

“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.

David Read. *New World, Known World: Shaping Knowledge in Early Anglo-American Writing*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. ix + 177 pp. \$37.50. Review by WILLIAM J. SCHEICK, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

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

1649 as neglected but rich repositories of this perceived strangeness. Texts are not only the product of distinctive individuals, Read contends; texts are themselves distinctive literary embodiments. The books under review in Read's study range from John Smith's *General History of Virginia* to William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

One way these texts register their distinctiveness includes peculiar gaps between what their authors seem to have intended and what actually gets recorded. Often, Read finds, some Old World literary convention breaks down when applied to New World experience. As a result the earliest colonial American texts fail to achieve a discursive stability.

This instructive failure in the function of familiar literary devices to contain, explain or simply describe utterly unfamiliar New World exigencies reveals telling and narratively opportunistic instances when authors do not know exactly what they are doing or trying to do. Each such textual breakdown, to apply Emily Dickinson's memorable image, becomes that "certain slant of light" which makes an "internal difference / Where the meanings are."

Read detects considerable incoherence in Smith's *General History*, which abounds in contradictions, asymmetrical juxtapositions and tonal confusion. Beyond his own understanding, Smith sometimes records a Native American's viewpoint in a manner which undercuts the certainty of English perspective.

Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* also reflects complicated and inconclusive experiences which, Read contends, lead the Pilgrim governor to consciously reject his initial providential-history project celebrating the divinely-guided deeds of prominent men. Instead, in the second book of his account and particularly in his observations about Thomas Morton and Isaac Allerton, Bradford embraces the experiential realities of a community dependent upon and defined by economic success through trade.

Morton's *New English Canaan* applies a mercantile and metropolitan framework to familiarize New World experience for homeland readers. Morton indicts his Pilgrim enemies for their failure to import London's urban/urbane culture, which Morton assures his audience can indeed be exported to a New World already replete with the multifarious contradictions characteristic of city life.

In *A Key into the Language of America* and *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* Roger Williams presents a curious paradox, Read argues. Williams affirms Christian certainties drawn from the Bible while at the same time he credits an

ideological pluralism based on New World “wilderness” experience. Firm belief and contingent knowledge intersect in Williams’ works, which sometimes simply leave this awkward juxtaposition unresolved, neither elucidated nor moralized.

If I mention missing in Read’s discussion any awareness of my own closely related interest in logocentric cruxes in *Design in Puritan American Literature* (1992) and logonomic conflict in *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America* (1998), excuse a murmured quibble from an old man who still likes to be invited to a good party now and then—because I do believe that *New World, Known World* is worth celebrating. Here is an author-centered, text-centered study that eschews fashionable and predictable political hegemonies. Here is a book that emphasizes the conflicted humanity of authors, to whom we are more than casually introduced and then to whom we are urged to listen very, very closely. How uncommonly humane.

William M. Kelso. *Jamestown: The Buried Truth*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006. xii + 238 pp. \$29.95. Review by WILLIAM J. SCHEICK, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

The earliest advertisements for New World settlement promised or intimated a plentitude of land, meat and women. Keenly aware of the importance of real estate to one’s social standing and economic survival, landless men became the most likely prospects to undertake the dangerous transatlantic journey. These potential colonists were also largely grain-eaters who valued animals as a culinary luxury as well as a profitable resource. And these men preferred to imagine the ready hospitality of friendly local women.

Of course advertisements, then and now, are notoriously unreliable. The first settlers at James Fort, later expanded into Jamestown, soon discovered the dark side of such fantasies. Water either too salty or contaminated, food spoiled by heat and humidity, crops destroyed by drought, disease spread by insects, Indians fiercely hostile to outsiders, life-threatening accidents, volatile arguments among the colonists themselves and the machinations of Spanish spies, among other hardships, all conspired against the earliest colonial Virginians’ dreams of a better life. It is said that dreams die hard, but at James Fort the dreamer’s end came all too easily.