

⁹⁵ Bradwell, *Physick for the Sickness* (1636), C2^r; Wear, p. 287.

⁹⁶ Richelle Munkhoff, ‘Poor Women and Parish Public Health in Sixteenth-Century London’, *Renaissance Studies*, 28.4, ‘Special Issue: Women and Healthcare in Early Modern Europe’ (2014), 579-96 (p. 589).

⁹⁷ Mendelson and Crawford, p. 189.

⁹⁸ Munkhoff, ‘Searchers of the Dead’, p. 2.

i. The Keepers

Petruchio's keepers are first referenced in Act Three, Scene Four, when Maria informs those present on stage that she has 'bespoke two women' to 'attend' Petruchio during his restraint (3.4.30-1). The women never actually arrive on stage, however. Instead, they appear in Fletcher's text in the aftermath of Petruchio's short-lived confinement in Act Four, where Maria makes vivid and sustained references to Petruchio's time in captivity alongside his female 'keepers' who were apparently 'clapped in upon him' (4.1.32). As Petruchio is seen breaking free from his confinement at the end of Act Three, it can be assumed that Maria's references to the keepers are mere fabrications intended to rile Petruchio, rather than indicative of actual events. Yet despite their intended purpose to further vex and disgrace Petruchio by making others believe that he was intimate with two elderly, plague-associated women instead of sharing a bed and consummating his marriage with his new, young wife, Maria's scathing comments regarding Petruchio's illusory keepers – the most extensive extant reference to the role in early modern drama – also reveal many of the pervasive socio-cultural anxieties attached to the contentious role.

Deborah E. Harkness suggests that the chief critics of the plague time keeper, and the catalyst for the many anxieties attached to the role that Maria seizes upon, were the licenced male practitioners at the Royal College of Physicians. The Royal College 'were inclined to see women who did medical work in the city as disordered—masterless, and adrift without proper supervision and accountability', despite women's deep-rooted positions in the established parish health-care system, such as their fundamental roles in midwifery, nursing,

and burial preparations.⁹⁹ In 1602, for example, a ‘true physician’ and a fellow of the Royal College vehemently condemned the involvement of women in medicine who practice:

Physick to the unavoidable and lamentable hurt and danger, of their poor and miserable Patients, if you consider them aright, for the most part are they abject & seditious scum, and refuse of the people, who [...] get their livings, by killing of Men.¹⁰⁰

Maria, likewise, can be seen to be reflecting upon such discourse when she asks Petruchio ‘Am I grown- [...] such a dog-leech / I could not be admitted to your presence?’ (4.1.86-9). Maria’s specific employment of the term ‘dog-leech’, meaning ‘an ignorant or underqualified medical practitioner’, suggests that she is directly comparing herself to the assortment of allegedly quack and sinister female figures practicing medicine in England during the early modern period.¹⁰¹ Importantly, immediately after summoning the image of the perceivedly incompetent medical practitioners, Maria steers the conversation, and our imaginations, back to Petruchio’s keepers. In doing so, Maria reinforces the entrenched links between the office and the notions of malpractice that were led by the male-centred medical community, who viewed the experienced ‘nurse-keepers’ as nothing more than ‘chattering’, ‘toothless and tattling old wives’; an image that, once again, recalls Maria’s evocation of the role in Act One.¹⁰² It is significant, then, that Fletcher implicates the controversial role of the keeper, one that is already recognised as being embroiled within their own patriarchal struggles beyond the stage, as part of Maria’s schemes to crush her husband’s authority.

⁹⁹ Deborah E. Harkness, ‘A View from the Streets: Women and Medical Work in Elizabethan London’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82.1, ‘Special Issue: Women, Health, and Healing in Early Modern Europe’ (2008), 52-85 (p. 64).

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, *The anatomies of the true physician, and counterfeit mountebank wherein both of them, are graphically described* (London, 1602), STC 18759, B2^r.

¹⁰¹ "dogleech, n." *OED Online* <www.oed.com/view/Entry/56472> [03 March 2022].

¹⁰² *The anatomies of the true physician*, B2^v.

Alongside the keeper's formidable critics, prevalent notions of fear also encircled the role. The cultural response that has been most extensively explored in plague scholarship is the detested institution which the keepers were integral to, and subsequently came to stand in for: the shutting-up of infected houses. As Thorpe argues, the keepers became a 'personification of quarantine', through which their physical and cultural presence came to embody the horrors and the indignity of domestic incarceration. And, as I have discussed, Maria is clearly keen to explore these indignities at Petruchio's expense in *Woman's Prize*.¹⁰³ The fact that Maria summons the figure of the keeper even after Petruchio has broken free serves as a potent, emblematic 'reminder' for him and those around him of his captivity and anguish.

However, Maria's recurring summoning of the keepers throughout the scene might also suggest her desire to taint Petruchio with the evocative cultural stigmas that accompany the role. As a result of their connections with plague time confinement, the office of the early modern keeper quickly became synonymous with contagious disease and mortality, rendering them ominous peripheral figures evoking both fear and disgust from inflicted communities. The responsibilities of the keeper required them to enter the spaces where no one else dared to venture, the homes of the infected. Consequently, the body of the keeper, that by necessity moved in and out of these numerous plague-stricken households, and likely maintained close contact with the infected under her care, was understood to be highly infectious and hazardous to public health. This unwholesome proximity to infection and death distorted and disfigured the corporeal form of the keeper in the collective cultural imagination, with one later contemporary unflatteringly describing them as 'dirty, ugly, and unwholesome Hags [...] nothing but ugliness and deformity, black as night, and dark as Melancholy'.¹⁰⁴ These sentiments resonate

¹⁰³ Thorpe, p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ *Shutting-up infected houses*, B1^r.

with Maria's description of Petruchio's keepers as 'two death's heads', suggesting that the women's physical bodies cannot be culturally disentangled from their macabre occupation and their daily dealings with death (4.1.90).

This contemporary reading of the keeper's body as a source of potent contamination draws upon the period's miasmatic frameworks of plague that appear as early as the national orders. Not only were the keepers instructed to walk near refuse channels where the miasmas of plague were said to lurk, thus making clear links between the keeper's body, waste, and the contagion it bred, but the orders also dictate that the keepers must live a segregated life away from their communities in the interests of public health.¹⁰⁵ Those appointed as keepers were ordered to live in isolation, and were not permitted 'to resort to any public assembly during the time of such their attendance' for fear of them carrying the infection to others.¹⁰⁶ As Munkhoff notes, the 'physical isolation' that the keepers undoubtedly experienced resulted in, on occasion, more 'extreme forms of shunning' from within the community.¹⁰⁷ A rare contemporary account of a keeper named Jane Jacquet, for example, records that after nursing those sick with plague, Jacquet was so 'shunned and abhorred' in her parish that she became a 'mere idle vagrant person leading a very loose life, making her habitation under hedges and in the woods'.¹⁰⁸ It is clear that the keeper's aging bodies could not be detached from the horrifying disease they nursed. Therefore, by subjecting Petruchio to the keepers, even imaginatively, and stressing his notional exposure to their loathsome and potentially infectious bodies, Maria prolongs her husband's ignominy and isolation as someone who,

¹⁰⁵ Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ *Orders Thought Meet* (1578), A4^r.

¹⁰⁷ Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

despite his new-found liberty, remains socially and pathogenically tarnished by the unsavory company he has allegedly been keeping.

Moreover, as well as their corrosive associations with decay and death, the keepers were also contemporaneously understood to be morally corrupt and infamously cruel, both in nature and occupation. In addition to charges of theft, the keepers were suspected of monstrous actions in polemics of the period which, as Maria alludes to in *Woman's Prize*, included hastening the death of their patients: 'What do I know / But those that came to keep him might have killed him?' (4.1.45-6).¹⁰⁹ This horrifying social casting of keepers as killers who, as Dekker describes in 1603, habitually 'killed all she kept', was something of an emergent topic at the time of the first performances of *Woman's Prize*.¹¹⁰ Like Dekker's pamphlet, John Webster's tragedy *The White Devil*, likely performed just two years after *Woman's Prize*, can also be read as capitalizing on the cultural infamy and intrigue that shrouds the office of the keeper. Lodovico states that:

The snuff is out. No woman keeper i' the world
Though she had practiced seven year at the pest-house,
Could have done quaintlier. My lords, he's dead (5.3.182-4).¹¹¹

Similarly, in Jonson's *Volpone* Mosca states, 'Faith, I could stifle him, rarely, with a pillow, / As well as any woman that should keep him' (1.5).¹¹² This is an image that clearly persists, as

¹⁰⁹ Thievery was synonymous with early modern plague keepers, with Dekker – who dedicates a whole chapter to 'The Abuses of Keepers [and] Nurses' – suggesting that 'they are called keepers, because whatsoever they get but hold of, they keep it with gripping paws never to let it go', Dekker, *English Villainies*, K2^v; According to Slack, the keepers 'ransacked houses and stole the cash' and furniture within the houses they were assigned to', Slack, *Impact*, p. 216; In *Woman's Prize*, however, it is Maria who might be perceived to be what Dekker describes as a 'gnawer of linen', as she is the only female to 'bezzle' (4.1.135) or make off with Petruchio's fabrics and other possessions, Dekker, *English Villainies*, K2^v.

¹¹⁰ Dekker, *The Wonderful Year*, F4^r.

¹¹¹ John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. by Benedict S. Robinson, Arden Early Modern Drama (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 278.

¹¹² Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. by Robert Watson, New Mermaids (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 36.

in 1625, Dekker similarly notes that ‘at midnight if she be alone with thee [...] thy pillow will she pull away, to hasten thee on thy journey’.¹¹³

In *Woman’s Prize*, however, any apparent concern for Petruchio’s welfare at the hands of his keepers is eclipsed by Maria’s contrived distress at having her spousal duties revoked, and her role as Petruchio’s wife and caregiver replaced by these notorious women. A resolute Maria claims that she was ‘refused’ and prevented from seeing or tending to Petruchio throughout his ‘sickness’ whilst his keepers were permitted to remain with him throughout (4.1.27-30). This not only serves Maria’s aim to further discredit Petruchio by highlighting his supposedly underhand sexual dealings with his keepers, but it also reveals the ways in which the role of the plague time keeper may have disrupted established caregiving traditions within the early modern home, a situation that Maria exploits to her advantage.

Throughout the scene, Maria bemoans how she has been excluded from Petruchio’s presence, and that, even as his wife, she was not permitted to see him, ‘not even to comfort him, she that all laws / Of heaven and nations have ordained his second’ (4.1.27-9). Maria’s protests echo those of Adriana in *Comedy of Errors*, whose husband has also been removed from her care. Unlike Petruchio, Adriana’s husband, Antipholus, is tended to by nuns, not keepers, who administer to him ‘wholesome syrups, drugs, and holy prayers [...] To make of him a formal man again’ (5.1.105-6).¹¹⁴ Adriana argues, far more sincerely than Maria, that it is her conjugal right to care for her husband:

I will attend my husband, be his nurse,
Diet his sickness, for it is my office,

¹¹³ Dekker, *English Villainies*, K3^r.

¹¹⁴ For further discussion on female healing in this context see: Sharon T. Strocchia, ‘Agents of Health Nun Apothecaries and Ways of Knowing’, in *Forgotten Healers: Women and the Pursuit of Health in Late Renaissance Italy* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 130-78.

And will have no attorney but myself,
And therefore let me have him home with me (5.1.99-102).

Pelling suggests that, via Adriana, Shakespeare is engaging with the ideas surrounding ‘the superior health and sickness rights of a married woman over a religious’, a popular and contentious topic, particularly after the Reformation.¹¹⁵ And although the keepers are described by Maria as anything but holy, being women ‘without faith’ (4.1.31), like Shakespeare’s Adriana, Fletcher’s Maria is also engaging with prevalent contemporary criticisms and anxieties surrounding institutionalised caregiving systems that reoriented relationships within the early modern home. However, as opposed to a religious order, Maria bemoans the domestic invasion of the secular, parish-assigned keepers, contrasting their supposedly lean services against her innate domestic capabilities as a wife. As discussed in the previous chapter, managing the household and caring for those within it was one of the few instances in which an early modern woman had authority. The keepers, and the duties they were called on to perform during plague time were, then, in many ways understood to be a direct threat to this established order, as Maria demonstrates:

I could have watched as well as they, have served him
In any use better and willinger.
The law commands me do it, love commands me,
And my own duty charges me (4.1.62-6).

That keepers were often understood as poor proxies for devoted wives and ‘tender-hearted’ mothers during plague outbreaks was clearly also a prevalent source of anxiety for many in the period, especially those who were left alone with, and at the mercy of, their ‘hard-hearted keepers’.¹¹⁶ This is confirmed by Lodge in 1603:

¹¹⁵ Pelling, p. 185.

¹¹⁶ *English Villainies*, K2^r.

For, to speak the truth, one of the chiefest occasions of the death of such sick folks (besides the danger of their disease) is the fright and fear they conceive when they see themselves void of all succor, and as it were ravished out of the hands of their parents and friends, and committed to the trust of strangers, who very often are but slenderly and coldly inclined to their good, wanting both service and succour.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, the fact that the London orders of 1609 explicitly encourage the separation of the sick and the healthy into separate rooms and even, in some cases, separate houses (as is the case with Petruchio and Maria), would have made the prospect of requiring the services of a keeper, and the anticipated disruptions to familial care made by their presence, more likely, and more immediately recognisable to Fletcher's first audiences. Therefore, as well as summoning the figure of the keeper as a potent symbol of Petruchio's captivity, staining his reputation with the moral and physical stench of infection, Maria also plays into and subverts prevalent anxieties about the keeper's distressing presence within the domestic space. She does this by highlighting the ways in which the plague time role shifted established dynamics and important structures of care within households. Moreover, by drawing upon the horrifying perceptions surrounding the keepers and their duties that rupture domestic order, Maria, for the first time in the play, conforms to gender norms by performing the role of the devoted wife who is simply safeguarding her husband and the household against the allegedly harmful influence of the keepers. Of course, Maria's artificial obsequiousness is met with Petruchio's disdain, who is all too aware that his wife's affection and sudden inclination toward domestic duty – after she was the party responsible for shutting him up and summoning the figures of the keepers to his side – are 'falsar than the devil' (4.1.43).

Above all, then, the harrowing figure of the plague time keeper, who disrupts established practices and care-systems within the home, provides Maria with the opportunity

¹¹⁷ Lodge, F3^r.

to further undermine her husband's domestic position and reinforce her own through the revelation and mockery of the ideals that surround her gender and domesticity, bending them to suit her own purposes. However, although the keepers' notional presence suitably demeans Petruchio, they alone are not enough to 'master him' (1.2.175). Skulking far more latently in Fletcher's text is the office of the searcher that, I argue, exerts the most power over Petruchio in Maria's plague plot. Despite never being explicitly mentioned, the searcher is a powerful presence within Fletcher's comedy. And, whilst the keepers are conjured from Maria's mind, the searchers are instead summoned into the text via her actions.

ii. The Searchers

In reporting her husband's 'condition' to the authorities in Act Three, Maria complies with the latest plague guidelines. In the section entitled, 'Notice to be given of the Sickness', the 1609 London orders state that:

The Master of every house, as soon as any one in his house complaineth, either of Botch, of purple, or Swelling in any part of his body, or falleth otherwise dangerously sick, without apparent cause of some other disease, shall give knowledge thereof to the Examiner of health within two hours after the said sign shall appear.¹¹⁸

With the Master of the house being ostensibly incapacitated due to his grave 'illness' that has caused him to fall 'otherwise dangerously sick without apparent cause', Maria reports the signs of infection in his stead, as his wife and the party responsible for the day-to-day running of the home. Maria also seems to have reported her husband's condition within the two-hour timeframe stated in the orders, as she later comments that Petruchio had fallen ill 'within this three hours' (3.4.34), by which time she had already notified the city who have 'sent a watch',

¹¹⁸ *Orders for health* (1609), p. 87.

who appears just two lines later (3.4.31-32). Therefore, Maria has outwardly conducted herself as a diligent and considerate citizen in promptly reporting her husband's 'affliction' in accordance with the latest plague orders.

However, in circumstances where a plague infection was suspected, or – as is the case in *Woman's Prize* – had been reported, a searcher would arrive to either confirm or refute the presence of the disease.¹¹⁹ Yet, as Traister notes, 'no one but Maria herself [...] verifies her diagnosis of plague'.¹²⁰ There is, of course, good reason for this. Maria is well aware that if her husband was indeed searched for signs of plague, her ruse would be quickly discovered and her efforts to isolate and incapacitate Petruchio, would have been in vain. Therefore, in order for her plan to remain unassailable, Maria must ensure that her husband's '[un]wholesome' condition is beyond doubt (3.4.57). Maria is very specific in her assessment of Petruchio's diagnosis as she unequivocally states that 'The sickness', a common synonym for the plague, 'Is I' th' house, sir / My husband has it now' (3.4. 26-28). Maria knows that this is an assertion that no one will dare question given the fear that the mere mention of the disease provokes. For instance, in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, at the first mention of his home being 'visited' in his absence, Lovewit recoils and demands that his servant draw back from the doorway (5.2.4).¹²¹ Likewise, Petronius, in *Woman's Prize*, upon hearing of his son-in-law's condition, instantly cries 'stand further off, I prithee' (3.4.27), inciting an escalation of anxiety that reaches its crescendo at Maria's panicked line: 'I am frightened from my wits, my friends' (3.4.35).

¹¹⁹ Wear, p. 106.

¹²⁰ Traister, p. 175.

¹²¹ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook; revised edition, New Mermaids (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p. 143.

There is a further crucial passage in this scene that is present in the folio texts but absent from MS, probably indicating a theatrical cut as the result of immediate performance constraints. The passage features a doctor and an apothecary who arrive on stage to offer their ‘opinion’ regarding Petruchio’s condition (F3.4.4). Crucially, instead of thwarting Maria’s plans, the visit from the medical practitioners only serves to strengthen them. And whilst Maria’s plan remains intact with or without the cut lines, it is still useful to examine how their re-insertion influences the verdict regarding Petruchio’s perceived plague and, importantly, how the passage speaks to contemporary plague time practices. Upon the arrival of the doctor, Petruchio thrusts his arm out of the locked door to show those present that he is free of any physical signs of plague infection: ‘If any man misdoubt me for infected, / There is mine arm, let any man look on’t’ (F3.4.1-2). Although this moment falls within a highly comedic scene, Fletcher’s audience’s might have been reminded of the shut-up house in Dekker’s *Wonderful Year* a few years earlier where, similarly, ‘the thrusting out of an arm might have saved’ those inside it from the fatal conditions of their incarceration.¹²² Like Dekker’s victims, Petruchio is not liberated from his confinement, and, as it is only his arm that the doctor surveys, the less-than-thorough examination of Petruchio undoubtedly works in Maria’s favour.¹²³ As already discussed, doctors very rarely visited plague victims and when they did it can be assumed they did so with great reluctance, as Petruchio’s physician demonstrates. At Petruchio’s prompting, the doctor only takes his pulse and declares that ‘it beats with the busiest’, a symptom of the high fever that was associated with early modern plague infection. At this, the angry Petruchio, whose rapid pulse presumably only increases at the news, ‘raves extremely’ at

¹²² Dekker, *Wonderful Year*, C4^r.

¹²³ Wear, pp. 334-5.

the doctor inducing a physiological state that in itself could, as Lee argues, ‘weaken a man’s defences against plague’ (3.4.28).¹²⁴

However, before the medical practitioners swiftly flee their defiant patient, Maria seizes the opportunity presented to her and declares, ‘I saw the tokens, sir’, to which Petronius replies, with sad finality, ‘then there is but one way’ (F3.4.18-9). The ‘tokens’ to which Maria refers are one of the visible somatic symptoms specific to bubonic plague recognised during the period, and the same ‘marks’ that Berowne identifies on the lovesick nobles in Shakespeare’s Navarre discussed in Chapter One. The national orders outline that it was the main objective of the searcher to view and search bodies, whether alive or dead, for any physical signs of plague, such as the presence of these ‘tokens’ upon the sufferer’s body.¹²⁵ Maria’s very specific reference to the tokens of plague and the fact that she is the only one to have allegedly seen these unambiguous physical markers of the disease upon Petruchio’s body is, thus, quite significant: typically no one but the searcher would verify the presence of plague within a stricken household. Additionally, it is also Maria who gives the order for the watchmen to seal up Petruchio’s home upon their arrival: ‘Pray do your office, lock the doors up fast’ (3.4.36). This was a duty reserved for the searchers only after they had made a positive identification of plague on an examined body, a responsibility that, as Munkhoff asserts, ‘effectively put them in charge of quarantine’.¹²⁶ Maria, who is later aptly described by Petruchio as someone who ‘deals by signs and tokens’, both identifies and reports the tell-tale

¹²⁴ Lee, p. 251.

¹²⁵ *Orders Thought Meet*, A4^r; ‘[...] most searchers were paid per body examined, rather than a set wage [...] this rate varied from 2d. to 4d. per examined body’, Harkness, p. 68.

¹²⁶ Munkhoff, ‘Searchers of the Dead’, p. 10.

signs of plague that seal Petruchio in his home upon her command. As such, the role and authority of the searcher is boldly seized by Maria who, in the plague-workers' necessary absence, gladly assumes it in their stead (4.4.72).

Moreover, the fact that Maria makes an erroneous report of plague in her performance as a plague searcher speaks to the wider and well-known contemporary conversations about the office. Such conversations included the alleged dishonesty of the women who assumed the role and the extent to which plague was seemingly being misreported to the authorities via the searchers as a result. As Elizabeth Mazzola notes, the Bills of Mortality 'drew heavily on women's labours, making use of the information supplied by the female searchers'.¹²⁷ If cases were being misrepresented by the searchers, then, as contemporaries feared, it would have significantly impacted the published figures of the plague deaths. This scepticism surrounding the searchers can be readily observed in the national orders which, as Munkhoff suggests, conflictually 'confer authority on searchers to articulate the truth of their findings', yet 'also reveal a tremendous suspicion of their ability to do so'.¹²⁸ As Munkhoff notes, 'women were particularly aware that their words were understood to hold a different relation to truth than men's'.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the fact that the searchers were typically poverty-stricken and elderly, as well as female, further discredited their authority, integrity and, importantly, their judgement in the eyes of officials.

These misgivings regarding the reliability of the searcher in public health orders reached their height just prior to the first likely staging of *Woman's Prize*. The 1609 London

¹²⁷ Mazzola, p. 1.

¹²⁸ Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', p. 13.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

orders, for instance, explicitly stress the searchers' fallibility, and outline the steps being taken by the authorities to mitigate this 'problem':

That there be a special care, to appoint women Searchers in every Parish, such as are of honest reputation, and of the best sort as can be got in this kind: And these to be sworn to 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. And for their better assistance herein, for as much as there hath been heretofore great abuse in misreporting the disease, to the further spreading of the infection: It is therefore ordered, that there be chosen and appointed three able and discrete Surgeons [...] to join with the Searchers for the view of the body, to the end there may be a true report made of the disease.¹³⁰

This item reveals important aspects of searchers' perceived inability to perform the role that had been assigned to them. Firstly, there is a huge emphasis placed on the requirement for the searcher to be able to generate a 'true report', and only from those women who were 'of honest reputation, and of the best sort as can be got in this kind'.¹³¹ The semantics of this last phrase alone are enough to suggest that honest women were thought to be a rare commodity within the communities from which the searchers were drawn. Secondly, to ensure that a 'true report' could be ascertained, it was determined that the searchers required supervisors, specifically 'surgeons' taken from the 'pesthouse', who in contrast to the searchers were 'able and discrete', and almost certainly male, to oversee their work and ensure its validity.¹³²

This preoccupation with the searchers' integrity is further manifested in the number of earlier decrees pertaining to the office. In 1592, for example, any searcher who was found responsible 'for any corruption' or who could be described as 'falsely reporting, shall stand upon the Pillory, and bear Corporal Pain by the Judgment of the Lord Mayor and court of

¹³⁰ *Orders for Health* (1609), pp. 85-6.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Aldermen'.¹³³ These anxieties surrounding the credibility of the searcher's role can even be found beyond official legislation. Dekker, for instance, explains how a householder who wished to conceal their infected from the authorities, and so avoid their house being shut-up, could do so simply by way of 'a little bribe to the searchers'.¹³⁴ Thus, the fact that Maria in her proxy-searcher role falsely reports Petruchio's 'plague' directly draws on the suspicions and discourse that surround the role of the searcher offstage. Fletcher also emphasizes the extent to which others within the play perceive Maria's dishonesty following Petruchio's incarceration. Jacques and Pedro, for example, condemn Maria's many undesirable 'tongues', particularly her 'lying tongue', and conclude that her 'unruly member' can be described as many things, but 'never a true one' (5.2.35-41).¹³⁵ Moreover, just like the searchers were made to pledge under oath to perform their work truthfully and scrupulously, Maria, in order to maintain her own integrity and diminish her husband's, insists that it is Petruchio who must swear that she acted honestly and accordingly in regard to reporting his illness and shutting him up:

About your foolish sickness, ere you have me
 As you would have me, you shall swear is certain.
 And challenge any man that dares deny it,
 And in all companies approve my actions (5.1.151-5).

Alongside their perceived moral corruption, the searchers' proximity to death and disease meant that the role also shared similar cultural anxieties with that of the keeper. As Munkhoff notes, the female searcher not only had a close 'relationship to the corrupt body', but also a power that intersected 'symbolically with early modern culture's deepest anxieties

¹³³ Forbes, p. 1035.

¹³⁴ Thomas Dekker, *A rod for run-aways* (London, 1625), STC 6520, B4^r.

¹³⁵ For further discussion on this topic see: Lynda E. Boose, 'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42.2 (1991), 179-213.

surrounding women, anxieties more familiarly figured in witches'.¹³⁶ Searchers were called to examine previously 'healthy' sites in their communities and could swiftly transform them into spaces of infection with one word. The very fact that these life-altering decisions were being made not by licensed physicians but aged women, whose 'judgement was as dim as their eyes', led to the supposition that the searchers' power might be unnaturally derived.¹³⁷ Searcher Ursula Barrett, for instance, who was appointed during the plague epidemics of 1604, 1625, and again in 1636, was accused of practicing witchcraft by her neighbours on numerous occasions during her time in the role.¹³⁸ Munkhoff suggests that the fears surrounding Barrett and her fellow female searchers likely stemmed from the perception that their 'true report threatened to entrap' the sick and their families 'in a horrific material reality' just like the destructive enchantments cast by witches.¹³⁹ As such, searchers were prime targets for witchcraft charges. This was in part due to what Mazzola describes as the searcher's recurrent 'excursions into hidden places', their 'seemingly magical powers and constant traffic with suffering', as well as their perceived immunity against plague.¹⁴⁰ This opinion was only strengthened through women like Barrett and her frequent re-appointments during severe outbreaks, where many around her fell prey to a disease that she remained seemingly impervious to.

In her adopted role as the searcher in *Woman's Prize*, Maria is similarly paralleled with the occult. In Act Four, Scene Two, Petruchio implies that he has been bewitched by Maria and questions if there is anything at his disposal that might reverse Maria's influence upon him by equally mystical means: 'If there be any witchcrafts, herbs, or potions, / Saying my

¹³⁶ Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', p. 2.

¹³⁷ Mendelson and Crawford, p. 134,

¹³⁸ Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', p. 21.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Mazzola, p. 9.

prayers backwards, fiends or Furies, / That can again unlove me, I am a man' (4.21.156-9). Furthermore, in the folio texts Bianca explicitly identifies Maria as a 'cunning woman', a female-healer figure often associated with witchcraft, who in this case has 'cured her' by making her more fearless (F4.1.95). Maria's associations with the occult are further reinforced in Act Five when Pedro calls for her to be 'drown[ed]' 'directly' (5.2.59), which when considered within the context of witchcraft summons a popular method of torture and detection used in witch trials known as 'swimming the witch'.¹⁴¹ Pedro's choice of notional punishment for Maria is, therefore, significant given her associations with witchcraft as a result of assuming the searcher's domestically-disordering role within Fletcher's narrative.

As a result of exercising her borrowed power in which she assumes the duties of a female searcher to ensure that her husband is sealed inside his own home, Maria also acquires many of the role's adverse associations. These associations include the searcher's perceived inherent dishonesty and the role's indissoluble links to the supernatural, qualities that made the searcher a powerful yet suspicious figure in early modern society. Consequently, as Munkhoff suggests, the prevalent anxieties that surround the early modern searcher stem not only from fears regarding her marginality and proximity to infection, like the keeper, but also from her unsettling power to control and alter domestic space, a power that Maria rehearses and revels in at her husband's expense. Through plague policy, the searchers are imbued with the authority to examine and detain those who might be socially far superior to themselves. The unsettling thought that a searcher could reorient domestic space and restrain those within was clearly a genuine concern for men like Petruchio who might, at any moment, have their

¹⁴¹ Heikki Pihlajamäki, 'Swimming the Witch, Pricking for the Devil's Mark': Ordeals in the Early Modern Witchcraft Trials', *Journal of Legal History*, 21.2 (2000), 35-58.

homes and authorities usurped by sinister, old women who were able to read, interpret, confine, and, perhaps most terrifyingly, ‘master’ their male bodies (1.2.175).¹⁴²

Conclusion

In what might be described as a cruel twist of fate, Fletcher, who reportedly died of plague in 1625, may have himself received a visit by one or two female plague workers in his own, probably shut-up, city home during his final days.¹⁴³ In *The Woman’s Prize*, however, Fletcher offers his audiences a rare and pathogenically innocuous opportunity to view a London home and its patriarch under the influence of contemporary plague measures. More notably, given their sheer lack of stage-time elsewhere in early modern drama, Fletcher also engages the shadowy female plague workers responsible for overseeing and performing some of these measures, women who are invited into the text by Maria as weaponised figures that she proficiently aims at Petruchio’s power and pride. And despite what I have suggested is their powerful influence within the play, their physical absence onstage has meant that these plague time figures have remained unacknowledged in Fletcher’s text until now. Their plague time roles allowed them to move widely outside of the home and play an active and integral part in organising and safeguarding not only their homes, but their neighbourhoods. As these were circumstances not ordinarily afforded to their sex or status, their new-found authority was inevitably muddled with fear and distrust, sentiments that Fletcher engages with forcibly in his comedy. These female plague workers that notionally stand alongside Maria in *Woman’s*

¹⁴² Munkhoff, ‘Searchers of the Dead’, p. 21.

¹⁴³ Fletcher ‘stayed but to make himself a suit of clothes, and while it was making, fell sick of the plague and died’, Munro, p. 25.

Prize, then, provide powerful examples of marginal female authority that not only takes up domestic space but, like Maria, takes control of it in new and unexpected ways.

Offstage, early modern plague prevention policy engendered seismic shifts in power in regard to gender and social hierarchies in both the wider medical marketplace and the more intimate domestic space. These are the same policies that present the very real socio-spatial opportunities through which Maria diminishes Petruchio's patriarchal authority onstage, opportunities that might not have been possible to quite the same extent otherwise, and that Fletcher's London audiences would have recognised and understood with particular clarity from 1609 onwards. Thus, Fletcher's treatment of domestic plague policy and its female workforce in *The Woman's Prize* not only serves to reduce patriarchal influence but it also, in line with the play's previous protofeminist readings, promotes female power. Domestic plague prevention is adopted by Fletcher as a system that works intricately in tandem with Maria's methods, reimagining the undesirable and undignified aspects of plague time shutting-up as a gender equalising force that offers not only 'reversal', but reform.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Whipday, p. 56-7.

III The Street

Public Health Politics and Pests

Chapter Five

Ordering the ‘Swarm[s]’: Plague time politics in *Measure for Measure*

As we have just seen in *The Woman’s Prize*, and as Fiona McNeil states, ‘whipping, carting, and the stocks’ threaten the transgressors of John Fletcher’s comedy and ‘punctuate the imaginary borders of the action’.¹ In Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, however, physically violent deterrents, incarcerations, and grave punishments uncomfortably puncture and stifle the main body of the play and become the driving force of the plot. *Measure* is a play that is preoccupied with ideas surrounding ‘strict *restraint*’, specifically, the scope and limits of lawful ‘restraint’; the text contains four out of the thirteen rare instances of the term that are present in Shakespeare’s extant corpus (1.4.4).² *Measure*’s uncomfortably suffocating atmosphere is also evoked by the multiple textual references to confined spaces within the play, such as ‘wombs, prisons, monasteries, convents, and city walls’, as A.R. Braunmuller and Robert N. Watson note.³ As such, Braunmuller and Watson suggest that ‘so much of the play’s action is controlled by walls and restraints – by enclosures both restrictive and protective – that a trigger warning for claustrophobics seems appropriate’.⁴ Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, despite the textual onus placed on corporeal confinement it is the alternative spatiality, ‘liberty’, and the immoral behaviors that such freedom facilitates, that is of most concern in Shakespeare’s play (1.2.121).

¹ Fiona McNeil, ‘Gynocentric London Spaces: (re) Relocating Masterless Women in Early Stuart Drama’, *Renaissance Drama*, 28 (1997), 195-244 (p. 224).

² All references to Shakespeare’s text are taken from: William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. by A.R. Braunmuller and Robert N. Watson, Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

³ Ibid., ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

Whilst *Measure*'s first documented performance places it at court in December 1604, as part of the Christmas celebrations hosted by England's new King James, J. Leeds Barroll suggests that its likely debut was at The Globe just three months before upon the reopening of the playhouses.⁵ Like *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, *Measure* most likely emerges in the immediate aftermath of the plague outbreak and its measures of 1603-4; the deadliest London had yet seen and would see for at least another twenty years.⁶ As well as triggering the Plague Act of 1604 discussed in the previous section, this first outbreak of Jacobean plague was also significant in other ways. It was during this outbreak that the failings of plague policy to prevent the spread of infection and maintain civic order were exposed, as were the people held responsible for its failure. As this chapter examines, the 'dissolute' masterless populations who 'swarm' England's capital, and whose disordered and unsavoury lifestyles had long been blamed for the spread of the disease, were not the only ones being held accountable for the calamitous public health crisis in 1603-4.⁷ There was also increasing resentment towards what Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton refer to in their scathing contemporaneous pamphlet *News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody* as the 'great and goodly swarm' of rich officials responsible for ordering the masterless and caring for the poor, who had fled from disease epicenters during the outbreak, abandoning both their posts and their people (1.976).⁸ This chapter suggests how *Measure*, a play staged in the immediate aftermath

⁵ J. Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 123; Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, however, suggest that it is performed at the Globe in 1603, Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, 'Measure for Measure', in *British Drama 1533-1642: British Drama Catalogue*, Vol. 5: 1603-1608 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 59-64 (p. 60).

⁶ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 151.

⁷ *A proclamation for the due and speedy execution of the statute against rogues, vagabonds, idle, and dissolute persons* (London, 1603), STC 8333.

⁸ All references to *News from Gravesend* taken from: Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, 'News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody', ed. by Gary Taylor, annotated and introduced by Robert Maslen, in

of an outbreak of plague, and that like *News from Gravesend* ‘anatomises’ the actions of those in and under control during public health crises, responds to and assimilates an outbreak of plague that, in Robert Maslen’s words, brought about a ‘redefinition of the urban community’.⁹

News From Gravesend, printed in 1604, is a pamphlet of two halves. The first is an Epistle Dedicatory addressed to ‘Sir Nicholas Nemo, alias Nobody’. Charles Whitney notes how this address ‘comprises an assault on the irresponsibility of London’s rich elite’ who had fled the city during plague, and how it outlines the precarious social and moral position that the rich ‘vagrants’ occupy in that same city upon their return.¹⁰ The second half is delivered as a poem containing ‘wholesome rhymes’ that ‘drink [...] to health’ in ‘sickness and [...] queasy times’, surveying the plague-related events of 1603-4 (ll.442-3). This couplet poem examines an array of topics including the causes of plague – which, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a very dangerous thing to debate – and the culpability of London’s citizens. As Maslen suggests, *News from Gravesend*, likely written largely by Dekker, ‘prepares the way for the radical interventionism’ of his 1625 *A Rod for Runaways* in that it attends:

To the actions of the ruling classes during the plague and presents itself as a witness on behalf of the ordinary citizen [...] In doing so, it records a subtle shift in power within London and within Jacobean society as a whole.¹¹

Thomas Middleton Works, eds. Taylor, Lavagnino and Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 128-48.

⁹ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁰ Charles Whitney, ‘Dekker and Middleton’s Plague Pamphlets as Environmental Literature’, in *Representing the Plague*, ed. by Totaro and Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 201-18 (p. 203).

¹¹ Maslen, p. 129.

As such, as a text that responds directly to the social politics surrounding the plague outbreak of 1603-4 from which *Measure* proceeds, Dekker and Middleton's pamphlet serves as a cultural barometer against which Shakespeare's more oblique plague time political parallels might be measured.

Measure has already been substantially read and contextualized within the plague outbreak of 1603-4, an event which, as James D. Mardock notes, forms 'the primary social and moral context framing' the play's 'production and performance'.¹² Michael Flachmann has argued that Shakespeare's comedy 'is surely one of the most macabre plays ever written', and reads Shakespeare's narrative alongside the *Contemplatio Mortis* model, tellingly also at its height in popularity during the outbreak of 1603-4, and through which Shakespeare's audiences, like the play's characters, are correspondingly 'fitted for death' and forced to face their own uncertain mortalities in a city beleaguered by pestilence.¹³ Similarly, Catherine L. Cox suggests that 'the problems of physical and moral disease that we have seen boil and fester in Vienna refuse to die quietly in our consciousness, producing a play that only uneasily we call comedy'.¹⁴

In regard to the scholarly conversation specifically about plague policy, however, much emphasis has been placed on Angelo's first 'proclamation' in Act One, Scene Two, declaring that 'all houses of resort in the suburbs' are to 'be pulled down' (1.2.97-8). As Mardock, Paul Raffield, and Leah S. Marcus respectively examine, Angelo's proclamation is a clear allusion to the royal proclamation *Against inmates and multitudes of dwellers in strait*

¹² James D. Mardock, "Thinking to pass unknown": *Measure for Measure*, the Plague, and the Accession of James I', in *Representing the Plague*, ed. by Totaro and Gilman (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 113-29 (p. 115).

¹³ Michael Flachmann, "Fitted for Death": '*Measure for Measure*' and the '*Contemplatio Mortis*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 22.2 (1992), 222-41 (p. 222).

¹⁴ Catherine L. Cox, "Lord Have Mercy Upon Us": The King, the Pestilence, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, *Exemplaria*, 20.4 (2013), 430-57 (p. 431).

Room and Places in and about the City of London that sought to regulate congested housing in the suburbs, and that was issued by James and his council as a direct response to the growing plague outbreak in London in 1603.¹⁵ This proclamation identifies ‘strait rooms’ or tenement buildings, which had been steadily increasing in London’s suburbs, as hotbeds of disease and disorder where plague had been permitted to proliferate and ‘overspread’.¹⁶ As Paul Slack notes, it was in 1603 that the crown’s ‘vigorous campaign against subdivision and new building’ really began, as in that year eight hundred cases of plague were recorded in ‘a single building’, which ‘together housed’ eight thousand.¹⁷

James’ proclamation, as Raffield notes, was undoubtedly directed at the ‘excessive numbers of idle, indigent, dissolute and dangerous persons’ who inhabited these ‘houses’, individuals who, as will be examined in more detail in due course, were more ‘likely [...] to become infected’ with plague.¹⁸ However, given that there is no explicit reference to plague in Angelo’s proclamation, Mardock suggests that *Measure*’s ‘euphemistically neutral’ ‘houses in the suburbs’ are intended to be interpreted by his audiences as brothels, as opposed to plague-ridden slums (1.2.92).¹⁹ As such, Mardock, Raffield, Cox, and Margaret Healy all concur that, despite Shakespeare inviting obvious and intriguing parallels with the plague-stricken metropolis of 1603, it is in fact sexually acquired syphilis, and not plague, that blights Duke Vincentio’s domain.²⁰ Cox states that ‘Shakespeare lends to the pox of Vienna and to Angelo’s

¹⁵ Mardock, p. 123; Paul Raffield, ‘Actors, Fornicators, and Other Transgressors of Law’, *Law and Humanities*, 15.2 (2021), 245-71 (pp. 266-7); Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (California: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 162-3.

¹⁶ *By the King a proclamation against inmates and multitudes of dwellers in strait rooms and places in and about the cities of London* (London, 1603), STC 8331.

¹⁷ Slack, *Impact*, p. 152.

¹⁸ Raffield, p. 267.

¹⁹ Mardock, p. 123.

²⁰ Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 173-8; Raffield, p. 268; Cox, p. 431; Mardock, p. 124.

reign of terror a pandemic quality familiar to him through his own experiences with pestilence' without actually representing plague onstage.²¹ Furthermore, Mardock suggests that it is through these textual allusions to pox that Shakespeare maintains a safe political distance between his Vienna and the London just beyond the playhouse by 'substituting a poxy city for a plaguey one'.²²

Not only does this chapter firmly reinsert plague back into Shakespeare's narrative, then, but it also argues that *Measure* is not just framed by the outbreak of 1603-4, as the above enquiries suggest, but actively responds to it. Moving beyond the seemingly isolated allusion to plague prevention policy that previous scholars have emphasized, this chapter instead reveals *Measure*'s sustained engagement with the socio-political discourse surrounding plague policy and its execution, or lack thereof, in 1603-4. This discourse, traceable in plague time proclamations, plays, and pamphlets, conveys systemic faults in English urban plague policy; faults that are so fervidly exposed in *News from Gravesend* that Dekker and Middleton resolved to publish their pamphlet anonymously, as Maslen suggests.²³ This chapter reveals how Shakespeare's *Measure*, although treading what is undoubtedly a safer, and slightly more objective line than the writers of *News from Gravesend*, nevertheless speaks to the plague time politics of the day too in its challenge to the 'city's institutions' and 'figure[s]', and its

²¹ Cox, p. 451.

²² Mardock, p. 123.

²³ Maslen states that the pamphlet's anonymity was probably more to do 'with its echoes of Nashe and its speculations on the metaphysical origins of plague', Maslen, p. 129; For further discussion on the charged political debates surrounding the origins of plague see: Kathryn Wolford, 'Quarantining Contagion: Providentialist Debates over Plague and Public Health in Elizabethan and Jacobean England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 84 (2021), 273-305; Furthermore, Joad Raymod notes that 'only a handful of publications in 1588 were anonymous [...] in 1614 about 8% of all publications were anonymous: mainly consisting of news items and literary works', suggesting that complete anonymity was uncommon at this time: Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 168.

exposure of an overwhelmed and negligent public health system (1.1.10-48).

This chapter outlines how the public health crisis in Shakespeare's *Measure* is ripe to be read alongside the very real one happening in London in 1603-4. As I will examine, like the plague reported in *News from Gravesend*, *Measure*'s public health crisis is also born out of the seemingly exponential growth of the urban poor, which had reached new heights just prior to the first Jacobean outbreak. It will then move on to consider what Angelo in *Measure* himself terms the 'remiss' behaviour of civic officials, the very people responsible for executing preventative policy and providing aid to this burgeoning urban population, who do little to alleviate either the health crisis in Shakespeare's play or the one that Dekker and Middleton relay (2.2.100).²⁴ Lastly, the greater understanding of *Measure*'s plague time contexts offered here clarifies aspects of the play— in particular its ending — that have previously appeared to critics as opaque or unsatisfactory, revealing new and significant socio-spatial meanings. And despite Dekker and Middleton's scornful critique of London's uninhibited populus and its inept governance during plague time, their pamphlet ultimately offers what Whitney describes as a hopeful 'moral solution' and a more 'godly, restrained, and civic-minded living' that, as this chapter argues, is beginning to be realised in the final scene of Shakespeare's *Measure*.²⁵

'I have seen corruption boil and bubble / Till it o'errun the stew': Plague and overpopulation in *Measure for Measure*

England's national plague policy sought to regulate and restrict the movements of those not only infected with plague but also those deemed likely to infect. As Michael Braddick has

²⁴ Maslen, p. 128.

²⁵ Whitney, p. 207.

suggested, central and local government in plague time England was ‘preoccupied during epidemics with concepts, not of neighbourliness, but of ‘order’.²⁶ Indeed, the national plague orders define themselves as a series of necessary directions to be used for the ‘curing and *ordering* of them after they shalbe infected’.²⁷ The orders promote their own significance and urgency by exposing and condemning the widespread absence of order within the realm and amongst its ‘subjects’, who, ‘by very disorder and for lack of direction wilfully procure the increase of this general contagion’.²⁸ Nevertheless, implementing such a centralised and orderly response to plague proved problematic in England’s sprawling capital. The Privy Council repeatedly accused the City officials of negligence in their adherence to the national orders, for example, and accused them of only shutting-up the houses of the ‘poorer sort’.²⁹

Consequently, and after much deliberation and friction between the two bodies, the Privy Council presented London with a set of bespoke regulations that provided the foundations for the city’s first book of printed orders in May 1583, which accommodated the specific challenges of urban plague management.³⁰ One of the main deviations from national plague policy was that one person who remained well was permitted to leave a shut-up house in order to obtain provisions for the household, a policy that as outlined in the previous chapter was revoked in the second London orders of 1609. This was a consideration which was most likely first sanctioned to account for the scale and the logistics involved in

²⁶ Michael J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England c. 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 127.

²⁷ *Orders Thought Meet by her Majesty and her privy Council, to be executed throughout the countries of this realm* (London, 1578), STC 9187.9, A3^r.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Slack, *Impact*, p. 213.

³⁰ Charles F. Mullet, *The Bubonic Plague and England: An Essay in the History of Preventive Medicine* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1956), pp. 380-3.

providing food and relief to the sheer number of people residing in the metropolis, an issue which as will be discussed was of particular concern during the outbreak of 1603-4.

Significantly, London's 1583 orders also included specific directions pertaining to the treatment of the masterless and the poor residing in the city, and state:

That all such as be diseased to be sent to St Thomas or St Bartholomew's hospital, there to be first cured and made clean, and after-wards those which be not of the city to be sent away according to the statute in that case provided, and the other to be set to work, in such trades as are least used by the inhabitants of the city, for the avoiding of all such vagrant persons, as well as children male and female, soldier lame and maimed, as other idle and loitering persons that swarm in the streets and wander up and down begging, to the great danger and infecting of the City for the increase of the plague and annoyance of the same.³¹

These orders explicitly locate the poor, 'vagrants and masterless men who live idle in the city' as dangerous sources of plague infection, whose mobility and socio-economic position outside of bounded domestic space threatened the wider health of the city.³² The vagrant classes are outlined as the demographic most likely to contract the disease, whose unchecked movements through the city are also responsible for its 'increase'. There was clearly little tolerance for these perceivedly plague-disseminating figures as all 'masterless men who live idle in the City without any lawful calling' were to 'be banished' in the hopes of banishing the disease along with them.³³ The London orders are significant, then, because they mark the first time in which anti-vagrancy sentiments are openly communicated within English plague policy and outline yet more ways in which the underprivileged and unbound urban bodies that move through the city should be regulated and restrained during outbreaks of plague. And despite the vast majority of apprehended vagrants fitting the social profile of young, single

³¹ Mullett, p. 382.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

men, what constituted vagrancy was far from distinct or finite. Reputable tradesmen who travelled in search of business, servants who had been dismissed by their masters, and even the stray dogs discussed in more detail in the next chapter, could be ‘expelled’ from communities as vagrant and masterless individuals.³⁴ As Bradley J. Irish notes, ‘England passed fourteen statutes and released over 200 royal proclamations concerning vagrancy during Shakespeare’s life’, decrees that forcibly demonstrate the extent of the contemporary concerns surrounding these socially liminal figures.³⁵

Thus, it is clear to see that as early as the 1570-80s centralised preventive measures against the disease were already bound up with notions of civic order that either reorganised or expelled further those who existed outside it. The bespoke London measures also make plain the latent anti-vagrancy rhetoric contained within the national plague orders and locate the poor and masterless of the city as dangerous vectors of the disease, whose unregulated freedoms could no longer be endured during outbreaks. Despite these sentiments, however, by 1602 it is estimated that there were approximately thirty-thousand ‘idle persons and masterless men’ residing in London alone.³⁶ And by the end of the year, just twenty years after the London orders were first printed, concern surrounding the regulation of these perceivedly dissolute members of society was greater than ever as mortality rates began to rise in the poverty-stricken liberties of the city which many of the city’s masterless called home. As Aaron Columbus states, ‘to understand the plague experience in London, the focus needs to be on the suburbs, where the disease was a long-term problem and intersected forcefully with

³⁴ Paul Slack, ‘Vagrants and Vagrancy in England, 1598-1664’, *Economic History Review*, 27 (1974), 360-79 (p. 366).

³⁵ Bradley Irish, *Shakespeare and Disgust: The History and Science of Early Modern Revulsion*, Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), p. 86.

³⁶ McNeil, p. 229.

poverty'.³⁷ From 1593 onwards, the disease consistently struck the poorer northern suburbs first, usually St Giles Cripplegate and Shoreditch, and it was here that most of the deaths typically occurred.³⁸ In light of this context and following Columbus' prompt, this chapter now moves on to examine the specific conditions surrounding the plague outbreak of 1603-4 and examines how the proliferation of impoverished suburban bodies, who subsisted in close proximity to death, disease, and one another, accelerated the singular public health crisis that I suggest Shakespeare's *Measure* responds to.

As Marcus suggests, London in 1603-4 was a city 'bursting outside of its traditional topographical limits'.³⁹ It was a city whose suburban population was also expanding faster than authorities could keep up with, as a proclamation from September 1603 reveals: 'Rogues, vagabonds, idle, and dissolute persons' have 'abounded every where more frequently than in times past' and now 'swarm [...] the whole realm'.⁴⁰ And, given the widespread contemporary understanding that vagrants left plague in their wake, 'the great and imminent danger' that continues to 'grow' in the proclamation's preface undoubtedly refers to the plague outbreak that was at its peak in September 1603, when in just the first week of that month three thousand deaths were recorded, mostly in the suburbs.⁴¹ Although this proclamation was a reissue of a previous decree made by Elizabeth I, James' preface above reveals crucial details regarding the public health issues presented by plague and that now faced England's new monarch.

³⁷ Aaron Columbus, "To be had for a Pesthouse for the use of this parish": Plague Pesthouses in Early Stuart London, c. 1600–1650', *Urban History*, 26 (2022), 1-21 (p. 7).

³⁸ Neil Cummins, Morgan Kelly, and Cormac O Gráda, 'Living Standards and Plague in London, 1560-1665', *The Economic History Review*, 69.1 (2016), 3-34 (p. 13).

³⁹ Marcus, p. 165.

⁴⁰ *A Proclamation for the due and speedy execution of the statute against rogues, vagabonds, idle, and dissolute persons* (London, 1603), STC 8333.

⁴¹ Mardock, p. 119.

Measure is so littered with sites that are either located explicitly in the suburbs or are seemingly infested with those hailing from the pathogenically precarious outskirts of the city that his audiences can scarcely tell where the city ends and the suburbs begin. And like the contemporary urban landscape beyond the playhouse, Shakespeare explicitly locates these suburbs as the epicentres of disease and disorder within his play. Mistress Overdone's brothel 'in the suburbs' (1.2.92), for instance, is described as an 'ill house' where 'immoral' acts promote both spiritual and physical corruption (2.1.64). This 'unclean' residence (2.1.77) is also where Lucio and his associates have supposedly been 'tainted' with disease (1.2.42).⁴² Shakespeare also identifies the site of the prison, a location which is referenced a staggering thirty-two times in the play, as a disease-generating space where its inmates suddenly succumb to 'cruel fever[s]' (4.3.68). As Pompey notes, the prison also shares clear socio-spatial links with the brothels of the suburbs: 'I am as well acquainted here as I was in our house of profession; one would think it were Mistress Overdone's own house, for here be many of her old customers' (4.2.1-4). As such, Shakespeare's decision to blur the boundaries between the liminal suburbs and the city proper appears to be a deliberate one that speaks to the pestiferous conditions surrounding the play's first performances.

Undoubtedly inspired by this pestered landscape, *Measure*'s language stirs up an atmosphere that is thick with fetid corruption and decay that resonates with the medical and lay plague literature of the period. As Cox notes:

The plague that ravaged England in 1603–1604, leaving in its wake more than 25,000 Londoners dead and extending the closure of London playhouses for more than a year, resonates as a strong chord in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Images of contagious disease, a breakdown in moral order, scenes of urban

⁴² Melissa E. Sanchez, 'Antisocial procreation in *Measure for Measure*', in *Queer Shakespeare: Desire and Sexuality*, ed. by Goran Stanivukovic (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 263-77 (p. 269).

crowding, and threats of sudden death suggest a comedy born in the season of pestilence.⁴³

Shakespeare's comedy is engulfed by what Cox describes as the 'pervasive imagery of disease' that mingles with the already 'vaporous' atmosphere of the play's many secrets (4.1.56).⁴⁴ Plague-producing miasma 'envelop[s]' the air of Shakespeare's Vienna (4.2.72), producing a play that is beset by 'blasting [...] breath' (4.3.68), and many 'strange' (5.1.151) and 'great' fever[s] that evoke both the symptoms and spread of epidemic disease (3.1.480). This figurative summoning of infection co-exists alongside explicit references to the 'many' physical, somatic 'diseases' that inhabit the world of the play and that sicken those who dwell within it (1.2.45). For instance, the text contains many overt references to the syphilis that, as discussed, Mardock, Raffield, Cox, and Healy have all respectively explored. In Act One, Scene Two, for example, Lucio summons the specific and debilitating symptoms of advanced syphilis when he teases the first gentleman about his supposedly 'hollow' 'bones' that have been 'feast[ed]' upon by the malady his 'impiety' has induced (1.2.55-6).

Moreover, Mistress Overdone also refers to 'the sweat' that has reportedly rendered her 'custom-shrunk' (1.2.81). Overdone's remark has previously been glossed as a reference to a treatment for syphilis, whereby the patient's body is encouraged to secrete the disease via induced and profuse sweating.⁴⁵ However, given the use of the definitive article, '*the* sweat' that Overdone alludes to is most likely sweating sickness, otherwise known as *Sudor Anglicus* or 'the English sweat' which, despite its name, also devastated Vienna in 1529.⁴⁶ Overdone's

⁴³ Cox, p. 430.

⁴⁴ Cox, p. 433.

⁴⁵ Woudhuysen, p. 168; Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, p. 129.

⁴⁶ Heinz Flamm, 'Anno 1529 – the "English sweat" in Vienna, the Turks around Vienna', *Wien Med Wochenschr*, 170 (2020), 59-70; John Caius, *A book, or council against the disease commonly called the sweat, or sweating sickness* (London, 1552), STC 4343; Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, pp. 28-9.

specific reference to this terrifying infection suggests that yet another disease, alongside the pox, is circulating in *Measure*'s community. This reveals the extent to which Shakespeare's urban environment, like the London beyond the stage, is beleaguered by a range of both endemic and epidemic maladies. Consequently, although plague is never mentioned in *Measure* explicitly, it is likely that Shakespeare's first audiences would not have had to work too hard to imagine the disease that had brought the city to its knees only months earlier, mingling and growing amongst the others in the play's suburbs

Furthermore, as a special issue plague Bill of Mortality from February 1603 states, it was not only the sickly and 'uncleanly [...] unwholesome' conditions of the suburbs that contributed to the spread of diseases such as plague: it was also the depraved activities that people seemingly indulged in, or invited others to partake in, whilst they were there.⁴⁷ According to the bill, these activities included 'drinking' and 'lying in company, and other such means, where pure complexions and clean bloods are defiled with such as are putrefied'.⁴⁸ As such, these dangerously uninhibited activities and their unbound agents posed a great threat to the body politic during outbreaks of plague when, as discussed in Chapter One, regulating one's body and its actions was paramount when it came to staving off the disease. In just the second scene of *Measure*, Shakespeare's audience is plunged into an environment pestered by the very figures referenced and reprimanded in the plague bill of 1603: society's dangerous peripheral figures such as bawds, prostitutes, tapsters, pimps, and disgraced women, otherwise known as the city's masterless and 'reprobate' population who, whilst making the suburbs of the city their home, have also 'tainted' it (1.2.42).

⁴⁷ *A True bill of the whole number that hath died in the city of London* (London, 1603), STC 16743.2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Crucially, not only does Shakespeare introduce the supposed vectors of disease within this second scene, but he also exposes what was understood to be one of the main contributing factors to the play's current health crisis: lechery. Whilst disguised as friar Lodovico, The Duke states that 'lechery' is 'too general a vice' within the city, a vice that must be 'cure[d]' with 'severity' (3.1.364). This apparent outbreak of what Raffield describes as 'sexual incontinence' in Shakespeare's urban community in *Measure* can also be seen in other contemporary plays and suggests that playwrights were rehearsing a general trope that drew on what was also one of plague's high-ranking contributing factors.⁴⁹ Like Middleton's play *The Phoenix* (also likely 1603), which states it is 'for those whose close lusts the plague never leaves the city', *News from Gravesend* also present the city's lustful acts and their perpetrators as agents that increased the severity of London's first Jacobean plague (15.231).⁵⁰ As Maslen suggests, amongst the divinely attributed causes of Dekker and Middleton's plague are the individual, 'internal ones, that 'every man within him feeds / A worm, which this contagion breeds' (ll.621-2).⁵¹ And like the imprisoned 'lecher', Claudio, who is compelled to 'imagine' himself 'bath[ing] in fiery floods' in *Measure* (3.1.126), the Lecher in *News from Gravesend*, along with the Drunkard and the Usurer, is forced to face his own corrupted mind and body upon his plague-derived death:

The adulterous and luxurious spirit
 Pawned to hell and sin's hot merit
 That bathes in lust his leperous soul
 Acting a deed without control (ll.1026-9).

⁴⁹ Raffield, p. 265.

⁵⁰ All references to *The Phoenix* are taken from: Thomas Middleton, 'The Phoenix', ed. by Lawrence Danson and Ivo Kamps, in *Thomas Middleton Works*, ed. by Taylor, Lavagnino and Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 91-127 (p. 93).

⁵¹ Maslen, p. 130.

Maslen notes that the ‘Lecher’s dying vision is [...] appallingly complex’, and it is ‘with merciless clarity’ that ‘he notes the resemblance between the heat of his lust in the past, the fire of his present fever, and the flames which await him after death’, all of which make him ‘freeze with horror’ (l.1032) akin to the ‘thick-ribbed ice’ and ‘viewless winds’ that seize Claudio’s body in *Measure* (3.1.127-8).⁵² As such, *Measure* is clearly drawing upon the immediate and pressing public health concerns that are being scrutinised on both page and stage as a result of plague in 1603-4. And whilst writers such as Thomas Nashe had blamed ‘the delicacy both of men and women’ for London’s previous plague of 1593 that ‘enforce[d...] the Lord to turn all their plenty to scarcity, their tunes of wantonness to the alarums of war, and to leave their house desolate unto them’, this was a subject that only appears to have really gathered momentum, in print at least, alongside the population growth just prior to the outbreak of 1603.⁵³ *Measure*, like *News from Gravesend*, then, is preoccupied with the wider civic consequences of individual lecherous acts that are rife in Vienna and that, as Dekker and Middleton argue, not only encourage ‘sinful blood, billows of lust’, but also plague (l.637).

Furthermore, this widespread promiscuity that, as Lucio states, is ‘so looked after’ both on and offstage had other consequences that, in the eyes of its contemporaries, significantly contributed to plague’s speed and severity in 1603 (1.2.138-9). The last stanza of *News from Gravesend*, unsettlingly entitled ‘The Necessity of a Plague’, which will be considered in more detail in due course, outlines this consequence:

Who amongst millions can deny
(in rough prose, or smooth poesy)

⁵² Ibid., p. 131.

⁵³ Thomas Nashe, *Christs tears over Jerusalem Whereunto is annexed, a comparative admonition to London* (London, 1593), STC 18366, p. 82.

Of evils 'tis the lighter brood-
 A dearth of people, than of food!
 And who knows not, our land ran o'er
 With people, and was only poor
 In having too too many living.
 And wanting living-rather giving
 Themselves to waste, deface and spoil,
 Than to increase (by virtuous toil)
 The bankrupt bosom of our realm,
 Which naked births did overwhelm.
 This begets famine and bleak dearth
 When fruits of wombs past fruits of earth;
 The famines only physic, and
 The med'cine for a riotous land
 Is such a plague (ll.1138-54).

As Whitney suggests, here Dekker and Middleton offer a 'more explicitly ecological [as opposed to divine] explanation for the urban plague: overpopulation'.⁵⁴ Yet, it is specifically the number of unregulated births, 'the fruits of wombs', and the natural result of the city's unregulated sexual intercourse, that seems to be of most concern here. In *News from Gravesend*, it is the 'overwhelming' number of illegitimate births that has made the wider community a prime target for plague through poverty and food shortages. This is an issue that *Measure* also seems interested in.

The sheer number of children referenced in *Measure* is striking. As Lucio implies in Act Three, he exists within an urban community where 'a hundred bastards' can swiftly swell to 'a thousand' (3.1.379-82). As the play progresses, more and more pregnancies and offspring appear, many of which are understood to be 'unlawful' (4.2.14). Juliet's pregnancy, for example, which has occurred outside of wedlock, leads to both her and Claudio being imprisoned for 'the sin' that she must 'carry' (2.3.19). Later, it is revealed that Lucio has likewise fathered a child with the prostitute Kate Keepdown; a son who is nearly 'a year and a

⁵⁴ Whitney, p. 207.

quarter old' and who resides in Mistress Overdone's brothel with his mother (3.1.459-61). Furthermore, when discussing the idea of an illicit sexual encounter between them, both Angelo and Isabella describe the act as one that unquestionably 'breeds' (2.2.145). Angelo states that his act of lechery would father a 'strong and swelling evil' / Of my conception' (2.4.6-7). Angelo's use of 'swelling' suggests a pregnancy which, given its context, would have been deemed especially unlawful and abhorrent. Isabella later echoes Angelo's concerns when she deliberates the cost of entering into a sexual contract with him: 'I had rather my brother die by law than my son should be unlawfully born', imagining yet another illegitimate child in the already overpopulated urban landscape (3.1.194-5).

Whether real or imagined, the surge of illegitimate and unlawful births in Shakespeare's *Measure*, like the 'naked births' that overwhelm early modern London in *News from Gravesend* (1.1.149), are born into a disease-ridden and what Mistress Overdone describes as a 'poverty'-stricken community (1.2.80). The masterless adults who were there before them, such as Pompey, were likewise 'bawd born', their disenfranchised fate sealed before they had even drawn their first breath (3.1.336). The children's displaced position within this unsustainable community renders them hazardous, masterless figures whose bodies are, as Melissa E. Sanchez describes, 'ignorantly open to infection'.⁵⁵ It is no coincidence then that Juliet's pregnancy is described as having 'blistered her report', evoking physically corrupted skin consistent with the somatic signs of bubonic plague (2.3.12).⁵⁶ Similarly, although its likely dating means that it is not directly relevant to the plague outbreak in question in this chapter, Middleton and William Rowley's *A Fair Quarrel* (1617)

⁵⁵ Sanchez, p. 267.

⁵⁶ For further discussions in regard to blisters and plague see: Mary Floyd-Wilson, "'Angry Mab with Blisters Plague": The Pre-Modern Science of Contagion in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, ed. by Howard Marchitello and Evelyn Tribble (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 401-22 (p. 406).

clearly parallels an ‘incurable’ illegitimate pregnancy with a plague infection that places both the mother and child at socio-economic risk:

PHYSICIAN Your intended bride is a whore, that’s freely, sir.

CHOUGH Yes, faith, a whore’s free enough, an she hath a conscience. Is she a whore? Foot, I warrant she has the pox then.

PHYSICIAN Worse, the plague; ’tis more incurable.

CHOUGH A plaguy whore? A pox on her, I’ll none of her.

PHYSICIAN Mine accusation shall have firm evidence. I will produce an unavowed witness, a bastard of her bearing.

CHOUGH I’ll burn all the rosemary to sweeten the house, for in my conscience ’tis infected. Has she drunk bastard? If she would piss me wine vinegar now nine times a day I’d never have her, and I thank you too (5.1.100-24).⁵⁷

However, as Dekker and Middleton note, it is these very same plague-engendering, destitute youngsters that are also ‘dreadful[ly] but ‘needful[ly...] dying’ in the outbreak of 1603-4 (1.1134). It is their deaths that apparently work to alleviate the pressure on London’s failing plague time public health system: ‘We would conclude (still urging pity): / A plague’s the purge to cleanse the city’ (ll.1136-7). As discussed in Chapter Three, burial records suggest that children were particularly susceptible to early modern plague. Therefore, a high mortality rate amongst poor children particularly, although tragic, would not have been a surprise to contemporaries. This certainly seems to be the case during the outbreak of 1603-4 when, as James Balmford records, ‘we see few ancient people die in comparison to children, and the younger sort’.⁵⁸ We know that this outbreak also claimed the lives of wealthier, non-vagrant children, like Ben Jonson’s seven-year-old son.⁵⁹ As Dekker and Middleton state,

⁵⁷ Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, ‘A Fair Quarrel’, ed. by Suzanne Gossett, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1209-50 (p. 1244).

⁵⁸ James Balmford, *A short dialogue concerning the plagues Infection* (London, 1603), STC 1338.5, p. 50.

⁵⁹ For further discussion of Jonson’s *On My First Son* in its plague time context see: Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 164-88.

London's streets are being 'purge[d]' and 'cleanse[d]' of its young vagrants in 1603-4 (l.1137). These are the same 'male and female children' that we encountered previously in the first London orders, who 'swarm[ed] in the streets and wander[ed] up and down begging'.⁶⁰ It is, then, unpleasantly easy to imagine that the fate of *Measure*'s vagrant and illegitimate children, which will be discussed in this chapter's final section, will be similar to the one facing the children in *News from Gravesend*, who succumb to 'the beggars plague, for none / Are in this battle overthrown / But babes and poor' (ll.972-4).

Thus, Shakespeare imbues *Measure*'s urban landscape with the pestiferous conditions considered necessary for early modern plague – and the tragedy that it bred – to flourish. Not only does this create an environment that his audiences would have understood and recognised from their own very recent experiences with plague, but it also draws on the specific public health issues that were believed to have contributed to that same outbreak and which are explored even more explicitly in Dekker and Middleton's *News from Gravesend*. The conditions described in *Measure* and *News from Gravesend*, then, outline a familiar outbreak narrative that from as early as 1593 characterised plague as a disease of the suburbs, exacerbated by the unsanitary 'living' conditions of 'too too many' (l.1144).⁶¹ Whilst this narrative remains epidemiologically accurate, as such conditions did indeed provide the perfect habitat for the known vectors of the disease, it is, in fact, only half of the story if we are interested in how the crisis of 1603-4 was interpreted and understood by its contemporaries and the communities it struck. The second half of this story is outlined in the second half of Dekker and Middleton's stanza quoted above:

[...] The lesser fly
Now in this spider's web doth lie

⁶⁰ Mullett, p. 383.

⁶¹ Slack, *Impact*, p. 154.

But if that great and goodly swarm
(That has broke through and felt no harm)
In his envenomed snares should fall,
O pity! T' were most tragical. (ll.974-9).

As I will now move on to examine, this 'great and goodly swarm' sat at the opposite end of the social spectrum to the vulnerable poor and the 'swarm' of dissolute persons of the suburbs.⁶² These are the plague officials, such as the Justices of the Peace, responsible for maintaining order and public health during outbreaks of plague who, instead, 'broke' away seemingly en masse from 'envenomed' London, their duties, and the people under their care at the height of the outbreak for fears of the disease. This is the 'swarm' that, as we shall see, both *Measure* and *News from Gravesend* hold to firm account for London's plague crisis in 1603-4.

'The bits and curbs': Plague Policy and *Measure for Measure*

Now with our city in such a sorry state, the laws of God and men had lost their authority and fallen into disrespect in the absence of magistrates to see them enforced, for they, like everyone else, had either succumbed to the plague or lay sick, or else had been deprived of their minions to the point where they were powerless. This left everyone free to do precisely as he pleased.⁶³

Despite the two hundred-and fifty-five-year temporal distance between Boccaccio's description of the dangerous political landscape in plague time Florence and the situation facing England's new king in 1603, the parallels between the two are striking. Whilst at Hampton Court in July 1603, The King and his Privy Council issued England's national

⁶² *A proclamation for the due and speedy execution of the statute against rogues, vagabonds, idle, and dissolute persons* (London, 1603), STC 8333.

⁶³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. by Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 9.

plague orders in the hopes of curbing the unfolding outbreak. Along with these orders were explicit instructions for them to be enacted quickly: ‘His Majesty [...] Withal straightly commandeth all justices of the peace and others to whom it may appertain to see the said orders duly executed’.⁶⁴ However, as the subsequent proclamations and discourse surrounding the outbreak – discussed in this section – suggest, these orders were not executed as and when The King commanded. James inherited a broken public health system upon his accession in 1603, and like fourteenth-century plague-stricken Florence, ‘the laws of God and men had lost their authority [...] and respect’, most noticeably in England’s capital. Unlike the Florentine ‘magistrates’ who were ‘powerless’ in the face of their own sickness, it seems that London officials, even when they apparently had the physical capacity to work, chose to default on their duties. This section examines the contemporary plague time resonances that I suggest underpin *Measure*’s interrogation of ‘the demigod, Authority’ in the midst of the analogous public health crisis identified earlier in this chapter (1.2.116). I read Shakespeare’s urban governors in parallel with the officials beyond the playhouse – ‘the justices of the peace and other officers in divers parts of the realm’ whose task it was to oversee vagrancy laws and plague orders within their locales – and who, like the authorities in *Measure* and *News from Gravesend*, are repeatedly admonished during the outbreak of 1603-4 for their ‘remissness, negligence, and connivances’.⁶⁵

It is hard to say what James I might have been thinking when faced with the public health crisis that confronted him upon his arrival into England in 1603, especially as he was already familiar with governing a country with much more stringent plague controls. In

⁶⁴ *Four statutes, specially selected and commanded by his Majesty to be carefully put in execution by all justices and other officers of the peace throughout the realm* (London, 1609), STC 9341, p. 58.

⁶⁵ *A Proclamation for the due and speedy execution of the statute against rogues, vagabonds, idle, and dissolute persons* (London, 1603), STC 8333.

James' native Scotland, formal legislation against the disease had been in place from as early as 1456.⁶⁶ As Richard Oram has examined, Scotland's penalties for plague-related breaches were severe. In Edinburgh in 1530, for example, when a tailor concealed his wife's illness from the authorities, he was 'condemned to be hanged before his own door' as 'concealment of infection' was a capital crime.⁶⁷ In the same year, in the Scottish capital two women were drowned 'for wilful endangerment of the safety of the community [...] for actions which could have led to the spread of plague'.⁶⁸ Scotland's more established and firmer plague policy was, as Mullett suggests:

Willing not only to threaten but to administer far harsher penalties [...] Moreover, because the authorities were even readier than their English fellows to consider specific breaches of the rules, no Scotsman could expect either to avoid the eye of the magistrate or escape the penalty.⁶⁹

English authorities, by contrast, do not appear to share their Scottish counterpart's keen eyes. A proclamation given in August 1603 explicitly censures London officials for not adhering to plague-related directions sent by James upon the first stirrings of plague, and stresses their perceived culpability regarding the scale of the current outbreak in allowing people to wilfully congregate in the city:

The spreading of the Infection in our City of London, and in the places next about it, doth give us just cause to be as provident as a careful Prince can be, to take away all occasion of increasing the same. And if such directions as We gave, and our Council, at our first approaching to the City, had been obeyed, it is like that (with Gods favour) the Sickness had neither grown to that height, nor spread so far as now it is. But that having been omitted by the negligence of such whom it most concerned to have had it

⁶⁶ Richard Oram, "'It cannot be decernit quha are clean and quha are foulle": Responses to Epidemic Disease in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Scotland', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 30.4 (2006), 13-39 (p. 14).

⁶⁷ Oram, p. 20.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Mullett, pp. 453-4.

performed, The same care of our peoples welfare, moveth us as much as we may, to provide for the time to come.⁷⁰

Moreover, whilst this issue was considerably more concerning in London due to its scale and density, lax governance was clearly not just confined to the metropolis. Disorder and ‘great neglect’ was reported in other cities across England during this outbreak, where ‘hospitality’ was ‘exceedingly decayed [...] the relief of poorer sort of people [...] taken away’.⁷¹

Similarly, a letter from a magistrate in York in 1604 states that ‘the infection doth so greatly increase in this city that unless we the magistrates have great care and do take pains in the governing and ruling of this city, and in taking order for the relieving of them, the poorer sort will not be ruled’.⁷²

The primary source of urban disorder and public health decline alluded to in *Measure* is, likewise, traced back to negligent and lax governance. The ‘laws’ and ‘statutes’ in Shakespeare’s Vienna are ‘drowsy and neglected’ much like those observed by James upon his arrival into England in 1603 (1.2.165).⁷³ In Act One, Scene Three, The Duke reveals that his dukedom has permitted perpetrators to offend without repercussions, a carelessness which he states has perpetuated unrestrained behaviour and widespread disorder:

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The neglectful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip,
Even like an o’er grown lion in a cave
That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers
Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch,
Only to stick it in their children’s sight
For terror, not to use, in time the rod

⁷⁰ *By the King the spreading of the infection in our city of London, and in the places next about it* (London, 1603), STC 8330.

⁷¹ *By the King At our first entrance into this our realm* (London, 1603), STC 8316.

⁷² Slack, *Impact*, p. 213.

⁷³ *By the King at our first entrance* (1603).

More mocked than feared; so our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
And liberty plucks justice by the nose,
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum (1.3.19-31).

Moreover, in Act One, Scene Two, the condemned Claudio explains that his newly enforced restraint and ensuing punishment at Angelo's hands stems from the very fact that he, like his fellow citizens, has enjoyed 'Too much liberty, my Lucio. Liberty, / As surfeit is the father of too much fast, / So every scope by the immoderate use / Turns to restraint' (1.2.121-4).

Dekker and Middleton, likewise, lament that what they perceive to be the retributory plague levelled against London in 1603 is the result of prolonged, unrestrained civic liberty: 'The city-sin / (Brought by seven deadly monsters in), / Which doth all bounds and blushing scorn, / *Because 'tis in the freedom born*' (ll.667-70).

So, what might the respective detrimental 'liberties[s]' and 'freedom[s]' in both *Measure* and *News from Gravesend* be responding to specifically? And how might this relate to the breakdown of crucial plague time procedures reported across England in 1603-4?

Informed by Slack's work, Cox suggests that:

Rather than enforcing plague measures at the first outbreak of disease, London officials in the spring of 1603 delayed warnings and restrictions until the disease had become uncontrollable. Reluctant to disrupt commerce and cause panic and hoping that the disease would die its own quiet death, city magistrates postponed action until stern measures were unavoidable.⁷⁴

Whilst delays in actioning public health policy for socio-economic purposes are certainly plausible, *News from Gravesend*, however, suggests that there is more to the breakdown of plague policy and the eruption of disorder experienced in 1603 than mere indecision. Dekker

⁷⁴ Cox, p. 439.

and Middleton state that the issues stem not from any postponement or reluctance on the part of the officials in charge of the orders but from the fact that by the summer of 1603, when plague was at its peak, there were no officials actually left in plague epicentres to enforce or uphold these orders. In the pamphlet's Epistle, for instance, readers are introduced to the 'pestiferous shipwreck of Londoners' whose:

Pilot, boatswains, master and master's mates, with all the chief mariners that had charge in this goodly argosy of government leapt from the stern, struck all the sails from the mainyard to the mizzen, never looked to the compass, never sounded in places of danger (ll.186-91).

In 'flying from' their 'charge so far', Dekker and Middleton state that the inaction of London's officials all but 'kill [ed]' those they were 'bound to cherish' (ll.946-57). In support of this claim, the inadequacies of London's 'martial discipline' and the plague policies that failed to be implemented in the city are listed by Dekker and Middleton (l.209). These include securing proper food supplies for those shut-up, sourcing surgeons for the sick, and providing proper burial ground for London's surplus dead (ll.200-20). As Maslen notes, in Dekker and Middleton's minds, it is 'the rich who are the vagrants' during the plague of 1603-4, and so 'the ordinary countryfolk, the "russet boor and leathern hind" police their movements in the absence of any legislation against their flight' (l.813).⁷⁵

Considering these compelling socio-political contexts that surround Shakespeare's play, does this then change how we might read *Measure*'s governing authorities and the management of their own public health crisis? As The Duke, upon admitting his own negligence, flees his city 'in quick condition' and 'haste', much might be said for his departure mirroring the movements of the 'vagrant' ruling elite fleeing London in 1603

⁷⁵ Maslen, p. 129.

(1.1.53). Indeed, Mardock has already drawn revealing parallels between Shakespeare's absconding duke from the 'disease-afflicted city space' of Vienna, and London's 'removed court' and 'its absent ruler' in 1603.⁷⁶ Cox, similarly, connects the 'reluctant' plague officials referenced above to The Duke's seeming 'reluctance to take a firm, personal hand in Vienna' that leads to his abrupt departure at the beginning of the play.⁷⁷ The civic leaders who have not yet been considered in their plague time contexts, however, are those appointed by The Duke himself and that are left behind in his stead: Angelo and Escalus. Angelo's role in particular speaks to the public censure of those charged with overseeing plague policy in 1603-4, whose disregard and neglect towards their communities, when exposed, saw them become figures of distrust and contempt.

Angelo and Escalus, whose 'scope is as' The Duke's 'own' in his absence, are well-placed to be read within these plague time roles (1.1.64). As Marcus suggests, 'Angelo and Escalus follow the basic pattern of London civic authorities or justices of the peace, conducting open, informal interrogations [...] working together as a pair to enquire into cases of sexual incontinence and bastardy'.⁷⁸ The 'strict deputy', Angelo (1.2.176), is brought in by The Duke as 'a man of stricture and firm abstinence' and as an individual who clearly recognises the necessity for direction and discipline, spatial orders that are also integral to early modern plague policy (1.3.12). Claudio, similarly, describes Angelo as a man who exercises firm restraint in both thoughts and deeds, and who 'blunts his natural edge with [...] study and fast', akin to the men in Shakespeare's Navarre discussed in the opening chapter (1.4.60-2). Angelo's response to the public health crisis that he has been called in to 'manage' is, even in light of his own supposed temperance, a severe one. He swiftly reinstates punitive

⁷⁶ Mardock, p. 122.

⁷⁷ Cox, p. 439.

⁷⁸ Marcus, p. 176.

law and order that, in his own words, ‘hath not been dead, though it hath slept’ (2.2.94).

Angelo and Escalus set to work immediately. They first remove one of the main sources of disease in the city by closing the brothels and, as Mardock has previously examined, reinstate a law which makes it a criminal offence to frequent or work in any such place.⁷⁹ In support of his new and unpopular legislation, Angelo states that:

We must not make a scarecrow of the law,
Setting it up to fear the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch and not their terror (2.1.1-4).

Moreover, in order to round-up these dissolute members of society who might expose and infect their fellow citizens, Angelo appoints a provost whose role is to manage breaches of law and order and to convey perpetrators to and from prison ‘by special charge’ (1.2.115).

John L. McMullan describes the provost, or provost-marshal, as ‘the third arm of practical policing’ employed to restore community order.⁸⁰ However, in 1603, a permanent provost position was appointed in London to maintain order within the growing city and to execute crucial tasks, which now included ‘see[ing] that plague regulations were adhered to’.⁸¹ This was the first time that the role of the provost is recorded as being explicitly associated with plague control and is significant considering the arrival of the plague act just one year later.

As such, the role of the provost in *Measure* can be read as a crucial extension of Shakespeare’s explorations of Jacobean urban plague policy, whose new role within the urban public health system would have likely been recognised on stage in 1604.

⁷⁹ Mardock, pp. 122-3.

⁸⁰ John L. McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London’s Criminal Underworld, 1550-1700* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 87.

⁸¹ Ibid.

However, due to the severity and perhaps representative nature of Angelo's rule, *Measure's* characters frequently dissect the form and limits of his 'tyrann[ical]' governance (1.2.159). Claudio, for instance, states that:

Whether it be the fault and glimpse of newness,
Or whether that the body politic be
A horse whereon the governor doth ride,
Who newly in the seat, that it may know
He can command, lets it straight feel the spur (1.2.154-8).

In Act Two, Scene One, Pompey also questions the robustness of Angelo's new 'orders' in front of Escalus, warning him that 'If you head and hang all that offend that way but for ten year together, you'll be glad to give out a commission for more heads [...] if this law hold in Vienna ten year, I'll rent the fairest house in it after threepence a bay' (2.1.228-32). Escalus, upon receiving Pompey's 'prophecy', threatens to 'whip' him if he appears before the court 'upon any complaint' again (2.1.236). The fact that such debates surrounding Angelo's strict public health policies are openly circulating in the community is in itself significant when considering Angelo's role within the context of plague prevention practices. The controls that Angelo places on and around the diseased and disordered bodies within the urban space of the play also speaks to the broader impact of socio-spatial reform brought about by the plague policies discussed throughout this thesis. This is especially true for the disputes surrounding the space of the home in light of the Plague Act of 1604 and the efficacy of forced household restraint, where even debating – let alone disobeying – this policy, as Pompey does with Angelo's statute, would have resulted in imprisonment or even death.

Yet, what seems to be most important to The Duke in installing Angelo as his deputy is not so much what Angelo does or does not achieve whilst in office; rather, it is what The Duke hopes to accomplish by placing Angelo in control. In Act One, The Duke suggests that he has

charged Angelo to ‘strike home’ and reawaken the aforementioned sleeping decrees in his ‘name’ (1.3.41). However, just a few lines later, The Duke reveals his real reason for ‘impos[ing] the office’ on Angelo:

The Lord Angelo is precise,
Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses
That his blood flows, or that his appetite
Is more to bread than stone. Hence we shall see,
If power change purpose, what our seemers be (1.3.50-5).

As Marcus states, it quickly becomes apparent that ‘The Duke’s secret motive is [...] to test Angelo – to probe into the workings of the city government and to the significance of his own delegation of authority by trying the virtue of a “precise” man whose whole demeanor and life seem dedicated to the rigor of law’.⁸² Therefore, much like the Marchese Phoenix in Middleton’s 1603 play, who feels compelled ‘to look into the heart and bowels’ of his father’s ‘dukedom’ and ‘mark all abuses ready for reformation and punishment’ (1.102-4), *Measure*’s duke also seeks to unearth the corruption that he suspects is seated at the heart of his government.⁸³ Thus, the readiness of these two stage leaders to expose their country’s corruption in the interests of public health also irresistibly intersects with James I’s arrival into a plague-stricken England who, as discussed, also quickly set about locating and marking the abuses and ‘negligence’ of his own officials in 1603-4.⁸⁴

Of course, what The Duke unearths in Angelo is a ‘corrupt deputy’ (3.1.256), an immoral and hypocritical figure at the heart of his government who introduces more degradation and disorder into the city than he eradicates. It is Angelo’s ‘desire’ that drives his most ‘foul’ qualities (2.2.176). He revels in the destruction of the virtuous Isabella, who he

⁸² Marcus, p. 176.

⁸³ Danson and Kamps, pp. 91-2.

⁸⁴ *A Proclamation for the due and speedy execution of the statute against rogues* (1603).

means to ‘corrupt [...] as the carrion does’ (2.2.169-70). The physical and moral putrefaction that metaphorically surrounds Angelo’s material body thus also infects the official body that he represents, and stands to infect the whole populus. Similarly, in *News from Gravesend*, Maslen notes that the putrefying ‘bodies of plague victims’ are regarded as ‘material evidence of the government’s irresponsibility and the swelling plague sores as physical manifestations of a deep-rooted moral corruption among the civic authorities’.⁸⁵ Likewise, in *The Phoenix*, the young heir also discovers ‘foul’ and ‘infectious dealings in most offices’ in his father’s realm (1.110-12).

These three contemporary texts, then, are clearly drawing on – or in the case of *News from Gravesend* openly reporting on – immediate discourse around the apparent failure of public health policy at the hands of perceivedly immoral London officials in 1603-4. In *Measure*, this resonance is most pronounced in the connections that are being made between civic corruption and physical infection, the compulsion of rulers to ‘unfold the evil which is [...] wrapped up / In countenance’ in public offices, and the entrenched negligence in the city’s public health and judicial systems (5.1.139-40). Thus, that *Measure* should emerge from the shadows of a huge public health crisis in 1604 that was, likewise, understood to have been exacerbated by both the unchecked liberty of its ‘unruly’ citizens and their negligent and immoral officials, as suggested in *News from Gravesend* and James’ proclamations, is significant (3.1.245). And, as we can now turn to examine, this context renders the newly ‘returned’ Duke’s reform and reordering of the urban community, in which he attempts to contain his city’s physical and moral diseases at the end of the play, all the more recognisably urgent for *Measure*’s first audiences.

⁸⁵ Maslen, p. 129.

‘There is pretty orders beginning, I can tell you’: Rereading The Duke’s plague time ordering

In Act Two, long before Angelo’s misdeeds catch up with him, Isabella threatens to expose his duplicity. Warning him that she will, ‘with an outstretched throat [...] tell the world aloud / What man thou art’, Angelo infamously replies:

Who will believe thee, Isabel?
My unsoiled name, th’austereness of my life,
My vouch against you and my place I’th’ state
Will so your accusation overweigh (2.4.153-7).

Nevertheless, as the ending of *Measure* demonstrates, Isabella is believed. Her accusations against Angelo are taken seriously and she succeeds in restoring her brother’s life and freedom. Moreover, Angelo’s ‘gross’ ‘slip[s]’ and corruption are also revealed, and the power and ‘state’ that he believed rendered him immune to censure are stripped from him just as quickly as they were conferred (5.1.472). By the end of the play, the power dynamics have shifted in favour of the urban citizens who, like Isabella and the majority of those living in the suburbs beyond the playhouse, had no choice but to remain in the poorly governed, overpopulated, and disease-ridden city. Such a shift is also reported in *News from Gravesend*:

Russet boor and leathern hind
That two days since did sink his knee
And (all uncovered) worshipped thee
Or being but poor and meanly clothed
Was either laughed to scorn or loathed,
Now thee he loathes and laughs to scorn,
And though upon thy back be worn
More satin than a kingdom’s worth
He bars his door and thrusts thee forth (ll.813-21).

As Maslen suggests, in 1604, with the plague finally in retreat, Dekker and Middleton found themselves a part of a ‘a new, dynamic urban community, where the analysis and treatment of

social ills takes precedence over pandering to the appetites of the rich', and whose members 'advocate[d...]a healthier, more democratic political regime'.⁸⁶ This final section examines to what extent the 'new [...] regime' that is notionally celebrated in *News from Gravesend* might also be taking hold in *Measure* via The Duke's reordering of the urban community at the closing of the play. Not only will this offer a fresh reading of *Measure*'s much-discussed ending, but it will also contextualise The Duke's final socio-spatial orders within their unique and immediate plague time contexts.

Measure's final scene, and The Duke's starring role in it, has drawn negative opinions from scholars and reviewers alike. Paul Hammond argues that the play as a whole is 'frustrating' as 'it raises the question of "the properties of government" but declines to answer it [...] it refuses to deliver, refuses to "unfold"''.⁸⁷ Likewise, Andrew Hadfield argues that *Measure* 'is a work that challenges and frustrates expectations, raising questions that it declines to answer'.⁸⁸ Raffield and Alexander Welsh's respective claims also propose that the comedy's ending offers little dramatic satisfaction for a modern audience. Welsh notes that 'The Duke in the end achieved no noticeable change in public morality and no personal reformation'.⁸⁹ Moreover, Raffield argues that Shakespeare's Vienna remains an 'ossified' realm, and that:

We need only look to the end of the play to realise that nothing has changed in Viennese society upon the return of The Duke, or at least nothing has been done to address and alleviate the social problems of the city, especially regarding the treatment of the poor and all those who lack agency.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Maslen, p. 131.

⁸⁷ Paul Hammond, 'The Argument of *Measure for Measure*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16.3 (1986), 496-519 (p. 496).

⁸⁸ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 190.

⁸⁹ Alexander Welsh, "'The Loss of Men and Getting of Children': *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*", *The Modern Language Review*, 73.1 (1978), 17-28 (p. 22).

⁹⁰ Raffield, p. 270.

However, I argue that when considered alongside the plague outbreak of 1603-4, The Duke's spatial orders prioritize his most vulnerable citizens rather than overlook them as Raffield suggests. Moreover, I suggest that the location in which these orders are proclaimed offer a productive model that might begin to find 'answer[s]' to the city's most pressing social problems.⁹¹

I first turn to consider The Duke's orders. Like Angelo, who is forced to keep his oath to marry Mariana, Lucio is commanded by The Duke to wed prostitute Kate Keepdown, much to his protestations: 'Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping and hanging' (5.1.522-3). The Duke also permits Claudio and Juliet to marry, and (more problematically) even proposes to Isabella himself.⁹² The Duke clearly conceives of the institution of marriage as a vehicle for the domestic and wider civic order that he is trying to impose within his city. The 'dangerless pleasures' of 'reverend and honourable matrimony' are likewise promoted in *The Phoenix* (8.164-6). As Lawrence Danson and Ivo Kamps note, Phoenix's (and I suggest The Duke's) approach to marriage:

Makes order out of actions which, in every outward way, are identical to the 'disordered appetites of beasts'. 'Matrimony' puts the exchange-value of sex under civic control; it creates the difference between 'soiled bastardy' and the 'legitimately fruitful' (ll.169-73).⁹³

As such, The Duke hopes that the disorderly men of *Measure* – Lucio, Angelo, and Claudio – will, like Pompey in his new apparently 'respectable' trade as executioner, 'turn good

⁹¹ Hadfield, p. 190.

⁹² Whilst it is beyond the scope of this work to engage with this moment it is important to acknowledge its problematic nature, particularly Isabella's silence in response to the proposal. For further discussions on this topic see: Pascale Aebischer, 'Silence, Rape and Politics in "Measure for Measure": Close Readings in Theatre History', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26.4 (2008), 1-23.

⁹³ Danson and Kamps, p. 93.

husband' and 'keep the house' (3.1.337-8). As well as hoping to curb sexual freedom, this sentiment draws on the notions of good husbandry discussed in Chapter Three, a system that was pivotal to general household health during plague time. Even the prisoner, Barnadine, is given direction and assigned to a place and person upon his release from prison, as The Duke instructs the friar to 'advise him, I leave him to your hand' (5.1.485-6).

However, it is the wider impact of these marriages that is most significant. The two illegitimate children that are repeatedly referenced in *Measure* – Juliet and Claudio's unborn child, and Lucio's infant son – are acknowledged at the closing of the play. As Claudio and Juliet are permitted to marry, they no longer 'lack [...] outward order' and their child is now legitimate in the eyes of the law (1.2.143-4). Moreover, Lucio is forced to acknowledge his 'begot [ten...]' son with Kate Keepdown and possibly many more yet unknown children besides (5.1.509-11). Thus, unlike the countless 'poor babes' or 'the fruits of wombs' that perished during the outbreak of 1603-4 in Dekker and Middleton's pamphlet (1.1151), *Measure*'s children are taken off 'the street', given homes and fathers, and hopefully provided for as a result of The Duke's ruling (4.4.9).

Moreover, as contemporary medical advice understood children as the demographic most physiologically susceptible to plague and the orders saw vagrant youths as highly mobile sources of the disease, The Duke's restructure not only acknowledges these socio-spatial plague risks but alleviates, if only marginally, the pressure on public health systems by dealing with them himself. The city's 'most dangerous' bodies (2.2.183): the vagrant, criminal, poor, illegitimate, and disorderly have not simply been banished like the London orders of 1583 command, they have been relocated and reordered through the bonds of marriage and the boundaries of domestic space. As such, The Duke hopes to safeguard his most vulnerable citizens in a way that perhaps Angelo's approach never could. Should The

Duke have killed Claudio, Angelo, and Lucio, their deaths would not have solved anything. Their deaths would have only ensured that their children – and any yet to come – remained illegitimate, poor, and probably homeless, perpetuating the hazardous unsystematic conditions that they and early modern plague are born out of.

Yet, it is these very same conditions that provide the backdrop for The Duke's anticipated 'return'. Where and how The Duke chooses to greet his officials and the populace in Act Five is noteworthy and speaks to the political shift that *News from Gravesend* reports was happening in urban communities as a result of the plague time events of 1603-4. The Duke sends word to Angelo and Escalus asking them to meet him 'at the consecrated fount / A league below the city' in the suburbs (4.3.96-7). The peculiarity of this location, which also indicates its significance, is intimated by Angelo who asks, 'why meet him [...] and reliver our authorities there?' (4.4.4-5). The Duke also gives Angelo and Escalus specific instructions to 'proclaim' their entrance 'an hour' before his own so that 'if any crave redress of injustice, they should exhibit their petitions in the street' (4.4.9). As such, The Duke makes clear that the meeting's accessible location and timings make public access to matters of 'public interest' the priority: 'By cold gradation and weal-balanced form / We shall proceed with Angelo' (4.3.98-9).⁹⁴ It is this accessibility that creates the open-forum model that later enables Isabella and Miranda to 'proclaim against' Angelo (4.4.22).

It is surely no coincidence given the events of 1603-4, that the city's suburbs – a location typically associated with disease and disorder and where behaviours and conditions had long been condemned – should now provide the setting for The Duke's reorganisation of the city and stage the reprimanding of its officials. In this final scene the 'faults' within the

⁹⁴ Braunmuller and Watson, p. 314 (n. 98).

city's governance are 'manifested' before and by the very people that both The Duke and Angelo have failed to shield from neglect, poverty, and disease (5.1.410). In facilitating this, The Duke is proposing a more democratic way forward whereby the people of the suburbs, whom the health crises in and beyond the world of the play disproportionately effect, are not only listened to and 'believe[d]' like Isabella, but play a more active role in the civic and public health debates that most concern them (2.4.153). Encouraging a comparable system to the one that is envisioned in Dekker and Middleton's *News from Gravesend*, then, what The Duke offers his citizens at the end of *Measure* is a positive move towards civic mutuality that, as Maslen suggests, will 'enable the urban community to tackle emergencies like the plague both efficiently and humanely'.⁹⁵ As such, a different kind of plague time 'swarm' emerges from the suburbs in the final scene of *Measure* that, like its counterpart in *News from Gravesend*, is now beginning to safeguard and order itself.

Conclusion: 'And what shall become of those in the city?'

This chapter has outlined what is *Measure for Measure*'s sustained engagement with directly contemporary plague prevention policy, from the socio-spatial qualities of the plague orders themselves to the heated discourse surrounding them. The plague outbreak of 1603-4 transformed London's urban community. Through his engagement with the sickly and unsystematic conditions that create plague and the policies that combat it, Shakespeare's *Measure* not only confronts urban audiences with a pestiferous landscape that would be all too familiar to them in 1604 but, in doing so, also offers them a means by which they might begin to make sense of and assimilate some of these urban transformations. Placing Shakespeare's comedy in conversation with Dekker and Middleton's plague time pamphlet, *News from*

⁹⁵ Maslen, p. 130.

Gravesend, enables a fresh, more nuanced plague time reading both of the play, and the outbreak it responds to.

Like *News from Gravesend*, Shakespeare's *Measure* offers its audiences both sides of this plague time story, one that reveals and reprimands the negligence of the authorities who fled and failed in their duties, and another that laments the vagrant poor who had no choice but to stay and watch as their city fell to disorder and disease. Dekker and Middleton's readers and Shakespeare's spectators encounter the plague time suburbs at both their worst and their best. And whilst both texts forcibly illustrate the pathogenic dangers posed by the suburbs corrupting activities that only serve to expand an already 'overrun' population (5.1.318), we also see, in both texts, this population begin to question their surroundings and scrutinize what – or, more precisely, who – might have exacerbated the public health crisis they encountered there in 1603-4.

Chapter Six

*'I entertained you ever as a dog, not as a devil': The Pestilential Dog in *The Witch of Edmonton**

On July 8, 2014, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) laboratory identified *Yersinia Pestis*, the bacterium that causes plague, in a blood specimen collected from a man (patient A) hospitalized with pneumonia [...]. An investigation led by Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) revealed that patient A's dog had died recently with haemoptysis [coughing up blood]. Three other persons who had contact with the dog, one of whom also had contact with patient A, were ill with fever and respiratory symptoms, including two with radiographic evidence of pneumonia. Specimens from the dog and all three human contacts yielded evidence of acute *Y. pestis* [plague] infection.¹

Dogs can become infected with plague. Despite the lack of laboratory testing facilities or a wider epidemiological understanding of pathogens, early modern societies were well aware of the role that canines played in plague transmission. Physician John Ewich in 1583, for example, describes how dogs are just as physiologically capable 'as men' to 'take this infectious poison of the Plague', and warns that 'dogs infected with the plague should be avoided'.² Afflicted communities might have also witnessed plague-related dog fatalities first-hand. During the widespread outbreak in England in 1563, for instance, the deaths of an entire household are recorded and attributed to plague, including the family's three dogs.³ Canines, just like humans, then, were understood to be potent carriers of the disease and, as a result, found themselves within the grasp of stringent plague prevention measures. However, whilst infected humans could be shut-up in their homes, dogs – especially strays who had no ties to

¹ Janine K. Runfola, et al., 'Outbreak of Human Pneumonic Plague with Dog-to-Human and Possible Human-to-Human Transmission--Colorado, June-July 2014', *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 64.16 (2015), 429-34 (p. 429).

² John Ewich, *The duty of a faithful and wise magistrate, in preserving and delivering of the common wealth from infection, in the time of the plague or pestilence two books* (London, 1583), STC 10607, p. 45.

³ Mark S. R. Jenner, 'The Great Dog Massacre', in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, ed. by William Naphy and Penny Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 44-61 (p. 51).

domestic space – could not be so easily detained, and more drastic measures were sought to protect communities from their contagious capabilities.

As this chapter examines, not only was early modern plague policy responsible for an enormous number of urban canine deaths between 1584 and 1665, but its ferocity towards the animal also engendered what can be described as a concurrent epidemic of plague time cynophobia.⁴ An array of early modern printed texts from pamphlets to medical regimens, many of which will be examined over the course of this chapter, not only locate dogs as objects of infection, disgust, and fear, but also outline how the animals ought to be regulated during outbreaks of plague, particularly in disease epicentres like London. Previous socio-historical engagements with dogs and plague culture, such as the work of Mark Jenner and Emily Cockayne, underpin this examination that aims to determine the extent to which this wider understanding and fear of canines as a result of public health measures might have also made its way onto the early modern stage.⁵

There is no better play to begin to look for the traces of such a cultural phenomenon than *The Witch of Edmonton*, a domestic tragedy that, as Lucy Munro describes, ‘thrives on contamination and admixture’ and features a dog whose very ‘touch is deadly’.⁶ Thomas Dekker, William Rowley, and John Ford’s 1621 play was written during a comparatively quiet period in England regarding plague, however. From 1612, it appears that only a few cases of plague were reported each year until the devastating outbreak of 1625.⁷ Despite this period of

⁴ Ibid., pp. 48-9.

⁵ Ibid.; Emily Cockayne, ‘Who Did Let the Dogs Out?—Nuisance Dogs in Late-Medieval and Early Modern England’, in *Our Dogs, Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society*, ed. by Laura D. Gelfand (Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 41-67.

⁶ All references to *The Witch of Edmonton* are taken from Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. by Lucy Munro, Arden Early Modern Drama (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 3, 57.

⁷ Ian Munro, ‘The City and Its Double: Plague Time in Early Modern London’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 30.2 (2000), 241-61 (p. 242).

perceived respite from the disease, the plague never fully disappeared from early modern imaginations. As Ian Munro suggests, plague was not understood as a ‘calamitous singularity but a constant presence’, and any reports of infections in England or abroad ‘repeatedly presaged its imminent return’.⁸ Such reports included news of outbreaks around the French Mediterranean coast and Denmark between the years 1619-21.⁹ Just three months before the court performance of *Witch of Edmonton* in December 1621, news of a ‘great plague and dearth’ in the city of Constantinople reached London via the *Corante* or *weekly news* that relayed major events of the thirty years war that raged in central Europe.¹⁰ This unsettling news undoubtedly triggered ripples of fear as communities braced themselves for a wave of infection that would not arrive on their shores for another four years.

When infection did arrive in England, the first phase of measures, as the Venetian secretary observed in London in 1603, was to ‘kill the dogs and mark the houses’.¹¹ This was done in the belief that such actions would respectively remove and contain sources of infection from public spaces. Two sources of physical infection are, likewise, removed from the community in the *Witch of Edmonton*: the condemned witch, Elizabeth Sawyer, and her animal familiar, Dog, who is run out of town at the closing of the play for his ‘beastly’ role in the spread of that infection and his association with the ‘noxious’ Sawyer (5.1.192).¹²

Although a dog is referenced in the play’s source material, Henry Goodcole’s 1621 account of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Edward A. Eckert, *The Structure of Plagues and Pestilences in Early Modern Europe: Central Europe, 1560-1640* (Basel: Karger, 1996), p. 128.

¹⁰ Munro, p. 3, citing ‘From Constantinople it is written that there is both a great plague and dearth in that City’, *Corante, or weekly news, from Italy, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, France, and the Low Countries* (London, 1621), STC 18507.32, p. 1.

¹¹ Jenner, p. 48.

¹² Bronwyn Johnston, ‘Go touch his life: Contagious Malice and the Power of Touch in *The Witch of Edmonton*’, in *Contagion and the Shakespearean Stage*, ed. by Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Cham: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 63-81 (p. 66).

the real Elizabeth Sawyer's alleged confession, *Witch of Edmonton*'s Dog functions as much more than the conventional animal familiar who, as Goodcole's pamphlet describes, appears 'in the shape of a dog [...] of two colours, sometimes of black and sometimes of white'.¹³ As Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge note, Dog is presented 'as an agent of evil, independent of Elizabeth Sawyer' within the play.¹⁴ Dog's unique and uncanny role has led to him being explored through a number of different critical approaches in recent years, such as the history of emotions, performance studies, critical race studies, and, of course, animal studies.¹⁵

However, it is the recent work of Bronwyn Johnston that has acknowledged Dog's contribution to the prevalent theme of 'contagion' that pervades Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's play. As Johnston notes, *Witch of Edmonton* 'demonstrates how contemporary audiences made sense of infection' via its engagement with concepts such as 'vermin, miasmatic infection and humoral imbalance'.¹⁶ Johnston argues that:

What is especially striking about *The Witch of Edmonton* is not the conflation of different theories of contagion, but the prominent role given to the devil as the medium through which different etiologies can work in the act of contagion [...] He is an airborne and invisible *species*, darting from eye to eye or eye to body, rendering a change in one's emotional or physical state. He is associated with miasmatic foul odours

¹³ Henry Goodcole, *The wonderful discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer a witch late of Edmonton* (London, 1621), STC 12014, C2^v.

¹⁴ Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, 'The Witch of Edmonton', in *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays: Sophonisba, The Witch, The Witch of Edmonton*, Revels Companion Library (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 143-209, (p. 23).

¹⁵ See Kathryn Prince, 'Emotions in *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Early Theatre*, 21.2 (2018), 181-94; Roberta Barker, 'An honest dog yet': Performing *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Early Theatre*, 12.2 (2009), 163-82; Meg F. Pearson, 'A Dog, a Witch, a Play: *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Early Theatre*, 11.2 (2008), 89-111; Molly Hand, 'Animals, the Devil, and the Sacred in Early Modern English Culture', in *Animals, Animality, and Literature*, ed. by Bruce Boehrer, Molly Hand and Brian Massumi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 105-20; Jeremy Cornelius, 'Contagious Animality: Species, Disease, and Metaphor in Early Modern Literature and Culture', (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Louisiana State University, 2023) in *LSU Doctoral Dissertations* <https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/6037> [accessed 17 February 2024], pp. 78-99.

¹⁶ Johnston, p. 64; For further discussion of Elizabeth Sawyer and contemporary frameworks of contagion see: Mary Floyd-Wilson, '"A witch! Who is not?": Demonic contagion, gender, and class in *The Witch of Edmonton*', in *Routledge Companion to Women, Sex, and Gender in the Early British Colonial World*, ed. by Kimberly Anne Coles and Eve Keller (London: Routledge 2019), pp. 139-53.

polluting the town. He is also very visible to the audience, reveling in his physicality and contaminating his victims through contact.¹⁷

It is this ‘physicality’ that this chapter is interested in exploring further. Johnston connects Dog’s physical form to vermin, the same perceivedly unclean creatures that inhabit *Titus*’s nightmarish pit in Chapter Two.¹⁸ Although vermin are widely associated with ‘dirt and contamination’, Johnston states that they are ‘not yet connected explicitly to the spread of disease’, a notion that I will refute.¹⁹ As such, Johnston makes no further connections between Dog’s outward animal form and disease of any kind, suggesting instead that it is the devil’s manifest form, which just so happens to be in the shape of a dog, that is the real polluting agent of the play:

In terms of contagion, it is not the devil’s incorporeal qualities but his very material form that is essential to the spread of corruption in *The Witch of Edmonton*. While the animal form does not automatically link him with the spread of disease in an early modern understanding, his status as a devil in corporal form does.²⁰

Following the lead of Molly Hand, whose zoocentric reading of animal familiars in *Witch of Edmonton* and Middleton’s *The Witch* encourages us to read them in their presenting animal forms as opposed to their occult contexts, this chapter will demonstrate how Dog’s animal form does, in fact, unreservedly ‘link him’ with the spread of early modern disease, and predominantly plague.²¹ In detaching the devil from the dog, this chapter serves to reinforce Johnston’s argument. It suggests that *Witch of Edmonton* is, indeed, a play that assimilates ‘different etiological concepts’ of plague transmission, of which Dog is most definitely a part.²²

¹⁷ Johnston, p. 64.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 41-2.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

²¹ Hand, pp. 105-20.

²² Johnston, p. 76.

This chapter begins by outlining the historical contexts surrounding canines and their indelible connections with plague that led to their enmeshment in violent public health measures from the mid sixteenth century, and examines how Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's Dog is well placed to be read within this context. The remaining sections explore the embodied presence of Dog and his animality on stage, specifically his unchecked mobility, unwholesome diet, and unregulated noise. These were the very canine exploits that, as will be examined, were thought to increase plague and that contemporary public health measures sought to mitigate during outbreaks. Thus, not only does this chapter demonstrate the extent to which Dog's animality converges with the 'complex model of contagion' that Johnston suggests is already present in the play, but it also reveals how audiences in 1621, anticipating the arrival of plague, might have perceived *Witch of Edmonton*'s 'great puppy' through very different eyes and ears (51.191).²³

Urban Dogs and Early Modern Plague Policy

In 1632, a 'Yorkshire woman [who] "while the minister was delivering communion did dangle a dog on her knee and kiss him with her lips" was presented for behaving irreverently not because she had a dog with her but because her actions were deemed inappropriate in the context of receiving communion [...] Similarly, the Cambridgeshire man who was presented in 1593 for bringing his dog into the parish church offended because his dog was wearing bells, and this disturbed the congregation.'²⁴

These Ecclesiastical court records present us with a rather benign view of the relationship between early modern canines and the communities they inhabited. It seems that the 'issues' that are being debated within these cases are, as John Craig notes, 'deportment, reverence, and

²³ Ibid., p. 64.

²⁴ John Craig, 'Psalms, Groans and Dogwhippers: The Soundscape of Worship in the English Parish Church', in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe, 1547-1642*, ed. by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 104-123 (p. 118).

noise' surrounding the creatures, and very little to do with the physical presence of the dogs themselves.²⁵ Indeed, the dogs in the court records are described as highly affectionate companions who even attend church services with their owners. As these cases demonstrate and as Joanna J. Kucinski suggests, dogs were generally 'held in particular esteem' within rural communities in the early modern period as they were 'essential to hunting, to warfare, and to the "country" lifestyle that became foundational to both noble and English national identity'.²⁶ This is a sentiment which is echoed in Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's *Edmonton*, and which undoubtedly contributes to the town's downfall. Kathryn Prince notes that 'the habitus of Edmonton [...] perceive dogs as companions, not killers, a misreading of Dog's emotions that allows him to prey on multiple characters'.²⁷ Cuddy Banks, for instance, initially sees Dog as a 'poor, dumb thing' that he would gladly 'bail' out of any 'gaol' (4.1.246-50). And, to Sawyer, who is later spurned by her furry companion, the 'dainty' Dog is her 'little pearl' (4.1.180). Moreover, as Prince suggests, even when Dog 'brushes against his victims Frank Thorney and Anne Ratcliffe, they receive his touch as a non-verbal expression of [...] canine emotions, not a threat'.²⁸ At no point do the inhabitants of Edmonton seem perturbed by the presence of Dog in his animal form; it is only when his devilish derivations are revealed that he begins to unsettle.

However, Dog's animal form likely received an entirely different reading from those seeing and hearing *Witch of Edmonton* in London. The city's anthrozoological experiences were far removed from that of the rural Middlesex community represented in the play; a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Joanna J. Kucinski, 'English Dogs and Barbary Horses: Horses, Dogs, and Identity in Renaissance England,' in *Renaissance Papers* 2014, ed. by Jim Pearce, Ward J. Risvold, and Nathan Dixon, (Boydell & Brewer, 2015), pp. 123–36 (p. 124).

²⁷ Prince, p. 189.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

community that, by necessity, shares a mutualistic relationship with its animals. As will be discussed, although dogs were readily seen and heard in and around London, their presence was not all together embraced, and the city's canines and the spaces they inhabited were repeatedly associated with the more unsavoury aspects of urban life. The city's Dog House, for example, that housed the Lord Mayor's hunting dogs and was known amongst contemporaries for its unwholesome 'stinks', seems to have captured both Rowley and Dekker's imaginations some time before they collaborated with Ford on *Witch of Edmonton*.²⁹ In his *Belman of London*, Dekker describes the Dog-House as a place where hungry canines 'pick [...] bones clean' from 'funeral banquets'.³⁰ And in Rowley's comedy, *A New Wonder, A Woman Never Vext*, the Dog-House was an apt place to dispose of 'lean'-pocketed men who had no 'lining' left: 'I could / Take him by the leg and hurl him into / The dog house'.³¹

London canines were infamous for much more than their aroma and appetites, however. In Act Four, Scene One of *Witch of Edmonton*, Cuddy lists the disreputable types of behaviour that a canine might exhibit and that his beloved Dog, to his better knowledge, does not. Tellingly, Cuddy's examples all concern dogs that one could only cross paths with in London:

The dog is no court foisting-hound that fills his belly full by base wagging his tail. Neither is it a citizen's water-spaniel, enticing his master to go a-ducking twice or thrice a week, whilst his wife makes ducks and drakes at home. This is no Paris Garden bandog neither, that keeps a bow-wow-wow to have butchers bring their curs thither, and when all comes to all, they run away like sheep. Neither is this the Black Dog of Newgate (4.1.260-8).

²⁹ G.M. *Certain Characters and Essays of Prison and Prisoners* (London, 1618), STC 18319, B2^r.

³⁰ Thomas Dekker, *The Belman of London Bringing to light the most notorious villainies that are now practised in the kingdom* (London, 1608), STC 6482, C3^r.

³¹ William Rowley, *A New Wonder, a Woman Never Vexed: A pleasant, conceited comedy: sundry times acted: never before printed. Written by William Rowley, one of his Majesties servants* (London, 1632), *ProQuest One Literature*, p. 64.

Reflecting on Cuddy's 'desire to understand and thus categorise [Dog's] preternatural being', Katherine Walker explains that he 'locates Dog somewhere between the canines found in the London landscape and the ghostly apparitions that haunt its prisons'.³² In doing so, the dramatists are clearly asking their audience to draw upon their collective cultural knowledge of the contemporary discourse surrounding canines as well as their own immediate understandings of dogs and their owners that inhabit the city just beyond the performance space. Asking audiences to draw on their own experiences of the city's canines would not have been a difficult task. Even if they did not have a dog of their own, it is quite likely that audience members may have, as Cuddy states, 'rub[bed...] shoulder[s]' with one of the 'astonish[ing]' number of dogs located in the city on their journey to the playhouse (5.1.216).³³ On route, audience members may have also heard the snarling and yelping of the dogs from the Bear Gardens that hosted some of the city's blood sports; sites that, like the brothels encountered in *Measure for Measure*, were also stowed away in the suburbs.³⁴ Dekker writes of the sounds he himself encountered in the Bear Garden, whose 'very noise put me in the mind of hell [...] the dogs like so many devils'; it is an apt observation in the context of *Witch of Edmonton*.³⁵

³² Katherine Walker, 'Early Modern Almanacs and *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 18.1 (2015), 1-25 (p. 11).

³³ 'Frederick Gerschow, The Duke of Stettin-Pomerania's secretary, was astonished at the number of dogs he and his party saw, and presumably heard, in England in 1602. Here, he says, even 'peasants' are able to hunt: 'they keep fine big dogs, at little expense', Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 75.

³⁴ See Amanda Di Ponio's chapter 'Bear-baiting and the Theatre of Cruelty', in *The Early Modern Theatre of Cruelty and its Doubles: Artaud and Influence* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), pp. 87-118.

³⁵ Quoted in Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 18.

Furthermore, some theatrical venues such as the Hope, which was built on the site of a former bear-baiting pit, were ‘Playhouse[s] fit & convenient in all things, both for players to play in, and for the game of Bears and Bulls to be baited in the same’.³⁶ Theatre and bear-baiting, then, were not only ‘branches of the same business enterprise’ that ‘share[d] the same locations and audiences’, as Andreas Höfele suggests, but they were also spaces in which bears, dogs, and actors culturally and spatially collided.³⁷ Audiences could see actors performing on Mondays and watch ‘the Baiting of Bears’ with its savage dogs the very next day.³⁸ Crucially, this suggests that audiences were collectively accustomed to seeing and hearing the destructive capabilities of dogs in theatrical spaces, an important nexus when considering Dog’s similarly ‘destructive’ role on stage in *Witch of Edmonton*.³⁹ Even the indoor Cockpit, where *Witch of Edmonton* received ‘singular applause’ and that was located in a more exclusive suburb, took its name from the adjacent cockfighting pit.⁴⁰ And although the creatures that typically fought in this location were birds and not dogs, the theatre’s proximity to animal violence does not go unnoticed in Dekker, Ford, and Rowley’s text, as ‘the witch’, like the many unfortunate birds next door, is also ‘beaten out of her cockpit’ and sent to execution at the end of the play (5.1.48).

So, when Cuddy imagines the journey Dog will take through London upon leaving Edmonton, it is no coincidence that his route takes him through many of the city’s most unsavoury places. Dog, like his urban canine counterparts offstage, will (as he has seemingly

³⁶ Andreas Höfele, *Stage, Stake, and Scaffold: Humans and Animals in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 7.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 220.

⁴⁰ William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton a known true story / composed into a tragi-comedy by divers well-esteemed poets* (London, 1658), Wing R2097, Title page.

done many times before) stalk through ‘Tyburn’ and ‘Thieving Lane’ before making his way across the ‘water’ via the ‘stairs amongst the bandogs’ to London’s most notorious areas, where ‘hundreds drop and sink’ amongst the playhouses, brothels, bloodsports, poverty, and plague (5.1.205-18). Whether these locations are heard by audiences at the Cockpit or the court, their squalid, pestilential conditions and the type of dogs that subsist within them — that the audience are invited to recall throughout the play — imbue *Witch of Edmonton*’s canine. To his urban audiences, who know his ‘kind’ only too well, Dog is patently a London dog (3.1.97).

The dogs that lurked within the playhouse walls and upon manuscript sheets did little to negate the revilement of the urban canine. In Thomas Nashe’s 1593 *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*, a comedy that engages England’s ongoing plague outbreak as its sombre backdrop, the hunter god, Orion, is accused of bringing pestilence to Earth via his unruly pack of fearsome dogs. Autumn’s invective against the dogs is so detailed and absolute that it is worth quoting in full:

AUTUMN: Is not enough for him to hunt and range,
But with those venom-breathed curs he leads,
He comes to chase health from our earthly bounds:
Each one of those foul-mouthed mangy dogs
Governs a day, (no dog but hath his day)
And all the days by them so governed,
The Dog-days height, infectious fosterers
Of meteors from carrion that arise,
And putrefied bodies of dead men,
Are they engendered to that ugly shape,
Being nought let but preserved corruption,
T’is these that in the entrance of their reign
The plague and dangerous agues have brought in.⁴¹

⁴¹ Thomas Nashe, *A pleasant comedy, called Summers last will and testament*. Written by Thomas Nashe (London, 1600), STC 18376, D4^r.

Autumn's speech in which he 'railest so against dogs', reveals that if we are to truly understand the connection between dogs and plague and perhaps even the source of this connection, we must look beyond what Autumn describes as our 'earthly bounds' to the skies.⁴² Orion's 'foul-mouthed' and 'venom-breathed curs' are clearly the embodiment of the 'dog-days' of summer; the hottest, most humid, and seemingly most 'infectious' days of the year that usually 'range' from July to August. This period derives its name from the constellation of *Canis Major* which contains the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius, also known as the 'Dog-star'. Contemporary astrologers noted that Sirius rose with and near the sun during these hot months.⁴³ Throughout antiquity, those who observed what Autumn describes as the 'ill-governed star', interpreted it as a bleak sign that portended imminent epidemics of fevers and plague.⁴⁴ In Homer's *Iliad*, for example:

Brightly its rays shine out
 Among the myriad stars in the darkness of night,
 And men call it the Dog of Orion, the brightest star of all;
 Yet nevertheless it's a warning of trouble to come,
 And brings with it much fever to wretched mankind.⁴⁵

Virgil in his *Aeneid* also describes how Sirius 'from on high, / With pestilential heat infects the sky: / My men – some fall, the rest in fevers fry'.⁴⁶ This ill-fated period is also mentioned in *Witch of Edmonton* when Cuddy has a narrow escape from drowning after Dog summons a

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Sophie Chiari, *Shakespeare's Representation of Weather, Climate and Environment: The Early Modern 'Fated Sky'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 71-2; See also Nichole Dewall, 'The Plague in *Romeo and Juliet*: "The Day Is Hot"', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, 34.4 (2021), 5-7.

⁴⁴ Nashe, *Summer's Last Will*, E1^v.

⁴⁵ Homer, *The Iliad: A New Translation* by Peter Green (California: University of California Press, 2015), p. 525.

⁴⁶ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions, 2015), p. 84.

spirit of Cuddy's beloved over a pond: 'Thinking to land at Katherine's dock, I was almost at Gravesend. I'll never go to a wench in the Dog-days again' (3.1.112-4).

These ominous readings of the star and its connection to the warmer seasons were particularly important when it came to forecasting the arrival of plague in early modern communities. It was well known that peak temperatures in England heralded peak plague seasons, a pattern which is corroborated in the steep rise in deaths over the summer months in the extant Bills of Mortality. In the epidemic of 1625, for example, the recorded deaths increased from seventy-eight plague dead on 26 May to over 4,400 dead on 18 August.⁴⁷ This established seasonal pattern of plague is referenced in *Summer's Last Will* when it is revealed that 'because the plague reigns in most places in this latter end of summer, Summer must come in sick; he must call his officers to account'.⁴⁸ Of course, we now know that these hotter and more humid months provide the optimal breeding conditions for fleas and lice that transfer the plague bacterium into humans from their infected hosts. However, to early modern communities besieged by plague, the dog-days of summer presaged long, uncomfortable months of heat, dread, and death.

Crucially, these 'hot' months when 'the mad blood' was 'stirring' as *Romeo and Juliet's* Benvolio states, was also when canine bodies – like those of humans – were thought to be most vulnerable to infectious disease (3.1.4). As discussed in the opening of this chapter, Ewich makes it clear to his readers that dogs can catch plague just as readily as humans. Ewich also provides us with an insight into why this was thought and, importantly, how this might have secured the canine's position in plague prevention systems:

⁴⁷ Anonymous, *Londons loud cries to the Lord by prayer: made by a reverend divine, and approved of by many others* (London, 1665), L2938.

⁴⁸ Nashe, *Summer's Last Will*, D4^r.

At certain times of the year, especially about the heat of the Star called Sirius [...] which time they commonly call the Dog days, they command the Dogs to be killed, the cause whereof I judge to be this: When as the Dog, (as Galen witnesseth) [...] is a living creature very hot, and by nature choleric, and hath the holes of his heart very straight and narrow, at that time when as the heat of the air is most burning and parching, the humours of his heart being inflamed, and blood above measure rising up [...] whereof afterwards ensueth great and present danger, both to men and also unto other beasts.⁴⁹

In his misguided attempts at protectively disentangling Dog from Sawyer's unwholesome reputation as someone who, as Johnston suggests 'contaminates the community', Cuddy asserts that he will protect the creature at all costs and that Dog's 'Dog-days are not come yet' (4.1.256).⁵⁰ Cuddy's assertion here, then, especially given its suggested epidemiological context, speaks to the complex position of dogs within contemporary understandings of infection and susceptibility outlined by Ewich. This was particularly true in cases of plague, a disease canine bodies were not only susceptible to and could carry, but whose preventative measures they were also at the mercy of.

As a result of the entrenched historical connections between disease and dogs, and the fact that plague had the potential to produce as many 'diseased cur[s]' as ill humans, canines continually found themselves in the hands of stringent plague prevention policies and practices.⁵¹ As Jenner argues, dogs were branded 'dangerous creatures' that incited 'medico-moral panic' during outbreaks of the disease.⁵² The first attempt to 'lessen' the number of dogs within England occurred in London during the plague outbreak of 1543, when it was ordered that dogs should either be 'banished or killed' and then 'buried out of the City at the common laystalls'.⁵³ It is possible that one of these canine-carcass 'laystalls' became part of

⁴⁹ Ewich, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Johnston, p. 77.

⁵¹ Cockayne, p. 54.

⁵² Jenner, p. 46.

⁵³ F.P. Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare's London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 38.

the city ditch, or ‘houndsditch’ as it was more commonly known due to the ‘much filth’ and the vast amount of dog remains that were ‘laid or cast’ there.⁵⁴ However, it was after the printing of the national plague orders in 1578 and the London orders in 1583 that public health measures against dogs accelerated. From 1579, a number of ‘petty fellows’ were appointed as dog-killers during outbreaks, and attendants carrying out the ‘common hunt’ within individual parishes in 1583 were paid four pence for every dog captured and killed.⁵⁵ And whilst Cockayne suggests that ‘figures may have been exaggerated by dog-killers exploiting the payment system’, it is estimated that some 1,882 dogs were killed in these early years between 1584-6.⁵⁶ Records of payment suggest that dog-killers were also employed in other English cities and towns, such as Leicester and Ipswich, during the period.⁵⁷

Whilst the practice was clearly not just restricted to London, the sheer number of dogs that were killed in the city during outbreaks of plague was immense. F. P. Wilson proposes that in 1592 the Westminster parish of St Margaret’s alone claimed the lives of around 656 dogs, and 502 were dispatched there during the outbreak of 1603.⁵⁸ During this outbreak, Dekker describes how London’s canines ‘were knocked down like Oxen, and fell thicker than Acorns’.⁵⁹ And despite plague’s absence in 1621 and later in 1634, when the play rose to popular acclaim, dog culls were clearly an established and ongoing practice that *Witch of Edmonton*’s audiences would have expected to be implemented should an outbreak be declared. And when an outbreak did erupt in London in 1625, records show that 190 dogs

⁵⁴ John Stow, *The survey of London containing the original, increase, modern estate and government of that city, methodically set down* (London, 1633), STC 23345.5, M1^v.

⁵⁵ Wilson, p. 39.

⁵⁶ Cockayne, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Jenner, p. 49.

⁵⁸ Wilson, p. 39.

⁵⁹ Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful year. 1603 Wherein is showed the picture of London, lying sick of the plague* (London, 1604), STC 6535.5, D2^r.

were slaughtered in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields alone in less than a month.⁶⁰ The ubiquity of plague time dog culls is further demonstrated in John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont's popular 1609 comedy *The Scornful Lady*, when Elder Loveless exclaims that:

I would 'twere lawful in the next great Sickness to have the Dogs spared, those harmless creatures, and knock I' th' head those hot continual plagues, Women, that are more infectious. I hope the state will think on't (4.1).⁶¹



1.1 Detail of London Scenes of the Plague 1665-6 (Museum of London).

This extract which, uncommonly, sympathises with plague time dogs, also exposes the brutal methods behind this practice. Canines were typically 'brain[ed]' during outbreak culls, meaning that they were struck across the head with an object such as a staff, as demonstrated in the late-seventeenth-century woodcut above (see figure one).⁶² Whilst dogs were typically at the mercy of the dog-killer's staff, plague time dog owners might also choose to dispatch their canines themselves in this manner as evidenced by John Noyes' letter to his wife in

⁶⁰ Wilson, p. 40.

⁶¹ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The scornful lady A comedy. As it was acted with great applause by the late Kings Majesties servants, at the Black-Friars* (London, 1677), Wing B1610, p. 43.

⁶² Jenner, p. 49.

1607, in which he instructs her to ‘keep in your dog or knock him in the head’.⁶³ When read within this context, we might wonder whether Dog’s coercion of Anne Ratcliffe to ‘beat out her own brains’ in *Witch of Edmonton* might not be some kind retributive act on his part (4.1.230).

However, this is not the only ‘beating’ that occurs in connection with Dog in the play. Cuddy has already warned Dog that he will be ‘staved off’ before he makes good on his threat in the final scene: ‘Come out, come out, you cur! I will beat thee out the bounds of Edmonton’ (5.1.182-212). ‘Beating the bounds’ was, as Alexandra Walsham notes, the annual ‘perambulation of the community’s uttermost limits and landmarks’ that enabled the inhabitants to cognitively ‘rechart the map that divided neighbouring communities’.⁶⁴ Not only did this ‘solemn ceremony’ often involve inhabitants carrying willow branches used to strike important community landmarks, but as Walsham suggests, it was also ‘designed to drive out evil spirits [...] and protect’ communities from, amongst other things, ‘pests’.⁶⁵ Although Cuddy (as far as we know) is not brandishing a willow-branch staff he is, by expelling Dog, protecting his community from a known ‘pest’ that is irrefutably connected with the ‘plague’ that has ravaged his town (5.1.86). David Nicol has suggested that this reference to the Rogation ceremony may even ‘indicate that Cuddy is physically beating the dog off the stage’.⁶⁶ With this in mind, it is likely that a 1621 audience would have made connections between a ‘corrupted’ Dog being threatened with a beating for infecting

⁶³ Craig, p. 115.

⁶⁴ Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 252-3.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 253.

⁶⁶ David Nicol, ‘Interrogating the Devil: Social and Demonic Pressure in “*The Witch of Edmonton*”’, *Comparative Drama*, 38.4 (2004), 425-45 (p. 440).

townspeople and ‘chased’ off stage, and the brutal methods of dispatching infectious urban dogs during plague time (5.1.200).

We can assume, however, that Cuddy does not catch Dog. Like the vulnerable urban dogs offstage, Dog is alert to his aggressors and, subsequently, how he might evade them. Francis Bacon suggests that capturing and killing canines was not an easy task during plague outbreaks as ‘it is Common Experience, that Dog[s] know the Dog-killer [...] And that, though they have never seen him before; yet they will all come forth, and bark, and fly at him’.⁶⁷ Dog is able to slip out of the community just as easily as he slips in. And whilst it is his devilish extraction that might allow him to ‘stretch’ and ‘draw’ his ‘bulk small as a silver wire’ so that he may ‘Enter at the least pore tobacco fume / Can make a breach for’, it is his agile, streetwise, animal body that allows him to avoid capture at the end of the play (5.1.207-9). It is this animal body that I now turn to examine in more detail. Whilst I have already located Dog’s urban animal form within both London and the wider cultural landscape, what I have not yet considered is how he moves through the landscape of the play, and how his actions and his autonomy invite us to think further about his contemporary reception within the context of plague and plague prevention.

Dog’s Body

Company receipts reveal that in 1602 Worcester’s Men purchased two lots of lamb skins and a canvas suit for twenty-two shillings for the now lost play *The Black Dog of Newgate, Part One*, with *Part Two* being paid for in 1603.⁶⁸ As Lucy Munro suggests, with such a suit at

⁶⁷ Cockayne, p. 58.

⁶⁸ ‘The Black Dog of Newgate’, *Lost Plays Database*, eds. Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis, Matthew Steggle, and Misha Teramura (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2023)

their disposal ‘in which an actor could play a dog’, Dekker, Ford, and Rowley ‘were able to draw on established traditions’ and ‘perhaps even ready-made costumes and props handed down from earlier plays’.⁶⁹ This likelihood that the actor playing Dog wore the *Black Dog of Newgate* ‘suit’ increases when we consider that *Witch of Edmonton* not only contains references to the eponymous *Black Dog* himself, as mentioned earlier, but also to Dog possibly ‘appear[ing]’ in lamb skins at the end of the play (5.1.31): ‘When the devil comes to thee as a lamb, have at thy throat’ (5.1.38). Whilst this also undoubtedly refers to Dog’s new ‘ghost[ly...]white’ coat and the sacrificial vein of Sawyer’s fate, it might also be a thinly veiled metatheatrical pun, especially if the performer has indeed been wearing black lamb skin-covered canvas for the majority of the play up until this point (5.1.32-4).

Although we have no way of knowing what Dog’s costume actually looked like or how convincing it might have been on stage, the ‘abundance of stage directions for Dog’ as Johnston suggests ‘indicates the physicality of the character, and the significant role’ that both his ‘movement and physical presence’ play in his characterisation.⁷⁰ Much like the devil-dog described in Goodcole’s pamphlet, who would ‘wag his tail’ when his ‘back’ was ‘stroke[d]’, it is clear from Dog’s stage directions that he must not only look like a dog, but also move like one.⁷¹ Dog’s physical contact with others in the play, the specifics of which will be discussed in more detail in due course, is what incites Edmonton’s inhabitants to self-harm and to harm those around them with little more than a ‘subtle rub’ from the canine himself.⁷² As such, Dog’s physicality is crucial as it is these physical actions which drive the plot.

<https://lostplays.folger.edu/Black_Dog_of_Newgate,_Parts_1_and_2> [accessed 12 November 2023].

⁶⁹ Munro, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Johnston, p. 68.

⁷¹ Goodcole, D1^r.

⁷² Johnston, p. 63.

Furthermore, as the ‘witch’s familiar’, Johnston notes that Dog is also ‘the carrier of all things harmful, transferring infection and evil influence from body to body’.⁷³ Nevertheless, when Dog ‘transfers’ this ‘infection’ he does so in the guise of what we can assume to be a reasonably convincing Dog, not as a devil. Given the contemporary plague time understandings of urban canines and their firm position within the disease’s medical frameworks and its prevention systems, then, what might contemporary audiences have made of Dog’s representation on stage? Focusing on what Roberta Barker refers to as Dog’s ‘doggy[ness]’, this section examines Dog’s physicality and spatiality alongside plague time public health discourse to examine how his represented canine form, and its movement and behaviour, enhance his dangerous, infective influence within the play.⁷⁴

As Johnston notes, Dog ‘wander[s] through the play touching everything [and everyone] he possibly can’: ‘The mind’s about it now; one touch from me / Soon sets the body forward’ (3.3.2-3).⁷⁵ Dog’s contaminating acts are choreographed via a series of explicit stage directions that instruct the actor playing Dog to make physical contact with, or specific gestures at, those he means to harm or incite. When he is delighting in his ‘sins and mischiefs’ (3.1.174), Dog is prompted with various doggy verbs such as ‘rub’ (3.3.14), ‘shrugging’ (4.2.67), and ‘pawing’ (4.2.112). Whilst these directions are undoubtedly there to aid the actor in making Dog appear more dog-like, it is via these overtly canine displays that Dog is able to physically ‘infect’ the town and its people. As Ewich describes, being ‘touched’ or receiving a ‘pawing’ from a ‘diseased dog’, in the way that many in Edmonton do, was a very grave thing during plague time.⁷⁶ However, Dog is also given specific stage directions outside of his

⁷³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁷⁴ Barker, p. 169.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷⁶ Ewich, p. 43.

actively contaminating actions, and it is these that an alert, plague time audience may have perceived to be the most threatening of all. In Act Two, Scene One, Sawyer summons Dog by ‘stamp[ing]’ her feet on the ground (2.1.263). Dog enters immediately and proceeds to ‘fawn [...] and leap upon her’ (2.1.263). This ostensibly affectionate canine behaviour, that people might welcome today, was as Ewich explains, not to be trusted or tolerated during outbreaks of plague:

For Dogs infected with the Plague, as when they are sick of other diseases or harms, they for the most part come home to their own houses, and fawn upon, and get them near unto them of the house, as hoping for help at their hands, or taking as it were sanctuary among them, so that after the example of Judas the traitor, they sometimes wrap their Master in this danger, and betray him.⁷⁷

Not only, then, does Dog display the types of seemingly innocuous canine behaviours that were believed to spread plague, but he also knowingly ‘wrap[s]’ Sawyer ‘in [...] danger’ as he is the ‘dissembling [...] hound’ who ‘puts’ her in her ‘winding sheet’ at the end of the play (5.1.34-43). As Ewich warns, after getting ‘near unto’ and ‘taking’ what he wants from Sawyer, Dog does in fact ‘betray’ her and leads her to her death.

Contrary to Ewich, however, Sawyer is not Dog’s ‘master’, despite inviting him ‘home’ to ‘play’ and ‘make holiday’ (4.2.301). And whilst Dog does, indeed, visit many homes during the course of the play, none of them are his own. Meg Pearson suggests that Dog represents ‘near total mobility’ in that he ‘determines how he will appear, changes his role at will, and wanders in and out of each and every plot in the play. His adaptability makes him the centrepiece’ of the tragedy.⁷⁸ However, Dog’s hyper-mobility can also be read more literally. In an effective use of dramatic irony – it is never made explicitly clear how often dog

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Pearson, p. 89.

is ‘unseen’ by the characters on stage – the audience see Dog move in and out of Edmonton’s homes (3.1.157). They see what he does when he is inside of those homes and see just how close he gets to the occupants. Importantly, the audience see the trail of death and destruction he leaves behind. The fact that the audience is, as Pearson states, ‘privy to Dog’s extracurricular meanderings’ is, therefore, crucial as it is these frequent and unregulated movements, particularly around the space of the home, that fuelled the anxieties surrounding canines during outbreaks of plague and that become the driving forces behind canine-related plague policy.⁷⁹

Plague policy surrounding canines was by no means universal. Lapdogs, understood as house-bound pets for elite society ladies, hounds of the gentry, and dogs that functioned in sectors such as agriculture, including greyhounds, spaniels, and hounds, were listed and excluded from the preventative plague time measures.⁸⁰ In 1576, John Caius in *Of English Dogs* notes that at the lower end of the canine spectrum lurk the ‘curs of the mongrel and rascal sort’, who should be ‘banishe[d...] as unprofitable implements, out of the bounds of my Book, unprofitable I say for any use that is commendable, except to entertain strangers with their barking in the day time’.⁸¹ Jenner suggests that it was these ‘less valuable and less restrained’ dogs that were located as the most dangerous of their species during outbreaks of plague as they traversed ‘the threshold between the domestic interior of the house and shop and the more public world of the street’.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

⁸⁰ Jenner, p. 55; Cockayne, p. 54.

⁸¹ John Caius, *Of English dogs the diversities, the names, the natures, and the properties* (London, 1576), STC 4347, p. 34.

⁸² Jenner, p. 55.

Akin to Dog's 'meanderings', then, Jenner suggests that the canines who were considered to be a threat during outbreaks were those that were not fixed to one particular household, as was the case with many urban strays who were 'very noisome and dangerous for many respects', and who were left to wander the streets in search of food and shelter.⁸³ Simon Kellwaye urges that dogs should not be suffered to 'run about the streets' in plague time 'for they are very dangerous, and apt cattle to carry the infection from place to place'.⁸⁴ Ewich, likewise, argues that dogs were adept at spreading plague because they were permitted to 'continually run up and down hither and thither'.⁸⁵ Cockayne suggests that there may have even been an increased number of strays in urban areas during plague as 'many owners may have abandoned their dogs for fear of catching the disease from them' or their owners might have died during the outbreak leaving no one to care for them.⁸⁶ As such, London's dogs, like the dogs that 'went wandering at leisure' in the Tuscan countryside of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, were 'driven off' from their houses either by force or hunger.⁸⁷

Hungry dogs in particular were understood to be a very dangerous thing during plague time. As briefly discussed in Chapter Two, there was a palpable anxiety within the period surrounding stray, hungry dogs who were adept at locating and eating unsuitably buried bodies. An anonymous 1625 plague treatise, for instance, describes how dogs were most apt to 'feed on the uncleanest things' that, like Tamora's 'detested and abominable' body in *Titus Andronicus* (2.2.74), might be 'throw[n]' into the streets (5.3.197).⁸⁸ Anything that had come into contact with the infected was also seemingly at risk of being devoured by canines. A

⁸³ Ibid., p. 52.

⁸⁴ Kellwaye, E1^v

⁸⁵ Ewich, p. 43.

⁸⁶ Cockayne, p. 54.

⁸⁷ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. by Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 13.

⁸⁸ Anonymous, *Especial observations, and approved physical rules* (London, 1625), STC 18760, B1^v.

plague remedy from 1603, which required a ‘hot loaf’ to be applied to the plague ‘sore’, also provided instructions for the safe disposal of the supposedly curative bread: ‘afterward bury the same loaf deep enough in the ground for fear of any infection’, as should a ‘dog feed thereon it will infect a great many’.⁸⁹

Witch of Edmonton’s Dog is clearly no exception as he eats anything that he finds in his path. Upon meeting Dog, Cuddy offers the stray ‘jowls and livers [...] crusts and bones’ (3.1.139-42), assuring him that if he is a ‘kind dog’ he ‘shall not starve’ (3.1.142-8). When asked if he will accept these ‘stolen goods’, Dog gleefully replies that he enjoys these ‘best of all! The sweetest bits, those’ (3.1.146-7). However, despite Cuddy’s generous offerings, it seems that Dog’s main source of ‘nourish[ment]’ within the play is provided in the form of Elizabeth Sawyer’s blood.⁹⁰ The audience witness Dog’s first meal when Sawyer seals her blood-pact with him amidst a pyrotechnic display of thunder and lightning in which Dog drinks blood from Sawyer’s ‘arm’ (2.2.164). Dog’s feeding method deviates somewhat from Goodcole’s pamphlet, which states that Sawyer’s familiar would put his head ‘under’ her ‘coats’ and suckle from a teat located in her perineal region.⁹¹ Dekker, Ford, and Rowley could not have staged such an explicit act; therefore, Sawyer’s arm serves as an alternative stage-friendly site for Dog’s blood-feast.

The blood that Dog feasts upon is no ordinary blood, however. Sawyer is ‘shunned and hated like a sickness’ in *Edmonton* (2.1.115-6). Her own language is laden with disease, which she continually ‘breath[es]’ out in the form of curses to those around her (5.2.69):

⁸⁹ Anonymous, *Present remedies against the plague Showing sundry preservatives for the same, by wholesome fumes, drinks, vomits and other inward receipts* (London, 1603), STC 5871.7, B3^r.

⁹⁰ ‘And I asked the Devil why he would suck my blood, and he said it was to nourish him’, Goodcole, C3^v.

⁹¹ ‘The place where the Devil sucked my blood was a little above my fundament, and that place chosen by himself; and in that place by continual drawing, there is a thing in the form of a Teat, at which the devil would suck me’, Ibid.

‘Diseases, plagues, the curse of an old woman follow and fall upon you!’ (4.1.27), and ‘Rots and foul maladies eat up thee and thine!’ (4.1.84). The fact that Sawyer identifies her body as one that is not only contaminated but contagious is significant and is reinforced by her self-proclaimed association with miasma in Act Two: ‘Must I be made a common sink / For all the filth and rubbish of men’s tongues / To fall and run into?’ (2.1.6-8). Johnston suggests that by likening herself to ‘a common sink’ Sawyer becomes ‘the embodiment of the town’s refuse pile, a noxious source of infection primed to contaminate all with whom she comes into contact’.⁹² It is this blood, envenomed with ‘plagues and consumptions’, that transfers to Dog when he feeds upon Sawyer (5.1.85-6). As Johnston states, ‘the bloodsucking enables him to transmit her decayed corruption into whoever or whatever’ he wants.⁹³ But like the hungry plague time strays who, likewise, ‘tear’ infected bod[ies]’ to ‘pieces’ (2.1.155), and play with the ‘carcass[es]’ of the ‘disease-slain’, it is Dog’s mobile, masterless lifestyle that motivates his pestiferous diet; a diet feared in urban communities, condemned in plague treatises, and mitigated by the plague orders (5.1.153).

The plague time anxieties surrounding these ‘worthless and low-bred’ creatures who wandered from place to place eating unwholesome things is also unquestionably tied to the early modern notion of vagrancy and the moral and biological dangers that such a perceivedly uninhibited lifestyle could engender, such as we encountered in the previous chapter.⁹⁴ Popular printed texts even describe human vagrancy in zoomorphic terms by using overtly canine traits to describe objectionable masterless behaviours. For example, in Thomas Harman’s 1567 *Caveat for Common Cursitors*, a text that taxonomises England’s vagrants, it

⁹² Johnston, p. 66.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ ‘A dog: now always depreciative or contemptuous; a worthless, low-bred’, “cur, n.” OED Online, (Oxford University Press, 2020) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/45943> [Accessed 18 July 2020].

is said that the ‘wild rogue’ conducts himself in the same way that stray canines do and ‘when the day doth appear, he rouses him up and shakes his ears, and away wandering where he may get ought to the hurt of others’.⁹⁵ Similarly, ‘upright-men’ were said to shelter in barns with women, ‘where they couch comely together’ like ‘dog and bitch’.⁹⁶ As Jenner argues, ‘masterless dogs’ were not just understood to be ‘breaking sanitary regulations’ but, like their masterless human counterparts, their unregulated status posed a very real threat to the stability and safety of the wider community as ‘visible’ and highly mobile sources ‘of disorder’.⁹⁷

What makes Dog’s animal presence in *Witch of Edmonton* particularly threatening within the context of plague, then, is not simply his inclusion within a pestilentially-fraught species; rather, it is the marginal status that he occupies within that species. Dog’s dangerous vagrancy is signposted before he even enters the stage. Directly before Dog’s fatal entrance, Sawyer curses Old Banks by stating that he is a ‘black cur / That barks and bites’ (2.1.131-2) and wishes ruin ‘upon that canker!’ (2.1.135). It is no coincidence that a black dog immediately enters the scene, unleashed, thus directly associating the vagrant canine with malignancy and ulcerous disease from his very first arrival in Edmonton in Act Two, Scene One. There are even more explicit moments during the course of the play that indicate Dog’s marginal domestic status and the danger it poses to the wider community. For instance, despite referring to Sawyer as his ‘dame’ and despite having been bestowed with the name of ‘Tom’ by Sawyer herself, a name which is later adopted by Cuddy, it is revealed that Dog drifts between many masters (3.1.131). During a revealing conversation with Cuddy, Dog

⁹⁵ Thomas Harman, *A caveat for common Cursitors vulgarly called vagabonds, set forth by Thomas Harman, esquire, for the utility and profit of his natural country* (London, 1567), STC 12787.5, B3^v.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, C3^r.

⁹⁷ Jenner, p. 55; For further discussion on vagrancy in the period see: David Hitchcock, *Vagrancy in English Culture and Society, 1650-1750* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985).

asserts that he has much work to do as he serves ‘more masters, more dames than one’ (3.1.159).⁹⁸

The true extent of Dog’s vagrancy is only revealed towards the end of the play, however, and begins with Dog’s rejection of Sawyer in Act Five. It is made clear throughout the play that Dog has become more than just a witch’s familiar to Sawyer as she exclaims that ‘no lady loves her hound [...] as I do thee’ (4.1.179-81). Any hopes of her sharing domestic bliss with Dog are dashed, however, when he disobeys her commands and cruelly abandons her before her execution, at which Sawyer heartbrokenly cries, ‘My Tommy! My Sweet Tom-boy! O, thou dog! Dost thou now fly to thy kennel and forsake me?’ (5.1.84-5). Dog’s final rejection of Sawyer occurs when he later casts off the name of ‘Tom’: ‘Whilst I served my old Dame Sawyer, ’twas. I’m gone from her now’ (5.1.102). Yet, Dog’s denunciation of domesticity extends further than his duplicity with Sawyer. Cuddy, who at this point in the play still considers Dog ‘a kind cur’ (5.1.92), asks him, ‘Were it not possible for thee to become an honest dog yet? ’Tis a base life you lead, Tom’ (5.1.166-7). Cuddy then proceeds to list the typical occupations that a respectable early modern dog, who was not in league with the devil, might embark upon. For example, Cuddy suggests that ‘some shop-keeper in London would take great delight in you and be a tender master over you’ (5.1.173-6). And should Dog want a more comfortable life than his present one, which sees him inhabit the bodies ‘of coarse creatures’ (5.1.125), Cuddy recommends that it would be better for him:

To serve in some nobleman’s, knight’s or gentleman’s kitchen – if you could brook the wheel and turn the spit – your labour could not be much: when they have roast meat,

⁹⁸ Given Dog’s assigned name, ‘Tom’, and the fact that Cuddy describes Dog twice as ‘poor’ also suggests that the dramatists might have been trying to make further contemporary links with vagrancy discourse. As Lindsey Larre notes: ‘Poor Tom’ who also features in *King Lear* is ‘the reviled Bedlam beggar or “Abraham Man,” an over-the-top caricature of false poverty and manipulative cozenage’, a deception that is certainly consistent with Dog’s character, Lindsey Larre, “Do Poor Tom Some Charity”: Performing Poverty and Pity in *King Lear*’, *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 52.3 (2022), 533-65 (p. 534).

that's but once or twice in the week at most. Here you might lick your own toes very well. Or, if you could translate yourself into a lady's arming-puppy, there you might lick sweet lips and do many pretty offices (5.1.182-92).

Dog rebuffs Cuddy's domestic advice. Instead, he revels in all the 'bestly things' that he has done in the town since his arrival (5.1.192), answering 'the worse thou heard'st of me, the better 'tis' (5.1.193). Clearly, Dog has no desire to conform to canine norms, eat wholesome food, enter domestic service, or become a loving pet. His only objective is to leave mischief and nuisance in his wake and feed his desire for 'corrupted greatness' (5.1.199). As a result of his refusal to embrace wholesome domesticity, Cuddy orders Dog to leave Edmonton like the masterless pest that he is. The alteration of Cuddy's behaviour towards Dog is key within this final encounter as it signals that Cuddy no longer identifies Dog as his 'puppison' friend who eats his scraps, but rather a masterless nuisance who feeds on infectious sources that he must now expel from Edmonton (4.1.255).

Dog does not want to be shut-up in a household and domesticated at the hands of a master like Cuddy or a dame like Sawyer. As Ewich describes, he seems to prefer being 'driven away' by the communities he visits rather than being 'diligent[ly] shut [...] up' and kept 'at home' by them.⁹⁹ As a volitional stray dog, then, who moves from place to place and deliberately declines domesticity, Dog's autonomous movements through the landscape of the play would have made him a fearsome creature to early modern audiences who were accustomed to the strict policing of such disorderly bodies and their corrupting movements and behaviours off-stage. Furthermore, it is Dog's unfettered freedom that facilitates his arguably most objectional canine behaviour, to which I will now turn: barking. As I will suggest, the perceived antisocial canine noises that captured the attentions of plague policy

⁹⁹ Ewich, p. 42.

makers and plague treatise writers also seems to have equally captured the imaginations of *Witch of Edmonton*'s dramatists, who use these noises and their enduring connections with plague to further enhance Dog's unsettling stage presence.

'The voice of a dog?': Dog's plague-engendering bark

When the real Elizabeth Sawyer is asked why it was that the 'devil' sometimes spoke and at other times 'barke[d]', she answers:

It is thus; when the Devil spake to me, then he was ready to do for me, what I would bid him to do: and when he came barking to me he then had done the mischief that I did bid him to do for me.¹⁰⁰

Sawyer's confession is significant as it directly aligns the canine bark with malevolent acts; a notion to which, as will be discussed, Dekker, Ford and Rowley's play is highly sensitive. The popular comedy *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* not only shares its location with the collaborative tragedy, but it too features vocal dogs that signal malevolence within the town using their voices. For instance, when a 'spirit' visits Peter Fabell in the opening of the play, Fabell states 'I know thee well, I hear the watchful dogs, / With hollow howling tell of thy approach'.¹⁰¹ Even in plays where the supernatural does not occupy a dominant theme within the narrative, such as *Much Ado About Nothing*, canine noise is still equated with notions of 'mischief':

An he had been a dog that should have howled thus, they would have hanged him; and I pray God his bad voice bode no mischief. I had as lief have heard the night-raven, come what plague could have come after it (2.3.81-5).

¹⁰⁰ Goodcole, C3^v.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous, *The Merry Devil of Edmonton As it hath been sundry times acted, by his Majesties Servants, at the Globe, on the bank-side* (London, 1608), STC 7493, A3^v.

Whilst Benedick states that it is the Dog's 'voice' – in this case 'howl[ing]' – that 'bode[s] trouble', it is 'the night raven' whose song heralds 'plague'. Likewise, in *Othello*, it is the same 'boding' raven that hovers 'o'er the infectious house' (4.1.21-2). However, the fact that Benedick's mind skips almost instantly from the aural presence of dogs to plague speaks to the clear and pervasive contemporary links that exist between the two. Moreover, just as Shakespeare tells us that dogs might be 'hanged' for howling, Middleton reveals that dogs are also 'killed [...] for barking', which, as I will now discuss, was common practice during outbreaks of plague (P4.145).¹⁰²

Bruce R. Smith suggests that 'barking dogs punctuated space and time' in early modern England.¹⁰³ The canine compulsion to bark at unsavoury things or people was also well known in contemporary culture. In *Richard III*, for example, the then Duke of Gloucester laments how he is 'so lamely and unfashionable / That dogs bark at me as I halt by them' (1.1.22-3). Furthermore, in *Witch of Edmonton*, Dog taunts Sawyer by saying that she is so 'ripe to fall into hell, that no note of my Kennel will so much as bark at him that hangs thee' (5.1.60-2). As Jenner notes, the early modern dogs that made themselves 'a nuisance were also treated as the likeliest to spread the infection' and, as a result, noisy dogs were singled out for death just as often as the strays.¹⁰⁴ The earliest explicit reference that locates barking dogs specifically within plague measures occurs in the 1430s during 'the infectious times of sickness' when, as Cockayne notes, 'controls were tightened [...] for the canines who "in the night times bark and fight in the streets to the nuisance of the people in their beds"'.¹⁰⁵ This

¹⁰² Thomas Middleton, 'The Phoenix' ed. by Lawrence Danson and Ivo Kamps in *Thomas Middleton: the Collected Works* eds. Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 91-127 (p. 101).

¹⁰³ Smith, *Acoustic World*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ Jenner, pp. 52-3.

¹⁰⁵ Cockayne, p. 48.

notion is echoed in the London plague orders of 1583, which state that ‘none shall keep dog or bitch unled nor within howling or disturbing of their neighbours’.¹⁰⁶ These vocal dogs are clearly understood as ambulatory forms of ‘noise pollution’ that harassed their plague time communities.¹⁰⁷ This connection is more clearly delineated in Autumn’s speech in *Summer’s Last Will*, where Orion’s dogs are said to:

[...] bark at night against the Moon,
For fetching in fresh tides to cleanse the streets [...]
They are deaths messengers unto all those,
That sicken while their malice beareth sway.¹⁰⁸

Dogs whose barking could not be controlled and who ‘disturbed’ their neighbours, particularly at ‘night’, were thus understood as major sources of both disorder and disease within the urban plague time soundscape and were repeatedly singled out for eradication in plague measures.¹⁰⁹

Both Christopher D. Foley and Matthew Thiele have identified Jonson’s *Epicoene* as a play that responds to the pervasiveness of the soundscape generated by plague and the subsequent anxieties that its distinct sound marks provoked.¹¹⁰ For example, the noise-averse Morose not only has to contend with the ‘perpetuity of ringing’ from the bells ‘by reason of the sickness’, but he is also forced to listen to the sounds of the bearward and ‘the dogs of some four parishes [...] under [his] window’ (1.1.167).¹¹¹ It is this canine cacophony that

¹⁰⁶ Mullett, pp. 380-83.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher D. Foley, ‘Jonson’s Acoustic-Oriented Dramaturgy in the First Folio Playtexts of *Epicoene* and *The Alchemist*’, *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 25.1 (2018), 81-105 (p. 84).

¹⁰⁸ Nashe, *Summer’s Last Will*, D4^r.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Some ancients thought that dogs were sacrificed to her [Hecate] and that she even was an eater of dogs [...] because their barking disturbed the air at night’, Anthony Dimatteo, ‘Antiqui Dicunt: Classical Aspects of the Witches in *Macbeth*’, *Notes and Queries*, 41.1 (1994), pp. 44-7 (p. 44).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.; Matthew Thiele, ‘The Sociability Cure: Expelling the Plague in Ben Jonson’s *Epicoene*’, *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 19.2 (2018), 240–60.

¹¹¹ Ben Jonson, *Epicoene or The Silent Woman* ed. by Roger Victor Holdsworth, New Mermaids (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 19.

provokes Morose to ‘send’ the bearward ‘crying away’ with a ‘bleeding’ head (1.1.170).

Thiele suggests that given the rhetoric surrounding canines as ‘filthy beasts’ that should be physically avoided during outbreaks of plague, Morose’s ‘reaction to the bear-ward’ and the proximity of his dogs ‘might not seem so excessive’.¹¹² Whilst the physical and highly-mobile presence of urban dogs as potential sources of infection was widely understood within the context of plague as this chapter has argued, it is undoubtedly the creature’s aural presence that seems to be the main concern for Morose here rather than the creatures’ pestiferous physical forms. And although Morose seems to be perturbed by even the slightest noise that he encounters in plague time London, is it possible – especially given the aforementioned plague measures regarding barking – that his reaction to the doggy din might be in some ways warranted?

Such an answer may lie in the period’s nascent ideas surrounding sound and hearing itself, and, more specifically, how sound was perceived to enter the ears. Early modern ears were extremely vulnerable organs. Katherine Hunt notes that in contemporary hearing manuals, ‘ears are commonly likened to doors, porches, and entryways: portals to the interior’.¹¹³ Just like the vulnerable portals of the household during plague time that we encountered in Chapter Three, whilst it was necessary for the ears to remain open to let useful sounds in, this also permitted more unsavoury sounds to enter alongside them. Hunt notes that the ear was increasingly becoming ‘something interstitial, mediating between the inner and outer self’.¹¹⁴ Free access to the ears, then, meant free access to the rest of the body; as Old Hamlet says, the ‘porches’ of the ‘ears’ lead straight to the body’s ‘natural gates and alleys’ (1.5.63-7). One of

¹¹² Thiele, pp. 248-9.

¹¹³ Katherine Hunt, ‘Hearing at the surface in *The Comedy of Errors*’, in *Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture*, ed. by Simon Smith, Arden Shakespeare Intersections (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 178-99 (p. 185).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

the main anxieties surrounding sonic penetration of the ear was its ability to, as Tanya Pollard suggests, ‘pry open the other senses’.¹¹⁵ The theatre, with its outpouring of words, music, and sound effects provided the ideal environment for the ears –and the other senses the ears were thought to unlock – to be breached. As Stephen Gosson writes, it was through the ‘privy entries of the ear’ that sounds could ‘slip down into the heart, and with gunshot of affection gall the mind, where reason and virtue should rule the roost’.¹¹⁶

However, this notion that unsavoury words and sounds could enter and ‘infect [...] ear[s]’ was not just a theatrical phenomenon (*H.4.5.88*). In his *Haven of Health*, Thomas Cogan states that even the very ‘noise’ and ‘rumours’ that ‘come’ from an infected place should be considered dangerous during outbreaks of plague: ‘And so to be separated that high mountains be between, whereby the venomous vapours may be letted, lest by blowing of the wind, or dilatation of the air, they approach unto us’.¹¹⁷ Cogan’s observations and the contemporary anxieties outlined above regarding the precariously open ear suggests, then, that ‘pestilence’ can just as easily be ‘pour[ed]’ into unwitting ears offstage as on it (*O2.3.347*). With this in mind, Morose’s response at hearing the ‘multitude’ of noisy dogs at his window during the ongoing plague outbreak that frames Jonson’s play begins to read as not so curious or overstated as it first might seem, and it is in fact consistent with established medical understandings of plague and the canine voice’s role in its transmission.

¹¹⁵ Tanya Pollard, ‘The Classical tradition’, in *Shakespeare/Sense: Contemporary Readings in Sensory Culture*, ed. by Simon Smith, Arden Shakespeare Intersections (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 62–81 (p. 69).

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 73; Stephen Gosson, *The school of abuse containing a pleasant invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters, and such like caterpillars of a commonwealth* (London, 1579), STC 12097.5, B6^v.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Cogan, *The haven of health chiefly gathered for the comfort of students, and consequently of all those that have a care of their health* (London, 1584), STC 5478, p. 299.

Moreover, Morose is not the only early modern Londoner to experience such aural anguish at the mouths of dogs, nor is he the only one to attempt to mitigate their influence. Samuel Pepys writes that during the plague outbreak of 1665, a barking dog prevented him from sleeping, causing ‘him to waste the following day taking physic and stopping indoors’.¹¹⁸ The question remains, did Pepys take ‘physic’ and stay at home because he was simply tired from lack of sleep the night before, or was it because he was attempting to mitigate his exposure to injurious canine sounds, as Cogan’s cautions and the plague orders suggest? Furthermore, an extant remedy or ‘secret’ from the period promises ‘To make that no Dog shall bark at you’, and advises the reader to: ‘take a black dog and pluck out one of his eyes and hold it in your left hand, and by reason of the savour and smell thereof the Dogs will not bark at you’.¹¹⁹ Despite the manifest animal cruelty and the undoubtedly messy process of preparing the remedy, its application is reminiscent of the nose-gay or pomander, which was also hand-held and that (far more agreeably) aimed to ward off noisome odours with more fragrant ones during plague outbreaks.¹²⁰ The fact that such a specific preventative exists once again demonstrates the perceived adverse effects of hearing the specific sound of a barking dog.

Thus, the contaminating influence of the wandering, barking canine is prominent across both the plague time urban landscape and its soundscape. But what does this mean for *Witch of Edmonton*’s Dog, a dog that, in the eyes and ears of his contemporaries, is capable of spreading infection not only through touch but through sound? As expected in a play that so prominently features a dog, there is a lot of barking in the text. Not all of these canine-related

¹¹⁸ Cockayne, p. 48.

¹¹⁹ William Ward, *The second part of the Secrets of Master Alexis of Piemonte by him collected out of diverse excellent authors* (London, 1560), STC 300, C1^r.

¹²⁰ See Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), p. 110.

sounds emanate from Dog, however. Sawyer repeatedly describes her neighbours as ‘base curs’ that ceaselessly ‘bite’ her and ‘bark’ at her (4.1.92). It is clear that this canine sound is of dramatic significance within the play, as long before Dog’s bark is heard the sound is planted in the audiences’ minds via the canine zoomorphism of Sawyer’s neighbours. As Laura Jayne Wright notes, ‘sound was a fundamental part of the theatrical experience and must therefore be heard attentively, as a vital unit of meaning on the early modern stage’.¹²¹ Following Wright’s lead, this final section examines Dog’s onstage aural presence to determine how and to what extent Dekker, Ford, and Rowley might be drawing on the animal’s noise and its plague time resonance offstage in their representation of Dog. More importantly, I will also consider what hearing these sounds might have meant to the play’s first audiences in both the context of the play and Dog’s contaminating role within it.

Dog himself adeptly switches between ‘bow-ings’ and ‘*barking*’ throughout the play (4.1.290). Dog’s ‘bow-wow[s]’, which are first heard in Act Four, occur in the presence of Sawyer and the townspeople (4.1.171). In stark contrast to the villager’s ‘barking’ at her, Sawyer expresses the joy she feels when she hears Dog ‘bow-wow’: ‘I could dance out of my skin to hear thee’ (4.1.185). Dog’s last ‘bow-wow’ is also to Sawyer, which he uses to substantiate his claim that he is indeed the same dog despite his new ‘white’ coat (5.1.41). Despite their sinister origins, Dog’s onomatopoeic ‘bow-wow[s]’ are meant to be comedic rather than concerning, and primarily serve to draw attention to the fact that Dog is being played by a devil actor through a human actor. This notion is reinforced by the many metatheatrical references to Dog’s ‘voice’, something which Cuddy attempts to replicate, albeit amusingly, in order to protectively conceal Dog’s presence in Act Four:

¹²¹ Laura Jayne Wright, *Sound Effects: Hearing the Early Modern Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), p. 2.

DOG Bow-wow-wow-wow!
 ALL COUNTRYMEN Oh, the dog's here, the dog's here!

OLD BANKS It was the voice of a dog.
 CUDDY The voice of a dog? If that voice were a dog's, what voice had my mother? So am I a dog! Bow-wow-wow! It was I that barked so, father, to make cox combs of these clowns (4.1.277-83).

A similarly onomatopoetic comedy-canine moment occurs in Middleton's *Masque of Heroes*. Doctor Almanac summons 'the churlish maund'ring rogue' Dog Day onto the stage, upon which Dog Day delivers an emphatic 'Wow!' at his master.¹²² Audiences are also treated to a series of 'bow-wows' from offstage during Ariel's song, 'Come Unto These Yellow Sands', in Act One, Scene Two of *The Tempest*.

The more theatrically ambiguous 'voice' that is associated with Dog, however, is his 'bark'. As opposed to the simulated canine-sounding words that are embedded into the actor's lines, Dog's 'bark' is always, rather unusually, printed as an external stage direction, which is sometimes contained in square brackets or simply italicised. Importantly, these stage directions are present in the only surviving text of the play, a Quarto text printed in 1658.¹²³ Present in the text from Act three through to Act Five, these stage directions offer a fascinating distinction between Dog's two canine voices. The first time that this stage direction appears is when Dog is alerting Cuddy to a 'spirit' (3.1.93):

DOG Ha, ha, ha, ha!
 CUDDY How now? Who's that laughs at me? Hist to him. [*Dog barks*] Peace, peace. Thou didst but they kind neither. 'Twas my own fault.
 DOG Take heed how thou trustest the devil another time.
 CUDDY How now? Who's that speaks? I hope you have not your reading

¹²² Thomas Middleton, 'Masque of Heroes', or 'The Inner-Temple Masque', ed. by Jerzy Limon, in *Middleton Works*, ed. by Taylor, Lavagnino, and Jowett, pp. 1320-30 (p. 1328).

¹²³ William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton a known true story / composed into a tragi-comedy by divers well-esteemed poets* (London, 1658), Wing R2097.

DOG tongue about you?
 Yes, I can speak (3.1.118-25).

Incidentally, the Quarto stage direction features an inconsistency on this line which reads as ‘[Dog braks]’.¹²⁴

Cuddy is the only person to hear Dog’s more realistic ‘bark’ in the play. Dog even alludes to the fact that he has saved his most authentically doggy sound for Cuddy when he states that ‘I used thee doggedly not devilishly’ (5.1.118). Even as Cuddy chases him offstage at the end of Act Five, Scene One, the stage directions state that Dog exits ‘*barking*’, a moment that I will return to in due course (5.1.219).¹²⁵ Working on the basis that it isn’t just a textual inconsistency and that there is intention behind the dramatists’ differentiation of the two canine sounds, what might, then, be happening here? Might these stage directions be gesturing to the presence of an external sound working independently of the actor playing Dog? A real dog, perhaps? Although the evidence for animals appearing on the early modern stage is ‘scanty’ at best, Höfele argues that ‘as dogs and bears performed the principal parts in the baiting ring, it seems plausible that they would have put in cameo appearances in the neighbouring venue’, especially given the commercial and cultural links between the two urban sites as discussed.¹²⁶ Whilst dog roles such as Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* could have easily been played by real canines, *Witch of Edmonton*’s Dog calls for something entirely different. As Munro notes:

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

¹²⁶ Höfele, p. 30.

It is virtually impossible [...] that Dog was played by anything other than a professional actor. He is required to stand on his back legs, perform complex physical manoeuvres and talk extensively to other characters, feats that would have been beyond a real dog.¹²⁷

Moreover, Michael Dobson suggests that it is likely that the dogs were ‘borrowed or rented for use on stage’ from the bear baiting pits, meaning that these dogs were ‘highly accomplished [...] trained killers’, not dogs trained to perform theatrical ‘dog tricks’ and definitely not ones you could place on a public stage unleashed.¹²⁸

What might be possible, however, is to deliver Dog’s ‘barks’, which are clearly asking for more than a perfunctory ‘bow-wow’, using a real canine voice from either on or offstage. And, whilst baiting dogs might not have been trained to perform ‘dog tricks’, they could, at the very least, bark in response to a stimulus, a skill they had likely honed in the ring. If Höfele’s assertions are correct and baiting dogs were hired in the public theatres, then the sound effect they could provide would have likely been just as ‘vast, huge [...] ugly’, ‘terrible’, and ‘frightful’ as the dogs themselves and would have greatly augmented Dog’s hostile presence on stage.¹²⁹ Furthermore, a genuine externally delivered bark from somewhere in close proximity to the stage would certainly make this final exchange between Dog and Cuddy all the more darkly comic, especially as Cuddy seems to be making a clear distinction between what he hears as Dog’s speech and his bark:

CUDDY: I know the villain loves me, [*barks*] No! Art thou there? That’s Tom’s voice, but ‘tis not he; this is a dog of another hair, this! Bark and speak not to me? (5.1.93-6).

¹²⁷ Munro, p. 59; For more examples of Elizabethan/Jacobean stage dogs see: Michael Dobson, “‘A Dog at all things’: The Transformation of the Onstage canine, 1550-1850”, *Performance Research*, 5.2 (2000), 116-24 (pp. 116-7).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117-8.

¹²⁹ Höfele, p. 30.

Importantly, even when his true devilish nature has been revealed and he is chased off stage by Cuddy at the end of the play, Dog still retains his ‘bark’ (5.1.211). He could easily switch to his more disingenuous devil-dog act, but he does not. Retaining his more authentic canine voice for this moment is entirely deliberate, especially if a sound effect of a real dog is used on or proximate to the stage. By making a noisy exit, Dog is relishing his descent into the wayward threat that his London audiences have known him to be throughout the play; a threat equipped with a sound that the dramatists know not only disturbs and ‘unsettle[s]’ but also has the potential to infect any ear that hears it.¹³⁰ Wright’s definition of ‘sound effect’ is most apt here, as they note that:

‘Sound effect’ is a useful term not only because it foregrounds sound itself, rather than speech or music, but because it allows for the possibility of sound’s effects: it’s capacity to persuade, to channel memory, to ‘affect’.¹³¹

Given Dog’s overwhelming pestilential associations both within the world of the play and beyond the playhouse, then, hearing Dog on stage – particularly his bark – would have certainly channelled plague time memories for the play’s first audiences. Furthermore, having also heard that plague was on the continent in 1621, a London audience might have felt more than a little uneasy about the noisy approach of an infected dog heading across the ‘water’ and straight for their city (5.1.219).

Conclusion

In this zoocentric examination of *The Witch of Edmonton*’s Dog that has attended to his species’ deep-rooted associations with early modern plague, Dog’s contaminating potential

¹³⁰ Wright, p. 2.

¹³¹ Ibid.

has been unleashed. Independent of its diabolical origins, Dog's stray animal form adds another crucial narrative of contagion that, as Johnston states, Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's play 'hinges' on.¹³² Dog's plague-susceptible body and its disorderly and disease-proliferating behaviours meant that, like humans, the animal was subject to stringent public health measures during outbreaks of the disease. However, unlike humans, dogs also found themselves at the mercy of widespread and relentless extermination efforts that saw hundreds of their kind put to death in large cities like London. It was these same measures that also perpetuated the distrust and distaste surrounding the stray urban canine that led to their unpleasant portrayal in public discourse during the period.

The Witch of Edmonton demonstrates the importance of remaining alert to the pathogenic dangers that lurk in early modern plague time communities and – like the body and the home – the streets required members of the community to remain alert to potential assailants at all times. Cuddy, who not only exposes but eradicates the source of infection from his community, only does so after Dog has been allowed to infect and kill far too many. Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's London audiences, on the other hand, were highly alert to the contagious capacity of Dog and would have interpreted him as the public health hazard he was medically and culturally understood to be. These frameworks are mostly imperceptible to audiences today, but for an urban Jacobean audience, what Dog did, where and how he moved, who he touched, what he ate, and how he sounded were all underpinned by anxieties of plague. Dog would have undoubtedly been the scariest thing on stage in a performance of *The Witch of Edmonton* and, as this chapter has demonstrated, this had very little to do with the devil.

¹³² Johnston, p. 64.

Conclusion

‘And England’s free, the plague is gone’ (11.126).¹

When Dekker and Middleton wrote these words in 1604, no one knew exactly when or where plague would return or how many would perish at its hands when it did. The only thing they could be certain of was its return. It is hard to imagine the sufferings wrought by early modern plague. Yet, as this thesis has demonstrated, early moderns not only had to contend with the continued reappearance of the disease itself, but they also had to endure the recurrent implementation of its preventative measures. And whilst there were those who did not contract plague, countless saw their world change considerably as a result of these measures. This cross-disciplinary study has sought to reveal how early modern drama offers a unique window into the embodied experience of plague prevention in early modern England. Reading these plague time plays alongside primary documents such as official plague orders and proclamations, and contemporary discourse such as medical treatises, conduct books, and plague pamphlets, has allowed me to trace the intricate socio-spatial changes that occurred in both the material and conceptual spaces of the early modern Body, the Home, and the Street upon the implementation of plague policy and the disease’s prescribed prophylactic practices.

The plays that make up this study demonstrate a range of engagement with these spaces and their plague time transformations. *The Woman’s Prize* and *Measure for Measure* respond to and represent plague prevention practices more explicitly, whereas the measures

¹ Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, ‘News from Gravesend: Sent to Nobody’, ed. by Gary Taylor, annotated and introduced by Robert Maslen, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor, John Lavagnino, and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 128-48 (p. 147).

hide in plain sight in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. Furthermore, whilst not directly referencing the measures themselves, *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Titus Andronicus* are still clearly drawing on the spatial paradigms and the surrounding discourse of plague time policies and practices within their narratives, and it is my hope that my approach to these plays in particular might lead to the discovery of more latent plague time experiences in more play-texts.

I also posed two important questions at the start of this thesis. Firstly, in what ways might playwrights be drawing on and utilising the discourse surrounding plague time policies and practices? Secondly, how might these plays have been received and understood by their audiences in the light of such measures and their medical frameworks? This thesis has revealed that playwrights reimagined plague time space with a similar dynamism as plague policy makers who were constantly rethinking and rewriting early modern space offstage in response to the disease. Early modern dramatists exploited their audience's familiarity with plague time practice and policy and utilized the cultural immediacy of these measures to organise and shape their narratives. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare draws on contemporary notions surrounding the vulnerability of the plague time body and the need to monitor and moderate this space by engaging with the advice from plague time health regimens and plague treatises. Likewise, in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Heywood capitalises on the vulnerable boundaries of the home, and the onus plague time advice placed on householders to cleanse and organise these homes, to explore the domestic consequences of female adultery. Moreover, in *The Woman's Prize*, Fletcher cleverly implicates the heated discourse surrounding plague time shutting-up and the divisive role of women in plague prevention systems in Maria's stand against Petruchio, which challenged the patriarchal systems onstage just as forcibly as they did beyond the playhouse. And whilst I had expected

to see some gender dynamics at play in my examinations of plague prevention policy and practice, particularly in the space of the early modern home, I had not quite anticipated the extent to which plague time prophylaxes intersected with contemporary gender debates and gender discourse, a dynamic which certainly invites further consideration.

Towards the reception of these plays – when read alongside plague policy, the many unburied bodies and disrupted burial sites in *Titus Andronicus* demonstrate how and to what extent the wider cultural imagination was seized by the dislocation of typical burial and bereavement practices during plague time, and reveals how these graves might have spoken to the particular horrors experienced by the play's first audiences during outbreaks. Likewise, *Measure for Measure* complicates the traditional narrative of urban plague and public health by drawing on the debates surrounding the ostensible failure of plague policy to protect its most vulnerable citizens that were emerging off stage in 1603-4. Even in *The Witch of Edmonton* – a play that does not emerge directly from an outbreak – we are invited to see how this play and its characters might have been received differently by audiences in 1621, who were now accustomed to living under disruptive and anxiety-inducing plague measures. Dog would have been interpreted as a far more dangerous influence in the play than he might otherwise appear to a modern audience owing to his species entrenched links with plague and plague prevention culture. My approach to Dog, particularly the focus on the original material performance conditions of his characterisation and staging, serves as a model for where this research might go next, and how methods such as practice as research might allow us to test out some of the points made in this thesis that might deepen our understanding of plague measures and their reception even further. For instance, how might the sound of a dog on stage actually work in practice? How might sensory plague time prophylaxes fill the stage? And how does plague prevention practice and its medical frameworks galvanise space

between individuals and audiences in the playhouse? Such an approach might allow us to see and engage with certain elements of plague prevention on stage that might not otherwise be quite so clearly defined or visible on the page.

This thesis, then, builds on the connections between plague and space that have been forged in plague literature studies, and speaks to the emerging social history scholarship that is examining plague prevention as a significant phenomenon encountered alongside the horrors of the disease. In contextualising these plays within their plague time contexts, not only have new and culturally valuable critical readings of the plays themselves emerged, but the plague time spaces they engage with and represent have been brought into much sharper focus through this historical phenomenological study, providing what are vivid socio-spatial encounters with the plague time experience. Understanding how we respond to disease and the social-cultural impact of those responses on the spaces we inhabit is more important than ever as we continue to recover from our own pandemic encounters and prepare for those that are to come.

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