

The “Sallow Mr. Freely”: Sugar, Appetite, and Unstable Forms of Whiteness in George Eliot’s “Brother Jacob”

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GEORGE Eliot’s “Brother Jacob” (1864) is one of her most unusual narratives. Unlike Eliot’s other texts, it is written in the tone of a fable, and it concerns the ambitions of confectioner David Faux—later called Edward Freely—who steals his mother’s savings in order to fund his emigration to the West Indian colony of Jamaica. Eliot (1819–1880) was certainly aware of, and participated in, the economies of empire, as Nancy Henry and others have noted, yet this is Eliot’s only story to repeatedly and overtly address colonial Jamaica, race, and the troubling economies of sugar.¹ In “Brother Jacob,” six years after David Faux’s successful theft of his mother’s money and Jamaican emigration, he returns to England under the assumed name of Edward Freely. Faux/Freely comes back from the island as a highly skilled confectioner who establishes a business in the market town of Grimworth. And twice in this narrative, Faux/Freely’s plans for fiscal and social gain are thwarted, or nearly thwarted, by his “idiot” brother, Jacob, and the latter’s uncontrollable sweet tooth in ways that warn against the ungovernability of bodies—especially white ones—who desire sugar.

Sugar is troubling in Eliot’s work, not only because of its morally suspicious means of production in the West Indies, but also because ingesting it troubles the very boundaries of race itself. Indeed, sugar is integral to producing highly racialized physical forms in “Brother Jacob.” In two early scenes, the narrator reflects upon the physiology of David Faux in relation to his longing for sweets. The text begins by considering the rashness of Faux, who has chosen early on in life to apprentice as a confectioner:

How is the son of a British yeoman, who has been fed principally on salt pork and yeast dumplings, to know that there is satiety for the human stomach

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even in a paradise of glass jars full of sugared almonds and pink lozenges. . . . David chose his line without a moment's hesitation; and, with a rashness inspired by a sweet tooth.²

Shortly after this, the text pays minute attention to David's racialized physiognomy as he contemplates colonial relocation:

David's imagination circled round and round the utmost limits of his geographical knowledge, in search of a country where a young gentleman of pasty visage, lipless mouth, and stumpy hair, would be likely to be received with the hospitable enthusiasm which he had a right to expect. Having a general idea of America as a country where the population was chiefly black, it appeared to him the most propitious destination for an emigrant who, to begin with, had the broad and easily recognizable merit of whiteness. (51)

The narrator here underlines David's "pasty visage," "lipless mouth," and "stumpy hair," and these traits are ironically linked to his "easily recognizable merit of whiteness" in this scene that troubles David's assumption of his physical superiority over the "chiefly black" population of the Americas.³ In this essay, I argue that this ambivalent racial depiction is ideologically connected to the text's earlier description of David's "sweet tooth" and "human stomach," which both long for the flavor of "pink lozenges" and "plum buns" (49). In both instances, the embodied, physical traits of the confectioner—"stomach," "sweet tooth," "lipless mouth," and "hair"—are key to understanding the complex fluidities of racial construction in the text. In these passages, David's "pasty" body is linked implicitly and explicitly to dark colonial bodies, and what enables this connection is the chief nineteenth-century commodity of the Caribbean: sugar.

While literary and historical analyses of sugar have rightly argued that it reveals extensive networks of slavery and colonialism, Eliot's discussion of sugar is about more than these networks: "Brother Jacob" helps us understand a fluid system of racial meaning and production in the nineteenth century that is inextricably tied to sugar and sugary physical desire. Much existing scholarship on "Brother Jacob" and its depiction of sugar has tended to examine the controversial colonial and domestic presence of the commodity in the text. For instance, Susan de Sola Rodstein discusses the tale's "fetishistic attention" to sugar, given that the Victorian increase in domestic sugar consumption had introduced "a slave-produced commodity into a nation that had abolished slavery."⁴ Moreover, Melissa Gregory's examination of the text takes on Eliot's treatment of race, as Gregory analyzes David Faux's "misguided faith in

his own whiteness" and his "idiot" brother Jacob's figurative proximity to black colonial bodies in the tale.⁵ Gregory rightly scrutinizes the suppressed presence of colonized bodies in "Brother Jacob," yet extant scholarship has still not fully grappled with the fraught construction of whiteness as an overtly racialized category in the novella. In redressing this scholarly omission, I place Eliot's cultural critiques of sugar in explicit conversation with the text's examination of white racial production: sugar produces, in the white bodies that desire it, racialized forms that are often troublingly fluid and unstable. "Brother Jacob"—and its discussion of sugar consumption—indexes significant, if overlooked, genealogies of racial meaning in the nineteenth century. The text positions the white body as an unstable and ungovernable site, I argue, and whiteness reveals an inherent, unwonted fluidity when it consumes or desires sugar. Eliot's narrative suggests that whiteness can, like sugar, utterly dissolve. It may cease to be recognizable *as* whiteness. Sugar thus reveals—and instantiates—the unruliness and instability of the white body. My analysis employs the methodologies of critical race and whiteness studies, as I examine how Eliot's text denaturalizes the frequent "invisibility of whiteness as a racial position" by making whiteness's fraught production anxiously and conspicuously *visible*.⁶ However, I do *not* claim that Eliot or her narrative necessarily attempt to dismantle the solidifying racial hierarchies of the nineteenth-century Western world. Nor am I interested in recovering Eliot's personally held philosophies regarding race and empire.⁷ Rather, I read "Brother Jacob" as its own site of meaning, a literary terrain that unconsciously reveals the complexities (and collapses) of the ongoing construction of whiteness as a racial category in the nineteenth century. If, as Sara Ahmed convincingly argues, we "do not face whiteness; it 'trails *behind*' bodies, as what is assumed to be given" (emphasis mine), then Eliot's text reveals what whiteness looks like when it is *in front* of bodies, when its active construction is rendered seeable and unfamiliar.⁸

Furthermore, my analyses of the intimate relations between sugar and racial production form a necessary, and frequently neglected, connection between Victorian and nineteenth-century American theorizations of racialized diets.⁹ And evoking Kyla Wazana Tompkins's recent call to "bind food studies to . . . critical race theory" in American studies, and her assertion that "eating is central to the performative production of raced and gendered bodies in the nineteenth century," I argue that in Eliot's text, the formation of racial identities—especially forms of whiteness—*must* be understood in relation to their physical ingestion.¹⁰

At the same time, while part of Tompkins's project excavates how "aesthetic and alimentary relationships work to concretize whiteness as a majoritarian racial position," my research underscores the spectacular (and often troubling) failures to solidify unitary ideals of whiteness when white bodies consume and desire sugar.¹¹ Moreover, my discussion of sugar and racialized bodies is in conversation with Parama Roy's analysis of the "psychopharmacopeia of empire"—specifically "spices, opium, sugar, and tea"—that were imperial commodities linked to "new experiences of . . . taste . . . and appetite."¹² Roy discusses how these ingesta helped form ideas of the body and new iterations of "desire, taste, disgust . . . appetite and . . . the embodied self" in the imperial context.¹³ My work, like Roy's, centers digestion in the history of empire's fraught construction of new bodily forms. And my writing—like Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's recent discussion of the potential of West Indian space to map broader "imaginative geographies"—also underscores the necessity of situating the Caribbean more explicitly within Western genealogies of race and bodies.¹⁴

In the following pages, I discuss the contested field of mid-nineteenth-century racial theory and the fraught coexistence of both inheritance and environmental models of racial construction in the period. Within this context, I analyze Eliot's examination of individual white bodies that are ambivalently racialized through their desires for, and associations with, sugar. I then discuss the text's communal racial anxiety, generated when sugar consumption affects the bodies of larger racialized communities. Throughout, I claim that sugar, and yearning for it, moves bodies between epistemes of racial meaning to reveal moments of overlap and rupture between disparate systems of racial ordering. Ultimately, the plasticity of racial forms connected to sugar in "Brother Jacob" suggests that bodies, especially white ones, are unruly and resist upholding coherent systems of racial meaning despite wider cultural attempts to fix them. Sugar disrupts dominant narratives of race's biological mechanism such that the white bodies connected to it are deemed unmanageable. "Brother Jacob" and its ungovernable, sugary appetites reveal that coherent constructions of whiteness cannot hold.

1. RACE AND THE "CLIMATE OF THE WEST INDIES": SUGAR AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY RACIAL THEORIES

Descriptions of racialized bodies in "Brother Jacob" reflect the nineteenth century's fluctuating, overlapping, and antithetical ideas about

how racial meaning was produced. For instance, by the mid-1800s, even before the publication of Charles Darwin's landmark 1859 treatise on natural selection and heredity descent, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, theories of racial difference that privileged inheritance—as opposed to older, climatic theories of race—had already gained scientific and popular ascendance in Britain and the Western scientific world. Moreover, the rising orthodoxy of the idea that physical markers of race were fixed and determined before birth depended on the vehement repudiation of older and relatively fluid environmental theories of race. Climatic racial theories understood the conditions producing racial difference to be malleable, and thus race was more responsive to external factors over time, such as geographical environment and even diet.¹⁵ Such environmental theories of race understood the body and skin as integral, potentially changeable sites that participate physically in the production of racial markers with the environment.

However, when Eliot composed "Brother Jacob," environmental theories of race were losing their scientific cachet.¹⁶ "Brother Jacob" was written by 1860 and later published in *Cornhill* in 1864; before and during this period, the emerging racial orthodoxy argued for hereditary racial descent alone as the force working synchronically and diachronically across measurable history.¹⁷ This hereditary force, according to polygenist racial theorist Robert Knox, "seem[s] always to have been" acting on bodies.¹⁸ Conceptually, in this descent-driven reading of human form, bodies are entirely predetermined and inherited, and thus not subject to radical change due to environmental factors or personal volition. Yet, despite the rising acceptance of this racial model, more fluid, environmental understandings of racial difference persisted into the period. And representations of bodies that challenged the hegemonic narrative of heredity often emerged as increasingly troublesome by midcentury, in part because such bodies spoke to the potentially unrestrained plasticity of human form in a racially charged period where many sought to fix, settle, and order racial difference.¹⁹ Depictions of malleable bodies with apparently incoherent racial genealogies were thus often figures of concern, as such forms countered the orthodoxy of racial inheritance.

Bodies desiring sugar are especially fluid in "Brother Jacob," and such forms show not only the stubborn persistence of environmental constructions of race but also that all bodies may be acted upon by overlapping, antithetical racial epistemologies. In particular, the treatment of white forms eating colonial sugar in "Brother Jacob" shows the incessant plasticity of bodies and their genealogies, and sugar was especially poised

to suggest the uncontained nature of the corporeal in the period. For instance, as Kate Flint, Carl Plasa, Pal Ahluwalia, Bill Ashcroft, and others have discussed, sugar was a particularly fraught colonial commodity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, given that it was produced by slave labor for much of the period in the West Indies and Brazil.²⁰ Flint notes sugar's particular olfactory "capacity to penetrate and linger" in colonial texts, as it acts as a "haunting reminder of the sources of much of Britain's imperial wealth" in the nineteenth century.²¹ Moreover, sugar production, as James Walvin has stated, was a "massive, international system which . . . locked together varied societies . . . into an intimate mutual dependence."²² Its status as a commodity thus dissolved fictions of national autonomy, and I am arguing that sugar, echoing its own chemical properties, performs conceptual dissolution for ideas of race in the period, as it troubles the orthodoxies of race's biological mechanism. In particular, sugar consumption suggests that whiteness cannot be separated from its problematic colonial origins, and it may not even remain stably recognizable as whiteness. Thus, white bodies in the nineteenth century are described as being both formed by the colonial dietary environment but also as always already preexisting white forms shaped by unchanging heredity; this contrast reveals race's conceptual and irresolvable tensions. And whiteness in "Brother Jacob" is both created and unraveled through these competing epistemological threads.

In fact, depictions of white bodies in proximity to Caribbean sugar have a long history of ontological instability, a history that the narrative of "Brother Jacob" both reflects and reproduces. And while Eliot addresses the presence of West Indian fortunes within Britain in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) through Mr. Armyn, who "had an estate in Barbadoes," Eliot's particular choice of Jamaica in "Brother Jacob" reflects a long-standing British preoccupation with that island and its imagined physical and emotional influence on white forms.²³ For instance, in the late eighteenth century, Bryan Edwards, a politician and enslaver who lived extensively in Jamaica, wrote his popular and influential history of the Caribbean, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793). In the text, he observes what his readers are meant to understand as distinct morphological differences induced by climate between the West Indian "Creole or Natives"—for Edwards, whites born in the tropics—and other white "Europeans" from the old countries:²⁴

I am of the opinion that the climate of the West Indies displays itself more strongly on the persons of the Natives, than on their manners, or on the

faculties of their minds. They are obviously a taller race, on the whole, than the Europeans; but I think in general not proportionably robust . . . but they wanted bulk, to meet our ideas of masculine beauty. All of them . . . are distinguished for the freedom and suppleness of their joints; which enable them to move with great ease and agility. . . . From the same cause they excel in penmanship, and the use of the small sword. . . . [T]he effect of climate is likewise obvious in the structure of the eye, the socket being considerably deeper than among the natives of Europe. (2:11–12)

Edwards's observations on the West Indies are based upon his experience living in Jamaica in particular, and he cites descriptions of the "obvious" differences between European whites and white West Indians, such as the latter's eye sockets, height, and divergent embodiments of "masculine beauty." These apparent bodily discrepancies are attributed solely to the "climate of the West Indies." Significantly, in his broad discussion of climatic racial influence, Edwards makes many links between diet and racial preference on the island, noting, for instance, that "[f]or bread, unripe roasted plantain is an excellent substitute, and universally preferred . . . by the negroes and most of the native whites."²⁵ Black and "native white" bodies are linked here in implicit opposition to those of his white European readers, and Jamaican whites are placed in contiguity with the black population through their shared appetites for the plantain.²⁶

Edwards records these white Caribbean dietary preferences with little apparent anxiety, but others writing at roughly the same moment, such as diarist Lady Maria Nugent, note more alarm about these proximities between black, brown, and white appetites and bodies.²⁷ In her diary entry from April 1801, for instance, Nugent notes:

It is extraordinary to witness the immediate effect that the climate and habit of living in this country have upon the minds and manners of Europeans. . . . In upper ranks, they become indolent and inactive, regardless of everything but eating, drinking, and indulging themselves, and are almost entirely under the dominion of their mulatto favourites. In the lower orders, they are the same . . . considering the negroes as creatures formed merely to administer to their ease, and to be subject to their caprice.²⁸

The "effect [of] the climate" is linked to unregulated appetite here and to the debasement of white bodies who care for nothing "but eating, drinking, and indulging themselves" in the close proximity of brown and black people. In this passage, Nugent does not explicitly name sugar or rum as the products of problematic "indulging," but she elsewhere notes

the physically altering effects of sugar on the body, observing: “I constantly feel my throat and lungs affected by it. Everything tastes of the smell and sugar, and I am in continual apprehension, lest my dear babes should suffer in their health by it.” In this latter entry, sugar is a physically oppressive commodity that even alters the whiteness of the skin; Nugent notes that the sugar residue “comes off upon one’s clothes, and even our skins seem to be dyed with it.”²⁹ In the earlier journal entry, colonial diet, often described as sugary in the period, also has the power to affect physical and social form. Nugent suggests that the established racial order of the colony may be unsettled due to European indulgence, as those whites who succumb to their desires are “under the dominion of their mulatto favourites.” Thus, unregulated European appetites and hungers threaten the social and physical coherency of white bodies.³⁰

Moreover, this anxiety regarding white colonial appetites, figural and literal, persists throughout the nineteenth century, as descriptions of white Creole diets remained a way of denoting understood racial differences—between whites and blacks, certainly, but also between Creole whites and British, European-born whites. For instance, J. Arbuthnot Wilson, a travel writer and self-professed owner of a Jamaican coffee estate, also cites the peculiar preference of the white Creole for plantain and other sweet endemic Jamaican foods in the late nineteenth century, as did Edwards decades earlier. Wilson condemns the preference for ripe, sugary plantain as a “damning fact against the taste and intelligence of the Creoles” vis-à-vis the English, claiming that “English infants would vastly prefer the inexpensive pleasure to be derived from simply sucking their own thumbs.”³¹ Wilson elsewhere condemns the “faint sickly things” eaten in Jamaica, and dietary preference for him is a dominant manifestation of geo-racial demarcation.³² “Brother Jacob” is in ideological contiguity with these other nineteenth-century narratives describing white Creole bodies shaped and differentiated by their appetites for sugary colonial products. In all these narratives, white bodies exist as both familiar, preexisting, and identifiable forms, but also as figures that are easily shaped, and potentially disrupted, by the exigencies of sugar.

2. “BROTHER JACOB” AND PROBLEMATIC WHITE BODIES

Sugar and physiognomy are inextricably linked in “Brother Jacob.” Strong sugary desire frames the first problematic bodily and moral descriptions we have of both the unethical David and his “idiot” brother,

Jacob. For instance, as I have suggested above, David's own physiognomy is deemed comically repellent, given the detailed descriptions of his "pasty visage, lipless mouth, and stumpy hair" as he contemplates emigration to the sugar-producing islands (51). Moreover, the narrator ironically links these traits to Faux's own "easily recognizable" whiteness (51); however, the whiteness described here and later in the narrative is not universally "recognizable" but is informed by specific proximities to the West Indies and its sugar. Certainly, the consumption of sugar had widespread ethical implications in early to mid-nineteenth-century Britain, given the rise of sugar boycotts in Britain popularized by the Abolitionist movement. But Eliot's text suggests that preference for this commodity might signal a deficiency in moral intelligence also reflected in physiognomy, echoing the observations of earlier writers who described the embodied nature of white Creole appetites.

Specifically, interwoven with descriptions of David's unappealing body that desires "sugared almonds," the narrator notes the deceitful manipulation of his "idiot" brother's equally problematic body through the vehicle of sugar. David makes a plan to steal and then bury his mother's savings in guineas in a nearby field, where he can later abscond with them to Jamaica without being observed. This scheme is underway one Sunday morning when David is interrupted by his brother, Jacob:

David . . . was about gently to drop the bag . . . when the sound of a large body rustling towards him with something like a bellow was such a surprise to David, who, as a gentleman gifted with much contrivance, was naturally only prepared for what he expected . . . he let it fall so as to make it untwist and vomit forth the shining guineas. In the same moment he looked up and saw his dear brother Jacob close upon him, holding the pitchfork. (52–53)

David, who is gifted "with much contrivance," is startled by his brother, who surprises him with a pitchfork. But instead of conceding defeat, Faux shows his titular, foxlike guile, which is literally actualized through proximity to sugar:

David did not entirely lose his presence of mind . . . and if he had had any lips they would have been pale; but his mental activity, instead of being paralysed, was stimulated. While he was inwardly praying . . . he was thrusting his hand into his pocket in search of a box of yellow lozenges, which he had brought . . . as a means of conciliating . . . the beauty of Miss Sarah Lunn. Not one of these delicacies had he ever offered to poor Jacob, for David was not a young man to waste his jujubes and barley-sugar in giving pleasure to people from whom he expected nothing. But an idiot with equivocal intentions and a pitchfork is as well worth flattering and cajoling as if he

were Louis Napoleon. So David . . . drew out his box of yellow lozenges, lifted the lid, and performed a pantomime with his mouth and fingers, which was meant to imply that he was delighted to see his dear “Brother Jacob,” and seized the opportunity of making him a small present, which he would find particularly agreeable to the taste. (53)

In this scene, David’s “contrivance” is enabled directly by the sugared lozenges in his pocket; his mind and body are acted upon, literally “stimulated,” in proximity to the enervating substance. Moreover, this barley-sugar commodity had already been earmarked for courting Sarah Lunn, a person from whom David has presumably *not* “expected nothing.” Sweets thus become instrumental in the deceptive acts of “flattering and cajoling” his brother and seducing Sarah Lunn, and David’s dissimulation is instinctually connected to this refined sugar, which his “thrusting” hands search for instinctively. Significantly, at the same moment, the narrator pointedly reminds readers of the physicality of David’s lipless face, noting that “if he had had any lips they would have been pale” (53).³³ David’s lips, a trait previously linked directly to his “recognizable merit of whiteness,” are a physiognomic reminder of race—and specifically race in proximity to sugar—in this scene. In fact, lipless mouths had long been read as physiognomic evidence of “coldness [and] industry,” traits befitting David, while they also marked the white mouth as racially distinct from the “large . . . African character” of black people’s lips.³⁴ Moreover, the physicality of fingers and lips sits apposite the deception of David’s brother, an act enabled and “stimulated” by sugar’s proximity. The text here cements the relationship between problematic iterations of the body, racialized whiteness, and sugar consumption.

Furthermore, the above physical description of Jacob’s “large body” and physical “taste” is crucial to the text’s assessment of bodies. Sugar has power on Jacob’s form that sparks anxiety about the uncontrollability of the body, especially the white “idiot” body, which was tied to fears about the stability of race and civilization in the Victorian period.³⁵ Jacob’s sweet “taste” is particularly ungovernable, as it links his body to sugar that is consumed on an intense and problematically visceral level. Indeed, the word *taste* has etymological roots to the body that precede its primary association with food, as it first described “senses related to touch,” and “the touch [and] feeling. . . with the hands.”³⁶ Taste is thus a profoundly corporeal and ambivalent force acting on the body. In this scene, for example, Jacob’s sugary desire proves an obstructive force to David, since Jacob’s sweet cravings are poised to expose

David's attempted theft, and the text hints that Jacob's sugary taste will not be easily governed. The narrator goes on to note:

Jacob . . . took one lozenge, by way of test, and sucked it . . . in as great an ecstasy at its new and complex savour as Caliban at the taste of Trinculo's wine, chuckled and stroked this suddenly beneficent brother, and held out his hand for more. . . . Jacob . . . had thrown himself down . . . in thorough abandonment to the unprecedented pleasure of having five lozenges in his mouth at once, blinking meanwhile, and making inarticulate sounds of gustative content. He had not yet given any sign of noticing the guineas, but in seating himself he had laid his broad right hand on them, and unconsciously kept it in that position, absorbed in the sensations of his palate. (53–54)

It is worth lingering on the detailed, sensory descriptions of Jacob's body in this scene. The narrator describes his state of pleasure at the "complex savour" of candy (53), a sensation so great that Jacob relinquishes all bodily control and throws "himself down . . . in . . . abandonment to the unprecedented pleasure of having five lozenges in his mouth at once" (54). What begins with tasting just "one lozenge" ends in the excessive "ecstasy" of five lozenges all at once, in this instance of complete physical abandon (53). Jacob's is not a cerebralized pleasure; feeling is entirely located within his "large body," a body reduced to "mouth," "blinking," and "inarticulate sounds of gustative content" (54). These words describe both his preexisting disabled form while they simultaneously demarcate a body made unstable through the power of sugar.

Jacob is somatically rendered as "hand," "mouth," and "palate," a state that is unruly and also potentially dangerous in this passage. For instance, David realizes quickly how difficult it will be to control his brother's "gustative content," as Jacob's hand covers the guineas, while David is trying to steal them. And as Melissa Gregory has observed, Jacob's body is also "threatening" and racialized (293), while he temporarily thwarts David's larceny here. As Gregory argues:

Eliot strongly aligns elements of [Jacob's] character with the Victorian stereotype of the primitive—an association that encourages a reading of the literary nemesis within the wider context of mid-Victorian imperialism. Eliot not only compares him to Caliban—Jacob is as thrilled with his lemon lozenges as Caliban with Trinculo's wine . . . but her decision to make Jacob an idiot . . . reveals [her] startling participation in an existing mid-nineteenth-century discourse which drew explicit connections between idiots and colonized natives. (293–94)

Gregory also asserts that "Jacob's hyper-physicalized body invokes nineteenth-century stereotypes of Africans . . . and his exaggerated body and face—an

exaggeration also thought to be common to idiots—further resembles nineteenth-century racist representations of black features.” She adds that “Jacob’s unnatural craving for sweets resonates as a symptom exhibited by both idiots and colonized subjects” (294). Gregory thus links anxieties concerning Jacob’s desiring idiot body to fears about unruly black colonial bodies, a connection that is cemented through shared sugary tastes.

While Gregory’s reading of sugar eliding the differences between black and idiot bodies is insightful, I want to underline that Jacob’s sugary palate also reflects a concomitant, if often suppressed, anxiety in the text—a fear that white bodies linked to sweet colonial commodities are *always already* suspect, and also prone to such excesses of appetite.³⁷ That is to say, while Jacob’s body and sweet palate do link him to the colonized, so-called primitive black subject, Jacob’s body is not just a proxy representative of blackness.³⁸ His ecstatic consuming body also reflects fears about the incoherence of white bodies in proximity to sugary colonial diets. Whiteness may be at once a preexisting “recognizable merit” and an unrecognizable plasticity affected by colonial environments. Jacob’s sweet desire not only collapses divisions between “colonized subjects and literal idiots” (294), as Gregory argues, but Jacob’s sweet tooth also reveals an enduring, anxious strand of the climatic racial construction of whiteness. Thus, while Eliot does reproduce racist tropes that “viewed idiots and colonized subjects as members of the same species” through her depiction of Jacob, her text at the same moment satirizes fantasies of white racial coherence through David and Jacob.³⁹ The latter’s sugary taste reflects fears that whiteness, in its more familiar domestic forms, can disintegrate in proximity to the sugary commodities of the colonies. This is the same dietary and bodily concern seen in later nineteenth-century writings describing white colonial diets, like Arbuthnot Wilson’s descriptions of the “sweetness . . . very sickly” of Jamaican sugary foods, which seem “damning . . . against the taste and intelligence” of white colonial bodies.⁴⁰ Jacob’s desiring body, like the appetites of whites in the Caribbean described by Bryan Edwards, Maria Nugent, and others, totally unsettles attempts to consolidate the racial production of whiteness. Sugar thus creates and evinces the unruliness of the white body.

3. “THE INFECTION SPREAD”: SUGAR, “GRIMWORTH DESDEMONAS,” AND COMMUNAL DIETARY ANXIETY

I have been arguing that depictions of Jacob’s unrestrained sugary desire and his “gurgling” form denote a body largely acted upon by involuntary

desire (55). Jacob's is a body problematically devoid of thought and caught in the throes of sugary ecstasy. However, textual anxieties regarding the sweet palates of both Jacob and David are not confined to the two brothers in this narrative. Instead, the socially disruptive desire for sugar spreads to the broader community in this tale in ways that are said to mirror a widespread "infection" (65). This is because diet was understood to have an effect on more than just the individual throughout much of the nineteenth century; it had a socially defining, deeply collective function as well. For instance, Kate Thomas notes the conceptual and etymological links between the terms *culture* and *diet*, as she observes that "[e]tymologically, there is a relation between the words 'diet' and 'culture': 'diet' finds its roots in . . . meaning 'mode of life' and 'culture.'"⁴¹ She also argues that "[d]igestion in the nineteenth century was regularly portrayed as playing a constitutive role in the management of civilization."⁴² Diet was thus seen as a communal phenomenon, characterizing collectives within whole cultures. In this vein, Thomas discusses the influential dietary ideologies of Ludwig Feuerbach, whose *The Essence of Christianity* George Eliot had translated from German in 1854.⁴³ Feuerbach is most famous for his assertion that "Food becomes blood; blood becomes heart and brain. . . . Human food is the foundation of human development and feeling. . . . Man is what he eats."⁴⁴ This connection between food and "the foundation of human development" was a compelling if contentious one in the nineteenth century, as Feuerbach was accused of being a materialist and thus unconcerned with the transcendental.⁴⁵ His claims about society and diet come from his *Das Geheimnis des Opfers oder der Mensch ist was er ißt* (The Mystery of Sacrifice or Man Is What He Eats), which was published in 1862, two years after "Brother Jacob" was written; however, Feuerbach's ideas linking diet to human society had been expressed at least twenty years prior.⁴⁶ In "Brother Jacob," analogous ideas of food and culture construct a similar understanding of, and concern about, the embodied effects of collective diets.

Eliot, who was familiar with Feuerbach's writings, engages with the idea of diet as a causal agent of social and racial development in "Brother Jacob." For instance, her descriptions of the town of Grimworth, where David Faux resides after his return from Jamaica, are particularly telling for how they converse with the period's "digestive model[s] of the workings of culture."⁴⁷ In chapter 2 of the narrative, set "nearly six years after the departure of Mr. David Faux for the West Indies" (61), the reader is presented with the changing town of Grimworth, whose long-standing economic models of consumption are

in a period of transition. The older ways of buying and consuming goods are revered by the established, landowning families in Grimworth, who had traditionally purchased their “sugar and their flannel at the shop where their fathers and mothers had bought before them” (61). And David Faux (now using the alias of Edward Freely), who sells consumable goods, is enmeshed with the town’s anxieties about newer marketplaces in the area. The narrator remarks, “if newcomers were to bring in the system of neck-and-neck trading . . . if new grocers were to fill their windows with mountains of currants and sugar, made seductive by contrast and ticket,—what security was there for Grimworth?” (61–62). Notably, the “seductive” commerce of the grocer, displaying his “windows with mountains of currants and sugar,” is the focal point of concern here, as sweets and their consumption embody broader social and fiscal changes in Grimworth.

Furthermore, Freely’s confection shop, seen through his store window, soon reforms the social and economic fabric of the town:

On one side, there were the variegated tints of collared and marbled meats, set off by bright green leaves, the pale brown of glazed pies, the rich tones of sauces and bottled fruits enclosed in their veil of glass—altogether a sight to bring tears into the eyes of a Dutch painter; and on the other, there was a predominance of the more delicate hues of pink, and white, and yellow, and buff, in the abundant lozenges, candies, sweet biscuits and icings, which to the eyes of a bilious person might easily have been blended into a faëry landscape in Turner’s latest style. What a sight to dawn upon the eyes of Grimworth children! They almost forgot to go to their dinner that day, their appetites being preoccupied with imaginary sugar-plums. (62–63)

The sumptuous and spectacular quality of Freely’s sugar is deemed a “bilious” “faëry landscape,” and its temptations of Grimworth’s physical “appetites” are thus tinged with desire and suspicion here. The imagery describing the shop window also pertains to art and artfulness. Confection is a “blaze of light and colour” like “a rainbow . . . suddenly descended into the market-place” (62), and the opulent “glazed pies, the rich tones of sauces, and bottled fruits” in the “delicate hues of pink, and white, and yellow, and buff” are twice likened to paintings. Comparing Freely’s decadent goods to the works of J. M. W. Turner or the Dutch masters suggests that his products are attractive but also painted usurpations of something solid and original, such as the forgotten and homely “dinner that day.”⁴⁸ And this scene of sugary excess is also tempting to a collective desiring body, as Freely’s products act directly on the “eyes” and “appetites” of the Grimworth children. Most

tellingly, the specific objects that tempt these children are "abundant lozenges, candies, sweet biscuits and icings"; not only are these all highly sugared creations, but the lozenges in particular align their desire with that of the unruly body of Jacob who, earlier in the text, throws "himself down . . . in thorough abandonment" and "ecstasy" after having eaten them (54). Moreover, "pink lozenges" are also one of the confections that initially entice David to become a confectioner, the objects having acted upon his own tempted stomach. Sugary food thus acts upon individual and corporate bodies in suspicious, destabilizing ways.

Soon, Freely's goods actualize collective, social change through the wholesale rearrangement of Grimworth's domestic culture by foreign and racialized means. Whereas the appearance of his business had first disrupted the traditional mold of shops seen in town, since a "confectioner and pastry-cook's business [had been] hitherto unknown in Grimworth" (62), Freely's baked goods then come to disrupt the domestic economy of the town, as its women are particularly susceptible to Freely's wares. After Freely's shop opens, for example, the women of Grimworth eventually reduce or cease altogether their production of handmade pastry, coming to rely on his often superior, easily attained goods. This culinary change reflects the midcentury British housewife's increased reliance on ready-made foods, as nineteenth-century food historians like Andrea Broomfield, Stephen Mennell, and others have documented.⁴⁹ But in "Brother Jacob," this alteration in domestic habits is overtly racialized and brokered through immediate economic ties to the West Indies. For instance, Freely's West Indian connections first enable his social introduction and the subsequent culinary shift in Grimworth, as "Mrs. Chaloner, the rector's wife, was among the earliest customers at the shop, thinking it only right to encourage a new parishioner. . . . Moreover, he had been in the West Indies, and had seen the very estate which had been her poor grandfather's property" (63–64). Chaloner and Freely are thus linked through the shared economic nexus of slave-produced sugar, the product that fueled the early fortunes of such estates in Jamaica. Their Jamaican economic connection is underlined even more explicitly when Freely attempts to reassure Chaloner's worries about the civil and economic unrest on the island by stating that "the missionaries were the only cause of the negro's discontent" (64).

Reminders of sugar's problematic origins and its effects on groups of susceptible white bodies also fuel moments of pivotal social and racial disruption in Eliot's narrative. Certainly, as Kate Thomas notes, the

perceived link between food and cultural construction was especially focalized through sugar in the period, given that “the eighteenth-century topos of ‘blood sugar,’ the notion that Britain’s sugar was soaked with the blood of slave labour, persisted into the nineteenth century.”⁵⁰ And not only is sugar explicitly linked to such slave labor, to “the negro’s discontent,” in “Brother Jacob,” but Freely’s sugar also resituates and reshapes the recognizable value of white bodies in Grimworth. For instance, when Faux first appears in Grimworth as Edward Freely, he is explicitly referred to as the “the stranger with a sallow complexion” by the townspeople (61). *Sallow*, an adjective denoting “a sickly yellow or brownish yellow colour,” is affixed to Freely four times in this short narrative in ways that are implicitly and explicitly racialized.⁵¹ For one, this descriptor of skin tone is only attached to Faux after he returns from the West Indies, suggesting the climate has altered his skin tone permanently. And in Grimworth, Faux/Freely’s brownish-yellow complexion is set in explicit contrast to the white-skinned inhabitants in town, a place where copious and refined quantities of Caribbean sugar had been previously unknown. Freely is, for example, set opposite his romantic interest, Miss Penelope, or Penny Palfrey, a young woman with “round blue eyes, and round nostrils in her little nose” and a complexion like a “pink and white double daisy, and as guileless” (69), a description evoking some of Eliot’s other, similarly hued English characters, such as *Middlemarch*’s Celia Brooke and *The Mill on the Floss*’s Lucy Deane.⁵² Freely is also explicitly contrasted with his rival for Penny’s affections, a Mr. Towers, “whose cheeks . . . of the finest pink, set off by a fringe of dark whisker [were] quite eclipsed by the presence of the sallow Mr. Freely” (67). The revered “blue eyes” and “pink and white” coloring of the white English body are either seduced or “quite eclipsed” by Freely’s sallow skin, produced by the West Indies.⁵³ Racialized, climatic differences set Freely apart from the native Grimworth population, and, as I have been arguing, the existential threat of Freely is not simply that he is a whitened yet essentially black colonial body, but, rather, that his form evinces the unfixed plasticity of white bodies who enter into intimate economic relation with the colonies and are shaped by the latter’s commodities.

Perhaps the most serious perceived threat that the “sallow-complexioned” Freely presents to Grimworth is that which he poses to the female segment of its population. He infiltrates the homes and kitchens of the town’s women through his confection in ways that link his wares to sexual, racialized incursion. Freely’s goods lure the female inhabitants of Grimworth to deceive their husbands, as is

the case of "Young Mrs. Steene, the veterinary surgeon's wife, who first gave way to temptation" after Freely's social introduction by Mrs. Chaloner (64). Mrs. Steene initially turns to Freely for a single "dish of mince-pies," as they were sure "to turn out well: it would be much better to buy them ready-made" (65). This initial "sophistry" is magnified when she continues to buy from Freely and muddles her household finances to hide her new habit from her husband. It is significant that this act of domestic deception is committed by Mrs. Steene, since she is already prone to Orientalist fantasy, given that "she knew by heart many passages in *Lalla Rookh*, the *Corsair*, and the *Siege of Corinth*, which had given her a distaste for domestic occupations" (64). Steene is often disappointed by her prosaic husband, who is "not in the least like a nobleman turned Corsair out of pure scorn for his race, or like a renegade with a turban and crescent, unless it were in the irritability of his temper" (64). The text suggests that she is likely to succumb to Freely, as he trades on the perceived exoticism of his own West Indian past. For instance, Freely is often "hinting at a life of Sultanic self-indulgence which he had passed in the West Indies" (68). The confectioner and his trade are thus marked explicitly as part of non-Western racial and cultural topoi, as are those most susceptible to his sugar, such as his Caliban-like brother, Jacob, Mrs. Chaloner, and Mrs. Steene.

Freely's most daring sexual and racial infiltration comes with his pursuit of Penelope Palfrey, a courtship that is fueled with the imagery of Caribbean exoticism and sugary appetites. For instance, Miss Palfrey is initially intrigued by the confectioner, as he seems to her "a sort of public character, almost like Robinson Crusoe or Captain Cook" because he had "been to the Indies and knew the sea so well" (70). Freely's presumed mastery of "the Indies" thus allows him to insinuate himself with the Palfreys, who are Grimworth gentry. And Freely is able to calm the initial misgivings of Penny's father through the commodity of rum, as Freely calculates rightly that Mr. Palfrey "would not, it might be hoped, be proof against rum—that very fine Jamaica rum—of which Mr. Freely expected always to have a supply sent him from Jamaica" (73). Freely understands and preys upon the apparent susceptibility of local white appetites for sugary products.

Indeed, West Indian food commodities are the instruments of racialization for Freely, as sugar's presence enables a latent plasticity in the minds and bodies of the Grimworth population. The narrator notes, for instance:

[I]t very soon appeared that [Freely] was a remarkable young man, who had been in the West Indies, and had seen many wonders by sea and land, so that he could charm the ears of Grimworth Desdemonas with stories of strange fishes, especially sharks, which he had stabbed in the nick of time . . . of terrible fevers which he had undergone in a land where the wind blows from all quarters at once; of rounds of toast cut straight from the breadfruit trees; of toes bitten off by land-crabs; of large honours that had been offered to him as a man who knew what was what, and was therefore particularly needed in a tropical climate; and of a Creole heiress who had wept bitterly at his departure. Such conversational talents as these, we know, will overcome disadvantages of complexion. (67)

Notably, the West Indies and specific aspects of its diet become exotic markers of Freely's otherness to the townspeople in ways that explicitly mark Freely as a white Creole, his actual place of birth notwithstanding. This white Creole status sets Freely in a racialized category that is not quite white, but not black, in ways that echo the morphological and cultural descriptions of white West Indian difference in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For instance, in addition to the textual references to "strange fishes, especially sharks," the mention of "breadfruit" and specifically the "land-crab" all denote a distinctly white Creole diet, given that black land crabs, along with ring-tailed mullet fish, were some of the most iconic endemic Jamaican foods in the nineteenth century. These foods were enjoyed particularly by "wealthy whites with access to resources and leisure" on the island, who helped demarcate a sense of "creole taste" in colonial Jamaica.⁵⁴ Thus, Freely not only intimates that he is a part of the Jamaican plantocracy (even though this is likely a fabrication meant to impress the townspeople), but the foods he brings with him to Grimworth threaten to destabilize the racial and socioeconomic structure of the village. The enthralled "Grimworth Desdemonas" mark this sexual and racial danger acutely. Melissa Gregory has argued that this scene presents the colonies as an "exotic fantasy space" (289), and I assert that this geographic fantasy space is not static, as Freely's descriptions of a Creole Jamaican diet threaten to darken the English "pink and white" of the English women smitten by Freely. Rebecca Mackay reads this scene as one denoting perceived danger to the mid-Victorian housewife who is "succumbing to the desire for knowledge beyond [her] ken," and thus "incur[ing] substantial risk of moral slander and bodily harm" (34). However, I want to underline that this "substantial risk" is also a racialized one, given that desire for Freely is staged here and elsewhere as being racially destabilizing in nature.

"Brother Jacob" continues to describe Freely in the language of a white Creole sexual tyrant using the metaphor of confection as the text details his romantic relationship with Penny. The narrator notes, for instance, that

when business permitted, Mr. Freely thought a great deal of Penny. He thought her prettiness comparable to the loveliest things in confectionery; he judged her to be of submissive temper—likely to wait upon him as well as if she had been a negress, and to be silently terrified when his liver made him irritable; and he considered the Palfrey family quite the best in the parish, possessing marriageable daughters. (71)

The confluence of sex, race, and sugar is quite striking here. Freely's un-English, and seemingly unwhite, attitudes about marriage have him likening Penny, his potential wife, to "a negress" who might be "silently terrified" of him in marriage.⁵⁵ In "Brother Jacob," the erstwhile "pink and white" Penny literally ceases to be white in Freely's sugared imagining of racial and sexual power. This mental and racial subjugation of Penny is enabled by likening her to one of "the loveliest things in confectionery." And the sugary body is also the re-racialized body in this passage describing the threat of Freely's racially subjugating desire. Freely can only imagine himself in communion with Penny and others in the text in problematic ways dictated by sugar and its attendant racial and sexual dominance. And while she does not explicitly desire sugar as Mrs. Chaloner and Mrs. Steene do, Penny's body acts as a locus for sweet desires. Penny's white female body is thus plastic and racialized through its imagined proximity to sugar, in ways that also speak to the broader peril of Grimworth, which comes to rely on Freely's confection to sustain their new domestic habits. Sugar both produces and reveals an imagined fluidity of white bodies that can be reformed and recontextualized racially, based on their consumption of, and proximity to, the product.

Before Penny's imagined transformation into "a negress" is allowed to occur, however, Jacob returns to the narrative, and his presence provokes a stark confrontation of the racially fraught properties of sugar on the body. "Brother Jacob" ends with the abrupt removal of Freely from Grimworth, when he is revealed to all as the impostor David Faux. Jacob arrives suddenly at his brother's confection shop one day, and his large physical presence is first heard by David and the Palfrey family as "an extraordinary disturbance . . . in the shop, as of a heavy animal stamping about and making angry noises" (80). Jacob is again

entirely defined by his animalistic, fleshly appetite, and he is discovered “eating his pie by large mouthfuls, and looking round at the other good things in the shop, while he . . . laid his left hand on some Bath buns” (80). Jacob, whose “heavy animal” presence and sweet tooth recall Victorian tropes about so-called savage bodies, is briefly kept quiet with a “glass jar of yellow lozenges” (81), and Penny is “frightened to death” by the physical sight of Jacob, who comes to “nod and grin at her” (82). Penny is troubled, as she soon begins to realize that Jacob may be David’s brother and thus her potential brother-in-law; indeed, Penny’s sister notes the subtly racialized physiognomic resemblance between the men, noting that Jacob has “got just the same sort of nose” as David (81).⁵⁶ But Penny’s disturbance by Jacob may be read simultaneously as a moment of textual recognition of their shared relation through sugar. Penny, hitherto imagined by David as a “negress” and one of “the loveliest things in confectionery,” is, along with Jacob and David, linked in a nexus of sugar that the narrator reminds us at this instant is also a racialized one. Indeed, immediately after this moment, when the Palfreys state their intention to leave the confection shop, the narrator directs attention to the skin of “Mr. Freely, whose complexion had become decidedly yellower during the last half-hour” (82). The changeability of Faux’s complexion acts as a tangible reminder of sugar’s fluid construction of all the white bodies in this scene.

4. CONCLUSION: SUGAR AND “UNEXPECTED FORMS”

While Victorian sugar has been discussed in terms of its “cultural colonization and its post-colonial transformations” in recent analyses, I contend that the commodity has been largely overlooked for how it also signaled deep anxieties about the apparent fluidity of racial construction—particularly white racial construction—in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ This connection between racial meaning and sugar is made legible in Eliot’s text, and sugar’s apparently transformative property on bodies must be understood in more than just cultural and political terms, since nineteenth-century texts framed the substance’s power over the body in explicitly physiognomic, racialized terms. Sugar and the body’s receptiveness to it are thus markers of climatic, environmental understandings of racial transmission that persisted well into the Victorian period apposite, and opposite, models of inherited racial stability. And sugar’s failure to be contained within any one discrete person is part of its particular ontological anxiety in Eliot’s text. Freely’s sweet wares are seen as an

"infection [that] spread" in Grimworth—marking sugary longing as uncontainable within any single body, and sugar also suggests that the discrete borders of bodies themselves cannot be contained. Sugar's fluidity reveals race's similarly troubling fluctuations, in part because their ontologies are deeply intertwined.

In the conclusion to "Brother Jacob," Faux leaves Grimworth in shame with Jacob, and the narrator notes that "we see . . . I think, an admirable instance of the unexpected forms in which . . . Nemesis hides herself" (87).⁵⁸ It is fitting that this narrative ends with a meditation on "unexpected forms," as the text is about the incessant changeability of bodily forms. "Brother Jacob" belongs to a history of texts that understands sugar to both demarcate and *produce* racial instability within and between bodies. I suggest that, in the text, sugar belies the comforting fixity that inheritance models of racial difference proffered in the period. Sugar is a dominant and troubling counterthread to this racial orthodoxy. Raced descriptions of unsettled white bodies in Eliot's text must thus be understood as both metaphorical symptoms of colonial anxiety and as iterations of the diversity of racial systems in the Victorian period. And as Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong have argued, such work is crucial to performing the structural work of "recognizing characters in a Victorian novel not as race-less, but as white."⁵⁹ Recognizing whiteness' inconsistent construction is part of the necessary labor of forming more accurate, nuanced histories of race that continue to shape our present moment. Such complex racial histories entirely subtend Eliot's story.

Ultimately, sugar's revelation of the body's fluidity suggests not just the strength of environmental forms of race in the Victorian period but also that bodies do not adhere neatly to systems of racial meaning. And this slipperiness of bodies precludes the creation of unitary, cohesive ideals of whiteness in a text that often satirizes the very attempt to do so. Sugar slips between racial regimes and bodily forms, allowing bodies to evade ontological cohesion. The history of the sweet product is, then, simultaneously a material, colonial history and an underexamined thread of the history of racial production. Sugar may at once transform a white body into one of the "loveliest things in confectionery" while simultaneously enabling it to be imagined as "a negress"—precisely because the genealogies of sugar and race are inextricable from each other. Thus, sugar's "painful corporeal history" must be better understood as part of the Victorian construction of the corporeal.⁶⁰

NOTES

This article became a much better one thanks to the invaluable insights of Mary L. Mullen, Ryan Fong, Elizabeth Coggin Womack, the members of the P19 Seminar, and the paper's anonymous reviewers.

1. Nancy Henry's *George Eliot and the British Empire* pays particular attention to Eliot's "quotidian relationship to the empire" (4). Henry's biographical analyses of Eliot reveal the extent to which authors like Eliot were quite literally invested in the empire. Eliot, for instance, "purchased . . . shares in The Great Indian Peninsula railway" (4).
2. Eliot, *The Lifted Veil* – "Brother Jacob," 49–50. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
3. David's reference to "America" is ambiguous in the text, as it might denote the North American landmass and its archipelagos and/or the United States of America. However, germane to David's ambitions, America also likely has a metaphorical connotation here, as it can symbolize a "place which one longs to reach; an ultimate or idealized destination or aim; an . . . object of personal ambition or desire" ("America, *n.*").
4. de Sola Rodstein, "Sweetness and Dark," 296, 300. Similarly, Carl Plasa addresses Eliot's examination of sugar's cultural impact, arguing that "Brother Jacob" critiques "the pursuit of profit in the sugar islands" while it "debunk[s] the apparently innocent pleasures to be gleaned from the consumption" of sugar (77).
5. Gregory, "Unexpected Forms of Nemesis," 288.
6. Dyer, "The Matter of Whiteness," 12.
7. As Carolyn Betensky argues, "[w]hen critics attempt to determine an author's political stance or intentions, we reinforce the idea that it is intentions and stances that reveal the principal thrust of her text" (17).
8. Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," 157.
9. As Ronjaanee Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong have argued, Victorian studies is "past due to join our colleagues in other periodized fields of British literature who have recently interrogated the bounds of their field's scholarship, methods, and social containments ("Undisciplining Victorian Studies," paragraph 18).
10. Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*, 3, 7.
11. Tompkins, "Eat, Sex, Race," 246.

12. Roy, *Alimentary Tracts*, 7.
13. Roy, *Alimentary Tracts*, 7.
14. Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar*, 24.
15. In the late eighteenth century, for instance, Immanuel Kant theorized the climatic theory of racial seeds to explain differences in skin color. In his writing, Kant departs from older humoral theories of race, and as Irene Tucker discusses, his theory purported that "all humans possess deep within their bodies [seeds] that render them fit for inhabiting all climates" (*Moment of Racial Sight*, 23). Moreover, she explains that Kant's "seeds manifest themselves differently depending upon where various individuals, capable of living anywhere, have actually chosen to migrate" (23). As Tucker discusses, this climatic theory of racial difference sought to explain physical difference as both the body's plastic "capacity to live anywhere" and as evidence of a "particular act of migration" made by a group of humans at a prior time. This system of racial meaning understands the body as infinitely adaptable; the imagined body is a relatively plastic one whose "seeds" enable multiple forms of racial change to occur across diachronic time, while seeds are also acting imperceptibly *within* synchronous time.
16. Richard Francis Burton and James Hunt founded the Anthropological Society of London in 1863, and the first issue of the *Journal of the Anthropological Society* was published a year later. The ASL anthropologists broke publicly with the older *Ethnological Society of London* over several issues; most pressing was the question of polygenesis versus monogenesis. Hunt and members of the Anthropological Society tended to be vociferous supporters of polygenesis—the supposition that the different racial groupings of humankind come from independent species or stocks.
17. When Eliot wrote and composed "Brother Jacob" in the 1860s, she was writing during an especially tumultuous period in nineteenth-century Britain and its colonies. For instance, Faux/Freely alludes to the unrest in Jamaica that would culminate in the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865. There were also ongoing and bloody sovereignty wars between the Māori tribes and the British Crown in New Zealand in the 1860s. "Brother Jacob" is also published a few years after the Indian Rebellion (1857) and against the contemporary domestic backdrop of the Lancashire Cotton Famine (1861–65) in northwestern England, and of course the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865).

18. Knox, *The Races of Men*, 13. The influential ethnologist and racial scientist Robert Knox—who helped shape the thinking of prominent anthropologists such as James Hunt, the founder of the London Anthropological Society—wrote in his 1850 monograph *The Races of Men*: “hereditary descent . . . is everything; it stamps the man. Setting aside all theories, I have endeavoured to view mankind as they now exist . . . and seem always to have been, into distinct races” (13).
19. For instance, in his treatise, Knox insists that “[h]uman history cannot be a mere chapter of accidents. The fate of nations cannot always be regulated by chance. . . . If any one insists . . . that a Negro or Tasmanian . . . may become also a Saxon or Scandinavian, I must contend against so ludicrous an error. And yet errors like this are committed daily” (12). Knox here distills the growing polygenetic insistence that the traits of both individuals and national groups are stable and attributed only to inherited racial characteristics.
20. See Ahluwalia, Ashcroft, and Knight, *White and Deadly*. See also Plasa, *Slaves to Sweetness*.
21. Flint, “Spectres of Sugar,” 83–84.
22. Walvin, “Sugar and the Shaping of Western Culture,” 22.
23. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 276. Discussing Mr. Armyr, Fanny Davilow’s father in *Daniel Deronda*, Nancy Henry observes: “Fanny Davilow’s father . . . can be figured as a contemporary of [*Mansfield Park*’s] Sir Thomas Bertram. He was a ‘West Indian,’ but his daughters, like the Bertram girls, were never in the West Indies. The implication is that he was or became an absentee plantation owner who sold out his interests” (111). Notably, Eliot sets *Daniel Deronda* in the years 1864–66, during the height of the Morant Bay upheaval, and the novel’s characters are acutely aware of the racial strife in Jamaica. The “Jamaican negro” is called a “beastly . . . baptist Caliban” by Mr. Grandcourt, a description that echoes Jacob’s own comparison to Caliban in “Brother Jacob.”
24. Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of British Colonies*, 2:1. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text. The term *Creole* had many definitions by the time Edwards was writing, but it primarily denoted a person born in “the Caribbean, [or] certain parts of the Americas” with “European or African descent”; the dominant understanding of the term pertaining to a “descendant of white European settlers” (def. 1a). By the eighteenth century, the term *Creole* could also mean “[a]ny person of

mixed ancestry born in a country previously colonized by white Europeans" (def. 1b), or even "A language that has developed from the mixing of two or more parent languages and has come to be the first language of a community" (def. 2a). However, Edwards deploys the term in its most dominant sense to refer to Caribbean-born whites in this passage.

25. Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial*, 1:195.
26. Plantain was, by the nineteenth century, a well-established and dietarily significant food in Jamaica, though it was not endemic to the island before the arrival of Columbus.
27. Lady Maria Nugent (1771–1834) was the wife of the governor general of Jamaica, Sir George Nugent. The pair resided in Jamaica between 1801 and 1805.
28. Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 97–98.
29. Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 249.
30. Nugent's anxieties about the precarity of colonial whiteness anticipate the monstrous fictional desires of Creole characters, like Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason, whom Susan Meyer describes as both "imagined as white" while she also "become[s] black as she is constructed by the narrative" (252). And in Nugent's text, many facets of Jamaican life might destabilize recognizable whiteness. For instance, shortly after the passage describing "eating, drinking, and indulging," Nugent forges an implicit link between the unregulated appetite and the nonstandard language of the white Creole, as she observes with disdain that the "Creole language is not confined to the negroes. Many of the ladies, who have not been educated in England, speak a sort of broken English, with an indolent drawling out of their words, that is very tiresome if not disgusting" (98). Inconsistencies in diet and language, things that go in and come out of the white Creole mouth, are problematic and "disgusting," given how they destabilize the coherence of white identity on the island.
31. Wilson, "The Epicure in Jamaica," 295.
32. Wilson, "The Epicure in Jamaica," 293. Wilson catalogs a number of "sickly" sweet West Indian foods that are deemed too sugary for the European-born English person. Beyond his descriptions of the "inexpressible nastiness" of the sweet plantain, he also describes sweet potatoes: "their faint sweetness is very sickly . . . their flavour strikingly reminds one of a toasted parsnip" (295), along with the "sour-sops and sweet-sops . . . faint sickly things [and] the naseberries . . .

- very much like brown sugar and water” (293). He also condemns “guava jelly [which] is . . . too sweet for the well-regulated tastes of a prudent adult” (293).
33. Lipless figures in Eliot’s fiction seldom suggest good character or pleasing aesthetics. For example, wife abuser Mr. Dempster, from *Scenes of Clerical Life*, is described as having “a bulging forehead. . . . The only other observable features were puffy cheeks and a protruding yet lip-less mouth” (185). And *Romola*’s “toad-faced” doctor, Maestro Tacco, is described as having “a bald low head and flat broad face, with high ears, [and a] wide lipless mouth” (162).
 34. Knox, *Races of Men*, 106. Regarding liplessness, the famed and influential practitioner of physiognomy, Johann Kaspar Lavater, describes the mouth as “the chief seat of wisdom and folly, power and debility, virtue and vice,” and he states that a “lipless mouth, resembling a single line, denotes coldness, industry, a love of order . . . precision” (59). Moreover, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thinner lips were increasingly part of the racialized taxonomies of bodies, particularly in illustrations of racial types that portrayed Africans as having characteristically fuller lips. Such visual representations of bodies and their lips were, of course, never neutral, as Lavater suggests that “fleshy lips must ever have to contend with sensuality and indolence” (59).
 35. “Idiots” were often described in animalistic terms, with one article on education from 1847 describing a disabled man as having “all the characteristics of an inferior animal” (*Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*, quoted in Gregory, “Unexpected Forms,” 294). Moreover, language linking idiocy to the bestial even characterized positive accounts of the mentally disabled. For instance, a favorable write-up of the Idiot Asylum at Earlswood in 1864 in *All the Year Round* entitled “Happy Idiots” states that before coming to the asylum, several “of these poor creatures . . . were in a condition inferior almost to the brutes” (566).
 36. “Taste, *n.1.*”
 37. Eliot’s descriptions of how sugary hunger shapes white bodies intersects with broader considerations of the physiological effects of hunger in the period. Discussing famines in the nineteenth century, Kevin Grant (quoting James Vernon) argues that “Hunger was one of the core dilemmas of British liberalism that helped determine where the boundaries would be drawn between . . . the subject and the citizen, the individual and the collective, the nation and

the empire" (Vernon, quoted in Grant, *Last Weapons*, 14). Vernon and Grant discuss how hunger and famine shaped the perception of collectives, and, in Eliot's text, sugary hunger influences the literal and figural shape of white bodies and communities.

38. Gregory, "Unexpected Forms," 293.
39. Gregory, "Unexpected Forms," 294.
40. Wilson, "Epicure in Jamaica," 295.
41. Thomas, "Matthew Arnold's Diet," 2.
42. Thomas, "Matthew Arnold's Diet," 3.
43. Eliot's English translation of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* was published in 1854.
44. Feuerbach quoted in Thomas, "Matthew Arnold's Diet," 12.
45. Thomas, "Matthew Arnold's Diet," 12.
46. Feuerbach coined the term "Der Mensch ist was er ißt" (Man is what he eats) in 1846. This phrase was part of his review of a volume written by Jacob Moleschott, a nutritional chemist.
47. Thomas, "Matthew Arnold's Diet," 12.
48. Kate Flint suggests that the J. M. W. Turner reference in this scene may also refer to the painter's famous piece *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and the Dying, Typhoon Coming On*, from 1840 (84). Evoking Flint, Carl Plasa suggests that "the painting's submerged presence in 'Brother Jacob' works to remind the reader of the links between the consumption and the production of sugar" (87).
49. Stephen Mennell notes that the middle-class British housewife might, by the nineteenth century, seek prestige by seeking to remove herself "from any practical involvement in the kitchen" (210). And Andrea Broomfield observes that domestic practices which "had been considered extravagant—buying bottled preserves and factory produced cakes—w[ere] now considered economical; growing, canning, and baking were often treated by domestic economists as useless indulgences for all the but the wealthiest" (138).
50. Thomas, "Matthew Arnold's Diet," 10.
51. "Sallow, *adj.*"
52. Eliot's representations of "pink-and-white" complexioned English women are often deeply ambivalent portrayals of conventional British femininity. For instance, Celia Brooke is described by Dorothea as a "thorn in [Dorothea's] side, a pink-and-white nullifidian" when Celia makes light of Dorothea's plans for improving the tenant cottages in Lowick (Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 36). And Lucy

- Deane, whom Robin Sopher describes as an embodiment of “Eliot’s discomfort with the ideology of femininity” (para. 1), is described as “pink-and-white” and contrasted with the “small brown arm” of the comparatively high-spirited Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (101).
53. Towers’s pink complexion reflects other ambivalent descriptions of white Englishmen in Eliot’s fiction. For instance, in *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), the titular character constructs a strawman Englishman character who would be a leader “wherever there’s a majority of voters who care more for money, for drink . . . than for anything that has ever been called Right in the World. . . . He’s a middle-sized man . . . stout with . . . an innocent pink-and-white skin and very smooth light hair” (294). And in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), the often-dominating Tom Tulliver is described as a “pink-and-white bit of masculinity with . . . indeterminate features” (33).
 54. Higman, *Jamaican Food*, 5.
 55. Freely’s unsettlingly foreign stance anticipates Eliot’s later description of the impatient Harold Transom in *Felix Holt, the Radical*, given Transom’s long sojourn in “the East,” his love of the hookah pipe, and his own submissive Greek wife. “I hate English wives; they want to give their opinion about everything,” Transom states. “They interfere with a man’s life” (20).
 56. Noses were commonly read as racially and nationally distinguishing signs in physiognomic discourse in the period. For instance, Lavater states that the “Tartars generally have flat indented noses; the negroes broad, and Jews hawk noses. The noses of Englishmen are . . . generally round” (*Essays on Physiognomy*, 56).
 57. Ahluwalia, Ashcroft, and Knight, *White and Deadly*, 10.
 58. Melissa Gregory’s excellent reading of “Brother Jacob” attends closely to the figure of Nemesis; she argues that the classical figure of Nemesis is a way of framing the ethics of empire, as the text poses “troubling questions about the morality of imperial authority” (283).
 59. Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong, “Introduction,” 378.
 60. Flint, “Spectres of Sugar,” 84.

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