

False Information in Early Modern Plague Recipes and the death of Andrew Marvell

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### Abstract

Plague recipes of the Early Modern period incorporated the Medieval religious view that the Bubonic Plague was result of collective sin. Common ingredients from the Medieval period were recirculated in the Early Modern period, such as, angelic(a) water, vinegar, treacle, mithridate, malmsey or muscadine wine, and rue. This paper will address the textual transmission of the recipe, “a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). It will focus on one ingredient, mithridate (an opiate). I will discuss how the dosage of mithridate increased from one dram to one ounce throughout the seventeenth century. This change in dosages led to the death of Andrew Marvell (the poet) who was suffering from malaria. This project will then articulate how and why the Hull History Centre copy was recirculated in the eighteenth-century British newspapers. This paper will finally articulate how false information arises during times of plagues. Also, I will discuss how and why the Oct. 18, 1770, *Reading Mercury* Newspaper article wound up on the inside cover of Columbia Universities, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Finally, I will address how in modern times, false information arose throughout COVID-19, similarly to the various plague recipes or receipts in the Early Modern period.

*Keywords:* “A Most Excellent Medicine,” Andrew Marvell, plague, recipe, mithridate, and malmsey or muscadine wine.

## Introduction

False information arises during times of plagues because of people's fear of novel-viral threats, resulting in an obsession for cleanliness, pureness, and spotlessness. In 1665, the Bubonic Plague erupted in England, and quack doctors sold fake remedies that supposedly treated plague symptoms. Daniel Defoe described in *A Journal of the Plague Year* that, because of quack doctors selling false information and promoting dangerous or ineffective ingredients, people died. Rev. Andrew Marvell copied "a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague" into his manuscript book of sermons (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1), which was believed to be a hopeful cure against plague symptoms, but the recipe may have been sold to him by a quack doctor. The recipe was bequeathed to the poet Andrew Marvell (Rev. Marvell's son) who was suffering from malaria; he used the recipe as a cure but overdosed on its key ingredient, mithridate (an opiate), which resulted in his death. The textual transmission history of the increasing amount of mithridate reveals the reason Marvell overdosed. Despite these occurrences, the recipe was recirculated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as Englanders feared the reemerging Black Death.

A *Reading Mercury* newspaper article, a letter to the editor, dated October 18, 1770, warned readers of the Russian Plague and referenced the same recipe that Marvell owned. A clipping of this article was glued onto the inside cover of Columbia University's copy of *A Journal of the Plague Year* (B824D36 S 1722). The recipe was also recirculated throughout the seventeenth century in several manuscripts:

- "An Old Experience Recip for the Plague" (National Library of Medicine, MS B 172, p. 52).
- "Dr Burges his Receipt" (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [174v]).

- “Dr Burghisse dyrection ag<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> plague” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [240v]).
- “A most excellent thing against the Plague” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [276 v – 276 r]).
- “*Mr. Ruthins medicine for the Plague*” (Wellcome Library, MS. 1322, p. 31).
- “*Sir Walter Rawleigh's Receipt against the Plague*” (Wellcome Library (CD-ROM, 1996) / L2864I), p. 6).

However, the variations in language and in dosages across these seven manuscripts show that “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) is the text recirculated in a letter to the editor of the *Reading Mercury* because it is an exact replica. For example, Sir Walter Rawleigh directs readers to “Take three pints of Malmsey” (CD-ROM, 1996) / L2864I) and Sloan’s “An Old Experience Recip for the Plague” likewise says to “Take 3 pints of Malmsey” (National Library of Medicine, MS B 172, p. 52) whereas the newspaper articles ask patients to “Take three pints of Muscadine wine” (To the Printer,” p. 4, 26 Oct 1770). Marvell’s copy has the same ingredients; he writes, “take 3 pints of Muscadine wine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). This presentation will discuss how these common recipes were recirculated as Englanders feared sickness and yearned for purity. It will also address how the London orders of 1665 are comparable to COVID-19 and how the people of the 2020 pandemic still obsessed over purity in times of false information.

### **Brief history of medical manuscripts**

In the Middle Ages, the Bubonic Plague was viewed as a spiritual crisis, but in the Early Modern Period, Europeans realized that the plague was a natural catastrophe. Thus, people saw the plague in the Middle Ages as humanity living in sin, mainly pride. In a sense, humanity had lost its way with spirituality (or with God) and collective sin needed to be absolved. The



pestilient disease, like Leprosy, produced lesion-like spots that had theological importance, especially compared to Christ's wounds on the cross. For example, Byron Lee Grigsby argues in *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* that Leprosy was viewed as a result of, or punishment for, individual sin, whereas the plague (or pestilence) was associated with collective sin (Grigsby 35). Grigsby states that "Leprosy and bubonic plague are combined through the role Christianity played in the interpretation and construction of each disease. Leprosy afflicts an individual" (35). Grigsby goes on to write that the "Bubonic plague was seen as a sign of a massive moral failing, a common breaking of the covenant with God, and a collective punishment. Control of this disease by individual Christian practice was impossible because it affected everyone" (35). While the Middle Ages saw the plague (pestilence) as humanity living in sin, this belief was preserved throughout various Early Modern recipes, as well.

Pestilence even contains sinful ideology which is prevalent through its Christian-like etymology. For example, the *Middle English Dictionary* defines pestilence as "An infectious or contagious disease; a fatal epidemic or disease, plague; ~ **of bestes**." The second definition of pestilence is defined as "Wickedness, iniquity, evil; harm." "Of bestes" or "airish bestes" means "Demons of the air." The scientific revolution (1543-1687) showcases how people saw the plague as a natural pandemic rather than God plaguing the earth. But often in the Early Modern period, philosophers, doctors, and also alchemists referred to the Bubonic Plague as pestilence. Yes, the Early Modern period saw the plague as a natural phenomenon, but the residual Medieval theology was persistent in this period by the use of holistic ingredients.

Even in the Early Modern period the spiritual aspect of the plague was still persistent. The ambiguous writer of *A collection of very valuable and scarce pieces relating to the last*

*plague in the year 1665* claimed that the natural aspect of the plague inflicts the patient because spirituality has left the body. He wrote, “since that this Intention was chiefly to be observed, all other Directions having respect unto it, Physicians were hereupon very cautelous lest they should by any means either divert Nature from this course, or prejudice her in such Designments” (33). The purpose is to purge nature (the physical aspect of the plague) from the individual so they can absolve the spiritual self. He continued, “Hence it was that Phlebotomy<sup>1</sup> was justly censured as a matter of dangerous Consequence in the *Pest*... the Fermentation of the Blood was abated, the Spirits took flight, and Nature became so debilitated, that she could no longer combate with her implacable Adversary [the illness]” (33). Either the “*Pest*” (33) is short for pestilence, or he describes the rat (the “*pest*” (33)) as the propagator of pestilence. Thus, Medieval theology on pestilence is incorporated in Early Modern medical recipes, especially through holistic (homeopathic) remedies or ingredients.

### **Scientific revolution**

Between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at the height of the scientific revolution (Eamon 297), a transition occurs where Black Death is no longer considered a result of sin but due to the natural world. Grigsby writes that “While fourteenth-century Europeans saw the plague as an unparalleled event, those in the fifteenth century recognized the plague as a normal albeit unfortunate, part of life” (127). This philosophical thought changed during the scientific revolution from 1543 to 1687 which peaked due to the continual threat of the plague starting in 1592. Grigsby describes the shift in the mindset of the plague

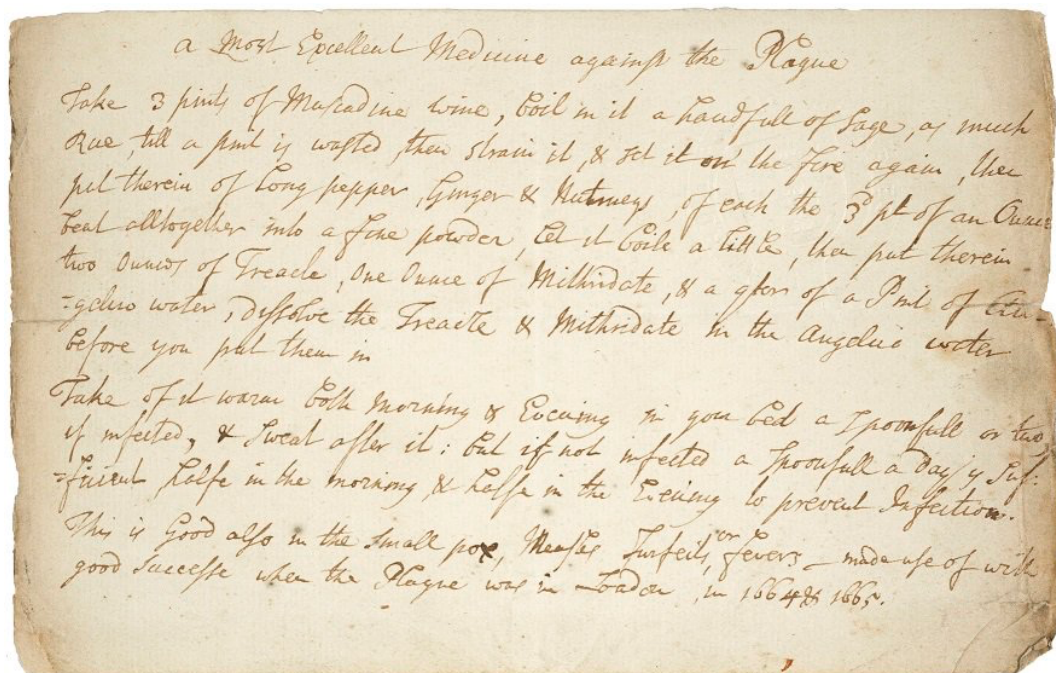
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<sup>1</sup> The *OED* Defines phlebotomy as “The action or practice of extracting blood from a vein for therapeutic or diagnostic purposes (originally by surgical incision of the vein, later by means of a needle and syringe, cannula, etc.); venesection; venepuncture.”

plague transmission and methods of protection become more important to literary authors than the interpretation of the meaning of plague. This change in focus can be demonstrative of a desire to take more control over the course of [the] plague, to change it from an event with [sic] is completely controlled by God to one that has some human interaction (128)

The plague's recirculation enforced people's realization that pestilence was not the wrath of God, but a natural disease. For example, Grigsby argues that "Rather than examining the collective sins of the community and the possibility that this disease was linked to the apocalypse, literary authors focused more heavily on methods of diagnosis, cure, and treatment" (127). While Grigsby articulates the shift in that the spirituality of the plague vanishes, I contend that the plague is viewed as a natural occurrence but still contained spiritual overtones which is significant through plague recipes. Also, Grigsby's chapter does not mention how the natural plague had an impact on the government and the public.

#### "[a] Most Excellent Medicine Against the Plague"



*a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague*

Take 3 pint of Muscadine wine, Boil in it a handfull of Sage, as much Rue, till a pint is wasted, then strain it, & set it on the fire again, then put therein of Long pepper, Ginger & Nutmeg, of each the 3<sup>rd</sup> pt of an Ounce beat altogether into a fine powder, let it Boile a little, then put therein two Ounces of Treacle, one Ounce of Mithridate, & a glass of a Pint of Rhenish water, dissolve the Treacle & Mithridate in the Rhenish water Before you put them in

Take of it warme both morning & Evening in your bed a Spoonfull or two if infected, & sweat after it: But if not infected a Spoonfull a day & Night. It will give Relief in the morning & Relief in the Evening to prevent Infection.

This is Good also in the small pox, Measles, Typhus, fevers made up of with good success when the Plague was in London, in 1664 & 1665.

Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1

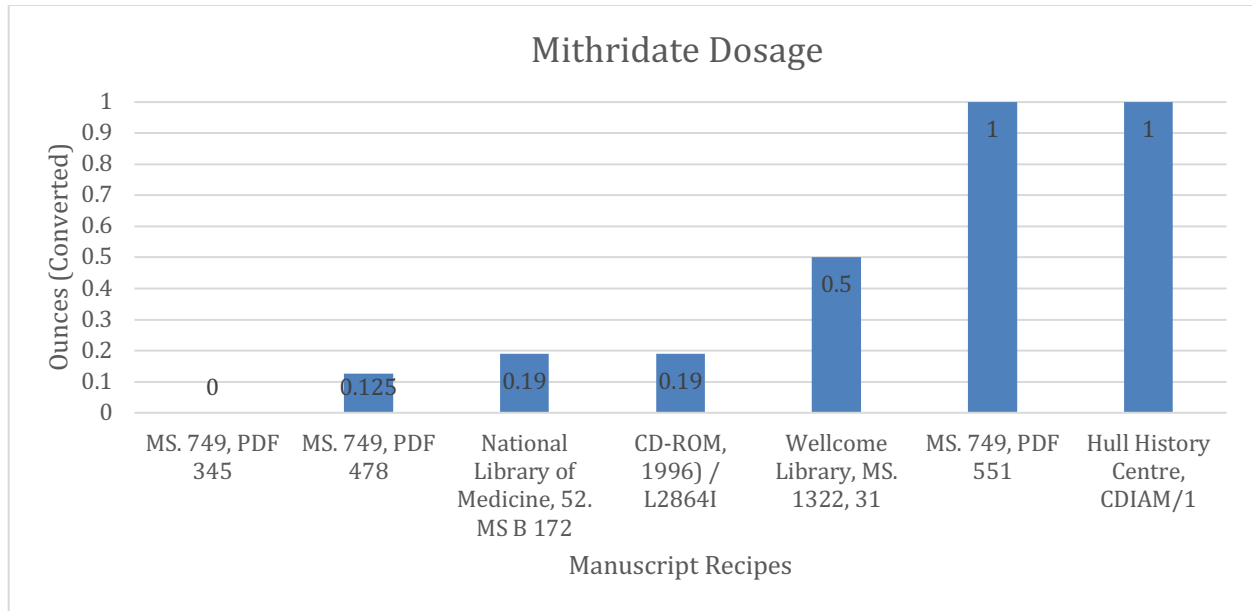
“[a] Most Excellent Medicine” was owned by Rev. Andrew Marvell who read and transcribed this recipe in his book of sermons (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). How Marvell acquired the plague recipe is inconclusive.



Unknown artist,. "Marvell, Andrew (1621–1678)." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Marvell’s book of sermons which included the plague recipe was bequeathed to his son, the poet, Andrew Marvell. As Marvell Jr. suffered from malaria, he procured the ingredients for “a Most Excellent Medicine” to cure himself (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). However, he overdosed and died because of an excessive amount of mithridate. Stewart Mottram writes regarding his death; Marvell’s recipe “prescribes twice-daily doses of one such ‘strong water’ containing all the ingredients –‘Triacle, Mithridate’ which James Primerose (a physician) “specifically cautions his readers against.” Mottram continues, Primerose “claim[ed] that the use of opium as a febrifuge was perfectly safe if taken in moderation, but not excess” (“‘A Most excellent medicine’: Malaria, Mithridate, and the Death of Andrew Marvell”). Much like what Mottram discusses, mithridate in “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) was prescribed to be taken twice a day at eight times the original amount. Various plague recipes

contained different doses of mithridate, depending on the person's body. Much like what Mottram discusses, mithridate in “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) was prescribed to be taken twice a day at eight times the original amount” (“‘A Most excellent medicine’: Malaria, Mithridate, and the Death of Andrew Marvell”). Various plague recipes contained different doses of mithridate, depending on the person's body.



As can be seen in the above chart:

- “D<sup>r</sup> Burges his Receipt” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749 f [174v]) is the one of the only recipes that does not call for mithridate and thus, it was absent.
- “D<sup>r</sup> Burghisse dyrection ag<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> plague,” called for “Mithridate one Drachme,” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [240v]).
- “An Old Experience Recip for the Plague” (National Library of Medicine, MS B 172, p. 52) called for one and a half drams, which clarifies that the dosage increased. One dram is equal to “1/8 of a fluid ounce” (“Early Modern Measurements”) so one ounce of mithridate could be lethal and would make an overdose likely.

- “A Most excellent thing against the Plague,” called for “an ounce of better mithridate” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [276v-r]).
- “a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague” called for “One Ounce of Mithridate” (Hull History Centre C DIAM/1).

It is quite possible that the recipe was fake, but Marvell could have taken more mithridate than required, resulting in an overdose. Little evidence exists to suggest the recipe worked. In Marvell’s copy it states that the recipe “made use of with good successe when the Plague was in London in 1664 & 1665” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). Consequently, a version of “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) was vastly recirculated throughout the Early Modern Period and, as a result, variants were generated. It is possible that the recipe worked, and Marvell’s body could not handle the mithridate dosage, but evidence shows that more mithridate was prescribed in Marvell’s copy than other plague recipes. Often dosages varied depending on the trial-and-error of homeopathic remedies. Therefore, false information arises out of fear, and Marvell’s recipe became a profitable medical recipe throughout the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. No vaccines existed and thus, people relied on quarantine, escaping bustling cities, and medical receipts (especially if it could quickly cure plague symptoms).

### **Quack doctors**

Quack doctors often exploited and profited off plague recipes, whether they worked or not. This is especially significant with the increased mithridate dosage as the recipe alluded that it was eight times more effective than previous versions. Eamon speculates that quack doctors “peddled nostrums and quick cures on the street-corners...some of the physicians had begun to serve up dubious panaceas of their own. There was a brisk market for medical ‘secrets,’ which

might be any sort of nostrum, electuary, or quick cure for what ails you” (162). Quack doctors often sold quick fix-it recipes, which could display how “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) was not a 99 % effective cure. Daniel Defoe explicitly portrayed quack doctors as corrupt in *A Journal of the Plague Year*. He described “what befell one of the Quacks, who publish’d that he had a most excellent Preservative against the plague, which whoever kept about them, should never be infected, or liable to infection.” Defoe continued, “this Man, who, we may reasonably suppose, did not go abroad without some of this *excellent Preservative* in his Pocket, yet was taken by the Distemper, and carry’d off in two or three Days” (204). Defoe’s exposé of the quack doctors reveals that they sold recipes regardless of whether they worked or not in order to profit off false information.

Philosophers of this period desired to keep the scientific craft experiments a secret: “because of the powerful and potentially dangerous ways in which *scientia experimentalis* could be used.” More importantly, “it is all the more necessary to safe-guard it, indeed to keep it secret from all but those who are morally and intellectually equipped to employ it beneficially” (Eamon 81). The protection of the recipes’ secrecy could prevent panic and exploitation; however, recipes were no longer secretive as they became a profitable commodity through newspapers and quack doctors.

### **List of Common Ingredients**

Common ingredients (like angel water or angelic(a)) of the Early Modern period derived from the Middle Ages. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines angelic(a) as a plant “cultivated for its seeds and stems which are used as a flavouring and in confectionery, and for its roots which are used medicinally.” According angelic(a)’s etymology in the *OED*, “the plant was so named on account of its reputed efficacy against poison and pestilence, probably because

of the fragrant smell and aromatic taste of its root.” These ingredients appeared in recipe or receipts, which were included in large editions that covered everything from how to bake a pie, to how to cure vomiting, or most importantly, how to cure plague symptoms. One way to cure Black Death was by sweating out the sickness.

Sweat was a key ingredient in Alessio Piemontese’s *A Collection of Seven and fifty Receipts good against the Plague*. The recipe “How to make a drink cause one to sweat” recommends taking “a dram of Mithridatum [mithridate]” (*Chap. 49*).

Chap. 49. How to make a drink to cause one to sweat.  
Take a dram of good Triacle, or a dram of Mithridatum, with bole  
Armoniack of the best of the powder of one of the herbs called Cardia-  
cee,

cee, described before, half a dram, Scabious water two ounces, water  
of Oxalife, Buglofs Borage of each an ounce and make a drink thereof.

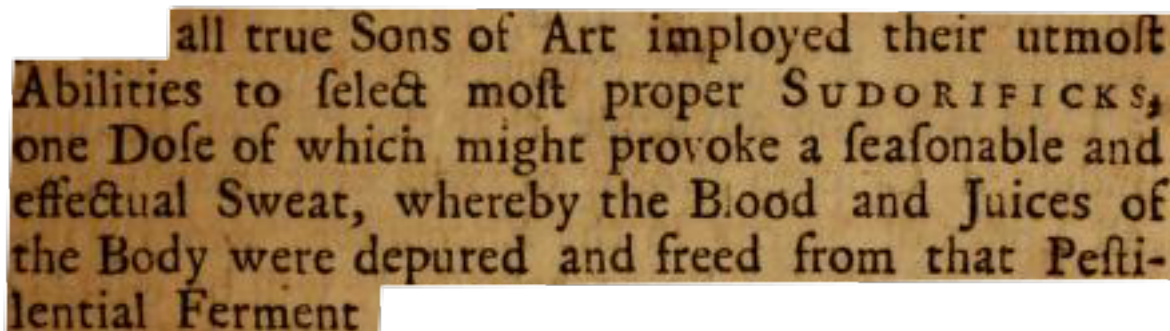
*A Collection of Seven and fifty Receipts good against the Plague*, pp. 18-19.

This would cause the sickness to leave the body. In the Early Modern period, sweating out plague symptoms was a common instruction for medical recipes. For example, sweat is described in “The chief Intention in the Cure,” which is that “all true Sons of Art employed their utmost Abilities to select most proper SUDORIFICKS<sup>2</sup>, one Dose of which might provoke a seasonable and effectual Sweat, whereby the Blood and Juices of the Body were depured and freed from that Pestilential Ferment” (*A collection of very valuable and scarce pieces* 33).

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<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines sudorific (the drug) as “promoting or causing perspiration; diaphoretic.”





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lential Ferment

*A collection of very valuable and scarce pieces 33*

The common ingredients of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were recirculated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the Early Modern period as plague spots reemerged.

David K. Coley writes in *Death and the Pearl Maiden* that “good smells were commonly believed to mitigate or even prevent transmission” (71). Thus, because “Peonies and gillyflowers in particular were used in satchels and scented amulets thought to keep illness at bay” (Coley 72), these ingredients were very common in medical receipts. For example, gillyflower was used in Chapter 32 of Piemontese’s text. As for ginger, it was recirculated in “a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). The common ingredients from Piemontese’s recipe book are angelic(a) water, rue,<sup>3</sup> vinegar, treacle, mithridate, and a sweet white wine like muscadine or malmsey. These ingredients were recirculated in Marvell’s text and plague recipes that follow the same formula, except for a few variations.

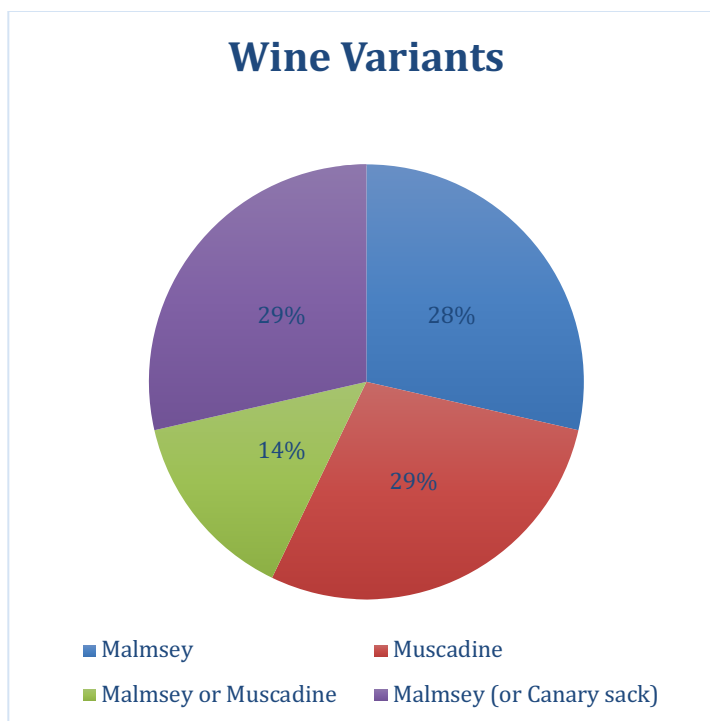
Altering ingredients was common as Early Modern medicine was strictly holistic and trial based. For example, Elaine Leong writes in *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England* that “readers also altered dosages,

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<sup>3</sup> The *OED* defines “Rue” as “Any of various southern European dwarf shrubs consisting the genus *Ruta* (family Rutaceae), *esp.* (more fully **common or garden rue**) *R. graveolens*, which has yellow flowers and bitter, strongly scented feathery leaves, and was formerly much used for medicinal purposes.”

substituted ingredients, and changed production methods to reflect their preferences” (163).

Leong goes on to write that “for example, the reader of *The Marrow of Physick* mentioned above was apparently happy to substitute ‘muscadine’ for ‘malmsey’ and add ‘mithridate’ in a ‘recipe against the plague, pox, measells and other infectious diseases’” (163). Dr Burges’ (possibly Dr. Thomas Brugis) recipe appears in the medical texts, such as *The Marrow of Physick* (1640) and *Vade Mecum: or A companion for a Chyrugion* (1653). Variants within similar recipes such as Marvell’s copy suggest experimentation with the homeopathic medical craft. For example, there are about three different medical recipes in Wellcome collection MS. 749, which are called “Dr. Burges his receipt” (MS. 749, f [174v]), “Dr Burghisse direction ag<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> plague” (MS. 749, f [240v]), and “A most excellent thing against the Plague” (MS. 749, f [276v-276r]). The textual variants in the various Dr. Burgess’s receipts prove Leong’s argument that malmsey and muscadine wine are interchangeable. The following textual variants for malmsey or muscadine wine clarify that “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) is the text recirculated in the 1770 newspapers because of its precise reproduction.



For example, “A Most excellent thing against the Plague” recommends the dosage of “3 pintes of the best malmsie” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [276v-r]). Likewise, “an Old experience Recip for the Plague” has readers “Take 3 Pintes of Malmsey (or Canary sack)” (National Library of Medicine, MS B 172, p. 52). Similarly, almost verbatim, “*Sir Walter Rawleigh’s Receipt against the Plague*” directs patients to “Take three pintes of Malmsey (or Canary Sack)” (Wellcome Library, (CD-ROM, 1996) / L2864I, p. 6). For example, “Dr Burghiss dyrection agt<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> plague” recommends that users “Rx<sup>4</sup> [take]. Malmsey 3 pintes.” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [240v]).

However, in another transcription, “Dr Burges his Receipt” directs people to “Take 3 pintes of muscadine” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [174v]). “M<sup>r</sup> Ruthins medicine for the

<sup>4</sup> The OED defines Rx as “In form R. [ < the initial letter of classical Latin *recipe* take, 2nd singular present imperative of *recipere* [receive v.](#)] In medical prescriptions, as the opening instruction: take. Cf. [Rx vb. at Initialisms 1](#), [recipe v.](#)”

Plague” is one of the only plague recipes to recommend taking either “3 pintes of good malmsey or muscadine” wine (Wellcome Library, MS. 1322, p. 31). The variants in the various Dr. Burgess’s receipts prove Leong’s argument that malmsey and muscadine wine are interchangeable. Also, most importantly, the textual variants are for the patients’ needs. Lastly, Marvell’s recipe tells readers to “Take 3 Pints of Muscadine wine” which is evidence that it was recirculated in the eighteenth century. The textual variants for malmsey or muscadine wine, which Leong describes, are prevalent in “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). The common ingredients, like mithridate and malmsey, in Marvell’s recipe were continuously recirculated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### **Variations of “a Most Excellent Medicine”**

By the end of the Early Modern Period, England was relinquished of the Bubonic Plague due to the Great Fire of London. However, by the latter end of the eighteenth century, Russia experienced an outbreak of a Black Death variant. The outbreak prompted the owner of Columbia University’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* to glue the Oct. 18 newspaper clipping to the inside cover. Not only does “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) provide a cure, Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* and the physical text effectively work as a communication device to stop or slow down the spread of the possible 1770 Russian Plague pandemic. Marvell’s recipe was recirculated in an Oct. 18, 1770 newspaper that warned Englanders of the Russian Plague. A letter to the editor transcribed “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) in the *Reading Mercury* newspaper article.

The textual variants for malmsey or muscadine wine prove interchangeability and clarify that Marvell’s manuscript is the recirculated text in the 1770 newspapers. The only manuscripts that call for muscadine are “D<sup>r</sup> Burges his Receipt” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [174v]) and

Marvell's recipe. But a letter to the editor of the *Reading Mercury* is almost a direct replica of the Hull History Centre text. The reason we know it is not "D<sup>r</sup> Burges his Receipt" (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [174v]) is because the newspaper reads "Take three Pints of Muscadine Wine, boil in it a Handful of Sage;" whereas, "D<sup>r</sup> Burges his Receipt" directs users to "Take 3 pintes of muscadine, and boyle therein a handful of rew, sage, dill<sup>5</sup>, of all alike, until a pinte be wasted" (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [174v]). The Hull History Centre copy preserves the recirculated text because it reads, "Take 3 pints of Muscadine wine, boil in it a handful of sage, as much Rue, till a pint be wasted" (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1).

However, Marvell's text does not include the instructions to "'Keep this as your Life, above all worldly treasure; in Time of Plague (under God) trust to this, for there was never Man, Woman, or Child that is deceived,'" the *Plague*-time trust to this; for certainly (*God* be praised for it) there was never man, woman nor child this drink deceived" (*The Public Advertiser*, p. 4 Oct 24, 1770). "[A]n Old experience Recip for the Plague" (National Library of Medicine MS B 172, 52.) and "Sir Walter Rawleigh's" recipe (CD-ROM, 1996) / L2864I) contain the last line, but that was common throughout the seventeenth century. However, "an Old experience" and "Rawleigh's" do not match the letter to the editor of the *Reading Mercury*. The last line(s) in this article suggest that the plague recipe was not problematic, but the recipe deceived Marvell (the poet) which led to his untimely death.

### **Recirculation of the Document in three different newspapers**

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<sup>5</sup> The *OED* defines dill as An umbelliferous annual plant, *Anethum graveolens*, with yellow flowers, a native of the South of Europe, Egypt, India, South Africa, etc., cultivated in herb gardens in England and other countries, for its carminative fruits or 'seeds'. Also called [anet n.](#)

The letter to the editor of the *Reading Mercury* was recirculated in the three different 1770 British newspapers, which is evident as the receipts communicated a cure, despite evidence of false information. For example, it was reproduced in *The Public Advertiser* (London) on Wed, Oct 24, 1770, *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (Oxford) on Sat, Oct 27, 1770, and *The Leeds Intelligencer and Yorkshire General Advertiser* (Leeds) on Tue, Oct 30, 1770.

To the P R I N T E R,

S I R,

*Reading, Oct. 18.*

I Have sent the following Recipe, which I accidentally met with in an old Manuscript Book, where it is called "A most excellent

Medicine against the Plague;" and at the Bottom is this Note, "Keep this as your Life, above all worldly Treasure; in Time of Plague (under God) trust to this; for there was never Man, Woman, or Child that is deceived."

At this Time, when the Plague rages in distant Parts, and perhaps may soon make nearer Approaches to us, I thought it my Duty to make it as public as I could, therefore hope you will insert it in your Paper.

I am, S I R,

Your humble Servant,

*A Friend to Mankind.*

#### R E C I P E.

TAKE three Pints of Muscadine Wine, boil in it a Handful of Sage, and as much Rice, till a Pint is wasted, then strain it and set it on the Fire again, and put in it Long Pepper, Ginger, and Nutmeg, of each the third Part of an Ounce, beat together to a fine Powder; let it boil a little, then put in it two Ounces of Treacle, one Ounce of Mithridate, and a Quarter of a Pint of Angelica Water; dissolve the Treacle and Mithridate in the Angelica Water before you put them in.

*Directions for taking the above Medicine.*

TAKE one Spoonful of it warm both Morning and Evening in your Bed, or two Spoonfuls if infected, and sweat after it; but if not infected, a Spoonful a Day will be sufficient, half in the Morning and half in the Evening, to prevent Infection. This is good also for the Small-pox, Meazles, Surfeits, or Fevers.

To the Printer of the OXFORD JOURNAL.

S I R,

Reading, Oct, 18, 1770.

I Have sent the following Recipe, which I accidentally met with in an old Manuscript Book, where it is called "A most excellent Medicine against the Plague;" and at the Bottom is this Note, "Keep this as your Life, above all worldly Treasure; in Time of Plague (under God) trust to this, for there was never Man, Woman, or Child that it deceived."

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Your humble Servant,

*A Friend to Mankind.*

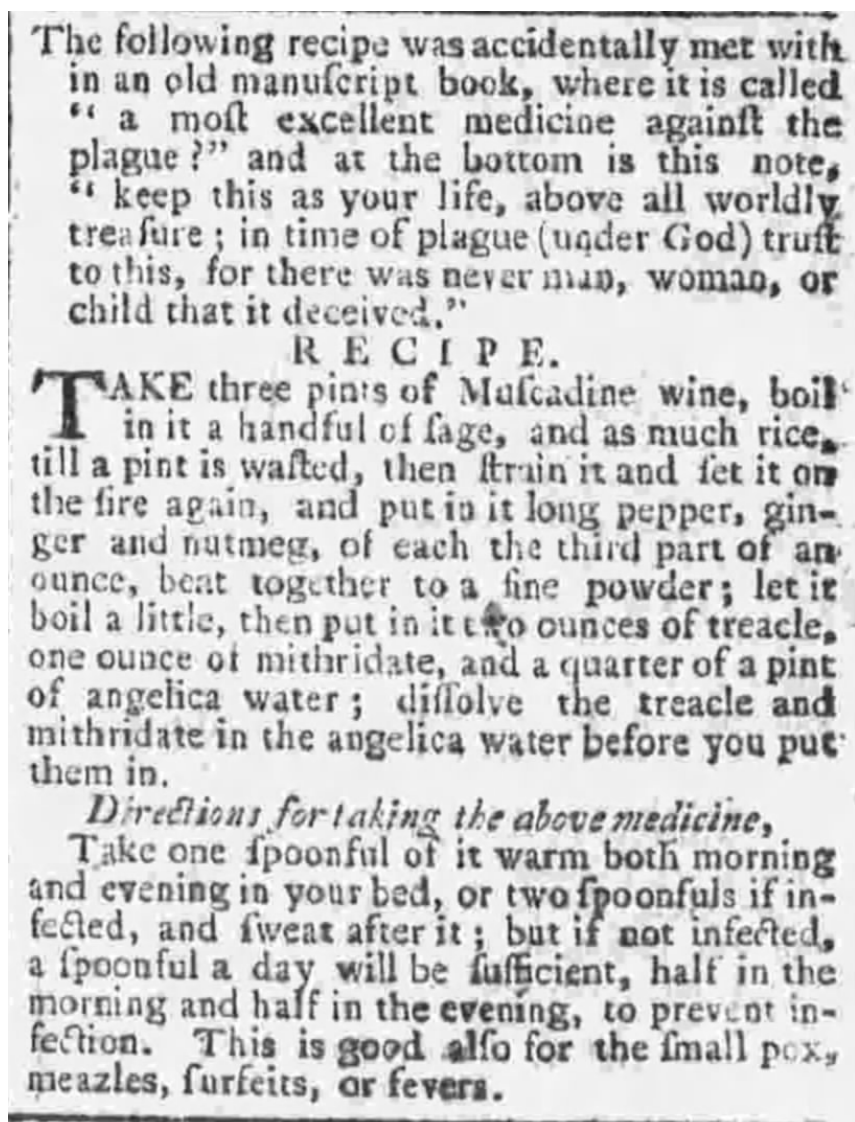
### R E C I P E.

TAKE three Pints of Muscadine Wine, boil in it a Handful of Sage, and as much Rice, till a Pint is wasted, then strain it and set it on the Fire again, and put in it Long Pepper, Ginger, and Nutmeg, of each the third Part of an Ounce, beat together to a fine Powder; let it boil a little, then put in it two Ounces of Treacle, one Ounce of Mithridate, and a Quarter of a Pint of Angelica Water; dissolve the Treacle and Mithridate in the Angelica Water, before you put them in.

*Directions for taking the above Medicine.*

TAKE one Spoonful of it warm both Morning and Evening in your Bed, or two Spoonfuls if infected, and sweat after it; but if not infected, a Spoonful a Day will be sufficient, half in the Morning and half in the Evening, to prevent Infection. This is good also for the Small-Pox, Measles, Surfeits, or Fevers.





*The Leeds Intelligencer and Yorkshire General Advertiser, p. 4, Oct 30, 1770*

However, the newspaper mistranscribed "rue" as it printed "rice" instead ("To the Printer," p. 4, 24 Oct 1770). The "u" in the scribe's hand could be mistaken for "ic" (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). However, the italic "u" is clearly visible, for example, in such words as "Muscadine," "put," "much," etc. (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). Throughout the seventeenth century, the

ingredient was rue, not rice. The *Public Advertiser* published a reader's letter exposing the change from "rue" to "rice" on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October ([p.4]).

**A HUMOURIST.**

*To the Printer of the Public Advertiser.*

S I R,

**O**N reading your Paper, the Public Advertiser, I found a Recipe for the Plague. I imagine your Men have made a Mistake in one of the Ingredients, by putting Rice for Rue, and so made a Pudding of it. I should imagine the Recipe to be a very good one, provided Rue was in the Room of Rice. I would beg the Favour of your examining your Correspondent's Letter whether it be so or not. However, I am sure that Rue is more proper than Rice. Your correcting that Mistake will be answering the Intention of my writing to you, and am, Sir, your constant Reader,

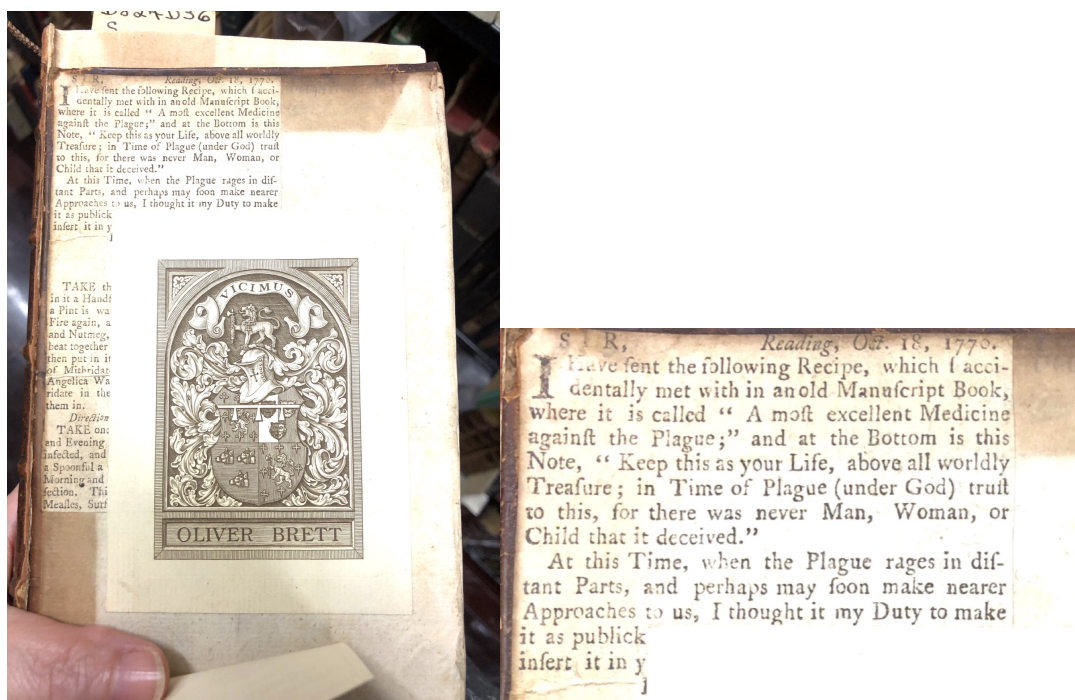
Oct. 24. J. B.

*The Public Advertiser*, 1770, [p. 4].

The reader wrote, "Sir, On reading your Paper, the Public Advertiser, I found a Recipe for the Plague. I imagine your Men have made a Mistake in one of the Ingredients, by putting Rice for Rue, and so made a Pudding of it" (*The Public Advertiser* Oct 26, 1770, [p. 4]). The readers concern demonstrates mistranscription. Therefore, the change of "rue" to "rice" in the 1770 newspapers corroborates that false information arises during times of plagues ([p.4]).

#### **Recirculation in *A Journal of the Plague Year*.**

The Oct. 18, 1770 *Reading Mercury* newspaper clipping was glued onto the inside cover of Columbia University's copy of *A Journal of the Plague Year* (B824D36 S 1722).



Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, B824D36 S. Defoe, Daniel, 1722.

The owner of B824D36 S is unknown, but it is surmisable that the owner read the article. The book (the text) is a form of written communication that could be passed around (transmitted) to help people treat themselves of plague symptoms. The article pasted onto the inside cover enforces it to not be accidentally lost. Robert Darnton's theory on the "communication circuit" ("What is the History of Books?" 11) is important as "a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague" (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) is communicated through people's history during times of plagues. Robert Darnton's "communication circuit" "runs from the author to the publisher...the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition" ("What is the History of Books?" 11). "[a] Most Excellent Medicine" (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) lived with many various transcripts in the seventeenth century before it reached Marvell and was bequeathed to his son, the poet. The recipe was transferred from its manuscript form to print on

Oct. 18, 1770, then to the inside cover of Columbia University's copy of *A Journal of the Plague Year*. The recipe was subsequently printed in the three 1770 newspapers.

Thomas R. Adam and Nicholas Barker, however, disagree with Darnton's theory in that the "communication circuit" is more related to people's history of communication. Adam and Barker argue, instead, that the text is a form of written communication as a means of textual history. Adams and Barker claim, "the weakness of Darnton's scheme is that it deals with people, rather than the book. It is concerned with the history of communication" ("A New Model for the Stud of the Book" 51). Adams and Barker claim that the book—not the people—creates a societal and cultural impact. Consequently, Adams and Barker's circuit has "five events in the life of a book—publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception and survival" (53). Despite Adam and Barker disputing Darnton's communication circuit, both the text and people are important through creating a social and historical impact. However, I claim that the survival of this manuscript throughout the Early Modern period and in the 1770s is for humanity's survival in the face of fear. The medical receipt derived from the Early Modern period in which Defoe's text takes place and it tells a hopeful story of survival during times of uncertainty. "[a] Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague" (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) is a hopeful cure against the plague that may or may not have ventured into England.

### **The Modernization of Purity**

People's desperation to procure homemade recipes in the Medieval and Early Modern Period are comparable to the events during COVID-19. Much like during the Coronavirus, people relied on social distancing and quarantining to essentially stay pure during the 1664-1665 London plague. The London orders of 1664 were instilled to stop or prevent the spread of the Black Death by specific procedures. For example, barriers on roads prevented people from

traveling. Also, local theaters, alehouses, public venues, etc., were shut down to stop the spread of the Bubonic Plague. *A collection of very valuable and scarce pieces relating to the last plague in the year 1665. Viz. I. Orders drawn up and published by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London, to prevent the spreading of the Infection* is a document which contains the London orders of 1665 in response to combat the plague. The London orders in *A collection of very valuable and scarce pieces* were recirculated in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) as a future warning against a possible Bubonic Plague outbreak.

“Orders concerning infected Houses and persons sick of the plague,” a chapter in *A Collection of very valuable and scarce pieces*, described specific measures to prevent the spread of the Bubonic Plague. For example, a list of some of the orders are as follows:

- “*Notice to be given of the Sickness*” described that the “Master of the House” should give the “Examiner of Health” two hours’ notice if they experience “Botch, or Purple, or Swelling in any part of his Body or fallieth otherwise dangerously Sick, without apparent Casue of some other Disease” (5).
- “*Sequestration of the Sick*” relayed that “As soon as any Man shall be found by this Examiner, Chirurgion or Searcher to be sick of the Plague,” (5) the person should sequester or isolate for a month, if he does not die.
- “*Shutting up of the House*” prevented the spread of the plague as Examiners monitored people's exposure. For example, “If any Person shall have visited any Man, known to be infected of the plague...The House wherein he inhabiteth, shall be shut up for certain Days by the Examiners Direction” (6).
- “*No person to be conveyed out of any infected House*” declares that when a person visits an infected house or place then goes to another place without giving notice to an official,

they will be charged by the Direction of the Alderman (8). The person will then be forced to quarantine or isolate for twenty days (8).

- “*Every visited House to be marked*” describes the ways in which contact spreading was monitored by marking the visited house “with a red Cross...a Foot long, in the middle of the Door” and the “printed Words...*Lord have Mercy upon us...over the same Cross*” (8).
- “*Every visited House to be watched*” described the Constables role to oversee the Watchmen who carefully surveyed the infected houses and ensured that the people did not leave. If the persons needed commodities, the watchmen would “minister Necessaries unto them at their own Charges (if they be able,) or at the common Charge if they be unable” (8). The isolation or “shutting up” should “be for the space of four Weeks” (8). The “Searchers, Chirurgeons, Keepers, and Buriers are not to pass the Streets without holding a red Rod or Wand of three Foot in length in their hands.” These men are not supposed to enter any homes, except for their own and to practice social distancing.

The chapter, “Orders concerning loose Persons and idle Assemblies” describes that groups of people were monitored, and places of large gatherings were prohibited. Consider the following examples:

- “*Beggars,*” or homeless people, for example, were strictly monitored as they were considered “a great cause of the spreading of the Infection, and will not be avoided, notwithstanding any Order that hath been given to the contrary.” The orders declared, “such Constables, and others,...do take special care that no wandering Begger be suffered in the Streets of this City, in any fashion or manner whatsoever, upon the Penalty provided by the Law to be duly and severely executed upon them” (11). The monitoring

of the homeless population clarifies that social distancing is not a novel practice in preventing the spread of contagions.

- “*Plays*” or “Bear-baitings, Games, singing of Ballads, Buckler-play” (11) were strictly prohibited. If the large assemblies refused, “the parties offending” would be “severely punished by ever Alderman in his Ward” (11).
- “*Feasting Prohibited*,” large assemblies of people; “[P]articularly by the Companies of the City, and Dinners at Taverns, Alehouses, and other Places of common Entertainment” (11). The money would be dispersed “for the Benefit and Relief of the Poor visited with Infection” (12).
- “*Tipling Houses*,”<sup>6</sup> lastly, were closely monitored as “Tipling in Taverns, Alehouses, Coffee-houses, and Cellars” were a “common Sin of this Time, and [the] greatest occasion of dispersing the Plague” (12). No one was allowed to enter these places, especially “after nine of the Clock in the Evening, according to the ancient Law and Custom of this City” (12). If this happened, people were “ordained in that behalf” (12) of penalties.

These specific measures were taken to prevent an uprise of Bubonic Plague cases. Thus, searchers monitored people and houses to stop the spreading of the plague. Defoe describes the orders in *A Journal of the Plague*

This Hurry<sup>7</sup>, I say, continued some Weeks, that is to say, all the Month of *May* and *June*, and the more because it was rumour’d that an order of the Government was to be issued

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<sup>6</sup> The *OED* defines tipling-house as “A house where intoxicating liquor is sold and drunk; an ale-house, a tavern.”

<sup>7</sup> “This Hurry” (8) refers to Londoners desiring to quickly flee the city.

out, to place Turn-pikes and Barriers on the Road, to prevent Peoples from travelling; and that the Towns on the Road, would not suffer People from *London* to pass for, fear of bringing the Infection along with them, though neither of these Rumours had any Foundation, but in the Imagination; especially at-first (8).

Therefore, Londoners were forced to isolate and if not, they would be charged a penalty. Consequently, people lived in fear during times of uncertainty and turned to medical receipts for closure.

Similar to the London orders of 1664, in 2020 as the Coronavirus eventually ravaged the United States, procedures were instituted to stop the spread of the novel virus. As of March 15th, 2020, the United States went into lockdown. According to the *CDC*, “U.S. states begin to shut down...New York City public schools system...shuts down while Ohio calls for restaurants and bars to close” (“CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline”). Bars, restaurants, schooling systems, and arenas were shut down to prevent the rise in COVID-19 cases. Moreover, people were required to wear facemasks, maintain six-foot distances from one another, and quarantine if they had symptoms (“How to Protect Yourself & Others”). However, during times of uncertainty, some politicians and news stations misinformed the public that household toxic chemicals could treat COVID-19 symptoms.

### **Modernization of False Information**

In modern times, false information arose claiming that the Coronavirus was a hoax, that masks subordinated the American people, that vaccines contained microchips, and (most importantly) that bleach was a miracle cure. Miracle Mineral Solution (MMS) was the modern equivalent to quick-fix-it recipes, as it was promoted to be a miracle cure, except that it “contain[ed],” the toxins “chlorine dioxide, sodium chlorite, and acetic acid” (Chary et al. 320).



For example, MMS claimed to be “a cure-all for almost all diseases, including malaria, HIV/Aids, cancer and now Covid-19” (“Bleach touted as ‘miracle ‘cure’). Similarly, “a Most Excellent Medicine” claimed that “this [the recipe] is Good also in the small pox, Measles, Surfeits, or fevers” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). Former president Donald J. Trump propagated false information by that claiming drinking bleach or swallowing horse deworming pills (Ivermectin) would cure COVID-19 symptoms, despite the fact that it may cause death. He stated in a Task Force Press Briefing on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020: ““And then I see the disinfectant where it knocks it out in a minute. One minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning?...So it’d be interesting to check that”” (“Coronavirus: Outcry”). Whether or not Trump was joking, his claims downplay the seriousness of a pandemic by spreading false information and make people susceptible to bleach poisoning.

Meghan A. Cook and Nicholas Brooke (2021) conducted a study that addresses toxic exposures and poisonings in relation with efforts to combat COVID-19. For example, Cook and Brooke show the percentages of toxic chemical poisoning or fatality cases for the treatment of COVID-19 in different countries from highest to lowest. For example, North America had the highest at 37.99%, the medium was South America at 6.08%, and the lowest was “Eastern Europe, South East Europe and South Caucasus” at 1.82% (7). Cook and Brooke’s study also shows the percentage of global deaths by toxic chemicals, or non-FDA-approved drugs, that would supposedly cure or prevent COVID-19. For example, 7% of people died due to “(Hydroxy)chloroquine,” 9% from “Methanol-based hand sanitizer,” 11% from Opioids, and 15% died because of “Bootleg, low-quality or home-brewed alcohol (often containing methanol)” (9). Cook and Brooke argue that the injection of toxic chemicals was a result of misinformation by government press meetings and social media (mainly leaning on the right side

of politics). For example, 20% of Americans were influenced by Public Broadcasting, 25% were influenced by Government Reports or Press Releases, 30% were influenced by National Commercial Media, 34% were influenced by Local Media, etc. Thus, in a panic, people abided by Trump's false logic which caused them to die from non-approved FDA medical treatments for COVID-19.

Bleach and Purell kill approximately 99% of germs, which purifies surfaces and contributes towards an obsession for cleanliness. For example, Purell (a modernization of purity) was sold off the shelves in 2020. In a Wall Street Journal article entitled “Hand Sanitizer Sales,” Sharon Terlep writes, “U.S. sales of hand sanitizer jumped almost sevenfold to \$1.3 billion for the 52 weeks ended Jan. 2 compared with the same period a year ago.” She continues, “That increase, which doesn’t include sales to businesses and institutions, is far higher than the jump in sales for other products in the pandemic. For instance, U.S. sales of toilet paper were up 20% over the past 52 weeks compared with a year ago” (“Hand Sanitizer Sales Jumped 600% in 2020.”). The increase in Purell sales shows that people still obsessed over purity in times of plagues as humanity does not want to be inflicted with the contagion. However, people need germs to build antibodies to ward off diseases. Eula Biss discusses in *On Immunity: An Inoculation* that because her son was immunocompromised, the body needs germs to combat viruses (23-24). Vaccines give the user a dose of the virus so they could build anti-bodies. For example, the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine

contain material from the virus that causes COVID-19 that gives our cells instructions for how to make a harmless protein that is unique to the virus. After our cells make copies of the protein, they destroy the genetic material from the vaccine. Our bodies recognize that the protein should not be there and build T-lymphocytes and B-lymphocytes that will

remember how to fight the virus that causes COVID-19 if we are infected in the future (“Understanding How COVID-19 Vaccines work,” *CDC*).

Therefore, the COVID-19 vaccines decrease the brevity of the symptoms and allow the body to recognize the virus in order to fight it. Ivermectin (horse deworming pills) and MMS are not scientifically proven to cure the Coronavirus; instead, they may lead to death.

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) printed an online article, “Why You should not Use Ivermectin to Treat or Prevent COVID-19” which states that Ivermectin should not be taken to cure COVID-19 symptoms because the “tablets are approved at very specific doses to treat some parasitic worms, and there are topical (on the skin) formulations for head lice and skin conditions like rosacea.” The FDA advises that animal medicine should not be ingested by humans as it could cause (at a large dose) “nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, hypotension (low blood pressure), allergic reactions (itching and hives), dizziness, ataxia (problems with balance), seizures, coma and even death” (“Why You Should Not Use Ivermectin”). Misinformation arose around Ivermectin, a drug that could cure COVID-19 symptoms; however, the FDA strongly claims that it does not cure or treat COVID symptoms and if taken at a large dose, a person could die. Similarly, “a Most Excellent Medicine” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1) was falsely proven to cure plague symptoms despite it causing death and uncertainty. Early Modern medicine was not 99% effective as most of the medical receipts were trial and error homeopathic medicines. Quack doctors illegally sold secret Early Modern plague recipes on London streets for a quick profit. Similarly, Trump claimed bleach was a quick-fix-it as to (in the means of power) profit off people’s fear.

## **Conclusion**

The Early Modern period embodied the Medieval theology of the plague as God's wrath because of collective sin. These beliefs were recirculated through plague recipes. For example, sweat was associated with purifying the body and the purging of sin. Ingredients such as, angelic(a) water, peonies, gillyflowers, ginger, and gromwell were included in the Early Modern receipts, like “a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). Moreover, Piemontese’s ingredients—rue, vinegar, mithridate, malmsey or muscadine, and treacle—are found in Early Modern recipes that derived from the Medieval period. Common ingredients were interchangeable as recipes were trial-based and dependent on the user's needs. Evidence of this claim lies with Leong who discusses the interchangeability of muscadine and malmsey wine. However, altering ingredient quantities led to the death of Andrew Marvell (the poet) by taking the increased amount of mithridate. Therefore, Marvell’s texts falsified its information by claiming that the recipe never deceived anyone. More importantly, during the Early Modern period, false cures (or quick fix-it remedies) were sold on the streets by quack doctors. What was once a secretive craft became a monopolized mercantile object in the Early Modern period—especially in 1665. Due to the plague continuing for centuries and the mortality rate increasing, the British people relied on recipes and isolation as a means of hope. The London orders of 1665 declared procedures to stop the spread of the plague in times of uncertainty.

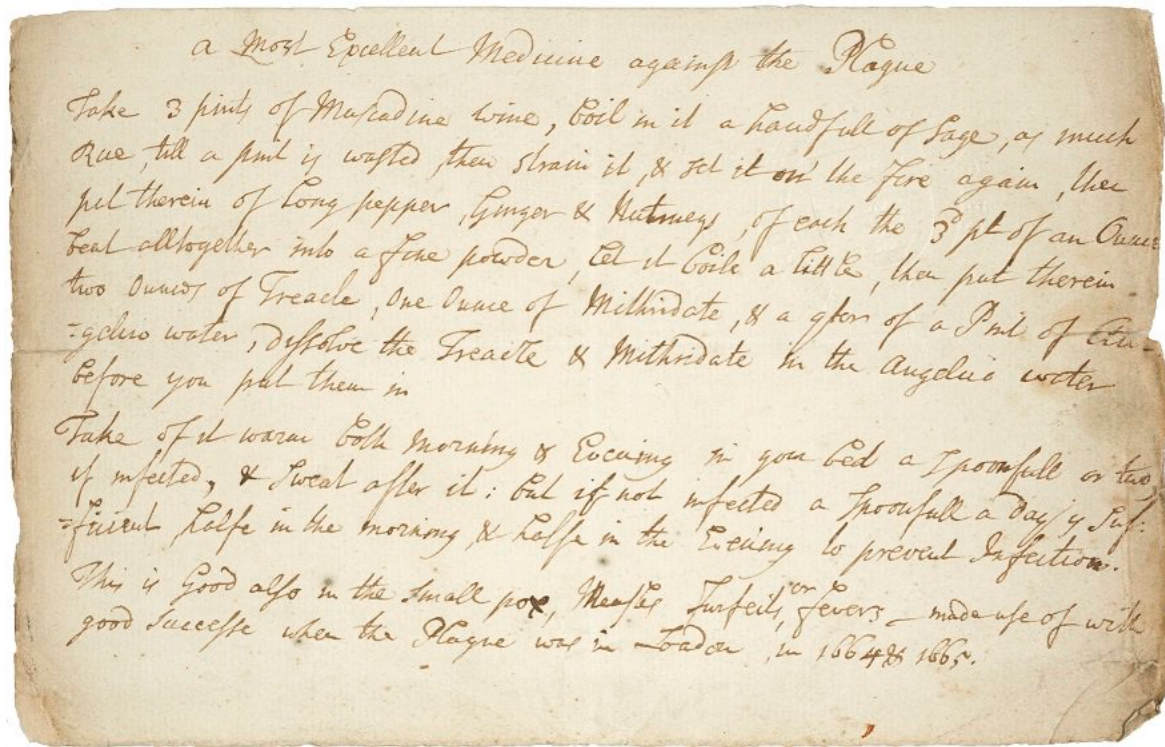
The people of England thought the Great Fire of London ended the Bubonic Plague, but in 1770, Russia experienced a Black Death variant. The Russian Plague erupted causing Englanders to panic and thus, an anonymous reader wrote to the *Reading Mercury* newspaper on October 18, 1770. He warned Londoners of the Russian Plague by providing a plague recipe, entitled “a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague” (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1). The

text communicated to British readers a possible way to treat plague symptoms. However, due to the extra amount of mithridate and the mistranscription of “rue” to “rice,” it clarifies that false information arised in times of plagues. Despite the mistranscription, the Oct. 18, 1770 newspaper clipping was recirculated in *The Public Advertiser*, *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, and *The Leeds Intelligencer*.

The Early Modern period lived in uncertainty that enabled people to isolate and experiment with plague recipes. Similarly, COVID-19 foregrounded fear of the unknown so people bleached surfaces and used Purell to become 99% pure. Trump falsely claimed vaccines contained microchips so some Americans refused the vaccines and boosters; instead, (without any medical knowledge nor doctors approval) they drank bleach and swallowed horse deworming pills to cure themselves of COVID-19 symptoms. Humans need germs (antibodies) to stave off diseases which is the role of vaccines. Unlike vaccinations, plague remedies used holistic remedies that did not generate antibodies, but could possibly cure plague symptoms. Similarly, “a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague” stated it never deceived a woman, man, or child, despite evidence of Andrew Marvell’s death (Hull History Centre, C DIAM/1).

## Appendix

"a Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague" (Hull History Centre C DIAM/1)



Transcript:

*A Most Excellent Medicine against the Plague*

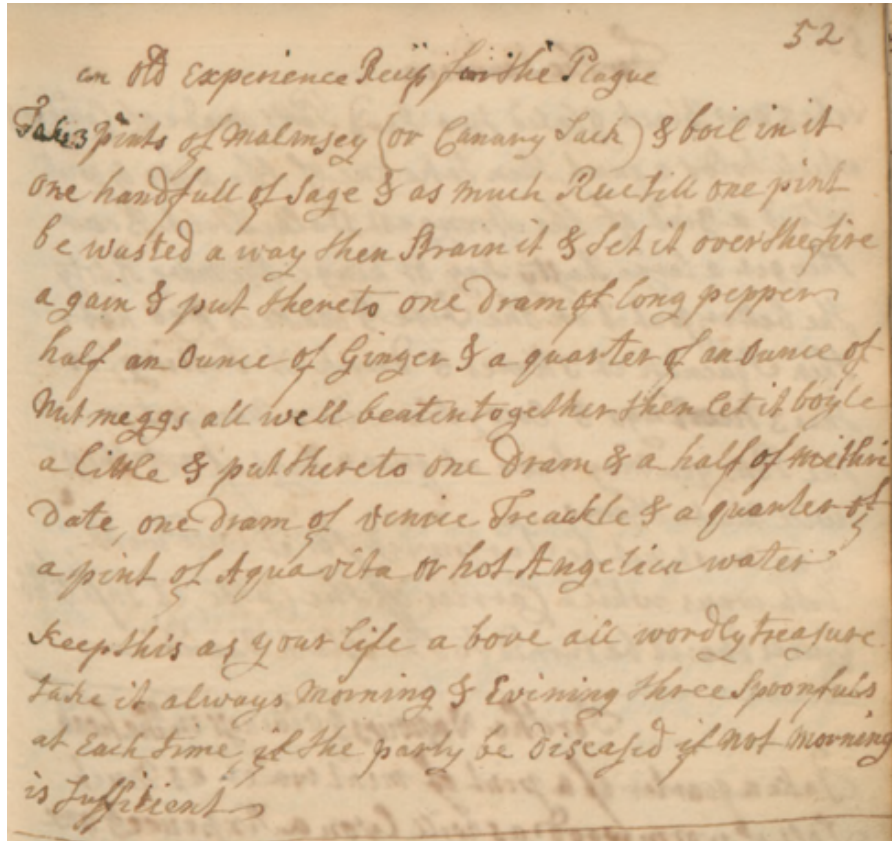
Take 3 pints of Mascadine wine, boil in it a handful of sage, as much Rue, till a pint is wasted, then strain it, & set it on the fire again, then put therein of Long pepper, Ginger & Nutmegs, of each the 3<sup>d</sup> [third] p<sup>t</sup> [part] of an Ounce beat alltogether into a fine powder, let it boile a little, then put therein two Ounces of Treacle, One Ounce of Mithridate, & a q[uar]ter of a Pint of Angelico water, dissolve the Treacle & Mithridate in the Angelico water before you put them in

Take of it warm both Morning & Evening in your bed a spoonfull or two, if infected, & sweat after it; but if not infected a spoonful a day/ is suf:

= ficient, halfe in the morning, & halfe in the Evening to prevent Infection.

This is Good also in the small pox, Measles Surfiets, <sup>or</sup> Fevers—made use of with good successe when the Plague was in London in 1664 & 1665.

“An Old Experience Recip for the Plague” (National Library of Medicine, MS B 172, p. 52)



Transcription:

*an Old experience Recip for the Plague*

Take 3 Pints of Malmsey (or Canary Sack) & boil in it

One handful of sage & as much Rue till one pint

Be wasted a way then strain it & set it over the fire

again & put thereto one dram of long pepper

half an Ounce of Ginger & a quarter of an Ounce of

Nutmeggs all well beaten together then let it boyle  
a little & putt thereto one dram & a half of mithri  
date, one dram of venice Treackle & a quarter of  
a pint of Aqua vita or hot Angelica water

Keep this as your life above all wordly treasure.

take it always Morning & Evening three spoonfuls  
at each time if the party be diseased if not morning  
is sufficient.

“Dr Burges his Receipt” (Wellcome Library, MS 749, f [174v]).



*D<sup>r</sup> Burges his Receipt.*

*Take 3 pintes of muscadine, and boyle therein a handfull -  
 of rew, sage, dill, of all alike, untill a pinte be wasted,  
 then strayne it, & sett it ouer the fire agayne, & putt -  
 thereto halfe an ounce of long pepper, halfe an ounce of  
 ginger, a quarter of an ounce of nutmeggs, all beaten  
 together, then let it boyle a little, & putt thereto one ounce  
 of London treacle, & a quarter of an ounce of venice -  
 treacle, & a quarter of a pinte of angelica water, & putt  
 it vp in a glasse, & take it laste warme morning & evening  
 a spoonfull, & if the party be infected, sweate thus 2  
 ayres, if not, halfe a spoonfull is enough night and -  
 morning  
 It is likewise good agaynst the small pox, surffets, and  
 such like distempers.*

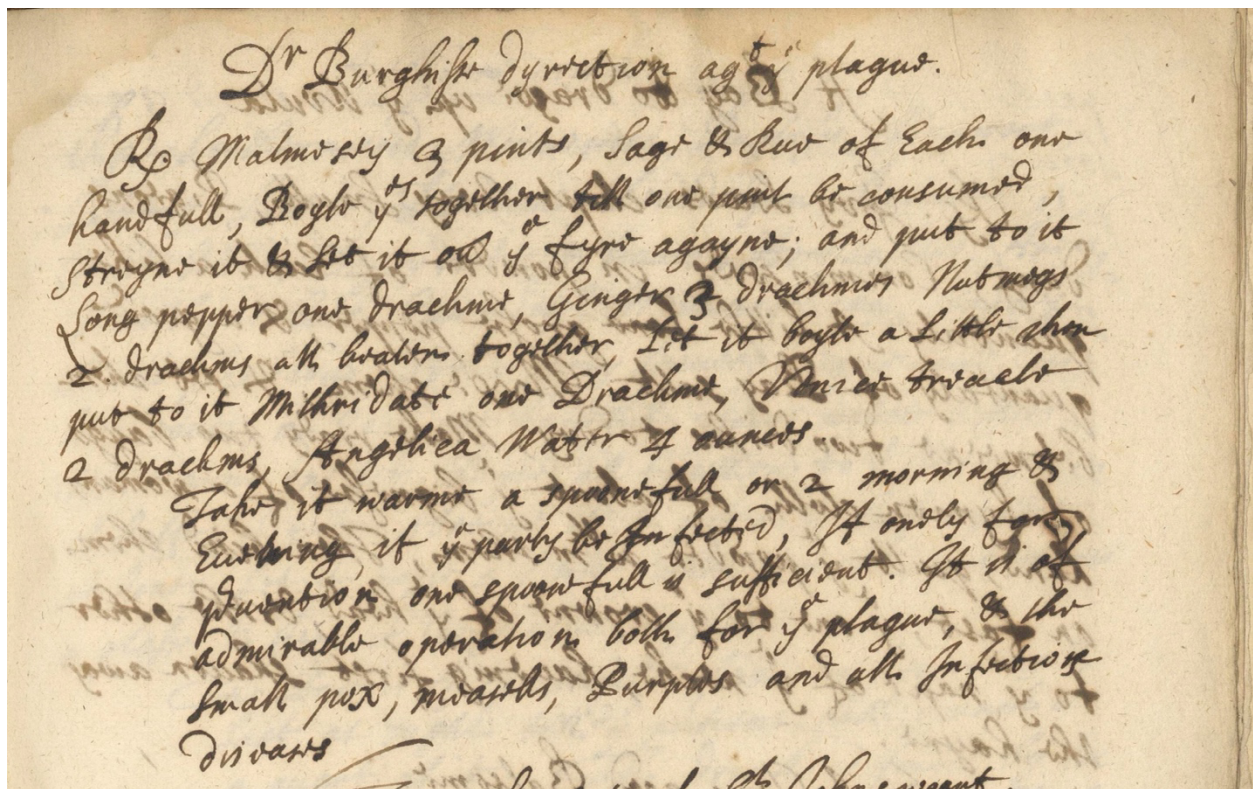
Transcription:

*D<sup>r</sup> Burges his Receipt.*

Take 3 pintes of muscadine, and boyle therein a handful –  
 Of rew, sage, dill, of all alike, until a pinte be wasted,  
 then strayne it, & sett it ouer the fire agayne, & putt –  
 thereto halfe an ounce of long pepper, halfe an ounce of –  
 ginger, a quarter of an ounce of nutmeggs, all beaten  
 together, then let it boyle a little, & putt thereto one ounce  
 of London treacle, & a quarter of an ounce of venice –

treacle, & a quarter of a pinte of angelica water, & putt  
 it vp in a glasse, & take it luke warme morning & euening  
 a spoonful, & if the party be infected, sweate there=  
 vppon, if not, halfe a spoonfeull is enough night and –  
 morning  
 It is likewise good agaynst the small pox, surfetts, and  
 such like diseases.

“Dr Burghisse dyrection ag<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> plague” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [240v]).



Transcription:

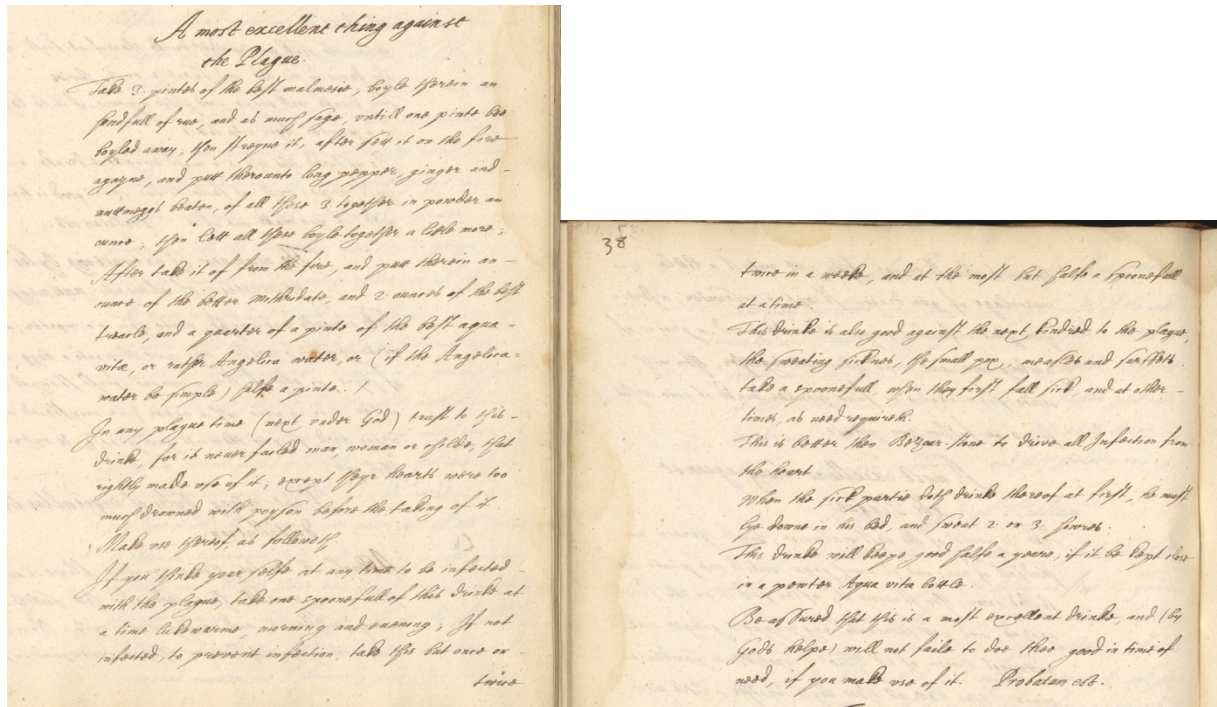
Dr Burghisse dyrection ag<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> plague.

Rx. Malmsey 3 pints, Sage & Rue of Each one  
handful, Boyle y<sup>es</sup> together till one pint be consumed,  
Streyne it & set it on y<sup>e</sup> fyre agayne; and put to it  
Long pepper one drachme, Ginger 3 drachmes Nutmegs  
2. drachms all beaten together, Let it boyle a little then  
put to it Mithridate one Drachme, Venice treacle  
2 drachms, Angelica Water 4 ounces.

Take it warme a spoonfull or 2 morning &  
Euening, if y<sup>e</sup> party be Infected, It onely  
preuntion one spoonfull is suffiecent. It is of  
admirable operation both for y<sup>e</sup> plague, & the  
Small pox, Measles, Surpets and all Infectioes  
diseases

“A most excellent thing against the Plague” (Wellcome Library, MS. 749, f [276v – 276r]).





Transcription:

*A most excellent thing against the Plague*

Take 3 pintes of the best malmesie, boyle therein an handful of rue, and as much sage, vntill one pinte bee boyled away; then strayne it, after sett it on the fire agayne, and putt thereunto long pepper, ginger and – nuttmeggs beaten, of all those 3. Together in powder an ounce; then let all those boyle together a little more; After take it of from the fire, and putt therein an – ounce of the better mithridate, and 2. Ounces of the best treacle, and a quarter of a pinte of the best aqua – vita, or rather Angelica water, or (if the Angelica= water be simple) halfe a pinte ./

In any plague time (next vnder God) trust to this –  
 drinke, for it neuer failed man, woman or childe, that  
 rightly make vse of it, except theyr hearts were too  
 much drowned with poison before the taking of it.  
 Make vse thereof, as followeth.

If you thinke your selfe at any time to be infected –  
 with the plague, take one spoonfull of this drinke at  
 a time lukewarme, morning and euening; If not  
 infected, to prevent infection, take this but once or –

twice

38

twice in a week, and at the most but halfe a spoonefull  
 at a time.

This drinke is also good against the next kindred to the plague;  
 the sweating sickness, the small pox, measles and surffets  
 take a spoonefull, when they first fall sick, and at other –  
 times, as need requireth.

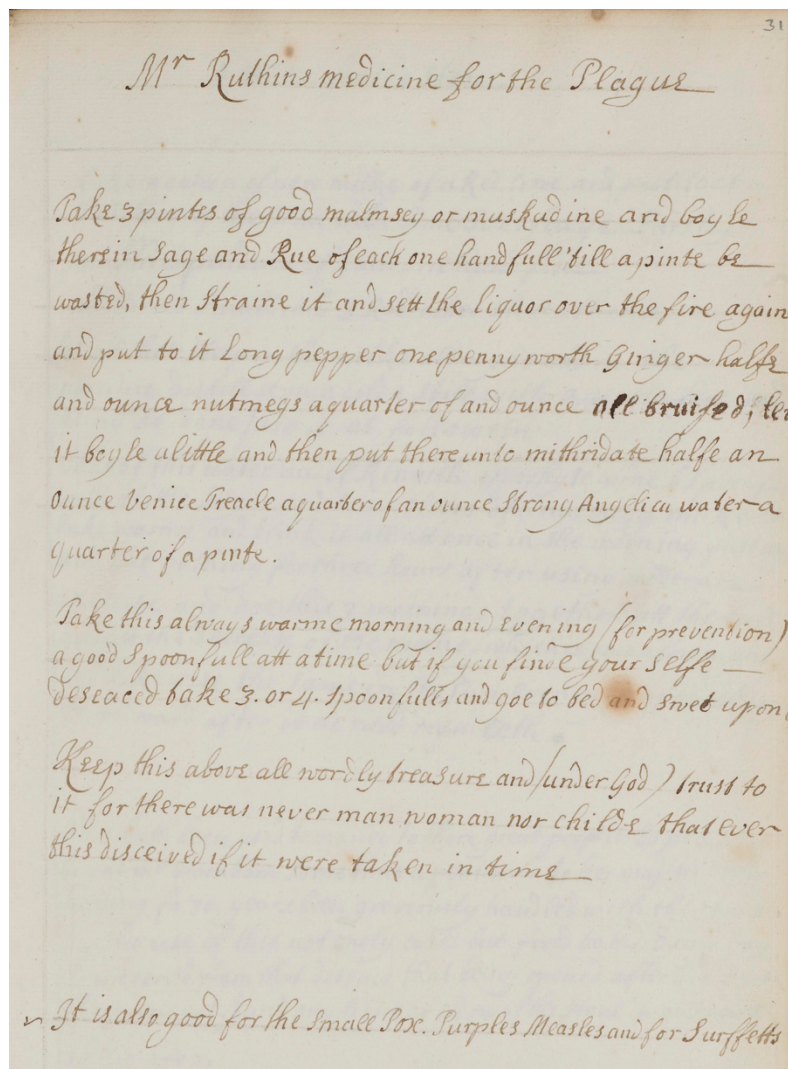
This is better then Bezaer-stone to derive all Infection from  
 the heart

When the first partie doth drink thereof at first, he must  
 lye downe in his bed, and sweat 2. Or 3. howres.

This drinke will keepe good halfe a yeare, if it be kept close  
 in a pewter Aqua vita bottle.

Be assured that this is a most excellent drinke, and (by  
 Gods helpe) will not faile to doe thee good in time of  
 need, if you make vse of it. Probatum est.

“Mr. Ruthins medicine for the Plague” (Wellcome Library, MS. 1322, p. 31).



Transcription:

*Mr Ruthins medicine for the Plague*

Take 3 pintes of good malmsey or muskadine and boyle  
 therein Sage and Rue of each one handful 'till a pinte be  
 wasted, then straine it and set the liquor over the fire againe  
 and put to it long pepper one penny worth ginger halfe  
 and ounce nutmegs a quarter of and ounce all bruised, let  
 it boyle a little and then put there unto mithridate half an  
 ounce Venice Treacle a quarter of an ounce strong Angelica water a  
 quarter of a pinte.

Take this always warme morning and euening (for prevention)  
 a good spoonful att a time but if you finde your selfe —  
 deseaced take 3. or 4. spoonfuls and goe to bed and sweet upon it.

Keep this above all worldly treasure and (under God) trust to  
 it for there was never man woman nor childe that ever  
 this deceived if it were taken in time

~ It is also good for the Small Pox. Purples Measles and for Surffetts

"Sir *Walter Rawleigh's* Receipt against the Plague" (Wellcome Institute for the History of  
 Medicine Library (CD-ROM, 1996) / L2864I), p. 6).

***Sir Walter Rawleigh's Receipt against the Plague.***

Take three pints of Malmley (or Canary-Sack) and boyl in it one handfull of Sage, and as much of Rue, till one pint be wasted away; then strain it, and set it over the fire againe, and put thereto one dram of long Pepper, half an ounce of Ginger, and a quarter of an ounce of Nutmegs, all well beaten together; then let it boyl a little, and put thereto one dram & a half of Mithridate, one dram of Venice-Treacle, and a quarter of a pint of Aqua-Vita, or hot Angelica-water.

Keep this as your life, above all worldly treasure: take it alwayes morning and evening three spoonfuls at each time, if the party be diseased: if not, every morning is sufficient.

In all the *Plague*-time trust to this; for certainly (*God* be praised for it) there was never man, woman nor child whom this drink deceived, if the heart were not poysoned and downed with the disease before.

***An approved Remedy against the Pestilence.***

Transcription:

*Sir Walter Rawleigh's Receipt against the Plague*

Take three pints of Malmsey (or Canary-Sack) and boyl in it one handfull of Sage, and as much Rue, till one pint be wasted away; then strain it, and set it over the fire againe, and put thereto one dram of long Pepper, half an ounce of Ginger, and a quarter of an ounce of Nutmegs, all well beaten together; then let it boyl a little, and put thereto one dram & half of Mithridate, one dram of Venice-Treacle, and a quarter of a pint of Aqua-Vita, or hot Angelica-water.

Keep this as your life, above all worldly treasure: take it always morning and evening three spoonfuls at each time, if the party be diseased: if not, every morning is sufficient.

In all the *Plague*-time trust to this; for certainly (*God* be praised for it) there was never man, woman nor child whom drink de-



ceived, if the heart were not poysoned and downed the disease before.

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179v. "A most Excellent Drinke against Plague, Sweating Sicknesse, Small Pox, & Measles or Surfetts."

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Folger Shakespeare Library: LUNA: Folger Manuscript Transcriptions Collection, MS. E.a.5, f.

182r. "Doctor Burges his approved medicine against the Plague."

[https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGER~3~3~11382~268268?qvq=q%3Acall\\_number%3De.a.5%20%3Bsort%3Acall\\_number%2Cmpsortorder1%3Blc%3AFOLGE~3~3&mi=185&trs=266](https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGER~3~3~11382~268268?qvq=q%3Acall_number%3De.a.5%20%3Bsort%3Acall_number%2Cmpsortorder1%3Blc%3AFOLGE~3~3&mi=185&trs=266).

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