A Matter of Taste: Assessing a Colonial Kitchen Queen's Domain in Early Modern Cookbooks

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I. Introduction

Alongside the great social and political changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, and its colonial offspring in Virginia's Chesapeake, thousands of Englishmen travelled to the New World in search of opportunity. Eventually, women would become part of the wider community, first as laborers, next as much-needed vessels for repopulation, and finally, as creators of a domestic, civilizing sphere within the brute, masculine-dominated colonial landscape. On the plantations, women were expected to participate equally in agricultural labor with men. Economically, women had greater freedoms and privilege than in previous years on the other side of the Atlantic, and they frequently exercised their power and authority in public spheres as well as private.

Over time, as colonial populations grew, women were increasingly expected to nurture the domestic sphere of their homes. As enslaved laborers became part of expanding plantation households, women would need to stretch their economic, culinary, and creative resources to meet the needs of the people they were obliged to maintain in good health. This extended beyond the domain of their own dining tables, and well into the still room of eighteenth-century medicaments. In short, colonial women's work became centered on the hearth and home, in the kitchen and well beyond. Though their social and political power and authority may not extend as far as their husbands, brothers, and adult sons, each plantation wife was queen of her own micro-community, and responsible for the health and welfare within.

In their role as domestics, the burden of cookery would fall disproportionately on colonial women, though this is perhaps not too far removed from gendered household expectations in their natal society. In England, prescriptive literature had long informed men, women, and

children on manners, comportment and socially acceptable behavior, as well as how to run one's household. This analysis has asked how specific data sets within Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife,*[1] the first cookbook printed in colonial Virginia, illuminate women's domestic responsibilities as well as other duties they may hold within their wider community. Furthermore, it will compare how the fifth, or "Williamsburg" edition mutated from the fourth, which had been published twelve years earlier in London. Analyzing differences in recipes, both subtle and major, paired with the additions and omissions between texts will inform certain difficulties colonial housewives might face in their attempt to recreate English recipes. As both texts span various categories of food, medical preparations, and home décor, and this project will research how women claimed their domestic space and moved within it by using gendered literature to maintain health and function on the colonial frontier.

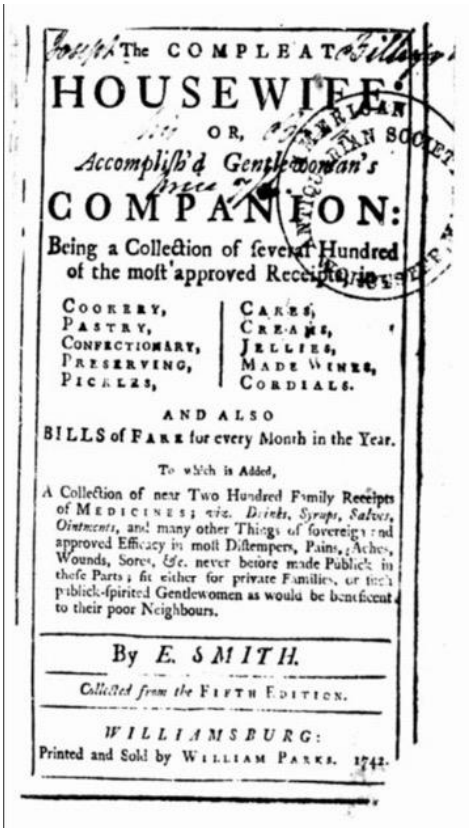
II. Cookbooks and Women in Changing Landscapes

> It being grown as unfashionable for a Book now to appear in Publick without a Preface, as for a Lady to appear at a Ball without a Hoop-petticoat, I shall conform to Custom for Fashion sake, and not through any Necessity. The Subject being both common and universal, needs no Arguments to introduce it, and being so necessary for the Gratification of the Appetite, stands in need of no Encomiums to allure Persons to the Practice of it, since there are but few now-a-days who love not good Eating and Drinking.[2]

[1] The full title of this cookbook is: *The Compleat Housewife: Or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion:: Being a Collection of Several Hundred of the Most Approved Receipts, in Cookery, Pastry, Confectionary, Preserving, Pickles, Cakes, Creams, Jellies, Made Wines, Cordials. And Also Bills of Fare for Every Month in the Year. : To Which Is Added, a Collection of Near Two Hundred Family Receipts of Medicines; Viz. Drinks, Syrups, Salves, Ointments, and Many Other Things of Sovereign and Approved Efficacy in Most Distempers, Pains, Aches, Wounds, Sores, &c. Never Before Made Publick in These Parts; Fit Either for Private Families, or Such Publick-spirited Gentlewomen As Would Be Beneficent to Their Poor Neighbors.* Due to the overly long title, I will use the abbreviated form, *The Compleat Housewife,* and when differentiating between the two editions under comparison, will label them as "Williamsburg," or "Fourth." Unlabelled references will always refer to the primary book being researched in this project, the Williamsburg Fifth edition.

[2] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* preface.

So begins Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife: Or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, first printed in London, 1727, with the fifth edition finding colonial American publication in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1742. Importantly, this version of *The Compleat Housewife* was the first cookbook published in colonial America. Cookbooks, placed within the greater sphere of female gendered prescriptive literature, are ensconced in a place of permanent importance when dissecting a woman's function within her own domicile. Close readings of these species of texts illuminate not only popular cookery, methods of cuisine, and epicurean beliefs, but also the roles and confines of women within their own spaces.



The COMPLEAT
HOUSEWIFE:
OR,
Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's
COMPANION:
Being a Collection of several Hundred of the most approved Receipts in
COOKERY, PASTRY, CONFECTIONARY, PRESERVING, PICKLES,
CAKES, CREAMS, JELLIES, MADE WINES, CORDIALS.
AND ALSO
BILLS of FARE for every Month in the Year.
To which is Added,
A Collection of near Two Hundred Family Receipts of MEDICINES; viz. *Drinks, Syrups, Salves, Ointments*, and many other Things of sovereign and approved Efficacy in most Distempers, Pains, Aches, Wounds, Sores, &c. never before made Publick in these Parts; fit either for private Families, or such publick-spirited Gentlewomen as would be beneficent to their poor Neighbours.
By E. SMITH.
Collected from the FIFTH EDITION.
WILLIAMSBURG:
Printed and Sold by WILLIAM PARKS. 1742.

Fig. 1: Title page of *The Compleat Housewife: Or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion:: Being a Collection of Several Hundred of the Most Approved Receipts, in Cookery, Pastry, Confectionary, Preserving, Pickles, Cakes, Creams, Jellies, Made Wines, Cordials. And Also Bills of Fare for Every Month in the Year. : To Which Is Added, a Collection of Near Two Hundred Family Receipts of Medicines; Viz. Drinks, Syrups, Salves, Ointments, and Many Other Things of Sovereign and Approved Efficacy in Most Distempers, Pains, Aches, Wounds, Sores, &c. Never Before Made Publick in These Parts; Fit Either for Private Families, or Such Publick-spirited Gentlewomen As Would Be Beneficent to Their Poor Neighbors*. Titling conventions are unique to this period.

Looking no further than the title page,[3] a reader can discern that what is between the covers caters to elite women in command of their own spaces. But what lies beyond the most glaringly obvious in the opening lines of the preface above is the voice of the author. Although little is known about Eliza Smith, her personality jumps off the page. Acknowledging the de rigueur, imitative nature of this first part of her tome, she also draws lines between the functional requirement of certain customs, "for Fashion sake,"[4] and fashion itself. Owning her wit, and clearly in possession of self-empowerment, Smith's individuality and authority shine through the text in her ability to relate to the reader, gentlewoman to gentlewoman. This verbiage, in addition to the baseline requirement of operative literacy in order to access the book's contents, places the tome directly into the hands of an elite woman, living within the higher strata of society.

However, neither Eliza Smith nor her opus were the first to cater to women's needs for more functionality in the household alongside new and inventive ideas for supper. After all, don't we all want to know what's for dinner? The pinning of this particular onerous duty squarely upon the shoulders of women originated much earlier, within a scope of research that lies beyond the boundaries of this project. However, sexually defined spaces for both men and women were recognized as set over a century earlier in literature with Gervase Markham's catalogue of prescriptive texts, including *The English Huswife*.[5] A gentleman fallen on hard times, in the 1590s Markham wrote prolifically, publishing a range of drama, poetry, and veterinary advice alongside his prescriptive tomes dedicated to yeoman husbandry.[6] Printed near the end of his career in 1615, *The English Huswife* dictated the range of advice necessary for women to realize their role in the running of their own households.

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[3] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife*, see Fig. 1.
[4] *Idem*, p. i.
[5] Markham, and Best. *The English Housewife*, p. xviii.
[6] Steggle. "Markham, Gervase (1568?–1637), author." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.*

Regardless of confidence in their own ability, elite women preferred cookbooks that were derived from or approved of by women from the highest social strata. Even for a writer as prolific as Markham, with a long career behind him to bolster credibility, he invokes an appeal to female authority in the dedication, writing, "To the right honourable and most excellentest of all ladies, Frances, Countess Dowager of Exeter."[7] Nevertheless, although the work is dedicated to the countess, Markham states that most of the book was written by another, yet unnamed woman of the same rank. It is suggested that more likely than not Gervase Markham did not write many of the books published under his name, but that he worked more as a compiler of texts, and perhaps utilization of a feminine authority figure as the author in place of himself lent more legitimacy to the text for the initial audience of this type of prescriptive literature.[8]

Associations by way of dedications to noble and royal members of society did not end there. In later cookbooks, the titles reach ever higher. If in Markham's book from 1615 the target audience is simply a "Huswife," later books are aimed at "Gentlewomen," "Accomplisht Ladys," and perhaps culminate with the pinnacle of women's roles in *The Queens Closet Opened: Incomparable Secrets in Physick, Chirurgery, Preserving, Candying, and Cookery*. Published in 1655 during the English queen Henrietta Maria's continental exile, this tome became one of the most popular cookbooks of the seventeenth century.[9] Written during a period of intense turmoil, the English Civil War, politicization of women's domestic roles thus reach deep into the heart of the kitchen. *The Queen-like Closet or Rich Cabinet* is another such volume that draws upon the authority of queenship in matters domestic, and it was written by Hannah Woolley, the first popular domestic personality.

[7] Markham and Best, *The English Housewife.* p. 3
[8] *Idem.* p. xvii.
[9] Knoppers,. "Opening the Queen's Closet: Henrietta Maria, Elizabeth Cromwell, and the Politics of Cookery." *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 2, pp. 464–99.

Writing in the second half of the seventeenth century, Woolley was not only among the first women to break the glass ceiling into being a published author of prescriptive texts, her advice manuals were so popular that her name alone carried the weight of archetypical, gentlewomanly comportment.[10] Indeed, her body of work paired with the widespread popularity and emulation of her ladylike ideal was also connected with the upper echelons of society. These dedications only added to her iconic status, even though at best she was born into the yeoman class. Rising to a celebrity-like prestige, Woolley's books are found on either side of the English Atlantic, and the depiction of her is notable in its suggestion of the ideal, middle-status Restoration Era lady. However, it is equally possible the engraving of her image is nothing more than a simulacrum of what an iconic gentlewoman may look like, and not the author herself.[11]

Figure 2: Engraving of Hannah Woolley, or an elite, Restoration Era gentlewoman complete with sumptuous clothing, perfectly dressed hair, wearing a benign expression, and glittering with jewels. Regardless of whether or not this image is reflective of Woolley herself, the depicted woman does indeed radiate the spirit of a fully actualized and confident female.

[10] Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain*, p. 14.

[11] Ezell, "Cooking the Books, or, the Three Faces of Hannah Woolley." In *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550–1800*, edited by Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, p. 170.

Notwithstanding the true identity of the first "Kitchen Queen," cross-pollination of identity between English and colonial was in fluid state throughout the colonial period.[12] Hannah Woolley's prescriptive texts provided advice, recipes, medicaments, and know-how for the social climber or entrenched resident in the highest levels of society. Moving back to *The Compleat Housewife,* when it was published over fifty years later in Williamsburg, it is curious to note the lack of women achieving the elevated level of celebrity that Hannah Woolley had reached in the interim.

As noted earlier, notwithstanding Eliza Smith's transatlantic success with *The Compleat Housewife,* she is all but a hollow name ascribed to that popular text, with no subsequent cult of personality constructed around her persona, similar to Woolley's.[13] Full study of celebrity-like veneration in popular domesticity lies outside the parameters of this research project, but one possible explanation for the lack of iconic women as idols in mid-eighteenth century British Atlantic culture might be ascribed to the rise of paternalism and Christian values. Additionally, elite women's roles were being increasingly defined by their ability to gracefully induce gentility and nobility in men. These women were passive, docile ornaments compared with the gender expectations for males. In contrast, elite southern colonial men were expected to be vigorous and competitive, martial, and comfortable in public rhetoric, in many ways opposite to their ideal women. The oppressive force of the patriarchy left little room for full expressive and female autonomy, except, of course, within their own household realms.

III. Practical and Colonial Womanhood Evidenced in the Art of Cookery

[12] Gaskill and Hamilton, "Colonial Identity: English or American?" Bill of Rights Institute.
[13] Cox, Nancy. "Smith, Eliza (d. 1732?), writer on cookery." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.*

Turning to *The Compleat Housewife* now fully in the context of its time, practically speaking, there are exactly 676 recipes spread across twelve distinct sections: "A BILL of FARE for every Season of the Year," "COOKERY, &c" "All Sorts of PICKLES," "All Sorts of Puddings," "All Sorts of PASTRY," "All Sorts of CAKES," "CREAMS and JELLIES," "Preserves, Conserves, and Syrups," "All Sorts of Made Wines," "All Sorts of Cordial Waters," "MEDICINES and SALVES," and lastly, "DIRECTIONS for Painting Rooms or Pales." Food, medicine, and décor are the places this edition projects the "complete" housewife. Furthermore, the publication of a book supporting such wide dietary selections suggests an environment rich in trade and cultivation.

Not mentioned in any section are the handling or keeping of livestock, other than occasions such as when one must "Cut off the Head of your Pig,"[14] or "Take a good Fowl, kill, pull, and draw it."[15] The suggestion here is, therefore, that either the keeping of a kitchen garden with a modicum of livestock for personal use might have fallen outside the purview of the owner of this text, or else those details are not entirely germane to the subject of this book. Comparison with the London edition shows the uniformity between the editions in these two aspects.[16] Also unmentioned is that very obvious province of womanhood: the rearing and care of children. It is absent entirely, other than in a few recipes for certain childhood illnesses. These two omissions suggest that while the expectation of kitchen gardening and motherhood may be linked with domesticity, the absence of those two aspects in her household do not preclude that housewife from being "Compleat."

[14] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* p. 19. *"To collar a pig."*
[15] ***Idem.***, p. 21. *"How to force a Fowl."*
[16] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* fourth edition, London.

Identifying the disparate sections in context is also illuminating. "COOKERY, &c" is centered on meat dishes, while "All Sorts of Puddings," and "All Sorts of PASTRY," set out directions for fare both savory and sweet. In the preliminary "Bill of Fare" selection, paradoxically, the menu does not reflect any recipe from the book at all. With few exceptions the London edition does allow for the prescribed menus within the monthly "Bill of Fare" section. These omissions from the Williamsburg may be partly due to the vague and simplistic language used; perhaps any complete housewife will have a capable and working knowledge of one of March's "first course" suggestions, "*Battalio Pye*," or January's "*Grand Sallad, with Pickles."* Differences in seasonality between the Chesapeake and England notwithstanding, it is just as well any salad in the "FOR January" menu featured pickled vegetables, as modern interpretations of salad differ and greenery is generally unable to grow in the winter in either agricultural zone.[17]

Indeed, the presence of salad in this menu is interesting due to its absence within both the cookbook's recipes. Looking back to Markham's *The English Huswife,* one finds an entire portion of Chapter II dedicated to "sallats" of every description. Far from a simplistic modern idea of green leaves adorned with sundries and dressing, seventeenth century salads are comprised of simple salads, compound salads, boiled salads, preserved salads, and pickled salads. Intriguingly, there are "strange sallats," which is an amalgam of compound salad made with both pickled and preserved parts. Furthermore, there are salads for show only, made of boiled and carved roots to adorn the table in the shape of knots, or birds, or "wildbeasts."[18]

"All Sorts of CAKES," "CREAMS and JELLIES," and "Preserves, Conserves, and Syrups," are not different in adaptation from a modern understanding, excepting the ingredients. In cakes, "*A Plumb-Cake*" suggests:

[17] Jordan, *USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map*.
[18] Markham and Best, *The English Housewife,* pp. 64-67.

> TAKE six Pounds of Currants, five Pounds of Flour, an Ounce of Cloves and Mace, a little Cinamon, half an Ounce of Nutmegs, half a Pound of pounded and blanched Almonds, half a Pound of Sugar, three quarters of a Pound of sliced Citron, Lemon and Orange peel, half a Pint of Sack, a little Honey-water, and a Quart of Ale-yeast, a Quart of Cream, a Pound and a half of Butter melted and poured into the middle thereof;…

before the rest of the recipe's directions complete the listing.[19] The overall spice profile indicates a palate trained to acquire such an impressive range of sweet, dense, and pungent flavors. Even "*An ordinary Cake, to eat with Butter*" advises the use of "some Spice." Congruent to baking in the present, the primacy of spice in the food of this cookbook is reminiscent of the modern ubiquity of vanilla.

The most prevalent ingredient throughout the entire cookbook is sugar. Of the 676 recipes, at least 328[20] call for sugar in one form or another. The differentiation in types of sweeteners include coarse, brown, fine, "Six penny", double refin'd, single refin'd, fine powdered, and Loaf sugar, as well as honey, specific treacles, and various syrups and candies. Extrapolated across both editions, the prevalence and variance of sugar in the books is comparable. Evidently, in addition to a preference for heavily aromatically spiced dishes, high levels of sweetness were also sought after.

Whether savory, spicy, or sweet, these matters of taste are referred to in nineteen recipes scattered throughout the text. Sectionally, "CREAMS and JELLIES," makes the commandment to "sweeten it to your Taste;" as nine times it is mentioned in this segment alone, with the

[19] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife*, p. 70.

[20] Although I spent hours upon hours interpreting specific data sets in *The Compleat Housewife*, certain verbiage in the text, interpretations of types of "syrups" and degrees of sweetness as defined in periodization would be necessary to come up with an exact tally of recipes that call for sweeteners of various description. Unfortunately, time and space dictate this lies outside the scope of this research paper.

specificity of utilizing "Sugar" in two of that number. The conventions of capitalization are interesting to note through these instructions. Overwhelmingly, both the words taste and sugar begin with capitalized letters, pulling the reader forward to note the words' importance. Considering many more words are structured in this way, a full analysis of the text and spelling conventions may illuminate reading or writing nuances. Whether the formatting is due to the author's specificity, a social idea, or printer necessity would be interesting for further comparative study. Intriguingly, if one considers some of the corseting limitations of colonial women's roles, it is heartening to note that at least in one realm, the sweetening of several dishes, a kitchen queen is granted leave to season and eat as she pleases.

The prevalence of sugar throughout the text squarely places this book in the middle of the bustling Atlantic trade, though as a caveat, William Parks, the Williamsburg printer reiterates at the end of the preface that:

> The Printer now begs Leave to inform the Reader, that he hath Collected the following Volume from a much larger, printed in England, which contain'd many Recipes, the Ingredients of Materials for which, are not to be had in this Country: He hath therefore collected only such as are useful and practicable here, and left out such as are not so, which would only have serv'd to swell out the Book, and increase its Price.[21]

Although the printer enjoins the colonial reader to remember all ingredients may not be available in the colony, understanding the limitations of supply chains and demand in this period could illuminate diet, disease, fertility, and general education for certain demographics in the Old South. Furthermore, the final wording in the printer's addendum may be suggestive of an emerging colonial practicality in identity as opposed to English extravagance, or "othering."

[21] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife.* p. vi.

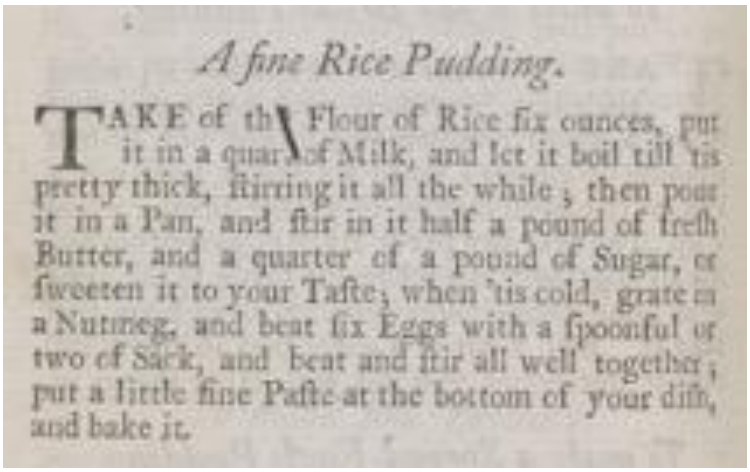
Certainly, the idea that the housewife purchasing this book should economize reiterates that particular virtue of "economy" as dictated by Markham.[22]

A quick comparison of the fourth and fifth editions illuminate specific reasons Parks might have omitted certain recipes. Several recipes that are available to London cooks and unavailable to their Williamsburg counterpart are identified. In addition to a surprising number of seafood-based dishes, the London provides recipes for 6 mushroom preparations, versus only 1 in the Williamsburg. Scotch-collops, a savory veal dish, appears to have been much more popular in the metropole with a recurrence of 4 separate recipes against the 1 in Williamsburg. Indeed, when it comes to economizing on variety, Parks left a fair portion out of his compilation of *The Compleat Housewife*.

The omission of nearly an entire section of the book suggests a different matter of taste between colonial and metropolitan households. "All Sorts of Pickles" in the London edition boasts thirty additional recipes to the Williamsburg. Considering there are only forty-six recipes in it, it seems that London cooks had a steadier stream of pickled offerings on their tables. In "All Sorts of Puddings" the selection is similarly enhanced in the London edition, where there are thirty-one more recipes for puddings than in the Williamsburg. Although many of the exclusions are additional preparations, for example in the case of "A Rice Pudding" there is only one iteration in Williamsburg whereas London contains three, it is still surprising that of the three recipes Parks chose to include, he excluded the one titled "A fine Rice Pudding," especially since there does not seem to reason to preclude it due to lack of ingredients, and rice, after all, grew in the Old South as well. A fuller, more comprehensive study might illuminate further scarcities between colonial and metropolitan marketplaces, and perhaps a subsequent nutritional

[22] Markham and Best, *The English Housewife.* p. xxiii.

study. What might be interesting to research is recent historiography and archives to view extant ships logs, bills of lading, and other tax or port records to see if trade routes and markets for trade ingredients can be interpreted.



A fine Rice Pudding.

TAKE of the Flour of Rice six ounces, put it in a quart of Milk, and let it boil till 'tis pretty thick, stirring it all the while; then pour it in a Pan, and stir in it half a pound of fresh Butter, and a quarter of a pound of Sugar, or sweeten it to your Taste; when 'tis cold, grate in a Nutmeg, and beat six Eggs with a spoonful or two of Sack, and beat and stir all well together; put a little fine Paste at the bottom of your dish, and bake it.

Recipe for "A fine Rice Pudding" in the fourth edition of *The Compleat Housewife*, p. 106.

Minimally speaking, other ingredients of New World provenance as they appear in the Williamsburg edition include Jamaica Pepper,[23] Jesuit's bark, and Virginia Snakeroot[24] which may or may not differ from Virginia Snakeweed.[25] It is comforting to note that Jesuit's bark is prescribed in the recipe '*To cure an intermitting Ague and Fever, without returning*,'[26] or what the modern reader might understand as malaria. Jesuit's bark is still considered a natural remedy for this devastatingly chronic illness, and so it seems not all curatives in *The Compleat Housewife* would be ineffective against the harsher diseases running rampant in the colonial world.

Practically, however, the subsections addressing "All Sorts of Cordial Waters," and "MEDICINES and SALVES," are quite dense, and difficult for the modern reader to digest in their ingredients and mystical approaches to health and wellness. In large part, distillations and

[23] Currently known as allspice.
[24] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife.* p. 202. "*For an ague*."
[25] *Idem.,* p. 161. "*An excellent Medicine for the spotted, and all other malignant Fevers.*"
[26] *Idem.,* p. 166.

alcohol make up medicaments. Also, between the 88 recipes in "Cordial Waters" and 187 in "Medicines and Salves," 85 contain sugar or honey. There are preservative effects as well as medicinal value in both sweeteners, to be sure, but in most cases, it appears to be a means to help the medicine go down. For example, the recipe for "Another Water against a Consumption," the need for something to elevate the taste becomes clear:

> TAKE a Pound of Currants, and of Harts-Tongue, Liver-wort, and Speedwell, of each a large Handful; then take a Peck of Snails, lay them all Night in Hysop, the next Morning rub and bruise them, and Distil all in a Gallon of new Milk; sweeten it with white Sugar-Candy, and drink of this Water two or three Times a Day, a quarter of a Pint at a Time. It has done great good.[27]

And even more worryingly for the patients under *The Compleat Housewife's* care is when sugar is not part of the recipe. For example, under the heading of "For a Rheumatism, or Pain in the Bones," the reader finds the following:

> TAKE a Quart of Milk, boil it and turn it with three Pints of small Beer, then strain the Posset on seven or nine Globules of Stone horse Dung[28] tied up in a Cloth, and boil it a quarter of an Hour in the Posset drink; when 'tis taken off the Fire, press the Cloth hard, and drink half a Pint of this Morning and Night hot in Bed. If you please you may add White wine to it. This Medicine is not good if troubled with the Stone.[29]

Plain and simple, the active ingredient appears to be horse dung, most likely unpalatable under any condition.

Food preservation would of course have been of paramount importance. The recipe '*To recover Venison when it stinks*,'[30] certainly suggests that sometimes even difficult household

[27] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife*, p. 153.
[28] "Stone horse" means stallion.
[29] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife*, p. 159.
[30] *Idem.*, p. 20.

economies must be taken, and suggests the audience for this book ranged further than the elite strata. The dictum is essentially a solution of salt, followed by more salt. The meat is then dried, and followed up with more salt and pepper. Calculation and analysis of ratios of preservatives and preservation methods would help understand the daily fare in the colder months, when game might be scarcer.

Another addition to the odd eighteenth century list of ingredients, alongside snails, stallion's horse-dung, earthworms, gunpowder, powdered human skull, and other medicaments of dubious healing power, ambergris finds its way into thirteen separate recipes, ranging from '*To make a Great rich cake*,' to '*To prevent Miscarrying*.' Generally unknown to modern readers, ambergris is "a secretion found in the intestinal tract of the sperm whale" that comes naturally when released into the sea.[31] Creating a musky essence when dried and aged, it lent a pleasing aroma to whatever dishes, medicines, lotions, or items it was used in, and for centuries, was highly popular on either side of the Atlantic world.[32] As a specialty trade item from a maritime culture, "Ambergrease" must also be considered an ingredient new and specific to this colonial Atlantic world culture. Historiography has shown that the early modern popularity of ambergris reached the highest echelons of English society; as a matter of taste, even Queen Elizabeth I had a penchant for gloves perfumed and oiled in ambergris.[33]

Raising the status on the complete housewife's household is an ability to differentiate between serving dishes ranging from china, to tin, to glass dishes. The recipe "*Lemon Cream*," calls for glassware, whereas "*Another Lemon Cream"* suggests china dishes. Unexpectedly, "*To*

[31] Cheng, Xu, Mao, and Wang. "Study of Structural and Electronic Origin of Ambergris Odor of Some Compounds." *Journal of Molecular Modeling* 15, no. 1, pp. 1–8.

[32] Holly Dugan. 2011. *The Ephemeral History of Perfume : Scent and Sense in Early Modern England*, p. 130.

[33] *Idem.,* p. 132.

make Orange Cream" leaves the serving selection entirely up to the cook stating, "pour out the Cream into Glasses or China Dishes." Providing alternate recipes for similar taste profiles or place settings is another rich vein of research, waiting to be tapped.

Speaking of tapping veins, with reference to the medical prescriptives, where a complete housewife might spend an equal amount of time creating distillations, "plaisters", and poultices, blood-letting is recommended as well. In "*A Receipt for Colds*," Venice treacle, snake-root powder, saffron powder, volatile salt of hartshorn, and syrup of cloves are all crafted into a bolus (a mass akin to a "horse-pill"), to be drunk down with "Mountain Whey." "N.B. Those who can't afford Mountain Whey, may drink Treacle-Posset," presumably a more economical drink. The recipe goes on to elaborate, "To such Constitutions as can't be provok'd to sweat, opening a Vein, or a gentle Purge, will be of great Service."[34] On the other side, in 'For a Pleurisy, if the Person cannot be blooded,' the patient is given a brew of "Carduus"[35] seeds or leaves boiled in a pint of beer. With a view of first assessing what species of thistle might be utilized by the colonial housewife, second determining what medical potency it might bring to the patient when thirdly, diluted with beer, it would be interesting to analyze how the medicine may heal a patient of pleurisy, a painful inflammation of the pleuritic membrane around the lungs. Additional research in how pleurisy was perceived, whether or not it meant the same in the eighteenth century versus in the twenty-first, as well as if medical understanding of any links between ailments of the lungs and prevalence of tobacco in the colonial Atlantic world economy.

Acknowledging the evolution of medicine and some of its more magical and practical origins, "Man's fat" forms part of the list for "*An Ointment for a Cold on the Stomach*," and "Boar's grease" is paired with the ashes of burnt bees and additional ingredients to form "*An*

[34] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* p. 223. "*A Receipt for Colds*."
[35] Modern readers know "carduus" as thistle.

Ointment to cause Hair to grow." Further direction calls for the housewife to create this "according to Art," and to commence treatment to the scalp on the day before the full Moon.[36] Other references to belief in the power of change in moon phases in healing can be seen in both "*A Powder for Convulsion Fits*," and "*To prevent Fits in Children*."[37] Perhaps the best place to see the translation of magical remedies according to "Art" is in the listing, "*For the Falling-Sickness*":

> TAKE of the Powder of a Man's Scull, of Cinnabar, and Antimony, of each one Drachm, of the Root of Male-Peony, and Frog's Liver dried, of each two Drachs, of the Salt of Amber, half a Drachm, Conserve of Rosemary, two Ounces, Syrup of Peonies, enough to make it into a soft Electuary, of which give the Quantity of a large Nutmeg every Morning and Evening, drinking after it three Ounces of the Water of the Lillies of the Valley; take it three Days before the new Moon, and three Days before the Full Moon; to bring the Patient quickly out of the Fit, let his Nostrils and Temples by rubb'd with the Oil of Amber.[38]

This recipe alone is rich with potential veins of research and further analysis, yet sadly, it will need to be pulled apart for interpretation in a future research project.

Certainly, *The Compleat Housewife* got the cure right at least some of the time. In "*All Sorts of Cordial Waters*," recipe number 400 describes how to craft "*the best Liquid Laudanum*."[39] Sack, spirit of wine, opium, and saffron are brewed with salt of tartar, cinnamon, cloves and mace in a corked bottle, as it is left out in the sun or next to a fire for a period of 20 days. The recurrence of rue in certain recipes also bodes well for the housewife's patient, as it is still known to efficiently treat arthritis, contusions, swellings, and etc. "*Rue-water, good for Fits*

[36] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* pp. 212-213.
[37] *Idem.*, pp. 210-11.
[38] *Idem.*, p. 202
[39] *Idem.*, p. 146.

of the Mother,"[40] mixes rue, green walnuts, and figs and then distils, to be kept for use when necessary, presumably, when a woman is experiencing the contractions of childbirth.

Conversely, although great pains are taken to demonstrate the lauded provenance of the prescription for gout, a notable disease prevalent in the early modern world due to a diet heavy in purines, the advice would not have helped the sufferer very much. That said, the professors of the Boerhaave and Osterdyke's[41] regimen do understand at least that the disease lives in the blood.[42] However, within the lengthy prescription for the gout, a suggested menu includes spinach, beans, and peas, all foods high in purines likely to settle in the patient's joints. Nevertheless, "In case a Fit of the Gout should return, and be violent, which they are of Opinion will not, then a little Opium or Laudanum may be taken to compose you." It is reassuring again here that the searing pain of this affliction is recognized and could be treated in the most extreme cases with medicine known to function as a palliative, much needed-during debilitating flare-ups of the condition.

Penultimately, on additional place of initial analysis in the Williamsburg version of *The Compleat Housewife* is in the importance of looking good. The recipe for hair growth referenced above is only the beginning. "*To make the Teeth White*,"[43] appears directly above "*A Powder for the Teeth*," to compete with the earlier dictum of "*To preserve and whiten the Teeth*." In contrast with varied preparations for rice pudding, here, at least, the publisher believes more than one recipe to whiten the teeth is necessary. Additionally, more gentle prescriptions for a complete housewife include "*To make Lip Salve*," "*To clean and soften the Hands*," "A Water to wash the

[40] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* p. 153.

[41] The learned men that appeal to male authority in authorship of medical treatise. Further research is necessary to view the erosion of female gendered space within the healing arts.

[42] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* pp. 192-194.

[43] *Idem.,* p. 219.

Face," "*A Remedy for Pimples*," and "*A Water to cure red or pimpled Faces*."[44] A further remedy for a spotted complexion, "*A good Thing to wash the Face in*," ominously calls the reader to "Wear a Piece of Lead, beaten exceeding thin, for a Forehead piece, under a Forehead-cloth; it keeps the Forehead smooth and plump."[45] From the modern perspective, it is understandably necessary, therefore, that *The Compleat Housewife* lists recipes for the treatment of cancer.

Finally, there are five recipes directly addressing cancer in *The Compleat Housewife,* of which four reference the breast. Two separate recipes deal with tumors in the title, with further recipes referencing them, or lumps, within the text.[46] In recipe number 664, '*An approved Remedy for a Cancer in the Breast*,'[47] the active ingredient is "the hard Knobs or Warts which grow on the Legs of a Stone-Horse," diluted in a glass of Sack. Number 418, "*A Milk-water for a Cancerous Breast*," calls for a gentle fired distillation of milk, cranes-bill, woodlice, and crab's eyes. Here, at least, the recipe includes sugar in the form of powdered white sugar-candy, though unfortunately, whether she sweetens it to her taste, or not, it is unlikely to help.[48]

IV. Conclusion

Assessing a woman's gendered domestic role as it evolved through the early colonial period can be achieved with close readings of prescriptive literature, including cookery books such as Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife*. In the public sphere, women writers dedicated to housewifery

[44] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife,* pp. 209, 213-14.
[45] *Idem.*, p. 209.
[46] *Idem.*, pp. 186, 204.
[47] *Idem.*, p. 223.
[48] *Idem.*, p. 152.

achieved distinction in the catalogue of texts available to elite women on both sides of the Atlantic World. As their roles narrowed while patriarchal culture was re-established through demographic change, women became isolated partly due to their limited movement due to domestic-centered labor, as well as the rural nature of life on a plantation in the colonial era Old South.

Though her community may be small, and her lifestyle limited to the wealthier sets, the elite colonial woman might yet be called to attend her households, inclusive of enslaved laborers, with nourishing meals and curative "physick." In addition, women were required to elevate their homes and bodies with a range of serving dishes and cosmetic applications. Prescriptions for décor also form a small portion of the text, although full analysis of this subset of data must for now lie outside the realm of this project.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, the repetition of certain recipes is an indication of the nature of many cookery books not only *The Compleat Housewife*. In general, they were compiled works rather than direct, original books of wholly unplagiarized authorship.[49] It is interesting, therefore, that Smith claims in her preface that the medical section consists singular, family recipes. A further study may be in comparison of Smith's preparations with her contemporaries, to see how the variance in medical treatments changed from household to household. It would also be interesting to research subsequent cookbooks published in colonial America, with a view of interpreting novelty in the books, or further evidence of plagiarism and compilation. A study like this might also indicate how domestic household American practicality evolved, especially when viewed in context of colonial Virginia, where the harsh realities of a frontier might impact supply of ingredients, and severity of afflictions.

[49] Ezell, "Cooking the Books, or, the Three Faces of Hannah Woolley." In *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550–1800*, edited by Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, pp. 159–78.

Though her power may wane, the elite woman of the colonial south still could grasp smaller measures of autonomy through household choices, whether that be in the wider marketplace or within her own kitchen. As one door closed, another opened. A dictum upon the title page of the book suggests the collection of medicinal recipes are "fit either for private Families, or publick-spirited Gentlewomen as would be beneficent to their poor neighbors."[50] Although poorer neighbors within American communities certainly existed in the rural landscape of the colonial Chesapeake, perhaps this book's printing in Williamsburg during the era of increased slave trade is indicative of higher status women needing to nurse expanding households of their own, inclusive of their enslaved laborers. Certainly, if the colonial woman's domain is her household, with the responsibility of the health of all who inhabit it, that household would also include her slaves. While cookbooks like *The Compleat Housewife* reflect the growing space of a female-dominated sphere and demonstrate the small spaces of empowerment where women could shine, still they fall short of permitting full power to women in the realm of the healing arts. The question is, therefore, is much more complicated than what's for dinner. It is more, so much more, than a matter of taste.

[50] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife*. Title Page.

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