A Chaste Maid in Cheapside Study Guide

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside by Thomas Middleton

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Introduction

Most scholars believe that Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* was first performed sometime between 1611 and 1613, although it was not published until 1630, when it was published in a quarto edition in England. This play, like many of Middleton's other works, details several plots carried out by unscrupulous people in search of wealth, marriage, or sex—and sometimes all three. The chaste maid of the title would have been a joke for Middleton's audiences since Cheap side was infamous at the time for its prostitutes and other lascivious people, and a chaste maid would have been hard to find. Middleton was born into London's prosperous middle class and had some exposure to most other classes as well. As a result, his plays include characters from all social levels, offering an accurate portrayal of what life was like in London at this time. In fact, some critics have gone so far as to call Middleton a realist, since he, above many other playwrights of the time, was so adept at exposing the harsh, un-romanticized reality of human vice and corruption. The play is intricately plotted and consists of several stories about many families which are ultimately resolved at the same time. Because of this masterful plotting and because the play was so audacious in its exploration of the depths of human depravity—which Middleton exploited for comic purposes—many critics consider the play to be one of his finest works. A current copy of the play can be found in the paperback edition of *Five Plays*, which was published by Penguin USA in 1988.

Author Biography

Middleton was born in 1580 in London, England. Although most scholars list April 18 as his christening date, most are unable to confirm his actual birth date. The playwright began writing at an early age, publishing at least three non-dramatic pieces as a teenager. He attended Queen's College, Oxford, starting in 1598, but apparently left without a degree after two years. The first record of his dramatic work comes in 1602 with *Caesar's Fall or The Two Shapes*, which he wrote with Anthony Munday, John Webster, and Michael Drayton. Especially in the early part of his career, Middleton often collaborated with other playwrights as part of his work for the famous producer Philip Henslowe.

Because of his collaborations, some of Middleton's plays have only been fully attributed to him since the 1970s, when Middleton scholarship increased significantly. These include *The Puritan* (1607); *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607); and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608). Middleton's plays often feature a cast of characters who try to connive or deceive each other, as they do in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, which Middleton most likely wrote sometime between 1611 to 1613, and which was first published in 1630. Other well-known comedies include *Michaelmas Term* (1607) and *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1608). However, while Middleton's comedies have been enjoyed by many, two of his tragedies—*Women Beware Women* (performed in 1621) and *The Changeling* (performed in 1621 and written by Middleton and William Rowley)—are often considered his two masterpieces.

Middleton wrote his plays during the late-Elizabethan period and was a contemporary of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, two playwrights with whom he is often compared. In his time, Middleton was an extremely popular playwright and was often commissioned to write and produce plays for noble or political clients. In 1620, Middleton started serving as city chronologer, a post he held until his death. Middleton died on July 4, 1627, in Newington Butts, Surrey, England.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside starts out during the season of Lent with a conversation between Moll Yellowhammer and her mother, Maudlin. The latter is very critical of her daughter saying that she is not very feminine and that she should feel lucky that she is getting married. Mr. Yellowhammer, a goldsmith, comes in announcing the arrival of Sir Walter, an older knight who is Moll's intended husband. At the same time, the Yellowhammers receive a letter from their son Tim who is returning from college. In return for giving Sir Walter Moll's hand in marriage, Walter is bringing a woman to marry Tim. The Yellowhammers believe that this woman is Sir Walter's landed niece, a Welsh gentlewoman, but she is in fact a prostitute. The Yellowhammers present Moll to Sir Walter, who initially tries to flee, afraid of her impending marriage. Touchwood Junior, a young man who is in love with Moll, dupes Yellowhammer into making him a wedding ring. When Yellowhammer asks how big the intended bride's finger is, Touchwood Junior says that it is the same size as Moll's. He also says that he needs the ring quickly, as he is trying to steal his bride away from her father. Yellowhammer does not see through this speech to realize that Touchwood Junior means Moll.

Act 1, Scene 2

Davy, Sir Walter's poor relative and personal valet, comes across Mr. Allwit whose wife is expecting a baby. Allwit delivers a lengthy monologue that describes how Sir Walter has taken care of the Allwits for many years. He alludes to the fact that Sir Walter has had a long-standing affair with Mrs. Allwit and that Sir Walter is the father of their children. Sir Walter enters and asks Mr. Allwit and two servants if anybody else has slept with Mrs. Allwit including Mr. Allwit. They all deny it and Sir Walter says that if anybody else does sleep with her, he will marry somebody else and leave them all without money. At this point the Allwits do not know about Sir Walter's intended marriage to Moll. Allwit tells the audience that he will fight to keep Sir Walter single, so that the knight continues to feel compelled to sleep with Mrs. Allwit and pay for all of the Allwits' expenses. Two of Sir Walter's sons by Mrs. Allwit, Wat and Nick, come in to say hello, and Sir Walter makes plans to get rid of them before his marriage by sending them off to be apprentices.

Act 2, Scene 1

Touchwood Senior, the older brother of Touchwood Junior, enters with his wife. They talk about the fact that they must live separately because Touchwood Senior is so fertile that his wife keeps having babies which they cannot afford to raise. Touchwood Senior's wife leaves and another woman, carrying a child enters. She says that it is Touchwood's bastard child and she threatens to announce this fact. Touchwood Senior gives her

some money, and she leaves him alone. While Sir Oliver Kix and his wife—relatives of Sir Walter—watch from afar, Touchwood Junior comes to ask for his older brother's help in buying a marriage license for his desired marriage to Moll. They both exit and the Kixes note that while Touchwood Senior is financially poor, he is rich in children. They on the other hand, are rich but have been unable to conceive, a fact that makes both of them bitter and causes them to fight because they need an heir to claim the property that will otherwise go to Sir Walter. A maid breaks up their fight, saying that Touchwood Senior has a fertility water that he drinks, which could make Lady Kix pregnant. The maid says that if Sir Kix is willing to pay Touchwood Senior a lot of money, he will give them some of the fertility water.

Act 2, Scene 2

Allwit and Sir Walter talk about Mrs. Allwit's new baby girl. While Allwit refers to it as Sir Walter's when they are alone, when others come in, such as the wet nurse, they refer to it as Allwit's child. In fact, when it comes time to choose gossips or witnesses at the baby girl's christening, Sir Walter says that he will serve as one himself to prevent the suspicion that Sir Walter is the father. Allwit offers to get Touchwood Junior, whom Sir Walter does not know, to serve as another witness. Allwit spies two promoters, authorities who were given the power to take meat from citizens who were not supposed to be eating it during Lent. Allwit insults them. The promoters are upset but return to their watching and soon confiscate some meat from one man. Another man works for somebody who pays off the promoters so they let him go. Finally, the woman with the child from the previous scene walks by the promoters, blatantly carrying a basket of meat with the baby hidden underneath. When the promoters take the basket and the woman leaves, they realize that they have been had and that the woman has dumped her unwanted child on them.

Act 2, Scene 3

Allwit and Davy get ready for the christening of Mrs. Allwit's child. The various witnesses including Puritan women, arrive on the scene and get ready to go inside to the christening. Meanwhile, Touchwood Junior has picked up the ring that he had Yellowhammer make and he and Moll make plans to steal away and be secretly married. Sir Walter enters and is introduced to Touchwood Junior, who is supposed to serve as one of the witnesses. The women squabble over their line order for going into the christening.

Act 3, Scene 1

Meanwhile, Touchwood Junior sneaks away and joins with a parson, who is going to marry Touchwood Junior and Moll in secret. Moll arrives with Touchwood Senior and the secret ceremony begins but is broken up by Yellowhammer and Sir Walter. Yellowhammer leaves with Moll whom, he says, he is going to lock up. Sir Walter

disavows any friendship with Touchwood Junior since he tried to steal Moll away from him.

Act 3, Scene 2

During the christening, the various women remark how much the large child looks like its father, meaning Allwit. They also note how gallant Sir Walter looks when compared to Mr. Allwit. Sir Walter gives Mrs. Allwit a very generous gift which the various women remark on, saying it is too rich. The nurse comes in bringing sweets and wine and Allwit notices that some of the women take more than their share. He also notes that if he were paying for all of this, he would be broke from the Puritan women's obvious excess. However, since Sir Walter is footing the bill, Allwit has nothing to worry about. The men leave and the nurse lets Mrs. Allwit know that her son Tim has arrived. Tim comes into the room, sees all of the married women and leaves. The nurse drags him back in. Mrs. Allwit calls for Tim's tutor who has arrived with him from college. Tim suffers welcoming kisses from all of the married women. In a private conversation, Davy tells Allwit that Sir Walter is intending to marry Moll. Allwit vows to stop the marriage.

Act 3, Scene 3

Touchwood Junior tells his older brother about his plan to steal Moll away from Yellowhammer. Touchwood Junior also encourages his virile older brother to get Lady Kix pregnant so that Touchwood Senior can claim that it was due to the fertility water and make money out of the deal. Sir Kix and his wife enter, fighting about their inability to conceive. Touchwood Senior sells Kix the fertility water, which is really just almond milk, then tells the knight that he must ride for five hours to shake up the elixir and make it work. Sir Oliver gives Touchwood Senior one hundred pounds and then promises to give him another hundred when his wife gets pregnant, a third hundred when she is bedridden and a fourth hundred when she actually has the child. Sir Oliver leaves for his five-hour journey, and Touchwood Senior and Lady Kix go to her coach so that he can impregnate her.

Act 4, Scene 1

Tim and his tutor get in a semantic argument in Latin which is broken up by Maudlin Yellowhammer. Tim says he can prove anything by logic and says that he will prove a prostitute to be an honest woman. Maudlin sends the Welsh gentlewoman in to Tim, hoping to strike up a love affair between them while Maudlin and the tutor leave. Tim tries to speak to the woman in Latin, but she does not understand it and she thinks that he does not understand English. As a result, she tries to speak to him in Welsh, but Tim does not understand. Maudlin comes in and realizes that Tim's use of Latin has caused the confusion. Tim has heard that the Welsh gentlewoman can sing and asks her to do so in order to see all of his wife's qualities before he marries her. She sings and Tim is impressed. They all leave and Yellowhammer and Allwit have a private conference in

which Allwit claims to be a relative. He also tells Yellowhammer that Sir Walter is a ladies man who has been sleeping with the wife of a man named Allwit for seven years. Since Yellowhammer does not know who Allwit is, he does not realize that Allwit is talking to him. Although Yellowhammer tells Allwit that he will not let Sir Walter marry his daughter, secretly, he says he will, since Yellowhammer himself has also kept mistresses. Maudlin comes in and says that Moll has escaped.

Act 4, Scene 2

Touchwood Junior and Moll attempt to escape across the river, but Maudlin jumps in the water and drags Moll back to land. Yellowhammer tells Sir Walter that they should be married first thing in the morning to prevent her from escaping again. In his grief over losing Moll again, Touchwood Junior draws his sword on Sir Walter and they fight.

Act 5, Scene 1

Davy goes to the Allwits, telling them that he thinks that Sir Walter's wounds from the fight may kill him. Sir Walter arrives, obviously hurt. Although Allwit first tries to help him, Sir Walter will have none of it and keeps accusing him and Mrs. Allwit of being his undoing. He says that they are the cause of his sin and that they have encouraged it. Now he wants only to repent and they keep showing him signs of his sin, such as three of the bastard children—Wat, Nick, and the baby girl—that he had by Mrs. Allwit. Allwit brings Sir Walter so that he can make his will, and Sir Walter savagely bequeaths curses, plagues, and other miseries to the Allwits. A servant enters and says that Touchwood Junior is dead, killed from the wounds given to him by Sir Walter. The Allwits suddenly change their tune and refuse to harbor Sir Walter now that he is wanted by the law as a murderer and can no longer be of any financial use to them. In addition, both of the Allwits refuse to acknowledge the fact that he has slept with Mrs. Allwit. Sir Walter leaves and the Allwits resolve to use the riches that they have acquired over the years from Sir Walter to get a house in the Strand, the most fashionable part of London.

Act 5, Scene 2

The Yellowhammers nervously attend to Moll who appears to be on her deathbed from a sickness she got while being dragged out of the water by her mother. Touchwood Senior enters with a letter from his younger brother, whom he says is dead. Moll appears to die and is carried out. Yellowhammer suggests that they miss Moll's funeral, so that they can go have Tim married to the Welsh gentlewoman. By doing this, they believe that they will get the riches that Sir Walter promised while not having to marry their daughter to Sir Walter, since he is wanted by the law.

Act 5, Scene 3

Sir Oliver speaks with his servants noting that his wife, Lady Kix, is newly pregnant. He instructs the servants to pay Touchwood Senior his next hundred pounds. The servants tell Kix about the impending funeral for Moll and Touchwood Junior.

Act 5, Scene 4

At the funeral, Touchwood Senior asks the assembled crowd if they would have been joyous to see Moll and Touchwood Junior married. The crowd says yes, at which point the two lovers rise from their coffins admitting that they faked their deaths and are married by the parson. Yellowhammer and Maudlin enter too late to stop the marriage. They also note that they have married their son Tim to the Welsh gentlewoman, who is a prostitute—a fact they learned too late. They talk about Sir Walter, who is in the debtor's prison for failing to pay all of his bills. Sir Kix tells Touchwood Senior that he and his family are free to live with Sir Kix and his wife, and that Sir Kix will support any children that the Touchwoods have. Tim and his new wife enter and Tim is upset that he has married a prostitute. However, Maudlin reminds him that he once said he could prove a prostitute to be an honest woman and now he has his chance. All of the guests retire to dinner where they will celebrate both new marriages.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play opens with Maudlin lecturing her daughter, Moll, on her faults as a woman. Maudlin tells Moll that at her age, Maudlin was pregnant, two years before she married. Maudlin believes that Moll needs to work harder to attract the attentions of a worthy knight. Yellowhammer enters his goldsmith shop and asks his wife, Maudlin, what she is doing. Maudlin tells him that she is lecturing their daughter about her faults. Yellowhammer reminds Maudlin that she isn't one to criticize because she, too, has many faults.

Yellowhammer and Maudlin discuss the impending arrival of a knight named Sir Walter Whorehound. The Yellowhammers have arranged the marriage of Moll to Sir Walter. Sir Walter is also bringing his wealthy niece to wed their son, Tim. Maudlin and Yellowhammer are excited at the prospect of gaining a wealthy daughter-in-law who is a devoted, genteel virgin, suitable for a gentleman like their son.

Soon Sir Walter Whorehound; a Welsh Gentlewoman; and Davy Dahumma arrive. The Welsh Gentlewoman, presented by Sir Walter as his niece, is to marry the Yellowhammers' son. Under his breath, Sir Walter tells the Welsh Gentlewoman that she must pass as a virgin; Davy Dahumma remarks sarcastically that this may prove difficult, since she is Sir Walter's mistress.

Sir Walter tries to speak to Moll, but she flees the room in fright. Maudlin makes excuses for her daughter's behavior. Eventually Moll returns to the room as Touchwood Junior arrives. Touchwood Junior slips Moll a note when no one is looking. He tells Moll to read the note and to send him her response in three words.

Yellowhammer asks Touchwood Junior how he can assist him. Touchwood Junior asks the goldsmith to make a wedding ring for him. The ring is to be for a gentlewoman he intends to marry. When Yellowhammer asks for his bride's ring size, Touchwood states that he doesn't know, but that Moll appears to have the same size finger. Yellowhammer remarks that his daughter is no gentlewoman. Touchwood Junior disagrees and asks for Moll's finger. Yellowhammer asks Touchwood Junior if he wants an inscription in the ring. Touchwood Junior would like the ring to be inscribed, "Love that's wise, blinds parents' eyes."

Yellowhammer thinks the inscription is odd; he says that Touchwood Junior is crazy if he thinks that he can steal a daughter from under the watchful eyes of her parents. Touchwood Junior mutters under his breath that then Yellowhammer is doomed, for he will soon steal Yellowhammer's daughter from under his very nose. Yellowhammer, however, is too focused on making the ring sale to notice Touchwood Junior's clues. The goldsmith promises delivery of the ring for the next day. As Touchwood Junior leaves, Moll silently wishes that she could leave with him.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The title of Thomas Middleton's comedy, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, is considered an oxymoron. Cheapside was a long, wide street that ran through one of the main sections of London. Its primary purpose was one of commerce. During the 17th century, it was a popular marketplace for legitimate merchants such as goldsmiths like Yellowhammer; but it was also the home of brothels and of prostitutes peddling their "wares." Thus it was highly unlikely that anyone seeking a chaste maiden in the streets of Cheapside would find one.

Materialism, greed, bourgeois posturing, aristocratic corruption, religious hypocrisy and sex are all themes found in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. All are elements Middleton found reflective of life in London at the time. Middleton openly and frankly exposes these human vices of his fellow countrymen without bitterness or a sense of superiority.

In *Cheapside*, Middleton explores the concept of marriage and the role of sex in multiple plot lines; in fact, the reader encounters six distinct story lines.

The first plot line involves the bourgeois, social-climbing Yellowhammers, eager to arrange the marriages of their children. A second follows the star-crossed lovers, Moll and Touchwood Junior, who are desperate to marry. Another plot involves the landless knight, Sir Walter Whorehound, who is so eager to marry Moll and secure her dowry that he is willing to pass off his whore as his landed niece for the sake of a profitable marriage.

Other story lines still to be introduced include that of Allwit, who exchanges his wife's sexual favors for financial gain; Touchwood Senior, the father of so many bastard children that he must live apart from his wife in order to support his growing family; and the aristocratic, wealthy Kixes, who bicker and fight incessantly over their inability to have a child to secure their fortune.

Because props and sets were not commonly used during this time, the burden of communicating what was happening in the play fell upon the actors. Double entendres (double meanings) and asides are two noteworthy techniques found throughout *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Middleton uses double entendres with bold sexual connotations throughout the play. The asides, which are comments directed at the audience and supposedly not heard by other characters, also serve to keep the audience apprised of what is happening.

For example, in this scene, when Sir Walter tells his prostitute that she must pass as a virgin, his valet, Davy, makes comments in the form of an aside to the audience. Davy turns to the audience and says, "Pure Welsh virgin, she lost her maidenhead in Brecknockshire." Davy is making a joke about Sir Walter's remarks by saying that, technically, the woman is a Welsh virgin, since she lost her virginity in Wales and not in England.

Another of Middleton's customs is to identify his characters through descriptive terms instead of proper names. For example, "Yellowhammer" can mean a goldsmith's occupation, a fool, or a gold coin. Yellowhammer appears to be both a goldsmith and a fool because he fails to recognize the love affair of his daughter and Touchwood Junior going on right under his nose. Touchwood Junior wants to marry Moll but knows that her family will not approve because he is not a wealthy knight.

As social climbers, the Yellowhammers are determined to arrange suitable marriages for their children; "suitable" to them means that their children must marry "up" into wealth and status. They believe that marriages to the wealthy Sir Walter and his landed niece will fulfill their desire to advance socially. However, unknown to the Yellowhammers, the Welsh Gentlewoman has no money and is Sir Walter's long-time mistress; in addition, Sir Walter is not as wealthy as they have been led to believe.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Davy Dahumma, Sir Walter's poor relative and personal valet, arrives at Allwit's house. Allwit asks Davy if Sir Walter is in town; Davy says that he will arrive shortly. Allwit tells Davy that Mistress Allwit has missed Sir Walter. In fact, she has been craving both pickled cucumbers and Sir Walter's arrival. Davy responds that the craving is probably a result of her pregnancy. Allwit encourages Davy to visit Mistress Allwit to let her know that Sir Walter will arrive soon.

Allwit begins a lengthy monologue about Sir Walter and how happy he is to hear of his return. Allwit's wife has been Sir Walter's mistress for 10 years. Because of this relationship, Allwit has enjoyed certain benefits in exchange for turning a blind eye. Sir Walter has paid all the bills for the Allwit family, which includes two boys, both fathered by Sir Walter. Allwit enjoys all the benefits without any of the concerns that come with the responsibility of supporting a family and home. He is free of jealousy, worry and torment. He scoffs at Sir Walter, who must bear all the costs and torments. He starts to sing blissfully, "La dildo, dildo la dildo, la dildo dildo de dildo."

Two servants enter the room while Allwit is singing to himself. They mock him, considering him less than a man and no more than a dildo. It is apparent that they view Allwit as nothing more than their Mistress's husband and not their master. They know that Sir Walter is their actual lord, so they pay Allwit little respect or attention.

At last, Sir Walter enters the room and begins to question the servants. Has anyone visited their mistress while he's been gone? Allwit silently mocks Sir Walter's jealousy. The servants tell Sir Walter that no living creature has entered the home. Then Sir Walter questions Allwit. He has heard, Sir Walter says, that Allwit offered to sleep with his wife while Sir Walter was away; is that true? If it is, then Sir Walter will marry and leave them all without any money or support. Allwit protests that he did not and would not do such a thing; he is offended by the suggestion.

Sir Walter's children, Wat and Nick, enter the room. The children greet Allwit, whom they believe to be their father. He greets them by addressing one as "villain" and the other as "bastard." After speaking to the children briefly, Sir Walter sends them on their way to school. Silently he contemplates what to do with the children when they are grown; he does not want his bastard children to know or mix with any legitimate children he may have when he marries. He decides to apprentice Wat to Yellowhammer and Nick to a vintner. That way, he reasons, he will always be guaranteed a supply of bowls and wine.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Middleton describes Allwit as a "wittol," an old English term that meant "cuckold." A cuckold is a man whose wife is sexually unfaithful to him. Allwit knows and accepts that

Sir Walter and his wife have been having an affair for over 10 years, just as he accepts that the two children the world thinks are his sons are, in fact, Sir Walter's. He is willing to look the other way because of the material benefits provided by Sir Walter. In essence, he prostitutes his wife for economic gain.

At this point, Allwit does not know that Sir Walter intends to marry Moll. In an aside to the audience, he explains that he is determined to keep Sir Walter single so that the knight continues to feel obligated to sleep with Mistress Allwit and to pay the family's living expenses.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Touchwood Senior and his wife, Mistress Touchwood, have decided to live apart. Touchwood Senior's strong sexual urges have produced many children but little money. His solution is to have his wife move out so that he can concentrate on making money. His wife agrees to move in with her uncle. Touchwood Senior thanks her for being such an understanding wife and promises to visit her often.

After Mistress Touchwood exits, Touchwood Senior sings the praises of both his wife and the institution of marriage. However, he considers it unfortunate that he has produced so many illegitimate children from his numerous liaisons. He is particularly fond of country girls; every harvest season he produces another illegitimate child. Last harvest alone, he had no fewer than seven women pregnant within three weeks of one another.

A Wench enters with a child. The Wench tells Touchwood Senior that the child is his. When he starts to turn away, she tells him that if he does, she will follow him through the streets with a curse on her lips. She was a virgin before she met him and can prove it. Not only did Touchwood Senior ruin her life, she continues, but her cousin Ellen's as well. Now Ellen cannot make a respectable marriage. The Wench says that Ellen may bring charges against Touchwood Senior. Touchwood Senior tells the Wench that he can find Ellen a husband if that is what she truly wants; he always has one or two men in his employ who are willing to marry women who are no longer virgins.

Touchwood Senior then tries to convince the Wench that he has no money and nothing to offer; he is only a younger brother with no great fortune. She tells him that he is a lying villain. Then Touchwood Senior tries to convince her of his poverty. He explains that, just this morning, he had to give up his house. All he has left are 20 coins and she is welcome to them. He tells her that there are other men, richer men than he, whom she could pursue. She reluctantly takes the money and leaves to pursue a life of selling herself in the streets of Cheapside.

Sir Oliver, Lady Kix and Touchwood Junior enter. Touchwood Junior asks his brother Touchwood Senior if he can help Touchwood Junior obtain a marriage license. Touchwood Senior says that he can get one for 13 shillings and four pence. They exit to buy the marriage license.

Sir Oliver and Lady Kix begin to argue. For seven years, the couple has tried unsuccessfully to have a child. Sir Oliver tells his wife to be patient. She asks how any woman can be patient when faced with such a setback. Sir Oliver tells her that he cannot help what has happened; he is doing everything he can, sparing no expense and trying any and all remedies suggested by the doctors.

If the Kixes are unable to produce a child, their estate will pass to Sir Walter Whorehound as their next direct descendant. Lady Kix knows that Sir Walter will inherit a great dowry when he marries the goldsmith's daughter, Moll, by misrepresenting his wealth. Sir Oliver believes that, while others may be deceived by Sir Walter, Lady Kix should not despair; patience is what is needed.

Lady Kix cries that she has suffered for such a long time. They continue to argue, so Sir Oliver tries to change the subject. He asks his wife if she will be attending the christening of the Allwit's third child. Lady Kix responds by lamenting that everyone else, including her sister, is having children and she is not. The argument continues.

A Maid enters and tells Lady Kix and Sir Oliver to throw away all potions and remedies because she has learned of a guaranteed cure for their childlessness. The Maid tells them that there is a gentleman who has sired at least nine children through natural means. She says that it will cost them much money but that they should hire Touchwood Senior to help them conceive a child. Lady Kix does not care how much it costs; it would be money well spent. So the Kixes decide to contact Touchwood Senior.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Lady Kix and Sir Oliver represent what Middleton believed to be the moral decay of the aristocratic class within England. The reader is presented with two characters who will go to any lengths to have a child in order to hold on to their estate and social standing. They are even willing to consider having Lady Kix impregnated by another man and then passing the child off as Sir Oliver's own.

In this scene, the reader discovers an important complication that lends to the rising action of the play. We learn that if Lady Kix and Sir Oliver are unable to produce a child, they will lose everything. Their estate would pass to Sir Walter as their next direct descendant. Sir Walter has already borrowed heavily against the estate and is in deep debt, a debt that stems from his financial support of the Allwit family and to living beyond his means. Because of his debt, Sir Walter is counting on Lady Kix and Sir Oliver not to produce an heir.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Allwit congratulates Sir Walter on the recent birth of his third child, a daughter, with Mistress Allwit. Allwit tells Sir Walter that he is going to go out and sing the baby's praises; he calls for the wet nurse to bring the baby to him again because he cannot help but kiss her three times every hour. Sir Walter tells Allwit that he is glad he could father the child for him. Allwit kisses the baby and then has the nurse take the child back to the nursery.

Allwit and Sir Walter begin to discuss the christening ceremony. Sir Walter suggests that his fiancée, Moll, Yellowhammer's daughter, should serve as the child's godmother. Allwit then recommends Touchwood Junior as the godfather. Sir Walter agrees and sends Davy Dahumma to inform the couple.

Some time later, in an alley by the Allwits' house, two Promoters are looking for people carrying meat baskets. Allwit sees them and decides to taunt them. He pretends to be a stranger to the city and asks the Promoters where he can buy meat during Lent. He tells the Promoters that he was directed to this street and was told that a butcher is nearby.

The Promoters think they can trick Allwit into telling them who the butcher is. They could then threaten the butcher into giving them free meat or else he will be sent to jail. As the Promoters' excitement level builds, Allwit tells them that he's changed his mind and will not reveal the identity of the butcher. Instead, he will return with his meat basket and wave it under their very noses. He tells the Promoters to "fuck off" and leaves.

Then the Promoters rob a poor, decent man of his basket of meat. When another man with a meat basket comes along, he is allowed to keep it because he works for Mr. Beggarland; Mr. Beggarland, a wealthy merchant, is in league with the Promoters. Next a Wench arrives carrying a basket with a leg of mutton. The Promoters order her to hand it over. She tells them that it is for her sick Mistress, who has been ordered by her doctor to have meat. The Wench pleads with the Promoters to let her retrieve the doctor to vouch for her; the Promoters tell her to leave the basket and fetch the doctor. She leaves only after they swear to hold the basket until she returns.

When the Promoters open the basket to inspect its contents, they see the leg of mutton but they also hear something. When they remove the mutton they see a baby in the basket. The Promoters realize that they have been tricked; the Wench has abandoned the child. The two men are so disgusted by the events of the day that they decide to dump the child at a nearby brothel and get drunk.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Promoters were minor, corrupt government officials who spied on butchers during Lent. Under English law, people were not allowed to eat meat during Lent. Exceptions were made only for the sick, pregnant women and foreign ambassadors.

The presence of the Promoters in the play exemplified Middleton's disgust for what he considered to be the religious hypocrisy of the time. This scene was used to question the legitimacy of having a government agency that, in essence, enforced specific religious practices. The Promoters, with their limited role in the play, served to mock what appeared to Middleton to be a lack of separation between the church and the state.

Another interesting point about this scene is the odd code of morality these otherwise immoral Promoters seem to possess. The Promoters have no problem taking meat from a poor man, but will ignore the law if anyone offers them a bribe or is considered a trusted ally of Mr. Beggarland. Yet they face their own version of a moral dilemma when the Wench successfully tricks them into keeping her basket and consequently, the child. While the Promoters feel no moral conflict in using their positions for personal profit, they appear conflicted about their promise to the Wench to keep the basket/child.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Allwit is getting ready for the baby's christening; he enters wearing one of Sir Walter's suits while Davy is attempting to help him dress. Two Puritan women and the Gossips, who arrive to witness the ceremony, congratulate Allwit on his good fortune. Touchwood Junior and Moll arrive next and Touchwood Junior tells Moll that he has the ring. Then Sir Walter joins the couple, thanks them for agreeing to be the godparents, and offers them a toast. The group prepares to walk to the church.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

In this case, Middleton used the term "Gossips" to refer loosely to friends who were invited to witness the christening ceremony. It was common to include a small group of Gossips to stand up with the child and vouch for the child's parentage in the community. In this case, to avoid suspicion, Sir Walter has decided to stand up as one of these Gossips. He believes this will prevent any rumors that he is the father of the child.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

The Gossips bicker over who is higher in the social ranking, which determines the order of the procession to the church. They suggest that Maudlin should go first but she refuses. The two Puritan women tell them to stop their quarreling. It does not matter who goes before or behind, they say; in the eyes of God, all are equal.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

It was not uncommon for Middleton to satirize the Puritans in his plays. In this scene, he takes the opportunity to mock the Puritans' hypocrisy when they state that all people are equal. Puritans did not view all people as equal; they were considered the most zealous group in the Protestant movement and, as their name implied, sought to be the purest and to impose their lifestyle on others. For example, the Puritans considered the theatrical community to be promoters of evil, idolatry and unethical behavior. They worked diligently to have all theaters closed and accomplished this goal in the early 1630s under the reign of Oliver Cromwell.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Touchwood Junior and Moll meet at a church to be secretly married. Touchwood Senior will act as witness. Before the Parson can marry the couple, however, Yellowhammer and Sir Walter arrive. Yellowhammer is furious with Touchwood Junior for duping him into making a wedding ring for his own daughter's marriage; he vows to lock Moll in her room and watch her closely until she can be wed to Sir Walter. Moll tells Touchwood Junior that, even though she will never see him again, she will always love him. Yellowhammer leaves with Moll. Sir Walter tells Touchwood Junior that he has wronged him. He never wants to see him again and he will never call Touchwood Junior "friend."

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

Middleton portrays Touchwood Junior and Moll as two star-crossed lovers parted by circumstances beyond their control. Readers can draw parallels between Middleton's version and an earlier, more famous version by Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, written in 1595.

Moll and Touchwood Junior provide a romantic plot line and a perfect foil in a play otherwise devoted to the dark side of human behavior. The couple offer the reader a type of barometer by which to gauge the immorality occurring throughout the play. Though they are not perfect - Touchwood Junior is willing to help his brother scam the Kixes and Moll tricks and deceives her parents about her relationship with Touchwood Junior - the reader tends to forgive them their "minor" transgressions because they appear to be motivated by love and not by greed, sex or money. Moll and Touchwood Junior are, in fact, the most moral characters in the play.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

The christening party returns to the Allwits' house to pay its respects to Mistress Allwit. Sir Walter presents her with a goblet and two gold apostle spoons as a gift for the birth of their child. The Gossips and the Puritans begin to eat and drink heartily, much to the disgust of Allwit. He complains that if he were paying for the party, he would be poor.

Maudlin's son Tim and his tutor arrive from the university. Tim is kissed and fawned over by every woman in the room. He is disgusted by them and their frivolity.

When everyone has left except Davy, Davy tells Allwit that Sir Walter is to wed. Allwit leaves the house, vowing to stop Sir Walter from marrying and thereby ending Allwit's comfortable financial arrangement.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

The christening celebration occurs during Lent, which is observed as a period of abstinence and moderation. Yet in this scene, the reader is presented with a very social gathering. After the men leave the room, the women let down their guard and begin to speak freely and frankly to one another They eat and drink to great excess until everything is gone and the room is in disarray. Thus Middleton portrays a scene of gluttony on the part of both the Gossips and the religiously stricter Puritans. He uses this scene to highlight again the hypocrisy of the Puritans, who did not believe in exaggerated celebrations, especially during Lent. Yet Middleton depicts them as avid partakers in all that is offered to them.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Touchwood Senior and Junior meet at Sir Oliver's house. Touchwood Senior is there to assist Lady Kix and Sir Oliver. Touchwood Junior tells Touchwood Senior that he has arranged a meeting with Moll; a maidservant, sympathetic to their cause, will assist them. Touchwood Junior leaves to rendezvous with Moll.

Touchwood Senior meets Lady Kix and Sir Oliver. The couple goes back and forth between yelling and cursing at each other and expressing their love and devotion. Touchwood Senior proceeds to give Sir Oliver a vial that contains "fertility water." He must drink the contents of the vial and then ride his horse for five hours straight; the up-and-down movement will stir the potion, Touchwood Senior says.

Sir Oliver pays Touchwood Senior 100 pounds. He will pay another 100 pounds when Lady Kix becomes pregnant, another 100 when she goes into labor and a final 100 pounds when she gives birth to a live child. Sir Oliver exits. Then Touchwood Senior tells Lady Kix that she must take her "potion" either lying down in her bedroom or riding in her coach. He exits to assist her.

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

The audience learns about the true contents of the vial and Touchwood Senior's deception through the use of another effective aside. Touchwood Senior holds up the vial to the audience and reveals, "Here's a little vial of almond-milk / That stood me in some three pence." The audience learns that, while Touchwood Senior only paid three pence for the vial, he intends to trick Sir Oliver into paying him over 400 pounds for it. In addition, the audience is able to share a laugh at the expense of Sir Oliver: a cuckolded husband, sent to ride aimlessly about the countryside for hours while Touchwood Senior is busy impregnating Lady Kix.

Act 4, Scene 1

Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

Tim and his Tutor are arguing in Latin. The tutor asserts that a fool does not have reason and, therefore, is not a rational animal. Tim disagrees and states that a fool is a man and that a man is a rational animal; so a fool is a rational animal. Maudlin interrupts and asks them what they are discussing. Tim tells her and Maudlin asks why they are discussing such a thing when everyone knows what a fool is.

Tim asks his mother what she believes a fool is. Maudlin responds that it is a person who marries before he has wit. Tim patronizes his mother by saying that that is a witty response for someone who has not attended a university. Still, Tim believes that if any fool is brought before him, he can prove that person to be rational by means of logic. Tim states that, by logic, he can prove anything; he can even prove a whore to be an honest woman. Maudlin states that only a woman can prove herself either an honest woman or a whore; Tim insists that he can do it. Maudlin tells him that many men would pay handsomely if Tim could prove their wives to be honest women and not whores.

Then Tim meets his bride-to-be, the Welsh Gentlewoman. A comedy of errors ensues when Tim speaks Latin to her and she responds in Welsh. Tim believes that the Welsh Gentlewoman is speaking some higher form of Latin, while she thinks he is making fun of her for being Welsh. Neither understands what the other is saying. Maudlin arrives and explains to Tim that the woman is Welsh and is speaking in her native tongue; she reprimands Tim for speaking in Latin.

Meanwhile Allwit, in disguise, arrives to convince Yellowhammer not to allow his daughter to marry Sir Walter. Pretending to be a fellow goldsmith and distant relative, Allwit tells Yellowhammer about Sir Walter's mistress and family. Yellowhammer expresses outrage and tells Allwit that he will end the engagement immediately.

However, when Allwit leaves, Yellowhammer silently confesses to seeing no reason to stop the marriage; after all, he has kept a mistress for years and even has a child by her. As long as Sir Walter does not give his daughter any diseases because he has a mistress, Yellowhammer can accept the relationship. At the end of the scene, Maudlin discovers that Moll is missing. Everyone exits to search for her. **Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis**

Tim is dimwitted but thinks he is smart because he attends a university. His insistence on speaking Latin wherever he goes lends to the comedic relief of this scene. Contrary to his belief, Tim has not mastered even the basic Latin dialect. Then when the Welsh Gentlewoman responds to him in Welsh, he thinks she is speaking a higher form of Latin and must be very intelligent.

Tim becomes enamored of his bride-to-be because he thinks she is a well-educated, chaste maiden. Although he was first reluctant to wed the Welsh Gentlewoman because she was unknown to him, he changes his mind after meeting her and is now eager to wed.

Act 4, Scene 2

Act 4, Scene 2 Summary

Touchwood Junior and Moll are again running off to marry; Touchwood Junior has arranged for two separate boats to whisk them away. However, Maudlin catches Moll by jumping into the river and dragging her back by the hair to meet Yellowhammer and Sir Walter. Yellowhammer vows to Sir Walter that he will watch Moll until morning, when they can be wed. Moll is horrified but Sir Walter is pleased because soon he will receive the 2000-pound dowry of gold.

In his grief over losing his love again, Touchwood Junior draws his sword on Sir Walter and the two men fight. Sir Walter is wounded. He stops the fight, telling Touchwood Junior that he has much to think about before going any further. Then Sir Walter flees.

Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene demonstrates the lengths to which Maudlin and Yellowhammer are willing to go in order to ensure that Moll marries a wealthy knight. Their desire to obtain greater social status takes precedence over the well-being of their daughter. They publicly humiliate Moll by dragging her through the streets by her hair and belittling her loudly. At one point, their cruelty is so pronounced that even Sir Walter tells the parents to stop or he will not wed the girl.

Act 5, Scene 1

Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

Sir Walter lies, apparently mortally wounded, at the Allwits' house; Allwit is concerned that all will be lost if his benefactor dies. Both Allwit and his wife try to comfort Sir Walter, but he curses them for their evil, greedy ways. Sir Walter asks Davy to write down his will, which he begins to dictate by cursing the Allwits.

Then a servant arrives to tell Sir Walter that Touchwood Junior is dead because of their fight. He says that Sir Walter needs to hide before the law finds him. Allwit tells Sir Walter that he will not hide a murderer in his house. Mistress Allwit argues with her husband, saying that if Sir Walter killed Touchwood Junior, it was probably in self-defense. A second servant enters to announce that Lady Kix is pregnant.

Allwit realizes that the money has now dried up. He tells Sir Walter's servants to remove Sir Walter from their home. After Sir Walter and the servants leave, the Alwits decide to close up their house and open a high-priced brothel.

Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

Under English law, if Sir Walter killed Touchwood Junior, then he would lose his estate and be hanged. Allwit is aware of this and so begins the push to have Sir Walter removed from his house. With the news that Lady Kix is with child, Sir Walter's fate is sealed in Allwit's mind; the birth of a Kix child will mean that Sir Walter cannot inherit the Kixes' estate. Allwit understands that there will be no more financial assistance.

So both Allwits turn on Sir Walter, unwilling to even acknowledge Mistress Allwit's long-term relationship and children with him. Ironically, Sir Walter is asked to leave a house that, for all intents and purposes, he maintained for 10 years and probably considered his own. At the end of the scene, Allwit still views himself a winner, whether he plays the *wittol* or the owner of a high-priced brothel. Either way, he can continue to exchange his wife's sexual favors for financial profit.

Act 5, Scene 2

Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

Maudlin and Yellowhammer attend to Moll, who appears to be dying from an illness she contracted while being dragged through the river by her mother. They have sent for the best doctors but Moll tells them it is too late. Then Touchwood Senior arrives with the news that Touchwood Junior is dead. When Moll hears the news, she faints. Her maid and Touchwood Senior carry her to her room, presumably to die. Maudlin and Yellowhammer, concerned with what their neighbors will think, decide to leave the city as soon as Moll dies. Yellowhammer even suggests that they not attend Moll's funeral in order to ensure that their son marries the Welsh Gentlewoman as soon as possible.

Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

The scene reaffirms the Yellowhammers' social-climbing ambitions. They are more concerned with appearances than they are with the health and well-being of their daughter. When they believe Moll is dying and therefore no longer of use to them, they turn their attentions to ensuring that their son's marriage to the Welsh Gentlewoman occurs quickly. They think that they can still improve their social standing if Tim marries Sir Walter's (supposedly) wealthy "niece."

Act 5, Scene 3

Act 5, Scene 3 Summary

Sir Oliver is excited by the news of his wife's pregnancy and wants to announce the news to the public. He orders his servant to pay Touchwood Senior another 100 pounds. The Servant asks Sir Oliver if he will be attending the funeral of Touchwood Junior and Moll (their funeral is to be held jointly). Sir Oliver sets out to attend.

Act 5, Scene 3 Analysis

This is a transitional scene, leading up to the climax, which reaffirms the pregnancy of Lady Kix and the loss of Sir Walter's chance to inherit the Kixes' estate.

Act 5, Scene 4

Act 5, Scene 4 Summary

Touchwood Senior, Sir Oliver, Allwit, Lady Kix, Mistress Allwit, Moll's maid, Susan, and a Parson are at the church for the funeral of Moll and Touchwood Junior. As the service begins, the two lovers suddenly sit up in their coffins. Their deaths were an elaborate hoax. The couple tricked everyone so that they could meet at the church and marry. They are joined in matrimony before Yellowhammer and Maudlin can arrive to stop them.

Meanwhile, Tim has hastily married the Welsh Gentlewoman. Only afterwards do the Yellowhammers discover that she was Sir Walter's whore and has no wealth or land. Tim is angry and vows to sell his wife's services to his fellow classmates when he returns to the university. His mother, Maudlin, reminds Tim that once he had said that he could prove any whore an honest woman. Tim replies that he could prove it about any other man's wife, but not his own; Maudlin insists that he try anyway. So Tim states in Latin that a wife cannot be a whore. The Welsh Gentlewoman responds that then, by logic, Tim can prove her honest, because "...there's a thing called marriage and that makes me honest."

Sir Oliver remains so pleased by his wife's pregnancy that he offers Touchwood Senior a job; Sir Oliver will provide Touchwood Senior with money, room and board if he continues to impregnate his wife. Sir Oliver will then raise the children as his own.

Sir Walter has recovered from his injury and was sent to debtor's prison after his creditors learned that he would not be inheriting the Kixes' estate.

In the end, Yellowhammer resigns himself to the marriages of both his children and invites everyone to attend the celebration.

Act 5, Scene 4 Analysis

At the play's climax, the young lovers sit up in their coffins and reunite to marry at last. After their marriage, the play begins to close, as the various plot lines are resolved.

Early in the play the reader was introduced to Allwit as a contented cuckold. Allwit was more than willing to relinquish his marital bed to another man as long as it provided him with certain financial advantages. Now that Allwit and his wife will leave Cheapside to open a brothel on the Strand, it appears that he remains prepared to exchange his wife for monetary gain.

Sir Oliver and Lady Kix are expecting a child; because of their good fortune, they will be able to keep their estate. Sir Oliver is so happy that he offers to support Touchwood Senior and his family financially if Touchwood Senior continues to impregnate his wife.

Touchwood Senior's reply to Sir Oliver's offer is another illustration of Middleton's use of double entendre. "Take heed how you dare a man, while you live sir, / That has good skill at his weapon." Touchwood Senior's "weapon" is actually a reference to his penis, his skill with which he demonstrates by his ability to impregnate women.

Sir Walter, hounded by creditors and now penniless, has been sentenced to debtor's prison.

The Yellowhammers resign themselves to events by looking at the bright side. While they are no better off financially or socially than when they started, they are glad that they only have one wedding celebration to pay for instead of two.

Tim, the self-proclaimed university scholar, has proven by logic that a whore is an honest woman and has married her. For her part, the Welsh Gentlewoman embraces marriage to a foolish, dimwitted boy in order to achieve the status of an "honest" woman.

Middleton effectively challenges the reader to question what they think they know in a *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. In *Cheapside*, nothing is truly as it seems. An honest wife, such as Mistress Allwit or Lady Kix, can act like a whore, while a common whore, such as the Welsh Gentlewoman, can pass as an honest wife.

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Characters

Mr. Allwit

Mr. Allwit knowingly lets his wife have an affair with Sir Walter Whorehound and in return, Sir Walter covers all of the Allwits' living expenses. Allwit is an example of a willing cuckold known as a wittol. For Allwit and for his wife, their marriage is more like a business arrangement than a traditional, romantic marriage. Allwit allows Sir Walter to be his wife's lover to the point where Allwit has lost the privilege of sleeping with his wife at all, as a scene with the jealous Sir Walter indicates. Allwit is also suspicious of Sir Walter, cautious that his benefactor may someday try to marry and no longer need Allwit's wife. When Allwit realizes that Sir Walter has come to town to marry Moll Yellowhammer, he tries to stop it by telling Mr. Yellowhammer that Sir Walter has had mistresses. Despite their strange arrangement, Allwit does genuinely enjoy his children—all of whom are bastards fathered by Sir Walter. When Sir Walter seeks redemption at the end of the play, thinking he is mortally wounded, Allwit tries to comfort him by bringing in two of these bastard children—Wat and Nick. However, when Sir Walter says that he will leave Allwit and his wife only curses in his will and when Allwit hears Sir Walter has killed a man and is a wanted fugitive, Allwit suddenly changes his tune and no longer wants anything to do with Sir Walter. He refuses Sir Walter sanctuary, and Allwit and his wife decide to use the possessions bought for them by Sir Walter to outfit a house in the Strand—the fashionable part of London.

Mrs. Allwit

With her husband's knowledge, Mrs. Allwit has an affair with Sir Walter Whorehound. In return, Sir Walter covers all of the Allwits' living expenses. Mrs. Allwit's marriage to her husband is more like a business arrangement than a romantic marriage. When the play begins, Mrs. Allwit is about to give birth to her latest child by Sir Walter. This fact and the event of the new baby's christening, give the play some of the most humorously ironic scenes—a fact noted by many critics. When Sir Walter seeks redemption at the end of the play, thinking he is mortally wounded, Allwit tries to comfort him by bringing in some of the bastard children that Mrs. Allwit has had by Sir Walter. This only makes Sir Walter more distressed, and he accuses Mrs. Allwit of helping to damn his soul by being his mistress. When Allwit tries to throw Sir Walter out after it is revealed that Sir Walter is a fugitive, Mrs. Allwit tries to intervene on Sir Walter's behalf at first. Ultimately, Mrs. Allwit sides with her husband. After they kick out Sir Walter, it is Mrs. Allwit who suggests they use their extra possessions to secure a house in the Strand.

Davy Dahanna

Davy Dahanna is Sir Walter Whorehound's poor relative and personal servant. Throughout the play, Dahanna makes many humorous asides to the audience at the

expense of Sir Walter and others. Dahanna is the one who notifies Mr. Allwit of Sir Walter's impending marriage. Dahanna is hoping that if Allwit can stop the marriage and Sir Walter dies childless, Dahanna may gain the inheritance from his distant relation, Sir Kix.

Mrs. Kix

Mrs. Kix, wife of Sir Kix, is distraught that they cannot conceive a child so she gets pregnant by Touchwood Senior. The Kixes are related to Sir Walter in an unspecified way, but the play does indicate that if the Kixes do not bear an heir, they will lose their fortune to Sir Walter. For this reason, the Kixes' childless state becomes a source of strife between them, and Mrs. Kix blames her husband, saying that she never had fertility problems before. After Mrs. Kix and her husband learn of the special fertility drink that Touchwood Senior can sell them, Mrs. Kix encourages her husband to buy it. While her husband drinks the elixir and is sent off on a long horseback ride—which Touchwood Senior says is the only way to make the drink work—the extremely fertile Touchwood Senior impregnates Mrs. Kix in her coach.

Sir Oliver Kix

Sir Oliver Kix is related to Sir Walter and the two are in competition to see who can produce the first legitimate heir and thus secure the Kixes' fortune; Kix unwittingly allows himself to be cuckolded. The Kixes' childless state becomes a source of strife between them, and Sir Kix blames his wife, saying she is barren—even though Sir Kix is an old man and is more likely culpable for their sterile condition. When Sir Kix hears about Touchwood Senior's fertility drink, he buys a vial of the drink from the latter. However, Touchwood Senior tells Sir Kix that in order for the drink to work, Sir Kix must take a long horseback ride to properly mix up the elixir. Sir Kix falls for this deception and, while he is gone on his trip, the extremely fertile Touchwood Senior impregnates Mrs. Kix. Sir Kix is so happy when his wife conceives that he offers to feed and house Touchwood Senior and all of his children including any other children that Touchwood Senior might have in the future.

Touchwood, Junior

Touchwood Junior is in love with Moll Yellowhammer, but her parents forbid her to marry him. The lovers try to marry in secret, but they are caught before they can be wed. Next, they try to run away together across the river, but Maudlin Yellowhammer jumps in the river, catches Moll, and drags her out. Finally, the two lovers fake their deaths. For Touchwood Junior, he fakes his by acting like he is mortally wounded in a duel with Sir Walter Whorehound. However, at the funeral for the lovers, Touchwood Junior and Moll rise up out of their coffins and get married before the Yellowhammers can stop them.

Touchwood, Senior

Touchwood Senior is an extremely fertile man who has more children than he can support and as a result, he and his wife plan to live apart before they have any more children. Touchwood Senior finds a benefactor for his children when he sells a fake elixir to Sir Oliver Kix, saying that it will make him fertile enough to impregnate his wife. However, while Kix is off taking the elixir, Touchwood Senior impregnates Mrs. Kix himself. Sir Kix is so happy that his wife is pregnant that he agrees to support Touchwood Senior and his family.

The Welsh Gentlewoman

The Welsh Gentlewoman is a prostitute whom Sir Walter Whorehound poses as his niece, who is to be married to Tim Yellowhammer in return for Sir Walter getting to marry Moll Yellowhammer. The Welsh Gentlewoman is married to Tim at the same time as the supposed funeral of Moll Yellowhammer. Although Tim is distraught when he finds out he has married a prostitute, she tells him that marriage makes her honest.

Maudlin Yellowhammer

Maudlin Yellowhammer tries to help her husband force their daughter, Moll, to marry Sir Walter Whorehound as an exchange for having their son marry the Welsh Gentlewoman, whom they believe is rich. Although Moll is one of the few chaste characters in the play, Maudlin treats Moll like she is worthless especially when Moll tries on two separate occasions to escape her marriage to Sir Walter. On the second occasion, Maudlin literally drags Moll out of the river by her hair. When Moll uses this incident to fake her own death, Moll's parents mourn her loss but do not attend the funeral because they are too busy trying to marry their son Tim to the Welsh Gentlewoman before Sir Walter Whorehound finds out that his intended bride is dead. As a result, the Yellowhammers arrive too late to Moll's funeral—where Moll and Touchwood Junior reveal that they are alive—and are unable to stop Moll and Touchwood Junior from marrying.

Moll Yellowhammer

Moll is the chaste maid of the play's title who wishes to marry Touchwood Junior, but her parents try to force her to marry Sir Walter Whorehound instead. Moll and Touchwood Junior try to marry in secret, but they are caught before they can be wed. Next, they try to run away together across the river, but Maudlin Yellowhammer jumps in the river, catches Moll and drags her out. Moll uses the incident to fake her death by acting as if she caught ill when her mother pulled her out of the river. At the same time, Touchwood Junior fakes his death by acting like he was mortally wounded in a duel with Sir Walter Whorehound. At the funeral for the lovers, Moll and Touchwood Junior rise up out of their coffins and get married before the Yellowhammers can stop them.

Mr. Yellowhammer

Yellowhammer is a goldsmith who along with his wife, Maudlin, tries to force his daughter, Moll, to marry Sir Walter Whorehound. Yellowhammer is blind to the fact that Touchwood Junior is having him make a wedding ring with which to steal Moll. However, Yellowhammer arrives in time to stop the two lovers' first attempt at marriage. When Allwit comes to see Yellowhammer, he poses as a relative who is trying to give Yellowhammer some advice. He tells Yellowhammer that Sir Walter is an adulterer and Yellowhammer tells Allwit that he will not have Sir Walter marry his daughter. However, when Allwit is gone, Yellowhammer notes that he himself has kept mistresses before, and that he still plans on going through with the marriage of Moll and Sir Walter. When Moll fakes her death, her parents mourn her loss but do not attend the funeral because they are too busy trying to marry their son Tim to the Welsh Gentlewoman before Sir Walter Whorehound finds out that his intended bride is dead. As a result, the Yellowhammers arrive too late to Moll's funeral—where Moll and Touchwood Junior reveal that they are alive—and are unable to stop Moll and Touchwood Junior from marrying. However, Yellowhammer realizes that it could be worse, as he has just married his son to a prostitute and finds comfort in the fact that he only has to pay for one dinner to serve both of his children's weddings.

Tim Yellowhammer

Tim is a university student who is unwittingly led to marry a prostitute posing as the Welsh Gentlewoman. Tim is very dim-witted, but he thinks that his university education makes him smart. As a result, he tries to use Latin whenever he can, much to the dismay of his mother and the Welsh Gentlewoman who thinks he is insulting her. Tim thinks that logic can solve anything and spends much of his time locked in logical debates with his tutor. Although at first he is apprehensive about his intended union with the Welsh Gentlewoman, he grows to be very fond of her. When he finds out after they are married that she is a prostitute, he is distraught until his mother reminds him that he once said he could use logic to prove a prostitute to be an honest woman—and now he has his chance. Ultimately, Tim accepts his wife when she says that, despite her past, marriage makes her an honest woman.

Themes

Marriage

In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, it seems like everybody is either married or wants to get married. In fact, one marriage in particular, the intended marriage of Sir Walter to Moll Yellowhammer, creates the conflict in the play. Sir Walter has agreed to marry Moll and in return he has agreed to have Tim Yellowhammer marry his niece. This first arrangement also introduces the first deception. While Moll is in fact a chaste maid, as the title indicates, Sir Walter's niece—who is not his niece at all but a prostitute—is anything but the Welsh gentlewoman she pretends to be. As Sir Walter is riding into Cheapside with the Welsh gentlewoman, he instructs her in her deception. Sir Walter says, "Here you must pass for a pure virgin." Sir Walter also deceives the Allwits by not telling them that he is planning on getting married. He knows that if the Allwits suspect Sir Walter is getting married, they will try to stop it because, as a single man, he will continue to be their benefactor. When Davy tells Allwit that Sir Walter is intending to marry Moll, Allwit leaves hurriedly saying, "I have no time to stay, nor scarce to speak, / I'll stop those wheels, or all the work will break." By this, Allwit refers to all of the hard work that he and his wife have put into making money off of Sir Walter.

While Sir Walter intends to marry Moll, she is really in love with Touchwood Junior, whom she wants to marry. Their attempts to marry are thwarted on several occasions. The first time, Touchwood Junior dupes Moll's father, a goldsmith, by having him make the ring that he intends to place on Moll's finger. Touchwood Junior is very bold in this ruse, telling Yellowhammer that he intends to use the ring to steal away a man's daughter. However, Yellowhammer does not suspect that he is that man and so criticizes any father who is so blind. Yellowhammer says, "And parents blinded so, but they're served right / That have two eyes, and wear so dull a sight." However, Yellowhammer breaks up the marriage of Moll and Touchwood Junior just in time before the parson can marry them. From this point on the Yellowhammers try to keep Moll under lock and key until she is to be wed to Sir Walter. Yellowhammer says, "In the meantime, I will lock up this baggage, / As carefully as my gold." With some help, Moll escapes again but is literally dragged back by her mother. Feigning a fatal illness, Moll "dies."

Her parents are so caught up with trying to marry Tim to the Welsh gentlewoman that they do not attend the funeral where Moll and Touchwood Junior rise from their coffins and are happily married. The parson says, "Hands join now, but hearts for ever, / Which no parent's mood shall sever." However, the Yellowhammers's "mood" is surprisingly calm and they support the marriage since Sir Walter has proven to be a debtor and is in prison and because they just found out that they have had Tim married to Sir Walter's prostitute. Yellowhammer says, "My poor boy Tim is cast away this morning, / Even before breakfast: married a whore." Tim is also distraught, until his mother reminds him of his own words, saying, "You told me once, by logic you would prove / A whore an honest woman, prove her so Tim." Tim accepts the challenge, but his new wife beats

him to it, saying, "Sir if your logic cannot prove me honest, / There's a thing called marriage, and that makes me honest." Thus, both marriages turn out happily.

Sex

Besides references to marriage, the play is saturated with sex, most notably extramarital affairs. Many of the male characters in the play have engaged in extramarital affairs and so have some of the women. In the seventeenth century when a man slept with another man's wife, he was said to have cuckolded the woman's husband. Cuckoldry, which was depicted by multiple horns on the cuckolded husband's head, was often used to provide humor in plays like this. In the play, two men, Mr. Allwit and Sir Kix, are cuckolded. Mr. Allwit is aware of his cuckolding and allows it to happen, since Sir Walter pays for all of the Allwits's expenses in return for the privilege of sleeping with Mrs. Allwit. Allwit says about Sir Walter, "He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse, / Monthly, or weekly, puts me to nothing." In fact, the affair between Sir Walter and Mrs. Allwit is so strong that Sir Walter is jealous of Allwit. Allwit says, "I may sit still and play; he's jealous for me—/ Watches her steps, sets spies—I live at ease."

Sir Kix, on the other hand, is unaware of his cuckolding although he unknowingly alludes to it at times. For example, in one passage Touchwood Senior, a very fertile man who plans on impregnating the barren Lady Kix—and attributing her pregnancy to the fake fertility drink that he sells to her husband—asks Sir Oliver if he remembers their deal. Sir Oliver says, "Or else I had a bad head." This comment, which can refer to Kix's memory, could also be taken by others to refer to the horns that Sir Oliver is about to gain through his cuckolding.

Money

Besides marriage and sex, the characters in the play obsess about money. By marrying Moll, Sir Walter will get two thousand pounds in a dowry. Although it appears that he has enough money, the audience finds out at the end that he has been having a hard time paying his bills. As Yellowhammer notes, Sir Walter "lies i'th' knight's ward now." The knights ward was a special section in debtor's prison that was devoted to knights. Yellowhammer further notes, "His creditors are so greedy." So, while in the beginning it appears that Sir Walter is marrying Moll because he is interested only in marrying a virgin, at the end the audience can see that he also needed the dowry money to settle his debts. Many of these debts were probably gained from trying to support the Allwits. Through his long relationship with Mrs. Allwit, Sir Walter pays for the children they have, as well as all of the Allwits' living expenses. This certainly helps to drain his funds. As for the Allwits, in the end they use the property and possessions that they have gotten from Sir Walter to better their position in life. Allwit says, "We are richly furnished wife, with household stuff." Mrs. Allwit suggests that they "let out lodgings then, / And take a house in the Strand." In other words, they are going to rent out their house in Cheapside and use the money to buy a house in the Strand, the fashionable part of London.

Touchwood Senior and his wife also worry about money, since his extreme fertility keeps creating children they cannot afford to raise. However, after he dupes Sir Kix into believing that it was his fertility water—and not Touchwood Senior's affair with his wife—that got Lady Kix pregnant, Sir Kix offers to take care of whatever children Touchwood Senior has. Kix says, "Be not afraid to go to your business roundly, / Get children, and I'll keep them." After this point, Touchwood Senior and his family no longer have to worry about money.

Style

Elizabethan Drama

The term *Elizabethan period,* named for England's Queen Elizabeth I, has not been defined in any concrete terms. While some only call dramas Elizabethan if they were written from 1558 to 1603, Elizabeth's actual reign, others call any drama up to 1642—when the theaters were closed—Elizabethan drama. For example, many scholars consider Thomas Middleton an Elizabethan dramatist even though the majority of his plays were written and performed during the Jacobean era. In any case, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* uses similar conventions as other Elizabethan dramas, and so is often included in this category. Elizabethan dramas were performed on stages that were vastly different from those used in classical and medieval times. Unlike medieval plays, Elizabethan drama used very few props or sets, putting the burden on the actors, the dialogue, and the actors' movements to communicate what was going on in the play. In addition, the playgoers were expected to pick up on these clues. Therefore, reading a complex Elizabethan drama like *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* can be very difficult without footnotes since the reader must often determine from the dialogue alone what is going on.

Double Entendre

Plays in the Elizabethan period were also often characterized by double entendres or double meanings. Writers like William Shakespeare, the most famous Elizabethan dramatist, were very adept at inserting these double meanings into the play through dialogue. So was Middleton. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, as in many of his other plays, Middleton's double entendres have sexual connotations. These double meanings show up in the very first exchange of the play when Maudlin Yellowhammer is scolding Moll for not taking her dancing lessons seriously. Maudlin remembers her own dancing lessons, saying, "I was kept at it; I took delight to learn, and he to teach me, pretty brown gentleman, he took pleasure in my company." By this dialogue, one can see that Maudlin was having an affair with her dancing teacher. This is one of the more tame passages in the play. Other more bold references include Touchwood Senior's warning to Sir Kix at the end of the play. Sir Kix has said that he will pay for any children that Touchwood Senior has. To this, Touchwood Senior responds, "Take heed how you dare a man, while you live sir, / That has good skill at his weapon." Touchwood Senior's "weapon" is a reference to his penis. He is skilled at using it because he is so fertile.

Aside

In addition to double entendres, which are spoken out loud in dialogue with another character, Middleton also makes use of asides—comments directed at the audience, which the other characters cannot hear. For example, when Sir Walter tells his prostitute

that she must pass as a virgin, Sir Walter's valet, Davy, makes a comment to the audience. Davy says, "[Aside] Pure Welsh virgin, she lost her maidenhead in Brecknockshire." Davy knows that the woman is a prostitute, so he makes a joke about Sir Walter's comment saying that, technically, the woman is a Welsh virgin since she lost her virginity inside of Wales. Besides these jokes, Middleton uses asides in the play to apprise the audience about the various deceptions that the characters are playing on each other. For example, in another aside, Touchwood Senior holds up the fake fertility drink, saying to the audience: "Here's a little vial of almond-milk / That stood me in some three pence." Although the almond milk only cost a few pence, he is using it to dupe Sir Kix into paying him four hundred pounds. These types of deceptions happen throughout the play and they are often accompanied by asides.

Historical Context

Cheapside in the Early Seventeenth Century

Contemporary audiences would have recognized the joke in the play's title. In the early seventeenth century, the chances of finding a chaste maid in Cheapside were slim. Technically, Cheapside—which was also known at various points as West Cheap or simply, Cheap—was the long, wide street that ran through one of the central sections of London. It served as one of London's marketplaces where merchants like Mr. Yellowhammer, the goldsmith from the play, peddled their wares. In this area, prostitutes also peddled their wares and the area itself had an unseemly reputation.

Catholicism versus Protestantism

The ambiguous morality in Cheapside and of England overall may have been the consequence of an ambiguous and constantly changing religious system. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, England underwent a Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, huge theological battles between various Christian churches. The Reformation was an attack on the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church by various popes and many clergy members. Two strong Protestant leaders, Martin Luther and John Calvin, led the charge for reform, in the process creating two new Christian denominations, Lutheranism and Calvinism, respectively. In defense, the Catholic Church instituted a number of reforms and embarked on a religious renewal. During this time period, Pope Clement VII refused to annul the marriage of Henry VIII of England to Catherine of Aragon. In response, Henry passed several acts that established the Church of England as an individual church with Henry as its head. Up until then, the Church in England had been the English division of the Catholic Church and thus had the pope as its head, as other regional Catholic Churches did.

Although Henry intended for the Church of England to remain Catholic, his successor, Edward VI, introduced many Protestant reforms during his short reign. Then, to make matters more confusing, Edward's half-sister, Mary, a Catholic, assumed the throne in 1553 and persecuted Protestants during her short reign. When Elizabeth I became queen in 1558, she restored Protestantism in England, passing several acts that favored Protestants. However, Protestants thought she was not hard enough on Catholics, and Catholics—backed by the pope—thought Elizabeth a heretic. Elizabeth toed the line during her long reign, not willing to endorse either side totally and the religious tension increased. The Puritans were the most zealous Protestants and as their name implied, they sought to be the most pure and to enforce this pure way of life on others. The Puritan movement in the early seventeenth century ultimately led to a series of English Civil Wars from 1642 to 1651 and the establishment of a short-lived Commonwealth (1649-1660), which was abolished when the monarchy's power was restored in 1660.

Law Enforcement and Prisons

Amidst all of this religious strife, London had many legal systems in place that dealt with both religious and civil issues. The play features two examples of the legal system in London at this time. The promoters, hired spies who confiscated meat that was bought illegally during Lent, are one example of a government agency that enforced religious practices. The other major example is the imprisonment of Sir Walter at the end of the play. When Mrs. Allwit asks what has become of Sir Walter, Mr. Yellowhammer notes: "Who, the knight? / He lies i'th' knight's ward now." The knight's ward was a special section in London prisons that was reserved for knights, to separate them from others who belonged to different classes. One of Yellowhammer's other lines, "His creditors are so greedy," indicates that Sir Walter has been arrested because he spent all of his fortune on the Allwits. As a result, he would have been thrown into one of the debtors' prisons, the most famous of which was Newgate.

Critical Overview

By the time Middleton wrote the play in the early 1610s, most of his comedies had been performed in front of private audiences. However, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* was written and performed for a popular audience. Charles Barber says in his critical introduction to the University of California Press version of the play, "This may help to explain the richness and exuberance of the play compared with its predecessors, and the fuller and more sympathetic handling of the romantic lovers."

In his own time, Middleton was a popular playwright with audiences, but was not held in as high esteem critically as was William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and other major playwrights of the Elizabethan and Jacobean time periods. Despite this fact, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* would certainly have been seen as a daring play in its time since it harshly satirized religious hypocrisy among groups such as the Puritans when the Puritan movement was gaining strength. The trend to ignore Middleton as one of the great dramatists of the seventeenth century continued throughout the next two centuries. There were exceptions to this, however. For example, in his 1887 essay on Middleton for The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists, Algernon Charles Swinburne argues that Middleton is a "genius," and calls *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* "a play of quite exceptional freedom and audacity, and certainly one of the drollest and liveliest that ever broke the bounds of propriety or shook the sides of merriment."

In fact, Middleton's works did not earn a substantial amount of critical attention until this century, and even then his image suffered from the fact that he often collaborated with others. Scholars still debate which of his plays Middleton wrote alone, which ones he wrote in collaboration, and which ones were actually written by others. For the most part, however, modern critics count Middleton as one of the great English dramatists and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* as one of the great English comedies. Many critics cite the play's deft combination of comedy and tragedy, especially as it serves to highlight humanity's vices. F. R. Mulryne says in his 1979 entry on Middleton for *British Writers,* "The play's gusto and seriousness, combined, make it one of theater's richest statements on money, sex, and society." Many critics note the realistic qualities of the play; it gives an astonishingly accurate portrayal of what real life was like for London citizens of the time. However, as Martin W. Sampson notes in his 1915 introduction to *Masterpieces of the English Drama: Thomas Middleton*, Middleton's realism differs from the realistic, or naturalistic, movement that took place at the turn of the twentieth century. Sampson says, "The Elizabethan with utter frankness reveals passions and prejudices, foolish, ignominious, or debasing, but he is free of bitterness and superiority."

In fact, the morality of the play—with its many tricks and deceptions—has elicited the most comment from critics. As Dorothy M. Farr notes of the play in her book *Thomas Middleton and the Drama of Realism: A Study of Some of the Representative Plays,* "We often meet greedy tricksters and false brides in Jacobean drama, but few so cleverly placed in relation to one another as these." Critics offer several explanations of the immoral behavior in the play which has sometimes elicited negative comments from

critics. In his book *Thomas Middleton's City Comedies,* Anthony Covatta sums up the sentiment from these critics. According to Covatta, "For them the play's world is a very dark one indeed, its characters completely lacking in moral and religious conviction and in normal human love." Covatta is one of the critics who believes that the characters' motivations can be traced to a desire to help their families. Covatta says, "Characters step outside the boundaries of propriety and morality but do so because the real advantages to be gained outweigh the hypothetical benefits of maintaining sterile order."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses the ambiguous morality that Middleton demonstrates in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

Modern readers may walk away from Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* shocked and appalled. The play takes place during Lent, a penitent time in some Christian denominations, but features several acts that are anything but holy. A husband willingly allows his wife to have sex with another man in return for financial security; another unwittingly pays for the opportunity to be cuckolded; and, a bastard child is wittingly donated to royal spies by being disguised as a basket of meat. With incidents such as these, Middleton's moral intent with the play has been widely discussed and challenged. Middleton was a Christian and has been labeled both a Calvinist and a Puritan by various critics. The latter may seem odd to a modern-day viewer since Middleton satirizes Puritans in the play. However, as Herbert Jack Heller notes in his book *Penitent Brothellers: Grace, Sexuality, and Genre in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies,* the outrageously immoral acts in the play can overshadow any moral message on the part of Middleton. Heller says, "a critic not sensitive to the religious perspectives of Middleton and his first audiences is likely to conclude that Middleton favors attitudes which he is, in fact, exposing." However, the play does have a moral center, albeit a shaky one, in the form of Moll Yellowhammer and Touchwood Junior.

From the very beginning of the play, most characters are depicted as being very immoral. Anthony Covatta says in his book *Thomas Middleton's City Comedies,* "It is beyond doubt that his characters are usually 'low,' both morally and socially. They are neither refined nor scrupulous." This is an understatement in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, which starts out immoral and gets worse. When Maudlin speaks to her daughter Moll in the first exchange of dialogue, Maudlin criticizes Moll for not being more like Maudlin was as a maid. However, as a maid, Maudlin was "lightsome, and quick, two years before I was married." This passage on its own could simply mean that Maudlin was excited and devoted to her feminine studies. However, it is soon revealed through the use of double entendre that Maudlin is saying that, when she was young, she was sexually active with her dancing instructor. Right from the start, the play takes on sexual overtones, which remain throughout the work.

Certain characters seem to have codes of morality that are conveniently flexible. For example, for both Allwit and Mr. Yellowhammer, it is okay to sell the sex of one of their family members in order to preserve their financial stability. In the case of Allwit, he allows his wife to sleep with Sir Walter in return for having the knight support the couple. Allwit says, "I thank him, h'as maintained my house this ten years, / Not only keeps my wife, but a keeps me." Likewise, Mr. Yellowhammer thinks nothing of marrying his daughter to Sir Walter even though she is not interested because in return, Tim Yellowhammer will marry the Welsh gentlewoman and inherit her fortune. Yellowhammer says, "Tis a match of Sir Walter's own making / To bind us to him, and our heirs for ever." Even when Yellowhammer finds out from Allwit that Sir Walter has

been having sexual affairs, he does not change his mind about having Moll marry the knight. Yellowhammer says, "The knight is rich, he shall be my son-in-law, / No matter so the whore he keeps be wholesome, / My daughter takes no hurt then, so let them wed." By "wholesome," Yellowhammer means free of venereal disease. In other words, as long as Sir Walter does not have any sexually transmitted diseases, Yellowhammer will overlook the knight's transgressions. As Dorothy M. Farr notes in her book *Thomas Middleton and the Drama of Realism: A Study of Some of the Representative Plays,* Allwit and Yellowhammer have specific moral codes that allow them to commit certain acts. Farr says, "In the code of both, greed excuses lechery."

Other characters have odd codes of morality that allow them to commit one immoral act but not another. One of the most famous examples from the play is the scene with the two promoters. These two hired spies demonstrate that they are willing to take meat away from the poor but will also turn a blind eye to anybody who bribes them enough. The first promoter says to his partner after letting a man sneak some meat by them, "Tis Mr Beggarland's man, the wealthy merchant. / That is in fee with us." However, when the country wench dupes them into taking her unwanted child, the two promoters have a moral dilemma since they unwittingly promised to keep it. Covatta says, "They are quite willing to use their post for personal profit but feel they cannot break their word."

Into this corrupt world, where almost everyone seems a villain, Middleton places two characters who help to balance out the immorality, at least a little bit. Charles Barber says in his critical introduction to the University of California Press version of the play, "The young lovers. . . . provide, even if sketchily, a norm of human relations by which we can judge the marketeering attitudes of the other characters." Moll Yellowhammer and Touchwood Junior are not entirely innocent of deception. Touchwood Junior at first appears very moral because he believes in chastity. As he remarks to Moll, "Turn not to me till thou mayst lawfully," meaning that they should wait until after they are married to have sex. Despite his own adherence to a chaste lifestyle, however, Heller notes that this good intention is offset by Junior's "active promotion of his senior brother's arrangement with the Kixes." Likewise, Moll engages in a series of tricks and deceptions to try to escape her upcoming marriage to Sir Walter and get married to Touchwood Junior without her parents' consent. However, despite the trickery of Moll and Touchwood Junior, their marriage is motivated by love, which makes them seem more moral than other characters.

In the end, all of the discussion over how moral the play is or even whether the play has a moral, may be a topic of interest only to modern readers and critics. Moral justification for the acts in the play was probably not an issue for many playgoers in Middleton's time since Elizabethan audiences found humor in situations that many modern viewers do not. As Martin Sampson notes in his introduction to *Masterpieces of the English Drama: Thomas Middleton*, "he who would understand the immense vivacity of Elizabethan drama must come to perceive that our forbears saw the funny side of many things which to us are beneath or above contempt." Likewise, since Middleton's play has been noted by many critics to be representative of life in London at the time, many of the playgoers may have recognized the moral sacrifices that the characters make in order to survive in the city. As T. H. Howard Hill notes in his entry on Middleton for *Dictionary of Literary*

Biography, "There is small security in his comic world for any of them, and even the best, like Touchwood and Moll, can thrive only by their wits."

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Wallace is a freelance writer and poet. In this essay, Wallace considers Middleton's deft investigation of truth and artifice.

In Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* nothing is quite as it seems. Wives act like whores. Whores pass for wives. Dunces spout Latin to prove their erudition. Middle class parents try desperately to marry their children into an upper class that tries desperately to hide the impending doom of poverty. Even the language Middleton chooses is rife with double meanings. Through all the complicated word-play and the sometimes bewildering tangle of revelations and protestations, Middleton inexorably explores the difference between what truly is and what can be seen, and the human need for both truth and artifice.

Middleton's Cheapside is crowded with characters who would like to be something other than what they are. The Yellowhammer parents want nothing more than to be considered a step above their current station. Their son, Tim, wants to be considered a learned gentleman. Their daughter, Moll, wishes she were engaged to a different man. Sir Walter Whorehound wishes he possessed the wealth his title suggests he merits. Mistress Allwitt, who has borne him seven illegitimate children, wishes to appear a respectable matron. Touchwood Senior wishes for fewer children, Sir Oliver and Lady Kix for just one of their own. Touchwood Junior longs for the hand of Moll, which is forbidden to him, when the play opens, by the competing ambitions of her parents.

Allwitt alone in this mix is happy in his state and, it seems, in touch with reality. As the cuckolded husband whose household is entirely paid for by the generosity of his wife's lover, Allwitt not only fully acknowledges his position, but glories in it: "I pay for none at all, yet fools think's mine . . . he's jealous for me, watches her steps, sets spies; I live at ease, he has both the cost and torment: when the strings of his heart frets, I feed, laugh or sing." Allwitt's disdain for the fools who are tricked by the shaky artifice of his sham marriage is matched by what could almost be described as a strange zeal for telling the truth. Not only does he horrify Sir Walter with his directness about the reality of their relation, he seems to take glee in telling the truth in other instances as well: he trumps the promoters with the fact of his wife's childbirth, which exempts him from the penalty they planned to place on him for the crime of having meat during Lent. When it looks as though Moll's unhappy engagement to Sir Walter might end his comfortable arrangement, Allwit resorts not to artifice, but to truth, going to the girl's father, Yellowhammer, with the facts of Sir Walter's domestic situation.

Interestingly, Yellowhammer, one of the characters sunk most deeply in both self-deception and machinations to deceive the rest of the world, reacts to the truth with more artifice by pretending to be enraged at the news but actually filing it away as a bargaining chip in his negotiations with Sir Walter for his daughter. In Middleton's artifice-infested Cheapside, the simple truth can't seem to survive on its own. In fact, Middleton almost seems to question truth's usefulness by giving Allwitt, an extremely corrupt character, such concern for it. Why does Middleton give such seeming concern

for truth to a character as corrupt as Allwittt? Middleton, whose vision while realistic is also highly moral, surely is not suggesting that lies are better than truth. He may be making a more complicated point: that a man with a conscience might want to hide parts of himself from the world because of his awareness that he has fallen short of his ideals. "The more slave!" Sir Walter exclaims of Allwitt. "When man turns base, out goes his soul's pure flame: the fat of ease o'erthrows the eyes of shame." Allwitt, although he seems committed to what is true, has actually lost something far more important: the ability to judge between not just truth and lies, but good and evil.

If Allwitt stands on the bottom rung of Middleton's moral ladder, Moll, the "chaste maid" of the title, and her reasonably virtuous lover, Touchwood Junior, cling somewhat clumsily near the top. The two lovers have done nothing wrong: even Middleton's loaded sexual language simmers down some in their speeches. The two of them want only to be joined in holy matrimony and are prevented by the avarice and artifice of those around them: Moll's parents, who want a daughter wed to a knight, and Sir Walter who wants Moll's parents' gold. Within this twisted world, the young lovers behave with as much honor as may be realistic: Touchwood properly buys a ring for his beloved and brings in a priest to consecrate their union. But, after two thwarted attempts at marriage, the young lovers resort to fighting artifice with artifice, faking their deaths to gain sympathy from both the public and their parents who are unable to stand against the tide of public opinion when the lovers are "resurrected" in the final scene. Their artifice, however, has a different edge to it than that of their parents, who work to obscure reality by pretending to be other than what they are. Instead, Moll and Touchwood Junior scheme only to reveal the deeper truth of their love.

Middleton's take on the usefulness of truth does not end with a simple preference for artifice over bare facts, however. In fact, although Middleton pairs Allwitt's zeal for revealing the naked truth with a deeply corrupt soul, Middleton is unsparing with his characters who refuse to see the truth when it stands clearly before them. Touchwood Junior buys Moll's wedding ring from her unsuspecting father, even telling the old man that he plans to deceive the parents of his intended in order to marry her, but Yellowhammer, blinded by greed at the sale, sees nothing. His blindness is ironically two-sided: he is unaware of his daughter's true value, objectifying her as only a bargaining chip with which to advance in the world, with little to no thought for her happiness beyond concern for her physical well-being. At the same time, although her moodiness leads him to suspect she might love someone other than Sir Walter, Yellowhammer is absolutely unable to conceive of the possibility that she might muster enough spunk to deceive him and follow her heart. Even when Touchwood boldly claims that Moll is almost a perfect copy of his beloved and uses her finger in fitting the ring, Yellowhammer, perhaps blinded by Touchwood's guarantee of payment, regardless of whether the ring fits or not, remains unseeing. He even adds his own line of mockery to Touchwood's little farce declaring, "I wonder things can be so warily carried, and parents blinded so; but they're served right that have two eyes and wear so dull a sight."

If Middleton punishes those that refuse to see clearly, he also rewards those who are true to themselves, however imperfectly. The purest example of this is the young lovers, who refuse to betray their hearts, against strong odds. Middleton is also kind to

Touchwood Senior, who, aware of his legendary fertility, uses his double-edged gift to bless Sir Oliver and Lady Kix with a child. In an absolute world, Touchwood Senior stands on very shaky ground, but Middleton uses him as the instrument to grant the wishes of Lord Oliver and Lady Kix, who then reward Touchwood by promising to provide for him and all his future children. On the other hand, the Yellowhammers, Sir Walter, and Tim, all of whom strive to be something which they are not, are those who are punished most severely, all three losing both money and prestige.

Within Middleton's logic of remaining true to oneself, the Welsh gentlewoman is an interesting aberration. Originally a whore, she passes for a maid and becomes a wife, serving as a foil to Mistress Allwitt who passes for a wife but serves as a whore. Middleton's insistence that his characters remain true to themselves would seem to necessitate her punishment for pretending to be something which she is not, which her marriage, and it's attendant rise to respectability, seems to contradict. But Middleton may be using her to make a larger point: that the categories of "wife" and "whore" are not defined by behavior alone, that the Welsh gentlewoman's true identity may not be completely defined by her past dalliances. But by no stretch of the imagination is she truly pure or honest, and Middleton is not absolutely benevolent with her: her marriage to Tim could be construed either as reward or punishment.

No matter how true or false Middleton's characters are to themselves, a vast gap remains for all of them between what they do and what they say. Throughout the play, character after character makes beautiful written and morally sound speeches on the way life ought to be—then goes on to belie this, sometimes with their very next act. Touchwood Senior's speech on marriage at the opening of act 2 is perhaps the best example. In his almost achingly lovely paean to marriage, he praises his wife's willingness to be separated from him until a time when they can afford the children their desire engenders. "Honest wife, I thank thee," he says as they part. "I ne'er knew the perfect treasure thou brought'st with thee more than at this instant moment. A man's happy when he's at poorest that has matched his soul as rightly as his body." As soon as Mistress Touchwood exits the scene, Touchwood's speech turns from praise of her character within half a dozen lines, to bitter ruminations on his inability to enjoy marital or extramarital relations without impregnating his partner—and then to an encounter with a woman who is likely the mother of one of his illegitimate children. Sir Oliver wishes his wife happiness at any price, then descends into recriminations about her fertility within half a page of dialogue. The gossips that attend Mistress Allwitt's lying-in offer strings of touching blessings on the likely doomed newborn while drinking so heavily they leave staggering. Even the addle-headed student Tim mouths a seemingly prescient nugget of advice on marriage, wondering that his parents "think I have no more care of my body than to lie with one that I ne'er knew, a mere stranger, one that ne'er went to school with me neither, nor ever play-fellows together"—but at the close of the drama, he's managed to marry, not just a stranger, but a whore.

What does Middleton mean to say by revealing the ugly ditch between what his characters say and the lives they lead? In the face of the worldly pressures which sympathetic characters like Sir Oliver, Lady Kix, Touchwood Senior, Touchwood Junior, and Moll face—poverty, society, biology—Middleton's realistic about the fact that it's

almost impossible to live a life of absolutes and survive. Middleton does not seem to judge his characters for their inability to live up to their more noble dreams. He is not willing to give up on them, either. In fact, by linking Allwitt's corruption with his brash insistence on looking the truth square in the face, Middleton seems to suggest that some artifice may, in fact, be a necessity for the human race. To avoid sinking completely into depravity, Middleton's characters need those lovely speeches. While they can't live up to them, the fact that they can still speak of better things provides the proof that their human flame is still flickering.

Source: Carey Wallace, Critical Essay on *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* in *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Marotti examines how Middleton leveraged the theme of fertility to great comic effect in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

When Thomas Middleton wrote *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611-1613), his finest and most complex comic drama, he was already a practiced and successful private theater playwright. In such plays as *Michaelmas Term*, *A Mad World, My Master*, and *A Trick to Catch the Old One* he had helped to perfect the form of city comedy that was so fashionable in early Jacobean London, reflecting, as it did, the intellectual sophistication, moral scepticism, and taste for irony of its educated audience. In composing *A Chaste Maid* for the public stage, he faced the problem of turning satiric comedy into popular comedy, or at least of merging the ironic vision of his coterie dramas with the festive spirit of that particular dramatic tradition which a play like Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* epitomizes. His solution was to utilize much of the thematic material he had handled in his earlier works—materialism and avarice, bourgeois pretensions, aristocratic degeneracy, religious hypocrisy, libertinism and prodigality—but also to expand his treatment of human sexuality to lay new stress on the theme of fertility and, hence, make Eros, not Momus, the god of his comic world.

Critical Essay #4

This new synthesis is anticipated by certain elements in his previous plays, such as the marriages and festivities at the end of *A Mad World* and *A Trick*, comedies which avoid the sterner, judgment-scene conclusions of the earlier, more didactic pieces, *The Phoenix*, *Your Five Gallants*, and *Michaelmas Term*. *The Family of Love* is a particularly interesting case: like *A Chaste Maid*, it concludes with a celebration of marriage and the family and a clear affirmation of the goodness and power of human sexuality properly used, proclaiming the value of fruitful love in honest physical terms. The love of Gerardine and Maria, the play's romantic hero and heroine, leads logically and naturally to sexual intercourse; and the child born to them in the course of the action is a symbol of the richness and vitality of their relationship. It is no accident that the play's loveless couples, the Purges and the Glisters, are childless, and the lecherous gallants, Lipsalve and Gudgeon, comically impotent in their sexual frustration. In any event, this comedy signals an interest on Middleton's part in the human reproductive powers—not merely because private theater audiences demanded sexual material, but also because he could make of it valid thematic use.

This interest in the theme of fertility is a continuing one for Middleton, especially apparent in the unusual number of pregnancies and onstage infants in his later plays. In *A Fair Quarrel*, a tragicomedy written in collaboration with William Rowley, the Fitzallen Jane relationship bears a remarkable similarity to the Gerardine Maria one: despite their use for the creation of some tragicomic responses, Jane's pregnancy and the onstage infant serve as a promise that the society of this play will once again be harmonious, that the quarrel between the Colonel and Captain Ager, who are unwittingly related because of the young lovers' precontracted marriage, will end "fairly," with the younger generation of characters enjoying life instead of thwarting it. In *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, Lactantio's cast-off mistress, disguised as a page to escape detection by the young hypocrite's antifeminist uncle, is visibly pregnant onstage before giving birth to their child. Aside from the broad comedy of the scene in which she is forced to improve her "manly" graces by taking dancing lessons which actually induce labor (the kind of farcical treatment of sex Middleton could not resist), she is striking evidence, in this play, of the power of fertile sexuality which the woman-hating Cardinal rejects, to which the widowed Aurelia (like Olivia in *Twelfth Night*) pretends to be immune, and which ultimately causes the discomfiture of the opportunistic Lactantio himself. In terms of the drama's festive conclusion, the child born to this anonymous girl is, as in *The Family of Love*, a sign of a languishing society's capacity for regeneration. In *The Old Law*, Agatha, who is sentenced to death under the outrageous edict stipulating that all men over eighty and all women over sixty are to be executed, makes a pathetic attempt at feigning pregnancy by hiding a cushion under her gown in order to be allowed to survive. Here, more obviously than in *A Fair Quarrel* and *More Dissemblers*, pregnancy —even a counterfeit one—is a symbol of the life-force within nature and the human instinct to live.

As Shakespeare's sonnets testify, man's pro-creative powers had a more urgent importance in an age of high infant-mortality and short life-expectancy. Jonson's

Hymenaei offers immediate conception as the ideal in human marriage; for fertility, as the conclusion of *A Mid-summer Night's Dream* and the wedding masque of *The Tempest* illustrate, is the greatest blessing a loving married couple can possess. In *Much Ado About Nothing,* Benedick comically remarks that marriage is a necessary institution because "the world must be peopled"—a commandment which is quite serious, considered against the background of all the immanent dangers to life and health in the medically primitive Renaissance. London, for example, lost more than 30,000 people in the plague of 1603-4; and man's only effective weapon against death was procreation. In Shakespeare's words to the young man of the sonnets: "nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defense / Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence" (Sonnet XII).

Critical Essay #5

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside demonstrates that the theme of fertility can find its fullest expression in comedy, the one form of drama which best embodies the *élan vital*; for this particular play fuses this theme with its basic comic pattern. In its joyous celebration of man's procreative energies, *A Chaste Maid* is close in spirit to comedy's origin in phallic song—a virtually prototypical comic drama (in Susanne Langer's definition of the form), "erotic, risque, and sensuous if not sensual, impious, and even wicked." If Eros is the "presiding genius of comedy," he exists here in his properly comic avatar Priapus in the character of Touchwood Sr., who, in his enormous sexual potency, most vividly symbolizes the power of fertility present in Middleton's dramatic world.

Functioning effectively as a life-principle in a world threatened by moral and physical disease and death, he has the incredible—and comically magical—ability of having his every act of intercourse result in a pregnancy. He remarks with genial self-mockery:

.. . of all men
I am the most unfortunate in that game
That ever pleas'd both genders; I ne'er play'd yet
Under a bastard; the poor wenches curse me
To the pit where'er I come; they were ne'er serv'd so,
But us'd to have more words than one to a bargain:
I have such a fatal finger in such business,
I must forth with't; chiefly for country wenches,
For every harvest I shall hinder haymaking;
Enter a wench with a child
I had no less than seven lay in last progress,
Within three weeks of one another's time.

In this tissue of double entendres, there is a spirit of vitality and play that distracts the audience from the potential moral issues in such rambunctious sexuality. Middleton, in fact, seems only interested in this drama in quickening his audience's ethical awareness with reference to such things as avarice and callous selfishness, sins which have a negative, asocial character and which result in the frustration of love and the disruption of families. For him, the forces which aid Thanatos in its battle with Eros are the really dangerous ones. So Touchwood Sr. exists, in his erotic vitality, as a healthy counterbalance to anti-life activities like fanatical and hypocritical religious asceticism, ruthless social-climbing, and the stubborn pursuit of wealth for its own sake. But, in this play's comic society, his fertility is initially a victim of economic "necessity": he and his wife are forced into a temporary separation because they cannot afford to have more children. As he explains to her in the very first scene in which they appear:

.. . our desires
Are both too fruitful for our own barren fortunes.
How adverse runs the destiny of some creatures,

Some only can get riches and no children;
We only can get children and no riches . . . .. .
every year a child, and some years two . . .

In this action, love must be liberated from the tyranny of money, or at least there must be a reconciliation of Eros and Pecunia, a harmony toward which the play as a whole must move; for the drama's hero and heroine, Touchwood Jr. and Moll Yellowhammer, face a problem thematically related to that of the Touchwood Seniors' and the solutions in the two plot lines are causally interrelated.

The Touchwood Seniors' problem finds its answer through an operation of comic accident. Since Middleton builds a farcical symmetry into his play in assigning to Sir Oliver Kix and his wife a problem precisely opposite to theirs (wealth and childlessness), it is inevitable that the two should cancel each other out. Sir Oliver suffers from impotence, as Lady Kix's insult, "brevity," implies, and, in spite of his railing against his wife for her supposed barrenness, it is clearly his fault that they are without children. Lady Kix complains:

Every one gets before me; there's my sister
Was married but at Bartholomew-eve last
And she can have two children at birth;
O, one of them, one of them would ha' serv'd my turn . . .

Obsessed with their desire for a family, they are willing to "give a thousand pound to purchase fruitfulness," an offer tailor-made for Touchwood Sr.

In his erotic comedy *Mandragola,* Macchiavelli uses a fertility potion as a central device for his comic intrigue. Callimaco (who is, like Touchwood Sr., a witty schemer) poses as a doctor with a powerful conception potion derived from the aphrodisiac mandrake plant and persuades Messr. Nicia not only to allow him to administer it to his wife, whom he desires, but to engage the sexual services of an anonymous victim who is supposedly to die from the encounter, a role played by Callimaco himself. In *A Chaste Maid*, Middleton creates a similar comic action, but he eliminates some of the complexities of the plot Macchiavelli uses, though he utilizes not one, but two fertility potions. In the scene in which the Kixes spend their energies in mutual accusation, a maid tells them about a certain doctor's miraculous remedy for sterility; and, since this is in the same scene in which Touchwood Sr. has been introduced, the audience is in on the trick from the start:

There's a gentleman,
I haply have his name too, that has got
Nine children, by one water that he useth;
It never misses; they come so fast upon him,
He was fain to give it over
.. . he'll undertake,

Using that water, within fifteen year,
For all your wealth, to make you a poor man,
You shall so swarm with children.

Excited by this vision of abundant progeny, the Kixes immediately hire Touchwood Sr. to administer the "water." In an episode of untroubled farce, Touchwood Sr. gives Sir Oliver a vial of almond milk (totemically, the appropriate color liquid) and sends him out to ride on horseback for five hours to build up his sexual potency. When Lady Kix asks him how she should take her medicine, this "doctor," who has, incidentally, just finished a meal of aphrodisiac foods, tells her, "Yours must be taken lying," and leads her off to have intercourse—in her coach, if necessary. When the "water" has worked its magic and Lady Kix's pregnancy is verified, Sir Oliver thinks that he has sired a child with the help of Touchwood Senior's medical skills and is so rapturously happy that he proposes, with comic unconsciousness, that their two families live in a kind of symbiotic relationship. He tells his cuckholder-benefactor:

. . . I am so endear'd to thee for my wife's fruitfulness
That I charge you both, your wife and thee,
To live no more asunder for the world's frowns;
I have purse, and bed, and board for you:
Be not afraid to go to your business roundly;
Get children, and I'll keep them.

In the harmony that is reached between need and abundance, the force of fertility is finally liberated. In the play's other two plots, however, this goal is harder to achieve, for the problems they contain are more serious and complex.

In the Sir Walter Whorehound Allwits plot, the comic action is more obviously satiric, since the fertility theme is subordinated to the moral issue of the bourgeois couple's adulterous relationship with their degenerate patron. Whereas Touchwood Senior's motives for his virtually amoral adultery with Lady Kix are healthy in the sense that he brings joy to the Kixes and reunites his own family, Sir Walter's relationship to the Allwits is a brutalizing one that strikes at the very foundation of marriage and the family. In fact, his ultimate expulsion from the play's reconstituted society is justified, in large part, by his pretense that his illicit relationship with Mistress Allwit carries with it the rights of a marital one—a mistake which Touchwood Sr., in his indiscriminate swiving, never makes. Middleton calls attention to Sir Walter's particular moral deformity by attributing to him the kind of thin-skinned jealousy we would expect of the husband, not the cuckolder: he thinks of Mistress Allwit as his rightful possession and is tormented because, as he says to the wittol, "I heard you were once offering to go to bed to her." His selfishness affects all three of the play's major plots; and so, after he has been wounded in his fight with Touchwood Jr., he justly deserves his virtual exile, becoming, like Dampit of *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, a scapegoat figure, carrying with him all the moral disgust the audience might feel for any of the play's other vicious characters.

In spite of the satiric material in this particular plot, the point of view of the Touchwood Sr. Kixes' plot carries over to soften some of the moral outlines. For even here Middleton is able to affirm some aspects of a basically unattractive situation. This is evident in the (apparently) deliberate dramatic parallelism between Sir Walter's latest child by Mistress Allwit and the infant brought to Touchwood Sr. by the country wench: in each case, Middleton amplifies the theme of procreative vitality and uses the infants, not to condemn male libertinism, but to expose life-denying, anti-carnal religious hypocrisy.

When the country girl leaves him to fare for herself in Puritan London with his latest bastard (her fifth child), the impoverished Touchwood Sr. remarks to himself:

What shift she'll make now with this piece of flesh
In this strict time of Lent, I cannot imagine;
Flesh dare not peep abroad now . . .

The pun on the word "flesh" is elaborated dramatically in the subsequent scene in which we witness the corrupt promotors selectively enforcing "religious wholesome laws." These civil regulations against the consumption of meat in the city during the Lenten season are representative of the pharasaical denial of man's physicality that must be exposed, as it is, by the very "flesh" it seeks to humble. And this is precisely what happens in the episode in which the promoters, who confiscate meat only from those who have not bribed them, seize upon the girl's basket, in which the infant is sleeping, but which they think contains only a piece of mutton they covet, and find themselves with a "piece of flesh" they had not expected to gather. The flesh, which they actually serve, but puritanically pretend to despise, has its revenge on them.

The christening party scene, at the center of which is another child (the new Allwit baby), is thematically close to this one; for, like the promotors, the Puritan ladies suffer a betrayal by their own appetites. What begins as a display of bourgeois pseudopoliteness becomes an image of comic animality. The women glut themselves on comfits and get ludicrously drunk on the wine offered them, making sexual advances, in their hiccoughing over-indulgence, at the first males to come into reach, Tim Yellowhammer and his Cambridge tutor. The infant, which, like the country girl's child, is a sign of the physical vitality within the world of *A Chaste Maid*, again occasions the unmasking of the animal appetites of religious hypocrites.

The Sir Walter Allwits' plot, then, may raise some serious ethical questions; but, as is evident in the christening party scene and the strong presence of the fertility theme (much is made of Mistress Allwit's pregnancy and the Allwit household has a total of seven children), there is something comically alive about it. In the Touchwood Jr.-Yellowhammers plot the mood is darker: here Eros is clearly repressed and, as the symbolic deaths of Moll and her lover indicate, the greed and opportunism of the Yellowhammers are more potent anti-life forces. Money tyrannizes over love in the Yellowhammers' insistence that their daughter marry the profligate, but titled, Sir Walter Whorehound against her will. In a scene which is probably intended as a parody of popular theater romantic pathos, Moll is apparently killed by a combination of her

parents' cruel insensitivity to her feelings and the news of her lover's supposed death. And the audience itself believes the young couple to have died; for it is probably meant to react to their resurrection in the final scene with a joyful surprise, jolted into a comic awareness of the value of life and love.

Eros is freed from bondage finally in the context of a conventional but highly theatrical device. After the coffins of the young lovers are brought onstage to file dirgeful music of recorders, attended by the play's major characters (with the exception of the Yellowhammers, who appear later, and Sir Walter, who is in a hospital recovering from his wounds), Touchwood Sr. delivers a funeral oration to enlist the sympathies of his audience, and then suddenly revives his brother and Moll: "Up then apace, and take your fortunes, / Make these joyful hearts; Here's none but friends." In a trick which Jacobean comedy borrows from the *commedia dell'arte,* the two lovers arise from their coffins and are married on the spot. This transformation of winding-sheets into wedding-sheets makes their caskets into life and fertility symbols: "Here be your wedding-sheets you brought along with you: you may both go to bed when you please too," Touchwood Sr. tells them, presiding over their resurrection and espousals (as he had over their earlier aborted wedding) like a benevolent fertility god. Even in this plot, love triumphs over all odds; and the double wedding with which the play concludes—Touchwood Jr. and Moll, Tim Yellowhammer and Sir Walter's Welsh courtesan—converts the mood of the comedy wholly into one of celebration, the avaricious Yellowhammer, despite a comic trace of stinginess, incongruously emerging as a joyful host to the younger generation:

So fortune seldom deals two marriages
With one hand, and both lucky; the best is,
One feast will serve them both: marry, for room,
I'll have the dinner kept in Goldsmiths' Hall,
To which, kind gallants, I invite you all.

This festive conclusion, like that of *A Mad World, My Masters*, not only regenerates the play's comic society, but it also ceremoniously reaches out into the world of the audience—a popular one in this case—to offer it the wholesome recreation of the spirits and the psychological cleansing that comic mirth can bring. *A Chaste Maid*, having exorcised its own narrowly moral concerns along with Sir Walter, whose absence is notable in this last scene, conveys to the spectators what Susanne Langer calls "the pure sense of life [which] is the underlying feeling of comedy," a feeling which has been implicit all along in the theme of human fertility.

Source: Arthur F. Marotti, "Fertility and Comic Form in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,*" in *Comparative Drama,* Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1969, pp. 65-74.

Critical Essay #6

In the following essay, Chatterji explores Middleton's integration of disparate elements and materials into a "coherent artistic pattern" in A Chaste Maid.

Richard Levin's recent article on the interrelations of the four plots of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* does justice to the highly complex structure of this fascinating comedy and covers an area of Middleton criticism so far practically neglected. While admiring the details of Professor Levin's elaborate and meticulous analysis, I feel, nevertheless, that the ground plan of the play is still missing. What fundamental design did Middleton have in mind when mustering with such splendid skill his own architectonic abilities? Why did he select the particular episodes that he did? In other words, what exactly brings together and unifies the various plots of the play, not excluding the Touchwood Senior episode? The answer, I believe, has to be sought not

merely at the level of plot (causal or analogical), but at yet another level, at which Middleton has ultimately integrated his work and with which the level of plot is correlated. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* is a fine achievement of the Elizabethan multiple unity, since, as has been recognized, the distinction of the play lies in its range and inclusiveness, the forging into coherent artistic pattern of material apparently heterogeneous, an ingenious reconciliation of discordants into a well-integrated comic whole. Middleton was dramatist enough to make a virtue of a necessity, even to glory in it. Among other modes of dramatic unification conventionally resorted to in the Elizabethan period, particularly when an unwieldy number of episodes or subplots were concerned, the most potent, though not always the most obvious, was the thematic. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* not only subscribes to this thematic unity, but, belonging as the play does to the genre of poetic drama, its language—particularly its imagery—also contributes significantly to the integration of the different dramatic components, endorsing the author's unified comic vision. A consideration of the play's principal theme and of its image technique can therefore, I believe, provide the necessary clue to its organization.

Critical Essay #7

Middleton's favorite perspective, that of looking at life in terms of the family, has received critical comment. It is this viewpoint that attains final comic shape in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, as it awaits tragic shape in *Women Beware Women* and *The Changeling*. In fact the family is the nexus of the play's various complications, the basis of its thematic as well as structural unity. The progress of the action admittedly depends on intrigue and counterintrigue, and they get delightfully complicated in the play's course. Yet, critically speaking, the initial comic situations, together with the problems they pose, become far more relevant to the understanding of the play than the intrigues. The latter exist not for themselves (as they do in *A Mad World, My Masters*) but for the comic solutions they provide, even if not originally intended to do so, as answers to these problems. The characters are intimately related to the situations and actions because the situations are either created by the characters or depend on them, while the intrigues are motivated by the characters in their conflict and interaction. Whereas in an early play like *The Phoenix* Middleton tries to link up fortuitously diverse satiric units through family relationships, by the time he writes *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* not only are family ties used to establish "causal connexions among the different plots," but the family itself as a functional dramatic unit becomes the focus of his comedy.

The family, as theme, is a subject of perennial human interest, with its appeal to fundamental instincts, but in this play it gains considerable local value by being rooted to a particular, Jacobean, social setting. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* the concept of the family is comically explored in almost all conceivable detail, but primarily in relation to begetting and birth, the necessary corollaries of the social institution of marriage. The rearing and upbringing of children, from the time of birth till the time they are well settled in life to start families of their own, also naturally constitute the comic concern of this play. The family, in all its implications, receives more systematic comic attention here than in any other play of Middleton or for that matter, perhaps, in any other Jacobean comedy. Therefore, to look at the play is to look at its various family units (out of which situation, character, action, mood, all emerge) and to study the problems in which each has become involved as a family. All the different plots are comic variations on this family theme.

We are introduced first to the Yellowhammer household, a typically bourgeois goldsmith family, which engenders both the Moll and Tim plots. Since the children in this family are already grown up, the prime concern of the parents is their proper education and marriage, and these are well under way in the very first scene. As representative citizen parents, the Yellowhammers share Quomodo's attitude of the social climber and seek to gain status by finding rich upper-class matches for both daughter and son. Maudlin Yellowhammer, the mistress of the house, is a proud descendant of Noah's wife in the miracle plays, her energies as scold being directed not to her husband but to her daughter. She is introduced loudly upbraiding her daughter for not responding sufficiently to her music and dancing lessons. Her frank contrast of her own youth, "I was lightsome and quick two years before I was married," with her daughter's, whom she depreciates as fit to be a plumber's daughter and not a goldsmith's, is rich in ironic

implications, both moral and professional. In her ardor to recommend the knight to her daughter, it appears that she herself would like to have him, if only she could. Middleton's irony consciously plays upon the mother-daughter relationship, and one is obliquely reminded of Lethe's theory regarding Thomasine's affections (in *Michaelmas Term*), as in other respects Thomasine is an obvious contrast to Mistress Yellowhammer. Finding her daughter's responses to the knight so cold, Maudlin also uses Falso's language of tender grievance (over his niece) and tries to goad her into a distasteful match. On her daughter's escape from the house, the virago is reported to have been seen in her full physical violence, hotly chasing her runaway daughter in a smelt boat and tugging her back by the hair. Though she is depicted as a cruel mother to Moll, here the action is farcical, the exaggeration and incongruity of her behavior making her role comic. Maudlin is the typical shrew. Still tugging Moll's hair, she wishes to make her own daughter "an example / For all the neighbours' daughters," and triumphantly presents her to her father: "I've brought your jewel by the hair."

Maudlin's husband, though overshadowed, represents the reverse of the same coin. He shares his wife's citizen aspirations and takes care to lock up his daughter safely, like his gold. Informed of his would-be son-in-law's moral depravity, he merely refers to his none-too-spotless youth and decides in favor of the match; after all, "The knight is rich." Marriage to him, then, is but an act of social convenience, though his own daughter is involved. Even her presumed death does not deter him from manipulating for the "rich Brecknock gentlewoman" as a good match for his son, to which his wife echoes assent. Lastly, when neither marriage turns out to his satisfaction he can still appease his citizen instincts for thrift by economizing on a joint wedding feast. A stock comic idea in Middleton, the single feast for a double purpose (compare *A Mad World, My Masters*, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*), is here given a satiric point.

Maudlin's relations with her son also occasion much comic business. Tim is solicitously being provided a Cambridge education, silver spoon included, so that he may turn out a bachelor of art "and that's half a knight." Like mother, like son. If Tim has the foolish pedantry to send a Latin letter, Maudlin has the presumption to interpret it, claiming, "I was wont to understand him." But the irony is that she can neither read Latin nor understand him as a mother (her social inferior, Hobson's porter, is at least shrewd enough to misconstrue the Latin to his own advantage), and Middleton makes the most of a dramatic situation by linking up the verbal comedy to traits of character. Maudlin sends for Tim from Cambridge because "There's a great marriage / Towards for him. . . A huge heir in Wales at least to nineteen mountains / Besides her goods and cattle." She tries to embolden him for wooing by calling him up among the female company of gossips at the Allwit christening, and characteristically offers him six sugarplums, which even her fool of a son resents. She also presumes to discuss her son's academic progress with his tutor. Trusting to the direct method of wooing, she locks the door on her son and the "Brecknock gentlewoman," but her plans are nearly frustrated by the fool's Latin pretensions. Tim's sole occupation in the play seems to be a fool's delight in parading his folly. The logical disputes of Tim and his tutor follow upon the irrational quarrel of the Kixes, and both would appear on the stage as equally devoid of reason and farcically exaggerated, though on different planes.

The Welsh courtesan, as bait, combines the traditions of a rich heiress (as in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*) and a pure virgin (as in *A Mad World, My Masters*), but is rather basely drawn, with none of the redeeming virtues of her predecessors. Dramatically she is a perfect match for Tim: a prize for his own stupidity and a retribution for his parents' covetousness, since the professed heiress is found to possess nothing at all, not even her maidenhead.

Moll is the only chaste person in this highly dubious household, as, apparently, in all Cheapside. In her single-minded devotion to her lover and her frantic efforts to be united with him, she is a romantic comedy heroine, complete with swan song. Yet Middleton seems to have used dramatic shorthand in delineating her character. Shorn of the pathetic sentiment surrounding a Rose (in Dekker's *The Shoemakers' Holiday*) or a Luce (in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*), Moll is depicted as the active partner in intrigue, escaping through unromantic holes and gutters. Even when she calls upon death, the context must dispel all pathos: Her parents scold in characteristic language, and her fatuous brother conceives the bright idea of keeping watch over her in armor (an obvious burlesque). Later when she appears to be dying, her parents still wrangle in mutual faultfinding while Tim and his tutor vie with each other to compose epitaphs in what they regard as a fight against time. To ask a Jacobean public theater audience to restrain laughter at such provocation would be asking the impossible. Surely Middleton knew what he was doing. One suspects the spirit of Littlewit's Hero and Leander puppet show to have entered surreptitiously in the handling of Moll and her affairs by the dramatist.

Touchwood Junior is drawn in the tradition of witty intriguer heroes like Middleton's own Follywit and Witgood. He wins a wit combat with Yellowhammer all in "good mirth," the father-in-law realizing too late that the posy on the ring is a joke at his own expense. The emphasis is again on parental relationship. Just as Yellowhammer puts himself on guard—"we cannot be too wary in our children"—Touchwood Junior aims at "blinding parents' eyes," at the same time comically justifying his action: "Rather than the gain should fall to a stranger, / 'Twas honesty in me t'enrich my father." As in the case of all intriguer heroes, he has a standby, his brother, who thus also has a family link to him.

That the Moll and Tim sequences are related as opposites has been observed by Professor Levin, but it needs to be stressed that the contrast is clinched by both characters belonging to the same household and involving the same set of parents, who play no negligible, if opposed, parts in the two plots. In fact the contrast lies fundamentally in the children's relation to their parents and the parents' respective attitudes. Moll is the rebellious daughter, making her own choice of a husband and resisting their imposition of Sir Walter, much to their annoyance. Tim is the docile son, gloating in his Cambridge learning, appreciated and shown off by his mother, smacking his lips over an arranged match, acquiescent in his parents' values, even siding with them in their harassment of his sister. By the time their two stories end, the parents too, we hope, have learned their lesson of parental folly. In respect to mood, while a general farcical tone unites the Yellowhammers with affairs of both daughter and son, yet the solid realism of the goldsmith's house (unrivaled even in *Eastward Ho*), with its harsh

mercenariness, sets off the romantic plot, on the one hand, and the low farce, on the other, both equally removed imaginatively.

If the Yellowhammer family is taken up with problems of grown-up children, the problems of the other three families of the play concern the begetting and birth of children and also their maintenance. In fact, the relation of "riches" to "children," a favorite comic idea of Middleton (compare *Michaelmas Term*), is fully elaborated in this play: "Some only can get riches and no children; / We only can get children and no riches." The two contrasted situations sum up the predicament of the Kixes and the Touchwoods. The Allwits glory in someone else's wealth and have to put up with someone else's children. The Yellowhammers, possessing both children and riches, value riches above their children. All pose problems for the comedy.

From the point of view of the family, the Allwit household represents the most outrageous comic situation that Middleton ever contrived. Though he may have taken hints from literary sources, the comic technique of inflation-plus-inversion is a mode congenial to Middleton that attains final expression here. (It is, in fact, present as early as *The Phoenix*, in the treatment of the captain who envies his friend's being kept by a courtesan and who in his turn unhesitatingly sells his wife.) The stock figure of the jealous husband who unintentionally helps his wife to cuckold him (like Harebrain) is reversed in the contented cuckold, Allwit. The comedy is savagely grotesque. Allwit's soliloquy cataloguing point by point the blessings of a cuckold's life is a *reductio ad absurdum* which appalls and shocks by its Swiftian irony of logical rigor. The comic apogee is reached with the complete inversion of roles between husband and cuckolder. Sir Walter is made to smart under the stings of jealousy while Allwit falls a-singing of dildoes. To the servants he is no longer the master but the mistress' husband.

The family theme is emphasized by the inclusion of children. Nick and Wat innocently (but ironically) refer to Allwit as their father while he curses them under his breath as bastards. Their education and future are often referred to, and it is significant that even Sir Walter wishes to prevent his bastards from mingling with the legitimate children he hopes to get in marriage. Mistress Allwit is conspicuous in the state of expecting her seventh bastard; the baby is born and christened. The family position is dramatically explored in what are regarded as the best scenes of the play, those connected with the christening of the bastard. By the very nature of the situation, this christening is a flagrant violation of all that the traditional ritual stands for—divine blessing, intimate family ties, social harmony—though the form is rigidly maintained. Allwit limits his task to inviting the gossips. Sir Walter not only supervises everything but sacrilegiously offers himself as the godfather to his own begotten child, in order to deceive the world. With appropriate symbolic significance Allwit gets into one of Sir Waiter's suits on the morning of the busy day. The situation provokes numerous *double entendres.* Properly enough, at the christening most of the conversation dwells on the topics of begetting and birth and the correct upbringing of children, so that these scenes not only appeal by their realism but also underline the major theme of the play.

The comic corollary of the explosive Allwit situation is the fantastic action of the wittol, who does his best to subvert the marriage prospects of the cuckolder in fear of losing

his own source of income. His poor relation, Davy, having a similar ax to grind, incites him to this attempt. The ensuing scene, in which Allwit describes himself most truthfully in highly derogatory terms, under the guise of a well-wisher and a relative to the Yellowhammers, is supreme in Middleton's concentric irony. Allwit's pose as a moral guardian is as ridiculous as his imposture of being a relation is false. And even so, what is the true nature of the benefit that he is supposed to reap for himself by this devious stratagem? But, of course, Yellowhammer can be trusted to get over his momentary moral compunctions as soon as Allwit's back is turned, and Allwit's purpose is defeated without his even realizing it.

Sir Walter's wound comes like the announcement of doomsday to the Allwit family. Mistress Allwit falls in a faint, while Allwit is ready to depart from this world with Sir Walter. This unnatural parasitic relationship (contrasted with that of the natural parasite, Davy) is amusingly shocking. Sir Walter's penitence and realization of sin are at first regarded as "raving," and the whore and her bastards are employed to restore him to his senses. That the children should be made to appeal to Sir Walter as the last resort of the Allwits again ironically points up the family theme. But since this only provokes the "will" of curses, the incorrigible Allwit family take their revenge by forsaking Sir Walter altogether in his hour of need. Husband and wife now become amicably reconciled, and their depravity is absolute as they brazenly plan to set up lodgings in the Strand with the very stock of Sir Walter's leftover goods.

Since a family is the thematic and structural unit of the play, Sir Walter Whorehound is to be regarded as the villain of the piece in his active role of the disrupter of families. His final rejection by the Allwits is in the ironic parting-shot tradition of Middleton (compare Proditor's turning on the captain in *The Phoenix*). A close parallel to Penitent Brothel in his repentance, Sir Walter is, however, steeped so far in sin that it is impossible for him to save himself or reform others. His futile penitence and the lack of salvation become almost a tragic theme at this point (echoing *Dr. Faustus* and *Macbeth*) and look forward to Middleton's own tragedies:

Her pleasing pleasures now hath poison'd me,
Which I exchang'd my soul for.

A comic villain may have appropriate comic retribution, and so long as serious sentiment is kept at bay one makes no objection; but the introduction of penitence, its poetic intensity combined with its ineffectuality, tends to disrupt the comic tone. After all, the comic (and cynical) question posed so far has been: As between equals, Allwit and Sir Walter, who reaps the greater advantage? Evidently Middleton's purpose is to alienate audience sympathy from the Allwits, for although Sir Walter is the dramatic villain, Allwit is made the principal satiric target at this point.

Touchwood Senior's family life offers an allied dramatic theme. Husband and wife might have lived happily had not the husband's fertility proved so disastrous. "You do but touch and take," ruefully observes the Country Girl, who appears with his bastard and gives him a piece of her mind before she can be bribed off. A farcical episode is made out of the clever disposal of the bastard. The discovery of a child for a lamb's head in

the time of Lent recalls the Mak episode of the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play,* in reverse. Middleton shows his dramatic skill by making a topical digression into a derivative comic incident. Sandwiched between scenes of the Allwit christening, its thematic link is the social accommodation of bastards. While Allwit has apparently resigned his family duties out of perversity, Touchwood has been forced to do so by sheer necessity; the comic smugness and complacency of one stands out against the comic uneasiness and reluctance of the other. Touchwood's hyperbolic eulogies on his wife's perfection may be contrasted with Allwit's sneering grotesqueries about his. The two wives, too, are well balanced: Mistress Touchwood and Mistress Allwit are both fertile, but while Mistress Touchwood is fully prepared to contain her desires and live away from her husband, Mistress Allwit cuckolds her husband by indulging them, though living under the same roof.

In exact contrast to the Touchwoods stand the Kixes, whose marriage has proved equally unhappy for lack of children. But while the Touchwoods are patiently submissive to fate and decide upon living separately, the Kixes refuse to accept their situation calmly. They "fall out like giants, and fall in like children" and are seen alternately scolding and kissing in bold, farcical manner. They quarrel aggressively on the constant theme of begetting and birth, charging each other with infertility. "O that e'er I was begot, or bred, or born!" Lady Kix laments, her language subconsciously expressing her own desires as well as reiterating the play's theme. Kix's bargain with Touchwood Senior—the payment by results and the even distribution of the reward over different stages in the actual process of having a child—has the typical Middleton touch:

One hundred pound now in hand.
Another hundred when my wife is quick;
The third when she's brought a-bed; and the last
hundred
When the child cries, for if't should be still-born,
It doth no good, sir.

Not only is it supposed to be a neat and careful business deal, but once more the comic theme of begetting and birth is closely explored. The Kixes' excess of joy when the medicine takes (as it must) farcically matches their previous wrangling.

The Kixes and the Touchwoods are an immediately contrasted pair of problem families. They have the affinity of belonging to the same type of genial farce, and neatly dovetail into each other when they team up to maintain and perpetuate their respective families, the lighthearted spirit of the solution almost anticipating Restoration comedy. The Allwit family, on the other hand, sets off both of these by its sordidly mercenary character. A kind of comic ratio may then be established if we compare the atmosphere of the Yellowhammer household in relation to the Moll and Tim sequences with that of the Allwit household in relation to the Touchwood and Kix plots, while taking into account at the same time the fact that the Yellowhammers and Allwits, as citizens of Cheapside, share a common scale of values.

The denouement, as befitting a comedy, is meant to bring about a happy ending all round, and it actually succeeds in preserving the various family units intact. Master and Mistress Yellowhammer continue their joint citizen life and have the (somewhat equivocal) satisfaction of seeing their children married and thus starting new families. Moll and Touchwood Junior undergo a comic resurrection from death and are married, presumably to live happily ever after. Even Tim's wife announces she will turn honest, if not by logic then by marriage. The Allwits are unexpectedly, if reluctantly, rescued from their abnormal situation and plan to live together as best they may. The family troubles of both the Touchwoods and the Kixes are blissfully over. Sir Walter, however, has no family. He courts Moll more for her dowry than for anything else, and tries to pass off his courtesan as a virgin. He undermines the very concept of marriage in a citizen household, and also seeks to thrive on the barrenness of another couple. Therefore he alone is punished. His real punishment is the disinheritance, which ties up neatly with the rest of the play, but Middleton lays it on heavily by confining him to prison for debt. As a consequence, "Reverend and honourable Matrimony" (". . . thou that mak'st the bed/Both pleasant and legitimately fruitful!" can now feel safe.

The supreme irony of the play is, of course, that the methods of solution are often as questionable as the problematic situations themselves, so that, though surface respectability is ensured, it is a patched-up one. In the course of the play each family is proved to have violated the basic assumptions of marriage. If Maudlin has been "light" with her dancing master, Yellowhammer has a bastard now grown up. Tim is married to a courtesan. Mistress Allwit has seven bastards including the one that is born, while Touchwood Senior may have had any number. Sir Oliver threatens to keep a whore and shares with Allwit the dishonor of becoming a contented cuckold, though presumably an unconscious one. Lady Kix claims she was other than barren in court, and readily accepts the kind of help that Touchwood Senior has to offer. Even Touchwood Junior is consciously responsible for his brother's dubious intrigue. Moll, the chaste maid of the title, alone is impeccable.

Yet as in the case of Wycherley's *The Country Wife,* the exuberance proves quite amusing; "we stop judging and start counting" (to borrow a phrase), as I have done. What has been remarked of Horner's stratagems may be equally applicable to the stratagems in the present play: "They are morally preposterous and factually incredible," demanding "a setting of outrageous farce." Touchwood's device to cure the Kixes is both ironical and fantastic, resembling the china episode in *The Country Wife.* The monstrosity of the Allwit household may be compared to the Horner situation; in both the assumptions go unquestioned, the comedy lying in what follows given such premises and in the extent of the absurdity to which conclusions can be pursued without the play's going up *in fumo.* Middleton and Wycherley share this highly explosive comic quality in their best plays, though their social values may differ considerably.

Critical Essay #8

The language of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* reflects its dramatic maturity, and is completely adapted to its stylistic requirements. The play's imaginative conception demanded a verse medium, and while Middleton transfers the suppleness and flexibility of his prose to verse, at the same time the verse remains capable of lending itself to the necessary stylization. Transitions from prose to verse are made imperceptibly, unlike the rigid, sealed-off divisions of his early plays. In effect, the highly dramatic quality of his medium in the mature tragedies is already anticipated. Speech is carefully governed by the local necessities of character and mood, of realism and comic inflation: Citizen colloquialism, indecent grotesquery, parody of Latin and scholastic logic, Puritan Old-Testament idiom, Welsh dialect—all find their place in this linguistic medley and contribute toward the total comic effect. Though Middleton's use of imagery is remarkably sparing, compared with that of his contemporaries, an overall poetic organization has been achieved by a significant pattern of images and key words related to the play's comic themes and attitudes.

The play's main theme being the family, the word "house" is repeatedly used with particular appropriateness and almost symbolic significance. A tension is set up among the subtly variant meanings of the term—dwelling, home, family, lineage—often with ironic intention. Allwit effusively expresses his gratitude to Sir Walter:

I thank him, has maintain'd my house this ten years;
Not only keeps my wife, but 'a keeps me
And all my family.

Sir Walter has maintained his house simply in the financial sense, as also ironically in begetting his family, and the abnormality of the Allwit situation is adequately defined. On the news of Sir Walter's wound, Mistress Allwit laments, "A misery of a house," and Allwit echoes her: ". . . here's like to be / A good house kept, when we're all together down." Again there is the interplay of meanings to which dramatic irony is added, since the kind of "house" kept so far has meant a total inversion of both house and housekeeping. When Allwit again takes up the word—"Cannot our house be private to ourselves," "You have been somewhat bolder in my house / Than I could well like of"—and finally drives Sir Walter literally out of his house (place of refuge), all his previous usages of the term and its different meanings are ironically brought to bear on his action.

Conversely, the Kixes presumably take the Touchwood Seniors within their house—"I've purse, and bed, and board for you"—in their unconsciously ironical mutual-benefit arrangement. Touchwood Senior refuses to keep his own bastard, on the ground "I've no dwelling; / I brake up house but this morning," which factually describes his plight while serving as an excellent excuse for his reluctance. When the exasperated Sir Oliver threatens "to give up house" and keep a "fruitful whore," Touchwood Senior in his turn tries to pacify him by promising means "To get and multiply within your house,"

where the double meaning is again ironically obvious. The Kixes' situation is chorically summed up by their maid: ". . . weeping or railing,/ That's our house-harmony." Her irony underlines the problem that it is in fact "house-harmony" which has been violently jarred into discord in the various family units that come within the play's comic scope. The future continuity of happy family life is also hinted at in the same terms when Touchwood Senior banteringly refers to Moll's marriage: "Now you keep house, sister."

Language imagery, both literal (e.g., references, descriptions) and figurative (simile, metaphor, analogy), is coordinated with stage imagery (e.g., action, stage property) to give the effect of unified comic vision. The Cheapside goldsmiths speak with their broad citizen accent while their vulgarity and debased scale of values are reflected in their language. Their class and professional biases are never forgotten: Their imagery is characteristically drawn from their wealth. Maudlin's contemptuous admonition of her daughter in the opening scene establishes her identity: "You fit for a knight's bed! drowsy-browed, dull-eyed, drossy-spirited!"; or

You dance like a plumber's daughter, and deserve
Two thousand-pound in lead to your marriage,
And not in goldsmith's ware.

Not only does the virago have her choice of vigorous epithets (comically pointed by alliteration), as does her husband when sufficiently roused, but the goldsmith's wife's pride of profession is revealed in the sharply contrasted pairs of images: dross/lead against gold, plumber against goldsmith. Middleton's irony is of course at Maudlin's expense, and the traditional moralistic undertone of the intrinsic value of lead over gold (as symbolized by Portia's caskets) is given an interesting comic twist.

Gold imagery is a composite part of the play's pattern. Realistically correct in the context of a goldsmith's family trade (one must remember such stage business as the weighing of a customer's gold chain in I.i and the ironic ring-making episode), this image is made to carry poetic significance by being related to the play's themes of greed and commercialism.

I bring thee up to turn thee into gold, wench,
And make thy fortune shine like your bright trade;
A goldsmith's shop sets out a city maid.—

says Sir Walter to his Welsh whore. (Notice the comic emphasis by the use of a concluding couplet and a sawlike generalization.) Here turning into gold has the connotations of both exchange and alchemy, while "shine" and "bright," normally applied to gold, are given ironic turns by being linked euphemistically to a dubious profession; "setting out" carries *double entendre* and multiple shades of meaning: "to embellish, adorn, deck out," "to display for sale," with perhaps the additional suggestion of "precious stone set in gold" (*O.E.D.*). Allwit also uses the gold image to describe literally and figuratively what he considers his unique situation: "I have the name, and in his gold

I shine." Yellowhammer's concern to keep Moll in safe custody is expressed in the conventional language of a miser hoarding gold (compare*A Staple of News,* IV.i).

In the meantime I will lock up this baggage
As carefully as my gold; she shall see
As little sun, if a close room or so
Can keep her from the light on't.

Maudlin, echoing her husband sarcastically, uses a related image: "I've brought your jewel by the hair." Even Tim cannot forbear using the family imagery: "Chang'd? gold into white money was ne'er so chang'd / As is my sister's colour into paleness."

Literal references to wealth and riches reinforce the figurative imagery in evoking a world of commercialized values:

I shall receive two thousand pound in gold,
And a sweet maidenhead worth forty.

Sir Walter anticipates his good fortune purely in financial terms. "O how miraculously did my father's plate 'scape! . . . Besides three chains of pearl and a box of coral," comments Tim thankfully at his sister's disappearance. (One is reminded of Shylock's dual sorrow for his daughter and his ducats.) A mother thus expresses concern for her dying daughter:

The doctor's making a most sovereign drink for thee,
The worst ingredience dissolv'd pearl and amber;
We spare no cost, girl.
Thou shalt have all the wishes of thy heart
That wealth can purchase!

Yellowhammer couples "riches" with love: "You overwhelm me, sir, with love and riches"—where the comic juxtaposition also contains dramatic irony by unwittingly referring to a penniless whore. Touchwood Junior's attitude defines the dramatic norm from which others have departed: "How strangely busy is the devil and riches," and the two implied equations are meant to counterbalance each other. When Touchwood Junior himself uses gold imagery, it is in conjunction with a vegetative image, "And shake the golden fruit into her lap," where the implications are not primarily commercial, though the suggestion of Kix's getting both child and property is subtly present.

Food imagery, particularly of flesh, is pervasively used in the play, since most of the *dramatis personae* are perpetually being driven by some kind of appetite: for food, for sex, for money. Stage imagery is correlated with language imagery, and an intricate texture results. Maudlin's recommendation of a husband—"had not such a piece of flesh been ordained, what had us wives been good for? to make salads, or else cried up and down for samphire"—is typical; to her, food and sex are almost interchangeable

concepts, and the pursuit of the image to include the fine distinction between flesh and vegetable is ludicrously comic. Allwit's wife "longs" for nothing "but pickled cucumbers" and Sir Walter's coming: Food and sex, governed by the same verb, are brought together, resulting in a comic grossness of attitude, particularly in its dramatic context. Allwit aptly likens his position to that of a man "Finding a table furnish'd to his hand" and in his turn refuses to "feed the wife plump for another's veins"; he also resists "being eaten with jealousy to the inmost bone."

Combined with the food-eating imagery, anatomical references reinforce the sense of physical grossness. The latter is further exemplified in such phrases as "rip my belly up to the throat," "With one that's scarce th' hinder quarter of a man," "what cares colon here for Lent?" Literal references to food, whether in speech or action, often acquire an unhealthy savor by their sensual associations and rankness of context. Such are the references to sweetmeats and the action of their distribution and pocketing, with Allwit's pungent asides, in the christening scene, where poor Tim finds his sugarplums so insipid; or Allwit's enumeration of his wife's delicacies. The list of aphrodisiacs on which Touchwood Senior is made to dine brings food and sex together on a farcical level. Even Touchwood Junior speaks of himself in terms of eating: "Or else pick a' famine," "it but whets my stomach, which is too sharp-set already." Middleton's comic use of the flesh image seems to be popularly inspired. "Mutton" was a contemporary cant term for a prostitute, and the *double entendre* whenever flesh is mentioned must have been quite transparent to the popular audience. This is easily perceived when Touchwood Junior refers to Sir Walter's Welsh whore— ". . . and brought up his ewe-mutton to find / A ram at London"—where the idea of the coupling of animals is fused into it (compare *Othello,* I.i.88-89). Touchwood Senior takes up the same image: "I keep of purpose two or three gulls in pickle / To eat such mutton with"; and he defines his ideal of marriage in similar terms: "The feast of marriage is not lust, but love," while its opposite is to "suck out others."'

In the scene of the disposal of the bastard by the Country Girl, stage imagery spills over into language imagery, and a complex of interrelations between associated images is established, contributing significantly to the play's comic unification. "Flesh" is made to apply to both human beings and animals, comically obscuring the differentia; and "flesh" also suggests food and sex, as it does elsewhere. Live animal, dead animal, animal flesh, human flesh, live human being—these concepts are variously juxtaposed, fused or disjuncted, combined and recombined to maintain a taut irony. Touchwood Senior refers to his bastard as "this half yard of flesh, in which, I think, / It wants a nail or two," and expresses his anxious concern about its disposal: "What shift she'll make now with this piece of flesh / In this strict time of Lent, I cannot imagine; / Flesh dare not peep abroad now." The identification between human being and animal flesh is complete. Figurative interchanging of a human being with an animal is translated into stage action in the ruse practiced by the Country Girl on the promoters. As a general background of the play, Lent with its "carnal strictness" (the phrase itself is telling) serves to emphasize the irony of all the different types of appetite depicted; but locally the concentration is on the desire for flesh (meat) as the passion of the season. Touchwood Senior comments on Lady Kix's behavior:

I hold my life she's in deep passion
For the imprisonment of veal and mutton
Now kept in garrets; weeps for some calf's head now:
Methinks her husband's head might serve with bacon.

The Lenten scene ironically proliferates with figurative and literal references to food, particularly meat: "This Lent will fat the whoresons up with sweetbreads, / And lard their whores with lambstones." "A bird," though primarily a term derived from snaring, is also food by implication, followed by references to veal, green-sauce, green goose. Meat is contrasted with fish, which symbolizes the strictness of Lent. Allwit's "scornful stomach" will admit no fish; a man caught by promoters must do with "herrings and milk pottage" in lieu of meat, while the promoters gloat over their seized veal. Guesses about the bastard, with "rump uncovered" and disguised under "a good fat loin of mutton," range over "a quarter of lamb," "a shoulder of mutton," "loin of veal," and a "lamb's head." The victims of the imposture see their folly in terms of expense for food: "Half our gettings / Must run in sugar-sops," since they have been figuratively made "calves' heads," and they exasperatedly leave the stage to "roast their loin of mutton." It appears that Lent might turn into a veritable banquet of flesh on the street outside, while inside Allwit's house comfits and wine are served at an ironical christening. One type of social corruption reinforces another analogically, and both are partially expressed in terms of an inordinate desire for food.

Animal imagery is the peculiar prerogative of Allwit in keeping with his character, though it is Whorehound who is named after an animal by the vice of his nature. While Yellowhammer refers to Moll as "minx" and Lady Kix dubs her husband "grub" in the heat of passion, Allwit quite dispassionately regards his wife as a pig: "My wife's as great as she can wallow"; "As now she's even upon the point of grunting." He describes the promoters as hungry dogs, "sheep biting mongrels." Connotations of animal and human being coalesce in his comic conceits:

Ha, how now? what are these that stand so close
At the street-corner, pricking up their ears
And snuffing up their noses, like rich men's dogs
When the first course goes in? . . .
T'arrest the dead corps of poor calves and sheep.

Various bodily processes referred to or depicted on the stage—eating, drinking, kissing, copulating, begetting, wetting—stress the physical aspect of human beings and bring them closer to the animal kingdom, not only in Allwit's speeches, where they predominate, but practically throughout the play.

Apart from the major images considered, minor images may also be shown to link up with the major imagery by association. Even when independently used, such images nonetheless perform a functional role by being intimately connected with theme and characterization. The term "fat" is often applied in association with the animal-cum-

human imagery, perhaps implying that human beings fattening on the flesh of animals imbibe their subhuman qualities. Such is Sir Walter's characterization of the promoters' bawds:

The bawds will be so fat with what they earn,
Their chins will hang like udders by Easter-eve,
And, being stroak'd, will give the milk of witches—

where supernatural associations are also added, the inflated and deliberate grotesquery being an intrinsic quality of his language throughout the play. Allwit's analogies for the wittol's household dovetail the different implications of "flesh" with a commercial image appropriate in the play's bourgeois background:

As other trades thrive, butchers by selling flesh,
Poulters by vending conies . . .

Imagery of poison, though not outstanding in the play's scheme, is connected with the food / meat imagery, on the one hand, and animal imagery, on the other, since the opposite of food is poison and it is also the property of certain animals to exude poison. The promoters, as the chief targets of topical satire, are the subjects of the most direct animal imagery, characteristically addressed by Allwit as dogs (already quoted) and reptiles:

And other poisonous officers, that infect
And with a venomous breath taint every goodness.

The most poignant expression of the poison image is in Sir Walter's repentance:

My taste grows bitter; the round world all gall now;
Her pleasing pleasures now hath poison'd me,
Which I exchang'd my soul for.

His meat has turned into poison, which now sickens him (the alliteration fixes the paradox), and the commercial metaphor in a religious context underlines the profanity of his action. The fish-flesh opposition, set up naturally in its Lenten context, is taken up with a difference in the incident of Moll's escape by water. Maudlin takes a smelt boat, which leads Tim to comment that she goes "afishing" for Moll, to which Yellowhammer concludes: "She'll catch a goodly dish of gudgeons now, / Will serve us all to supper." When Moll is dragged back half-drowned, Tim describes the scene:

She hath brought her from the water like a mermaid;
She's but half my sister now, as far as the flesh goes,
The rest may be sold to fishwives.

But here fish and mermaid carry sexual *double entendres.* As representative of the bourgeoisie, the Yellowhammers' stock of imagery also includes other forms of merchandise (apart from their family—gold / jewel—images) or financial transactions:

As there's no woman made without a flaw;
Your purest lawns have frays, and cambrics bracks.
But 'tis a husband solders up all cracks.
E'en plain, sufficient subsidy-words serves us, sir.

The concepts of dry and wet are counters playfully tossed about in the play's scheme. Kix, as his name implies, is barren and therefore dry; "'Tis our dry barrenness puffs up Sir Walter," Lady Kix complains. Wetness applies to fertility, and Touchwood Senior is supposed to get "Nine children by one water that he useth," his sallies are also referred to as "drinkings abroad." But wetness also implies urine. The gossips refer to a girl too wet to be married; Allwit comments on fingers washed in urine, and suspiciously looks for wet under the stools. Tim is nauseated by the wet kisses of a gossip. In a serious context, dryness is lack of grace; Sir Walter bequeaths the Allwits:

All barrenness of joy, a drouth of virtue,
And dearth of all repentance.

Such examples illustrate Middleton's way with language, the effort of the conscious artist to wring different meanings out of the same word, adapting a similar method to comic or tragic issues. This mode of work becomes most systematized in his greatest play, *The Changeling*.

Middleton was no mean artist, and particularly when writing his major comedy he appears to have completely mastered the art of unity in variety. Therefore, the first impression of a bewildering medley, rich but crazy, turns out on closer inspection (and the play demands such scrutiny) to be a vitality and exuberance well within the dramatist's control. A wide range and variety of situations, characters, actions, moods, language are integrated within the play's scheme. The comic tone ranges from hilarious farce to the grimly grotesque, and all shadings from the light to the sombre are present in this chiaroscuro effect. The realism of Middleton has been repeatedly noticed, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* is obviously rooted in the everyday realities of the Jacobean social word: its class conflict, citizen behavior, puritan hypocrisy. Localization in space—London of Cheapside—is balanced by localization in time: Lent with its strict laws and their violations. But what is artistically more significant is the play's stylization, the comic distortion and violent coloring that the characters, almost caricatures, receive through the audacious poetic technique that Middleton adopts as the final phase of his comic development. It is as though the realism of Middleton's social comedies—*The Phoenix*, *Your Five Gallants*, *Michaelmas Term*—combines with the fancifulness of his domestic-intrigue comedies—

A Mad World, My Masters, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*—and both together acquire a new direction, testifying to a rare synthesis of poetic sensibility and intellectual energy in the play's comic organization. Perhaps only the peculiarly sophisticated yet accommodating nature of the Jacobean public stage could do full justice to this distinctive play, yet one would like to see *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* revived today.

Source: Ruby Chatterji, "Theme, Imagery, and Unity in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,*" in *Renaissance Drama VIII,* edited by S. Schoenbaum, Northwestern University Press, 1965, pp. 105-26.

Topics for Further Study

Read a city comedy from any other playwright during Middleton's era and compare it to *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.

The story features two knights, Sir Oliver Kix and Sir Walter Whorehound. Research and discuss the methods by which men could become knights in the seventeenth century. Choose another knight from this time period and write a short biography about him.

Many plays from this time period were salacious like *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Find a salacious painting from this era that you think could serve as a companion piece to the play and explain why you chose this painting.

Using historical records, maps, or any other source you can find, draw a map of Cheapside circa 1610. On the map, plot out the major events of the play, using the descriptions in the play as a guide.

Compare and Contrast

Early 1610s: Despite the morally ambiguous lives that many citizens lead in London, they still must keep adultery and other immoral acts hidden from the public eye, for fear that they may lose social or political favor.

Today: London is famous for its tabloid newspapers, which frequently root out and publish salacious rumors and facts about others, especially the English royal family.

Early 1610s: Protestants who belong to the Church of England follow the doctrine of *The Book of Common Prayer* and the *Thirty-Nine Articles.*

Today: Although the Church of England still

uses *The Book of Common Prayer* and the *Thirty-Nine Articles* to inform its doctrine, it also relies on other sources, including the Bible.

Early 1610s: English people live in a time of civil and religious unrest, as various political and religious groups vie for power. England is one of the major imperial powers of the time period.

Today: English people live in anticipation of war as the result of its alliance with the United States—the driving force in the campaign against Saddam Hussein and Iraq, which United States President George W. Bush claims has weapons of mass destruction. The United States is generally acknowledged as the world's strongest superpower.

What Do I Read Next?

Unlike *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* Middleton's

The Changeling (first performed in 1622), which he co-wrote with William Rowley, is a tragedy. In the story, Beatrice-Joanna, a wealthy, beautiful woman, suddenly becomes attracted to a servant, which leads her into a life of deception, crime, and sin.

In Molière's play *A School for Husbands* (first produced in 1661 and first published in 1714), two brothers differ on their methods for how to raise young women. While Ariste believes in being more liberal and giving women freedom, Sganarelle mistrusts women and believes in repressing women. As in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* the two young lovers in this play defy the wishes of their elders.

In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside,* most of the characters are unscrupulous and commit a variety of sins without remorse. In *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology* (1997), Solomon Schimmel uses many classical and contemporary sources to discuss sin from both a scientific and philosophical standpoint. The book focuses on the seven deadly sins: lust, greed, envy, anger, pride, gluttony, and sloth.

In William Shakespeare's play *Much Ado about Nothing* (circa 1598), the chastity of a maid, Hero, is doubted by her betrothed suitor, Claudio, when another character, Don John, dupes Claudio into believing Hero has been having an affair. Claudio rejects Hero at the altar, but, through the help of several others, Don John's deceit is revealed.

Further Study

Friedenreich, Kenneth, ed., *Accompanying the Players: Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580-1980,* AMS Press, 1983.

This book offers essays about Middleton from three different centuries, giving readers an overview of Middleton's critical reception throughout the years.

Porter, Roy, *London: A Social History,* Harvard University Press, 1995.

Porter's one-volume history of London examines the growth of the city from classical times to the present day.

Pritchard, R. E., ed. *Shakespeare's England: Life in Elizabethan & Jacobean Times,* Sutton Publishing, 1999.

In this book, Pritchard assembles a number of writings from Shakespeare's contemporaries, including excerpts from books, plays, poems, letters, diaries, and pamphlets. These writings detail each writer's view of what life was like in England in this time period. The book includes a selection from a longtime collaborator with Middleton,Thomas Dekker, who talks about Cheapside.

Steen, Sara Jayne, *Ambrosia in an Earthen Vessel: Three Centuries of Audience and Reader Response to the Works of Thomas Middleton,* AMS Press, 1993.

Steen examines how various audiences and readers have received Middleton's plays throughout the years.

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Covatta, Anthony, *Thomas Middleton's City Comedies,* Bucknell University Press, 1973, pp. 34, 151-52, 158-59.

Farr, Dorothy M., *Thomas Middleton and the Drama of Realism: A Study of Some of the Representative Plays,* Barnes & Noble, 1973, p. 35.

Heller, Herbert Jack, *Penitent Brothellers: Grace, Sexuality, and Genre in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies,* University of Delaware Press, 2000, pp. 78, 80.

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Sampson, Martin, "Introduction," in *Masterpieces of the English Drama: Thomas Middleton,* American Book Company, 1915, pp. 3, 9.

Swinburne, Algernon Charles, "Thomas Middleton," in *Thomas Middleton,* edited by Havelock Ellis, The Mermaid Series: The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists, Scholarly Press, 1969, pp. vii-xiii, originally published in 1887-1890.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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