

# MIRACLES AND PLAGUES: Plague Discourse as Political Thought

GRAHAM HAMMILL

## ABSTRACT

*This paper proposes that early modern English writers used plague discourse to explore contradictions in the constitution, configuration, and preservation of the body politic. The plague was the other side of the miracle, the figure by which early modern political philosophers theorized and debated interrelations between the mystical authority of the sovereign and the emergence of new forms of life. While plague legislation offered a paradigm of community based on immunization, local responses to the plague by writers such as Thomas Dekker, Hanoch Clapham, and George Wither called for neighborly and democratic forms of sociality. But the early modern English writer who experimented most dramatically with plague discourse was Michael Drayton. His plague poem, *Moses, His Birth and Miracles*, uses central themes and concerns from both plague legislation and protest literature to explore relations between reform-minded poetry and the plague and to account for the violence that attends political reform.*

Plague legislation had an enormous impact on the early modern English cultural and political imaginary. In part, the plague prompted writers to imagine new forms of social and political control. For instance, when Charles I reissued plague *Orders* at the beginning of the Personal Rule, he urged the College of Physicians to update its advice, which had remained unchanged since the *Orders* were first issued under Elizabeth, and he charged his royal physician, Theodore de Mayerne, with developing a public health campaign modeled on new programs in cities including Paris and Venice. Mayerne proposed building state-run public hospitals, and he also urged the creation of a board of health, based on Italian models, that would be granted absolute authority to regulate localities in times of epidemic (Slack 218–19). The project was dropped when it became apparent that outbreaks of the plague in

1630 and 1631 were not going to reach epidemic proportion, but it is still possible to see in Mayerne's plans the imaginative beginnings of modern discipline, in Foucault's sense of the word, in which the state uses the biological sciences to assert and maintain control of individual bodies, on the one hand, and entire populations, on the other (*History* 145).

But in early modern England, plague legislation goes in a different direction, and so does the political imaginary that derives from it.<sup>1</sup> The aspect of plague legislation that this essay focuses on is household quarantine. Quarantine laws initiated a debate over the means by which the state should preserve and safeguard the existence of its population. It will be my argument that this debate far exceeded the question of how to manage and contain a communicable disease; it shaped early modern English understandings of national community, sovereignty, and the role of violence in enacting political reform. Recent scholarship on the plague in early modern England emphasizes the plague as a political provocation. Rebecca Totaro argues that the reality of the plague led certain writers to engage in utopian imaginings, offering a fanciful relief that transformed, improved, and in some cases competed with governmental, religious, and medical public health practices (38–39). And Jonathan Gil Harris persuasively shows how shifts from Galenic to Paracelsian paradigms of infection, disease, and cure led sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English writers to conceptualize political enemies (real and imagined) as pathogens within the body politic and to formulate policy accordingly (*Foreign Bodies* 19–47).<sup>2</sup> This essay extends Totaro's foregrounding of imagination and Harris's emphasis on political enmity to consider the ways in which these issues recommend plague discourse as a mode of political thinking especially attuned to the pairing of sovereignty and violence. Plague discourse, this essay will argue, became a way of thinking about political making. While household quarantine was instituted in a series of emergency provisions that *de facto* reinforced the authority of the sovereign, some early modern English writers reimagined the plague in a way that qualified and displaced that authority in the name of political and moral reform.

The plague represents the other side of the miracle. As scholars from Carl Schmitt to Francis Oakley have argued, the miracle was an important figure in early modern jurisprudence, to the degree that questions of legality and sovereignty were modeled on a Scholastic distinction between God's absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) and his ordained power (*potentia ordinata*) (Oakley). While the former designates God's absolute will to do

whatever he pleases, the latter indicates his willingness to act within the bounds of natural law. Miracles underscore God's absolute will even within a natural order and, by analogy, legitimate a juristic theory of absolutist sovereignty (Schmitt 36). Debates about miracles were very often debates about institutional legitimacy and interpretive authority, as Alexandra Walsham and Lorraine Daston have argued in the contexts of religious history (Walsham, "Miracles") and history of science (Daston).<sup>3</sup> Interpreting an event as miraculous reinforced the authority of the institution doing the interpreting—be it Catholic or Protestant churches that offered competing narratives of miraculous events, or secular philosophy that began to question the evidence of the miraculous itself. The plague reinforced the distinction between God's absolute and ordained power insofar as it is represented as God's intervention in the created world. However, the plague differed from the miraculous—at least in the writers considered below—in that plague discourse used God's power to intervene in the natural order to put contemporary political authority on trial. Rather than consolidate divine authority and state power, plague discourse tended to split the two, turning the former against the latter as writers began to search for new models of political community.

This essay contrasts two models of community that resulted from household quarantine, one based on immunization and another based on charity, neighborliness, and democratic decision-making. It then turns to an analysis of Michael Drayton's little studied plague poem, *Moyses in a Map of His Miracles*, which synthesizes these two models of community. Although Drayton is a much more conservative poet than the plague protesters who urged charity and neighborliness in response to the plague, his uneasy relation with both models of community draws out the investments of both in sovereignty and violence and helps us to see the role that plague discourse played in the shaping of modern biopolitics.

#### IMMUNITY AND CHARITY

Early in 1579, Elizabeth issued plague *Orders*, which enjoined local officials to seal infected households for six weeks with all household members inside, both the sick and the healthy. Elizabeth's plague *Orders* gained statutory support in 1604 and were reissued by royal proclamation under James and Charles I and by the Long Parliament with little to no change until 1666, when the *Orders* were substantially altered (Slack 209). Household quarantine was reinforced by the Plague Act of 1604, which gave watchmen legal

authority to use violence to keep household members shut up, to hang anyone with plague sores found outside communing with others, and to whip anyone else who escaped household quarantine (Slack 211).

Severe as they were—and they were much more severe than continental legislation—the plague *Orders* represented these harsh measures as acts of charity. The Plague Act of 1604 justifies punishment by arguing that it will achieve “the charitable relief and ordering of persons infected with the Plague” (Statutes 4: 1060–01). Although the parallel phrases “charitable relief” and “ordering of persons” suggest that ordering is a kind of charity, one effect of the act is that ordering takes precedence over charitable relief so that charity no longer simply indicates care *for* the sick. It also indicates protection *against* the sick. Nicholas Bownd gets at the shift in concepts of care and community in one of his plague sermons, published in 1604. “At this time,” he urges, “the Magistrates in the places infected, should take good order that the sicke be well looked unto, and provided for, and that there bee care taken that they not come abroad, and that the whole may be kept from the sicke” (90). Bownd’s sentence begins by highlighting the responsibility that government officials have toward the sick: “the sicke should be well looked unto, and provided for.” But it ends by offering a vision of community defined against the sick: “that there bee care taken that they not come abroad, and that the whole might be kept from the sicke.” Charitable action here means more than taking care of the sick. It means protecting the community against an infected and implicitly rejected part.

Rather than instating a model of discipline that radiates out from the sovereign into the general population based on the continental model of the state hospital, quarantine laws prompted early modern English writers to imagine a version of community based on immunization. Immunity is an Anglo-Norman legal term, deriving from the Latin *immunitas*, which indicates a privilege that grants exemption from certain duties or obligations. It is often associated with asylum, sanctuary, or benefit of clergy, which is how Robert Parsons used the term in his polemic against Edward Coke defending Jesuit priests against prosecution by the English state. Ecclesiastical persons have the “honour of exemption, and immunitie” from temporal authority not only by positive law but also by divine law as, Parsons argues, Hebrew scripture demonstrates (F2r). In this sense, immunity is granted to an individual or class of individuals as exemption from the norms by which community is defined. This sense of exemption is not confined to individuals but can also be used to characterize entire communities. In Book Four of *The*

*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker cites Tertullian, who explains that just as it is not fit to fast on the Sabbath, so too does this “same immunity” hold for “all the time which is betweene the Feastes of Easter and Pentecost” (1: 331). He then leans on Tertullian’s statement to justify his doctrine of things indifferent. That the Church Fathers offered immunity in particular instances indicates the rights of individual state churches to decide which practices will or will not be part of communal service without compromising that community’s relation to the broader universal Church.

There is a second sense of immunization emerging in English in the seventeenth century in which immunization indicates an act of rejection in which an individual or community is defined through the expulsion of a threat on the inside. In this sense, an individual or community is itself immunized against a threatening influence that is separated off from the community in order to prevent further contamination. In his *Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, Edward Reynolds begins by describing the need to immunize oneself from certain corrupting passions and then goes on to argue for a model of Christian redemption in which community comes together through the rejection of the spiritual and physical enemies of Christ, “giving us *Immunity* from all spirituall dangers” (422). On both an individual and a communal level, an interior contagion is actively rejected and kept on the outside in order to maintain the purity of the inside. It is this second sense of immunization that household quarantine implies, as community is protected from contamination by isolating some of its members and removing them from social interaction. In this sense, immunization no longer protects individuals or classes of people from communal obligations. Instead, immunization defines and preserves communal norms through the rejection of spiritual foes that are potentially already infecting the individuals who make up that community—the “sick,” as Bownd puts it, that must be “kept” from the “whole.”

Clearly, immunization was years away from becoming a medical practice, but we can see a logic of immunization, derived from political and theological sources, informing legislation on household quarantine as well as responses to it. Instead of imagining community through the rejection of one of its infected parts, protesters of plague legislation reversed the logic of immunization and began to imagine the possibility of a charitable community understood through that rejected part. In *The Wonderfull Yeare* (1603), Thomas Dekker details the “unmatchable torment” it is “for a man to be board up every night in a vast silent Charnell-house” (27). Dekker aims to

provoke sympathetic identification with the rejected part in order to reproduce community through the obligation of charitable action.

If some poore man, suddeinly starting out of a sweet and golden slumber, should behold his hous flaming about his eares, all his family destroyed in their sleepes by the mercilesse fire; himselfe in the verie midst of it, wofully and like a madde man calling for helpe: would not the misery of such a distressed soule, appeare the greater, if the rich Usurer dwelling next doore to him, should not stirre, (though he felt part of the danger) but suffer him to perish, when the thrusting out of an arme might have saved him! O how may thousandes of wretched people have acted in this poore mans part? how often hath the amazed husband waking, found the comfort of his bedde lying breathlesse by his side! his children at the same instant gasping for life! and his servants mortally wounded at the hart by sickenes! the distracted creature, beats at deaths doores, exclames at windows, his cries are sharp inough to pierce heaven, but no earth is opened to receive them. (28)

In this passage, Dekker poses a fundamental question: which is worse, the danger of infection or the social isolation and lack of neighborly care produced by household quarantine? He uses sympathetic identification to provide an answer. Dekker conjures a readerly community around sympathy with the quarantined plague victim. In so doing, he also suggests that sympathy can counteract the “felt...danger” of infection and justify breaking plague *Orders* insofar as the very act of identifying with plague victims encourages an imaginative transgression of quarantine law.

The Protestant minister and ex-Brownist Henoeh Clapham radicalizes Dekker’s position, arguing in 1603 and 1604 that the plague is a judgment against humanity issued by the Angel of Death as a blow or strike. Clapham defines the plague through its classical and Hebrew roots. The word derives from the Greek *plege* and Latin *plaga*, Clapham writes, meaning “a blowe or stripe inflicted on mankind,” and it also derives from the Hebrew *devar*, meaning “to speake, whether it be a speech of life or death” (*Epistle A4v*). The plague is a blow or strike through which God speaks, an act of violence that is also a moment of revelation. To think that the plague is infectious, based on “aeryiall corruption,” Clapham argues, is tantamount to rejecting God’s word (B1r). For Clapham, the plague is a divine judgment that tests the political order. It is only “Atheists, mere Naturians, and other ignorant persons” who “hold [the plague] to be a natural disease, preceding from natural causes only” (A3v). The atheist’s response to the plague is quarantine, which only

divides the community and justifies God's judgment against it, whereas for Clapham the more properly Christian response is neighborliness, which binds the community together, softens the Angel of Death's strike, and abates God's judgment. Clapham was arrested by Richard Bancroft in November 1603, for breaking plague *Orders*. When questioned by Lancelot Andrews, he broke with his initial position, distinguishing between a natural and a supernatural plague. For a natural plague, "naturall political orders are urged," while for a supernatural plague, Clapham recommends "Fasting and Prayer" (*Answeres* 7).<sup>4</sup> But when pressed on the policy of separating the healthy from the sick, Clapham refuses to equivocate. It is "a piety, a worke of faith, charitie, glorious as *Martyrdome*, to stand by it, doing service one to another, even to the death and buriall." Only heathens would do the opposite. "Judge now," he continues somewhat ominously, "who last pest-tyme walked as the Christians, and who as the Heathen" (25–26). As with Dekker, Clapham indicts the social isolation produced by quarantine law as antithetical to the ideals of charitable community. More than that, he argues that the violence of God's judgment tests the soul of the Christian community, demanding a charitable response that the *Orders* actively prevent.

Prompted by his experiences in the plague of 1625, in *Britain's Remembrancer* (1628) George Wither translates Clapham's call for charity into an argument for democracy. Like Clapham, Wither portrays the plague as an act of divine judgment, writing that "those dull *Naturalists*, who think this *Foe*, / Doth by meere nat'rall causes, come or goe, / Are much deceav'd" (47v), and then, like Clapham, Wither charges these naturalists with atheism. Although Wither defends himself against what he calls "Claphamnisme," he goes on to justify breaking plague *Orders* in terms that elevate Clapham's stance to the level of democratic decision-making:

And, whereas we our *Orders* did transgresse,  
 It was necessitie, not wilfulnesse,  
 That urged it; because our common woe,  
 Did farre beyond the powre of *Order* goe.  
 .....  
 Yea, our first *Orders* had we still observ'd,  
 The healthie Housholds would not halfe have serv'd  
 To keepe the Sicke. And who should then have heeded  
 Our private cares? Or got us what we needed?  
 As long as from each other we refrain'd  
 We greater sorrowes ev'ry day sustain'd:

Yea, whilst for none, but for our selves we car'd,  
 Our brethren perisht, and the worse we far'd.  
 This made us from our *Policies* appeale,  
 And meete in *Love*, each others wounds to heale.  
 This, made us from our civill *Orders* flie,  
 To make more practice of our *Charitie*.  
 And hereunto, perhaps, compell'd were we,  
 By meere necessitie, to let us see  
 Experiments, of that unmatched good,  
 Which floweth from a Christian *Neighbourhod*. (50v–51r)

Wither's specific point is to justify breaking the laws of the commonwealth out of sympathy for the sick. The "common woe" trumps the laws of the commonwealth by providing a reference point by which to measure the justice of breaking or suspending that law. Wither's broader point is to use this action to derive an ideal model of community. Once concern for the community reduces self-interest, he implies, a new form of community begins to emerge. Reversing an absolutist model so that prerogative is located in the people and not necessarily the monarch, Wither then refers extra-legal decision-making to a vision of community based on "experiments" of charity. Rather than learning this lesson, Wither goes on to argue, the English nation itself has become like Pharaoh, growing bolder as the plagues grow worse: "When he most plagued us, we most presumed; / And sinned most, when we were most consumed" (172r). Wither's purpose is to break this presumption by presenting Britain at a crossroads. Charging the members of the 1625 Parliament with vanity and self-interest for refusing to provide Charles I with funds for the war with Spain, Wither predicts that general disease in the body politic will only lead to a deeper schism between Charles and the Parliament, and between and among the clergy (262v–63r). The reason Wither expounds the horrors of the plague is to prevent this possible future, like Clapham hoping to jolt his readers out of their complacency, "to stirre up their affections, and beat into their understandings, the knowledge and feeling of those things which I deliver" ("A Premonition" B3r).

For Clapham and Wither, the plague is the theologico-political equivalent of the miracle, a wonder or marvel that either shows or portends the juridical authority that God has over the created world. In the case of miracles, God's authority was almost always transferred to the person or institution that proclaimed, participated in, or verified the miracle. When curing scrofula through the royal touch, for instance, Elizabeth was quite



careful to attribute her power to heal to God, whose instrument and agent she claimed to be. But this deference only reinforced the sacred role of the monarch by legitimizing royal power as a sign of divine favor (Turrell 10–12). For Hobbes, the reinforcement of juridical authority is precisely what the miraculous is supposed to do. Given that people are often mistaken in proclaiming an event a miracle, for Hobbes the central issue concerning miracles is evidentiary. “The question is no more, whether what we see done, be a miracle,” he writes. Rather, the question is, who decides and upon what grounds. And for Hobbes, the answer is the monarch or sovereign. “In [this] question,” he explains, “we are not every one, to make our own private reason, or conscience, but the public reason, that is, the reason of God’s supreme lieutenant, judge; and indeed we have made him judge already, if we have given him a sovereign power, to do all that is necessary for our peace and defence” (296). The veracity of miracles extends beyond their immediate credibility inasmuch as the decision on what counts as a miracle gives broader evidence of the sovereign’s authority to embody and regulate public reason.

For Clapham and Wither, the plague splits this authority into two. In plague rhetoric, the monarch is no longer simply a proxy for divine authority. Rather, divine authority potentially turns against the monarch and his or her ordering of the state. Dekker’s, Clapham’s, and Wither’s calls for charity and neighborliness might better be understood as what Kenneth Reinhard calls a political theology of the neighbor (11–75). Household quarantine isolates certain sick neighbors and preserves the community through their containment and exclusion. By contrast, Dekker, Clapham, and Wither emphasize a responsibility toward the neighbor that goes far beyond care for the sick. It implies the decoupling of political and theological authority without divorcing the two entirely. The miracle of the plague is not that it reinforces sovereignty but that it leads to new visions of political community.

### CONTAMINATION

The plague differs from the miracle in that it introduces enmity as a central category. As the biblical example of Egypt suggests, one people’s miracle is another people’s plague. It is, after all, the Angel of Death who finally brings about the Israelites’ freedom by reducing the Egyptians to unbearable suffering. Even more than the miracle, the plague shows that the structure of authority implied by the miraculous depends on the distinction between friend and foe. With quarantine law, the problem of the enemy is weirdly

internalized, so that plague victims who are also members of the polity are now seen as a threat to the commonwealth and to civil order, both of which are reconstituted through the isolation and separation of these plague victims from the polity.

Drayton is the early modern English poet who most fully explores this internalization. He indicates the communal aspects of enmity in two topical references in his plague poem, *Moyses in a Map of His Miracles*, first published in 1604 and republished as part of *The Muses Elizium* in 1630. In one topical reference, Drayton compares the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea to the Spanish Armada, drawing a parallel between the defeat of Pharaoh's tyranny and what he calls the justice that "scourg'd th'Iberian pride" (3: 3.72). In the other topical reference, Drayton explains that he has taken the plague that afflicted London in 1603 as the model for his extended description of the ten plagues that afflicted the Egyptians in Exodus, "the unpeopling" of London serving as "a booke / Whereby to modell Egypts miseries" (3: 2.557, 552–53). While the comparison between Egypt and Spain relies on and gives scriptural resonance to the distinction between friend and foe, the comparison between England and Egypt internalizes that distinction and applies it to members of the state, as fellow Englishmen and women afflicted by the plague become weak versions of the theological enemy in need of moral reform. Unlike Dekker, Clapham, or Wither, Drayton has little sympathy for his neighbors. Instead, he responds to the plague by developing a moral order based on the merging of immunization and a politico-theological version of community.

Broadly speaking, Drayton's *Moyses* was part of his early campaign to attract James's attention. As soon as it was clear that James was going to succeed Elizabeth, Drayton began to write and publish a variety of poems that he hoped would secure his place as the new poet laureate for the new monarch. Taking his cue from James's professed admiration of DuBartas, Drayton wrote and published *Moyses* as his version of sacred history and, in the topical references cited in the previous paragraph, encouraged James to intervene in European politics against Catholic Spain and to establish a new moral order at home, rooting out what Drayton perceived to be the effects of Elizabethan corruption on national character.

Drayton's central strategy throughout *Moyses* is to extend the metaphors of health that James uses in his political writings to characterize sovereign prerogative. In the *Trew Lawe*, James qualifies his claim that the king is above the law and has the "power of life and death" over each of his subjects

by arguing that he should only execute a subject in reference to “the health of the common-wealth” (75):

As the judgment comming from the head may not onely imploy the members, every one in their owne office as long as they are able for it; but likewise in case any of them be affected with any infirmitie must care and provide for their remedy, in-case it be curable, and if otherwise, gar cut them off for feare of infecting of the rest: even so is it betwixt the Prince, and his people. (77)

Drayton takes James’s metaphor literally and expands it. Following James’s lead, in *Moses* he shows how the health of a commonwealth is neither a qualification of prerogative nor a metaphorical justification, but is instead one of the most efficient arenas in which prerogative might be executed. Especially in his description of the Jews wandering in the desert, Drayton repeatedly emphasizes Moses’s care for the creaturely needs of the people as a means for producing obedience, what he calls “affliction sweete” (3: 3.96). Following Exodus 15, for example, Drayton describes the episode of the bitter waters at Marah as if it were an object lesson in producing obedience through nurture. In Exodus, Moses makes potable water out of foul and then promises that God will care for the Israelites if they follow his laws. In Drayton’s poem, when Moses casts “medicinall branches” (3: 3.82) into the waters to make them potable, not only does he show the extent of God’s power “in every little thing” (3: 3.93), but he also teaches the Israelites to approach “tribulation” (3: 3.94) with patient obedience and trust in the authority of its leader. Drayton teaches a similar lesson several pages later, when he retells the story of Numbers 11, where the “mixt multitude” incites the people to murmuring because they are tired of eating manna (Num. 11.4). God, “impartiall and so rightly just” (3: 3.437), sends the people quails, but then smites the Hebrews with a plague for their impudence. As Drayton explains it, not only are the plagues divine punishment for immoral behavior, as Clapham claims, but also God’s use of disease to punish the lustful is an appropriate model for a monarch to apply in encouraging and regulating morality. It is not only politically prudent but also theologically legitimate, Drayton suggests, for a monarch to cut off the morally corrupt in order to prevent the infection of the whole.

Were this all that Drayton did, his poetry would be largely uninteresting, a conservative rearticulation of James’s absolutist ambitions in terms of plague discourse. What makes Drayton’s poetry interesting (if also troubling) is his effort to think through the acts of reform and political invention

implied by this model of government. Although Drayton uses the plague to reinforce James's early political writing on prerogative, as he explores and identifies with the violence implicit in that prerogative he develops a poetics that claims this violence as his own. We can see this in the relation Drayton draws between his plague poem and pastoral poetry in his description of the eighth plague, the plague of locusts or, as Drayton would have it, the "plague of Grasshoppers" (3: 2.448). Drayton initially describes the grasshopper as a pastoral poet, an "idle creature" who sings "in wanton summer" and praises the "paineful laboring" of the toiling ants (3: 2.453–55), gesturing toward a pastoral landscape and mode of poetic production in which poetry withdraws from the concerns of the world. At least since Spenser, who is Drayton's strongest influence, pastoral tends to mute or subdue the force of poetic creation by casting poetic representation at one remove from the world of politics. Pastoral retreat creates ineffective poetry because it is based on the act of retreat. At the same time, this distance gives pastoral poetry the means to reflect on the world of politics. As Harry Berger has argued, pastoral (or, at least, what Berger calls strong pastoral) tends to construct "within itself an image of its generic traditions in order to critique them and, in the process, performs a critique of the limits of its own enterprise" (*Situated Utterances* 132). That is, sophisticated pastoral uses the separation of political and poetic creation to engage in metacritique, subtly targeting pastoral retreat in order to give poetry a limited space within which to claim poetic making against the political order. So, for example, in the *Julye Eclogue* in *The Shepheardes Calender* the lowly preacher Thomalin calls out Morrell as proud for preaching from the top of the high hill, berating him for exposing himself to the "pyne, plagues, and dreery death" brought about by the "noysome breath" of the Dog Star (Spenser, *Julye* 24, 23). But at the same time, this critique also rebounds back on Thomalin for embracing the lowly, easy, and ultimately self-protecting retreat of the pastoral shepherd. Pastoral poetry is primarily a poetics of critiques, engaged at various levels of complexity.

In his description of the grasshopper, Drayton gestures toward pastoral poetry in order to transform it, replacing Spenserian metacritique with a poetics of infection that cures the ills of the social body by spoiling it. Instead of separating poetic and political making, Drayton uses the grasshopper-poet to solder the two together, producing and then claiming a natural force of destruction as his own. The grasshopper who once praised the ants from the vantage point of the pastoral poet "Now eats the labourer and the heaped store" (3: 2.456) and then goes on to strip the natural world of its ornamental

covering. Instead of retreating from politics into nature, Drayton forces a damaged vision of nature into the sphere of politics, as the grasshopper-poet is now driven or compelled to transform poetic creation into a destructive force that precedes and precipitates political and moral reform. More than that, Drayton identifies with this act of violence, so that the grasshopper becomes a literalization of the kind of purifying violence that Drayton hopes his poem will bring about. As a figure for the pastoral poet, the grasshopper infects the natural order with the same kind of violence that Drayton hopes will transform corrupt England.

We can get a sense of the stakes of this identification, and more generally Drayton's thinking about political and poetic making, if we turn briefly to the role of miracles in Schmitt's discussion of political theology. Proposing that "all significant modern concepts of the state are secularized theological concepts" (36), Schmitt goes on to argue that just as theology needs a God who can suspend the natural order, so too does the state need a sovereign who can suspend the legal order and "[decide] on the exception" (5). Normative legal theorists consistently identify "the lawfulness of nature" with "normative lawfulness" in order to posit the modern subject of rights (41). For Schmitt, by contrast, both the natural and the normative order assume the external force of a creator that liberal theorists of the state imply but ignore. Drawing out this force, Schmitt makes God's capacity to intervene in the natural world the basis for his argument that constituting power must be located in the personal authority of the sovereign: "The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology" (36).

Schmitt makes his argument for political theology alongside a critique of Emmanuel Sieyès, the eighteenth-century French political writer who coined the term *constituting power* to legitimate the will of the people as the authority by which the constitutional state is created. Arguing against Sieyès, Schmitt claims that the sovereign is constituting power's only possible source. Since the people can only decide exceptions through representative figures, states founded on the "organic unity" of the people will inevitably confront an exception that *must and cannot* be decided (49). While it would be possible to respond by arguing, as Wither does, that the people do, in fact, have the capacity to decide outside the bounds of the law, Drayton identifies nature as a third term that displaces both the sovereign and the people as the alternating loci of constituting power. For Schmitt, nature incarnates an excess that is under the control of the sovereign but beyond the purview of the law. Drayton's plague poetry takes Schmitt's argument one step further.

Increasingly, Drayton does not assume an already present sovereign figure who will intervene in a natural order. Identifying with the violence of the plague, Drayton splits the link between sovereign and miracle that Schmitt forges, and turns the latter against the former. He locates constituting power in infected nature and then injects an excess of that infected nature into the social body as if, metaphorically speaking, infected nature were an antigen that cures by poisoning the wound.

In *Moyses*, the primary figure for the social body is the shamed woman, a figure that would have been familiar to Drayton's readers from the Hebrew prophets. The description of the eighth plague—the plague of the grasshoppers—culminates with Drayton comparing Egypt's cannibalized landscape to lascivious women stripped and awaiting punishment:

The trees all barcklesse nakedly are left  
 Like people stripped of things that they did weare,  
 By the enforcement of disastrous theft,  
 Standing as frighted with erected haire.  
 Thus doth the Lord her nakednesse discover,  
 Thereby to prove her stoutnesse to reclaime,  
 That when nor feare, nor punishment could move her,  
 She might at length be tempred with shame.  
 Disrob'd of all her ornament she stands,  
 Wherein rich Nature whilome did her dight,  
 That the sad verges of the neighbouring lands  
 Seeme with much sorrow wondering at the sight.  
 But *Egypt* is so impudent and vile,  
 No blush is seene that pittie might compell,  
 That from all eyes to cover her awhile,  
 The Lord in darkenesse leaveth her to dwell. (3: 2.465–80)

On one level, this image uses shame to produce moral rectitude. The dynamic is akin to the form that charity takes in official explanations of household quarantine. While Egypt does not feel ashamed about her nakedness, Drayton writes, “neighboring lands” wonder at the sight “with much sorrow.” Egypt becomes a kind of infected country that other nations metaphorically quarantine. On another level, the figure of the shamed woman points to constituting power as a particularly destructive force. Throughout the poem, Drayton is fascinated with the plague as a force that mirrors and deforms feminine sexuality—for instance, comparing the plagues to menstruation (3: 2.100) and describing in some detail breasts that have been transformed

by plague sores (3: 2.317–24). In his figure of the shamed woman, Drayton usurps the fecundity that he associates with feminine sexuality in order to turn that fecundity against itself. In the process, he transforms that fecundity into an uncreating or uncreative kind of life force that he then claims at the heart of his political and poetic project.

Drayton returns to this vision of constituting power as a destructive poetic and political force in *The Muses Elizium*, his final, innovative, and influential pastoral poem, which he published in 1630 along with three poems that form a continuous sacred history: *Noahs Flood*; his early *Moses* poem; and *David and Goliath*. While Drayton never achieved anything like the kind of preferment he hoped for at James's court and while he spent most of James's reign frustrated over what he perceived to be James's lack of concern for the nation's moral well-being, he began to achieve some recognition at Charles's court. *The Muses Elizium* reflects that recognition variously in its positive representations of Charles and Henrietta Maria and its use of devices and figures from early Stuart masques to reformulate and revivify pastoral poetry. Perhaps the most significant pastoral poem written during the Personal Rule, *The Muses Elizium* transforms an earlier, Spenserian tradition of political critique into the pastoral celebration of royal authority that royalists like Richard Lovelace will later use during the Civil War to recall the glories of the lost monarchy.

Drayton presents himself on the verge of recognition at the end of *The Muses Elizium*, when an unnamed satyr enters the poem as a refugee from Felicia, a pastoral country antithetical to ideal Elizium and associated with venery, bacchanalia, and James's rule. Thomas Cogswell sees the satyr as Drayton's self-portrait (223). Like Drayton, the satyr stands on the verge of inclusion within the court at Elizium after having left Felician immorality in his past. But this moment of inclusion is particularly fraught. Even as the satyr withdraws into the safety of Elizium and, by extension, the Caroline court, his demand for justice against Felician vice begins to infect the world of Elizium as well. The satyr describes Felicia through a series of images of life infected and, therefore, stripped of communal value: "the lanke and empty Pap" that produces no milk for the starving infant (3: 10.95); the "Caryon" being eaten by "hungry Crowes" (3: 10.100); and, for Drayton, most provocative of all, the land itself shorn of vegetation, "thus rob'd, of all her rich Attyre, / Naked and bare" and pleading "that *Jove* would dart his fire / Upon those wretches that disrob'd her so" (3: 10.105–08). As the satyr goes on to prophesy, "I see the plagues are shortly to come / Upon this people

clearly them forsooke” (3: 10.120–21). The plague here becomes the basis for political prophesy. Drayton ends *The Muses Elizium* with the prediction that the French will defeat Felicia. While the moral assessment of Felicia depends on a sharp division between Felicia and Elizium, between the courts of James and Charles, nevertheless the satyr’s prophesy blurs that division in order—hopefully from Drayton’s point of view—to reassert it. Charles had recently made peace with the French in a controversial decision that many people, Drayton included, thought harkened back to James’s refusal to take up the cause of European Protestantism. If Caroline policy was beginning to look like Jacobean pacifism, Drayton’s strategy was to qualify his pastoral celebration of Caroline sovereignty by injecting into it an infected image of the ideal pastoral world he also celebrates.

#### IMMUNITY AND DIVINE VIOLENCE

This essay has argued that in England household quarantine formalizes into a logic of immunization, a political logic in which community is constituted by the ongoing expulsion of an infected part. We might see this formalization as evidence in support of Roberto Esposito’s thesis that immunity becomes the central dynamic by which modern biopower is shaped. Immunity names “the negative protection of life” in which life is sheltered “in the same powers that interdict it” (9, 56). That is, Esposito argues, the very capacity of life to expand is routed through a sovereign power that preserves life by claiming the authority to kill it. His main interlocutor is Foucault who, he argues, makes a set of contradictory claims about modern biopower. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault proposes that modern biopower is “absolutely incompatible with relations of sovereignty” (35).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, a closer look at Foucault’s writings shows his position to be more ambiguous. After announcing a radical discontinuity between sovereignty and modern biopower, Foucault goes on to say that the continued existence of sovereignty in modern configurations of biopower is a mystery (36), and toward the end of his seminar he further modifies his claims by proposing that biopower complements the sovereign’s right “to take life or let live” (241). Reading the paradigm of immunization within a tradition of English liberalism that begins with Hobbes and Locke, Esposito aims to reconcile sovereignty with a modern regime of biopolitics through the figurations of violence that immunity suggests.

A number of early modern writers assumed this model in order to reverse it, imagining a form of community based on neighborliness, charity,



and sympathetic identification. Dekker, Clapham, and Wither reverse the relations between infectious part and immunized whole that quarantine law posited, so that for Dekker sympathetic identification with plague victims imaginatively breaks plague *Orders*; for Clapham resistance to quarantine laws involves experimenting with a new set of social relations based on neighborliness; and for Wither resistance involves positing a democratic vision of society that stands in tense relation to Charles's increasing assertions of personal rule. But this emphasis on charity and sympathetic identification prevents the creative aspects of violence from fully emerging. Drayton does not identify with the infected part; rather, he identifies with the force of infection. In so doing, he is able to extend immunization into a poetic strategy that inoculates against the dangers of moral depravity by injecting an element of that force into the social body. In his 1604 plague poem, *Moses and a Map of His Miracles*, and in his 1630 *Muses Elizium*, which includes the *Moses* poem, Drayton claims the destructive force of the plague and injects it into the social order as both cure and revenge. He wants to cure the society of moral corruption, and he wants to revenge himself on the court for not following his vision of moral order. Drayton has little sympathy for the democratic visions of his fellow writers. Instead of basing a sense of community on the infected part, he transforms immunity into a viral logic that contaminates sovereignty and undoes it paradoxically by strengthening it.

It is suggestive to consider the limits of Drayton's efforts alongside Walter Benjamin's concept of divine violence. Opposed to the sovereign's efforts to display power through flamboyant and excessive punishment (Benjamin's example is Apollo and Artemis's punishment of Niobe), divine violence turns force against such display of power in an effort to displace whole systems of power. "Divine violence," Benjamin writes, "which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred dispatch, may be called 'sovereign' violence" (252). By divorcing this violence from its means and putting the word *sovereign* in scare quotes, Benjamin indicates the movement by which political myth might give way to its own undoing. Divine violence breaks free from current versions of political sovereignty and its myths of power by claiming the force of constituting power against its localization in the person of the sovereign, transforming constituting power into something more revolutionary. Drayton's poetics of infection is located just this side of that moment of transformation. Like the "dread voice" that interrupts Milton's *Lycidas* (132), Drayton cuts short the pastoral idealism in *The Muses Elizium* in order to prophesy a destruction to come, injecting a rhetoric of the

plague that destabilizes the pastoral world that he has been elaborating. Drawing on the rhetorical resources of the Hebrew prophets, Drayton calls forth a divine judgment that looks forward to the destruction of the courtly world that Drayton otherwise seems to celebrate. In *Lycidas*, Milton also uses plague rhetoric: “The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,” he writes, “But swoll’n with wind, and the rank mist they draw, / Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread” (125–27). But there is a significant difference between these two. Milton draws a sharp distinction between divine violence and political sovereignty. Even in 1637, eight years before adding the head note explaining that “by occasion” he foretold “the ruin of our corrupted Clergy, then in their height” (“Headnote” 120), Milton synthesizes immunization with the proto-democratic vision of society developed by poets like Wither, radically revising the terms of pastoral, and reimagining relations between self and community in the process. By contrast, Drayton confuses the two and becomes a symptom of the very system his poetry also seeks to undo. Soliciting court approval while also prophesying the downfall of the nation, Drayton turns plague discourse into a form of *ressentiment*, creating imaginary worlds that idealize administration while dreaming of the destruction of the world that he inhabits because that world does not let him actualize his ambitions. And yet Drayton’s *ressentiment* has a positive aspect, too, in that it discloses the relations between immunization and political theology that make up at least one aspect of early modern biopolitics.

#### NOTES

1. Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary control is much closer to the institutional forms that develop in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. In part, this is due to a lack of centralization around public health in late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. But this is also because in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England the plague was a theological problem at the same time that it was also a problem for government administration. Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary control cannot account for the theological aspects of the plague and how those aspects affected the political imaginary of early modern England.

2. In *Sick Economies*, Harris discusses developing concepts of contagion in English policies regulating international trade (108–35).

3. As Clark and Walsham (*Providence*) have argued, miracles were central aspects of early modern English religious experience for both Catholics and Protestants.

4. See also Clapham, *Doctor Andros* (12–60).

5. Foucault also makes this argument in *History of Sexuality* (135–59).

## WORKS CITED

- Benjamin, Walter. "Critique of Violence." *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*. Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996. 236–52. 4 vols. 1996–2006.
- Berger, Jr., Harry. *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics*. Intro. Louis Montrose. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.
- . *Situated Utterances: Texts, Bodies, and Cultural Representations*. Intro. Judith Anderson. New York: Fordham UP, 2005.
- The Bible: Authorized King James Version*. Ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Bownd, Nicholas. *Medicines for the Plague*. London, 1604.
- Clapham, Henoeh. *Doctor Andros His Prosopopeia answered*. Middleburg, 1605.
- . *An Epistle Discourging upon the present Pestilence*. London, 1603.
- . *Henoeh Clapham his demaundes and answeres*. Middleburg, 1604.
- Clark, Stuart. *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.
- Cogswell, Thomas. "The Path to Elizium 'Lately Discovered': Drayton and the Early Stuart Court." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 54.3 (1991): 207–33.
- Daston, Lorraine. "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe." *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture*. Ed. Peter G. Platt. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999. 76–104.
- Dekker, Thomas. *The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker*. Ed. F. P. Wilson. Oxford: Clarendon, 1925.
- Drayton, Michael. *The Works of Michael Drayton*. Ed. John Hebel, Kathleen Tillotson, and Bernard Newdigate. 5 vols. Oxford: Blackwell, 1931–41.
- Esposito, Roberto. *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*. Trans. and intro. Timothy Campbell. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1978.
- . *Society Must Be Defended*. Trans. David Macey. New York: Penguin, 2003.
- Harris, Jonathan Gil. *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- . *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2004.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Ed. J. C. A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Hooker, Richard. *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*. Ed. W. Speed Hill. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1977–81.
- James VI and I. *Political Writings*. Ed. Johann P. Sommerville. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Milton, John. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt Hughes. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957.
- Oakley, Francis. "The Absolute and Ordained Power of God and King in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Philosophy, Science, Politics, and Law." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59.4 (1998): 669–90.

- Parsons, Robert. *An Answer to the fifth part of the Reportes lately set forth by Syr Edward Cooke*. [Saint-Omer], 1606.
- Reynolds, Edward. *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*. London, 1640.
- Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Trans. George Schwab. Cambridge: MIT P, 1985.
- Slack, Paul. *The Impact of the Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*. London: Routledge, 1985.
- Spenser, Edmund. *Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*. Ed. Richard McCabe. London: Penguin, 1999.
- Statutes of the Realm*. 11 vols. London: Dawson's of Pall Mall, 1963.
- Totaro, Rebecca. *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2005.
- Turrell, James F. "The Ritual of Royal Healing in Early Modern England: Scrofula, Liturgy, and Politics." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 68 (1999): 3–36.
- Walsham, Alexandra. "Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England." *The Historical Journal* 46.4 (2003): 779–815.
- . *Providence in Early Modern England*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Wither, George. *Britain's Remembrancer*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1967. Rpt. of The Spenser Society, no. 28–29, 1880.
- Žižek, Slavoj, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard. *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006.

Copyright of Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies (University of Pennsylvania Press) is the property of University of Pennsylvania Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.