Personifications of Plague in Three Tudor Interludes: *Triall of Treasure, The longer thou liuest, the more foole thou art, and Inough is as good as a feast*
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At the end of the anonymously written *Triall of Treasure* (1567), a figure named Visitation appears to punish the reprobate Luste for repudiating God, taking up with a number of vices, and inordinately embracing his companions, Pleasure and Treasure. The nature of Luste’s punishment is physical. Visitation declares, “nowe I am come to vexe thee with paine.” He continues,

Anguishe and griefe into thee I doe caste,
With paine in thy members continually,
Now thou hast paine thy pleasure can not laste,
But I will expelle him incontinently.

(E1v)

Once “visited,” Luste’s speeches are dedicated to describing his pain: “Gogs woundes these panges encrease euer more;” “shall I still in these panges remaine[?]” (E2r). This scene of affliction is presented as the logical outcome of Luste’s bad behaviour: “Thou shalt knowe that . . . the almighty thou canst not mocke,” Visitation tells him (E1v). Shortly afterwards, Time appears to take Luste offstage to meet his last judgement. Luste’s final appearance in the play is as a handful of dust: “Beholde here howe Luste is convuerted to duste,” claims Time. “This
is his Image, his wealth and prosperitie” (E4r). Luste’s affliction and death are connected directly to his status as unrepentant sinner—specifically, as a man consumed with avarice.

The Tudor interlude was a hybrid form of theater that was developed prior to, and alongside, the “professional” theater of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Unlike Shakespeare’s theater, the interlude did not have a dedicated playing space. Rather, interludes were generally performed in the banqueting halls of private homes as after-dinner entertainment or even as a distraction between courses. Players used the pre-existing doors of the Tudor hall for their entrances and exits; because the hall was crowded with guests, the players almost inevitably interacted physically with their audiences. As W. T. Craik observes, the frequent cries of “Room!” found in the interlude indicate cases where the players aggressively tell the audience to move aside to accommodate their movements. But the interlude form does more than simply acknowledge the proximity of player and audience. It exploits this relation. Craik argues that the interlude’s unique quality lies in the way in which “continual contact with the audience is sought and maintained.” The dramatic impact of the interlude’s playing conditions, that “Everyone was in the play . . . [and] the dramatic action was limited only by the four walls of the hall,” depended, of course, on the contents of the particular interlude. But it also depended on the broader cultural and historical context of the interlude’s production.

Triall of Treasure and the two other interludes I examine here, The longer thou liuest, the more foole thou art (ca. 1567), and Inough is as good as a feast (ca. 1565–1570), both by William Wager, all stage scenes of judgment. Like many other Tudor interludes, they incorporate a core allegorical plot structure of the medieval morality play (Mankind, Everyman): the battle between virtues and vices for the soul of a representative human figure. But in these three interludes, the emphasis is on the fall from grace without redemption of three villains: Luste, Moros, and Worldly Man, respectively. What makes this group of interludes unique is suggested by the names of the eerie figures who represent divine wrath in each of the interludes: Visitation, Gods Judgment, and Gods Plague. Together, these figures evoke the bubonic plague, the early modern biological disaster most commonly associated, at the time, with divine retribution. They torture their victims while providing the audience with the satisfaction of seeing a bad man punished. The presence of these figures, and of the physical symptoms they inflict, make these plays more than simple iterations of the moral interlude’s structure of punishment and reward. Using, as they do, manifestations of plague
to achieve the reprobate’s destruction, they also reconfigure plague as a punishment only for the wicked, restoring the connection between sin and death-by-plague that plague itself regularly confounded. By examining these interludes in the context of the major plague outbreak of 1563, I will argue that they use the moral clarity of the interlude’s plot structures and the close playing conditions of the Tudor hall to replicate the plague experience for their audiences, to clarify the association between sin and punishment-by-plague, and to symbolically purge the playing space of the threat of disease.

1563 was a plague year of unusually devastating proportions. The outbreak that struck London killed 17,404 people, an estimated 24 percent of the total population of the city. This particular outbreak did not follow the epidemiological pattern familiar to London plague historians. All major outbreaks following the 1563 plague tended to strike the seedy suburbs, a fact exploited by Jonson in the setting of The Alchemist, and by anti-theatrical writers, who viewed theater as a plague as morally devastating as the disease was physically deadly. However, in 1563, the ten worst-affected parishes were within the city walls, and the ten least-affected parishes were predominantly outside them. Paul Slack notes that this situation “cannot be explained by any equally radical alteration in the location of prosperous and impoverished areas in the city. They did not change places. . . . The richest parishes were always in the centre of town and the poorest on the periphery.”

The 1563 outbreak may have created a serious crisis for understanding the plague’s ravages, especially for the wealthier members of society, who would also be the main audience for the moral interludes of the period. Triall of Treasure, The longer thou liuest, and Inough contain evidence that these interludes offered reinforcement for the common explanatory framework that suggested that plague struck only those who deserved it. While Triall of Treasure and Inough both focus on the sin of ambition and the accumulation of worldly goods as the main reasons for the reprobate’s suffering, and potentially constitute a critique of the wealthy, the plots of these plays entail the targeting and execution of one particularly sinful rich man, whose body is removed from the playing space in the play’s denouement. The privileged audiences of these plays may have enjoyed the ritualized scapegoating and punishment of the reprobate characters, who, through their positioning as objects of derision, distinguish themselves as deserving targets of the plague’s painful ravages. Produced at a time when London’s elite were especially concerned about the negative impact of social status on
physical health and well-being, these interludes serve as an important record not only of the impact of plague in general, but specifically of the 1563 outbreak.

Despite the severity and frequency with which plague struck early modern London, it is relatively under-represented in theatrical entertainment of the period. While early modern plays contain many uses of pestilential language, particularly in the form of curses, there are almost no plays about the plague in later theater, Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1610) excepted. Louis F. Quatliere and William E. Slichts have recently argued that the plague was simply less theatrical than a disease such as syphilis: “The plague had become too generalized a scourge of God by Shakespeare’s time to make effective theater. It served well enough for a remote narrative of mass fatality but the pox had far greater potential on the stage to represent protracted suffering, to complicate plots, and to evoke scornful laughter and moral disapproval.” The plague’s inherent resistance to the imposition of a stable meaning made it difficult to represent theatrically. Early modern medical models of plague (which represent it as a vicious disease entity of ambiguous causation) and religious concepts of it (as the scourge of God, sent as a punishment for the sins of humanity) both fail to explain its operations. There is no correlation between the behavior—moral or hygienic—of the individual and his or her likelihood of infection: the plague’s effects were periodic, random, and devastating. The interlude form, however, provided a handy schematic for codifying the plague. The three interludes I examine consolidate the relationship between plague and sinfulness by associating the two rhetorically. They offer their audiences the fantasy of a plague personified and capable of making precisely the distinction between guilty and innocent that plague in fact did not. They attempt to tame the plague, to make it comply with the divine plot of reward and punishment, and to render it capable of theatrical representation.

Ambiguous Causation: Medical and Moral Views of Plague

Early modern medical writers provided little support for an understanding of plague as a limited or controllable disease entity. Obviously these writers did not have access to an understanding of plague as the transmission of the *Yersinia pestis* bacillus by the rat flea. In his guide for the student physician, *Enchiridion medicum* (1608), Galenic doctor Petrus Pomarius Valentinus outlines the causes of this “pernicious & vnusual putrifaction:”
Sometimes this pernicious quality hath it beginning in ourselues, for it happeneth that sometimes the humors of our bodie doth so much degenerate from the natural temperature, that at the length it taketh vnto it self a pernitios & venemos quality, & so is constrained to striue with deadly venoms. Sometimes it ariseth from outward means, as malign & putrified exhalations which are communicated to the aire; sometimes from dead carcases not buried; sometimes from fennes, pooles, and standing waters corrupted . . . oftentimes also it happeneth from the variable commision of the Planets; and then it is the hidden and admirable scourge of the most iust God for our sinnes.¹⁵

Valentinus’s list of potential causes of plague emphasizes the ubiquituousness of the forces of bodily corruption: they are in the air we breathe, in the movements of the planets above us, and, most disturbingly, within us.

Earlier medical writers had likewise emphasized the ubiquituousness of sources of the plague’s infection. Simon Kellwaye’s lengthy treatise on remedies for the plague, *A Defensative against the Plague* (1593), offers itself as a guide for those who might not otherwise receive medical help.¹⁶ The causes he lists include the bad smells and astrological influences cited by Valentinus; however, Kellwaye also emphasizes that other people should be looked to as the primary source of infection in contemporary metropolitan life. Because the disease has entered human society, “it is dispersede among vs, by accompanyng our selues with such as either haue, or lately haue had the disease them selues; or at least haue beene conuersant with such as haue bene infected therewith.”¹⁷ Kellwaye also lists the clothing of the infected and domesticated animals (dogs, cats, pigs, and, curiously, weasels) as potential sources of infection.

Thomas Paynel’s early plague work, *A Moche Profitable Treatise Against the Pestilence* (1534) gives several reasons for the advent of plague, only one of which is even partially under human control.¹⁸ The movement of “celestiall bodies, by the whiche the lyvely spirite of man is corruptyed,” or by which the air is rendered more likely to carry plague, are among his preferred explanatory causes.¹⁹ To answer the question of why some people are infected and others are not, Paynel refers to “fortune and chaunce,” and advises that susceptibility depends on where one lives and one’s constitution: “ye shall note, that all suche as be disposed to the pestilence, are of a whotte complection, and their conduites are wyde and large, their poores open, and
replenished with divers humours." Disposition itself was commonly thought to be a product of time of birth, a condition obviously beyond the control of the individual. According to Paynel, hot, open-pored individuals are not only more likely to get the plague, but are also more likely to engage in behaviour and emotional habits that might invite infection: "all suche bodyes as be moche resolvyed, as these do often tymes companye with women . . . and these whiche by great labour and vehement angre are chafed and hotte: al such are moche more disposed to have the pestylence than any other." The message is simple: if you are of a certain disposition, or unlucky enough to live in the wrong place, you are much more likely to get the plague.

Medicine's lack of comforting or specific answers to the question of what one could do to avoid the plague arguably placed more pressure on supernatural accounts of the plague's transmission. The severity of the plague's outbreaks and the speed with which it could kill may have been reason enough to associate it with biblical plagues. However, non-medical responses to plague were equally challenged to associate it with a particular set of behaviours: the most sinful members of society were not necessarily the most susceptible. Most non-medical plague writings from the period attempt to resolve this problem by constructing the disease as a divine response to the sins of humanity in general, thus obscuring the fact that there is no obvious relationship between guilt and infection—if we are collectively guilty, then we must collectively suffer. The indeterminacy suggested by this logic haunts plague writings from the very beginning of the medieval experience of it. The main source for an eyewitness account of the arrival of the European plague of 1348, Historia de Morbo by Gabriele de' Mussis, lists the causes of God's desire to send a pestilential visitation to ravage humanity:

May this stand as a perpetual reminder to everyone, now living and yet to be born, how almighty God . . . looked down from heaven and saw the entire human race wallowing in the mire of manifold wickedness, enmeshed in wrongdoing, pursuing numberless vices, drowning in a sea of depravity because of a limitless capacity for evil, bereft of all goodness, not fearing the judgements of God, and chasing after everything evil, regardless of how hateful and loathsome it was.

This list is typical of plague writings in its baroque elaboration of the all-consuming nature of human vice. Its style is echoed in a 1375
sermon on the plague by Hugh Brinton, Bishop of Rochester. Brinton likewise describes the cause of plague in general terms: “Today the corruption of lechery and the imagining of evil are greater than in the days of Noah, for a thousand ways of sinning which were unknown then have been discovered now.” The idea of numberless and new-fangled sins paints broad strokes over the plague’s confusing realities and unstable meanings: why now? Why us? But the strategy of naming causes that are collective in nature is only one of the means by which plague writers avoid direct confrontation with the plague’s unpredictable tendencies.

For religious writers such as Brinton, the terrifying qualities of plague’s indeterminacy could be worked to rhetorical advantage to bring their congregations into a more penitential position. For other writers, however, the plague’s ravages were irreconcilable with the idea of divine justice, a problem that could not be expressed directly in most plague writings, but instead tended to manifest metaphorically. The plague’s tendency to make no distinction between innocent and guilty may be responsible for the depiction of human suffering found at the end of William Muggins’s response to the 1603 outbreak, London's Mourning Garment, or Funerall Teares. In the closing prose section of the pamphlet, “A godly and zealous Prayer unto God, for the surceasing of his irefull Plague, and grievous Pestilence,” the ravages of plague are virtually indistinguishable from the scenes of vice it is purportedly sent to eradicate. Plague victim, penitent, and sinner become equally repugnant in the eyes of God:

often times while one prayeth in the bitternesse and anguish of his spirit, another blasphemeth in the pride and presumtion of his heart. Heare one groveloth on the ground, gasping and gaping after life, there another walloweth in the sinke of sin, and puddle of iniquitie, vomiting up his owne shame. O God, how displeasing a spectacle is this to thine eyes: how harsh musicke (and distempered harmony) is it to thine eares. Therefore thine hand is stretched out, to smite off the withered branches of those trees which are corrupt.

This passage depicts a nightmare scenario of a world overrun by disease, both moral and physical. The praying man and the blasphemer are equally implicated in the spectacle that displeases God. Muggins’s depiction of the common suffering and offensiveness of humanity may be viewed as the logical outcome of the lack of concrete causal explanations for the plague’s transmission; equally, this depiction may be
precisely the sort of nightmare the plague evoked for the interlude’s audiences, who would probably have preferred to differentiate themselves from such scenes of mass suffering.

Determinate Causation and the Rhetoric of Plague in the Moral Interlude

The moral interlude’s performance of God’s vengeance offers to revise the plague experience. Visitation, Gods Judgment, and Gods Plague attack only the sinful. Figures of retribution, they deal out infection, all the while emphasizing the direct connection between bad behavior and the pain they inflict. In re-establishing, as they do, a causal relationship between punishment and deserts, these interludes offer their audiences a reassuring fantasy version of the plague, one that promises that only the bad and ignorant will suffer. The bubonic credentials of Visitation, Gods Judgment, and Gods Plague are suggested by more than their names. The forms of the physical suffering accompanying their arrival and the rhetorical associations the plays labor to make between sin and disease leave little room for doubt that these figures are representations of plague.

In Triall of Treasure, Visitation initially leaves some room for the interpretation of his name as he explains the various potential meanings that can attach to him. Upon his first appearance, he announces,

I am Gods minister called Visitation,  
Which diuers and many waies you may vnderstande  
Sometime I bring sicknes, sometime perturbation,  
Sometime trouble and misery throughout the lande,  
Sometime I signifie gods wrath to be at hande,  
Sometime a foreronner of distruction imminent,  
But an exectuter of paine I am at this present  
(E1r–E1v)

This menu of potential meanings of Visitation’s name is promptly and comically narrowed by Luste’s reaction to this speech: “O cockes harte, what a pestilence is this” (E1v). Similarly, the pestilential associations of Gods Judgment in The longer thou liuest are suggested by Moros’s reaction to him. Gods Judgment arrives at the play’s climax to strike Moros with his sword. Knocking Moros down with it, he declares, “For as much as vengeance to God doth belong, . . . / With this sword of vengeance I strike thee” (G1v). Moros does not see Gods Judg-
ment and does not directly acknowledge what has happened to him. Instead, after falling down, he indicates that he experiences this blow as physical illness: “I feele in my selfe no manner of quickenes,/ I beginne now straungly to sicken” (G1v). Finally, the symptoms Worldly Man suffers in Inough as Gods Plague arrives on the scene are quite plague-specific. Having sent away his companion vices, Worldly Man is suddenly taken ill:

> By my trueth me thinks I begin to wax sick:  
> In sending away my counceller, I was somwhat to quick.  
> Wel, I will sit me down and say to sleep heer:  
> Til they into this place again doo appear. Oh my hed.  

(F1v)

The association between sudden illness and plague is, as God’s Plague himself will emphasize, part of the punishment plague signifies in Wager’s formulation. Simon Kellwaye and Thomas Paynel both note the association between plague and “sluggishness, and universall fayntnes of all the body, with a great desire to sleepe.” Kellwaye also notes that “great paine in the head” is among the early signs of infection.27

But these associations do more than establish the pestilential credentials of the interludes’ figures of retribution. They also function to build a connection between the reprobate and his vulnerability to infection, his need for punishment. In Triall of Treasure, Luste’s vulnerability to infection lies in his association with vice. The more he follows the chief vice, Inclination, the closer he gets to fatal illness and death. Luste’s ultimate capitulation to painful sickness is only the last manifestation of a series of pangs he suffers throughout the course of the play. Early on, having taken Inclination’s suggestion “to become disciple to doctor Epicurus” (B2v), and having embraced a group of vices, he experiences a sudden and severe pain. The stage direction indicates that Luste should “Bowe to the grounde” as he cries,

> Out alas, what a sodaine passion is this,  
> I am so taken that I can not stande,  
> The crampe, the crampe, hath touched me y wis,  
> I shall die without remedie nowe out of hande.  

(B3v)

At the time, Inclination assures the other Vices that Luste’s violent spasm is harmless:
This crampe doth signifie nothing in effect
But howe he is bowed by me Inclination,
None of all your counceles he will nowe reiecte

(B3v)

Later, however, Inclination utters predictions of disaster for Luste under his breath, even as he encourages him to woo Treasure. Inclination wryly orders “a pynte of white wyne & borage” for the table. When Luste asks why, Inclination replies, “Mary me thinke you are not well” (D3r). This is significant to a discussion of plague because, in the final section of the Enchiridion medicum, “A Declaration of the quality of certaine seedes, hearbes, flowres, rootes, and waters,” Valentinus lists borage among several plants that are “Things good for the heart.” According to Valentinus and other medical writers, in cases of pestilence “The part affected is the heart, by meanes of the pestilent aire which creepeth vnto the same by the lungs; through necessity of respiration, whereby the vitall spirits are assailed.” Perhaps even more relevant to a discussion of Luste’s condition is Kellwaye’s inclusion of borage in his recipe for “A good purging potion,” the purpose of which is to rid the body of infection that has not yet fully manifested. “I must here giue you to vnderstand that the infection doth often times lye with in vs, with out any manifest signe or knowledge there of at the first,” he warns. Periodic purges are important because “it is not only the venemous and contagious ayre which we receiue that doth kill vs, but it is the present communicating of that contagion, with some superfluous humors in our bodies.”

The hints of medical details accompanying the reprobate’s moral dissolution and punishment in the interludes are reinforced by the rhetorical associations the plays establish between sin and disease. In The longer thou liuest, for example, the “plague” is identified with the lamentable social conditions which pertain in the world of the play. As Pietie, one of the interlude’s virtues, comments,

O what a plage is it euermore,
When vertuous men haue euell speede,
And fooles haue ease, wealth and honour.

(E2r)

This association extends to all practitioners of vice. As Exercitation, one of the play’s other virtues, notes,
Certaine persons I coulde rehearse by name,
Haue pretended a great perfection,
And why? to auoyde punishment and shame,
Due for their vitious infection.

(C1v)

The play, of course, names only one person deserving of punishment and shame: Moros, its reprobate. The threat Exercitation makes here is significant in that it implicates the interlude’s audience, particularly those who can identify their own vices and pretensions, in the cycle of identification and punishment represented in the interlude itself. But the meanings of “infection” in *The longer thou liuest* continue to multiply. Impietie, one of the play’s vices and Moros’s companion, tells him that

Fortune appointed me to be gouernour,
Of your owne person you to directe:
And to conuince euery vaine troubluer,
Which shall presume your minde to infecte.

(E3v)

Among the uses the play makes of the notion of infection, then, is to demonstrate that the perception of infectiousness depends upon the perspective of the speaker: one vice’s infection is a virtue’s good counsel. Which perspective wins out is of course conclusively determined by the arrival of Gods Iudgment at the end of the play.

Inough shores up the ideological connection between death by plague and sinful behavior through a metaphorical association of disease with the sin of ambition. With the death of Worldly Man, Wager stages a literal fruition of the metaphorical connection between disease and moral degradation; however, by the time he falls ill, Worldly Man has already been marked as diseased by the discourse of other characters in the play. Disputing with Worldly Man on the topic of the source of true happiness, Heavenly Man is the first to describe Worldly Man’s lust for wealth as illness:

What men are more wicked, wretched, and miserable:
Then those that in riches account their blisse,
Beeing infected with Ambition that sicknes uncurable.

(A4v)
The rhetorical association between “sickness” and plague was a common one: plague’s terrifying lethal qualities and its biblical proportions caused it to be referred to as “the sickness.” However, an even more specific connection between ambition and plague is made in a speech by Contentation, one of Heavenly Man’s companions. Contentation adds a social dimension to the relationship between ambition and plague:

we have seen of late dayes this canker pestilent
Corrupting our Realme to our utter decay.

Ambition I mene which cheefly dooth reign,
Amongst those who should have been example to other: . . .

It is often seen that such monstrous Ambition,
As spareth not to spil the blood of the innocent:
Wil not greatly stick to fall to sedition,
The determinations of God therby to prevent,
But God I trust shall disappoint their intent.

(B1v)

This passage constructs ambition as a contemporary social problem, thus associating it with the understanding of plague as a fresh scourge for new sins, as in Brinton’s “thousand ways of sinning which . . . have been discovered now.”29 The rhetorical association between plague and Worldly Man’s vice short circuits the problem of the ambiguous causal relation between sin and plague by equating the two. In addition to the fantasy of retribution offered by the personification of plague in the play’s conclusion, Inough offers Wager’s audience the fantasy of an identifiable causal association between the plague’s attacks and a specific set of behaviors. Wager’s drama is a fantastic rendering of an infected world: here, virtue guarantees immunity.30

Triall of Treasure reproduces some features of the rhetorical association between sin and disease featured in both The longer thou liuest and Inough. There are in fact entire passages shared between this interlude and Inough. There is some ambiguity in the dating of Inough: Margaret Healy gives it a date of 1565, Pheobe Spinrad, approximately 1570.31 Triall of Treasure has a definitive print date of 1567. Whichever play came first, there is substantial evidence of borrowing.32 The plays do differ in terms of their stage business and tone: Triall of Treasure, with its scenes of male wrestling and Greedy gutte’s attempt to “ride” the bridled vice Inclination, is a bawdier play. However, it uses the same language as Inough to associate ambition with pestilence. As the action traces Luste’s downward trajectory, Juste asks,
What men are more foolish, wretched and miserable,
Then those that in these treasures accownt their whole blys
Being infect with ambition that sicknes uncurable.

Likewise, Juste replicates Contentation’s speech in Inough when he inveighs against the dissolute state of his society:

We haue seene of late daies this cancar pestilent
Corrupting our realme, to our great decaie,
Ambition I meane, which chiefly did raigne
Among those that should be examples to other.33

Beyond these moments that address the social aspects of pestilent behavior, Triall of Treasure does most of the work of connecting Luste’s behavior and his disease through the physical pangs with which he is stricken throughout the play. The burden of representing Luste’s descent into illness is thus shared between the speeches of the virtuous characters and Luste’s physical behavior. This dual technique is perhaps responsible for the further use the play makes of the rhetorical connection between sin and plague through the commentary of the vices.

The vices in Triall of Treasure often participate in a sort of pestilential doublespeak. Sturdines, who seems to support Luste in his sinful pursuits, uses the terminology of plague as he and Luste discuss Luste’s fears. Luste speaks of his distaste for “death, pouertie or paine,” claiming that he is sometimes disturbed by thoughts of these misfortunes. Rather than take these worries as a cue to seek a spiritual solution, however, he reports that he resolves them by pursuing diversions: “to the entent to dryue them awaye,/ I either go to sleape, or els to some playe” (B2v). Sturdines replies, “By gogs precious hearte, euen so doe I, / But sometyme they comber me pestilently” (B2v). It is also Sturdines who, left alone in the playing space, addresses the audience and describes Luste’s character in plague-ridden terms:

Is there more vanitie vnderneath the sonne,
Then to be inclined after this sorte, . . .
this Luste is the Image of all wicked men,
which in seeking the worlde, haue all delectation . . .
with Elation or Pride he is also associate,
which puffeth vp his sences with presumption pestilent.
Like Inclination, who has earlier indicated his awareness of the illness-inducing properties of Luste’s decisions, Sturdines plays both sides of the pestilential fence, encouraging Luste’s dissolution while collaborating with the audience to mock him.

Plaguing the Audience: Performance Conditions of the Interlude

_Triall of Treasure, The longer thou liuest_, and _Inough_ build on their culture’s desire to understand plague as retribution for a particular set of behaviors. They use rhetoric that connects sin and plague to create the expectation that the reprobate characters who populate their world will be punished. And punished they are, experiencing protracted scenes of physical pain and distress, the spectacle of which constitutes a demonstration of the results of their bad behavior. Visitation, Gods Judgment, and Gods Plague differentiate the virtuous from the reprobate in a manner that is clear and total. The threatening qualities of these figures of judgment and the potentially contaminating presence of the quaking, spasming bodies they afflict should not be underestimated in terms of their performative impact. The physical proximity between audience and players created by the interlude’s playing venue has particular implications for the entrances and exits of pestilence personified. For an audience that had only recently witnessed the real assault of the plague among their friends and families, the passing among them of figures of plague and their blasted victims must have been a chilling experience.

Signs that these interludes may have deliberately exploited the proximity of player and audience appear in Sathan’s speech in _Inough_ as he comes to collect the dead body of Worldly Man. Seventeen lines after the vice Couetouse’s farewell to the audience and his implied exit from the playing space, Sathan addresses Couetouse: “Oh my boy Couetouse, I may thank thee of all this,” he says (Glv). This moment suggests that Couetouse and Sathan pass each other on their way from, and to, the playing space. The idea that the actors would pass among the audience before taking part in the action of the interlude renders the silent entrance of Gods Plague all the more eerie. As Worldly Man’s head begins to hurt, Gods Plague comes onstage and stands silently behind him (s.d. Flv). Finally, he speaks. After a lengthy monologue on Worldly Man’s folly in focusing exclusively on the accumulation of wealth, Gods Plague names himself:
I am the plague of God properly called,
Which commeth on the wicked sudainly:
I go through all townes and Cittyes strongly walled,
Striking to death and that without all mercy.

(F1v)

The entrance of this mysterious, silent figure, creeping through the audience to stand behind the physically stricken Worldly Man, would only increase the resonance he would already share with the invisible infection of plague that only announces itself when it is too late to act against it.

Similarly, in *The longer thou liuest*, Gods Judgment enters, according to the stage directions, “with a terrible visure” (s.d. G1r), as Moros shadow boxes against imaginary enemies. The instruction for costuming Gods Judgment contrasts with the series of costumes and postures Moros has worn throughout the course of the play to signify both his folly and the process of aging. He first enters “counterfailing a vaine gesture and a foolish countenance” (s.d. A3r). Later, he enters “Gaily disguised and with a foolish beared” (s.d. E3r). Finally, just before his death, he arrives “furiously with a gray beard” (s.d. G1r). “A man I am now, euery inch of me,” he announces (G1r). The comic effect of Moros’s costume changes, combined with the fact that he cannot see or hear Gods Judgment, potentially operates as a foil to Gods Judgment’s threatening sobriety as he addresses the audience directly:

I represent Gods seuer elejigation,
Which dallieth not where to strike he doth purpose,
Hether am I sent to the punishment,
Of this impious foole here called Moros.

(G1r–G1v)

Gods Iudgement’s relationship with the action is complex: he invites Moros to repent, to no avail. He addresses the audience again, and announces the arrival of Confusion to the stage, drawing out the moral lesson for them: “This is the reward of such a foolish Asse” (G2r). He orders Confusion to torment Moros (G2r), and delivers a lengthy speech on the various types of fools who deserve smiting (G2v). Finally, this in/visible stage presence concludes,

Many thinges moe of fooles we could talke,
But we haue detained long our audience,
An other way I am compelled to walke,
Desiring you a while to haue patience.

(G3r)
If Gods Judgment’s final words seem cordial, they may not have made the spectacle of his final passage through the audience, “compelled to walke” toward some unknown scene of retribution, any less frightening.

The spectacles of suffering that constitute the climaxes of the interludes would probably also have had disturbing implications for a sixteenth-century audience, most of whom, during an outbreak of plague, would have either witnessed real scenes of such suffering, or would have fled to the countryside in an attempt to avoid them. However, these spectacles equally serve to sanitize the playing space. In the world of the interludes, the plague’s infection is not, strictly speaking, a purely communicable disease: it can be controlled by avoiding certain sin. Symbolically, the reprobate characters’ suffering means that everyone else in the room, who has presumably not actively exhibited these behaviors, is safe. Their pain thus serves to reinforce the fantastic pestilential narrative; the subsequent removal of their bodies likewise removes the potentially contaminating element from the social world of the play, as well as from the hall itself.

In *The longer thou liuest* and *Inough*, Wager adds humiliation to the spectacle of the suffering of Worldly Man to infuse these scenes with a comic force that also underlines their function as scapegoating. The pestilence is contained. The audience can enjoy their relative superiority over the reprobate sufferers while simultaneously witnessing—and surviving—their figurative infection.

In *The longer thou liuest*, as we have noted, part of Moros’s punishment is that he does not seem to recognize it is happening. After Gods Judgment strikes him with his sword, he becomes increasingly disoriented. He struggles to explain away his sudden feeling of illness: “It was but a qualme came ouer my hart,/ I lacke nothing but a cuppe of good Wine” (G2r). Unheard by Moros, God’s Judgment adds, “Indurate wretches can not conuert, / But die in their filthines like swine” (G2r). Confusion, who will offer to carry Moros from the playing space, enters, “with an ill fauoured visure, all things beside ill fauoured” (G2r). Gods Judgment emphasizes that it is part of Moros’s punishment that his confusion be public:

Behold here cometh shame and Confusion,  
The reward of such wicked fooles all:  
To all the world shall appeare thy abusion.  

(G2r)
Moros’s punishment thus becomes a form of pestilential scapegoating; his ignorance of the display of his final punishment makes it only more repellant and worthy of derision. Even as he sickens, he becomes less aware of what is happening to him:

I am a sleepe, in a dreame, or in a traunce,
Euer me thinke that I should be waking:
Body of God this is a wonderfull chaunce,
I can not stand on my feete for quaking.

(G2r)

The reduction of Moros to a pathetic figure is a major theme of Confusion’s invitation to him to meet his fate. Moros’s absolute desert of his fate becomes just the final component of the public exposure of his folly. “Thou art now a pesant of all pesantes,” Confusion tells him:

A derision and mocke to Man and Woman,
Cum forth of thy folly to receiue thy hyre,
Confusion, pouerty, sickenes, and punishment,
And after this life eternall fyre,
Due for fooles that be impenitent.

(G2v)

The protraction of the process of affliction in the final scene of _The longer thou liuest_ emphasizes its importance to the cultural work of the interlude: Moros’s final dissolution is displayed, manifesting itself as physical pain in proportion to his folly.

A similarly humiliating display accompanies the death of Worldly Man in _Inough_. The interlude follows the formula of the other two scenes of retribution: here, Gods Plague delivers a summary of Worldly Man’s crimes along with the sentence of physical suffering. He targets Worldly Man with his pestilential breath and damning speech, claiming, “It is euen I that vpon thee dooth blowe,/ Filling thee with plagues and sundry disease” (F1v). Simultaneously, he predicts Worldly Man’s loss of his earthly treasures: “Thy il gotten goods shall not thee deliuer,” he claims (F1v). A comical scene follows, but Gods Plague does not depart altogether: the stage direction has him “Go out and stand at the door,” a position from which he presumably watches the slapstick that follows (s.d. F1v). Couetouse and Ignorance return to Worldly Man to find him feverishly dreaming of punishment in hell. Worldly Man tells them,
Me thought before me the plague of God did stand:
Redy to strike me with a Sworde in his hand . . .
But Lord how sick I am, and how terrible is my pain:
No place in my body, but sicknes therin dooth reign.

(F2v–F3r)

In the business that follows, the vices manage to call Phisicion to come help the dying Worldly Man. His condition deteriorates: “Oh, oh, alas, what a pang is this at my hart?” he cries (F3r). In Worldly Man’s final scene of humiliation, the vices turn the examination into a bizarre scene of exposure and degradation, at turns begging Phisicion to help and interfering with his work:

Ignorance.
Stand away foolish knaue and let maister Phisicion come:
Couetouse.
Maister Flebishiten, should I say, M. Phisicion, I pray you look in his bum
Couetouse.
Jesu mercy, lo how busy maister Phesicion is:
Heer you Sir? is it not best you look on his pis.

(F3v)

The vices’ mock distress at Worldly Man’s illness causes Phisicion himself to remark on their comic excess:

By your leaue my maisters, me thinks it is no time to iest:
Stand back I pray you, and doo not me molest.
Passion of me maisters, count you this a play?

(F3v)

After Phisicion declares Worldly Man a hopeless case, he leaves. In Inough, the pestilential death scene closely follows the desperate scenes of sudden illness and death caused by the plague itself. Like many Londoners who died of the plague, Worldly Man’s suffering finds no relief through either the doctor or the bedside “friends” who can do nothing to save him. The prolonged spectacle of suffering and death, designed to redraw the lines of punishment and reward that plague itself violated, leaves only the problem of effective disposal of the corpse itself. Inough addresses this issue as the devil conveniently removes the contaminated body from the playing space, telling it, “Come on mine owne Boy, go thou with me” (G1v).
The interludes Triall of Treasure, The longer thou liuest, the more foole thou art, and Inough is as good as a feast may be considered constituents of an under-recognized pestilential legacy in early modern theater. As I have argued elsewhere, the plague’s overwhelming cultural impact cannot have failed to register in popular entertainment. However, the severity of its assaults and the lack of a known mode of transmission meant that the disease was ill-suited to the narratives of divine retribution most commonly evoked to explain it. The spectacle of affliction and suffering in these interludes, rendered specific through pestilential rhetoric and marked by the signs of the physical disease itself, operates to reinforce the purported causal connection between sin and plague. The reprobate’s behavior guarantees his ugly demise, a fact that enables the interludes to write the plague experience into the realm of fantasy. Here, God’s justice is transparent and predictable. These texts co-opt the interlude structure of the conflict between virtue and vice in order to tell an alternative story about the disease that ravaged early modern Europe and which, in 1563, threatened the lives of the interlude’s audiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOTES

1. All quotes from plays are taken from Anonymous, Triall of Treasure; William Wager, The longer thou liuest, the more foole thou art; and William Wager, Inough is as good as a feast. As much as possible I have attempted to preserve the spelling and punctuation of the original texts, with the exception of the substitution of ‘s’ for the long ‘s’. Superscripted letters and abbreviations are silently lowered and expanded (“ye” to “the”, “comon” with a tilde over the “m” to “common”).

2. Craik, The Tudor Interlude, 10. For another detailed discussion of the performative implications of the Tudor interlude as an indoor entertainment for an elite audience, see Johnson, “Audience Involvement in the Tudor Interlude.”


4. Ibid., 26.

5. See Steven Mullaney’s argument that the early modern stage “certainly served as a prominent affective arena in which significant cultural traumas and highly ambivalent events . . . could be directly or indirectly addressed, symbolically enacted, and brought to impartial and imaginary resolution.” Following Mullaney’s model, this study asks what specific cultural work the three interludes under consideration here accomplish. What traumas do they resolve? And how do they resolve them? See Mullaney, “Mourning and Misogyny,” 144.


7. For a discussion of the associations between plague and theater, see Healy, Fictions of Disease, 91 and Mullaney, The Place of the Stage, 49. For a discussion of The Alchemist’s associations between criminality and plague, see Cheryl Lynn Ross, “The Plague of The Alchemist.”


10. For a discussion of Inough that reads it as a protest piece on behalf of the poor, see Healy, Fictions of Disease, 85–7.

13. For the effects of plague on the activity of theater itself, see Barroll, Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare’s Theatre, 173. By his calculations, theaters were closed for 71 months from 1603 to 1613 alone. For reproductions of plague bills during the period of Shakespeare’s career, see Wilson, The Plague in Shakespeare’s London. For information and statistics on the outbreaks of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in metropolitan London and other locations, see Slack, The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England.
14. See Slack, 7–17 for a fascinating discussion not only of the plague bacillus and its effects, but of the various possibilities for early modern plague transmission, including the causes of fresh epidemics in early modern England.
16. Kellwaye, Defensative. In his forward to the Defensative, George Baker writes that Kellwaye “hath considered that in every place a good Phisition is not to be gotten at all times, so that the partie infected may be dead before any such helpe can be had.”
17. Kellwaye, Defensative, B1r.
19. Ibid., A3r.
20. Ibid., A4r.
21. Ibid., A4r.
22. Thomas Dekker offers a chilling yet comically presented series of urban legends largely centered around the speed and randomness with which plague could take lives in his pamphlet The Wonderfull Yeare.
23. Of this type of reasoning Rosemary Horrox writes, “This emphasis on the universal sinfulness of mankind, which merited a universal punishment, implicitly denied that plague strikes only the individually guilty.” Horrox, The Black Death, 98.
24. de’ Mussis, Historia de Morbo, 14.
25. Brinton, “Be Watchful,” 146. References to Noah and the flood are not unusual in plague texts, as one of the mysteries of the plague’s ravages seems to have been why humanity might deserve another severe scourging. The plague contradicts biblical narrative in that it may be viewed as a revocation of the promise God makes to Noah after the flood, that “the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Genesis 9:15). A mass, Recordare Domini, apparently composed by Pope Clement VI during the early plague years, included a prayer to “Remember, O Lord, your covenant, and say to the scourging angel, ‘Now hold your hand’, so that the earth is not laid waste and you do not lose every living soul.” In Horrox, 122.
27. Both passages are from Kellwaye, Defensative, 15.
28. Such associations were commonplace in the period. See Healy, Fictions of Disease, 50–122 for a nuanced discussion of the ways in which the literal disease was co-opted in the period to the discussion of specific social ills.
30. Although I do not deal directly with the immunity of the virtuous in this essay, it should be noted that the plays do associate virtue with resistance to infection. Speaking of the virtuous Juste in Triall of Treasure, Visitation notes that “he [Juste] is so associate and comforted with truste,/ That no kinde of impacience his soule can infecte” (E1v). Likewise, Heavenly Man in Inough “alwaies is content,/ Patiently to suffer God’s visitation” (A4r).
31. Healy, Fictions of Disease, 85; Spinrad, Summons of Death, 91.
32. Compare, for example, Heauenly Man’s speech in Inough with Truste’s speech in Triall of Treasure:
Though the Worldly man doo folowe their lust,
Crying on Earth is our felicitie and pleasure:
Yet God dooth so rule the harts of the Just,
That their study is, cheefly to get Heavenly treasure.

(Inough B1r)
But though wicked men folowe their lust,
Cryng, on earth is our felicitie and pleasure,
yet God doth so guide the hartes of the iuste,
That they respecte chiefly the celestiall treasure.

(Triall D1r)

33. The rest of this speech seems to refer to the martyrdom of Protestants:
We saw howe their brethren they did disdaine,
And burned with fire the childe with the mother,
It is often seene that such monsters ambitious,
As spare not to spill the bloud of the innocente,
Will not greatly sticke to become seditious,
The determination of God therby to preuente.

(D1v)

34. “The Playhouse as Plaguehouse in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy.”