Dear Renaissance Workshop,

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this partial chapter draft—my first! As I note at the end of this paper, I have not included (and have not written) the last ten or so pages of this chapter which will turn briefly to Richard Brome’s *The English Moor.* This chapter draft is brand new, so I am open to any and all comments and suggestions. I am particularly unsure about what I’m doing with “maternal imagination” a la Paré and Montaigne towards the end of this draft, so if folks have thoughts or questions on that section in particular, I am eager to hear them all.

Thanks again! And I look forward to discussing this with you!

“The Mother’s Mouth”: White Women Consume in Thomas Middleton’s London, 1613

**Middleton Writes London, 1613**

In his 1613 pageant, *The Triumphs of Truth*, Thomas Middleton attempts to codify just what makes a Londoner a “true” Londoner. This lavish processional pageant, thrown in honor of the new Lord Mayor of London, tells the story of Mother London. Bereft at her “sons’” quarrelling, Mother London must dispel the evil mists of Error, Envy and other allegorical bad actors from her city with the aid of her friend, Truth. Performed as a parade through the city, *Triumphs* used the urban geography of London, the ill-defined separation between the actor and audience member in the mobile crowd, and the allegorical drama to mythologize and theorize London *to* Londoners in the midst of massive economic change. Just what a “Londoner” is in this rapidly growing city is articulated, mostly clearly, by an outsider.

Midway through the pageant, the King and Queen of the Moors arrive on an unpiloted ship. The King is candid in his first words upon landing:

I see amazement set upon the faces

Of these white people, wond’rings and strange gazes,

Is it at me? does my complexion draw

So many Christian eyes that never saw

A king so black before?[[1]](#footnote-1)

The King’s opening lines make clear his and his queen’s specific utility to the pageant plot. In bringing Blackness to the processional, a fractured London populace becomes unified (at least rhetorically) under the category “white people,” in the first known use of the term.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Black monarch’s body and speech renders whiteness suddenly visible, speakable, and legible through this recognition. In fact, there is little reason to believe that he and the Queen have made an appearance for anything other than to draw Londoners into an awareness of their own whiteness. The King and Queen will serve no other role in the Error-banishing plot to come.

The King’s opening lines racemake on the basis of phenotypic traits, but they also make visible how racemaking works and crosses beyond physical characteristics. Religion, too, is bound up in the King’s racial imaginary. It is not just a white gaze that looks upon him and his wife in “amazement,” but a Christian one (“so many Christian eyes that never saw/A king so black before”). Just as this slippage between the “white person” and the “Christian” occurs easily here, the rest of the King’s speech continues to fold in a variety of other racial markers into his conception of whiteness. The King, for instance, understands his own relation to whiteness to be bound up in traditional moralizing dichotomies which associate whiteness with goodness and blackness with immorality (“I being a Moor, then in Opinions lightnesse,/As far from Sanctity as my Face from whiteness”).[[3]](#footnote-3) He quickly complicates this dichotomy when he reveals that he, the Queen, and the rest of their people have been converted to Christianity, and this conversion is understood to run contrary to the “moral” evidence inherent to his skin color. He assures the crowd, “How ever Darkness dwells upon my Face,/Truth in my soul sets up the Light of Grace.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The King’s conversion does not work to invalidate the initial biases of the shocked white gaze, but rather to strengthen the assumption that skin color indicates “natural” moral character. Error feels betrayed upon learning of the King and Queen’s conversion, calling them his “sweet-faced devils.” The color of their skin is inherently “sweet” to allegorical bad actors. The play, then, argues that the King and Queen’s skin *did* make them natural co-conspirators with Error; it is only through their proximity and assimilation into Christianity that the monarchs achieve moral standing in spiteof their skin color:

My Queene and People all, at one time won

By the religious conversation of English merchants, factors, travellers,

Whose truth did with our Spirits hold commerce

As their affairs with us; following their path,

We were all brought to the true Christian faith.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Thus far, the King has folded black/white moral iconography, Christianity, and skin complexion into his articulation of whiteness via his own Blackness, but he includes one more item into his racial logic here: mercantilism.

As Anthony Gerard Barthelemy has explained, *Triumphs* was far from the first lord mayoral pageant to incorporate Black characters. In addition to serving as “exotic paraphernalia, used essentially to increase the air of extravagance surrounding a particular pageant car,” these figures “also serve as visible reminders of British success in trade and exploration.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The pageant was, in fact, the direct result of British trade: It was funded by the London Grocers’ Guild in celebration of one of their own rising to the status of Lord Mayor. The pageant’s existence, then, is dependent upon the success of a newly expansive global food network which lined the pockets of London grocers. *Triumphs*’ is full of references to this economic globalism. Even the scene of the King and Queen’s conversion is an explicitly transactional one: the “merchants, factors, travellers…*hold commerce*.” The King’s speech fuses together the colonial-capital-Christian fantasy under the umbrella term of “whiteness.”

In other words, Middleton’s pageant seamlessly connects British trade interests to a Christian vision of crusading mass-conversion, Christian conversion to whiteness, and whiteness to its proximity to non-whiteness. The Londoners’ whiteness becomes legible through its international trade (an exceedingly violent business that was frequently excused through its “Christianizing” mission). Barthelemy argues of *Triumph* that, more than anything, the King of the Moors’ speech serves as an “endorsement of continued trade.”[[7]](#footnote-7) To this, I would add that it is also an endorsement of “merchant whiteness.” That the King and Queen rule over the “Moors”—a slippery term that could and did apply to numerous non-white people in the early modern period—crystallizes just how invested the pageant is in not only providing a cohesive urban and/or national identity for its audience, but also in providing a cohesive *racial* identity for the vast majority of its audience.[[8]](#footnote-8)

So, in 1613, Middleton connects the emergent category of whiteness as an identity marker with London’s new international trade endeavors, endeavors which involved contact with and exploitation of non-white persons. As Susan Anderson has argued, Middleton’s *Triumphs*’ focus on the mercantilist identity of London works nationalistically and racially: “The portrayal of ‘elsewhere’ [for example, through the King and Queen of the Moors] in the shows establishes a pro-nationalism that homogenises the London audience to enable a sense that the economic advantages of the merchant elite accrue to all.”[[9]](#footnote-9) This homogenizing effort is manifest in the very form of the pageant itself. The pageant must be able to maneuver and manage the mass of audience members and actors through the cityscape as the performance progresses; this is what Anderson call the pageant’s “fantasy of control over space.”[[10]](#footnote-10) This organized movement mirrors the synthesizing/unifying effect of placing a group under a single term (i.e., “white people”).

The form of the pageant thus makes it ripe for racializing work. The people of the processional are not clearly distinct as audience and cast member. As Heather C. Easterling explains it, the pageant form created unique slippages between who is audience and who is performer in the ill-defined crowd, making participants “not only audience-members but also cast-members in this display.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The audience becomes the city addressed, performed, and transformed by the power of pageantry. The audience at once has their city made legible to them through the allegorized drama and racializing tropes, but they are also co-producing *with the pageant* what the city signifies through their laughter, applause, and participation. The pageant cannot achieve its homogenizing work without a captive, movable audience.

The introduction of the racial and national outsider in the King and Queen of the Moors operates as social glue for the pageant-goers and -performers: *This is who you are because this is who you are not.* What the pageant stages is that the audience’s white gaze on the King’s and Queen’s bodies does the same racemaking work as the King’s candid words. The pageant sets up the conditions, before the King ever expresses it as such, for which the audience reacts togetherat the arrival of “difference.” In programming this response, Middleton manipulates the blurred lines between audience and actor in this pageant to generate the conditions for a collectivizing theory of *why* this difference exists. Middleton argues, through the words of the King, that this difference is brought about through British mercantilism. In a characteristically circular racial logic, British mercantilism is at once evidence of white, Christian superiority *and* the catalyst to identify as white in the first place.

This chapter considers Thomas Middleton’s 1613 dramatic output as a significant moment in the articulation of racial whiteness as a specifically mercantile identity. Middleton’s 1613 city comedy, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, is similarly concerned with the effects of nascent, British global capitalism on the lives of seventeenth-century Londoners. Unlike the city pageant which works to create a coherent vision of London through the organized mayhem of the mobile crowd, the city comedy works within the contained boundaries of the playhouse space to make comedy of the very same mayhem that the pageant seeks to control and categorize. If *Triumph* imagines what *makes up* British whiteness, then *Chaste Maid* dramatizes what racial whiteness looks like in everyday London spaces—from the birthing room to the New Exchange. *Triumph* theorizes broadly on the macro-forces that bridge British mercantilism with British whiteness; *Chaste Maid* looks to the micro-forces that embed elements of this vision of racial whiteness into the everyday.[[12]](#footnote-12) In short, *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Triumphs of Truth* can be seen as two sides of the nationalizing, racializing, and urbanizing coin (minted 1613).[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Labor and Leisure in *Chaste Maid’s* Reproductive Economy**

*Chaste Maid in Cheapside* is about how reproductive labor fits into the new merchant-centered vision of the London economy: It is about the (mis)management of London’s crowded sexual-reproductive and commercial markets, and it is a play that draws into parallel the marketplace and the bedroom. Middleton’s turn from global trade to the nuances of London reproductive politics fits neatly into his mercantilist racializing project. Reproduction was, after all, at the heart of England’s developing colonial-capital economy.

Historian Jonathan Scott has argued that England was unique in its colonial strategy. Whereas other globally invested nations like the Netherlands colonized for the extraction of goods alone, England colonized for the extraction of goods *and* the settlement and reproduction of English people throughout the world.[[14]](#footnote-14) Silvia Federici has similarly seen the seventeenth-century in England as a moment of profound change in state control of reproduction. This control served the interests of capital labor production and was enacted, according to Federici, through the reproductive terrorism of state-authorized witch trials and executions.[[15]](#footnote-15) Jennifer Morgan argues also that around “the turn of the seventeenth century…as England joined in the transatlantic slave trade, assertions of African savagery began to be predicated less on consumption and cannibalism and more on production and reproduction.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Enslaved women in English-held settlements were understood as double laborers—both productive in manual labor and reproductive in their gestational labor. This labor position was epitomized in the 1662 Virginia statute which “defined all children born of the bodies of black women as slaves, even if their fathers were free and white.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

All three of these accounts situate the turn to reproductive control and terrorism (in settler-colonial, enslavement, and intra-England contexts) at the turn of the seventeenth century. All three recognize the capital-mercantilist primacy of English economic strategy as infiltrating the sexual-reproductive lives of its citizens and non-citizens. It is at this very moment in British economic history that we find Middleton’s pageant and play—two texts that are deeply interested in the very mercantile/capital/transatlantic nexus that Scott, Federici and Morgan, taken together, situate us within.

It is not only the year of *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*’s original performance that places us firmly within this context, but also its eponymous setting. Cheapside was the center of commercial and sexual trade in seventeenth-century London and the site of citywide ceremonies, like the Lord Mayor’s pageants. (*Triumph* and *Chaste Maid* are thus connected by year *and* setting.) Cheapside was the neighborhood in London that was most obviously dedicated to and implicated in the new British global economy. As Karen Newman puts it, “the great merchant fortunes [on display in Cheapside] amassed by London’s civic elite increasingly depended on the exploitation of natural resources, on the power of indentured and enslaved labor, and on the development of systems of credit that stoked trade far from Cheapside and its denizens.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Newman notes that Cheapside then becomes vital, centrally-located proof that the wealth of Britain was shifting from the “land and local estate economies” of the gentry to the “middle-class merchants” invested in transatlantic trade.[[19]](#footnote-19) That Middleton chooses to locate his repro-comedy in this place of urban consumption of global goods suggests that he was aware of how intimately reproductive labor was to commercial wealth accumulation. It is particularly notable, then, that play achieves its comedy in large part by negating the labor done by reproducing female characters and by insisting upon these same characters’ gluttonous consumption of market goods.

Women are inert reproducers in Middleton’s London. Not one but two plotlines depend upon the shuffling around and employment of laboring male reproducers—an inversion of the typical sex-work model seen, for example, in Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), whereby women are shuffled around as sex workers in the marketplace for *non*-reproductive ends. The primary domestic-reproductive drama centers upon the Allwits and Sir Whorehound (yes, Whorehound). Mr. Allwit, none too keen on involving himself in the labor of getting and paying for the children in his house, has invited Whorehound to become the chief financial and seminal benefactor with the full consent of Mrs. Allwit.[[20]](#footnote-20) Publicly, Mr. Allwit claims the children as his own and operates as the children’s father in situ. Mrs Allwit’s late-stage pregnancy (shown at the beginning of the play) is from her sexual arrangement with Sir Whorehound.

A parallel (though not identical) plotline involves Touchwood Senior. Touchwood begins his narrative arc by (s)exiling his wife from the city. He is too potent; they are too poor. They are overrun with children they cannot afford. His situation, however, worsens just as his wife exits the stage and London for good: He has gotten another poor woman, referred to only as “the Wench,” pregnant, along with half of her cousins in the country. (Touchwood makes explicit in this exchange the tacky relationship between reproductive and manual labor in suggesting that this mass impregnation has caused quite the labor crisis in the villages.)[[21]](#footnote-21) Unable to support his wife or extramarital partners, Touchwood is offered a chance to make his potent condition fiscally lucrative rather than draining. Sir Oliver and Lady Kix, a wealthy yet infertile couple desperate for a child, have heard from their Maid that Touchwood “never misses, they come so fast upon him.”[[22]](#footnote-22) The pair set to hiring him as a sperm donor, though Sir Oliver is told that this is simply a “water solution” Touchwood has cultivated in a clear joke on semen and the ignorant cuckold.

Even as the play stages the final triumph of Mr. Allwit casting Whorehound out of his house and assuming his role as patriarchal head, it simultaneously concludes with Touchwood Senior’s permanent employment as Kix and Oliver’s seminal agent. (His performance review is in: Lady Kix is pregnant with twins by the end of the play.) Touchwood Senior then replaces Whorehound, albeit in a different household. The perpetuation of waged male reproductive labor functions in such a way to negate or at least make invisible the existence of female reproductive labor within the plot. Male reproductive labor becomes a waged labor that is only in need of an in-house and inert uterus. The play thus creates a sexual-reproductive market in which the main good being traded onstage is the fertile men’s sperm. What makes this so essentially *comic* is that the potency of the men is entirely misaligned with traditional *social* potency: The wealthy and genteel Sir Oliver must hire the desperately poor Touchwood Senior. The other “sir” in the play, Sir Walter Whorehound, is similarly debased and separated from his biological children when Mr. Allwit trumps him as head-of-household. Paternity in Middleton’s London favors the unknighted. Power is literally and physically transferred to the hands of the middling or low merchant class. Mr. Allwit makes this class upheaval clear when he boasts, “‘tis the knight/Hath took that labour all out of my hands;/I may still sit and play.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

*Chaste Maid*’s comedy exaggerates a new economic reality: Bourgeois reproductive leisure that used to be reserved for the landed gentry has now become accessible to the middling classes. This class shift has occurred, according to the logic of both *Triumph* and *Chaste Maid*, because of the arrival of trade network that implicated British merchants in an economy built off land dispossession and race-based human trafficking.[[24]](#footnote-24) It is the conditions behind this class disturbance that contributes to *Triumph*’s assertion that, in spite of shifting class hierarchies, merchant-whiteness is what unites Londoners. *Chaste Maid* is a comedic vision of this new merchant-white reproductive labor *and* leisure. In this play, reproductive leisure is insistently feminine, overly consumptive, and completely devoid of labor—and absolutely no one embodies this white reproductive leisure more than Mrs. Allwit.

Take, for instance, Mrs. Allwit’s first post-partum entrance at the scene of her newborn daughter’s baptismal celebration: “A bed thrust out upon the stage, ALLWIT’S WIFE in it.”[[25]](#footnote-25) In an over-assertion of Mrs. Allwit’s lack of effort, Middleton demands a tall ask from his performers and stage managers—a bed “*thrust out* upon the stage” with another person (a boy actor) in it. At the very least, this maneuver would require the sudden movement of nearly 200 pounds (actor + bed), demanding that the prop bed have either wheels or be strongarmed out by stagehands. Moreover, *Chaste Maid*’s play text rarely draws attention to its mechanics of scene-setting, so this direction gives further pause and offers us two options for considering its inclusion in the text: Either this stage direction was handwritten into the stage manager’s notes for this performance, or the stage managers at the Swan in 1613 had made the executive decision to *thrust* the bed upon the stage with Mrs. Allwit in it. If the latter, this set change must have made such an impression that the collocation of the 1630 print edition enshrined this particular set decision and excluded, we can assume, a host of others. In either case, Mrs. Allwit’s entrance to her newborn’s baptismal celebration is marked in the text and in performances thereafter as an integral component to how one reads Mrs. Allwit and the gendered reproductive politics at the heart of the comedy. Put simply, why must Mrs. Allwit not, under any circumstances, be shown doing work on the stage?

Of course, we know that she *has* performed the difficult and labor-intensive task of delivering a child sometime between Acts 1 and 2, but the first lines of the third act swiftly erase any indication of labor being done. Gossip #1 (one of many female guests to come to the baptismal) enters alone, announcing, “We have brought you home/A kursen soul.”[[26]](#footnote-26) To which, Mrs. Allwit replies, “Ay, I thank you for your pains.”[[27]](#footnote-27) *Chaste Maid* goes so far as to set the scene of the baptism as a labor task for the party guests, and Mrs. Allwit openly recognizes this as such—“I thank you for *your* pains.” Her first words after being unceremoniously “thrust” into the scene, Mrs. Allwit transfers labor from the one who bore the child gestationally to the one bearing the child dramatically. Entrance into the “world” is subbed for entrance onto the stage. The labor that Mrs. Allwit has just undergone is swiftly eradicated in the space of the first three lines of the scene.

In fact, the complete separation of labor from Mrs. Allwit’s “labor and delivery” is the central joke of the first fifty or so lines of the baptismal celebration. The Gossips’ discussion about the nature of the birth makes this particularly evident:

3 GOSSIP

‘Tis a large child, she’s but a little woman.

1 PURITAN

No believe me, a very spiny creature, but all heart

Well mettled, like the faithful to endure

Her tribulation here, and raise up speed.

2 GOSSIP

She had a sore labour on’t I warrant you, you can tell neighbour.

3 GOSSIP

O she had great speed;

We were afraid once,

But she made us all have joyful hearts again;

‘Tis a good soul i’faith;

The midwife found her a most cheerful daughter.[[28]](#footnote-28)

A number of slippages happen here. The pains of labor are once again transferred from the one who delivered (Mrs. Allwit) to the one being delivered (her newborn daughter), but the account of these labor pains never comes from Mrs. Allwit herself. (In fact, Mrs. Allwit never verbally addresses the labor she has just undergone, further separating her from the labor we know she has performed.)[[29]](#footnote-29) The Gossip’s read the child’s body, not the mother’s, and the celebration of the successful birth is, once again, not Mrs. Allwit’s but her friends (“We were afraid once, / But she [the baby] made us all have joyful hearts again”).

The child, in the space of these lines, is not even recognized to be the possession of her mother; rather, the Gossips direct initial maternal impression to the midwife: “The midwife [not the mother] found her a most cheerful daughter.” The Gossips and the Puritans present these labor displacements as, in part, the product of the proliferation of unnamed women employed to the service of Mrs. Allwit’s pregnancy. In Act II Scene ii, Mr. Allwit receives word of his daughter’s birth from not one, but two in-house nurses—a wet and a dry nurse. The Wet Nurse, like the Gossips and Puritans, is careful to separate Mrs. Allwit from the action of delivery, telling Mr. Allwit, “You must be proud on’t sir,/’Tis the best piece of work that e’er you did.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Of course, the Wet Nurse’s compliment performs yet another misdirection of labor credit, in transferring the seminal efforts of Whorehound to Mr. Allwit.

But why make so many jokes that all have the same punchline? Middleton seems to be particularly struck by the transfer of bourgeois reproductive practices to the middling merchant class. Part of this transfer includes the ability for a new class of people in London to have access to hire laborers within their home. In a play so fixated on who gets paid for reproductive efforts (see, Whorehound and Touchwood’s employment), Middleton strikes sharp on what the “wage-ification” of reproductive labor produces—a system of labor displacements that, like any capitalistic wage economy, separates labor from the means of production. This phenomenon manifests here in the separation of Mrs. Allwit’s labor from the body that did the delivery and from the body of the child that she delivered.

Even still, these are odd labor displacements according to the play’s logic as I have described above in that the labor is redistributed onto other female characters; however, the reality of the performance further undermines these brief slippages of staged female reproductive labor. That is, there are no female actors in this play at all. Every female character that will come to this baptismal celebration is played by a boy actor, so even the *labor* of representing (on stage) the fiction of feminine reproductive *leisure* is another displacement. Regardless of this metatheatrical labor negation, the play makes quick work to redirect the brief transfer to female reproductive labor. As the scene floods the stage with fellow gossips and female puritans, all the characters fall into a party of mass over-eating which must be regulated by the efforts of Mr. Allwit and Whorehound together. Reproductive leisure, then, is principally marked by gratuitous consumption. Once again, the scene becomes a double for the (perceived) set-up of the playhouse: While there is no recognized female “labor” performed on stage, there is female consumption of the play itself. Women as audience members become implicated into the misogynist logic performed. The city comedy is working in the way that city comedies do—by fictionalizing the new “realities” of urban living to in turn perpetuate fictions that inform the audience of their city dwelling; or more specifically, by, as Susan Anderson has argued, “concentrate[ing] the nascent capitalist dynamics of the city into a space where it can be tested on a human level.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

*Chaste Maid* models new gendered and classed statuses of white women which were bound up in leisure, consumption, and reproduction. Now no longer restricted to the upper class of the landed gentry, London’s nouveau riche’s access to the consumption and leisure previously reserved for the very few transform these habits from exclusively *class* characteristics and into a *racial* characteristic. In other words, this (perceived) “democratization” of leisure[[32]](#footnote-32) demanded new identificatory categories. Much like *Triumph* requires the racial outsider to unite a London fractured by shifting class categories, *Chaste Maid* dramatizes these class upheavals to transform what was once “bourgeois feminine” into “British whiteness” and “white feminine.” Unlike *Triumph*, however, *Chaste Maid*’s racial imaginary is not envisioned through the body of a non-white visitor, but through the food that the characters consume in excess. Whereas *Triumph* brings on the King and Queen of the Moors to affix a racial logic to the pageant for the *Grocers’* Guild of London, *Chaste Maid* finds its racial fictional power in the food these grocers would have sold. These racial distinctions do not need to come via unpiloted ship, *Chaste Maid* argues; they are already on the table.[[33]](#footnote-33)

**The Birth, Buffet, and Burse**

Mrs. Allwit’s room is abuzz: What follows her *thrust* onto the stage is one of the most talked-about scenes in *Chaste Maid*’s reception history. Mr. Allwit and Whorehound have ensured that the women attending to the newborn’s baptism are catered to with a fully stocked buffet, and the women make sure that the conversation is fully stocked with rumors about their adult children’s sexual activities and marital arrangements. They eat! They drink! They chat! They go back for seconds! They urinate on all the fine cushions! It is a debauchery of a girls’ day, and the men are our color commentators, looking on at the baptismal buffet with misogynistic disgust directed primarily at the women’s voracious consumption of the comestibles and their extreme laziness. (They can sure get up for seconds, but they cannot, it seems, get up to pee.) We are presented with a scene that is by and large orchestrated by the men onstage: The men have set the table. The men have lengthy dialogues in aside that inform our moralistic opinion of the scene going on in front of us/them. The men are left to clean up the mess in the women’s wake. The baptismal buffet is cast in the shadow of masculine authority.

For this reason, criticism around this scene traditionally centers around what agency women are afforded here. The primary debate has centered on if the women gain power through their over-consumption and through their close relationship to the food market, *or* if they are turned into commodities and consumables themselves. There is somewhat of a consensus here: Women and the food markets are inextricable from each other in this city comedy, but what the women actually index through this relationship has been less decided. Shannon Miller argues that the consumptive pregnant woman is equated with commodity *and* the marketplace and built out of masculine anxieties around economic volatility in the wake of new class and trade norms.[[34]](#footnote-34) Keri Sanburn Behre shifts the agency to the women, suggesting that the food-based marketplace in newly capitalistic England offered “ordinary women” the ability to “destabilize (and even subvert) power structures and garner authority,” all the while “exacerbat[ing] a potent anxiety about the control and negotiability of women’s body.”[[35]](#footnote-35) For Sabine Schülting, the *Chaste Maid* women are the pawns of a society in which “both romantic and sexual desire are subordinated to the pleasures of consumption,” a desire that leads to Mr. Allwit’s dismissal of patrilinear family structures and transformation of his wife into a commodity for sale.[[36]](#footnote-36)

These readings capture “ordinary women’s” (by which they mean mostly “nouveau riche, British white women’s”) contradictory relationship to the marketplace in the early modern period. On the one hand, the market offers them buying power, and on the other, it becomes a locale that is considered parallel to their own “commodification” on the marital, sexual, and reproductive markets. The problem is that these readings often consider the market in its iteration as endpoint sale, not as a complex process that implicates countless peoples and lands from around the world. Gender is one of *many* things being negotiated during a Cheapside purchase; a host of biopolitical decisions, negotiations, and fictions have been accumulated in the transition from plantation commodity to London comestible. These biopolitical consequences travel with the commodity. In other words, food commodities in *Chaste Maid* serve a similar function to that of the King and Queen of the Moors in *Triumphs.* While I agree with Behre that Middleton is attentive to the ways in which the globalist food markets of London provided space for women to gain agency, this agential access cannot be understood fully without a consideration of the conditions under which this agency was afforded. *Chaste Maid* draws attention to these conditions throughout the play, but especially at the scene of Mrs. Allwit’s post-baptismal buffet, where we find one key (and overused) ingredient—sugar.

Mr. Allwit helpfully provides us with a menu-as-complaint in the middle of this raucous celebration: “These women have no consciences at sweet-meats, where e’er they come; see and they have not culled out all the long plums too – they have nothing here but short wriggle-tail comfits, not worth mouthing.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Mr. Allwit’s description is tooth-rooting. Everything is coated in sugar and made of sugar. “Sweet meats,” “comfits,” and “long plums” (more commonly recognized as “sugar plums”) all describe foods that have sugary insides, such as candied nuts and dried fruits, which are then coated thickly in a mass of sugary substances. The different names Mr. Allwit uses to designate each type of sweet treat suggests that “sugary” is not one palate among many at this buffet, but the only palate offered. This gluttonous consumption of sugar is seen, by Mr. Allwit, to be a particularly feminine affliction (“these women have no consciences at sweet-meats”). The confectionary is a woman’s consumptive domain, and, as scholars such as Kim F. Hall have noted, it was also, at the time, women’s creative and productive domain.

Hall writes, “when an English woman made a confection from a cookbook like Plat’s, she implicitly helped foster watershed changes in England’s economy.”[[38]](#footnote-38) (In other words, she has the power through and over the food marketplace that Behre notes in her account of the play.) Hall continues: “Looking at sugar, which is a product associated with both white women [in their role as chief conservers and preservers in early modern English cooking culture] and African slavery, reveals the importance of women and gender ideologies in the growing consumption of ‘foreign’ luxury goods in England.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Hall modifies traditional readings (like those that collect around *Chaste Maid*) that consider women’s agency in food spaces as exclusively self-autonomizing labor and/or consumption. In other words, the London women’s autonomy here is achieved through the consumption of goods are decisively, inextricably connected to violent colonial labor systems. The occasion of sugar consumption draws women into the racial imaginary being built out of sugar-plantation enslaved labor.[[40]](#footnote-40) Their autonomy in this network is not “feminine agency.” It is white agency afforded to female subjects.

The play makes clear that female over-consumption of sugary goods is not all “sugar and spice and everything nice” (though that *does* seem to be Middleton’s formulation for “what little girls/women are made of”). Sugar’s connection with the feminine is revolting to all of the male characters onstage. Tim’s entrance midway through the banquet notes this aesthetic disdain most clearly upon smelling a guest’s breath: “This woman has villainous sweet breath, did she not stink of comfits; help me sweet tutor, or I shall rub my lips off.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Whereas the women have a “villainous sweet breath” from their love of sugary goods, Tim’s tutor’s “sweetness” is a sweetness of disposition. Not all that is sweet is good; the ingestion of the sweet thing, in Tim’s formulation, makes someone’s breath—perhaps indexical of their “spirit”—vile. Sugar, as *the* luxury of the feminine-reproductive space, reveals here the catch in female marketplace agency: While women may gain access to the comestibles and buying power that men have in this new London, their participation is characterized always already as gross over-consumption, and as such casts them villainous.[[42]](#footnote-42)

*Chaste Maid*’s buffet knits together race-, class- and gender-imaginaries for a rapidly changing London socioeconomic scene, and it does so through its insistence on the interoperability of reproduction and consumption. Consumption, more than any other action, becomes the marker of gender here. When the newborn child is passed around to the party guests, she is noted primarily for her precocity in mimicking the act of chewing:

2 GOSSIP

Gossip, is’t not a chopping girl, so like the father?

3 GOSSIP

As if it had been spit out of his mouth,

Eyed, nosed and browed as like a girl can be,

Only indeed it has the mouther’s mouth.

2 GOSSIP

The mother’s mouth up and down, up and down.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Of course, we the audience know that the child carries none of the genetic material of her father, Mr. Allwit, and part of the comedy of this scene is that the Gossips read paternal features where there are none, casting doubt on any attempt to “read m/paternity” on an infant at all. Regardless of the validity of their assessment, the Gossips base their conclusions about m/paternal likeness on the Allwits’ mouths. Whereas the child appears to be “spit out of his [*Mr*. Allwit’s] mouth,” her own mouth in its “up and down, up and down” motion marks her as *Mrs*. Allwit’s child. Mr. Allwit’s mouth is metaphorized as having procreative powers; in other words, his spit is imagined to be generative. Mrs. Allwit’s and her daughter’s mouths are distinguished by the unproductiveness and their consumptiveness. Mr. Allwit’s produces something outside of his own body; Mrs. Allwit’s and her daughter’s mouths only strive to take *in*. The daughter’s infant efforts to imitate her mother’s most notable activity redouble this theme of feminine unproductivity: Have just been born, her mastication is futile; her mouth moves around air. Consumption and un(re)productivity become genetically gendered. The conditions of capitalist London have created new rubrics through which to characterize “whiteness and “woman,” and these characteristics are figured as epigenetically transferable to same-sex offspring.

The poor child has hardly exited the womb when she is likened to her mother and her mother’s friends as a monstrous consumer. When she is first shown to her fathers upon her birth, Mr. Allwit describes her (to put it as bluntly as he does) as an overweight opportunist. “A goodly girl i’faith; give you joy on her, / She looks as if she had two thousand pound to her portion / And run away with a tailor; a fine plump black eyed slut.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Mr. Allwit won’t be winning any Father of the Year awards, but his lines here set a precedent for the ways in which the newborn’s body will be repeatedly read for her relation to goods and consumption. According to those who hold the child in the wake of her birth, she is already who she will be in adulthood. (This is a habit that no one in *Chaste Maid* can seem to shake. Recall Gossip #3’s exclamation, when seeing the child for the first time, “‘Tis a large child, she’s but a little *woman*.”[[45]](#footnote-45)) Mr. Allwit considers her infant clothes prophetic for her future behavior; this fancy clothing indicates that she has a “market value” (i.e., a dowry) higher than she does in reality, or/but also it suggests that she will be a sexually promiscuous woman for material gain, running away with a tailor—a profession often linked to lechery[[46]](#footnote-46)--in order to acquire more expensive clothing.

But what really stands out in Mr. Allwit’s initial address to his daughter is that she looks like a “black-eyed slut.” This shocking and (seemingly) offensive turn-of-phrase has received minimal editorial treatment, from what I can tell. The Brissenden edition skips the gloss on “black-eyed slut,” and Linda Woodbridge’s edition mollifies the force of the word “slut,” glossing it as “girl (playful, not seriously implying sluttishness)”.[[47]](#footnote-47) While this far more innocuous reading is plausible, it is not clear that Mr. Allwit doesn’t mean something much worse. According to the OED, the two most common uses of the word “slut” were either a “sexually promiscuous or lascivious woman” (i.e., what Mr. Allwit suggests his daughter would be in running away with the tailor) *or* “an untidy, dirty, or slovenly woman; a woman who is habitually careless, lazy or negligent with regard to appearance, household cleanliness” (i.e., his daughter’s mother and all of her urinating friends).[[48]](#footnote-48) Given the baptism guests’ insistence that the daughter is like her mother in her mastication, it is not unlikely that Middleton is suggesting something similar here—that Mr. Allwit projects onto his daughter the same sexual promiscuity and consumptive slovenliness of her mother. In fact, the Wet Nurse in this scene seems to corroborate Mr. Allwit’s impression of his “slutty” newborn daughter, when she calls her a “knocker” just a few lines later.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Mr. Allwit’s description of his daughter is a part of a larger reproductive-consumptive picture that I have been teasing out so far—that *Chaste Maid* is committed to portraying this child as the product, not of Mrs. Allwit’s *reproductive labor*, but the product of Mrs. Allwit’s *consumptive leisure.* The joke, in other words, is that the newborn is not from what Mrs. Allwit gestated, but what she ingested.

The idea that a mother could impress the child from the outside in through her visual imagination had been a part of medical discourse around generation, monstrous or otherwise, since antiquity, and anxieties about this maternal imagination transforming the paternal nature of the fetus were alive in seventeenth-century reproductive discourse. Marie Hélène Huet details how “[d]esire and repulsion, craving and horror come together, exciting the imagination, which is capable of marking the progeny of proof, for all to see, of an unsatisfied desire or shameful imagination.”[[50]](#footnote-50) For example, Montaigne argues in “Of the Power of the Imagination” in the late-sixteenth century that “mothers can transmit to the bodies of children in their womb marks connected with their thoughts.”[[51]](#footnote-51) His signature example is that of “a girl all bristly and hairy whom her mother claimed to have conceived like this because of a portrait of John the Baptist hanging above her bed.”[[52]](#footnote-52) As Huet makes clear, this example from Montaigne is evident of the primacy of images in the anxieties around the maternal imagination, but more than the image itself, it is the power of the maternal *desire* that contributes to this overwhelming impressive imagination. The violence of this desire perpetuates obsessive imagination which then transforms the fetus from what it would have “naturally” become into what the mother renders it “imaginatively.”

The maternal imagination is not limited to saintly images, but frequently participates in a racial imaginary that expressly links “unnatural” maternal fixation to the reproduction of non-white bodies. Montaigne briefly references the archetypal example when he writes, “witness that woman who gave birth to a blackamoor.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Ambroise Paré expands on this story in the 1570s when he details a story from Hippocrates wherein

a princess [was] accused of adultery, because she had given birth to a child black as a Moor, her husband and she both having white skin; which woman was absolved upon Hippocrates’ persuasion that it was [caused by] the portrait of a Moor, similar to the child, which was customarily attached to her bed.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Paré’s solution to this phenomenon? Stop putting imagination-boosting images around pregnant women’s beds: “it is necessary that women—at the hour of conception and when the child is not yet formed…not be forced to look at or to imagine monstrous things with intensity.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Paré’s example from Hippocrates (though there are several other examples of this tale in antiquity, notably in an obverse story from Heliodorus’s epic prose narrative, *Aethiopica*) and Montaigne’s example both suggest that, in the early modern period, there was always the danger of a “third” entering the twosome of biological reproduction. The desire that should be in place in the act of conception is displaced post-coitus onto an inanimate object that performs animating work. Both women in Paré and Montaigne’s examples fixate upon an image that situates above their bed, figuring a sort of sexual usurpation of the image over the father that is often presented as the repro-sexual threat of a Black person in portraiture.

A similar bedside usurpation is conjured in Mr. Allwit’s description of his wife’s late-stage pregnancy set-up:

When she lies in,

As now she’s even upon the point of grunting,

A lady lies not in like her; there’s her embossings,

Embroiderings, spanglings, and I know not what,

As if she lay with all the gaudy shops

In Gresham’s Burse about her; then her restoratives,

Able to set up a young ‘pothecary,

And richly stock the foreman of a drug shop;

Her sugar by the whole loaves, her wine by rundlets.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Mr. Allwit’s complaint is textbook misogyny for the period: Fat, lazy, and absorbent of all his assets, Mrs. Allwit’s body is made into an effigy symbolizing what happens when the bourgeois repro-consumptive practices are given over to the merchant masses. Though she may lie with all the trappings of a genteel lady, “a lady lies not in like her.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Part of the reason why she is not a “lady” is because she is literally “in bed” with the new mercantilist goods—the very objects that lend her the previously-exclusive bourgeois practice to begin with.

To put it another way, the market has come to the bedroom, and like the portrait of St. John or the Moor, the goods around her overwhelm the paternal through the force of her desire for them. She not only consumes the goods from the market, but these goods attend to her throughout her late-stage pregnancy. Her decorative items (“embossings/Embroiderings and spangles”) sit alongside the foods that she craves. Yet again, we are reminded of Mrs. Allwit’s voracious affinity for all things sweet; she consumes “[h]er sugar by the whole loaves.” Her commitment to participating in the marketplace has such buying power that Mr. Allwit imagines that she could single-handedly support an upstart apothecary shop. Here, her husband asserts women’s consumerist power *and* distinguishes her body from the market itself. She is *not* for sale in this scene; she is not a commodified good; she is a mockery of early capital consumption in the London cityscape.[[58]](#footnote-58) Her newly transferred power in mercantilist London becomes the butt of the joke, in part because her purchases do the work of separating her from alignment with the commodities.

These jokes are successful (like a lot of jokes) because they are sexual. Through these purchases and the arrangement of these goods amongst the cushions of her birthing room scene, the ménage á trois of Whorehound and the two Allwits brings in a fourth—the shops. Mrs. Allwit is not just surrounded by the goods, it is “as if” she is sexually involved with them—“As if she *lay with* all the gaudy shops/In Gresham’s Burse about her.” Gresham’s Burse is a pseudonym for the Royal Exchange in London, the geographical nexus for a massive network of global commodities which linked international trade to London consumers. If we’re considering this reference through the racial-mercantile logic set up for us in *Triumph*, then the Royal Exchange is perhaps *the* site where Britishness-as-whiteness was most clearly negotiated.

That Mrs. Allwit is “in bed” with this trade synthesizes the reproductive-consumptive white-femininity that I have been trying to bring forth. As with the Hippocratic woman fixating on the Moor’s painting, as with Montaigne’s woman gazing at the image of John the Baptist, Mrs. Allwit’s imaginative attention settles on the goods she desires and the goods she cannot get enough of: sugar, wine, embossings, etc. When Mrs. Allwit produces her “monstrous” and consumptive daughter, that daughter joins ranks with countless other women (staged and referred to throughout *Chaste Maid*) whose desire could transform or mark the female fetuses within them.[[59]](#footnote-59) Consumption or ingestion is reproductive through its leisure, because her leisurely consumption of global goods within the locale of London marks her as white through her marketplace agency. If we follow this conclusion back to the baptismal buffet, we get a picture of *Chaste Maid* which verges on fearmongering: If all the women in London share the same consumptive desiring imagination as Mrs. Allwit, what will all these women come to reproduce? I think the answer Middleton primes his audience to land on is “consumers,” or more specifically, “white-women consumers.” If *Triumph* establishes its vision of “white people” (“white men”) through engagement in global trade, then *Chaste Maid* establishes its vision of “white women” through shopping at the market.

NOTE TO RENSHOP:

[I end here because what follows will be a transition from the white womanhood presented in Middleton to white womanhood presented in Richard Brome’s later city comedy, *The English Moor.* I plan for this to be a quick reading of the play (somewhere around 8-10 pages) as a more explicit articulation of white femininity in its portrayal of white women performing blackface. Like *Chaste Maid*, *The English Moor* is filled with references to transatlantic goods and trading and does racemaking work in tandem with the work of presenting a vision of white-London-merchant identities. This reading will conclude the chapter.]

1. Thomas Middleton. *The Triumphs of Truth* in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*,ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010): 411-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gary Taylor. “nO.2” in Thomas Middleton. *A Game at Chesse: An Early Form* in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnion. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010): 1790, n. 0.2. Taylor identifies this, not only as the first use of the term, but also as the “first use of *white* in its modern racial sense in English drama,” 1790, nO.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid, 423-24. The King’s address to the color-coded moralizing dichotomy bound up in early modern Christian imaginary echoes the work of Kim F. Hall who argues that the “binarism of black and white might be called the originary language of racial difference in English culture.” This binarism intensified, Hall argues, in the 1550s right when England began to be involved in the slave trade and transatlantic colonization. Kim F. Hall. *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995): 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, check page #. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, 435-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Anthony Gerard Barthelemy. “Words of the Sponsors: Blacks in Lord Mayors’ Pageants” in *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne.* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999): 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Barthelemy, “Words of the Sponsors,” 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This insistence that London is defined by its connection to and investment in British international mercantilism is consistent throughout the pageant; it alternately is seen as the moral success of the Londoners (seen here in the King’s speech), and its greatest moral failing. See, for instance, Error’s gloating description of “Gluttony and Sloth,” who “[w]ill tell thee more then a whole heard of knaves, / The worth of every Office to a hair, / And who bids most, and how the markets are,” 481-4. At the same time, the City is celebrated for its international goods. The Lord Mayor is told to imagine being led to a bankside in order to see standing there “five islands artfully garnished with all manner of Indian fruit trees, drugs, spiceries, and the like,” 199-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Susan Anderson. “Generic Spaces in Middleton’s *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613) and *Michaelmas Term* (1607).” *Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Biannual Journal of English Renaissance Studies* 88 no. 1 (2015): 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Heather C. Easterling. “‘Surging Like the Sea’: Re-Thinking the Spectacle of the Crowd in Early Modern London.” *The London Journal* (2021): 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. As Kelly J. Stage has written, city comedies are “commentaries and re-creations of elements of urban negotiation;” they are *not* “exact representations.” According to Stage, the staging of early modern London through a medium that recognized its “own created quality” generated a parallel understanding among audiences that they were living—in the outside urban space—in a created environment as well. In other words, the recreation of the macro-urban environment was likewise a fabricated and choreographed performance of actors, spaces, and types, which the Lord Mayoral pageant makes clear in its maneuverings of the crowd. Rather than exclusively satirizing or rejecting the constructed-ness of urban space, plays like *Chaste Maid* (and I argue, city pageants like *Triumphs*) also “enforce orderly and productive visions of the city.” Kelly J. Stage, *Producing Early Modern London: A Comedy of Urban Space, 1598-1616.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018): 6, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I am not the first to argue that *Triumphs* and *Chaste Maid* should be considered two parts of a whole 1613 Middletonian vision. In the only other study that compares *Triumphs* and *Chaste Maid,* David Bergeron argues that “the pageant in a sense allegorizes what is incarnate in the comedy. Middleton has, perhaps unconsciously, fashioned an impressive Renaissance gold medal, with one side depicting a large foreground of sin and corruption (the comedy) and the obverse with an equally large foreground of virtue (the pageant).” Bergeron considers the play to make a cohesive moralizing vision of “middle-class struggle for social and economic position.” In other words, both play and pageant are for Bergeron, as they are for me, essentialized mercantilist fantasy. But whereas Bergeron sees this to be the triumph of the middle-class, I see this as a cohesive racializing fantasy of English whiteness being formed through the globalizing economic conditions that gave rise to this middle-class in the first place. David Bergeron. “Middleton’s Moral Landscape: *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Triumphs of Truth*” in *‘Accomaninge the Players’: Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580-1980,* ed. Kenneth Friedenreich. (New York: AMS Press, 1983): 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Scott argues that by the late sixteenth century, the English and Scots were developing a settler-Protestant model of colonialism in Ireland. Whereas the colonization of Ireland “was the work of farmers, religious settlers, and soldiers,” the colonization of the Americas was the work of merchants. Jonathan Scott. *How the Old World Ended: The Anglo-Dutch-American Revolution, 1500-1800.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019): 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Federici’s argument is a historical modification on Foucault, who argues similarly that capitalism requires an increase influence of state-control over the sexual and reproductive lives of its citizens—famously termed “biopower.” Whereas Foucault’s argument is situated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Federici finds biopolitical initiatives in English society as early as the sixteenth. Whereas Foucault focuses primarily on the male laborer in this paradigm, Federici argues that the female body was similarly manipulated for repro-labor ends. She argues that “the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor.” Silvia Federici. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation.* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004): 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jennifer Morgan. *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Karen Newman. “‘Goldsmith’s ware’: Equivalence in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71 no. 1 (2008): 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. As will be discussed later, Mrs. Allwit’s level of consent or agency in this arrangement has been traditionally read as non-existent. See, for example, Sabine Schülting who argues that Mrs. Allwit “has effectively been bought by Sir Walter,” or Keri Sanburne Behre who considers Mrs. Allwit “as the valuable animal commodity by which he [Mr. Allwit] makes his comfortable living.” Sabine Schülting. “‘What Is’t You Lack?’: Material Culture in Thomas Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.*” *Litteraria Pragensia* 24 no. 47 (2014): 103; Keri Sanburne Behre. “‘Look What Market She Hath Made’: Women, Commerce and Power in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Bartholomew Fair.*” *Early Theater* 21 no. 1 (2018): 134. While I agree that Mistress Allwit does not have the same level of autonomy as Whorehound or Mr. Allwit over their tripartite arrangement, her repeated, expressed desire for Whorehound’s company, sexual or otherwise, suggests that theirs is an arrangement less akin to spousal abuse and more akin to that found in queer kinship models. Negating Mrs. Allwit’s participation in this arrangement assumes that this arrangement could not be at all happily queer. In arguing this, I follow two recent arguments on the queer sexual-reproductive potential within this play: Simone Chess. “Contented Cuckolds: Infertility and Queer Reproductive Practice in Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and Machiavelli’s *Mandragola*” in *Performing Disability in Early Modern English Drama*, edited by Leslie C. Dunn. (New York: Palgrave, 2021): 117-140; and Erin Ellerbeck. “Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and Adopted Bastards” in *Cures for Chance: Adoptive Relations in Shakespeare and Middleton.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022): 70-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Touchwood complains that “the poor wenches curse me” because he has “such a fatal finger in such business/I must forth with’t, chiefly for our country wenches,/For every harvest I shall hinder hay-making.” All quotes will be taken from Thomas Middleton. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* edited by Alan Brissenden. (London: A&C Black, 2002): II.i. 56-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid, II.i.188-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid, I.ii.51-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. As far as I can tell, *Chaste Maid* criticism has ignored (nearly) wholesale the economic forces that contributed to the repro-class upheaval so frequently mentioned in work on this play. The closest consideration of international labor and consumption politics in regard to *Chaste Maid* comes from Karen Newman. “‘Goldsmith’s ware,’” 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, II.ii.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, III.ii.2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid, III.ii.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid, III.ii.17-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Mrs. Allwit is spoken about often throughout *Chaste Maid* but rarely does she actually speak. Appearing four times on stage, Mrs. Allwit speaks a total of 248 words over the course of the play. In contrast, her husband’s monologue describing the condition of her lying-in in Act I Scene ii is 413 words. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, II.ii.22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Anderson, “Generic Spaces,” 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. I use “democratization” here with scare quotes because, of course, for the majority of Londoners this level of reproductive comfort would not be accessible, and of course, the leisure that folks like Mrs. Allwit experience here requires the increased employment and labor of lower-class folks and, for the goods she consumes from across the Atlantic, indentured and enslaved labor. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Barthelemy demonstrates how the Grocers’ Guild pageants increasingly became more and more explicit about the grocers’ intimate relationship between the enslaved plantation labor that was contributing to their supply. The staging of “happy” but enslaved “planters” in these pageants glossed over the means by which “London’s grocers might provide the population with exotic fruits and spices, and of course, reap the financial benefits of plantation and slave economics.” Barthelemy, “Words of the Sponsors,” 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Miller writes, “Middleton’s play offered the female, and particularly the pregnant, body as a sign for the insatiable consumer whose access to the growingly capitalist economy could be destructive. Further, it re-imagined the commodification of women as a threat to the stability as women internalize the carnivalesque nature of the economy and its fluctuating value.” Shannon Miller. “Consuming Mothers/Consuming Merchants: The Carnivalesque Economy of Jacobean City Comedy.” *Modern Language Studies* 26 no. 3 (1996): 94. Gail Kern Paster, famously, argues something similar in “Leaky Vessels,” writing that the women’s leaky bodies in this scene (either through urine or spilt wine) “not only insinuate womanly unreliability but also…define the female body even when it is chaste as a crucial problematic in the social formation of capitalism.” Gail Kern Paster. “Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy.” *Renaissance Drama* 18 no. 1 (1987): 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Keri Sanburn Behre. “‘Look What Market She Hath Made’: Women, Commerce, and Power in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Bartholomew Fair.*” *Early Theatre* 21 no. 1 (2018): 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Schülting, “‘What Is’t You Lack?’,” 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, III.ii.69-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Kim F. Hall, “Culinary Spaces, Colonial Spaces: The Gendering of sugar in the Seventeenth Century” in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects,* ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dympna Callaghan. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. I am indebted to my peers at the Folger Dissertation Seminar (2021) for making me more attendant to this term “occasion” as a way to think about modes or temporalities of racial and gendered engagement. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, III.ii.184-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. A similar sort of logic remains pervasive today, wherein traditional women’s roles in heterosexual marriages cast them as the “shopper,” both for necessities such as groceries and for hobbies (e.g., trips to the mall as “girl’s days”). The bad joke that just won’t go away is that women, in these roles, are notorious and indiscriminate spenders of male wages. See, for instance, a Reddit post in 2020 from user “todaysthroaway4731” on the forum “AITA [Am I the Asshole?”], entitled, “AITA for telling my wife that we should not be spending $1100/mo on groceries? No kids, just us.” This post includes a complete list of the groceries and price-breakdown from his wife’s grocery trips and a reference to her clothing purchases as well. Fiscal responsibility at the space of the market, grocery store, or the mall, includes fiscal derogation in such a misogynist system. (To be fair to this Reddit user, $1100/mo is quite a lot….) todaysthrowaway4731. “AITA for telling my wife that we shouldn’t be spending $1100/mo on groceries? No kids, just us.” *Reddit.* Accessed 30 Jan 2022. <https://www.reddit.com/r/AmItheAsshole/comments/f71095/aita_for_telling_my_wife_that_we_shouldnt_be/> [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid, III.ii.12-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, II.ii.12-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, III.ii.17, emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Brissenden notes here that “tailors were traditionally lecherous,” n. 14, pp. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “n. 14” on Thomas Middleton’s *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, ed. Linda Woodbridge in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*,ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010): 925. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. “slut, n.” *OED Online.* December 2021. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/view/Entry/182346?rskey=8mCh8I&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed January 27, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The Wet Nurse seems to mean this line as a compliment: “They’re pretty children both, but here’s a wench/Will be a knocker,” Middleton, *Chaste Maid,* II.ii.25-26. The gloss in the Brissenden is a little less cagey about the Wet Nurses’ meaning here, noting it as either “(a) good-looker (b) notable copulator,” n. 26, pp. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Marie Hélène Huet. *Monstrous Imagination.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993): 18-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Michel de Montaigne. “Of the Force of the Imagination” in *The Complete Essays*, translated by Michael A. Screech. (New York: Penguin, 2004): 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ambroise Paré. *On Monsters and Marvels*, edited by Janis L. Pallister. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid, 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Middleton, *Chaste Maid,* I.ii.30-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. As Schülting writes upon reading this scene, “the increasingly affluent merchant class emulated aristocratic fashions of decorating lying-in chambers, and it is exactly this acquisition of cultural capital that is implied when Allwit boasts that ‘a lady lies not in like’ his wife. Thanks to the arrangement with Sir Walter, the Allwits are able to purchase the status symbols that need to be owned by the aristocracy alone.” Schülting, “What Is’t You Lack?”, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. This reading runs in direct counter to Shannon Miller’s account of these lines. She writes that Mrs. Allwit’s “grotesque consumption envelops the market until the distinction between her body and Gresham’s Burse is erased. Her expanding body becomes the marketplace, itself uncontained and uncontrollable.” Miller, “Consuming Mothers/Consuming Merchants,” 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Mr. Allwit repeatedly asserts that shopping-crazed wives are the norm for London. In the same speech, he refers to “some merchants [who] would in soul kiss hell,/To buy paradise for their wives, and dye/Their conscience in the blood of prodigal heirs/To deck their night-piece,” I.ii.42-45. In his description of the menu at the celebratory buffet, he alludes to “a citizen [who] complain[ed] once that his wife’s belly only broke his back: mined had been all in fitters seven years since but for this worthy knight that with a prop upholds my wife and me and all my estate buried in Bucklersbury,” III.ii.72-76. In another scene, local “promoters” (law enforcement officials) police the streets for those buying illegal meat during the time of Lent. All those they apprehend are looking to bring meat home specifically for the women in the lives—the men for their wives and mistresses, and the Wench for a made-up woman that she works under. See, II.ii. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)