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‘Look What Market She Hath Made’: Women, Commerce, and Power in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Bartholomew Fair*

*This essay examines the effects of women’s roles in early modern English food marketplaces, highlighting ways that ordinary women could use their participation in food transactions to destabilize (and even subvert) power structures and garner authority. In Thomas Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) and Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), food informs a complete understanding of early modern attitudes toward shifting gender roles in the ever-evolving and expanding food economy.*

While seventeenth-century recipe books and conduct manuals enjoined the English woman to gather and grow food in her ‘owne yard’¹ as much as possible, practical realities of population and shifting food economies necessitated her participation in proliferating food markets. This tension between feminine behavioural ideals and practical reality meant that the early modern English woman’s participation in these markets required a complex performance that largely took place outside of the dominant discourse, lurking in what James C. Scott calls the ‘hidden transcript’.² We can discern the stories of these women in the reflections inscribed in the public transcripts of popular literary works: both Thomas Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613) and Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) are rich with the depiction of early modern eating and preoccupied with the ownership, control, and consumption of food. In the context of expanding and distrusted food markets, the wench in *Chaste Maid* plots to unload her baby, and Ursula unapologetically prevails in her pig and ale booth as the city dwellers wrestle with the temptations of the fair. Both the Cheapside district and Bartholomew Fair were major sites of food exchange in London, and both plays reflect the changing food culture engendered by the burgeoning market economy in 1613–14 London. In this essay, I will examine the effects of women’s roles in these food marketplaces, highlighting ways that ordinary women could use

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their participation in food transactions to destabilize (and even subvert) power structures and garner authority. In so doing, they exacerbated a potent anxiety about the control and negotiability of women's bodies. Through the lens of anxiety and repulsion inscribed in the public transcript, we are able to see a hidden transcript in which women might choose to trade the privileges of sexual desirability for something even more powerful: agency in the economy of London's food markets.

Literary texts written by men, especially those that depict the problematic culture in which they were written, can help scholars understand the veiled contexts and reflections of women's stories. As Scott observes, the discrepancies between 'hidden transcripts' and 'public transcripts' can be particularly revelatory of subordination and domination:

In ideological terms the public transcript will typically, by its accommodationist tone, provide convincing evidence for the hegemony of dominant values, for the hegemony of dominant discourse. It is in precisely this public domain where the effects of power relations are most manifest, and any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination.³

Laurie A. Finke argues that researchers attuned to both public and hidden transcripts in literary works 'may be able to reconstruct some of the rich interplay between the public and hidden performances that describes the relations between men and women'.⁴

Scenes focused on the consumption of food in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Bartholomew Fair* have received fairly limited critical attention: David Bevington, in the Norton introduction to *Chaste Maid*, even goes so far as to argue that the two major food scenes (the promoters and the christening) are 'gratuitous' and 'extraneous to a tightly managed plot', representing simply 'a wonderful vignette of London life of the time'.⁵ Critical orthodoxy treats *Bartholomew Fair* similarly: arguments centre on locating a protagonist and the most important elements of the story. Richard Levin argues that the disintegration of parties and rearrangement of relationships constitute the centre of the action and that the fair and its denizens function as a static background on which the visitors act.⁶ By sparing these scenes careful attention, however, critics and scholars miss a significant opportunity to gain insight into the plays' female characters and the meaningful social context in which they acted. As Scott asserts, 'By assessing the discrepancy between the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge

the impact of domination on public discourse'.⁷ These scenes provide a tableau on which to do just that.

Food is different from other forms of property because of its placement in the hierarchy of human needs as well as its perishability. These factors amplified the early modern household's dependence on markets and other reliable structures of distribution. And, because of their domestic roles — household management, food preparation, and hospitality functions — early modern women had considerable access to food as a type of property. This access was complicated by the behavioural ideals espoused in recipe books and conduct manuals printed in London during this time period. Gervase Markham's *The English Housewife*, originally published in 1615, encourages women to eat modestly from their own gardens and not to acquire foods from the market or any unfamiliar or foreign sources:

'Of her diet.' Let her dyet be wholesome and cleanly, prepared at due howers, and Cookt with care and diligence, let it be rather to satisfie nature then our affections, and apter to kill hunger then reuiue new appetites, let it proceed more from the prouision of her owne yard, then the furniture of the markets; and let it be rather esteemed for the familiar acquaintance she hath with it, then for the strangenesse and raritie it bringeth from other Countries.⁸

This advice that women focus on their ability to grow and harvest food from their own yards and place higher value in local, familiar foods was consistent with sermons and handbooks that advised women to 'keep to their homes, and away from the market'.⁹ Juan Luis Vives's manual *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* even goes so far as to attribute the rule to both Aristotle and Seneca, preaching 'Hit is becommynge for married women to go lesse abroad than maydes, because they have that whiche the maydes shulde seme to seke ... as for for the abroad, neither knowe you, nor be you knowen'.¹⁰ At the same time, however, even Vives acknowledges the necessity of women going to the market, whether to make a living or to buy goods for their households, and thus sets forth a list of behavioural rules intended to control young women in the market: 'if younge women must nedes do this, let them be curteise without flatterynge words, and shamfast without presumtion, and rather take losse in theyr marchaundise, than in theyr honesty'.¹¹ This warning that women in the marketplace take losses rather than have their propriety questioned by shrewdness or bargaining hints that the cultural discomfort with women inside the marketplace ran especially deep.¹²

But, as David Underdown suggests, the expanding market economy simultaneously granted women an increased sense of independence even as it brought them under scrutiny: 'The preoccupation with scolding women during the century 1560–1660 can therefore be seen as a by-product of the social and economic transformation that was occurring in England during that period — of the decline in the habits of good neighbourhood and social harmony that accompanied the spread of capitalism'.¹³ David Pennington underscores this paradox as well, suggesting that though popular printed materials of this time period promoted a very rigid social order, that order seemed 'troublingly out of reach'.¹⁴ Together, these factors engendered a uniquely charged role for the innumerable women who, by necessity or choice, headed to the markets daily.

Food economies were also shifting at this time: F.J. Fisher observes that the authorities' perpetual concern for London's food supplies caused hyper-awareness of the market system that grew, gathered, and exchanged foodstuffs.¹⁵ As a result of the city's growth and increased demand, 'the production of fruit, hops, and vegetables rose from the position of insignificant and neglected branches of general farming almost to the status of independent industries'.¹⁶ In 1615, Cheapside and other markets (Newgate Market, Leadenhall, and Gracechurch Street) were so overwhelmed by food-trade business that Smithfield was discussed as a necessary alternative common marketplace.¹⁷ Fisher argues that by the early seventeenth century, 'there was a general feeling that the city's appetite was developing more quickly than the country's ability to satisfy it'.¹⁸ Alan Everitt corroborates that the increase in scale of market operations constituted a major 'marketing problem' for the expanding economy.¹⁹ The growing markets, then, can be understood as both deeply threatening to the English way of life and entirely necessary to maintaining it.

The hyper-local ideal expressed by Markham and others was unrealistic in other ways too. Natasha Korda points out that Markham's very book was based on recipes that utilized costly and exotic ingredients (available to the early modern English woman only through market outlets),²⁰ while Amy Louise Erickson reveals that the injunction for women to stay indoors was unachievable given that they were expected to leave the house for regular visits to the market in order to uphold basic household responsibilities.²¹ John Norden observed in 1594 that the wives of husbandmen commonly went to the market several times per week to sell such items as 'mylke, butter, cheese, apples, peares, frumentye, hens, chyckens, egges, baken, and a thousand other country drugges, which good huswifes can frame and find to gett a penny'.²² And Pennington goes further, pointing out that while many women were in the market simply to sell household excesses,

many more engaged in the market through practices unconnected to domesticity, driven by profits more than household diligence.²³ In the juxtaposition of these conflicting public transcripts and the plays that depict women's participation in food markets, then, lies an additional opportunity to understand women's active lives in the food economy of London. The hidden transcript herein reveals the women as increasingly empowered agents in those markets and exposes the resulting cultural anxiety regarding their participation. The plays that I examine below make manifest the contradiction between behavioural ideals and the reality of expanding markets.

The audience of Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* would have been sharply aware of a myriad of implied threats to Englishness and family life as a character identified simply as 'the wench' uses the market to her own advantage, plotting to outwit two corrupt city officials. The play highlights the widespread appetite for and consumption of meat, forbidden by law during the Lenten season in which the play is set. Cheapside was the chief commercial street in the heart of Old London, containing hundreds of shops and trading plots; its side streets and lanes, including Bread Street, Milk Street, Honey Lane, and Friday Street (for the fishmongers), were named after the items sold there.²⁴ The wench, who has recently given birth to an illegitimate child fathered by Touchwood Sr, represents the negative exemplum of the ideal English housewife — she is the quintessential woman in the market transgressing conduct dictates to her own advantage. She cleverly engages the city officials, known as 'promoters', in a food transaction in order to rid herself of evidence that marks her as a sexually dishonest woman.²⁵ She sets out to fool the promoters, packing the child at the bottom of a basket of meat (purchased with the money Touchwood begrudgingly gave her) and covering the basket only partially. When confronted, she argues that the meat she carries was ordered by a doctor for 'a wealthy gentlewoman that takes physic' (2.2.164–6), counting on the fact that the promoters will not accept such an excuse from someone who has not lined their pockets.²⁶ She thus cleverly tricks the promoters into confiscating her basket, taking advantage of her market savvy and the promoters' lack of suspicion of her.

Indeed, the men are fooled easily. After gleefully sending her away, they unpack the large quantity of meat: 'a good fat loin of mutton', the fairly common, strongly flavored meat of an adult sheep;²⁷ 'a quarter of lamb', the more tender, fatty meat of a younger sheep; and 'a shoulder of mutton' (180–3). While juggling these large pieces of meat, the characters note that the basket is still heavy and eagerly begin to guess at what it might contain:

SECOND PROMOTER Some loin of veal?

FIRST PROMOTER No, faith, here's a lamb's head; I feel that plainly. (189–90)

The promoters become more ambitious with their expectations for the remaining meat, first hoping for veal, which was appreciated in England as early as the fifteenth century.²⁸ When the first promoter reaches into the basket with his hand, he mistakenly declares the 'meat' to be a lamb's head, an even more rare delicacy that was cooked and used as the adorned centerpiece for a feast.²⁹ The irony mounts as the promoters continue to unload the basket:

SECOND PROMOTER Ha?

FIRST PROMOTER 'Swounds, what's here?

SECOND PROMOTER A child.

FIRST PROMOTER A pox of all dissembling cunning whores.

SECOND PROMOTER Here's an unlucky breakfast. (191–5)

That is, instead of veal or a lamb's head, they procure the wench's illegitimate child. The promoters stumble over their assumption that all the basket's contents are consumable with their 'unlucky breakfast' characterization. As they begin to understand that they have been tricked, their attention quickly turns to their assumed responsibility for the child's bodily needs and the fact that they must now use their wages and graft for sugar-sops, nurses' wages, soap, and candles (199–204). In his exasperation, the second promoter exclaims, 'Nothing mads me but this was a lamb's head with you; you felt it! She has made calves' heads of us' (205–6). Culinarily, calves' heads were one of the less-desirable forms of meat, salvaged either as the basis for head cheese or mock turtle soup (a popular Scottish dish).³⁰

A powerful food metaphor dominates this scene. At the top of the basket, the 'mutton', an early modern slang word for prostitute, represents the wench. The promoters' misinterpretation of the downy head in the basket metaphorically connects the child, or 'lamb', to his 'mutton' mother — who is, by now, quite free of her burden. The second promoter expresses outrage that the woman has made 'calves' heads', or fools, out of them by transferring her metaphorical lamb — the evidence of her status as mutton — to the promoters. In doing so, the wench has transferred her own status as meat onto the promoters; thus the second promoter's acknowledgement completes the wench's plot. In this scene, Middleton captures his audience's attention with the dynamics of food control. The scene depicts a woman of small means and little power using her shrewdness in handling food

to advance her own position and thwart the corrupt system of the promoters. The woman, to the audience's delight, escapes without consequence, while the loathed promoters learn a lesson about the yields of their greed. The scene reveals the promoters' actual regulatory power but then encourages audience members to celebrate the subversion of that power. The humour reveals the cultural impossibility of the manuals' dictates as well as an undercurrent of anxiety about the power women wield in the marketplace.

Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* depicts an even more flagrant subversion of established social and economic mores regarding women's behaviour at food markets. The premise of the primary plot is that a group of Londoners travel to the fair to partake of roasted pig's flesh, for which Win, who is pregnant, supposedly longs. The original desire for the meat served at Bartholomew Fair belongs not to Win, however, but to her husband John Littlewit, who persuades his wife to express a craving for the meat because he himself longs to eat roasted pigs' flesh and see the performance of a play he has written. Ursula, a prominent vendor of roast pig and ale at Bartholomew Fair, profits directly from the commercial arrangement of the marketplace. She maintains a position of leadership and power at the fair, runs her booth and sets unfair prices based on her whims, and serves as the central meeting place for the fair's vagrants and visitors. Additionally, she makes no pretence of being an honest merchant or any apology for being dishonest. She coaches her terrified employee, Mooncalf, to pad her profits for her beer and bottle ale: 'I ha' told you the ways how to raise it: froth your cans well i'the filling, at length, rouge, and jog your bottles o' the buttock, sirrah, then skink out the first glass, ever and drink with all companies, though you be sure to be drunk; you'll misreckon the better and be less ashamed on't' (2.2.97–104).³¹ She then outlines her variable pricing structure for roast pig: 'Five shillings a pig is my price, at least; if it be a sow-pig, sixpence more; if she be a great-bellied wife, and long for't, sixpence more for that' (113–15). Ursula charges a standard price of five shillings per pig; for pigs that have had a litter of piglets, she charges sixpence more; and if the *customer* is pregnant and has a longing for pig's flesh, she charges yet an additional sixpence. In so doing, she claims an additional profit of 10% for the involvement of female reproduction in the transaction, whether by her pig or her customer. In the case that both pig and customer are involved in procreation, that 10% markup becomes 20%. Ursula's commercial domain exists outside of the conventional patriarchal power structures that attempt to regulate the play's other women; in her booth and at the market, Ursula reigns supreme.

The habitual characterization of women as food diminishes their successful subversions in both plays. The language is steeped in the notion of women's

bodies as the property of their husbands and families. With the notable exception of the scenes in which women deal directly with actual food, the plays repeatedly evoke an ideological collapse of the women and the food they elsewhere handle so adeptly. The image of the play's women as consumed, or at least consumable, strengthens as the husbands and other male characters continually refer to them as food. In an aside in act 1, scene 1, of Middleton's *Chaste Maid*, Touchwood Jr refers first to the Welsh Gentlewoman as Sir Walter's 'ewe mutton' and then to Moll in terms of meat: 'I must hasten it, or else peak o' famine; her blood's mine, and that's the surest' (150–4). He continues, to Moll, 'Turn not to me till thou mayst lawfully; it but whets my stomach' (156–7). Maudlin's greeting to Sir Walter invites him to 'draw near and taste the welcome of the city' (165–6) by kissing her. Touchwood Sr builds on this imagery when he offers to provide his wench's sister a husband to replace the marriage he has destroyed with his sexual bouts: 'I'll tender her a husband. I keep of purpose two or three gulls in pickle to eat such mutton with, and she shall choose one' (2.1.75–6, 81–3). Touchwood suggests that he has birds preserved and stored in brine that will make the 'mutton' more palatable. The woman who is no longer sexually desired (and who cannot be financially supported) by Touchwood Sr is metaphorically disposed into his belly.

This woman-as-meat model appears elsewhere in *Chaste Maid* as well. Allwit has, for four years, encouraged another man to meet the sexual needs of his wife and the financial needs of his family. Out of gratitude that Sir Walter bears the brunt of worry and responsibility for Mistress Allwit's sexual fidelity, he asks, 'what affliction nature more constrains / Than feed the wife plump for another's veins' (1.2.47–8). Allwit expresses gratitude that he is in charge neither of his wife's satisfaction nor of her sexual fidelity, and his language indicates that he is merely plumping and caring for an animal that he will feed to another man. Later, Allwit indicates to Yellowhammer, while disguised, that he is glad to make his living by selling his wife, just as meat peddlers make their living by selling meat: 'as other trades thrive — butchers by selling flesh, poulters by venting conies, or the like' (4.1.236–8). Rather than seeing himself as a cuckold, Allwit prefers to think of his wife as the valuable animal commodity by which he makes his comfortable living.

Despite the traction of this motif in the bulk of the play, *Chaste Maid*'s two scenes that centrally feature food actually subvert the women-as-meat motif. As Master Allwit disgustedly watches the puritans and gossips celebrate Mistress Allwit's daughter's christening, he characterizes their eagerness as greed: 'Now we shall have such pocketing!' (3.2.60–2). Allwit marvels at the women's lack of

inhibition with the costly sweet foods set out for the christening banquet, noting a woman who has placed three sweets in her mouth at one time and becoming upset that others have picked all of the sugar-plums³² out of the pudding. Allwit's robust agitation forces him to yell after the women as they leave: 'You had more need to sleep than eat! Go take a nap with some of the brethren, go, and rise up a well edified, boldified sister! ... How hot they have made the room with their thick bums!' (211–13). Allwit's discomfort with the gossips' appetites and 'pocketing' indicates the extent to which publicly eating, rather than posturing as objects to be consumed, is threatening behaviour for women.

In the scene with the wench and the promoters, of course, the ownership of the meat (and the baby) — and thus the wench's status as meat — shifts to the promoters. The promoters believe they are in control of the confiscated food, exclaiming 'look what market she hath made' (2.2.159), but in fact the wench has orchestrated the entire transaction to the benefit of her own sexual behaviour and the disadvantage of the corrupt officials. Such a transaction could never have happened outside of the context of the market; indeed, it is the wench's agency, comfort, and sophistication in the market that enable her to best the officials. Considering the fast growth of the markets and the increasing role women played in them, such a situation would have been unimaginable even a few years prior. In both of these food scenes, then, in contrast to the rest of *Chaste Maid*, the women manoeuvre the available food whilst the men scramble to understand what is happening.

Like *Chaste Maid*, *Bartholomew Fair* reflects the tension between conduct dictates and the necessity of the market with descriptions of its female characters in terms of food. Winwife's description of Win in act 1, scene 2 focuses on her features as edible fruits, conflating female desirability with consumability: 'a wife here with a strawberry breath, cherry lips, apricot cheeks, and a soft velvet head like a melocoton' (13–15).³³ He goes on to kiss her against her will, but with her husband's permission, as though she is being offered, hospitably, as a refreshment. As with other instances of women being compared to food, this suggests a view of women's bodies as consumed or consumable property.

At the fair, Win's public presence blurs the boundaries between woman as *consumer* and woman as *consumed*. Immediately upon Win's arrival, Whit insinuates similarity between her body and the meat being sold: 'A delicate show-pig, little mistress, with shweet sauce, and crackling like de bay leaf I'de fire, la! Tou shalt ha' de clean side o'de tableclot' (3.2.65–8). While overtly he is trying to sell Ursula's pig, his description obscures Win's position with relation to the sauce and the tablecloth, suggesting that she is fit to be served *as* the meal. Win goes on

to encounter yet more depictions as food as she ventures deeper into the public sphere and mercantile food economy. From act 1 to act 3, Win metaphorically progresses from fruit to roasted pig as she submits to Winwife's unwanted sexual advances and her husband's (and clergyman's) appetites. When she agrees to be dressed like a prostitute, Knockem and Whit overtly market her flesh as 'fowl'. Like the women in *Chaste Maid*, Win is readily characterized in the play as *both* consumer *and* consumable; here, her consumability is showcased in a misproportioned depiction of the sexual market's demand for her body. Casting women as consumable property mollifies discomfort with the independence these women increasingly exercised in food markets while simultaneously acknowledging the possibility that they might claim such agency over their own bodies for personal and financial gain — ie, sexual freedom and even prostitution.

Most of the play's other characters see Ursula as abhorrent and thus exempt from the embarrassment that the other women like Win express over their bodily functions.³⁴ Ursula unashamedly admits to being 'all fire and fat' and worries that she 'shall e'en melt away to the first woman, a rib' (2.2.52–3). She scolds Mooncalf for failing to enlarge her chair to accommodate her hips: 'Did I not bid you should get this chair let out o'the sides for me, that my hips might play?' (66–8). Her acknowledgment of her body size and insistence that her hips must have room to 'play' does not affect her appetite for ale, as she immediately demands a refill of the tankard she began drinking in line 72–3: 'Fill again, you unlucky vermin' (78).³⁵ Ursula intentionally embodies the distaste with which her trade was regarded: the nuisance and filth created by London's 'pig problem' contributed one of the most common offences recorded in court records during the seventeenth century.³⁶

Where Win cannot escape her own repeated characterization as food, Ursula manages to evade such characterization, as her critics struggle to fit her into the model imposed on the play's other women. Knockem acknowledges her as animal-like, endearingly referring to her as 'my little, lean Ursula, my she-bear' (2.3.1, playing on the meaning of her name). Later in the scene, he threatens her by comparing her with a horse: 'I'll ha' this belly o'thine taken up and thy grass scoured, wench' (58–9). Unlike fruits, pigs, and poultry, though, neither horses nor bears were eaten in England except as a very last resort in times of dire scarcity.³⁷ Quarlous and Winwife join Knockem to verbally abuse Ursula quite brutally as they each struggle to successfully compare her to food:

QUARLOUS Body o'the fair! What's this? Mother o'the bawds?

KNOCKEM No, she's mother o'the pigs, sir, mother o' the pigs.

WINWIFE Mother o'the Furies, I think, by her firebrand.

QUARLOUS Nay, she is too fat to be a Fury; sure some walking sow of tallow.³⁸

She drinks this while.

WINWIFE An inspired vessel of kitchen-stuff!

QUARLOUS She'll make excellent gear for the coach-makers, here in
Smithfield, to anoint wheels and axletrees with. (2.5.72–9)

Ursula's tormenters move quickly through a litany of insults, seemingly unsatisfied with the terms available to them. They end by comparing her to a vat of kitchen grease, and then simply to grease fit for use by the coach-makers. Of course, none of these comparisons succeeds in affecting Ursula's demeanour; note the placid stage direction above: '*She drinks this while*'. The men's rapid progression from inedible being (bear, horse, bawd), to edible female pig (sow, which may also refer either to congealed iron or a channel for water), to mythological scourge (fury) to edible material (kitchen grease) before finally settling on a related-but-inedible material (wagon lubricant grease) indicates their inability to satisfactorily compare Ursula to something fit for their own consumption.³⁹ Ursula does not fit the play's model of a consumable, sexually desirable woman.

Like the gossips and the wench in *Chaste Maid*, Ursula subverts the women-as-food device applied to most of the plays' other women. But unlike their quiet rebellions, she celebrates her subversion without shame or apology. Even more infuriating for her tormentors, though, is that Ursula seems to reject the desirability that would shame her into seeking their approval. She responds to their taunts with commensurate brutality, defending her own size and corpulent body composition while mocking the men's preference for thinness (2.5.81–5). Quarulous's retort explicitly criticizes Ursula's unattractiveness sexually — he argues that the man that would venture to have sex with her 'might sink into her and be drowned a week ere any friend he had could find where he were' (93–4).⁴⁰ His description is significant because instead of metaphorically consuming Ursula's flesh, the would-be brave man unwittingly becomes the devoured; he disappears into Ursula's monstrous body and becomes a part of it 'like falling into a whole shire of butter' (97).⁴¹ While the play deftly compares the other female characters with food as if to allay anxiety about women's increasing roles in public markets, and while the audience is positioned to cheer the wench in *Chaste Maid* as she outmanoeuvres her status as meat, *Bartholomew Fair* presents Ursula as monstrous,

the ridiculous counter-balance to the position occupied by the play's puritan minister. Only when we examine this monstrosity in relationship to the rest of the women and in the context of these food markets do we see the power she wields. The women-as-food device systematically diminishes the power and personhood of most of the female characters, but in her unwillingness to be made palatable, Ursula firmly maintains hers.

When Quarlous and Winwife overturn Ursula's scalding pan on her legs in their physical fight, their antics can be read as an unsuccessful attempt to cook her. But upon hearing her cries, Joan Trash, Mooncalf, Knockem, Nightingale, Edgeworth, and even Justice Overdo rush immediately to Ursula's aid. Knockem, who had, for a time, participated in Quarlous and Winwife's taunts, comforts her: 'Patience, Urs. Take a good heart; 'tis but a blister as big as a windgall. I'll take it away with the white of an egg, a little honey, and hog's grease, ha' thy pasterns well rolled, and thou shalt pace again by tomorrow. I'll tend thy booth and look to thy affairs the while. Thou shalt sit i'thy chair, and give directions, and shine Ursa Major' (2.5.182–7).⁴² The other characters bustle around her, tending to her needs, gathering ingredients and preparing a salve for her wound, taking over the function of her booth, and fantasizing about avenging her tormenters by cutting their purses. This scene reveals Ursula's impressive stature within the social structure of the fair: she wields power and commands respect. Ursula's mastery of the market and refusal to enact the shameful projected onto her body elevate her beyond property — somewhere near equal to the status of a man. She is thus not only the object of loathing and anxiety, but also an agent of power.

Because of her bulging flesh, Ursula represents 'an emblem of excess and immorality'⁴³ within the play. In a lecture to Knockem, Busy warns that 'the fleshly woman which you call Ursula is above all to be avoided, having the marks upon her of the three enemies of man: the world, as being in the fair; the devil, as being in the fire; and the flesh, as being herself' (3.6.32–5).⁴⁴ Since women's reproductive capacity was viewed as opposite to the male mind, spirit, or rational capacity, Maurizio Calbi points out that in the early modern sex-gender system, 'women do not simply *have* a body. They *are* the body ... the female body always-already bears the mark of monstrosity'.⁴⁵ If women are their bodies, Ursula is larger and more unapologetically and monstrously female than the play's other women. When Justice Overdo exclaims of Ursula, 'Oh, the sow of *enormity*, this!' (5.6.61–2, emphasis added), he describes her dangerousness with the word he has used to describe all of the fair's transgressions.⁴⁶ That is, the transgressions of the fair are the transgressions of Ursula's body, representing the perceived danger to society inherent in women being allowed to run rampant in the market.

As we have seen, the depiction of women as consumable in *Bartholomew Fair* goes hand in hand with their characterization as sexually desirable beings. In acquiescing to her husband and Knockem, Win metaphorically and then very literally allows her flesh to be put to sale. Ursula, by contrast, embraces her own *undesirability*, escaping this characterization. She enjoys mercantile success as customers and fellow merchants pack into her booth to exalt her roast pig and ale. In these food transactions, Ursula transfers ownership but maintains control. Haslem argues that any triumph of the female grotesque that Jonson accomplishes with Ursula is negated by the depiction of the other women's 'several bodily purgations as gestures of shame rather than triumph'.⁴⁷ But while Ursula's success and power are certainly not celebrated, her acceptance of her own 'enormity' and her willingness to be sexually undesirable, though not free of social repercussions, expose a crack in the patriarchal power structure and cultural anxiety about women's power. Ursula, with her unacceptable body and lack of shame, has discovered and occupied this space. More broadly, a play about a powerful character like Ursula within the carnival context of *Bartholomew Fair* might carry just enough credibility to be dangerous. The temporary license of the carnival-within-a-play, then, can be read as a microcosm of the puritan argument against theatre itself; if a performative work can evoke a situation to make credible such a phenomenon as a woman who operates outside patriarchal power structures, then that woman becomes a possibility within the collective cultural imagination. This positioning thus reveals an emerging social space for women who were willing to make sacrifices to access power.

Significantly, both *Chaste Maid* and *Bartholomew Fair* end their forays with a reassuring return from the transactions of the market to the safer domestic offerings of hospitality with plans for large, communal meals — a wedding feast for Moll and Touchwood (*Chaste Maid* 5.4.127–9) and a summons to supper from Justice Overdo (*Bartholomew Fair* 5.6.118–19). In these plays, food is more than just a backdrop or an ideology: it is a visceral preoccupation that informs a complete understanding of early modern attitudes toward shifting gender roles in the ever-evolving and expanding food economy. Both plays demonstrate an awareness of this preoccupation, reflecting and contributing to radical ideas about the roles of women in the new economy. Of course, these concerns, tangled up in one another, reflect the conflict between behavioural ideals and practices in early seventeenth-century London seen both in the wench in the market scene of *Chaste Maid* and the spotlight on Ursula's behavioural impropriety in *Bartholomew Fair*. Even the plays' titles reveal an obsession with women's conduct ideals and the chaotic market, respectively, with *Chaste Maid*'s titular emphasis on the

uniqueness of Moll's chastity within the context of the market district of Cheapside, and *Bartholomew Fair's* emphasis on the public and transgression-lenient environment of the fair. The cultural desire to stabilize and regulate women's participation and power within the developing model of commercialism explains why both of these plays so fervently reinforce ideas of women as food. The food scenes and transactions in these plays reveal the delicate balance that most women would have navigated out of necessity, honing their skills while deflecting the public nature and power components of their involvement. With their rich use of food in these dramatic scenes set in mercantile London, Middleton and Jonson shed light upon the cultural anxiety surrounding women's participation in food economies. These texts reveal a hidden transcript, uncovering the potential for power connected to deceptively simple acts of exchanging food. Acknowledging the significance that the plays' audiences would have perceived in these exchanges — and those featured in other works in the period — reveals the spaces that women could use to destabilize, and even subvert, the new economy's shifting patterns of power and control.

Notes

I wish to thank Meg Roland and Marjorie Swann, for their generous mentorship; Chris Behre; the editors and anonymous peer reviewers at *Early Theatre* for their thoughtful and productive remarks; and the AGT Writing Challenge. Research was supported by the Richard and Jeannette Sias Fellowship at the Hall Center for the Humanities and the Everett Helm Visiting Fellowship of the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana–Bloomington.

- 1 Gervase Markham, *Covntrey Contentments, OR The English Huswife. CONTAINING The inward and outward Vertues which ought to be in a compleate Woman* (London, 1623; STC: 17343), 4. From the Library of Dr. and Mrs. John Talbot Gernon, The Lilly Library, The University of Indiana. Markham's handbook enjoyed frequent printings from its original publication in 1615. It was then reprinted with other works into Markham's larger volume, *A Way to Get Wealth*, beginning in 1623, so its audience seems to have been wide and varied. The work praises household efficiency and suggests relying principally on items and ingredients obtainable from the land immediately surrounding the household. Markham idealizes a country lifestyle, which may not have been possible for many of the book's readers, judging by its popularity.
- 2 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 2008).
- 3 Ibid, 4.
- 4 Laurie A. Finke, *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (London, 1999), 4–5.
- 5 David Bevington, introduction, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, by Thomas Middleton (New York, 2002), 1453–7.
- 6 Richard Levin, 'The Structure of *Bartholomew Fair*', *PMLA* 80.3 (June 1965), 172–9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/461264>. For example, he refers to Ursula's booth simply as the 'pig-booth' and treats it as a backdrop for the interactions of the visitors.
- 7 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 4.
- 8 Markham, *Covntrey Contentments*, 4.
- 9 Shannon Miller, 'Consuming Mothers/Consuming Merchants: The Carnavalesque Economy of Jacobean City Comedy', *Modern Language Studies* 26.3 (1996), 77, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3195450>.
- 10 Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, ed. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman, and Margaret Mikesell (Urbana, 2002), 128–31.
- 11 Ibid, 131.

- 12 Although the food markets depicted in the plays and literature are complex and dictated by disparate norms, regulations, and the class statuses of the women participating, I argue that a shift in attitude toward women's participation in these various markets applies across these distinctions.
- 13 David Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England', *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge, 1985), 126–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cb09780511560552.006>.
- 14 David Pennington, *Going to Market: Women, Trade, and Social Relations in Early Modern English Towns, c. 1550–1650* (Burlington, VT, 2015), 2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315585390>. He continues, 'In the face of rising poverty and uncertainty — and the protests they provoked — it is unsurprising that authorities worried that the paternalistic order, in which commerce was to be regulated for the good of the commonwealth, was in danger of fraying' (5).
- 15 F.J. Fisher, 'The Development of the London Food Market, 1540–1640', *The Economic History Review* 5.2 (1935), 47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2599198>.
- 16 Ibid, 52.
- 17 Ibid, 57–8.
- 18 Ibid, 64.
- 19 Alan Everitt, 'The Marketing of Agricultural Produce', *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. IV 1500–1640*, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge, 1967), 565, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cb09780511560415.003>.
- 20 Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, 2002), 36–37, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812202519>.
- 21 Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London, 1993), 10–11, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203435939>.
- 22 John Norden, *Speculi Britanniae Pars: An Historical and Chorographical Description of the County of Essex, 1594*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis (Camden Society, 1840), xii. See The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) *frumenty* 1, a dish made with hulled, boiled wheat.
- 23 Pennington, *Going to Market*, 164.
- 24 Karen Newman, 'A Chaste Maid in Cheapside and London', *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, ed. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr, et al. (New York, 2006), 237.
- 25 Laura Gowing, in *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in 17th-Century England* (New Haven, 2003), examines the cultural practices that 'problematized such women's sexual consent, desire, and agency' (83). Legal accounts of illicit sex tended

to address only issues of paternity and not the incidents of rape that frequently caused them: '[t]he erasure of female consent was supported by a culture which equated men's love and desire with coercion and violence, and which systematically undermined women's sexual agency' (99).

- 26 This and all other references to *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* are taken from Thomas Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (New York, 2002), 1458–513.
- 27 Alan Davidson and Tom Jaine (eds.), 'mutton', *The Oxford Companion to Food*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2006), 528.
- 28 Ibid, 824.
- 29 Ibid, 376.
- 30 Ibid, 376. Head cheese is a jellied concoction made by boiling the head of a calf (or pig, sheep, or cow) until the meat fell off.
- 31 This and all other references to *Bartholomew Fair* are taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (New York, 2002), 961–1065.
- 32 *OED* sugar-plum n., small round or oval sweetmeat, made of boiled sugar and variously flavoured and coloured; a comfit.
- 33 A melocoton is a peach. This and all other references to *Bartholomew Fair* are taken from Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair, English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (New York, 2002), 961–1065.
- 34 In *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, 1993), Gail Kern Paster examines the role of early modern bodies in these same plays by interrogating the way subjects policed their excretions. She scrutinizes the humoral body through issues of embarrassment and the use of shame for social control, arguing for 'the place of physiological theory in the social history of the body' (3). She further addresses the belief that women were unable to control their humours and examines the ways in which men took it upon themselves to regulate and judge them. She produces an analysis of *Chaste Maid*, arguing that 'What is at stake here is a semiology of excretion in which an ostensibly natural behavior becomes thoroughly implicated in a complex structure of class and gender differences' (34–5).
- 35 Elena Levy-Navarro, in *The Culture of Obesity in Early and Late Modernity: Body Image in Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Skelton* (New York, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230610439>, argues that 'Ursula's remarks make no sense to those who, like Mistress Overdo and Win, will insist on hiding their bodies and their bodily processes, nor do they make any sense to their male counterparts who are invested in having women conform to their thin regime' (181).

- 36 Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise, and Stench in England, 1600–1770* (New Haven, 2007), 193.
- 37 Davidson and Jaine, ‘bear’, 66; ‘horsemeat’, 387.
- 38 *OED* sow n.¹, female pig; and n.², channel or trench of liquid.
- 39 Later, Alice mocks Ursula’s size, so enormous that she destroyed the beadle’s vehicle ‘you rid that week and broke out the bottom o’ the cart’; and even compares her to a chamber pot, or ‘night-tub’ (4.5.78–9).
- 40 Both Levy-Navarro (*The Culture of Obesity in Early and Late Modernity*, 182–4) and Leah S. Marcus, ‘Pastimes and the Purging of Theater: *Bartholomew Fair* (1614)’, *Staging the Renaissance*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York, 1991), 202–3, discuss this episode as a form of bear-baiting. Note that Ursula’s name literally means *she bear*.
- 41 Ursula comments with a similarly unflattering portrait of thinness, wishing for them ‘lean playhouse poultry that has the bony rump sticking out like the ace of spades or the point of a partisan, that every rib of ’em is like the tooth of a saw, and will so grate ’em with their hips and shoulders as, take ’em altogether, they were as good lie with a hurdle’ (2.5.103–7). Ursula’s words infuse the thin, bony prostitute with the power to saw apart the men paying for flesh, enticing Quarlous to threaten public punishment for her audacity: ‘Do you think there may be a fine new cucking stool i’ the fair to be purchased? One large enough, I mean. I know there is a pond of capacity for her’ (2.5.114–16). Quarlous expresses anxiety that Ursula’s body size may place her outside the reach of rituals of public humiliation.
- 42 The terms ‘pastern’ and ‘pace’ again liken Ursula to a horse rather than a consumable animal.
- 43 Levy-Navarro, *The Culture of Obesity in Early and Late Modernity*, 176.
- 44 Levy-Navarro argues that ‘Busy’s sermon exposes the problems inherent in the puritan bodily aesthetic, which grants the thin body privilege to the extent to which it makes the fat one the embodiment of sinful appetites and excess consumption. Notably, Busy does not see himself as implicated in these three sins, but instead sees Ursula as an essential embodiment of them all’ (ibid, 180).
- 45 Maurizio Calbi, *Approximate Bodies: Gender and Power in Early Modern Drama and Anatomy* (New York, 2005), 73, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203567128>.
- 46 Interestingly, ‘sow’ commonly refers to a female pig used for breeding, suggesting that Justice Overdo may also be struggling to characterize Ursula as food, as well as abusing her as immoral (*OED* n.¹, 2, abusive term for fat, slovenly, clumsy woman).
- 47 Lori Schroeder Haslem, ‘“Troubled with the Mother”: Longings, Purgings, and the Maternal Body in *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Duchess of Malfi*’, *Modern Philology* 92.4 (1995), 450, <https://doi.org/10.1086/392266>.