

# “The Mother’s Mouth”: Markets, Birthing Rooms, and White Women in Thomas Middleton’s London, 1613

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## INTRODUCTION: MIDDLETON’S “WHITE PEOPLE”

Thomas Middleton’s 1613 London Lord Mayor’s pageant, *The Triumphs of Truth*, has been central to early modern critical whiteness studies because it contains the first known use of the term *white people*.<sup>1</sup> This essay argues that another of Middleton’s 1613 works—the city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*—should be considered alongside this pageant as a text embedded within a nascent rhetoric of British whiteness that was particular to the burgeoning consumer economy in London, which *Triumphs* celebrates.<sup>2</sup> Both texts are

I would like to thank those who provided crucial feedback on earlier versions of this essay, with special thanks to Noémie Ndiaye and Timothy Harrison as well as the members of the Renaissance Workshop at the University of Chicago and participants in the 2021–22 Folger Institute Dissertation Seminar. I also wish to thank Jeffrey Masten and the anonymous reader from *Renaissance Drama* for their insightful responses.

1. Gary Taylor is credited with identifying this as the first usage of the term. See Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chesse: An Early Form*, ed. Gary Taylor, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1790, 2.0.2n. Arthur L. Little Jr. discusses this passage a number of times in his groundbreaking work on critical whiteness studies. See, e.g., his works “Is It Possible to Read Shakespeare through Critical Whiteness Studies?,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 268–80; and “Introduction: Assembling an Aristocracy of Skin,” in *White People in Shakespeare: Essay on Race, Culture, and the Elite*, ed. Arthur L. Little Jr. (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 1–26.

2. 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

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*Renaissance Drama*, volume 52, number 1, spring 2024.

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<https://doi.org/10.1086/729781>

concerned with the commercial or consumerist interaction between the Londoner and the foreign good; these consumerist interactions, in turn, evidence the Londoner's whiteness in two distinct ways. In *Triumphs*, the spectacle of the public, street-based pageant celebrates the highly masculine work of international trade and thus addresses a specifically masculinized whiteness. *Chaste Maid* places these imports in the feminized space of the lying-in chamber; this city comedy thus portrays a domesticated, feminized, and far more complicated version of this consumerist whiteness.

*Triumphs* states the racial implications of the globalized London marketplace explicitly. Midway through the pageant, the King and Queen of the Moors arrive via an unpiloted ship. The King identifies the pageant-goers on the shore as "white people" (412).<sup>3</sup> He goes on to explain how he and his people were induced to become Christians through contact with Englishmen, and it is in this explanation that the text reveals how closely integrated trade is with British whiteness:

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.

(435–40)

The King's narrative rehearses the oft-cited connection between Christian proselytizing and colonial economic aspirations. The King and his people's conversion is inspired by contact with racial, religious, and, most crucially, economic outsiders. The monarchs are converted by "English *merchants, factors, travellers,*" whose "truth did with their spirit *hold commerce.*" Christian missionizing is characteristically integrated into concomitant trade initiatives, such that distinctions between the commercial and religious blur in the King's rhetoric. If the King initially recognizes the "white people" looking back at him as phenotypically and religiously

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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 racializing fantasy of English whiteness, 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 *Accompanying the Players: Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580–1980*, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich (New York: AMS, 1983), 133, 138.

3. Thomas Middleton, *The Triumphs of Truth*, ed. David M. Bergeron, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, 973. All subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically.

“white,” then he also recognizes them as “white” because of their global mercantile endeavors.

Early modern lord mayoral pageants like that of *Triumphs* were often vehicles through which a racial and mercantile identity could be performed and presented to its London audience, and Middleton’s was far from the first lord mayoral pageant to introduce Black characters as spectacles showcasing London as a global economic hub. Anthony Gerard Barthelemy argues that characters like the King and Queen of the Moors “serve as visible reminders of British success in trade and exploration.”<sup>4</sup> After all, *Triumphs* was the direct result of British international trade. The London Grocers’ Guild funded the pageant to celebrate the rising of one of their own to the status of Lord Mayor, and the guild had just recently joined ranks with the newly established East India Company (1600).<sup>5</sup> The East India Company instituted a monopoly on the Eastern spice trade, and the Grocers’ Guild operated as a middleman between the company and the British consumer.<sup>6</sup> The pageant’s success was, then, in large part predicated on profits generated from this newly expansive global food network, which lined the pockets of London grocers and brought the exotic or foreign to the stalls of urban food sellers with increasing efficiency.

The importance of these consumables to the pageant is highlighted when the allegorical figure of Mother London directs the audience to the waterside, where they are said to find “five islands, artfully garnished with all manner of Indian fruit trees, drugs, spiceries, and the like” (197–201). Five “islands” had, in fact, been designed and fabricated to accompany the Lord Mayor’s pageant, and these islands served as visual reminders of the mercantile successes that made this extravagant public event possible.<sup>7</sup> The collaboration between the Grocers’ Guild and the East India Company grew a wider market for “oriental spices” from the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asian “Spice Islands.”<sup>8</sup> Trade arrangements

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4. 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: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 47.

5. David Bergeron, “Introduction,” in Middleton, *The Triumphs of Truth*, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, 967.

6. The East India Company’s founding in 1600 “granted [it] a monopoly of . . . new direct trade with the orient. Their early interest was focused on pepper, nutmeg, and mace. . . . Correspondences between the company and the court makes clear that most sales of imported spices were to London grocers.” Jon Stobart, *Sugar and Spice: Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29.

7. *Triumphs* cost nearly double that of the average early Stuart pageant, totaling around 1,300 pounds. Bergeron, “Introduction,” 965.

8. William A. Pettigrew and Mahesh Gopalan, “Introduction: The Different East India Companies and the Variety of Cross-Cultural Interactions in the Corporate Setting,” in *The East India Company, 1600–1857: Essays on Anglo-Indian Connection*, ed. William A. Pettigrew and Mahesh Gopalan (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–18.

such as these made goods that were once prohibitively expensive (i.e., certain spices, herbs, and sugars) increasingly available to the burgeoning London middle class. These largely nonessential goods were, according to Jon Stobart, the primary wares of the grocers by the early seventeenth century, making their businesses “above all, a place to buy imported food,” rather than “general provisions.”<sup>9</sup>

These prop islands—and the whole pageant—can be seen as an extremely expensive marketing campaign on behalf of the Grocers’ Guild. At the very least, it is clear that the pageant was designed to whet Londoners’ appetites for various foreign comestibles. The pageant-goer visually consumes Indian goods, much in way they consume the spectacle of the King and Queen’s sudden arrival. Both are moments of striking edibility. The character of Error gestures toward this edibility when describing the monarchs in gustatory terms—his “sweet-faced devils” (464; emphasis mine). *Triumphs* racializes both the spectacle and the audience through the binary interaction between the globally trafficked consumable and the city-dwelling consumer. This binary was, as Gitanjali G. Shahani argues, one that early modern England was familiar with. For Shahani, these “culinary contact zones” facilitated “racial formations by which people became food, by which subjects became edible objects.”<sup>10</sup> Displaying the Grocers’ Guild’s growing international import initiatives by offering such spectacles as “sweet-faced” Moors and fabricated Indian spice islands, *Triumphs* stages a certain vision of whiteness through its proximity to and consumption of the import. While I agree with Shahani that the English racial imagination of non-white, non-British persons was early forged within “culinary contact zones,” I argue that whiteness was also codified in these edible moments.

#### CITY COMEDY AND THE DOMESTICATION OF WHITENESS

*Chaste Maid* is likewise committed to staging moments where Londoners ingest, as Susan Anderson puts it, that which is from “elsewhere.”<sup>11</sup> Although no Black

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9. Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, 26.

10. Gitanjali G. Shahani, *Tasting Difference: Food, Race, and Cultural Encounters in Early Modern Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 2. Noémie Ndiaye likewise argues, in the early modern Spanish theatrical context, there was a similar “commodifying script of blackness,” one that was often “predicated on metaphors of food and luxury goods.” Ndiaye contends that these commodifying scripts worked in tandem with Jesuit missionary efforts—a group that was invested in the “mercantile ethos of the colonial project,” in a similar conflation of religious and commodifying tropes seen here in Middleton’s *King of the Moors*. Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 39, 76, 73.

11. As Susan Anderson argues, pageants like *Triumphs* focus on the mercantilist identity of London: “The portrayal of ‘elsewhere’ in the shows establishes a proto-nationalism that homogenises the London audience to enable a sense that the economic advantages of the merchant elite accrue to

monarchs arrive and no Indian fruit and spice islands are on display, this city comedy is an extension of the racializing work made so explicit in *Triumphs*.<sup>12</sup> *Chaste Maid* reformulates and domesticates the whiteness articulated in *Triumphs* by staging practices of female consumption at reproductive moments. I mean domesticated in two senses. Whiteness is made domestic in its connection to a national identity (i.e., Britishness) and ritualized, or made into habit, because of the practices that occur in domestic spaces. These two phenomena are co-constitutive yet gendered differently. *Triumphs* is interested in domesticating whiteness in the first sense, through the male-dominated space of international trade, which brings the import to the London riverbank. *Chaste Maid* is interested in domesticating whiteness in the second sense, through the feminized consumption of that good within the domestic setting. This whiteness-as-consumption is made into an inheritable, racial trait within the figure of the Allwits’ baby, who is born during the play. The theory of maternal impression is instructive here for how the interaction between the pregnant person and the object could come to leave physical evidence upon the child. In short, the goods that accoutred an early modern lying-in chamber were not neutral items but ones that were thought by some to leave indelible marks upon the fetus.

The city comedy genre has long been noted for rendering visible how the materials of a changing mercantile city interact with and inform domestic issues of reproduction, but it has been largely overlooked in the growing subfield of early modern critical whiteness studies.<sup>13</sup> As Jean Howard contends, theater was crucial in making “cognitive and ideological sense of life in [a] city” that was undergoing profound economic, demographic, and social change.<sup>14</sup> One such way that sense was made, I argue, was in stitching together what it meant to be British, a

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all.” 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.

12. For Taylor, Middleton extends his racializing work in 1624 in his play *A Game at Chess*, wherein two competing factions (the White House and the Black House) vie until the White House comes out on top. This reading assumes that racializing work relies on a black/white dichotomy that is visualized through the medium of the chessboard. My argument is that this dichotomy need not be explicitly present to be a play about whiteness. Gary Taylor, *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip Hop* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 132–39.

13. Early modern critical whiteness studies focused on the theater have largely centered on plays set outside of Britain, most often Italy or Spain. Middleton’s corpus has recently gained important attention from critical whiteness scholars. See Jamie Paris, “Black Blood, Black Desires: On the Fragility of Whiteness in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling*,” *Early Theater* 24, no. 1 (2021): 113–37; and Katherine Gillen, “Fashioning English Whiteness in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*,” in *The Revenger’s Tragedy: The State of the Play*, ed. Gretchen Minton (London: Bloomsbury, 2018): 113–33. Both essays, however, are concerned with Middleton’s tragedies set in Spain and Italy, respectively.

14. Jean Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 14.

Londoner, and, ultimately, white by way of the city comedy's interest in the nexus of the market and the birthing room. It is a genre that is especially equipped to demonstrate how, as Arthur L. Little Jr. explains, "'white people' signals a still ongoing assembling of complexes, i.e., an assemblage, that we have come to organize singularly through/as *race*."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the whiteness that emerges in the scene of birthing-room consumption need not be "discretely invented" to be implicit and potent.<sup>16</sup> It comes forward through the "complexes" established around consumer interactions, "culinary contact zones," misogynistic truisms, and ideas about and anxieties around sexual reproduction. This assemblage occurs when Middleton stages middle-class London women consuming newly available international goods while performing the important labor of birthing British children. This whiteness is perhaps even more powerful in its implicit, nubile, and fragile iteration. Whereas *Triumphs* gives name to the abstract concept of "white people," *Chaste Maid* embeds the same abstract matter that makes those pageant-goers "white" into the domesticated rituals and practices of Middleton's early modern London. This implicit and perhaps even accidental race-making weaves whiteness, as a global and commercial position, into the fabric of daily life in London.

### THE BANQUET, THE BIRTH, AND THE MOTHER'S MOUTH

Though scholars have consistently read *Chaste Maid* as a play about the relationships between pregnancy, childbearing, market economies, and feminine agency, it has largely escaped recognition as a play about race—or rather, as a play about white women.<sup>17</sup> Karen Newman does note the importance of *Chaste Maid*'s eponymous setting, arguing that Cheapside served as vital, centrally located evidence

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15. Little, "Introduction," 6; emphasis in the original.

16. Little, "Introduction," 6. See also Urvashi Chakravarty, "Fictions of Race: Racecraft, Reproduction, and Whiteness in *Titus Andronicus*," *English Literary Renaissance* 52, no. 3 (2022): 330–42, which argues that "the process of race-making is also a structure of world-making; it is an *assemblage* and a scaffolding of power, a continuous process of invention that labors to depict itself as natural and naturalized" (330; emphasis mine).

17. The primary debate has considered whether the women gain power through their overconsumption and through their close relationship to the food market, or whether they are turned into commodities and consumables themselves. Within this critical discussion, there appears to be an agreement that 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. See, e.g., 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): 127–44; Shannon Miller, "Consuming Mothers/Consuming Merchants: The Carnavalesque Economy of Jacobean City Comedy," *Modern Language Studies* 26, no. 3 (1996): 73–97; Gail Kern Paster, "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy," *Renaissance Drama* 18, no. 1 (1987): 43–65; Sabine Schülting, "'What Is't You Lack?': Material Culture in Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*," *Litteraria Pragensia* 24, no. 47 (2014): 97–111.

of “the great merchant fortunes amassed by London’s civic elite,” fortunes that “increasingly depended on the exploitation of natural resources, on the power of credit that stoked trade far from Cheapside and its denizens.”<sup>18</sup> That *Triumphs* was also set and performed in the Cheapside district reinforces that this area was intimately tethered to London import endeavors. *Chaste Maid* takes this setting and dramatizes how reproductive labor fits into the new merchant-centered vision of the London economy.

Middleton’s play reveals how domestic and reproductive politics bleed into the consumerist and trading politics of the world outside. Much of the plot relies on the comedy generated from the intersection of these two phenomena. In perhaps the most cited and illustrative scene of the play, a Wench, who has recently delivered a baby, hides the newborn in a basket filled with meat during the Lenten season. She does this so that the Promoters (i.e., Lenten patrollers) will confiscate her basket and thus relieve her of the economic burden of caring for a child she cannot afford. The newborn, for a moment, is confused for a piece of meat, for a good that can be bought and sold at the market. Reproductive and mercantile domains lose their sharp distinction here: in turning the child into a consumable, the Wench saves herself from monetary ruin, but her surrender illustrates the ways in which the economics of childbearing are implicated with the market.

The market and the domestic/reproductive realm meet once again in one of the primary plots of the comedy—that of the Allwits and Sir Whorehound. Mr. Allwit, none too keen on involving himself with the labor of getting and paying for children, has invited Sir Whorehound to become the chief financial and seminal benefactor with the full consent of Mrs. Allwit.<sup>19</sup> Publicly, Mr. Allwit

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18. Karen Newman, “Goldsmith’s ware’: Equivalence in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2008): 113.

19. Mrs. Allwit’s level of consent or agency in this arrangement has been traditionally read as nonexistent. See, e.g., 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.” Schülting. “‘What Is’t You Lack?’” 103; Behre. “‘Look What Market She Hath Made,’” 134. While I agree that Mistress Allwit does not have the same level of autonomy as Sir 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*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn (New York: Palgrave, 2021), 117–40; 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.

claims the children as his own and operates as the children's father in situ, and Mrs. Allwit's late-stage pregnancy (shown at the beginning of the play) is from her sexual arrangement with Sir Whorehound. The offstage delivery of this child somewhere between acts 1 and 2 leads to an onstage baptism celebration. Mr. Allwit and Sir Whorehound ensure that the women attending the party are catered to with a fully stocked banquet as they spread rumors about their adult children's sexual escapades and potential marital arrangements. With seemingly limitless eating, drinking, and gossiping, it is a truly raucous scene—so raucous that Mr. Allwit is left to wonder if a wet spot on the cushions is wine or urine.

In the middle of the party, Mr. Allwit provides the audience with the banquet menu through complaint: "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 left nothing here but short wriggle-tail comfits, not worth mouthing" (3.2.69–72).<sup>20</sup> Mr. Allwit's description is tooth-rotting. Everything is coated in sugar and made of sugar. "Sweet-meats," "comfits," and "long plums" (more recognizable today as sugar plums) are all excessively sweet treats, candied nuts or dried fruits coated in a sugary mass. Sugary is not one palate of many here but the only one on offer. This is a proper early modern banquet, meaning a dinner course consisting of wine and sweets such as these.<sup>21</sup> Early modern sugar banquets, particularly those put on for a pregnant person's lying-in or a celebration for the infant's baptism, were meant to serve as extravagant evidence of a family's financial success. This was especially true for the emerging middle class. In the decades prior, sugar was a good reserved for the extremely wealthy, but by 1613, sugar was just beginning to become financially accessible for the middling sort, primarily through the collaboration between members of the Grocers' Guild and global sugar traders.<sup>22</sup> This steady decline in price and increase in marketability was made possible in large part by the growing enslaved labor force

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20. Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, ed. Alan Brissenden (London: A. and C. Black, 2002). All subsequent quotations are cited parenthetically. References are to act, scene, and line of this edition.

21. As Janelle Day Jenstead notes, Mr. Allwit's wine and sugar purchases for his wife are, in some respects, "standard cures for the rigors of childbirth." While "nourish[ing] the laboring mother," these goods "also fulfilled a 'ceremonial and social function,' being consumed by visiting gossips during the first week of lying-in." Jenstead reads this as Mr. Allwit's celebration of his own wealth in being able to put on such an elaborate banquet for his guests, but through, I would argue, the denigration of his wife in putting the consequences of these purchases on her rather than himself. Janelle Day Jenstead, "Lying-in Like a Countess: The Lisle Letters, the Cecil Family, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 390–91.

22. "Of particular importance [to the Grocers Guild] was the sale of sugar, the price of which fell through the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as New World supplies developed." Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, 25.

on Spanish- and Portuguese-held plantations on Atlantic islands and in the Americas.<sup>23</sup>

As Sidney W. Mintz argues, sugar in England had always been associated with the foreign or exotic. Before the sixteenth century, sugar was a luxury good trafficked primarily out of the Middle East or Mediterranean, particularly Sicily and North Africa, but also Atlantic islands such as São Tomé and Madeira.<sup>24</sup> By the sixteenth century, Madeira and São Tomé relied heavily on enslaved African labor, and the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in America were also exploiting the enslaved labor of African and Indigenous persons in order to meet the increase in global demand.<sup>25</sup> Again, *Triumphs*’ association of “sweetness” with the King and Queen of the Moors in Error’s epithet, “sweet-faced devils,” suggests that the sponsoring Grocers’ Guild and its customers were at least somewhat familiar with conflating their import foods with the lands and peoples that produced them. The gratuitous consumption of the grocers’ sugar in *Chaste Maid* rehearses the racial binary established in *Triumphs* of consumer and consumable, relocating it from the scene of the import’s arrival to the moment of the import’s domestic ingestion. The whiteness that comes forward in this relocation is more implicit and perhaps more dangerously racialized in its staging of the excessive consumption of a good that was nearly synonymous, by the seventeenth century, with land colonization and enslavement.

However, while the raw good of sugar was tethered to foreignness or non-whiteness, the refinement of sugar made it also serve as a symbol of England’s growing identification with whiteness. Historically, the most refined or whitest sugars were the most expensive; thus, the whiter your sugar, the higher your class status. Although England was not in the business of sugar production until the establishment of the sugar plantations in Barbados in 1627, the country had been in the business of sugar refinement since 1544. By 1585, London had positioned itself as a premiere sugar refiner for European trade.<sup>26</sup> *Chaste Maid* is thus set within a London that was in the business of making sugar a white good. As such,

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23. Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

24. Mintz estimates that sugar was in the wealthiest of English households by the thirteenth century, though it may have been in circulation as a luxury import even earlier.

25. Cedric Robinson argues that by the second half of the sixteenth century, the colonizing populace in Spanish and Portuguese American colonies was replacing Indigenous enslaved laborers (decimated by the genocidal colonization of the previous century) with West African enslaved laborers. The primary crop that encouraged this demand for trafficked and enslaved labor was sugar. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 125–26. For a thorough account of the history and geographies of this sugar production, see Mintz, “Production,” in *Sweetness and Power*, 19–37.

26. Mintz, “Production,” in *Sweetness and Power*, 45.

sugar operated as a visual symbol of whiteness (in its hyper-refinement) and as a practice of whiteness (in its consumption). Sugar banquets like that of Mrs. Allwit's were steeped in class and racial significance.

The primacy of sugar at the celebration integrates two crucial domains of England's seventeenth-century economy: transatlantic trade and domestic reproduction. Mrs. Allwit's banquet illustrates how the macro-forces of global trade can dictate the practice of the micro-domestic instance. Moreover, the overabundance of sugar featured in the specifically feminine, reproductive social space genders the act of sugar-eating. As Kim F. Hall notes, domestic sugar work was an early modern woman's creative domain. Hall argues that the proliferation of texts such as Hugh Plat's 1602 cookbook, *Delightes for Ladies*, which taught women how to preserve fruits and make sugar molds, was crucial in making sugar a staple of not only the middling, domestic space but also the London market more broadly. As Hall puts it, "when an English woman made a confection from a cookbook like Plat's, she implicitly helped foster watershed changes in England's economy."<sup>27</sup> Sugar work connected women to the racialization of sugar and sugar consumption, a racialization refined in and through London industry.<sup>28</sup>

Hall's argument about white women's sugar work is exemplary of recent scholarship that details how early modern British women participated in and contributed to the newly emergent category of *whiteness* through their cosmetic, culinary, artistic, and literary labor.<sup>29</sup> *Chaste Maid's* banquet scene, however, stresses a different, though just as insidious, way in which white women ritualized, normalized, and practiced whiteness such that it became a domestic norm—with their

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27. 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 Dymna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 169.

28. Hall writes, "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." Hall, "Culinary Spaces," 169.

29. Hall set the course for this work in the final chapter of *Things of Darkness*, where she argues for the importance of the early modern portraiture trend to paint white aristocratic women alongside Black enslaved people. She writes, "European women and African slaves are both objectified, but the slave becomes a sign of profitable difference and the promise of continually multiplying wealth and novelty that will fill her desires and complement her beauty." Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 244. For work on white women's literary racial work, see, e.g., Joyce Green Macdonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Hall, "The Daughters of Eve and the Children of Ham: Race and the English Woman Writer," in *Things of Darkness*, 177–210. For work on the cosmetic trend of whitening makeup (popularized by Queen Elizabeth), see, e.g., Kimberly Poitevin, "Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 58–89; and Josie Schoel, "Cosmetics, Whiteness, and Fashioning Early Modern Englishness," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 1–23.

seemingly passive, unlaborious, uncreative, and leisurely ingestion of a foreign good. As *Triumphs* makes clear, whiteness is not something one makes: the white people standing on the banks of the Thames during this pageant are simply granted their whiteness by their position in relation to the spectacles imported to and for them. Sugar’s place within the reproductive ritual of the post-birth banquet signals a moment where whiteness is not something one consciously puts on, creates, or even stages; rather, it signals a moment where the practices of whiteness become habit. *Chaste Maid* is not about how whiteness is invented but rather about how that whiteness is precariously “assembled” (to borrow from Little again) through the materials that accumulate in feminized spaces.

The habituation of this white consumption obfuscates the tenuousness of whiteness. In *Chaste Maid*, this habituation gathers force as it loses its association with moral goodness. The white women of *Chaste Maid* may have “white” sweet teeth, but their consumption of these comfits is not at all cleared from misogynistic vilification. In fact, the female diners are revolting to all the male characters onstage. Tim (the son of the local goldsmith, Yellowhammer) enters midway through the banquet and quickly vocalizes his aesthetic disdain for the women to his tutor-companion: “This woman has a villainous sweet breath, did she not stink of comfits; help me sweet tutor, or I shall rub my lips off” (3.2.184–86). Whereas the women have “villainous sweet breath” from their voracious eating of the banquet goods, Tim’s male tutor’s sweetness is dispositional. Women’s sugar-eating is thus incorporated into the misogyny of the everyday.

Crucially, this white femininity is not limited to the adult women onstage but extends to the female infant. This is particularly evident during the party when the child is passed around to the guests, inspiring comments about the infant’s likeness to her mother and presumed father, Mr. Allwit:

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 moulder’s mouth.

2 GOSSIP. The mother’s mouth up and down, up and down.

(3.2.12–16)

The Gossips’ insistence that the child is “so like the father” is filled with irony, since the audience knows that Mrs. Allwit’s husband is not biologically related to the child. The Second Gossip bases her assessment on the newborn’s “chopping” nature. “Chopping,” as an adjective, in the early modern period served as an “epithet of a fine healthy, strong child,” according to the *Oxford English*

*Dictionary*.<sup>30</sup> But the modifier “chopping,” made from the present participle of the verb “to chop,” could mean either to snap or take up quickly into the mouth, or, also, to speak quickly or swallow one’s words.<sup>31</sup> In this second sense, the child’s “chopping-ness” likens her to her mother, whose mouth is said to move “up and down, up and down.” The infant, then, mimics the women onstage who eat up all the sugary goods on the banquet table and gossip with each other. This “chopping” motion, however, is quite distinctive from Mr. Allwit’s spitting mouth (“[a]s if she had been spit out of his mouth”). Here, the father’s mouth is metaphorized as having authoritative, procreative powers; his spit (perhaps a euphemism for his semen) is the formative agent for the girl’s eyes, nose, and brows—“as like [the father] as a girl can be.”

In short, the Gossips’ reading of the infant’s m/paternity is based on the motions of several mouths. We have Mrs. Allwit’s and the Gossips’ consumptive and chatty mouths, the newborn’s mouth that imitates the women’s motions, and Mr. Allwit’s seminally spitting mouth. In this formulation, the father’s mouth produces something outside of his own body, authoring (most of) the features of the child. By contrast, the women’s mouths are notably unproductive and consumptive. The infant’s chopping mouth underscores this unproductivity: because she has just been born, her mouth forms no words and consumes none of the sugary provisions. Still, her “chopping” nature suggests that chatty consumerism is both a gendered and inheritable trait. The infant, in this way, is white through her mouthy feminization.

This inheritable trait is not limited to the oral mouth. The “mother’s mouth up and down, up and down” is also a sexual pun, with “mouth” as a euphemism for the vulva. In fact, this double entendre is repeated in the play. The Welsh Gentlewoman (a suitor for Tim) performs a love song that includes a very similar pun. Singing that Cupid’s “darts are so confounding, / That life and sense would soon decay, / But he that keeps their lips in play,” the Gentlewoman combines the sexual meaning of “to play” with the double entendre of the “lips,” which are to be “played” with (4.1.185–87). In the Gossips’ lines at the banquet, the sexual innuendo of the mother’s mouth does in fact extend to sexualize the infant. Mr. Allwit himself sexualizes his daughter when he first lays eyes on her in the previous act. Looking at the newborn’s fine clothing, he claims that she “looks as if she had two thousand pound to her portion / And run away with a tailor; a fine plump black eyed slut” (2.2.12–14). Mr. Allwit anticipates a future for his daughter in which she has sex and runs away with a tailor—a profession often associated with lechery—in

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30. *OED Online*, s.v. “chopping,” adj. 2.

31. According to the *OED*, the verb “to chop” could mean, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “to take into the chops and eat, to snap up,” and, simultaneously, to indicate a “hurried reading or speaking in which the words are ‘swallowed’ or bolted.” *OED Online*, s.v., “chopping,” v.3.

exchange for material gain (i.e., fine clothing).<sup>32</sup> These lines make clear that the child’s body is not just visibly like the mother in her chatty consumerism but also in her sexual lechery.

The double entendre of the mouth thus sets up a pervasive analogy between penetrative sex and oral ingestion. Within this dense web of punny associations, sexual reproduction becomes inherently consumptive, and vice versa. According to the Gossips, the newborn infant will, like her mother, be “consumptive” in the bedroom and the buffet. In what follows, I argue that something similar occurs with the phallus and the consumable object. In other words, if the women’s consumption of a given good is likened throughout *Chaste Maid* to penetration by a phallus, then the penetrating phallus is thus conceptually linked to the good in the act of consumption.

#### THE MATERNAL IMAGINATION AND THE REPRODUCTION OF WHITENESS

The conflation of the sexual and the consumptive is established even before the baptism celebration through Mr. Allwit’s description of his wife’s furnishings for her lying-in chamber in act 1:

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 wines by rundlets.  
(1.2.30–37)

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32. Brissenden notes the tailors’ reputation for lechery. Middleton. *Chaste Maid*, 32, 2.2.14n. Brissenden skips the gloss on “black-eyed slut” entirely, and most editions work to diminish the sexual implications of the word “slut” in its modern-day usage. Linda Woodbridge’s edition glosses this as a “girl (playful, not seriously implying sluttishness).” Thomas Middleton, *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, ed. Linda Woodbridge, in *Thomas Middleton: Collected Works*, 925, 2.2.14n. While this reading is certainly alive, the word “slut” also meant a “sexually promiscuous or lascivious woman,” according to the *OED*. Given the gossips’ 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 he does onto her mother. The Wet Nurse seems to corroborate Mr. Allwit’s impression of his “slutty” newborn when she calls her a “knocker” just a few lines later (2.2.26). *OED Online*, s.v., “slut,” n.

Mr. Allwit participates in textbook early modern misogyny: fat, lazy, and absorbent of all Sir Whorehound's assets, Mrs. Allwit's pregnant body is made into an effigy of feminized gross overconsumption. Mrs. Allwit, a middling-class pregnant woman, luxuriates in the birthing room goods that were, until very recently, reserved strictly for aristocratic women. Though the practice of lying-in was permitted to nearly all women in English society regardless of class, the nature of that lying-in—the privacy, goods, and rest time afforded to each woman—was dependent on that woman's class status. Janelle Day Jenstead writes that the provisions given to a woman during the lying-in period “registered status in numerous ways and became an opportunity to display one's status.”<sup>33</sup> This display of wealth became particularly important to the emergent middle class in seventeenth-century London as they tried to establish themselves as the *nouveau riche*.

However, as Mr. Allwit's comment—“[a] lady lies not in like her”—suggests, an aristocratic lady Mrs. Allwit is decidedly not. This line could be read in at least two ways. Mr. Allwit could imply that his wife's “grunting” and overindulgence indicate that, no matter how many high-class furnishings she accrues, she will never be able to “lie-in like a lady would.” On the other hand, Mr. Allwit could also mean that the foreign or exotic goods formerly reserved for the aristocracy (sugar, wine, drugs or “restoratives,” “embossings,” etc.) are now so integrated into middle-class ritual that they have lost their prestige as exclusively upper-class goods. Rather, they are now affordable for the merchant and middle classes whose consumptive habits have tarnished the exclusivity of these formerly expensive wares. Middleton in 1613 would have been particularly attuned to this shifting market relation, since many of these goods were the domain of the Grocers' Guild. In addition to the sale of sugar and spices, they were also involved in stocking apothecaries.<sup>34</sup> If we are to read *Triumphs* as a marketing campaign for the guild, as I have suggested, then the public availability of the street-based pageant symbolizes the increased availability of these goods to nonaristocratic or non-elite Londoners. In the pageant, the display of these goods performs a kind of fantasy erasure of class alongside the class-blind ascription of these Londoners' general whiteness encoded in the King's naming them “white people.” *Triumphs* suggests that if these goods are becoming available to most Londoners, then this whiteness, too, is becoming available to them. Mrs. Allwit's formerly aristocratic furnishings achieve something similar: if these goods are available to her, then white femininity and reproductivity are available to her as well.

This white reproductivity is figured as an eroticized relationship between Mrs. Allwit and her goods. As with the erotics of her mouth's “up and down” motion, Mrs. Allwit's consumerism is sexualized when her husband suggests she is

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33. Jenstead, “Lying-In Like a Countess,” 375.

34. Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, 26.

literally “in bed” with the market. His wife’s room is not only decorated with import wares; it is “as if” she is intimately involved with them (“As if she *lay with* all the gaudy shops / In Gresham’s Bourse about her”). Of course, “to lay with,” in its most direct sense, means “to lay beside or among,” but it also carries with it the meaning, very alive in the early modern period, of “to have sex with.” In other words, the *ménage à trois* of Whorehound and the two Allwits has brought in a fourth in “the gaudy shops / Of Gresham’s Bourse.” Although Mr. Allwit is already being willingly cuckolded by Whorehound and although his paternity has already been usurped, his speech proposes that there might be yet another paternal usurpation going on throughout Mrs. Allwit’s lying-in.

Again, the play suggests a sexual connotation of a good consumed. This misogynistic joke charges any object in a woman’s possession as evidence of her uncontrolled libido, and it insists, through this misogyny, on a London woman’s active role in the perpetuation of global consumerism and the racial implications that accompany those transactions. Gresham’s Bourse, or the Royal Exchange, served as the epicenter for England’s global commodity trade and linked international goods with the everyday London consumer. Considering this reference in light of the racial-mercantile logic set up in *Triumphs*, the Royal Exchange was perhaps *the* site where that racialization of British whiteness was most clearly, if passively, negotiated and put into practice within the London city limits. If British whiteness was emerging from this market relation, then Mrs. Allwit can be read as literally “in bed” with the manufacturer of that whiteness. The tenuous and sublimated nature of these racial implications is clear; these are precarious networks of associations that, in 1613, are just beginning to be worked out. But the assemblage of whiteness in *Chaste Maid* is a material assemblage of goods, and this nascent assemblage is becoming common through the familiarity of misogynistic cliché. As Katie Kadue argues regarding women’s association with flowers and decay in the early modern period, “part of what turns a commonplace into the more pejorative cliché is precisely its association with women.”<sup>35</sup> The “of course-ness” of misogynistic cliché domesticates this white femininity.

But the force of this joke is found not just in the absurd eroticization of Mrs. Allwit and her goods but also in the reproductive potential of an eroticization that, in turn, has implications for British and white reproductive futures. The notion that a mother’s gestating body was dangerously porous to external stimuli was all over early modern discourse about pregnancy and fetal development. A fetus’s features could be influenced by anything the mother consumed or wished to consume—whether that consumption be of edible, tactile, or even imaginary stuff. This phenomenon was variously called “maternal impression,” “maternal

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35. Katie Kadue, “Flower Girls and Garbage Women: Misogyny and Cliché in Ronsard and Herrick,” *Modern Philology* 118, no. 3 (2021): 321.

imagination,” or “maternal desire.” Maternal impression was often considered to be the source of “monstrous births,” a disastrous overhaul of patriarchal and moral authority, a supplanting of the masculine, informing seed with the whims of the unruly female mind (or mouth). As Marie H el ene Huet argues, “in an epistemology strictly defined by the laws of resemblance, it could be said that the monster is truly that which resembles *what is not* its father.”<sup>36</sup> Monstrous births, however, were evidence not just of the fragility of masculine paternal authority but also of the unfixedness of racial whiteness.

One of the most famous examples of the maternal racial imagination is rehearsed by the French surgeon Ambroise Par e in his 1575 *On Monsters and Marvels*. Par e writes about

a princess [who 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 the 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.<sup>37</sup>

Par e is citing Hippocrates, but narratives like this from a variety of sources were in circulation in early modern England, such as that from Heliodorus’s epic prose narrative, *Aethiopica*. In the Heliodoric tale, the skin tone of the mother and child are reversed from that of Par e’s. An Ethiopian princess, Chariclea, is born with white skin because her mother fixated on a picture of a white-bodied Andromeda and Perseus during the moment of conception.<sup>38</sup> In this story, sexual reproduction is once again associated with and influenced by a form of consumption—here, through the visual consumption of an artwork. In other words, this scene literalizes the substitution of the human phallus for the “ingested” object. No emie

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36. Marie H el ene Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 35; emphasis in the original. Lisa Walters likewise argues that such “monstrous births indicated that the womb and imagination could be conceived as hidden spaces outside of patriarchal society that could directly threaten the political body.” Lisa Walters, “Monstrous Births and Imaginations: Authorship and Folklore in Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 116. For the religious implications of this belief, see Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

37. Ambroise Par e, *On Monsters and Marvels*, ed. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 38–39.

38. Chariclea’s mother relates this story to her daughter: “I brought you to birth I found you white, a complexion alien to the native Ethiopian tint. I knew the reason for this: when I consorted with my husband I was looking at the picture which represented Andromeda just as Perseus had brought her down from the rock, and my offspring unhappily took on the complexion of that body.” Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Romance (The Aethiopica)*, trans. Moses Hadas (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 94.

Ndiaye contends that this narrative of maternal impression “push[ed] hereditary modes of thinking about skin tone to the foreground, [and] helped integrate blackness as a category into the early modern racial matrix.”<sup>39</sup> These iterations of the maternal imagination myth suggest that the paternity of the fetus could be usurped both at and beyond the moment of conception and that the misogynistic pun of the mouth/vulva existed within a network of associations that were intimately tethered to concerns of skin tone and racial difference.<sup>40</sup>

However, just as much as the white skin of the fetus-in-utero was susceptible to the influence of the visual consumption of artwork depicting a figure with a skin tone distinct from that of both the father and mother, so too was the fetus seen as influenced by the tactile or oral consumption of an edible good. In a proximity search of “mother” and “imagination” in the database Early English Books Online (EEBO), with results from 1576 to 1659, over a fourth of all results include a description of the kinds of markings a fetus could take on when a pregnant person encounters or desires certain foods.<sup>41</sup> For example, the seventeenth-century French astrologer, Jacques Gaffarel, describes a sister of his who “had the Figure of a Fish upon her Left Leg, caused by the desire [his] mother had to eat Fish, when she was Great,” much like a friend who “had a Mulberry growing upon his Forehead; caused likewise by his Mothers Longing after them.”<sup>42</sup> Even if the mother only had skin contact with an object, a child might have such a mark at the same point on their body. Sir Kenelm Digby describes a woman who was surprised by a mulberry fallen upon her breast, which sent “small grains or atomes of the fruit . . . and then to the same place upon his skin.”<sup>43</sup> In these stories, the consumption and reproductive potential of a good is broadly conceived—from oral or visual ingestion to tactile contact with a desiring force.

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39. Noémie Ndaiye, “‘Everyone Breeds in His Own Image’: Staging the *Aethiopica* across the Channel,” *Renaissance Drama* 44, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 158–59.

40. Paré’s solution to the issue of maternal imagination makes explicit the importance of being selective with the materials placed around a pregnant person’s bedroom. Paré writes that “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.” Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, 39–40.

41. This search was based on a proximity within three words (“mother” NEAR/3 “imagination”), which generated twenty-five unique hits that were expressly about this phenomenon (six of which were racial in nature). (Note that this tally excludes sources that involved, frequently, the colloquial phrase “the mother of imagination,” which is distinct from this medical belief.) The sources that cite the “monstrosity” of incongruous skin tones between parents and child span from the 1576 (the earliest source) to 1658 (one of the latest). Of these twenty-five unique items, six are related to food.

42. Jacques Gaffarel, *Vnheard-of Curiosities* (London: 1650), 143; accessed via Early English Books Online (EEBO).

43. Sir Kenelm Digby, *Touching the Cure of Wounds by the Powder of Sympathy* (London, 1658), 97–98.

While most scholarship on the early modern maternal impression focuses on the monstrous anomaly, what these sources reveal is a parallel, more quotidian belief that the materials at a mother's disposal could inform the features of the fetus in less-than-monstrous ways. Under this theory, it is hard to imagine that any object in the early modern mother's bedroom would not have the capacity to capture the maternal mind, press upon the mother's skin, and disrupt "right" fetal development. The meeting point between the reproductive female body and the visual or edible consumable offered a rich imaginative space wherein mercantile British whiteness could inform visions of white reproductive futures. Just as the consumable had the capacity to inform the fetus and the mother, so too did foreign goods always have the capacity to "transform the English humoral makeup," as Shahani puts it, "and by extension, English ethnicity itself" such that "routine acts of consumption necessarily revealed the vulnerability of the body to the other."<sup>44</sup> As many scholars have noted, what these parallel anxieties reveal is how whiteness comes to be formulated through its precarious relations with non-whiteness.<sup>45</sup> The white consumer is always in danger of being "informed" when in contact with the foreign import; the white mother is always in danger of reproducing "non-whiteness" through her consumption, however variously that consumption manifests. Mrs. Allwit's and her daughter's precarious and dangerous ingestion of the "non-white" object paradoxically reveals their whiteness; their susceptibility to these goods is racial.

While there is no specific mention of maternal impression in *Chaste Maid*, the international goods available for Mrs. Allwit's consumption evoke the racial, maternal, and consumable paradigms at the heart of anxieties around maternal impression and import goods. In short, these goods are not reproductively or racially neutral. This is not to say that Middleton intended to evoke maternal impression or even to negotiate white femininity in the staging of this birthing room scene. Rather, I argue that this scene is embedded within a host of misogynistic and racial clichés that converge on Mrs. Allwit's laboring body. Through that alchemy, we can see how fictions of race emerge as a conglomeration of associative fictions. These fictions cohere through the force of an expanding global economy and

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44. Shahani, *Tasting Difference*, 16.

45. The scholarship on the precarity of the category whiteness is extensive. See Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), which argues that "white as a skin colour is just as unstable, unbounded a category as white as a hue, and therein lies its strength. It enables whiteness to be presented as an apparently attainable, flexible, varied category, while setting up an always moveable criterion of inclusion" (57). See also, Arthur Little, "Re-Historicizing Race: White Melancholia and Shakespearean Property," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 84–103; "whiteness seems to be a property that's at once immanent, intimate, and out of reach. It's a self-fashioning . . . that may make use of the Other" (92).

come home, or take root, in *Chaste Maid* in the figure of the white gestating woman. The fabricated nature of these racial and gendered fictions is alive already in the language Mr. Allwit uses to describe his wife's lying-in chamber. Though we can assume that the spectacle of Mrs. Allwit surrounded by the goods from Gresham's Bourse is not a pure fiction, it is still "as if she lay with all the gaudy shops." This "as if" puts the assumed facts of Mrs. Allwit's material conditions into the realm of supposition, into the domain of Mr. Allwit's own pseudo-paternal imagination. Mr. Allwit's suggestive "as if" opens the door for the kind of fictionalizing work that, in large part, determined the early modern British conceptualization of whiteness and femininity.

Citing Michel de Certeau, Jean Howard writes that early modern English plays "helped to transform specific places into significant social spaces, that is, into environments marked by the actions, movements, and daily practices of its inhabitants."<sup>46</sup> This "highly ideological process" worked to "construct and interpret the city."<sup>47</sup> I take Howard's claim one step further and argue that city comedies transcribed these marked environments into dynamic spaces where a domesticated whiteness could emerge through the convergence of multiple idioms, clichés, and anxieties. This convergence or scaffolding at once shores up whiteness within a confusing multiplicity and reveals the tenuous "logics" upon which that racial whiteness rests. *Triumphs* presents the terms of whiteness in an idealized, symbolic moment; *Chaste Maid* particularizes and complicates that whiteness by making it into a practice, a relation between a body and its stuff. *Chaste Maid*'s performance of a material interaction nested inside a maternal ritual enables the emergence of a habitus of white femininity that is largely non-semantic. Instead, it charges the quotidian domestic space with subliminal racial meaning and transforms the spectacle of "white people" into the acts and traditions of the everyday.

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46. Howard, *Theater of a City*, 3.

47. Howard, *Theater of a City*, 3.