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“Fare-ill, England!”: Plague and Colonization in the Early Modern English Atlantic

Plague never crossed the early modern Atlantic, but the fear of it certainly did. Speaking before a congregation of puritan peers on November 5, 1626, Thomas Hooker delivered an eloquent Thanksgiving sermon that praised God’s mercy for having spared England from the violence and suffering that spread across continental Europe and the deadly outbreak of plague that killed at least one-fifth of London’s population the previous year. Plague, famine, and war ravaged England in the 1620s, conjuring popular rumors of the coming apocalypse. In response, Hooker and his zealous audience looked abroad, envisioning colonization as an escape from the many *plagues* of their English nation. Invoking the resonant lessons of Jeremiah 14:9, Hooker ends on a serious yet light-hearted note. “Oh, therefore my brethren, lay hold on God... stop him at the town’s end, and let him not depart!” he continued, “he is not yet gone! Suffer him not to go far, suffer him not to say farewell, or rather fare-ill, England!”¹

This paper seeks to uncover how plague featured into the minds of England’s early puritan colonizers. In examining contemporary reactions to the plague epidemic of 1625 that erased approximately one-fifth of London’s population, it argues that puritan reformers increasingly recognized the social problem of plague as cause for national religious reform. Plague was seen as a disease of the poor, and many blamed London’s deadly recurrences of

¹ Thomas Hooker, *The Danger of Desertion* (London, 1631) in *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology*, eds. Alan Heimert and Andrew Delbanco (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 62-69; 69.

plague on the city's swelling number of poor laborers, vagabonds, and criminals. The association between plague and poverty was further strengthened by social responses of flight and quarantine in which the elites fled the city while the sick and poor were shut up in their homes. Within the context of the 1620s, a period of economic, political, and religious turmoil in England, many contemporaries interpreted the plague of 1625 as a sign of the end of times. While many puritan reformers focused their efforts on domestic reform, increasing numbers proceeded to interpret New World colonization as a solution to England's turmoil. From their perspective, God was leaving England, and it was time for them to leave as well.

Hooker's sermon touches on several entangled forces that initiated English expansion into the Atlantic world. While Atlantic historians are familiar with the causes of the puritan-led Great Migration and Hooker's role in it, however, the meaning of plague and Hooker's use of it as a metaphor for God's wrath has largely been left out. This is due, partially at least, to the incongruity of plague and Atlantic history. During the early modern period, maritime transportation was simply too slow for plague to survive trips across the Atlantic and establish footholds in the historically-susceptible Native American populations in the Americas and the Caribbean. In other words, unlike measles or smallpox, plague was one of the few elements of the Old World that European colonizers could not bring with them. Fear of the disease and its religious meaning, however, proved to be far more portable. In some ways, the *impact of plague* in Tudor and Stuart England can be traced around the Atlantic world as national responses to plague contributed to an emerging imperial ethos.

Plague and colonization have a deeper relationship than scholars have uncovered. Through weaving together the disparate historiographies of plague, social reform, and colonization, this paper reveals the conspicuous places where these conversations intersect in

ways that highlight plague's lasting significance beyond the deaths it caused. Plague was a social problem with a profound impact on English society that has yet to be fully considered. In breaking from the current trend among plague historians that have focused on refining the complex relationship of plague through combining history with science, I return to the social focus of earlier plague historians that have since dropped out of focus.² In doing so, this paper builds off of the impressive foundation laid by Paul Slack's *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (1985).³ Slack's monograph remains the leading and most thorough study of plague in early modern England and it is this seminal work that has paved the way for others to explore plague's social impact and legacies.

In addition, the arguments made here draw significantly from Ann Carmichael's *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (1986) and Nükhet Varlik's *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World* (2015).⁴ Carmichael's study on the social impact of plague's endemic presence in fifteenth-century Florence, particularly in exacerbating class conflict, yields important parallels to England reactions to plague in the seventeenth century. Similar observations can be drawn from Varlik's study of the relationship between plague and the state. As Varlik notes, diseases such as plague followed the same networks that transport

² This is to say that I am interested in different research questions than those that have dominated the field of plague history since the advent of computer science, microbiology, and aDNA which have emerged in part as an authoritative response to the persistence of 'plague deniers'. On the current state of plague history, its scientific turn, and the need for a multidisciplinary approach, see Monica H. Green, "Editors Introduction to *Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death*," in *Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death [Pandemic]*, ed. Monica Green, *The Medieval Globe*, Book 1 (2014), 9-26. For a problematic, but important, rebuttal to this approach, see Lukas Engelmann, "The Burial Pit as Bio-historical Archive," in *Histories of Post-Mortem Contagion: Infectious Corpses and Contested Burials*, eds. Christos Lynteris and Nicholas H. A. Evans (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 189-211.

³ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985). An older but important work is F. P. Wilson's *The Plague in Shakespeare's London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

⁴ Ann G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Nükhet Varlik, *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: The Ottoman Experience, 1347-1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

goods, people, and ideas. If we conceive of disease as its own functioning network in relation to empire, then an empire's metropolis is also the "capital of plague," just as Istanbul was for the early modern Ottoman Empire.⁵ This framework can easily be applied to London which functioned as the administrative center of the British Isles that also doubled as a gateway to the commercial and information networks of continental Europe. Together these works on plague history offer useful frameworks to expand the social history of plague in early modern England that overlaps the history of social reform and colonization traditionally disconnected from plague.

Identifying plague as a social problem, as opposed to a strictly epidemiological one, allows historians to explore the overlap of plague history with broader trajectories in social history. The history of increasing social disorder in seventeenth-century London has received ample attention from historians over the last several decades. The collapse of England during the English/British Civil Wars (1642-1651) in particular has caused historians to examine the preceding decades with an eye for causes of social discord.⁶ The victorious emergence of a distinctly puritan faction led by Oliver Cromwell, moreover, has similarly forced these historians to dig deep into the origins of England's religious radicalism that directly or otherwise formed the foundation of Cromwell's 'Republic of Saints.' Simultaneously, historians of Atlantic colonization have explored the same history looking for early forces that propelled English puritans to establish sister colonies in 1630, Providence Island and Massachusetts Bay, and Thomas Hooker's New Haven in 1638. The works of Karen Kupperman and John Donoghue, in

⁵ Varlik, *Plague and Empire*, 6.

⁶ See for instance Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, reprint edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1992); Michael Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008); and Jonathan Scott, *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

particular, demonstrate the centrality of early social reform to developing puritan schemes of colonization.⁷ Focusing on puritan responses to the plague of 1625 opens a window of examination into how plague featured into the existing dialogue of social reform and the developing dialogue of colonization.

Analyzing social reactions to plague through the lens of religious/religiously-driven reform is critical. The European worldview of plague in the early modern era was deeply religious and defined by a binary of *corruption* and *order* worth unpacking further here. In the strictest sense, contemporaries interpreted plague through Galenic and Hippocratic theories of medicine and health that stressed corruption as the source of contagion.⁸ Externally, diseases were thought to have thrived in corrupted environments detectable through agents of miasma such as bad smells, gaseous vapors or smoke, or other unseen forces released into the air through either natural causes or the hand of God directly. Internally, the corruption of humors made the body susceptible to infection. As a result, preventative measures were designed with the intent of restoring order either to the environment or the body itself that ranged diversely from cleaning city streets to specific herbal remedies.⁹ This concept of corruption and order formed the foundation of English responses to plague in this period, but importantly, it did so as the framework of a broader mindset that explained social change on a wider scale. In the broadest

⁷ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630-1641* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁸ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 24. For an overview of medicinal theory and its foundational influence on public health that carried over into the early modern period, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). For contemporary usage of Galen, see Thomas Thayer, *An Excellent and Best Approved Treatise of the Plague* (London, 1625).

⁹ For a comprehensive discussion of herbal remedies and other plague prevention measures, see Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning the Plague and the Pox* (London, 1652). See also Anonymous, *Physicall Directions in Time of Plague* (Oxford, 1644); Stephen Bradwell, *Physick for the Sicknesse, Commonly Called the Plague* (London, 1636); Anonymous, *Especiall Observations and Approved Physicall Rules* (London, 1625); Nicholas Bownd, *Medicines for the Plague* (London, 1604).

sense, corruption took a variety of forms that contributed to social calamity that required responses from the state to restore order. The language of ‘order’ is seen directly in plague legislation as evidenced by the Elizabethan plague Orders of 1578, but order pertained to more than plague itself.¹⁰ During the tumultuous years of the 1620s, puritan observers blamed England’s troubles on London’s increasing poverty, vagrancy, and above all, sinfulness. Corruption and order defined the language of reform in ways that allowed for plague’s seamless inclusion into England’s social tapestry. Its implicit importance has escaped the eyes of seventeenth-century historians that have traditionally underemphasized the disease’s significance, resulting in the relegation of plague history into a space disconnected from the mainstream narratives.¹¹

Finally, a few notes on plague, how it spreads, and the science behind it are worth laying out. Bubonic plague is caused by the bacteria bacillus, *Yersinia pestis* (*Y.pestis*).¹² It differs from other deadly diseases of the early modern world such as influenza, measles, or smallpox in that it

¹⁰ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 303.

¹¹ The one notable exception to this is Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), but no one epidemic is discussed in great detail. Many of the major works on England’s social transformations during the early modern period hardly mention plague at all: Alec Ryrie, *The Age of Reformation: The Tudor and Stewart Realms, 1485-1603* (New York: Routledge, 2013); John Schofield, *Cromwell to Cromwell: Reformation to Civil War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009); Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603-1714* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996); J. P. Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640* (New York: Longman, 1986). This may also be explained to some degree by the assumption that plague naturally declined in virulence or influence during the seventeenth century. See for example: “both plague and malaria had about disappeared [in north-western Europe] by the close of the seventeenth century,” William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor Press, 1976), 231. The conceptualization of plague as a hyperbolic arch that peaked in the Late-Medieval period and ‘tapered off’ in the seventeenth century is a device historians appear ready to do away with: Nils Stenseth, et al., “Plague: Past, Present, and Future,” *PLoS Medicine* 5, 1 (2008), e3: 1-5.

¹² On how contemporaries identified plague, see Anonymous, *Concerning the Constitution of an Aire Infected and How to Know Plague-sores and Carbuncles* (Oxford, 1644). It is worth considering that the records are rarely explicit on whether or not the word plague even refers to bubonic plague as opposed to other diseases. This is an important distinction that historians will have to continue to clarify going forward. See Ann G. Carmichael, “Universal and Particular: The Language of Plague, 1348–1500,” *Medical History, Supplement*, vol. 27 (Feb. 2008), 17-52. A good example of how unclear contemporaries could be when referencing plague is Thomas Fuller, *A Sermon Intended for Paul’s Crosse* (London, 1626).

could not be transmitted from person to person. Rather, plague is a zoonosis (animal-to-human disease) and only infects humans accidentally, most often when the pathogen runs out of rodent hosts.¹³ Contemporaries did not know this, but modern innovations in computer science, bacteriology, microbiology, and bioarchaeology have greatly enhanced the historian's toolkit for examining the social effects of plague in the distant past.¹⁴ Arguably the most important outcome of this recent transformation in scholarship is the developing emphasis from historians to conceive of *plague ecologies* that operated in tandem with, but not dependent on, human networks.¹⁵ In other words, plague did not come and go between dormant and active phases between the time of the Black Death and the Marseilles epidemic of 1722. Rather, scholars have now begun to emphasize that plague persisted in the unseen zoological networks driven by rodents and fleas.

Understanding plague epidemics requires a deeper examination of how human populations interacted with these networks and where they intersected. As Varlik notes, "Epidemic waves were separated by interepidemic phases of nonactivity (or low-level activity) among the human populations, depending on a variety of factors, including climate, the availability of a replenished pool of human and rodent hosts that lacked immunity, and flea-to-host ratios."¹⁶ Rethinking the spread of plague in early modern London in these terms is crucial. Until more studies are undertaken, we can only hypothesize, but it is not insignificant that plague seemed to always spread out of London's suburbs, where rat populations would have subsisted from the neighboring granaries and coexisted with the impoverished laborers working and living

¹³ Varlik, *Plague and Empire*, 17.

¹⁴ Lester Little, "Review Article: Plague Historians in Lab Coats," *Past and Present*, no. 213 (Nov. 2011), 267-290.

¹⁵ See especially an important essay by Ann Carmichael on how the Hundred Years' War disturbed the existing plague network among alpine marmots which then resulted in the spread of plague in northern Italy during the fourteenth century. Carmichael, "Plague Persistence in Western Europe: A Hypothesis," in *Pandemic*, 157-191.

¹⁶ Varlik, *Plague and Empire*, 19.

there.¹⁷ As we shall see below, the confluence of these human and nonhuman networks would have a profound impact on London's experience with plague and how contemporaries reacted. Indeed, as Paul Slack has written, "both sin and epidemic disease were concentrated in towns and in London, it was the suburbs which were 'most polluted' by spiritual 'filthiness' as well as by pestilence."¹⁸

THE 1625 EPIDEMIC

In 1625, an outbreak of plague spread out of the suburbs into London, consuming the city. Tens of thousands perished within the city of London alone as those who could afford it took flight. London fell into a state of disorder that had become routine during severe plague years: city trade halted, the infected were shut up in their homes, incoming ships were quarantined, and watchmen patrolled the streets to impose plague regulations with brute force. Those who survived the year were fortunate, but plague would continue to reverberate sporadically through the city all through the following year. Mortality estimates vary, Slack gives a total estimate of 26,350 plague deaths and a total mortality estimate of 41,312, amounting to twenty percent of London's overall population which is estimated to have been just over 200,000.¹⁹ Its catastrophic effects on English and London society were deeply felt by survivors for years afterward. Contemporary chroniclers firmly believed God was punishing England, but for what they could not be certain. Some blamed London's excessive poverty and vagrancy, others pointed their finger at the new king, Charles I whose first year as sovereign was nothing

¹⁷ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 160.

¹⁸ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 26.

¹⁹ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 151. Some contemporaries including Joseph Mead hinted at the likelihood that plague deaths were underreported. See Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 241, 400n.68. For a contemporary review of mortality bills that reaffirmed the link between plague and the poor, see John Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations, Mentioned in a Following Index, Upon the Bills of Mortality* (London, 1652).

short of calamitous for multiple reasons. The war with Spain, stagnation in the cloth trade, and multiple poor harvests all enhanced plague's destructive power. Before 1665, the 1625 epidemic was the 'Great Plague.'²⁰

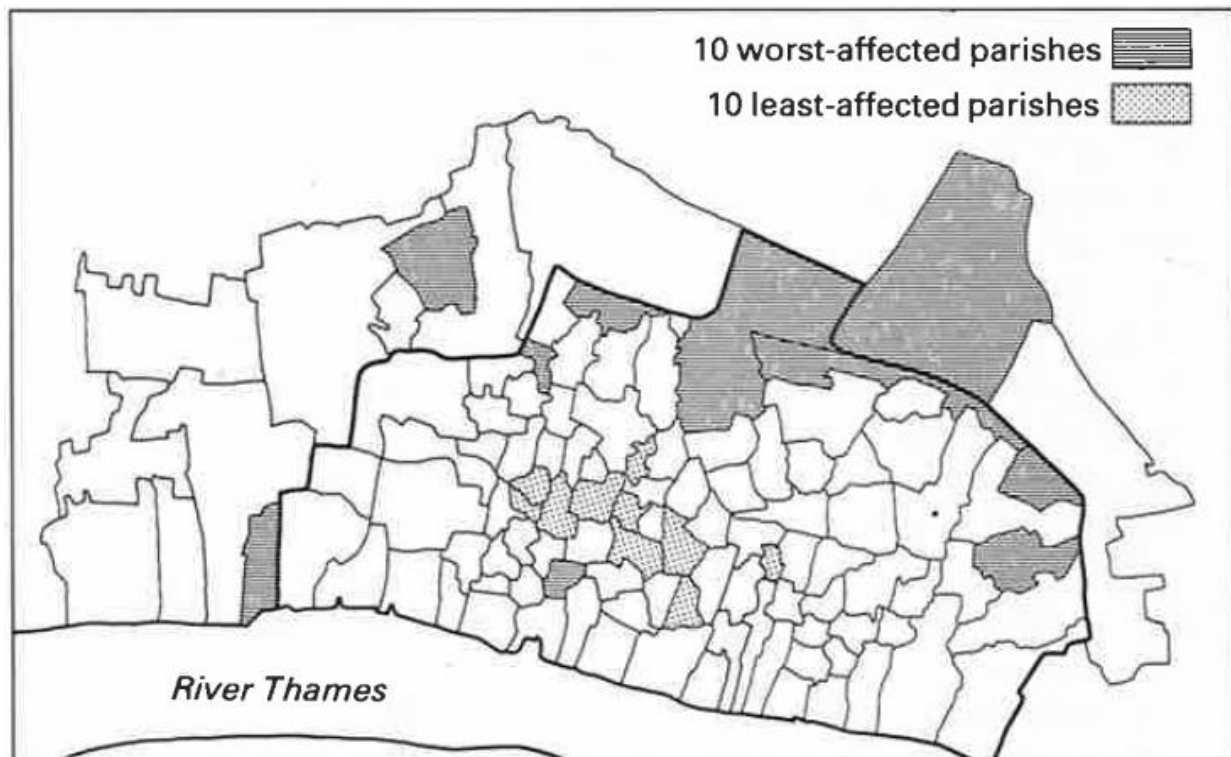


Figure 1: London parishes in the plague of 1625. (Source: Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 155)

The spread of infection may have been affected by the unusually wet weather of the early months. Historians have traditionally assumed—as did contemporaries—that the plague spread into England from Amsterdam which had experienced a deadly plague outbreak the year prior, but as already discussed, plague's endemic presence in London means *Y. pestis* was already a permanent fixture in the city.²¹ Thomas Dekker recognized the internal presence of plague within

²⁰ Anonymous, *LACHRYMAE Londinenses: OR, LONDONS LAMENTATIONS and TEARES*, (London, 1626), page unnumbered. <http://tei.it.ox.ac.uk/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/A06/A06268.html>.

²¹ Given that plague epidemics in London frequently occurred the year after a major outbreak in Amsterdam, as had happened in 1603, 1625, and 1636, there is likely some connection, but it does not dissuade from the fact that plague deaths still occurred annually from 1600 on. In the case of 1630, contemporaries suspected an infected shipment of Ottoman rugs. Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare's London*, 86.

the city leading up to the 1603 epidemic, writing “Death... hath pitcht his tents... in the sinfully-polluted Suburbs...”²² London’s rat populations concentrated along the riverside food markets and the outskirts of the city closest to the city’s granaries where the poor generally lived. Interestingly, contemporary reports tell of unusually warm weather in early February followed by unprecedented flooding that caused significant damage to the riverside markets along the Thames.²³ As displayed in Figure 1 above, this might explain the relative lack in severity of plague along the river in 1625 as compared to 1603 when at least three riverside parishes suffered heavy mortality rates.²⁴ Nevertheless, plague ravaged the impoverished suburbs. While it is possible that these outer parishes experienced infection outbreaks independent of each other, contemporaries identified Bishopsgate (the most north-eastern shaded parish in Figure 1) as the starting point.²⁵ As George Wither remembered, plague...:

Stole into *London*; and did lurke about
The well fill'd Suburbs; spreading there (no doubt)
Infection unperceiv'd, in many a place
Before the bleare ey'd *Searchers*, knew her face;
And since they knew her, they have bribed beene
A thousand times, to let her passe unseene.
But at the length, she was discover'd at
A *Frenchmans* house without the *Bishopsgate*.²⁶

²² Thomas Dekker, “The Wonderfull Yeare...” in *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 1-62; 31. Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare’s London*, 86.

²³ Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare’s London*, 129.

²⁴ See additional parish maps including for 1603 in Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 154-156.

²⁵ The farmost shaded parish to the northwest of the map in Figure 1, St. Bartholomew might have experienced infection independently of the other parishes due to the location of the local hospital that might have taken in some of the early plague victims that year, indicating that different parishes may have experienced infection differently from one another. I thank Winston Black for this observation.

²⁶ George Wither, *Britain's Remembrancer containing a narration of the plague lately past*, (London, 1628), 45; <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A15627.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

Plague quickly set about suffocating the city. By the end of April the rate of infection proceeded to climb at an alarming rate and efforts to contain the infection were failing. In response to the lax response by city officials, Lord Mayor of London, John Goare lamented, “the infection of the Plague is daily dispersed more & more in divers parts of this City and the Liberties thereof.”²⁷ Nevertheless, the Stuart government had to proceed with important affairs. As had also happened in the last major epidemic of 1603, plague came again following the death of the monarch, this time King James I/VI, who died of dysentery on March 27.²⁸ Albeit in disorderly fashion, Crown officials conducted the king’s funeral ceremony in early May, causing many weary travellers to come to London and potentially contract plague as a parting gift. For fear of prolonging the window of infection created by the crowds who gathered for James’s funeral, the coronation of Charles I was postponed until October.²⁹ The date selection hints that city officials already understood, or could at least predict, the seasonality of plague and had expected infection rates to decrease by then. In the interim, however, Charles still had a wedding to finalize and a city to restore order to.

For Charles, the outbreak could not have come at a worse time. An air of uncertainty had shrouded his public image even before assuming the throne. Prior to his father’s death, Charles and the Duke of Buckingham had recently returned from Spain after a failed attempt to arrange his wedding to a Spanish Infanta, a potential match widely opposed in England on the basis of England’s rivalry with Spain and disdain for Catholicism. Charles and Buckingham responded by pushing James to go to declare Spain, but Parliament resisted to the relief of the populace, not

²⁷ John Goare, *By the Major* (London, 1625); Kirsty Rolfe, “‘It is No Time Now to Enquire of Forraine Occurrents’: Plague, War, and Rumour in the Letters of Joseph Mead, 1625,” in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 563-582; 570.

²⁸ Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed*, 107.

²⁹ Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare’s London*, 133-135.

wanting to become embroiled in the Thirty Years War erupting on the continent. Following James's death, Charles married by proxy the French princess Henrietta Maria on May 1, further stoking popular fears of a Caroline plot to return England to Catholic rule. "The French entanglement," Derek Hirst argues, "determined the course of domestic history more than did any other diplomatic episode of the early-modern period."³⁰ In addition to large religious concessions and a loss of honor, the promise to aid Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII's chief minister, in suppressing Protestant uprisings in France (and eventually a naval war with Spain) made for a political disaster Charles would have to navigate carefully if trust from his subjects was to be fully restored. This posed a significant problem for a king deeply interested in replicating the absolutist regimes of France and Spain. It is understandable then that some contemporaries interpreted the 1625 plague as evidence of God's disapproval, an important moment that might have contributed to the erosion in the idea of the 'divine right' of kings.³¹ Indeed, as Graham Hammill has argued, "In plague rhetoric, the monarch is no longer simply a proxy for divine authority. Rather, divine authority potentially turns against the monarch and his or her ordering of the state."³²

Beyond Charles's personal problems, he inherited a kingdom in disarray that plague only exacerbated. The outburst of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) in Europe greatly reduced dependable foreign demand for English cloth. The disastrous market effects were further compounded by unprecedented rainfall all over the British Isles generated by strong El Niño activity in 1621 that would reverberate throughout the following decade as seen by the unusually

³⁰ Derek Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England, 1603-1658* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 137.

³¹ Scott, *England's Troubles*, 113-118; Hirst, *Authority and Conflict*, 136-139.

³² Graham Hammill, "Miracles and Plagues: Plague Discourse as Political Thought," *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2010), 85-104; 93.

wet weather of 1625.³³ Contemporaries recognized the inevitable connection between heavy rains and bad harvests and this fear was no less present in 1625 following heavy rainfall over the early summer months. As one London observer put it: “the hands of God stretched out daily more and more against us by the increase of His plague in this City... doth cause such a distraction and consternation in men’s minds... never seen in our age... Now men make hay standing up to ankles in water.”³⁴ The connection between plague and famine merits further exploration. Bad harvests preceded or succeeded major plague outbreaks by only one year in at least 1500, 1563, 1593, 1603, 1625, and 1630.³⁵ Contemporaries recognized this connection and interpreted plague and famine as separate but linked manifestations of God’s wrath. As the puritan minister William Gouge wrote in 1631, “We oft in Scripture readc of plague and famine joynd together. For the one is a cause of the other. Famine breedeth pestilence: and pestilence causeth famine...”³⁶ In any case, the 1625 plague spelled doom for a financially crippled England as merchants, city officials, and ministers fled the city in droves, virtually shutting down everyday business throughout the city.³⁷

By the seventeenth century, flight had become a divisive issue in England’s social fabric. As was so often the case in plague epidemics, those who could afford to leave London quickly fled the city. Notable among those who fled were John Milton and John Evelyn, both of whom

³³ Parker, *Global Crisis*, 327.

³⁴ Quote taken from Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare’s London*, 139.

³⁵ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, (plague years) 61-62, (bad harvests) 73. Paul Slack has also shown how London legislation towards plague and famine developed in cohesion given the interrelated threats of both issues to the poor. High food prices during bad harvests led to greater general impoverishment (malnutrition notwithstanding) which resulted in an increased number of vagrants in need of work. These vagrants were openly seen as dangerous and a social burden based on their reliance on poor relief and their innate ability as wanderers to spread disease. Slack goes so far as to call 1620 as the “nadir for the poor of early modern England;” Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988), 48-51 (quote on 51).

³⁶ “...The ancient Grecians do set them out by words very like, which come from the same root;” William Gouge, *God’s Three Arrows* (London, 1631), 160.

³⁷ Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare’s London*, 155-158. .

remembered the mass exodus vividly.³⁸ The ability to flee generally depended on wealth, and many middle class merchants either lacked access to necessary capital or simply could not afford to close their businesses, creating a conspicuous rift along class lines. The wealthy had begun to leave in waves by April, but the arrival of the new Queen meant many city officials had to stay behind until mid-June. Although many were expected to stay and cater to the sick and those who could not afford to leave, social obligations of watchmen, physicians, or justices did not always deter flight. This is not to say that flight was always a successful strategy for avoiding infection, as members of Parliament (MPs) discovered when plague followed them to Oxford, but by 1625 the flight of London's upper echelons had become routine and expected during major outbreaks.³⁹ Many contemporaries sought to justify flight. William Gouge offered up multiple explanations, one being that "the pourer and meaner sort" are "not of such use, but may better be spared," drawing from Matthew 19:24 and Samuel 13:3 to argue for the right to flee based on the need to attain salvation before death, a state of being which naturally came more quickly to the perpetually suffering poor.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, many including Gouge believed "Plague is an immediate stroke of God," a predetermined destiny from which the uninfected were free to avoid.⁴¹ Thus, flight could be encouraged based on the doctrine of both predestination, but also on a biased social norm that wealthy citizens contributed more to the prosperity of society than the poor.

³⁸ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 19; Ryan J. Hackenbracht, "The Plague of 1625-1626, Apocalyptic Anticipation, and Milton's Elegy III," *Studies in Philology*, vol. 108, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 403-438; 424. See also a literary study by Rebecca Totaro which argues that early modern English writers confronted the harsh realities of plague by engaging in utopian thought, creating alluring alternate realities that influenced or competed with civic, religious, or medical responses to epidemics. *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literary Studies from More to Milton* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005).

³⁹ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 18.

⁴⁰ Gouge, *God's Three Arrows*, 25.

⁴¹ Gouge, *God's Three Arrows*, 24.



Figure 2: Woodcut featured in Thomas Dekker's *A Rod for Run-aways* (1625)

While many were quick to dismiss the fate of the poor left to battle infection, others chastised the practice of flight as an immoral blight on society.⁴² Arguably the most vocal critic was Thomas Dekker. As he had in 1603, Dekker responded to the 1625 plague with heavy condemnation of London's aristocracy. The famous woodcut (Figure 2 above) printed on the title page of his pamphlet, *A Rod for Run-aways* (1625) depicts in vivid detail how Dekker interpreted plague and social responses to it.⁴³ The visual metaphor of plague as arrows held by Death, in this case pointed at both the fleeing nobles and the dying poor, symbolizes the

⁴² Others still, enjoyed the increased freedoms they incurred when their masters left the city, as did William Lilly in 1625; *William Lilly's History of his Life and Times* (London, 1715), 44-49.

⁴³ Thomas Dekker, *A Rod for Run-aways* (London, 1625) in *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*, 135-171; 135.

indiscriminate nature with which plague killed. Haphazard coffins and body parts, moreover, convey the sense of discord that accompanied major plague outbreaks that resulted in the abandonment of the sick and the desecration of the dead. Lastly, to the right of the image we see the words “keepe out” accompanied by the image of provincial townspeople fending off London’s runaways as was commonly practiced by towns in the countryside fearful of the spread of infection by London travellers.⁴⁴ The phrase “I follow,” accompanied by the lightning and arrow, hammers home the futility of flight. For Dekker and others believed that if plague was God’s will, it could not be escaped, rendering the abandonment of the sick and poor all the more needless and damning. “For, God will not have his Strokes hidden, his markes must bee scene,” Dekker continues, “Hee strikes not one at once... but many...As his mercy will be exalted in our weekly Bills...so he will have his justice and indignation increased in those Bills, and therefore let no man go about to abate the number, His Arithmetick brookes no crossing.”⁴⁵

But flight could not be wholly prevented, and its social impact is important in shaping how elite attitudes towards plague and the poor developed. Indeed, the flight of social elites left resulting death tolls significantly disproportionate with higher mortality rates among the poor and middling classes unable to flee infection. These high death tolls among the poor, witnessed perpetually by social elites returning to the city after an epidemic, affirmed the attitudes exhibited by contemporaries like Gouge who already understood the poor as naturally more vulnerable to the disease. As Ann Carmichael has shown, this was also the case in fifteenth-century Florence where elites perceived the poor as most vulnerable to diseases due to increased incidence of malnutrition and exposure to worse living conditions.⁴⁶ Similar to early modern

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare’s London*, 141.

⁴⁵ Dekker, *A Rod for Run-awayes*, 151-152.

⁴⁶ Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor*, 58.

English attitudes, Florentine linkages of the poor and plague were constructed within the framework of corruption and order, but Carmichael develops this further by inserting plague into the context of other diseases that transmitted differently. Although bubonic plague is not contagious from person to person, other deadly diseases including influenza, measles, and smallpox are. Unable to fully recognize the invisible epidemiological network driven by rats and fleas in relation to the spread of plague, contemporaries latched onto what they observed and made sense of it within the broader context of disease and health. epidemics waves disproportionately affected working-class areas of Florence and that the clustering of plague deaths as indicated by death records confirms the existence of at least some reporting bias to how the spread of plague was documented in ways that affirm social views towards the poor.⁴⁷ As a result, the poor, and not plague, became the focus of Florentine prevention measures. The enhanced mortality of plague in conjunction with other infectious diseases convinced Florentine legislators “that plague was a contagious disease best controlled by segregating and isolating potential sources of infection.”⁴⁸ Galenic principles of purity and contemporary values of cleanliness intermingled into a contemporary ideology of “moral sanitation” that required regulating or restricting the mobility of Florence’s ‘infectious’ working class.⁴⁹

Poverty and plague fused into a singular threat to the security of the state, prompting regulatory measures including prostitution restrictions, quarantines, property protection measures, travel bans, and eventually the institution of *lazaretti* (pesthouses).⁵⁰ With the exception of the pesthouse which was not a staple of English plague prevention until 1665, these

⁴⁷ Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor*, 77, 85-89.

⁴⁸ Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor*, 90.

⁴⁹ Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor*, 98.

⁵⁰ Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor*, 110-119.

other regulations featured centrally in the prevention strategies employed in seventeenth-century London where poverty, vagrancy, and disease were intimately linked and ‘moral sanitation’ a necessary step in social reform.⁵¹ “Impermanent as they were,” Slack writes, “these policies encapsulated in the books [of orders] had had a permanent effect on attitudes as was day-to-day poor relief. Human action could mitigate the divine punishments of pestilence and famine.”⁵² This last point reflects an important change in social attitudes on the relationship between man and God that informed an emerging puritan ideology that obsessed over the limits of human ability: religious commitment empowered society to transform itself in godly ways.⁵³

This attitude developed in part as a result of the plague prevention measures utilized in early modern London, most important among them, quarantine. Quarantine procedures were not universally adopted in England until the plague orders of 1579 and remained unchanged until 1666.⁵⁴ Designed with the intention of preventing infection, infected households were entirely ‘shut up’ in their homes, prevented from leaving without permission and left to depend on the local parish for relief. Both the infected and their dwellings were marked to warn their neighbors while authorized watchmen patrolled the streets authorized to use excessive force if a marked person broke code. Some managed to escape, but many were left to fend for themselves. City officials even recognized how ineffective the process was, but without an alternative the practice continued. Effective or not, the isolation of the infected gave city elites a needed sense of control, it confirmed an ideological underpinning that plague could somehow be controlled.⁵⁵

⁵¹ See for instance, Anonymous, *The Shutting Up Infected Houses as It is Practised in England Soberly Debated* (London, 1665).

⁵² Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, 148.

⁵³ Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God’s Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 37-46.

⁵⁴ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 209.

⁵⁵ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 45-48.

Officially, city magistrates packaged quarantine together with other plague legislation as a benevolent service to the city approved by leading physicians.⁵⁶ However, as Kira Newman has argued, “there was a popular narrative that portrayed quarantine and isolation as personal punishment rather than prudent policy.”⁵⁷ Indeed, quarantine laws in England differed significantly from the rest of Europe in how strictly they were enforced.⁵⁸

Thomas Dekker and George Wither both remained vocal critics against quarantine, and their writings capture how many contemporaries saw the segregation of the sick, most of them poor, as immoral and ineffective in pacifying God’s wrath. As Hammill notes, Dekker’s *The Wonderfull Yeare* argued that the danger and pains of social isolation far outweighed the threat of infection.⁵⁹ Dekker repeats this idea of quarantine as an ineffective and cruel punishment in 1625, writing: “Hath not God therefore just cause to be angry with this distrust, this infidelity of our Nation? How can wee expect mercy from him, when wee expresse such cruelty one towards another? When the Brother defies the Brother, what hope is there for a Londoner to receive comfort from Strangers?”⁶⁰ Like Dekker, Wither also saw increased piety and devotion to Christian neighborly virtues as the only way to hinder the devastation of plague:

So, when our Sicknesse, and our Poverty,
Had greater wants than we could well supply,
Strict Orders did but more enrage our griefe,
And, hinder in accomplishing releefe.
Had ev'ry house beene lockt which we suppos'd
To stand infected, few had beene unclos'd,
Yea, our first Orders had we still observ'd,

⁵⁶ See College of Physicians, *Certain Necessary Directions* (London, 1636).

⁵⁷ Kira L. S. Newman, “Shutt Up: Bubonic Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern England,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 45, no. 3 (Spring 2012), 809–834; 810.

⁵⁸ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 210–211.

⁵⁹ Hammill, “Miracles and Plagues,” 90.

⁶⁰ Dekker, *A Rod for Run-awayes*, 156.

The healthie Housholds would not halfe have serv'd
To keepe the Sicke. And who should then have heeded
Our private cares? Or got us that we needed?
As long as from each other, we refrain'd,
We greater sorrowes ev'ry day sustain'd:
Yea, whilst for none, but for our selves we car'd,
Our brethren perisht, and the worse we far'd.⁶¹

The responses of Dekker and Wither to flight and quarantine during the 1625 plague epidemic tie contemporary attitudes of plague into the burgeoning puritan ideology that emerged in response to London's increased poverty and 'corruption' in the 1610s, perhaps not coincidentally after a decade of unusually severe plague spurred by the 1603 epidemic. The consequences of London's corruption and perceived lack of religiosity manifested in the 1620s in the form of economic depression, political turmoil, bad harvests, and deadly diseases. The language of Dekker and Wither encapsulated the broader social attitude towards plague in London adopted by puritans. Their arguments against flight and quarantine, moreover, coalesced into the identification of a social problem that could not be avoided with wealth or status. Plague was God's wrath and could only be pacified with reformation. For Gouge, plague presented itself simultaneously as a blessing and a curse, a purge of love meant to usher England into a reformed state, a transformation puritans saw themselves ordained to lead:

When publike and generall Judgements come from wrath against (snfull nations, cities, and other societies, there may be fome righteous ones mixed among those wicked ones: and by reason of that mixture they may taste of the bitternesse of that cup that is given to the wicked to drinke. Yet the Lord can so sanctifie that common Judgement to the Saints that partake thereof, as that which is an effect of wrath to others, may be a fruit of Gods love to them. Thus a plague may be sent in wrath against a society, and yet therein Gods love be manifested to his Saints, either in preserving them from it, or taking them by it to heaven. In relation to

⁶¹ Wither, *Britain's Remembrancer*, 50-51. Wither drew from the writings of Henoeh Clapham; *An Epistle Discoursing upon the Present Pestilence* (London, 1603).

such persons we may truly say, that whether God send famine, or war, or any other trouble, he doth it of his goodnesse and love.⁶²

What made plague unique from the other catastrophes of the 1620s was how social elites conceived of ways to control it. Plague's concentration among rat populations that subsisted in the poorer parishes of London gave the disease misleading but identifiable characteristics that could be addressed. "It was becoming possible to view plague not as a catastrophe of immeasurable proportions, but as the particular problem of certain social groups and localities," Slack continues, "from there it might spread and threaten respectable society; but it had identifiable origins which must be attacked if epidemics were to be controlled."⁶³ While elites' flight from plague attracted criticism, it also reaffirmed the dominant view that plague was born out of poverty. Moreover, similar arguments against quarantine also made use of reformation language, but the centrality of the state in administering and policing quarantine procedures simultaneously supported arguments that plague could be successfully controlled through systematic restrictions over the sources of infection: poverty. As one watchman wrote in 1626: "'Poore People, (by reason of their great want) living slut-tishly, feeding nastily on offals, or the worst & unholsomest meates; and many times too long lacking food altogether; have both their bodies much corrupted, and their Spirits exceedingly weakened... And therefore we see the Plague sweeps up such people in greatest heapes."⁶⁴ Time and again across Europe, state responses to plague were designed with the poor in mind.

⁶² Gouge, *God's Three Arrows*, 87. For a similar interpretation, see Robert Harris, *Hezekiah's Recovery* (London, 1626).

⁶³ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 195.

⁶⁴ Stephen Bradwell, *A Watch-Man for the Pest* (London, 1626), 46. <http://tei.it.ox.ac.uk/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/A16/A16629.html>.

The persistence of early modern plague outbreaks thus altered the relationship between European subjects and their governments. While Paul Slack has made valuable contributions towards broadening our understanding of the plague orders as a vehicle of social control, our interpretation of this relationship can be enhanced by a comparative approach that considers the effects of similar regulations used in other early modern cities. Nükhet Varlik's study of plague in early modern Istanbul is especially useful for thinking about how plague prevention measures including quarantine, the regulation of funerals, the restrictions of vagabonds, and the increased oversight of trade—all elements of London's own policies—contributed to a new elite ideology that empowered social reformers. She argues “the threat of epidemics compelled the Ottoman central administration to exercise a new form of governance that manifested in the development of technologies for the surveillance of bodies, the regulation of their movement, and control of the space in which they lived, worked, and died.”⁶⁵

These regulations collectively redefined the role of the state in maintaining public health as well as a new correlation between plague and cleanliness so that by the seventeenth century, Ottoman contemporaries associated plague outbreaks with uncleanness. Immediate responses to mass mortality, including the regulation of burials and funeral services, gradually evolved into a new social norm, the expectation that a certain level of cleanliness and hygiene should be maintained in urban spaces.⁶⁶ This framework can easily be applied to London for its emphasis on physical cleanliness, but also spiritual cleanliness. In this vein, puritan reformation ideas meshed neatly with state-sponsored responses to plague imposed by the Crown and Parliament during the 1625 epidemic. As Slack points out, “Preachers’ association of plague with the ‘sin of

⁶⁵ Varlik, *Plague and Empire*, 248-249.

⁶⁶ Varlik, *Plague and Empire*, 291.

the suburbs' and of the poor, and their attacks on idle vagrants, drunkards, alehouses, plays and popular games, therefore supported magistrates whose public-health regulations included control of precisely the same people and assemblies."⁶⁷ Indeed, the social objectives of moral sanitation pursued by English puritans seeking to complete the English Reformation overlapped considerably with policies implemented by Charles I who wanted to 'purify' London, transforming the city into a metropolis "fit for an absolute king."⁶⁸

Deeply embedded within this ideological push for cleansing the city was the indoctrination of the poor. As was common in major plague epidemics, the 1625 outbreak generated renewed religiosity among the poor who were often too busy to maintain their relationships with God. At its peak, the epidemic reached over 4,000 deaths per week in the month of August, and contemporaries noted how the poor would flood nearby cemeteries to see if the death had been caused by plague but also to take in the religious service.⁶⁹ Slack argues plague did little in provoking religious enthusiasm on the basis that most preachers and ministers fled. However, contemporary sources hint at the increased numbers of poor attending services during plague years.⁷⁰ A study that attempts to examine patterns among the preachers and ministers who stayed behind during plague outbreaks could potentially shed light on how fervently the writings of puritan preachers like Gouge were supported. As one Londoner reflected in 1625, "I have therefore beene perswaded to make publike this Meditation, Confession, and Prayer, which in these dayes of publike Calamitie, I walking hourelly through

⁶⁷ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 304.

⁶⁸ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 217. William M. Cavert's study on air pollution in London suggests urban smog might have also played a significant role in generating legislation meant to cleanse the city; *The Smoke of London: Energy and Environment in the Early Modern City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 59.

⁶⁹ The persistent clustering of crowds around funerals led to attempts by the city to regulate attendance, Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 285-288. On the mortality statistics of 1625, see Wilson, *Plague in Shakespeare's London*, 136-137.

⁷⁰ Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 286-287.

the valley of the shadow of Death, (burying forty, fifty, sometime sixty a day, and in the Totall, more then two thousand alreadie) I poured out in the presence of my God...”⁷¹ One wonders how puritan ministers might have acted on the window of spiritual vulnerability to secure a stronger social base.

Nevertheless, the problem of poverty in London remained. The enclosure of common lands and decline in rural wages worsened by dearth caused London to quickly become overburdened by a swelling poor population that flooded the urban tenement neighborhoods. As Donoghue observes, the puritan hotbed of Coleman Street Ward witnessed these demographic changes firsthand as buildings within the ward tripled and a neighborhood of ‘self-made’ citizens—many through early colonization ventures—began to drown in a sea of destitution.⁷² Unquestionably, responses to this rising tide peaked became all the more urgent by 1625 when plague ravaged Coleman Street Ward.⁷³ According to Christopher Hill, “Puritans thought that if beggars could be subjected to congregational discipline they would disappear: a view which Bacon regarded as very plausible.”⁷⁴

However, puritan reformers and Charles I’s regime clashed fiercely on the matter of religious reform. Even before Charles ascended the throne, puritans’ relationship with the Stuart monarchy was particularly rocky. Many did not approve of James I’s toleration of Catholics, especially after the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The rise of Arminianism exacerbated tension further by asserting the hierarchical significance of the Roman Catholic church and validating the sanctity and divine right of kings, a particular aspect of Arminianism proudly supported by

⁷¹ Crashawe, *Londons Lamentation for her Sinnes* (London, 1625), page unnumbered.
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A19581.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

⁷² Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes*, 14-15.

⁷³ See Figure 1 above.

⁷⁴ Christopher Hill, *Liberty Against the Law: Some Seventeenth-Century Controversies* (New York: The Penguin Press, 1996), 61.

Charles I.⁷⁵ Consequently, Charles uses his authority over the Church of England to appoint prominent Arminians into positions of power including William Laud (1573-1645) as the archbishop of Canterbury. The 1625 plague, in conjunction with the broader turmoil of the 1620s, made it clear that England needed a religious cleansing, but Charles had steered England in the wrong direction.⁷⁶

The less conservative puritans quickly identified Laud as anti-Calvinist and an enemy of English Protestantism.⁷⁷ His policies resolidified the ecclesiastical hierarchies opposed by puritans by empowering bishops, repositioning communion tables to the eastern end of churches, ordering the return of vestments, and instituting a new Book of Common Prayer. At the same time, unlicensed puritan preachers were increasingly banned. Compounding all of this, Charles's marriage to a Catholic princess inspired a torrent of rumors that the Stuart monarchy would return England to a Catholic state. Puritans feared the worst. The Stuart monarchy had reversed much of the progress made during Elizabeth's reign and England's troubles in the 1620s intersected at a point when puritan reformers felt increasingly isolated.⁷⁸ In a sense, however, the flight and survival of puritan elites from London in 1625 affirmed their Calvinist belief that God had saved them for a social project of divine proportions, one to be accomplished with or without the support of the state. The resultant religious radicalism that emerged out of antagonisms between Laud and puritan elites in the 1630s would go on to form the bedrock of two separate

⁷⁵ On the rise of English Arminianism, see Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, ca. 1590-1640* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷⁶ The timing of this transition is especially important as the epidemic of 1625 generated a surge in millenarian thought. Hackenbracht argues the 1625 plague significantly influenced Milton's own 'apocalyptic consciousness'; "The Plague of 1625-1626," 404. See also Michael B. Young, "Charles I and the Erosion of Trust, 1625-1628." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 22, no. 2 (1990): 217-35.

⁷⁷ Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes*, 11-44.

⁷⁸ William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 261-263.

but related causes: the English Civil Wars and New World colonization. By the 1630s English domestic reform have taken on an important Atlantic dimension.

John Donoghue and Carla Pestana have both made convincing arguments for expanding our view of the English Revolution into the Atlantic world, but to do so for plague differs here in an important way.⁷⁹ Plague could not leave the Old World in a physical sense, but the idea of it certainly did. Most of the English colonists crossing the Atlantic for Plymouth in 1620 or Massachusetts Bay and Providence Island in 1630 brought with them vivid memories of plague tearing apart communities and killing thousands for as long as they could remember. These migrants may not have written about plague once settled in the New World, but we know the emergence of the Atlantic and the Americas changed how Europeans interpreted and engaged with plague in important ways. As Laura Smoller has written about the Black Death (1346-1353), Europeans turned to geography in order to adopt plague into their pre-existing worldview.⁸⁰ Her emphasis on geography and how Europeans mapped out the plague provides a unique window into how European interpretations of the plague often collided with traditional knowledge, especially with regard to the accepted geography of the apocalypse prophesied in scripture. The plague moving westward towards Jerusalem from the east confirmed apocalyptic narratives like the Cedar of Lebanon or Gog and Magog, evoking the accepted global geography that placed Jerusalem at the center.⁸¹ The ‘rediscovery’ of the Americas transformed the existing European worldview substantially, but how plague fit into this new geography has yet to be investigated in the ways early European views of Native Americans, for instance, have been

⁷⁹ Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes*; Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁸⁰ Laura Smoller, “Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages.” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Caroline Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 156-188.

⁸¹ Smoller, “Of Earthquakes,” 159-161.

studied. Importantly, as Benjamin Schmidt and Karen Kupperman have shown, the emergence of the New World into European consciousness was a long, drawn-out process constantly susceptible to change as Atlantic crossings became more frequent and increasingly entangled.⁸²

Without question, England's many domestic disasters of the 1620s reshaped contemporaries' vision of the New World and its potential utility. Like Thomas Hooker, many contemporaries looked back on the war, famine, and plague of the 1620s as a cataclysmic sign that God was leaving England, and worse still, for Spain.⁸³ English contemporaries recognized Spain's colonization of the New World integral to the nation's meteoric rise in global power and wealth. The emergence of a global Spanish empire and the eruption of the Thirty Years' War equally fed into English fears of an emerging Black Legend that explained Spain's new found glory as a sign the Antichrist was now on earth.⁸⁴ Taking a page from the Dutch Republic that had founded a West India Company in 1621, militant English Protestants increasingly lobbied for their own private enterprise that could be used to challenge Spain's hegemony in the Atlantic world. Within this context, colonizing the Atlantic world emerged as a solution to England's domestic woes.⁸⁵ Indeed, driven by increased religious and political opposition to the Stuart

⁸² Benjamin Schmidt, *The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *America in the European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁸³ It is possible that English contemporaries saw the Thirty Years' War as the cause of famine and plague in England during the 1620s as it appears Gouge believed, *God's Three Arrows*, 348-349.

⁸⁴ As an example, see this essay by Rodger Martin which examines the significance of the New World in Milton's *Paradise Lost* with particular attention to how Milton represents Spain's conquests in Mexico as the doings of Satan himself; "The Colonization of Paradise: Milton's Pandemonium and Montezuma's Tenochtitlan," *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4 (1998), 321-355.

⁸⁵ It should be noted in the case of Donoghue's work that some puritan reformers, such as Maurice Thompson, interpreted social control over the poor as justification for exploitative plantation labor in Virginia and Barbados. I have decided to separate this conversation from the reformers who ultimately settled in New England and Providence Island because the idea of domestic mastery of the poor to colonial mastery, through the lens of labor, is deserving of its own analysis and it involves a different colonial outlook unrelated to founding a 'city upon a hill.' Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes*, 25, (on forcing the poor into colonial labor schemes) 19-21; Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 15-16. For an examination of the English Atlantic as a 'Protestant Empire,' see Carla Gardina Pestana: *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

regime, Donoghue argues, the puritan elite of Coleman Street Ward “engaged in Atlantic piracy and colonization to promote a militant Protestant, anti-Spanish foreign policy that would prove more personally lucrative than the one envisioned by the crown.”⁸⁶ By the 1630s, English domestic reform had taken on an important Atlantic dimension.

Puritan reactions to the plague of 1625 were informed by this transition and without question plague featured into how these early reformers conceptualized the Atlantic world. In adopting the New World into a worldview stricken by plague, these writers returned to the biblical geography emphasized by Smoller and expanded it. Rather than take flight from London, the early colonizers of Massachusetts Bay and Providence Island took flight from Europe and they grounded their actions in the language of corruption and order, in judgement and salvation. According to Gouge, it was important that the puritans “avoid the judgement that falls on the wicked... [and] For this end did God cause an arke to be made for Noah and His family to go into from the old world, that To they might be preserved from the general deluge.”⁸⁷ Time had become geography and unlike Noah, the English puritans left the Old World, taking the fear of God’s wrath with them. As Thomas Hooker called out in 1626:

Look to it, for God is going, and if he do go, then our glory goes also. And then we may say with Phineha’s wife, I Samuel 4:22, *The glory is departed from Israel*. So glory is departed from England; for England hath seen her best days, and the reward of sin is coming on apace; for God is packing up of his gospel, because none will buy his wares (not come to his price). God begins to ship away his Noahs, which prophesied and foretold that destruction was near; and God makes account that New England shall be a refuge for his Noahs and his Lots, a rock and a shelter for his righteous ones to run unto; and those that were vexed to see the ungodly lives of the people in this wicked land, shall there be safe.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes*, 43.

⁸⁷ Gouge, *God’s Three Arrows*, 23.

⁸⁸ Hooker, *Danger of Desertion*, 69.

Early English colonizers sought out profit and glory, but they were also seeking refuge. English puritans became Noah, and the Atlantic was his flood. The Old World had become corrupt with endemic plague, death, and war and the emergence of the enemy within, Charles I and Laud, signalled the time to leave.⁸⁹

Within the context of the 1620s, the epidemic of 1625 was a catastrophic disaster that rattled London to its core. In the years prior, puritan reformers had already exhibited growing concerns for London's increasing population that saw crowds of poor and destitute enter and corrupt the city. The Stuart regime ignored their calls for domestic religious reform, and many feared London's moral corruption would soon be met with divine punishment. God's wrath came in the form of plague, famine, and war, all physical manifestations of divine punishment that necessitated an urgent religious response. Unlike famine and war, however, London's past experiences with plague going back into the sixteenth century had turned plague into a social problem that could be controlled. Through the social processes of flight and quarantine, London elites developed an ideology that linked plague to the poor. Attempts to prevent London's physical corruption of plague overlapped with existing puritan concerns for London's moral corruption. By the end of the 1620s, however, England's puritans found themselves increasingly isolated politically and religiously by the state, causing many to look abroad for refuge from an Old World steeped in perpetual corruption. Thomas Hooker would not cross the Atlantic for another several years, but his early works indicate that plague featured centrally in the minds of godly reformers ready to give up on England's reformation. In 1638, he sailed for the New World to found a new colony, a *New Haven* from England's corruption, destitution, and fall from grace.

⁸⁹ On 'the enemy within' and its usage within European geographies of plague, see Smoller, "Of Earthquakes," 162-163.

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