newsbooks, title pages, and portraits of Anna Trapnel and Elizabeth Alkin. There is also a detailed index, helpful for both students and active scholars. The only curiosity in this otherwise extremely well researched book is the omission of some scholarship on collaboration in the mid-seventeenth-century book trade, notably the work of Stephen Dobranski. This minor caveat aside, Nevitt’s study makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the revolutionary public sphere and those who shaped it.


The actual scope of Rebecca Totaro’s study is significantly less ambitious than the title implies; her more modest major premise is intriguing, however, as she reads early modern English utopian literature exclusively as a cultural response to bubonic plague. The period from 1348 to approximately 1720 Totaro calls “plague time” (4). Totaro finds in “plague-literature” literary “works produced either in direct response to a plague visitation or those in which bubonic plague functions as an essential event or primary metaphor” (13), including utopian fiction. Such plague literature, she contends, demonstrates that, in a state of perpetual anxiety over the possibility or reality of epidemic, “they [men and women] practiced utopianism, imagining that in the future their children would live longer and in less fear. Those with the most powerful imaginations began the work of building toward that place of improved health” (36). In these plague-inspired utopias, their authors fashion boundless literary domains “in which to illustrate and then animate abstract ideas, seeing whether and to what degree they work, before perhaps employing them in the real world” (19). And from this genre’s characteristic interrogation of the universal, familiar experience of bubonic plague, early modern culture realizes “there is practical hope, a realistic guide to a more prosperous future that begins now” (19).

Totaro’s claims interestingly suggest she will employ a form of cultural poetics to read her chosen plague texts as dynamic agents of cultural production. But her various explications of plague-time utopias end in contradictions and closed readings. The reader is warned: “some of these plague-
infected works display overt symptoms, and others ooze the odor of plague-time. Another set defiantly masks the buboes in their narrative in order to avoid detection” as plague-inspired utopian fiction (8). Recognizing (or not) then, the argument’s broadly and somewhat ambiguously defined parameters, the reader is somewhat prepared for some of the plausible but often exquisitely forced analyses of so-called “plague-literature” that follow. For if, as the author contends “all lives—including those of the most imaginative of English writers—had a conceptual place for plague” (8), meaning an (apparently) intimate knowledge of such an (apparently) ubiquitous horror, then any and all texts might be made (apparently) to speak plague.

The reader’s perception of bubonic plague as an insidious, ubiquitous presence in early modern England for nearly four hundred years is essential to Totaro’s argument where frequently overstatement and implication substitute for rigor and coherence. She (repeatedly) proclaims “ever in mind if not literally in body,” bubonic plague “ruled the minds of the nation [early modern England]” (6). Typically, one finds that plague discourse quickened in proximity to major epidemics, but the silence of years intervening (of which there were many) between major national epidemics seems to contradict the author by suggesting that the individual and communal fear and anxiety that defines Totaro’s “plague-time” largely receded from consciousness. It’s a terribly dramatic but unsupportable claim, as we finally have no way of knowing if in fact, as Totaro asserts, plague exerted such a singular and sustained psychological hold on early modern English culture. But it is precisely this claim that in part permits the author to locate significant textual representations of utopian hope-in-plague-time.

The book’s first two chapters capably map the cultural terrain of plague-time (epidemic). Along with examples of plague discourse produced by the state, the church and the early modern medical establishment, Totaro reads the works of such poets John Davies and John Taylor and the dramatist and plague pamphleteer Thomas Dekker to reconstitute for the reader a sense of the pervasive cultural anxiety due to bubonic plague from 1348-1722. Of principle interest to the author is the ascendancy of Galenic theory as the “natural philosophy” that “supplied the platform from which early modern men and women understood their relationship to the natural world” (49). According to Galenic plague ideology the disease had a divine origin but a mundane form: the environmental focus was miasma—stinking and, there-
fore, harmful air and the conditions that produced it. Galenic theory in medical and scientific communities in early modern England influenced both practical and imaginative methods of containing plague. For example, in their prescriptions of popular quarantine and sanitation practices the Plague Orders designed to manage sixteenth-century urban (London’s) epidemics responded to Galenic theory. Similarly, utopian fiction essentially signifies an individual and collective hope in the form of imaginative (medically progressive) narrative responses to plague: “while many were wishing and living, others determined to put their plans for ideal health into writing” (13).

Totaro’s first example of a plague-time utopia is Thomas More’s *Utopia*. One learns *Utopia’s* Galenic representation of plague and the fantastically effective civic prophylactics deployed against it reflect More’s experience as an under sheriff of London and later as the city’s Commissioner of the Sewers (72). More’s credentials are further underscored as we learn of his association with the physician Thomas Linacre and his advocacy for Linacre’s vision (inspired by contemporary Italian practice) for public health in England. The miasmatic (and so potentially contagious) air of London’s streets, alleyways and yards was an obvious nuisance, but seemingly neither city nor state government was as enthusiastic about public sanitation or a comprehensive program for public health, including the administration of epidemic, as was Thomas More: Thus “England would not surpass other nations in healthcare. But Thomas More’s land of Utopia would. It rivaled all nations by its best practices of medicine. Its citizens would be healthier than England’s or any other known population” (75). In *Utopia* Galenic plague ideology is refined and ideal, and more fantastically, accurate and effective. This interesting and capably-argued reading well supports Totaro’s assertion that her “plague-texts” result in “a formation of hope” (23). But then the argument takes a disorienting and damaging turn. *Utopia* is a private reserve, as Totaro confides in the chapter’s closing moment:

even if Thomas More ultimately wrote *Utopia* as a bit of self-entertainment and not as a prescription for the nation, he did imagine a world grown out of his present conditions of plague-time and into a healthier future. By this one measure of better health and hope fulfilled, Thomas More offers us *eutopia*—a better alternative to plague-time England and perhaps a guide out of it. (86)
She seems unaware of or unconcerned by this radical contradiction of her thesis. By some now relaxed criteria, *Utopia* offers an irrelevant hope—but to us. Significantly and despite the author’s repeated claims, it is revealed that *Utopia* only ever minimally engaged in the culture’s production of plague’s meaning. The identity and cultural function of a plague-time Utopia is incredible. Following this perplexing and illogical turn, the argument immediately takes another.

Chronological structure trumps generic and/or thematic similarity, as Totaro explores what she identifies as popular dramatic “plague texts”: Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*, and Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, “the most overtly pestilence-ridden” of early modern drama; “only Tony Kushner’s Tony Award winning *Angels in America* (1991) comes close to matching Jonson’s play in the staging of infectious disease” (110). Arguably utopian in form in that both plays offer depictions of “two worlds in contrast” (107), neither one offers a fantasy of hope-in-plague-time: Instead we discover that both reveal the fraudulence of medicine and its inspiration of false hope. One’s frustration confirms that, now, having once abandoned and now modified her thesis, for Totaro, indeed virtually any text is a plague-text. Yet we are encouraged by biographical sketches hypothesizing for each author some form of an intimate personal experience of plague (Shakespeare’s birth in the midst of a visitation in Stratford, the periodic prohibition of dramatic performance in London due to plague epidemic, the death of Jonson’s son and best friend and maybe even his parents of plague) that gives the authors a particular sensitivity to and interest in bubonic plague: “always in mind,” a sort of psychological and intellectual authenticity.

Totaro eventually returns us to more certain and familiar utopian ground with chapters on Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World*. The former best and most closely supports the argument’s thesis. *The New Atlantis* is a text preoccupied with and motivated by the meaning of plague-time and its author an active and vocal proponent of scientific and medical progress. In contrast to England’s occasional and ineffective policy, Bacon’s Bensalemites practice a rigorous and comprehensive and humane policy of personal quarantine. Bensalem defers to the wisdom and learning of a professional organization of wise and learned and progressive scientists. Bacon’s utopian land possesses more efficacious medicines and sanitation policies. Its people are god-fearing people who may honestly assert
"You shall understand that there is not under the heavens so chaste a nation as this of Bensalem; nor so free from all pollution and foulness" (137). Thus as representation of a society that has mastered plague through science, Bacon's *The New Atlantis* provides its reader with imaginative possibility of practical deliverance from bubonic plague.

Subsequent chapters examine the selected works of Margaret Cavendish, particularly *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* and *The Blazing World*, and provide a brief comparison and contrast of Bacon's and Cavendish's literary style in order "to gain insight into each author's conception of the human condition" (159); finally and similarly, by reading *The Blazing World* together with John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "we gain an understanding of how Cavendish and Milton conceive of the human condition" (172). Ultimately, however remarkable the trajectory of Margaret Cavendish's musings on the nature of plague, Totaro argues that Cavendish's utopia also fails to provide a culturally relevant fiction of hope.

When writing a book review, one always wants to be diplomatic and encouraging of one's colleagues and fellow scholars. We inhabit an insular environment, after all, and there are relatively few of us working in this particular period and fewer still exploring a subject as complex and significant and frankly relevant as the textual production of plague in early modern England. One longs to write "this provocative and brilliantly executed study makes a significant contribution to the field of X," or words to that effect. Of course, frankly unfavorable reviews such as this are more difficult to write: obligatory, concluding thoughts seem either redundant or patronizing. Thus I will end as I began: The major premise of Rebecca Totaro's *Suffering in Paradise: The Bubonic Plague in English Literature from More to Milton* is intriguing.


In *New World, Known World* David Read emphasizes the strangeness of colonial America as first encountered by newly arrived Europeans. Read knows that this is not news to the academic community, but he hopes to revitalize interest in certain colonial American texts written between 1624 and