THE IMPACT OF THE PLAGUE ON ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my loving wife, Deb. This is for all of the short holidays, small vacations, and missed birthdays that you have patiently watched slip by with understanding grace. With all my love.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history few natural phenomena have proven to be more formidable than a visitation of either the bubonic or pneumonic plague. This recurring phenomenon is recorded in man's earliest forms of written records. Visitations of the plague are mentioned in ancient Mediterranean and early European literature, and plague regularly figures in the literature of England from the time of the Norman Invasion (1066). Also, revealed literature, such as the Bible, mentions the plague and often attributes plague visitations to the pagan and Christian deities. Although the plague is most noted for its impact on informative and didactic literature, it also contributed to the development of imaginative literature.

Nothing can fully convey the devastating impact the plague had on civilizations, from earliest times up to its abatement in the eighteenth century. The clinical descriptions of the diseases themselves, even by today's standards, are horrible. According to Paul Slack in The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England (1985), in those afflicted by the disease:

> Cells are rapidly destroyed and nervous tissues inflamed. The victim's temperature rises to around 40 degrees Celsius and he suffers head-aches, vomiting, pain and delirium before sinking

> into a final coma. At the same time the unmistakable signs of the disease appear on the skin. A blister forms at the site of the original flea-bite and develops a gangrenous blackish carbuncle. The lymph nodes usually in the groin but sometimes in the armpit or the neck, swell and suppurate, forming the buboes which give the bubonic plague its name. Finally, fresh carbuncles appear, along with blisters and large subcutaneous spots which can change colour between orange and black, blue and purple. These spots were described by historical observers as the "tokens" of the plague, and they and other clinical manifestations made cases of bubonic plague easily recognisable.[1]

The speed with which the disease was contracted and ran its course was terrifying to those who did not know its cause or cure.

Three varieties of the plague visited European culture: bubonic, septicaemic, and pneumonic. The septicaemic plague was an acute form of the bubonic plague; however, its symptoms were such that it appeared to be a separate form of the disease. Nonetheless, each variety had its own specific clinical symptoms. The bubonic plague was characterized by the buboes as mentioned above. With the septicaemic plague, the disease-causing bacilli entered the bloodstream so quickly that death occurred before buboes had time to develop. The pneumonic plague often began as a case of

bubonic plague but was complicated by pneumonia. It then became a distinct disease which attacked the respiratory system.

The disease in man was actually caused by a disease found in the black rat. The bacillus, Pasteurella pestis, was transmitted to man from the rat by the rat's fleas. The starving flea would move from a dead rat to a human and would introduce the bacilli into the human bloodstream. The disease was spread through the human community by fleas that would attach themselves to humans, their clothes, and their baggage. The unsuspecting human would carry the disease when he or she traveled. The short period in which the disease ran its course in humans made it impossible for humans to know that they were carriers in time for quarantine to be effective.

The mortality rate from the bubonic plague averaged between 60 and 80 percent. One reason for such an alarming rate was the speed with which the disease took control. The incubation period lasted approximately six days, a relatively short period. Half of the deaths attributed to the plague occurred within eight days of infection, although some victims lived up to a month. Some even survived. Always, an entire community would be affected quickly.

The main contrast between the pneumonic plague and the other two forms of plague was the method by which it was transmitted. Unlike the bubonic and septicaemic strains, pneumonic plague was transmitted though the air rather than

by the fleas of the black rat. The bacilli were transmitted by a victim's coughing or sneezing so that the next victim inhaled the contagion. The fatality rate for pneumonic plague was much greater than that for bubonic plague, a virtual 100 percent. The true cause of the plague was not discovered until 1894. Until then people could only speculate upon its cause. The suspected causes were many; however, these can be generally classified and narrowed to four. The first was the supernatural. This cause was associated with God's (or the gods') punishment to man for his sins. A second belief was that a corruption of the air caused the plague. The third speculated cause was that "the conjunction of the stars and the aspects of the planets," had a potent influence on the health of the nation. Astrological predictions, which were popular and accepted as valid in early history, provided the main source for this belief. The fourth cause was individuals' bodily susceptibility to the disease.[2]

The scientific and theological literature of the plague years, which covers the period from the beginning of written history to approximately the mid-eighteenth century, informed afflicted civilizations of the plague and its consequences. Also, the plague received brief mention in many medieval literary works, including Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1380-1400), Boccaccio's Decameron (1349-1351), Petrarch's Triumph of Death (1348-1349), and Langland's Vision of Piers Plowman (1362, 1377, 1392). Eventually many

literary works were written with the plague as the main subject matter. The term "plague literature" used here will separate literature with the plague as the main subject matter from literature with references to the plague as an image, event, or situation within a broader literary scheme.

As mentioned earlier, much literature written during the plague years informed the literate masses of the plague, speculated on the reasons for its occurrence, and offered possibilities for coping with its consequences. As such literature developed in England, however, its style progressed from an informative approach to an imaginative one. The style of informative literature can be seen in the following passage from the Diary of Rev. John Ward (1839) by John Ward dealing with the symptoms of the plague:

> The Plague ordinarily begins with vomiting; there are large Buboes that appear in the Emunctories [lymphatic glands]; Carbuncles which come anywhere; the Blanes which are things like blisters; and the tokens are spots of bright flaming red colour.[3]

Imaginative literature sought to treat the subject matter of the plague's symptoms in an entirely different manner, as is illustrated in the following passage from George Wither's The History of the Pestilence (1625):

> The Pestilence, moreover thither brought....
> A Mantle, wrought with purple spottes, shee wore,
> Embost with many a Blaine, and loathsome sore;

Shee had a raving voice, a franticke looke,
A noysome Breath; And in her hand shee shooke
A venom'd speare; which where it towcheth, fills
The vaynes with poysons, and distractes and kills.[4]

Authors of plague literature expressed themselves in this manner in an effort to reach a general audience, and, as a result, works on the plague conformed to the popular literary forms of the day: pamphlets, poems, sermons, and prose fiction. Not only were these works designed to inform the literate public, but often to win favor for their authors in various positions, both political and monetary, when they celebrated in their works the virtues of a potential patron.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth century, English plague literature had reached its zenith, in both its informative and imaginative forms. Several countries during these years had authors who wrote what could be considered plague literature; England, however, boasted several major figures who wrote imaginative works with the plague as their subject matter. The foundation for this literary development was built on plague pamphlets and sermons which were produced as didactic literature.

England, as with other countries, recorded plague visitations throughout its history. The first reported plague in England was Justinian's Plague in 558. This was a significant epidemic because it weakened the Roman legions

that occupied England and eventually led to their decline, not only in that country, but in the rest of the Roman Empire in the west. The first visitation of the plague in England that affected society drastically was the plague of 664. It lasted twenty-five years and caused extensive damage to the economic and social fabric. Until the Black Death of 1348-1351, all plague epidemics in England were primarily pneumonic. In 1348 the bubonic plague was introduced to the island from Europe and, as in Europe, it helped to disrupt medieval society, thereby providing the catalyst for the transformation from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. All over Europe the vast reduction in population caused the economic balance to shift from one social class to another. Those that survived the plague were able to capitalize on the riches and enterprises of those that died. Entire families were wiped out, leaving their peers and subordinates to profit. After the Black Death the bubonic plague became the dominant form of the disease to affect England, with occurrences until the eighteenth century.

Three major visitations of the plague occurred in England (more especially London) during the seventeenth century. These visitations, which became the subject of the plague literature examined here, include the 1603, 1625, and 1665 plagues. These were not all of the plague visitations of this century, but they were the most devastating. The Great Plague of 1665 was particularly important because it

was the last major visitation to devastate London. As it passed and fell from memory, so too did the literary form of plague literature, with the exception of Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year, written in 1721, though even it took the 1665 plague as its subject.

Many English authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mentioned the plague in their works, though few used the plague as their primary subject matter. However, three English authors--Thomas Dekker, George Wither, and Daniel Defoe--based significant works on the plague. The plague works of these authors can also be defined as imaginative literature and, therefore, offer an excellent basis for the study of plague literature.

Thomas Dekker, noted as a writer of interest to the middle class, was a prominent pamphleteer in the early seventeenth century. His ability to write both poetry and prose allowed his works to reach a wide audience. During and after the plague of 1603, Dekker produced a broad variety of plague pamphlets that qualify as imaginative literature. Three such pamphlets warrant particular study: The Wonderfull yeare (1603), Newes from Graves-end (1604), and The Meeting of Gallants (1604).

George Wither wrote several poems about the plague of 1625. The first such work was The History of the Pestilence, written in 1625. Wither revised and expanded this poem in 1628 and renamed it Britain's Remembrancer. The purpose of both was two-fold. First, Wither wanted to

gain favor with King Charles I. In both works he, therefore, included a detailed preface, praising the new monarch. Wither also made considerable mention of the King's virtues within the text of his narratives. The second and primary reason Wither wrote the book was to warn England of its sinful ways and to explain the cause of the plague. Wither felt that the plague was God's warning to the people and a demonstration of His wrath.

The last important author to take up the subject of the plague and whose work will be studied here is Daniel Defoe. That work is Journal of the Plague Year (1722). Two facts make this work intriguing. First, it is purely fiction. The work was written in 1721 and presented to the public in 1722 as a general warning of a feared plague that was sweeping through Europe at that time. The second significant feature of Defoe's work is that its subject matter was the Great Plague of 1665, which had occurred when Defoe was only five years old. Yet his narrative is so convincing that only an expert on the 1665 plague could have recognized it as fiction.

All these are works of imaginative literature. They conform to certain literary structures, and contain certain literary elements which, when combined, create a distinct literary work. More to the point, all the elements of these literary works are influenced by their subject matter, hence the term plague literature. The literary elements to be examined in these works particularly affected by the subject

matter are theme, plot (climax, conflict), character or characterization (dialogue), and imagery (metaphor, simile, allusion).

The works of plague literature discussed here take the form of lyric poetry, prose, and epic. Each has its own distinct characteristics, related to the above list of literary qualities. The epic, for example, is a "long narrative poem in elevated style presenting characters of high positions in adventures forming an organic whole through their relation to a central heroic figure and through their development of episodes important to the history of a nation or race."[5] Lyric poetry is the poet's response to the subject matter of the work using human senses, emotion, and intellect to project this response. Prose, on the other hand, does not have a standard metrical structure as in poetry and often uses the language of the common people. Prose and narrative poetry stress plot and character. All these forms rely on theme and imagery.

Before proceeding, there is an important point that must be mentioned concerning the literary forms employed by the writers of plague literature. The use of prose and epic literary devises, sometimes in combination, suggests the attitude the writers were taking with their works. In the seventeenth century, and to some degree in the eighteenth, prose was considered the form to be used when writing for the general public; it was the language of the "common man." Prose pamphlets, particularly, were viewed as a journalistic

literary form. The epic, conversely, had been and was considered the form to be used when writing about subjects of grand significance. The combination of these two forms, with their two different established purposes, reveals much about the attitudes the writers brought to their efforts. They viewed the plague as a subject, a historical reality, that demanded serious attention. They also felt, however, that it was an issue important to every inhabitant of London. Even Dekker's lyric poetry, with its ballad-like qualities, indicates the importance of plague literature to the common man.

It is the combination of the literary elements and the use of the plague itself as the subject matter which makes this mode of literature both unique and imaginative. Particularly interesting is how the plague itself shaped these literary works, whose authors combined clinical and social aspects with the literary elements to create a literary form unique to their age.

NOTES

[1] Paul Slack, The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) 8.

[2] F. P. Wilson, The Plague in Shakespeare's London (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927) 3-6.

[3] Slack 8.

[4] George Wither, The History of the Pestilence (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1932) 14.

[5] Hugh Holman and William Harmon, A Handbook to Literature, 5th ed. (New York: McMillian Publishing Co, 1986) 177.

THE PLAGUE PAMPHLETS OF THOMAS DEKKER

Thomas Dekker, one of the more significant writers of the English Renaissance, was not only a gifted playwright, but a reputable author of prose and verse as well. While scholars consider his plays to be his most notable works, he was better known in his own day as a poet and a writer of prose, particularly pamphlets. For the purpose of this study, three of the plague pamphlets written by Dekker are important: The Wonderfull yeare (1603), Newes from Graves-end (1604), and The Meeting of the Gallants (1604). These pamphlets offered London society an explanation of the 1603 visitation of the bubonic plague. Such pamphlets were, in fact, one of the main vehicles for communicating information about the plague and a variety of other subjects of social concern and were read by all levels of seventeenth-century society. Even though the primary intent of these works was to transmit information, they were often also imaginative and entertaining. Dekker's abilities as a pamphleteer enabled him to write pamphlets which contained the elements of imaginative literature, while retaining the plague as the central focus of his work.

Dekker is believed to have been born in 1572. The exact details of his early life, including parentage and place of birth, are not really known, though Dekker himself stated that he was born and reared in London. Dekker was probably

sent to a dame and grammar school to learn the basic elements of reading, writing, religion and arithmetic. No records exist showing Dekker as a university student. The Latin used in his works reveals no extraordinary Latin studies, except possibly a good grammar school education and possibly an avid childhood interest in learning.[1]

Many of Dekker's works reflect the Elizabethan London in which he grew up. Dekker's biographers believe that he was possibly influenced by travels abroad between 1588 and 1593, possibly as a sailor. His technical knowledge of nautical terms and his familiarity with foreign cities and their customs give weight to these theories.[2]

The Diary of Philip Henslowe (1598-1604) gives the first written documentation of Dekker. These entries usually refer to loans given by Henslowe to Dekker and payments for manuscripts that Dekker wrote. These entries appear between 1598 and 1604. Henslowe must have recognized Dekker's literary ability since he paid forty shillings to obtain the playwright's discharge from the Counter Prison where he had been placed in 1598 because of debts.[3]

From 1604 to 1613 Dekker led a financially unstable existence. When he was not writing or attempting to write for the theater, he wrote tracts. Between 1609 and 1612 he probably wrote more than one Lord Mayor's show.[4] In 1613 he was arrested and imprisoned for debt again. His imprisonment lasted until 1619. Although imprisoned, Dekker continued to write both professionally and personally. In

1615 he wrote the poem "The Artillery Garden," which was published in 1616. In 1619 he wrote "Dekker's Dream."

Upon his release from prison, Dekker tried to resume his work as a playwright. From 1619 to 1625 he produced several plays for various theatrical companies. Then in 1625 a visitation of the plague, the worst outbreak since 1603, closed the public theaters. During this time, Dekker once again wrote a plague pamphlet, A Rod for Runaways. This pamphlet, the only one he wrote that year, was written for both moral and monetary reasons. In 1628 he published two tracts, Wars, Wars, Wars and Brittania's Horror, and a Lord Mayor's show. In 1629 he published one tract, London's Temple, and another Lord Mayor's show.[5]

The years 1630 and 1631 were fruitful years for Dekker's literary career. In 1630 the plague struck London once again. It was not as serious a visitation as that in 1603, but it did cause thousands of Londoners to flee. Dekker wrote two pamphlets "of religious admonition to the citizens in response to the morality of London's citizens."[6]

In 1632, aged and weary from his financial problems, Thomas Dekker died. Even though Dekker spent a majority of his life in debt and imprisonment, he never lost his faith in God or his love for his country. Each of his plague pamphlets reflects his feelings for both. First, his pamphlets always present his belief that the plague was caused by Divine intervention. Second, his pamphlets were his method of warning his beloved London and England of the

plague and offering instruction and comfort to its people. George Price concludes in his book, Thomas Dekker (1969), that Dekker believed:

> ...if natural evils like epidemic and earthquake, which are manifestations of God's anger are to be averted or limited, it will be on the same conditions: the purification of men's lives.[7]

Price further believes Dekker's pamphlets were a warning to the public:

> The plague pamphlets exhort his countrymen, especially Londoners, to renounce their vices and serve God justly and piously, for fear of the punishment of disease and death: ...The satiric tracts, which are the ones most imitative of Thomas Nashe's technique, survey the rampant evils of London life in order to warn the innocent to avoid contact with the vicious, but more generally, and vaguely, to repel all men from the practice of vice.[8]

Dekker was warning his fellow Londoners that their greatest defense against the plague was their abstinence from vice.

The Wonderfull yeare (1603) is one of Dekker's most important pamphlets. It employs the elements of imaginative literature while still delivering an informative message. The pamphlet concentrates on the major events occurring in 1603. These include the death of Elizabeth I, the accession of James I to the throne, and the visitation of the bubonic

plague. In each event Dekker believed God's will to be manifest. In addition to covering Elizabeth's death, James' accession and the plague visitation, Dekker included several tales to construct a universally understood moral, that the plague was punishment from God for society's sins. Dekker mentions also, however, that these tales are for enjoyment:

> At the ende of all (like many Epilogue to a dull Play) certaine Tales are cut out in Sundry fashions, of purpose to shorten the lines of long winter nights, that lye watching in the dark for us.[9]

Dekker begins The Wonderfull yeare with an embellished passage which provides the reader with an elaborate description of the beginning of spring, suggesting that Vertumnus, the god of the year, has passed through the first "principall Court-gate of Heaven."[10] The porter at the gate is Janus, the god of all beginnings. Janus wears two faces under his hood to represent the uncertainty of the times. The tranquility of spring is suggested by the introduction of a gentle spring sky. The sky, at that season, acquires feminine qualities: "By virtue of which excellent aires, the skie got a most cleare complexion lookt smug and smoothe, and had not so much a wart on her face."[11] The sun, on the other hand, is personified with male characteristics. "The Sunne likewise was freshly and verie richly apparalled in cloth of gold like a bridegroom."[12] Through this personification, Dekker creates a sense of

universal harmony, and thus tranquility, which creates the false impression that London and the entire universe are at peace:

> And as the country was frolicke, so was the citie merry: Olive Trees (which grow no where but in the Garden of peace) stood (as common as Beech does in Midsomer,) at every man's doore, braunches of Palme were in every mans hand: but all more calm than a still water, all husht, as if the Spheres had bene, playing in Consort. In conclusion, heaven lookt like a Palace, and the great hall of the earth like a Paradice.[13]

The statement "As if the Spheres had bene, playing in Consort,"[14] is a further reference to the 17th Century belief that the movement of the planets played an important role in human destiny. This false sense of security only conceals the tragedies to follow.[15]

In Dekker's work, Elizabeth does not simply get sick and die. By analogy he describes her sickness as being a child she bore and raised. Once the child (sickness) matured, it took the Queen to heaven:

> ....and filling her hie forehead full of black wrinckles, tumbling long up and down, (like a great bellyed wife) her sighes being whirlewindes, and her grones thunder, at length she fell in labour, and was delivered of a pale, meagre, weak childe, named Sicknesse, whom Death (with a pestilence)

> would needes take upon him to nurse, and did so. This starueling being come to his full growth, had an office given him for nothing (and thats wonder in this age) Death made him his Herauld;...charged him to goe into the Private Chamber of the Englishe queene, to summon her to appeare in the Star-chamber of heaven.[16]

As magnified, through personification of sickness as a child, Elizabeth's death was a tragic event for Dekker and his country. Ironically, Dekker uses birth as the deliverer of sickness to the Virgin Queen. As with the changing of the seasons, this passage "satirizes an artificial way of celebrating death which is but an extension of the artificial way of celebrating spring and life."[17] Elizabeth's death further causes the birth of a new monarch, James I, whose presence counters Elizabeth's death and implies that he will stabilize England and return it to a tranquil nation. Dekker projected this image in his work, which also served to appease James. Not only does James offer England hope for a brighter future, with the use of a metaphor, Dekker portrays James as the sun which further suggests the new King is as the Son or Viceroy of God by bringing rebirth to the realm:[18]

> God stuck vatiantlie to us, For behold, up rises a comfortable Sun out of the North, whose glorious beams (like a fan) dispersed all thick and contagious clowdes. The loss of a Queen, was paid

with the double interest of a King and Queen.[19]
In this passage Dekker alludes to the rising of the sun which relates to the resurrection of Christ. He rises in the North, implying Scotland, James' original home.[20] Finally, he mentions the sun dispersing clouds which, notably, relates to the theory that the plague was transmitted or carried by the clouds and thereby anticipates the first section of the pamphlet.

Dekker's faith in James and the embellished manner of presenting James' accession to the throne was a wonderful method to lure the reader back into a sense of the tranquility England experienced before Elizabeth's death. The security produced with James's accession was short lived, however, because an ominous force also appeared in England in 1603. This was the pestilence. Dekker alludes to the false sense of security and the coming of the plague through the use of the Greek tale of the Trojan Horse.[21] "Whilst Troy was swilling sack and sugar, the mad Greekes made bonefires of their houses: Old Priam was drinking a health to the wodden horse and before it could be pledged had his throat cut."[22] Dekker continues with a metaphor to suggest that for every pleasant event that occurs, there is also sadness. "Flowers no sooner budded, but they are pluckt and dye, Night walks at the heels of day, and sorrow enters (like a taverns-bill) at the taile of owr pleasures."[23] He also uses heightened language to suggest that all of these acts are the work of God who can, at any moment,

bring joy or sadness. "Behold that miracle-worker, who in one minute turned our generall mourning to a generall mirth, does now againe in a moment alter that gladness to shrikes & lamentation."[24] Dekker's use of contrast to describe these events and the general gloom of Jacobean literature blend effectively with his presentation of plague material. Frederick O. Waage describes this contrast in Thomas Dekker's Pamphlets, 1603-1609 and Jacobean Popular Literature (1977) as a universal pattern:

> The form of The Wonderfull Yeare, considered as a whole, appears to imitate two universal patterns. The first is temporal and linear. The reader experiences the joy of spring, then the death of one ruler and proclamation of another, and finally the plague in all its intensity.[25]

Dekker's first direct mention of the plague is a passage which describes the fear he experiences in knowing the plague is present. The horror causes Dekker's body and his emotions to become unstable:

> A stiffe and freezing horror sucks up the rivers of my bloud; my haire stands of end with the panting of my braines; my eye balls are readie to start out, being beaten with the billows of my tears; out of my weping pen does the inck mournefullie and more bitterly that gall drop on the pale-fac'd papr, even when I do but think how the bowels of my sicke country have bin torne.[26]

In the preceding passage, Dekker's body acquires the characteristics of an inanimate object, and inanimate objects in turn acquire human characteristics. Dekker's blood vessels become rivers, his tear ducts become billows, and his brain pants. His ink pen weeps, his paper is pale-faced, and his country's bowels are torn. All of these images enhance his description of the fear he has for the plague and suggest the havoc it will cause the body politic of England. They further provide a description of symptoms of the plague.

Dekker then gathers his thoughts and relies on his inner self to cope with the plague. In order to express his thoughts he uses an allegory and calls sorrow and truth to assist him in his fight against the plague.[27] Sorrow and truth are human emotions, but Dekker uses them as characters and invokes them as the epic poet would invoke the muse:

> Sorrow and Truth sit you on each side of me,
> whilst I am delivered of this deadly burden;
> prompt me that I may utter ruthfull and passinate
> condolement; arm my trempling hand, that it may
> boldly rip up and Anatomize the ulcerous body of
> these Anthropophagized plague.[28]

Sorrow and Truth are personified and sit next to Dekker. He asks them to prompt and council him so he might fight his enemy, the plague. Just as sorrow and truth are personified, so too is the plague which becomes a Scythian, which feeds on human flesh.[29]

One of the most embellished passages in Dekker's The Wonderfull yeare is that in which he extends his allegory to include the traditional character Death and follows this allusion with a cataloging of plague symptoms, reminiscent of the use of catalogues of warriors in the great classical epics:

> Imagine then that all this while Death (like a Spanish Leager, or rather like a stalking Tamberlaire) hath pitcht his tents (being nothing but a heape of winding sheets tackt together) in the sinfully-polluted suburbs; the Plague is Muster-maister and Marshall of the field; Buring Feavers, Boyles, Blaines, and Carbuncles, the Leaders, Lieutenants, Serieants, and Corpralls; the maine Army consisting (like Dunkirke) of a mingle-mangle, viz. dumpish Mourners, merry Sextons, hungry Coffin-sellers, scrubbing Bearers, and nastie Grave-makers.[30]

Dekker is describing an army, one created by Death, with the Plague as his field marshall.[31] The Plague is Death's earthly representative. The symptoms of the plague are its officers (lieutenants, sergeants, and corporals). The soldiers of the plague are the humans. These soldiers perform the duties of mourners, coffin sellers, and grave diggers in support of the Plague's battle against society.

Dekker also uses the epic form to set the tone for the grand encounter between Death and its enemies. The Plague

is described in battle fashion with Death being unmerciful. "No parley will be granted, no composition stood upon... A hundred or two lost in every shirmish."[32] The victims try to flee, but the country people force them back to London. Figuratively, the masterful warrior, Marshall Plague, waits for their return and sets a trap:

> ... for the enemy taking advantage by their flight, planted his ordinance against the walls; here the Canons (like their great Bells) roard; the Plague took sore pains for a breech, he laid about her cruelly, ere he could get it, but at length he and his teranous band entred; his purple colours were present (with the sound of the Bow-bell in stead of a trompet) advanced, and joynd to the Standard of the Citie; he marcht even thorow Cheapside, and the capitall streets of Troynouant: the only blot of dishonour that struck upon this Invader, being this, that he plaide the tyrant not the conqueror, making havock of all, when he had all lying at the foote of his mercy.[33]

In this passage Dekker uses battle imagery to show the devastation as the plague swept through London. In so doing, the plague was not selective; it affected all parts of the city. Those that tried to escape were destroyed when they returned. This passage, by using excellent heroic imagery, reflects the general theme of the work. The plague was unavoidable; it affected all parts of the city and all

classes of society with amazing speed and without mercy.

The theme of inescapability is echoed throughout the latter portion of the pamphlet by vignettes that portray plague victims and their ordeals:

> And at this point, a little more than half way through the published tract, Dekker begins a series of anecdotes which comprise the remainder of the work. Nearly all are ironic, for the swiftness and unexpectedness of either death or recovery lead to dramatic reversals.[34]

One such story involves two young lovers who marry during the height of the plague. During the ceremony when the priest says, "in sickness and in health,"[35] and "for better, for worse,"[36] the bride develops the symptoms of the plague. Even though the marriage ceremony is completed, the couple is unable to consummate the marriage, and within a short period of time they both die:

> ...she was a wife, yet continued to be a mayd: he was a husband and a widow, yet never knew his wife: she was his own, yet he had her not: she had him, yet never enjoyed him."[37]

Consistent with the theme of the pamphlet, the plague strikes this couple so quickly that even though they are man and wife, they do not sexually bond.

Another plague story tells about a runaway that contracts the disease and is abandoned by his fellow travelers. Everyone, including the Innkeeper where he

stayed before he got sick, shuns him. While he is trying to reach the security of his home, a second traveler takes pity on him and carries him to a field where he dies. The second traveler returns the plague victim's clothes to his widow in London. The next day the second traveler dies. Once again, this small story serves to solidify Dekker's theme, first by the manner in which the runaway is treated and second, by the swiftness with which the plague overtakes both victims.[38]

These two stories perfectly express the theme of the pamphlet. First, the plague indiscriminately strikes its victims without regard to their social and moral status. Lovers, good Samaritans, and runaways are all affected. Second, the plague moves with such speed and fury, people could do little or nothing to escape its path. The selection of these settings, the marriage day for two young loves and the loneliness felt by the traveler, stresses the horror and helplessness experienced by the general public during the plague.

These stories also display Dekker's use of character and characterization in the pamphlet. The characters themselves are not distinctive. This fact reinforces his theme that the plague, God's messenger, shows no mercy and respects no social distinction. It can be said, however, that the narrator, who appears to be Dekker, can be considered as a character. Whoever the narrator is, he certainly is a survivor of the plague. His narrative is directed to

project the fear and horror of the plague, as seen in the imagery discussed earlier:

> ... the bare ribbes of a father that begat him, lying there: here the Chaples hollow scull of a mother that bore him: round about him a thousand Coarses, some standing bolt upright in their knotted winding sheetes: others halfe mouldred in rotten Coffins, that should suddenlyyawne wide open, filling his nostrils with noysome stench, and his eyes with the sight of nothing but crawling wormes.[39]

The narrator speaks of his own fears, but he also can tell the stories of the other plague victims as an impartial observer. Dekker's use of his characters, combined with the embellished style, communicates a very effective message. Not only is the audience to understand that the plague is Godsent, unmerciful, and swift, but they also are meant to be moved by the theme because of the literary qualities of the pamphlet. This work contains all of the elements to stand alone as an imaginative work.

Newes from Graves-ende (1604), a combination of prose and poetry, continues Dekker's plague message to his country and city. The "Epistle Dedicatory" is written in prose while the actual story is in verse. Dekker continues his use of imagery to stress the cause and the horror of the plague. In this pamphlet, however, Dekker presents his belief that the plague is God's way of punishing humans for

their sins and disclaims the beliefs that mysterious clouds and celestial bodies are the cause:

> ...he presents the typical argument that if the plague was a vapor engendered in the air and water, we would all catch it, and he also concludes traditionally that the plague is caused by sin, and its cure is not medicine but moral reform.[40]

Imagery, similar to that used in The Wonderfull yeare, continues to dominate Dekker's literary effort. The most prevalent embellishments are Dekker's allegory and epic catalogue to describe death and the plague. "Laying down (so well as I can) the manner how death and his army of pestilent Archers, entered the field, and how every arrow that they drew, did almost cleave a heart in sunder".[41] Once again, the reader is introduced to death's army, with archers causing death with every arrow they draw and release.

In Newes from Graves-ende, the sin that causes God to punish society (mankind) is greed.[42] Dekker's own personal life, filled with financial problems, is an example of the monetary desires of his society. Money and greed are first mentioned in the "Epistle Dedicatory" where Dekker compares the red crosses on the doors of London which represent the sick and infected, with the crosses of silver which represent man's quest for money:

> You talke of a Plague in London, & red Crosses set

> upon dores, but ten plagues cannot melt so many crosses of silver out of Lawyers purses as the Winchesterians (with a hey-pas, re-pas) jugled out of theirs to put into their own.... So that being puft up with an opinion, that the Silver Age was crept into the worlde, they denyed (in a manner) the King Coyne, for a penny was no money with them.[43]

Here Dekker is suggesting his conclusion concerning the necessity of the plague, as a method of population control:[44]

> How needfull (tho hos dreadfull) are
> Purple Plagues, or Crimson warre.
> We would conclude (still vrging pittie)
> A Plague's the Purge to clense a Cittie:
> Who amongst millions deny
> (In rougn prose, or smooth Poesie)
> Of Euils, tis the lighter broode,
> A dearth of people, then of foode![45]

He does suggest that even though the plague will purge the city, it still will not cleanse it of greed and corruption. No matter how many plagues God sends against man, as symbolized by the red crosses painted on the doors of infected households, human greed (crosses of silver) will continue to occur. Dekker carries the message further by stating that money does humans no good once the plague is upon them:

For then the Usurer must behold
His pestilent flesh, whilst all his gold
Turns into Tokens, and the chest
(They lie in) his infectious brest:
How well heele play the Misers part
When all his coyne stick at his heart?
Hees worth so may farthings then.
That was a golden God mongst men.[46]

Dekker uses metaphor to show how "gold turns into tokens." This image implies that as the coin chest holds their tokens of wealth, so will their own chest hold their tokens of death.

Greed is not the only sin that Dekker talks about. He also discusses the evils of excessive drink:

And in his meales adores the cup,
(For when he falls downe that stands up
Therefore a goblet Scull flows o'er
He worships Bacchus on all foure.
For none but his God but Bacchus then,
Who rules and guides ale drunken men).[47]

Dekker uses the image of a human skull as a goblet, flowing over with alcohol, to imply the victim is excessively drunk. The skull itself is the symbol of death and the end of intelligence. Bacchus is the ancient god of wine and revelry, therefore, symbolizing man as worshiping a false god, in this case, drink and merriment.

Dekker then extends his metaphor further to compare the

plague to wine:

> When he shall see blew marks mock grapes,
> and hang in clusters on each veine,
> Like to wine-bubbles, or the graine
> Of staggering sinne, which now appears
> In the December of his years,
> His last of howers; when heele scarce have
> Time to goe sober to his Grave.
> And then to die! (dreadful to thinke!)
> When all his blood is turned to drinke:[48]

In the case of the drunk that becomes the plague victim, the buboes that appear on the veins of the body will look like grapes on a vine. The vine further symbolizes the spread of the plague throughout the body and, more importantly, throughout civilization. This passage allows Dekker to project human sins and to inform the community that their sins will be the ultimate cause of their demise.

Dekker poses several theories concerning the belief that the plague was caused by mysterious clouds that were often seen before a plague visitation. His use of imagery provides a convincing defense for this theory:

> Nor drops this venome, from that faire
> and christall bosome of the Aire,
> Whose ceaseles motion clarifies
> All vaporous stench, that upward flies
> And with her universall wings,
> thick poisonous fumes abroad she flings

... Then rivers would drink poysond aire:
Trees shed their green and curled haire:[49]

The air has become feminine, dropping venom from her bosom. This is a personification with the air acquiring the human characteristics of a female. It is ironic that Dekker would use the feminine gender to represent air. The female image is usually associated with mother nature, the life-giver image. Because mother nature spreads these fumes, rivers "drink poysond" and trees "shed their green and curled haire" representing the death of nature. This image further suggests that the balance of nature has been disrupted.

The characters and characterization in Newes from Graves-ende, as in The Wonderfulle yeare, are general. The narrator is not omniscient. He is both participant and judge. Like The Wonderfull yeare, where Dekker uses vignettes in Newes from Graves-ende uses vignettes that depict general characters. The main part of the pamphlet is the verse which relates the theme of the story, that man's sins are the main cause of the plague and only when humans stop displeasing God will the plague cease:

Cease vexing heaven, and cease to die,
Seeke therefore (after you have found
Salve naturall for the naturall wound
Of this Contagion,) Cure from thence
Where the first evil did commence
And that's the Soule: each one purge one,
And Englands free, the Plague is gone.[50]

Dekker's plague message is clear and direct. Man must stop believing the cause of the plague to be physical and celestial and start searching his soul for the true reason, his sins.

The last Dekker pamphlet to be reviewed is The Meeting of the Gallants at an Ordinarie or The Walkes in Powles (1604). The Meeting of the Gallants contains literary elements similar to those found in the other pamphlets, yet Dekker's style becomes different. The main difference lies in Dekker's use of imagery and characterization. Though all characters are fictional, he uses a combination that includes a dialogue between allegorical beings which portray War, Pestilence and Famine. Another group of characters portray survivors of the plague. The third category of characters are those within stories told by the survivors. Each of the human characters is a product of the stories of the allegorical characters.

The pamphlet is divided into three sections. The first section is an allegorical dialogue among the three imaginary enemies of man - Warre, Famine, and Pestilence - who are part of Death's army which will be released with the opening of the Fourth Seal during the end of the world as told in the Book of Revelation (6. 7-8). These characters actually set the tone of the story, with Pestilence using the other two to show his power and destruction. The second section of the pamphlet is a discourse between citizens of London who have survived the plague, have met at the ordinarie, and

are discussing the city's situation. They continue by having the Host tell tales about the humorous events that occurred during the plague. The third part consists of vignettes told by the Host. The vignettes are light, but each contains a moral. They also develop varied themes which are displayed in all of Dekker's plague pamphlets. The Meeting of the Gallants contains another important aspect not found in the other works studied, a detailed look at everyday life in London, particularly the textile industry, during and after the plague. "It contains anecdotes, usually humorous, of the chances and changes of the plague, and pictures of London life which are rich in topical allusions and noteworthy for their colour and vigour."[51]

The pamphlet begins with a dialogue among the allegorical characters Pestilence, Warre, and Famine, the Furies who paid man for his sins. Although these characters are allegorical, they have acquired both human and god-like qualities. Each challenges the others' destructive force. Warre is the most honorable of the three. He accuses Pestilence and Famine of being "Cowards of Hell"[52] for attacking civilization during peaceful times:

> Famine and Pestilence, Cowards of Hell,
> That strike in peace, when the whole worlds unarmed;
> Tripping up soules of Beggars, limblesse wretches
> Hole-stepping Prisoners, miserable Catchpole's,
> Whom one vacation stabs dare you Furies

Confront the Ghost of crimson passing Warre?[53]

This passage establishes the three subjects as having human characteristics. Famine further portrays Warre as human by threatening to starve him and by making reference to Warre's blood. Warre considers Famine as weak and calls Pestilence a bragging "plaguy woman."[54] Warre further refers to Pestilence and Famine as "hags of Realmes."[55] Once again, Dekker uses feminine images to portray the villains.

Pestilence is relentless in showing her power. She considers her fury capable of waging a great battle and compares her casualties to those of Warre:

> Say that an Army fortie thousand strong,
> Enter the crimson lists, and of that number
> Perchance the fourth part falls, markt with red death?
> Why, I slay fortie thousand in one Battaile,
> Full of blew wounds, whose cold clay bodies look
> Like speckled marble.[56]

Pestilence's embellished description of her casualties' wounds not only presents the illusion of the battlefield, but it also gives the reader a vivid clinical description of the survivors:

> As for lame persons, and maimed Souldiers
> There I outstrip thee too; how many Swarmes
> Of bruised and crackt people did I leave.
> Their Groines sore pier'st with pestilentiall Shot.
> Their Arme-pits digd with Plaines and ulcerous Sores,
> Lurking like poysond Bullets in their flesh?

Othersome shot in the eye with Carbuncles,
Their Lids as monstrous as the Sarazens.[57]

Pestilence's battle metaphor not only presents a vivid description, but it also projects the graphic image of the plague's wrath.

Dekker continues the argument between the Furies and includes one more passage which conveys two of the themes. This passage is Pestilence's dialogue concerning the randomness by which she chooses her victims. The allusion she uses deals with the usurers and their money. The themes that are presented in this material first display the fact that the plague affected everyone in every facet of life and, second, that money does not save a person from the plague. Pestilence argues with Warre and demonstrates that even usurers are affected by her fury, but not so with Warre's fury:

Who ever read that Usurers dyed in Warre
Grasping a Sword, or in iron yeare,
Languisht with Famine?[58]

Pestilence further transforms all of their gold into dead-tokens, and often, the victim succumbs to her at their work place:

Amongst their golden Hills: when I have changed
Their Gold into dead tokens with the touch
Of my pale-spotted, and infectious Rodde,
When with a suddaine start and gastly looke,
They have left counting Coyne to count their flesh,

A summe up their last usuary on their Brests,
All their whole wealth, lockt in their bony Chests.[59]

Dekker is pressing the point that the only wealth a person has is the soul that rests in his or her heart, not the coins collected in the course of a lifetime. This reinforces the earlier verse where man's tokens of gold in a money chest is transformed into tokens upon his chest or breast.

The second section of The Meeting of the Gallants consists of a dialogue between several gallants who convey the status of London life after the plague. In their discussion they speak of many things; however, one of the most important points they uncover is the effects the plague has had on the social structure of the city. Dekker introduces this transformation by using local clothing styles of the day. One of the characters, Ginglespurre, points out that during the plague the fashion was to wear ragged clothes. The reason for this was the people were afraid of satin during the plague, "because they thought it very dangerous to deale with Sattin this plague-time, being Divell enough without the plague."[60] This intentional pun comparing the cloth, satin with the demon, Satan is followed by the real reason:

> ...beside there hath bene a great Dearth of Taylors, the propertie of whose deathes were wonderfull, for they were took from Hell to Heaven: All these were Motives sufficient to

> perswade Gentlemen as they loved their lives, to come up in their old sutes.[61]

This economic change, combined with the indiscriminate loss of life during the plague, had created an imbalance in the social structure. This imbalance is projected in the following passage:

> But see how we have lost our selves, Powles is changde into Gallants, and those which I saw come up in old Taffata Doublets yesterday, are slipt into none yards of Satn to day.[62]

Such class imbalances occurred frequently during the plagues and were a major concern of the upper classes. To make his point, Dekker relies on the literary device of characterization by selecting persons who are relaying stories of the plague.

The third section of The Meeting of the Gallants consists of a variety of humorous tales told by the Host of the ordinarie. These tales are very entertaining, but they also contain a moral (often hidden) or reflect on a social issue of the plague years.

An example of such a social issue is the case of runaways from the plague. Dekker and other citizens were very critical of persons who fled from the plague. In fact, Dekker manages to mention (normally negatively) runaways in every plague pamphlet. This pamphlet is no exception. In his short tale, "Of one that fell drunke off from his Horse taken for a Londoner, dead," Dekker contends that the people

of a small village mistake a drunk who has fallen off his horse for a runaway. His manner of speaking of his accused runaway is less than complimentary:

> ...every one gave up his verdict, and all concluding in one that he was some coward Londoner, who thought to fly from the sickness, which it seemed, made after him amayne him beside his horse.[63]

Dekker does not openly call the runaway a coward; he uses the host as the spokesperson. He is using narrative distance to enhance the effect. In this case the host is his speaker.

Even though it is pointed out that these tales deal with comical blunders, Dekker does not conclude them on a humorous note. He concludes with several depressing notes of entire families being swept away by the plague. "How often whole households emptied to fill up Graves."[64] In this passage Dekker points out that families were struck with the plague and died for the purpose of filling graves. Even his concluding statement, "But let not this make you sad, Gallants: sit you merry stil: Here my dainty Bullyes, Ile put you all in one Goblet, and wash all these Tales in a Cup of Sack,"[65] does not lighten the burden Dekker has placed on the audience.

The contrast between the humorous tales and the serious points that is prevalent throughout Dekker's pamphlets suggests his primary literary device and helps to strengthen

the overall theme. Dekker, as with other plague pamphlet writers, realized the importance of conveying the message to all the inhabitants of London that the plague was a product of their sins and if they did not change their habits God's wrath would destroy them all. In order to reach the various social classes of London, Dekker resorted to mixing forms of literature, thereby making his pamphlets accessible to all literate classes. The lyric poetry, with its embellished language and imagery, appealed to the higher social classes. The stories, which were often humorous and sometimes graphic, attracted the lower social classes. Each conveyed a central theme, whether by a simple moral or by epic form, that no one person or social class could escape God's wrath.

NOTES

[1] George R. Price, Thomas Dekker (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1969) 17-18.

[2] Price 19-20.

[3] Price 22-23.

[4] Price 26-27.

[5] Price 31-33.

[6] Price 33.

[7] Price 157.

[8] Price 156-157.

[9] Thomas Dekker, Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925) 2.

[10] Dekker 9.

[11] Dekker 9-10.

[12] Dekker 10.

[13] Dekker 10.

[14] Dekker 10.

[15] Frederick O. Waage, Thomas Dekker's Plague Pamphlets, 1603-1609, vol. 53 (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1977) 57-63.

[16] Dekker 11.

[17] Waage 65.

[18] Waage 156.

[19] Dekker 20-21.

[20] Waage 61.

[21] Waage 207n.

[22] Dekker 25.

[23] Dekker 25.

[24] Dekker 25.

[25] Waage 53.

[26] Dekker 25-26.

[27] Price 115.

[28] Dekker 26.

[29] Dekker 26.

[30] Dekker 31-32.

[31] Price 116.

[32] Dekker 32.

[33] Dekker 32-33.

[34] Price 116.

[35] Dekker 45.

[36] Dekker 46.

[37] Dekker 46.

[38] Waage 135.

[39] Dekker 27.

[40] Waage 143-144.

[41] Dekker 73.

[42] F. P. Wilson, introduction, Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker, by Thomas Dekker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925) xii.

[43] Dekker 76-77.

[44] Waage 141.

[45] Dekker 102.

[46] Dekker 97.

[47] Dekker 98.

[48] Dekker 98.

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Dekker 82-84.

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Dekker 102.

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Dekker 51.

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Dekker 107.

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Dekker 107.

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Dekker 109.

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Dekker 108.

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Dekker 109.

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Dekker 109.

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Dekker 110.

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Dekker 110.

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Dekker 114.

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Dekker 114.

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Dekker 118.

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Dekker 127.

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Dekker 133.

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Dekker 133.

GEORGE WITHER'S THE HISTORY OF THE PESTILENCE

George Wither, English poet and pamphleteer of the seventeenth century, played, as did Thomas Dekker, a major role in the development of plague literature. His The History of the Pestilence (1625) and Britain's Remembrancer (1628), besides being examples of imaginative literature, use the plague as their main subject matter. These lengthy poems served two purposes for Wither. First, they were a tribute to Charles I, and, second, they were Wither's prophetic message to England that the plague was God's punishment for society's sinful ways.

Wither was born in 1588 in Bentworth, Hampshire. His family was very prominent, and during his youth he was accustomed to servants and luxury. As a child he attended the village school. In 1603 he was at Magdalen College, Oxford, but the exact dates of his stay at Oxford are not known. Wither's personal writings contend that he entered Oxford in 1604. In 1605 his education was curtailed because of family financial problems that required his return to Benthworth.[1]

At age eighteen Wither left Bentworth and went to London. For the first five years (1606-1611) in London, Wither "engaged in legal pursuits, cultivated literary friendships which soon generated his pastoral and satiric poetry."[2] In 1611 he entered Lincoln's Inn. During this

period Wither published his first work, "Abuses Stript and Whipt" (1613). This work, as with his works written prior to 1625, projects a style that Wither used in all his works:

> In "Abuses" the poet emphasizes three convictions that become permanent traits. These are (1) his belief that his message (and experience) concerns all men (2) his resolution to avoid personalities in social criticism (3) and the logical conclusion that plain language aids the readers' understanding best.[3]

After it was issued, Wither's "Abuses Stript and Whipt" was not received well by the authorities, and he was imprisoned for four months. The imprisonment has never been fully explained; however, the most convincing explanation is that the tract offended Henry Howard, the Earl of Northampton.

Other early works, "The Shepards Hunting" (1614) and "Satyre Written to the Kings Most Excellent Maiestie" (1615) also protested oppression and drew criticism from the authorities. " Wither's Motto" (1621) once again offended some prominent official, causing Wither to be imprisoned for three months.[4] "The Schollers Purgatory" (1624) is a bold defense of the freedom of the press, but it also mentions that the King allowed his judgment to be swayed by the Stationers. This work earned Wither a third trip to prison.[5] In 1631 he traveled to Holland. While in Holland he published "Psalmes of David" (1632).

Prior to his travels abroad, Wither survived the London

Plague of 1625. After his plague experiences Wither felt himself to be of a "self-styled prophet."[6] As a result of the plague Wither developed the belief that it and other national calamities were God's wrath against mankind for their sins. This belief is reflected in his later works such as "The Dark Lantern" (1655), "Tuba Pacifica" (1664), and "A Memorandum to London" (1665). Wither also altered his literary style to include Biblical characters, incidents, or settings.[7]

From 1635 to 1642 Wither lived at his country estate near Farnham, in Surrey. Except for brief service as Captain of Horse for the Earl of Arundel during Charles I's expedition against the Scottish Presbyterians in 1639, he was primarily retired. During this period he wrote "Emblemes" (1635), "The Nature of Man" (1636), and "Halelujah" (1641).

During the great political upheaval in England from 1642 to 1660, Wither served the Parliamentary government as soldier, magistrate, pamphleteer, prophetic poet, and private remonstrant.[8] Even though Wither supported Charles I against the Scottish Presbyterians, he deserted the Royalist cause for the Parliamentarians because he felt that Parliament pursued the righteous cause. Wither was promoted to Major in the Parliamentary Army and in 1642 was appointed the Commander of Farnham Castle.

Wither remained in Hampshire and Surrey until 1660 when he returned to London. Shortly after returning to London,

Wither wrote "Vox Vulgi" (1661) which criticized the Convention Parliament, and he was again imprisoned, this time for three years. He died in London on May 2, 1667.

From the period 1655 to 1667, most of Wither's works projected his religious counsels to the nation. This counsel stemmed from his prior convictions that God's wrath descends on man because of his sins. His early works The History of the Pestilence (1625) and Britain's Remembrancer (1628) laid the poetic foundation for his later writings which pursued this idea.

For the purposes of this study, The History of the Pestilence will be reviewed. Of the two works, The History of the Pestilence was the earlier. It contains the literary elements of plague literature. Britain's Remembrancer is an expanded and weaker version of The History of the Pestilence and does not contain any additional elements important to the development of the genre of plague literature.

Wither's The History of the Pestilence is in the form of epic. The poem contains supernatural forces which routinely decide the fate of humans. The setting is vast and involves the entire universe of the seventeenth century, heaven and earth. Wither also begins the poem in media res by opening the first Canto with the end of the plague and then returning to the beginning:

> The Storme is past, and loe, wee now obtyene
> The cheerefull brightness of Gods face againe.
> Let all Affaires keepe off, and give the way;

ffor, through my greatest outward ffortunes lay
This howre at spoile, I would not be adviz'd
To speak for then, till I had sacrifiz'd:
Nor will I to the world one Line allowe
Till I have made performance of my vowe.[9]

Also in line with the epic form, Wither invokes a Muse to inspire and instruct his efforts. He catalogues armies, characters and warriors. Finally, he uses extended formal speeches. These epic characteristics affect imagery, characterization, and plot to create an imaginative work that suggests the profound nature of Wither's topic and theme.

The theme of The History of the Pestilence is the most important literary element of the work. The theme, that this plague is released on man because of God's anger with man's sinful ways, is echoed throughout the poem. All other literary elements and the epic foundation support and strengthen this theme. Charles Hensely's discussion of Britain's Remembrancer, which contains The History of the Pestilence as its first two cantos, reiforces this idea:

A very long poem of epic pretensions, it is, besides the poet's documentary-like description of the bubonic plague of 1625, a rambling catalog of dire predictions mixed with personal digressions psychologically rich....The conviction that all men's sins are the later chief cause of the plague and other national troubles stimulates

later prophetic musings, musings, declarations,
and diatribes.[10]

Wither begins the poem by introducing London as a city of excessive sin. The city itself is referred to as a female and takes that image:

Our Soveraigne Citie, there I did espye
Upon the Couch of softe Securitie;
And how with Peace, and Plentie being fedd,
She toyed like a wanton on her Bedd,
I saw she drest in all that rich Attyre
Which doth enflame her Lovers with desire:
And how her idle children ev'ry day
Sate downe to eate and drincke, and rose to play.
ffor Shee was then insensible of Cares,
Shee had almost forgotten Sighes and Teares;
And all this Island, in her cup of pleasure
With her had quaffed, so much of measure,
That they grew drunck together through excesse
And, wilde and giddie, in their drunckness.[10]

Sin is the prevalent factor in this passage. Wither imaginatively represents London as a woman consumed in excess who becomes wild and giddie. This image suggests a Biblical "Eve," with London coercing England into the original sin. The city has forgotten God's warnings.

Wither expands his reference to these sins by speculating what God must view on earth from heaven:

ffor, whether hee, who from his Heav'ly Spheare

Beholdeth all our thoughtes and Actions here,
Did with a searching eye, examyne more
Our courses at that present, then before.
Or whether hee, our thanklessnes had eyde,
Discover'd our Hipochrisie, our Pride,
Or our Impietie; Or whether hee
Did in our Citie, or this Kingdome see
Our old Idolatries come creeping in;
Or, whether hee, some new devised Synn
Did finde to sprout among us here? yea, whether
It were some one of their, or altogethe;
Or what it was, I know not; But, it prov'd
A cryeing Synn; And so extreamely mov'd
God gentlenes, that Angry hee became,
His browes were bended, and his eyes did flame.[12]

With this passage, Wither is pointing out the sins that society has committed against God. God's gentleness turns into anger, causing the very universe to shake under his wrath:

Heere sate the King of Godds; and from about
His Eyelids, soe much terror sparked out,
That ev'ry Circle of the Heav'ns it shooke
And all the world did tremble at his looke.
...The troubled Ayre, before his presence fledd.
...The Coursers of the Sunn, mistook their path.
The hoast of Heav'n was frighted at his wrath.
And (with a voyce, which made all Creatures quake)

To this effect, the great Eternall spake.[13]

The two passages cited above are very important for several reasons. The first passage establishes the fact that God is angered by man's sin. The second passage suggests several popular theories concerning the origin of the plague in seventeenth-century London as being caused by the air and a celestial disturbance.[14] To stress this point, Wither uses one characteristic of the epic by placing the setting on a grand scale. Wither's use of such phrases as "ev'ry Circle of the Heav'ns" gives a reader the impression of a setting of great magnitude. So great are man's sins, God's anger disrupts not only heaven but the entire universe. The stars and planets are displaced, which enhances the seventeenth-century belief that a disorder in the Cosmos often caused the plague. The air fleeing God's presence refers to the belief that strange clouds or disrupted air caused plague outbreaks. Thus Wither brings the development of his ideas out of heaven and back into seventeenth-century London.

Next, Wither uses epic imagery to portray God's calling forth a great army to destroy civilization. This army is under the command of Vengeance, a figure of allegorical dimension:

...Goe drawe together
Thy fforces Vengeance; march then quickly thether
With all our Judgements, and consume them soe
That wee may never more displeased growe
Att their unkindenes, or be Cheated, by

The ffayned weepings of Hipocrisie.[15]

Wither then introduces the troops of the army which, in reality, are both natural and man-made phenomena, but are presented as having both supernatural and human characteristics:

Sterne-visag'd Warr, (whose very looke doth strike)
Came driving on his Charrett, Juhu-like
Arm'd, and besett with Halbertes, Bills and Glaves,
Bowes, Arrowes, Pikes, Pollaxes, Darting-Staves,
Gunnes, Balles of fire, and ev'ry thing yet furthers
The worke of Dessolation, Woundes, and Murthers.
His prime companions, Theft and Rapine were,
With whatsoever cruell doth appeere;[16]

Warr is the first soldier and leader introduced. He is portrayed as a mortal warrior and has in his possession all of the items used in war that bring destruction and death upon his victims. Warr is accompanied by the allegorical figures Theft and Pillage, actual incidents found during war and during visitations of the plague. Death is the next commander displayed. Wither never uses the term death; however, the description of the "Fiend" provides the reader with the name:

On which hee falls: This is that roaring Feind
Who Lawes and Leagues doth into peeces rend.
...This is that Sacrilegious Theife, that spares
Nor Hospitall, nor Temple; neither heares
The suite of crye of Aged, or of young

Nor regardfull of the weake or strong:
The Infant from his mothers brest he snatcheth
And braynes it in her sight: The wife hee catcheth
Ev'n from her husbands bedd. And Virgins from
their Lovers armes, his strumpetts to become.
...And usually, the last of all those Rodds
Which on a thankless kingdome hee doth lay
Before hee fynally remove away
The means of Grace.[17]

Wither describes death as the last of all instruments that God uses when his Grace is no longer bestowed on humans. Wither suggests not only the death of the body, but the death, or damnation, of the soul.

Through embellished language, Wither also projects the suddenness and indiscriminate manner in which death occurs. The child at its mother's breast, the virgin in her lover's arms, and the wife in her husband's bed, all suffer the cruelty and swiftness with which the plague can strike. Wither's point is the same as that Dekker made in The Wonderfull yeare, as in the case where the young couple are married, but unable to consummate their marriage before they die of the plague.

Wither's next character is famine, who is portrayed by a sneaky, lean woman and whose appearance takes on the characteristics of an actual famine victim. Pestilence follows with references made to her destructive power. Wither uses a Biblical allusion to convey the history and

power of the plague. He refers to the plague brought upon Egypt by God in order to allow Moses and the Israelites to escape:

> Betwixt an E'v'ninge tide, and break of day
> ffrom every house, a Soule she took away,
> Thoughout the land of AEgipt, and could mark
> Their Eldest borne, although the night were darke.
> In little space, shee quite had overthrowne,
> Great Cities, and dispoyled many a Towne.[18]

The plague is shown here to be powerful enough to take a victim from every house in Egypt. The passage further suggests the swiftness with which she took her victims and the impartiality by which she chose them. When using Biblical allusions, Wither always uses the image to address an immediate concern. In this passage, he concludes by mentioning "Great Cities" that have been destroyed, which suggests the possibility that London could be destroyed.[19]

Wither describes Pestilence as a supernatural being whose appearance has the bodily characteristics of a victim of the plague:

> A Mantle, wrought with purple spottes, shee wore,
> Embosed with many a Blaine, and loathsome sore;
> Shee had a raving voyce, a franticke looke,
> A noysome Breath; And her hand she shooke
> A venom'd speare; which where it towcheth, fills
> The vaynes with poysons, distractes and kills.[20]

The mantle mentioned suggests the purple buboes that a

plague victim has at the spot where bitten by the flea. The raving voice and the frantic look are the delirious sounds and wild looks that were made by the plague victims because of the fever that usually accompanied the plague; the breath of these victims was often irregular, hence the "noysome breath." The shaking hand alludes to the twitch caused by convulsions. The venomed spear symbolizes the injection of the plague into the bloodstream.

The last battalion mentioned by Wither is commanded by God's arch enemy, Satan. Within his army are those inner enemies of man which condemn his very soul. It is because of Satan and his army that man's sins exist. They create and, allegorically, are the sins that man commits, thereby invoking God's anger:

> The mayne Batalion, was both rangd & ledd
> By that slye Prince (ev'n that malicious one,)
> Who in the Ayerie Region hath his Throne:
> To further his designes, hee brought in Lyes,
> Extortion, Bribing, Fraude, and Perjuries.[21]

Lies, extortion, bribery, fraud, and perjury are all sins punishable by God. Wither has given them the appearance of soldiers that are ready to assist in man's destruction.

Wither presents his reader with an imaginary army of unyielding force that will, at God's command, descend upon civilization and destroy it. Wither contends, however, that God's "owne goodness brought yet meanes about, Which stopt our Doome, before his words were out."[22] This passage argues

that only through God's grace was the world saved. God's grace is influenced by his sense of justice and mercy which Wither expands into personification.[23] This personification transforms God's sense of justice and clemency into his two supernatural daughters: Justice and Clemencie. Wither uses these daughters to wage a formal debate as to whether or not God should destroy mankind.

Clemencie is the first daughter to speak. She reminds him that she has counseled him in the past and asks him to invoke Mercy on England:

> Tis I, at whose entreatie, though wert mov'd
> To send thine onely Sonne, thy Best belov'd
> ffor mans Redemption, to assume the nature
> The fforme, and ffrailties of that synfull creature;
> Tis I, that have presumed to become
> A suiter now, to stay thy heavie Doome.
> ...In Judgement, thou hast promised; oh! Lord
> To think on mee (even in thy written word)[24]

Through the counsel of Mercy, God allowed Christ to die for man's sins. She is contending that all of God's wise decisions have been made when he has used her for counsel. The passage refers to God's use of mercy in all of his dealings with mankind.

Wither also uses Clemencie to introduce his second purpose for writing the work, which was to seek the patronage of Charles I of England.[25] Clememcie contends that Charles I should be used by God on earth to keep all people

righteous. She implores God to let the King correct his people and return them to the righteous path:

> Grant him thy Justice, and thy Righteousnes,
> The wronginges of his people to redresss.
> Let him the widowe, and the Orphane save;
> Releeve all such, as neede of Comfort have;
> And lett his Mountaines, and each lesser Hill,
> His humble Dales, with peace and plenty fill.
> ...Since thou, to rule thine Israel dost appoint him,
> With thy most holy Spirit, Lord annoynt him;
> Make thou a league with him, as thou hast done
> With David, and adopt him for thy Sonne:
> ...And lett his Kingdomes harbour none of them
> Who shall denye him, to be their Supreame.[26]

Wither uses the extended dissertation of Clemencie to pay tribute to Charles I. The first section of the passage shows Wither invoking God's justice and righteousness on the king. Clemencie asks God to let Charles I be the one responsible for the people of his kingdom. In the second section, Wither alludes to the fact that in this century, kings were believed to be direct descendents of Christ; therefore, they were considered holy. Clemencie also asks God to adopt Charles as a holy son as he did with David. Finally, Wither insures that Clemencie reminds God that Charles I, on earth and in England, should reign supreme. This last note is a clear message to the readers of the work that Charles I ruled by divine will.

Clemencie is countered by Justice who, seeing that God is reconsidering his decision to destroy mankind, reminds Clemencie that mercy is often undeserving:

> Though wert Soliciter
> for king Manasses, (that Idolater)
> And gottst him pardon. Though hast Procter binn,
> ffor Jeroboam, that made Isr'ell synn:
> Thou art for any, who in thee beleeves;
> Ev'n Traytors, Strumpetts, Murtherers & Theeves:[27]

Justice uses the errors made by Clemencie to try to change God's decision. Justice also reminds God that he must show her favor in his decisions:

> Once thou the globe of Earth didst wholy drowne;
> ffrom heav'n thou threwst the synfull Angells downe;
> And (which is more) thy best beloved dyde
> That my displeasure might be satisfiede.[28]

To show Justice's favor, Wither uses three Biblical events to display God's real justice. The preceding passages refer to the great flood, the expulsion of Satan and his followers from heaven, and the death of Christ. Each event was catastrophic, but it did not end civilization; rather two events, the flood and the death of Christ, gave the human race a chance for redemption.

Justice further contends that God should not show favor to England and by restating the theme of the poem backs up her point:

> And wilt thou still contynue thy compassion,

To this unthankfull and forgetfull Nation?
What are they, but a most corrupted breed,
A wicked, a perverse, ingratefull seed?
A People for instruction, so untoward,
Soe stubborne in their Courses, and soe forward,
That threatninges, Love, not punishment can mend them
And therefore Desolation must attend.[29]

Justice has reiterated the theme that the sins of humans warrant the wrath of God. In addition, she suggests that through justice mankind is allowed to obtain salvation.

Wither does not allow Justice to prevail in the argument. God gives in to Clemencie. It is Clemencie, however, that still insists that England be punished:

Why then (said Justice) I may quite dismess
This Hoast of Plagues, which heere assembled is.
Not soe (replyed Mercy): ffor no Curse
is greater, nor is any (m)ischeife worse,
Then want of due Correction: And if I
Should yeild to that, it w(er)e not Clemencye,[30]

Wither contends that with mercy one must show good judgment. If England were to go unpunished for its sins, then God would most assuredly destroy it later.[31] Pestilence is chosen to punish England. God chooses Pestilence because she is not subjective about whom she chooses as a victim. This characteristic explains the indiscriminate manner that the plague struck its victims.

The second Canto of the poem discusses a variety of

subjects dealing with the plague. Sections of the second Canto strengthen and magnify the images created in the first Canto. The most important of these sections deals with the spiritual nature of the plague and with the salvation society must pursue to end the plague.[32]

Through the use of simile, Wither gives the reader an excellent description of the plague. In the following passage he uses several images to that end:

It is an Arrow which is often shott
By gods owne hand, from his far-striking bowe
Without the healp of any means belowe.
It is Gods Angell, and to Death can smite
Miraculously, an Army in a night.
It is a Rationall Disease, which cann
Pick with discretion here and there a man:
And passe o're those, who either marked are
ffor Mercy, or a greater Plague to beare.
Wee see it suting hath, to Natures lawes,
A naturall Motion, and a Natual Cause.
ffor, as a ffire, into some dwelling throwne,
Burnes Tymber, melteth mettall, cracketh Stone,
Defaceth Statues, makes moist places drye,
The Vaults belowe, to sweate; the Tyles to flye.
And sheweth it owne force in severall kyndes,
According to that object, which it findes.
So hath the Pestilence, a naturall powre,
To harden, fright, endanger, or devoure.

(And dyvers other Changes to procure)
As shee doth finde the present temp'rature,
Of mynde or Body, fitting the Rejection
Or els for intertaynement of Infection.[33]

This passage is a capsule of information that presents the reader with much about the nature of the plague. Wither uses similes to explain each characteristic. First he states that the plague is an "Arrow" and an "Angell" of God to express his belief that the plague resulted from the wrath of God. Wither further portrays the disease as a rational force. It has the ability to pick its victims. It obeys natural laws and has a purpose in nature, which makes it more terrifying. Additionally, it disrupts bodily functions, causing several clinical problems to occurr. It defaces statues, suggesting the deformity caused by the sores of the plague. The mouth becomes dry because of fever, which is illustrated "moist places dry." The groin area of plague victims often sweated and swelled. Wither uses the "Vault" to refer to the groin area. His use of the phrase "And sheweth its owne force in severall kyndes" implies there are various forms of the plague and different symptoms for different people. The reference to the plague's having the power to "harden, frighten, and devour," symbolizes the cruelty, horror, danger, and certain death caused by the plague.

Wither uses another passage of extended simile to describe the way to salvation from God's wrath. As with the

preceding passage, Wither condenses all ideas on the subject of salvation (both human and spiritual) into one central point:

> Hee therefore who desireth a defense
> Against the Arrowe of the Pestilence,
> A compleat Armor must from God procure,
> And weare it still, his person to assure.
> Hee must put on the Helmett of Salvation
> And shooe his Feet with holy Preparation
> A Bealt of Truth, must for his loynes be sought,
> His Breastplate must of Righteousnes be wrought.
> The Sheild of Faith, his Targett must become
> The Dartes of Sathan, to defend him from:
> Gods Word must be the sword upon his thigh:
> His Prayres like a contynuall Shott must flye
> ... Hee must moreover, purge out of the Soule
> The filthyness of Synn, which makes it foule.
> Hee must goe feed on Rue, (ev'n Rue for Synn)
> Abhorr those crymes, that hee hath lived in:
> The bytter Cupp of true Repentance take
> With Hearb of Grace, a soueraigne Cordiall make.
> The Diett of Sobriety assume.
> His house with works of Charitie perfume.
> And watch, that from his heart, in secrecye
> Arise noe Savours of Hipochisy
> he must beleeve, our God soe loves him, that
> His everlasting food is aymed at;

In all his suffringes: And that God doth knowe
And marke his Nature, and his temper soe
As that hee will impose nor more nor lesse
Then shall bee needfull for his happyness.[34]

Wither states that if a person is to battle the plague he must arm himself spiritually. This armor must come from God and consist of the imaginary helmet of salvation, the shoe of holy preparation, the belt of truth, the breastplate of salvation, the shield of faith, the sword which is the word of God, and his prayers, represented by gun shot. Furthermore, one who would escape the plague must purge himself of sin. Feeding "on Rue" refers to being remorseful of sin. A person must hate the sins that he has committed. He must drink the imaginary cup of repentance and have an imaginary diet of sobriety. Charity must be in his home with no hypocrisy in his heart. A person must believe that God loves him so that He will insure his happiness. Wither finally contends that if a human does all of these things his faith will carry him through all events, even the plague.

In conclusion, George Wither's History of the Pestilence warrants recognition as both an imaginative work and a commentary on the events of the plague of 1625. He created a poem which can only be described as an epic because it employs all the characteristics found in an epic. Wither's use of the epic form stresses the universal importance he placed on the plague and its consequences. Wither's belief

that the plague was God's wrath for man's sins compelled him to use the epic form because the plague and its consequences threatened all of mankind. This form offered the most popular explanation for the cause of the plague in a most convincing manner.[35] Additionaly, it gives the modern reader a valuable insight into the fundamentally religious manner in which seventeenth-century society interpreted a disaster of grand proportions.

NOTES

1 Charles S. Hensley, The Later Career of George Wither (The Netherlands: Mouton & Co, 1969) 17-18.

2 Hensley 20.

3 Hensley 25.

4 Hensley 29-35.

5 Hensley 41.

6 Hensley 42.

7 Hensley 57.

8 Hensley 89.

9 George Wither, The History of the Pestilence, ed. J. Milton French (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1932) 5.

10 Hensley 42-43.

11 Wither 7.

12 Wither 8.

13 Wither 9.

14 Hensley 55-56.

15 Wither 11.

16 Wither 12.

17 Wither 12.

18 Wither 14.

19 J. Milton French, introduction, The History of the Pestilence, by George Wither (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1932) xviii.

20 Wither 14.

21 Wither 15.

22 Wither 15.

23 Hensley 48.

24 Wither 16-17.

25 French xi.

26 Wither 23.

27 Wither 28.

28 Wither 30.

29 Wither 31.

30 Wither 40.

31 Hensley 48.

[32] French xvi.

[33] Wither 65.

[34] Wither 66-67.

[35] Arnold Kettle, "The Precursors of Defoe: Puritanism and the Rise of the Novel," Seventeenth-century England: A Changing Culture, vol. 2, ed. W. R. Owens (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1980) 319.

DANIEL DEFOE'S A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR

Daniel Defoe's writing career of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries included political and social pamphlets, journalistic tracts, short fiction, and the novel. His energetic style in writing, especially in his portrayal of the individual and individual situations, made him a popular author, not only with readers of his day, but with future generations as well. His abilities as a journalist enabled him to create A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), a fictional work, based on historical fact, in journal form, that depicts the horrors of the Great Plague of London of 1665. Defoe's literary style and subject matter qualify the work as plague literature. It is Defoe's use of characterization, whereby the Great Plague of London is viewed in a series of short stories told by a narrator, that especially creates an imaginative and informative work. Even though the idea that the plague was God's wrath for man's sins is present, Defoe is more concerned with preparing the individual Londoner for the feared visitation of the Plague of 1720-1721. He does this by creating a fictional journal that covers the events surrounding the Great Plague of 1665, which occurred when Defoe was only five years old.

Daniel Defoe was born in 1660 in London. His father was a butcher and planned for his son to enter the ministry.

His father enrolled him in James Fisher's school at Dorking, and later Defoe studied for the Presbyterian ministry at Charles Morton's Academy at Stoke Newington. Defoe's interest was not in the ministry, however, and eventually he became a businessman. In 1684 he married Mary Tuffly who had a sizable dowry which allowed them to live in comfort for some time. However, business failures in 1692 caused bankruptcy, from which Defoe never fully recovered. It was at this time that he began writing.

Politically, Defoe led a varied life. In 1685 he joined Monmouth's Rebellion, escaped capture, and in 1689 he "paraded into London as a volunteer trooper in the triumphal procession of William and Mary to a banquet at the Guildhall."[1] His writings for William III won Defoe the king's favor, a role which lasted until William III's death in 1702.

In 1701 Defoe wrote "The True-Born Englishman," a satirical poem denouncing English xenophobia and chauvinism. This poem was praised by William III and further heightened Defoe's position. The king's death, however, reversed Defoe's political fortunes. William's death brought Queen Anne to the throne, and with her the High-Church Tories came into power. They ridiculed Defoe for his advisory relationship with William III. Defoe countered with the satire "The Shortest Way with Dissenters" (1702). This work was written in a manner that praised the Tories superficially, but the underlying meaning clearly ridiculed them as

religious bigots. At first the Tories were fooled by its meaning. Then the entire country realized the true meaning and praised Defoe for his trick. The government was not amused and ordered Defoe's arrest. To avoid prison, Defoe sold his services as a popular writer to the government.

Not only did Defoe write pamphlets and books for the government, from 1704 to 1713, he also wrote and published the newspaper, the Review, a popular compendium of topical economic and political news. This was a tri-weekly paper written entirely by Defoe.

Defoe remained politically active throughout his life. In the first decade of the eighteenth century he was an agent in the promotion of the Union of Great Britain and Scotland and wrote the History of the Union (1709) in honor of the endeavor. From 1711 to 1713 he promoted peace with France and the establishment of the Hanoverian dynasty. His writings and works for the government continued until 1730.

From 1719 through 1728, Defoe's literary career prospered, and as a result many works appeared, including several works such as The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719), The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders (1722), A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), Roxana (1724), A General History of the Pirates (1724-1728), and Atlas Maritimus et Commercialis (1728). For a while his literary success allowed Defoe to live comfortably. However, debts soon began to reappear, and he had to go into hiding. On April 26, 1731 Defoe died while

hiding from his creditors, alone, without friends or family.

One of the most distinguishing attributes Defoe displayed in his works was his ability to project the everyday life of the individual character. In his works, the reader actually can understand the plight of all characters of the story. This is especially true in The Journal of the Plague Year. Defoe tells the story, in journal form, much as a reporter would tell a news story, with the additional dimension of the emotions of characters:

> By personating a citizen of London, who lived in the midst of the contagion, and was a spectator or the scenes he describes, he not only secured credit for his narrative, but was enabled to enliven it with numerous stories of probable occurrence, and with picturesque descriptions of the agitated feelings of the people.[2]

It is this method of producing lifelike characters, displaying human emotions in every type of situation, that makes Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year a fine example of imaginative plague literature.[3]

Defoe concentrated on the individual and the fate of the common people in London during the plague:

> ...what Defoe wanted was the individual agony in the individual story--the tale of the man who dies beside his sick wife, ...or the horror of the woman suddenly kissed by one of the plague victims while walking in the street.[4]

He did not discount the traditional belief, however, that the plague was the product of God's wrath, a horrible example of His anger at man for his sins. He also felt that God's mercy stopped the plague, just as his anger had started it:

> Nor was this by any new medicine found out, or new method of cure discovered, or by any experience in the operation which the physicians or surgeons attained to: but it was evidently from the secret invisible hand of Him that had first sent this disease as judgement upon us; and let the atheistic part of mankind call my saying what they please, it is no enthusiasm; it was acknowledged at that time by all mankind.[5]

This passage sums up Defoe's belief in divine judgment and intervention. Unlike his fellow plague writers, however, Defoe was more skeptical of the survivors' lasting sincerity in their thankfulness to God:

> I believe many of them were really thankful. But I must own, that for the generality of the people, it might too justly be said of them as was said of the children of Israel, after their being delivered from the host of Pharaoh, when they passed the Red Sea, and looked back, and saw the Egyptians overwhelmed in the water, viz., that they sang His praise, but they soon forgot his works.[6]

The allusion to the Israelites' failure to remember God's

works is an indirect warning to his readers that they should not forget that their salvation depends on the mercy of God.

The narrator's skepticism stems from his early observations of the average citizen of London before and during the visitation of the plague. The public's superstition and their dependence on "astrologers and seers" were not in line with the rationalism of Defoe's time:

> Defoe's age prided itself on its rationality and its understanding of natural causes. Granted, the mass of people in any age do not hold an intellectual view of life, yet for Defoe and his readers resorting to astrologers and seers for explanation of the plague was regressive, much as the irruption of violence among neighbors is retrograde in any civilized society. Defoe assumes that his readers will share his disdain for soothsayers and quacks, if only for religious reasons.[7]

As with every plague visitation, people saw signs and apparitions that they labeled as precursors to disasters. However, the narrator explains each sign as psychological illusion, as "vapours in abundance."[8] One story in Journal of the Plague Year deals with a group of poor people that imagined they saw a ghost in the air, with a sword in its hand. Mild hysteria overtakes the crowd, and before they disperse all except the narrator can see it:

> ...I think it was in March, seeing a crowd of people in the street, I joined with them to

> satisfy my curiosity, and found them all staring up into the air to see what a woman told them appeared plain to her, which was an angel cloathed in white, with a fiery sword in his hand, waving it or brandishing it over his head. ..."Yes I can see it all plainly," says one. ...Another saw the angel. One saw his very face, and cried out what a glorious creature it was![9]

The narrator reports that this was strictly a creation of their imagination; however, each one wanted to see something; therefore, he did:

> ...I looked as earnestly as the rest, but perhaps not with so much willingness to be imposed upon; and I said, indeed, that I could see nothing but a white cloud, bright on one side by the shining of the sun upon the other part. ...But the woman turning upon me, looked in my face, and fancied I laughed in which her imagination deceived her too, for I really did not laugh, but was very seriously reflecting how the poor people were terrified by the force of their own imagination.[10]

In this passage Defoe points out that in times of crisis, such as the plague, people will allow their imaginations to overwhelm their reason. The action of the characters allows the reader to see their shortcomings, which provide a hidden moral that Defoe hopes the reader will understand and defend against should hysteria break out during the feared plague

visitation.[11]

Defoe further tries to warn the public against other vices such as spreading rumors. He contends that these rumors caused the public to withdraw from their neighbors and relations:

> But these two stories had two marks of suspicion that always attended them, which caused me always to slight them, and to look on them as meer stories, that people continually frighted one another with. First, that wherever it was that we heard it, they always placed the scene at the farther end of the town, opposite or most remote from where you were to hear it. ...In the next place, of what part soever you heard the story, the particulars were always the same, especially that of laying a wet double cloth on a dying man's face, and that of smothering a young gentlewoman; so that it was apparant, at least to my judgement, that there was more of a tale than of truth in those things.[12]

Defoe is mildly reminding his audience that rumors eventually prove false and if people listen to such rumors they often react carelessly. Once again, characterization provides Defoe's audience with a moral which will help them to cope with the plague. Defoe is clearly pointing out that rumors and false stories only tend to make people more suspicious of their fellow man:

> Defoe traces the process by which urban dwellers, after constant confrontation with plague victims, develop a sense of alienation from the hostility of others-the anonymous "them" with whom we are familiar today. As the plague spreads, concern for the plight of others decreases.[13]

Just as Defoe portrayed the cruel and unjust part of man's behavior, he also tried to show the mercy and goodness found in all classes of society. The poor are often shown as both the recipients and the givers of mercy. Defoe focused on the plight of the poor during the plague because they did not have the financial means to cope with or run from the plague. To make his point, Defoe recites several stories that reflect the goodness found in all classes toward their fellow man.

One such story involves the narrator and a poor waterman. During the plague, the narrator would take occasional walks to view the disaster. One day while he walked by the waterfront, he met a man who was walking in front of a row of houses. After starting a conversation with the man, the narrator realized he was not infected with the plague, but that his family was. The man had placed himself in quarantine against his own family. The narrator at first thought it was terrible for the man to desert his family; however, he changed his mind when the man explained his case fully:

> "But", said I, "why do you not come at them? How

> can you abandon your own flesh and blood?" "Oh, sir," says he , "the Lord forbid! I do not abandon them; I work for them as much as I am able; and blessed be the Lord, I keep them from want;" and with that I observed he lifted up his eyes to heaven, with a countenance that presently told me that I had happened on a man that was no hypocrite, but a serious, religious, good man, and his ejaculation was an expression of thankfullness that, in such a condition as he was in, he should be able to say his family did not want.[14]

Defoe uses this story to show that though the husband could run away from the plague and leave his family to perish, he chooses instead to stay and continue to provide for them. His torture lay in the fact that he could not be with them. His salvation was that he could continue to provide for them, even at the peril of being infected himself.

The story continues with the waterman giving the provisions to his wife. He gives her everything, including food and money, that he has earned by supplying the refuge ships that are anchored in the river. The narrator is so taken by the goodness of the waterman that he begins to cry and have pity on the poor family:

> As I could not refrain contributing tears to this man's story, so neither could I refrain from charity for his assistance. ..."Here," says I, "go and call thy Rachel once more, and give her a

> little more comfort from me." ...So I gave him four shillings, and bid him go lay them on the stone and call his wife. ...I have no words to express the poor man's thankfulness, neither could he express it himself but by tears running down his face. ...and I parted with no money all that year that I thought better bestowed.[15]

The reader realizes the goodness that is still present in the social classes of London society. A poor man stays with his family, but does not live with them, so that he may continue to provide for them. He experiences one of mankind's greatest fears, loneliness, so that the family can survive. The narrator's visit with the waterman allows the reader to understand that in times of despair there often develops a common bond between all classes in a society:

> I have argued elsewhere that throughout the Journal of the Plague Year there is a gradual identification of the "people" with the suffering masses and a tendency toward reconciliation. The two are connected insofar as great disasters not only reconcile men to various beliefs, as happens in Memoirs of a Cavalier, but also tend to reduce the barriers of social distinction.[16]

The narrator, himself, is touched by the poor man's plight and cries for him and his family. He offers the poor man money, which is a token of the narrator's charity for his fellow man's troubles. The narrator points out that the

money was spent more wisely than all the other money he spent the rest of the year. "In the episode concerning the poor waterman, Defoe accurately connects the spreading infection with the loss of charity."[17]

On the other end of the scale, Defoe shows the evil and cruelty displayed by other denizens of London. He relates stories of nurses murdering their patients to steal their valuables, physicians refusing to see patients for fear of contagion, and families fleeing from their relations for self-preservation:

> This, I say, took away all compassion; self-preservation, indeed, appeared here to be the first law. For the children ran away from their parents as they languished in the utmost distress. And in some places, though not so frequent as the other, parents did the like to their children; nay, some dreadful examples there were, and particularly two in one week, of distressed mothers, raving and distracted, killing their own children; one whereof was not far off from where I dwelt, the poor lunatick creature was not living herself long enough to be sensible of the sin of what she had done, much less to be punished for it.[18]

Defoe establishes the fact that not only are there good deeds to be found, but also evil ones. He points out, however, that in most cases involving plague victims, the individual does not know what he or she is doing. This is

especially evident in the cases where the mother allows her infant to nurse, not knowing she has the plague:

> ...Of a mother in the parish where they lived, who having a child that was not well, sent for an apothecary to view the child; and when he came, as the relation goes, was giving child suck at her breast, and to all appearance was herself very well; but when the apothecary came close to her he saw the tokens upon that breast with which she was suckling the child. ...so he takes the child, and going to a cradle in the room, lays it in, and opening its cloths, found the tokens upon the child too, and both died before he could get home to send a preventive medicine to the father of the child, to whom he had told their condition.[19]

Unknowingly, the mother has killed her child, or, as in some cases, the child has infected the mother. Each one depended on the other, one out of motherly love and the other for survival. The plague, as viewed in earlier works, was not sympathetic to the mother and child. In Thomas Dekker's, The Wonderfull yeare, the same type of situation occurs between lovers that die of the plague. In this case, the plague disregards marital bliss. In The History of the Pestilence, George Wither makes reference to both the sudden death of mothers nursing and, in turn, infecting their children, and lovers dying in each other's arms. This theme, and the characterization of the mother-child

relationship in the narrator's story, once again serves as a moral. The plague's choice of mother and infant as victims shows that the plague affects everyone, no matter what station they might enjoy in society.

Not only does the narrator report on individuals and individual occurrences, he also gives the reader a view of the actions of the municipal government in their effort to combat the plague. The narrator praises the Lord Mayor, and the city magistrates are praised by Defoe for their actions. He projects a very professional image of them and favorably comments on the laws created to protect the people. They are characterized as highly devoted citizens, and their actions prove this devotion:

> But the magistrates wisely caused the people to be encouraged, made very good by-laws for the regulating the citizens, keeping good order in the streets, and making everything as eligible as possible to all sorts of people.
>
> In the first place, the Lord Mayor and the sheriffs, the Court of Aldermen, and a certain number of the Common Council men, or their deputies, came to a resolution and published it, viz., that they would not quit the city themselves, but that they would be always at hand for the preserving good order in every place and for the doing justice on all occasions;[20]

With this description of the municipal system, Defoe

completes his journal of things that occurred as he imagined it and, in addition, offers society insight for the future:

> His perception of the conditions of urban life and his awareness of the moral situations in which they place the individual give the Journal immediacy to the modern reader, who--city dweller or suburbanite--lives with a constant sense of the impinging apocalyptic event, in suspicion and dread of his fellow man.[21]

Defoe's fictional account portrays the plague and its many aspects and gives the reader a personal view of its consequences. Defoe's use of a journalistic style with an objective narrator character creates an imaginative, yet believable, story:

> It is the most lively Picture of Truth which ever proceeded from imagination: and in spite of every anachronism which forbids the belief, we cannot take it up, after a hundredth perusal, without yielding, before we have traversed twenty pages, to a full conviction that we are conversing with one who passed through and survived the horrors which he describes."[22]

The narrator of the story also contributes to the overall literary form of the work. Defoe's narrator is a middle-class merchant, not necessarily unlike himself, who reports his observations of the plague. This characterization technique presented the narrator as a reliable

observer:

> His greatest characteristic was the single power which he possessed of putting himself so thoroughly in the place of the fictitious personages whom he invented, as to make fiction look more like truth than the barest and most positive truth itself when narrated by the inferior pen.[23]

Defoe wrote in this objective fashion because he knew if he did not, then the public would not buy or believe his works.[24]

Each story in A Journal of the Plague Year speaks of some aspect of the plague; its swiftness, its symptoms, its devastating effects on the population, and its purpose. It is important to realize, however, that each story not only gives the reader an eighteenth-century view of the plague, but also instruction, through the use of a moral, to enable him to deal with a disaster such as the plague. The characterization also enhances each story by showing the reader how the characters reacted in such situations.

In conclusion, The Journal of the Plague Year is unlike the works of Dekker and Wither, although it also relates several of the same important messages. The plague was a product of God's wrath for man's sins. The plague was swift, and it was not concerned with the victims that it took. Man's vices caused the plague, and only spiritual salvation would save them. The Journal of the Plague Year differs vastly in the fact that Defoe was writing to warn

and instruct for a future visitation that never came. Even though the expected plague did not occur, Defoe supplied his and all future generations with a convincing look at what might have been.

NOTES

[1] "Daniel Defoe," Collier's Encyclopedia, 1960 ed.

[2] Walter Wilson, "Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel De Foe," Defoe: The Critical Heritage, ed. Pat Rogers (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 96.

[3] Bonamy Dobree, English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century 1700-1740, The Oxford History of English Literature, vol. VII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 411-414.

[4] Maximillian E. Novak, Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe's Fiction (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983) 68.

[5] Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year (New York: The New American Library, 1960) 239.

[6] Defoe 240.

[7] W. Austin Flanders, "Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year and the Modern Urban Experience," Daniel Defoe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Max Byrd (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976) 157.

[8] Defoe 32.

[9] Defoe 31.

[10] Defoe 31.

[11] Flanders 157-158.

[12] Defoe 89.

[13] Flanders 154.

[14] Defoe 110.

[15] Defoe 111-112.

[16] Novak 69-70.

[17] Flanders 167.

[18] Defoe 118.

[19] Defoe 121.

[20] Defoe 181.

[21] Flanders 169.

[22] "British Critic and Quarterly Theological Review," Defoe: The Critical Heritage, ed. Pat Rogers (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 114.

[23] Charles Mackay, "A Great Whig Journalist," Defoe: The Critical Heritage, ed. Pat Rogers (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 196.

[24] Dobree 410-411.

CONCLUSION

The plague works written by Thomas Dekker, George Wither, and Daniel Defoe offer readers diverse forms of imaginative literature while still focusing on the plague as a subject of immediate and practical concern. Each writer uses a different approach in his presentation. Dekker's mixture of lyric poetry and prose, Wither's epic poetry, and Defoe's prose journal reflect their artistic individuality, but still convey their ultimate, and similar, reasons for writing. Didactically, each work explains the theoretical causes of the plague, both spiritually and physically. Each work projects the devastating effects of the plague, its symptoms, the speed with which it overtook its victims, and the undiscriminating way it chose its victims. The works also offer a way, theoretically, to cope with the natural disaster and a method to prevent its return.

An important literary element found in each of the works is the author's use of implied and stated morals. Each work presents the moral that the plague is God's wrath on man because of his sins. The lyric poetry of Dekker's Newes from Graves-ende: "Cease vexing heaven, and, cease to die"[1] is a perfect example. In Wither's History of the Pestilence, the author tells the reader, in epic style, that he must arm himself against the pestilence by putting on the armor provided by God: "Against the Arrowe of the

Pestilence, A complete Armor must from God procure."[2] Defoe places less emphasis on the theme of God's wrath, but still considers it the cause of the plague: "but it was evidently from the secret invisible hand of Him that had first sent this disease as judgement upon us."[3]

A popular method of transmitting these morals was through the use of short stories or vignettes. Dekker and Defoe, especially, used this literary device to relay their thoughts. Though often these stories are humorous, they still show that the consequences of the plague are not humorous. Stories that involve issues such as runaways always had a moral message for the audience, and each author displays his feelings about this issue. In the case of the runaways there is both scorn for the refugees as in Dekker's works where he criticizes them for fleeing their social responsibility, and Defoe's work which criticizes the country folk for not allowing their London neighbors safe passage through their towns. As seen by these examples, God's punishment for man's sins was not the only matter treated by the writers of plague literature.

The epic style was employed by Wither in his description of the 1625 plague visitation. To some extent Dekker used some of the characteristics found in the epic. Foremost among the epic characteristics found in the two writers' works is the cataloging of events and characters. Dekker and Wither both describe the armies commanded by the imaginary Field Marshall Pestilence, and Wither describes

man's adversary with images related to the plague symptoms. The vivid cataloging of these symptoms not only gives the reader a detailed clinical description of the plague, but it also impresses upon the reader the fear and suffering the plague victim experienced. In line with the epic, both Wither and Dekker invoke muses whose purpose is to instruct and counsel the poet. The settings for these works are of universal proportion. The first Canto of The History of the Pestilence is in Heaven and on earth, which in the seventeenth century was the entire universe. In The Wonderfull yeare, Dekker insures that the beginning of the story finds the universe in harmony. Each story features elements of the supernatural. God is one of the main characters in The History of the Pestilence, and all of Dekker's plague pamphlets employ some sort of supernatural beings as characters. As with the ancient epics, these supernatural beings actually decided the fate of the human characters.

The poets' use of the epic in their plague works reflects the importance they placed on the subject matter. The epic has traditionally been used by writers to convey a story of grand proportions and significance. In Dekker's and Wither's case, they felt that the plague was a grave concern to their society and that everyone should be made aware of its devastating consequences. The epic was their way of implying to their community that they should take all precautions to prevent a plague visitation by returning to a path of righteousness.

Also found in these works, but not necessarily a function of epic poetry, is the author's use of imagery and embellished language. Personification is the primary image used by Dekker and Wither. Dekker uses personification to describe Death as the marshall of the field, with fevers, boils, blaines, and carbucles as Death's leaders, lieutenants, and sergeants. Dekker's body functions take on the characteristics of inanimate objects while inanimate objects take on human body functions. Dekker's blood acts like a river while his pen weeps. Dekker's emotions, sorrow and truth, come to life and give him counsel. In the same vein, Wither uses the allegorical characters Clemencie and Justice in the History of the Pestilence to wage a debate over the extermination of mankind. It is with extended simile that Wither offers mankind salvation from God's wrath. Wither uses imaginary armor and weapons to describe this road to salvation. The plague, itself, even takes on the form of a Scythian, an imaginary monster that feeds on human flesh. Imagery combines with the moral in Newes from Graves-ende to turn gold tokens into plague tokens.

Each author used characterization differently to develop his work. In Wither and Dekker the narrators are very general in nature. Neither of the narrators in their works is omniscient. The reader can conceive that each narrator is a survivor of the plague, although he is not presented as an active participant in the action. In Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year, the narrator is an active participant in

the action of the story. However, the objective tone produced by Defoe's use of the narrator makes him and the other characters so believable that he directly invokes the reader's empathy. Defoe's method of characterization is important to his work because the primary thrust is to prepare London and England for a predicted plague visitation. He does so by creating characters and events so real, with the use of historical documents, that no one would question their credibility. His characters so project minute details of everyday life that the reader cannot tell what is fictional and what is not.

Each author also refers to earlier events to strengthen his study of the plague. Dekker refers to the false sense of security enjoyed by England prior to the 1603 visitation to that of people of Troy just before and the Greeks presented the Trojan Horse to the city. London's joy, as with Troy, was experienced only for a short period. London's ignorance of its excessive sins was just as devastating as the Trojans' ignorance of the Greeks' plans. Wither refers to the Biblical tales of Moses' and the Israelites' flight from Egypt and the plague as the tool of their initial escape. Defoe refers to the Israelites singing praise to God's might but forgetting his teachings. Each author, by using allusions of such grandeur, elevates the importance and concern they place on the plague.

Another interesting characteristic of each of these works, which is not a literary feature, is the homage paid

by each author to the authorities of his era. Each author hoped that his praise would gain him political favor from his patrons. Dekker not only praised Queen Elizabeth I, but also paid homage to her successor James I. He refers to James as the sun rising in the North in reference to his Scottish heritage and his link with the Divine. In The History of the Pestilence, Wither projects King Charles I as the champion of the human race and has Clemencie plead to God to let Charles use his God-given powers to cause the people to repent of their sins. Defoe lauds the accomplishments of the city authorities during the plague of 1665. His motives were both civic and monetary. It was an effort to make the authorities realize that they had to plan and prepare for the plague as a community.

None of the literary devices used by the authors to present their plague material was chosen by chance. There are two main reasons for their choices of literary style. The first was to appeal to the type of audience that each author wished to reach. The second was to project the importance that the author placed on the plague.

In the first case, each author felt that all of England should be informed of the plague, its causes, symptoms, and consequences. In Dekker's and Wither's cases, the use of lyric poetry appealed to the intellectual classes of society. The poetry included imagery, embellished language, and a moral that could be understood by all. Dekker's and Defoe's use of prose in the form of short stories and

vignettes was a popular form read by the lower classes of literate London. Once again, these stories contained a moral, but they were directed more toward the everyday occurrences of the common man. A literate and intelligent citizen could comprehend the sometimes humorous story and still understand that the plague and its consequences were grave. All three authors genuinely had the citizens of London and England at heart.

The second reason the authors employed their particular styles was the importance they placed on the plague itself. In the works of Dekker and especially Wither, the elements of epic poetry are found. In the context of literature, the epic is normally used only to convey situations of national or universal significance. Wither and Dekker never forgot that the plague was the punishment of God against his children for their sins. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, this belief was not taken lightly. Both authors wanted to project this subject of grave concern. After all, man's continual disobedience could and would ultimately lead to his total extermination. Defoe, while concerned over God's will, was more concerned with warning and preparing the general populace for the predicted plague. His work dealt more with the practical side of a visitation and concerned itself with the moral obligations of all of the citizens before, during, and after the plague. Each author's versatility still provided his audience with a frightening and believable work that stressed the plague's

horrors in their society.

The last major visitation of the plague in London occurred in 1665. Defoe's work, a prelude to an event that never came to pass, became strictly an imaginative piece. With this work, plague literature as a distinct form ended. In the late nineteenth century, it was discovered that God may have sent the plague as punishment, but He sent it in the form of a bacillus that could be isolated and ultimately cured. With this discovery, the causes of the plague formulated by Thomas Dekker, George Wither, and Daniel Defoe finally became outdated. The works of these authors are nevertheless still of value. First, they are imaginative literature. They are still widely read, and studied. Second, these works give the modern reader a valuable insight of what the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writer and citizen felt about his society and the universe as a whole. These beliefs may be distant to modern society, but they dictated the actions and moral reactions to plague in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

NOTES

[1] Thomas Dekker, Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925) 102.

[2] George Wither, The History of the Pestilence, ed. J. Milton French (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1932) 66.

[3] Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year (New York: The New American Library, 1960) 3.

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