
Il convient ici d’applaudir Éliane Viennot, professeur à l’Université de Saint-Étienne, qui dirige la collection de « La Cité des Dames ». Théâtre de femmes de l’Ancien Régime mettra à la portée du public des œuvres de femmes dramaturges inconnues ou oubliées. Outre son prix modique, le format et la reliure robuste du volume ne manqueront pas de plaire aux lecteurs qui attendront sans impatience ceux des trois siècles suivants.

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Linda Levy Peck

**Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England**


Linda Levy Peck has written an impressively wide-ranging and thought-provoking book, crammed with important claims and evocative detail. It is a rich study, well served by its publisher, and it ought to be widely read. But for all its considerable virtues, the book is also a victim of its own ambitions: it left me impressed but skeptical, enlightened but never completely convinced.

Peck’s most significant contention is that the “practices, sites, and mentalities” of luxury consumption, usually associated with the long eighteenth century, were actually put in place a century earlier—not by a rising urban bourgeoisie, but by courtiers, aristocrats, gentry, and rich London merchants (352). She contends that Jacobean and Caroline England witnessed a series of transformations crucial to the formation of a consumer society—the birth of “new ways to shop;” the persistent (and productive) royal intervention in luxury trades, manufacturing, and consumption; the development of new appetites, shaped by reading and foreign travel, for “buying, building, furnishing, and collection” (2); and the rise of new modes of being, of identities shaped by the purchase and display of goods.
Peck presents her argument in a series of interlinked chapters that combine the fruits of original archival research with data culled from secondary sources, some of them very obscure. She begins by studying the “practice and culture of shopping for luxury goods in seventeenth-century London” (31). She offers an innovative account of the mixed fortunes of the New Exchange as a site of luxury consumption in early Stuart London and tracks the place of shopping in evolving gender stereotypes and in new forms of public sociability. Then Peck turns to the Jacobean regime’s attempted promotion of English luxury manufacturing—glassmaking, tapestry weaving, and especially silk production. Where many historians have dismissed these efforts as farcical failures driven by the crown’s hunger for short-term financial fixes, Peck offers an unusually upbeat assessment both of the regime’s motivations and of the impact of government intervention on the long-term development of domestic luxury manufactures. Just as she notes gendered anxieties about the female shopper taking shape long before their supposed eighteenth-century emergence, here she traces the circulation of an early Stuart proto-Mandevillian discourse of political economy that stressed the public benefits of increased luxury production and consumption.

The next two chapters discuss the creation of “new wants” (112) in the early seventeenth century, tracking the role of print culture, newsletters, and foreign travel in stimulating desire for the curious, the foreign, and the exotic. Peck effectively synthesizes much recent work on Jacobean and early Caroline collections of curios and fine art, arguing that public display and print reportage of such collections stimulated a broader-based desire for consumption that, in turn, spurred development of an English art and fine-print market. Peck then offers an account of Jacobean and Caroline building, interior furnishing, and garden design, which she sees as modes and sites of luxury consumption, self-fashioning, and the absorption of foreign styles and tastes. She surveys notable early Stuart building projects that were inspired both by travel and by the circulation of printed architectural treatises. And she uses inventories to document a growing elite taste for French upholstery and “Asian luxury goods” (216).

Peck’s final three chapters take her story into the era of civil war, Revolution, and Restoration. The political upheavals, land confiscations and unprecedented tax burdens of the 1640s and 50s, she argues, did not seriously disrupt the “active markets for luxury goods, art, building, and furnishing” (233), and the supposedly puritanical regimes of the 1650s did not curtail the development of luxury consumption. The disruptions of war and revolution could even act as stimuli—exiled Royalists acquired expensive continental tastes, Parliamentarian grandees had occasion to
build and consume, and the auction of the king’s picture collection broadened the domestic art market.

Peck’s chapters on the Restoration era are more narrowly focused. She first offers a case study of Charles Cheyne’s 1670 purchase of a marble tomb monument for his wife from a Roman workshop associated with the baroque sculptor Bernini. She then focuses on the early years of the Royal Society, exploring the points of contact between the values and practices of the new science and the mentalities and practices of luxury consumption. Royal Society committees and reports investigated techniques of luxury manufacture; scientific instruments became objects of consumer desire (Charles Cheyne bought a telescope, as well as a funerary monument, in Rome); aristocratic virtuoso culture was absorbed rather than rejected by the Royal Society; and several Royal Society members planned to rebuild London after the Great Fire as an urban space dedicated to “royalty and retail” (341).

In many ways, Peck’s achievement is very impressive indeed. She utilizes diverse evidence to address a variety of topics that are rarely, if ever, discussed together. She covers a good 75 years of history, integrates the reconstruction of practice with the analysis of mentality, and blends social, economic, cultural, gender, and political history. The breadth of her ambition sometimes compromises her ability to deliver the goods, however; and nagging problems of both conceptualization and execution undercut some of the book’s achievements. Sometimes Peck stretches her evidence too thin, relying in places on limited amounts of impressionistic and qualitative anecdote to sustain arguments that demand systematic quantitative data. Her claims about the continued thriving of the luxury markets during the 1640s and 50s are, for instance, based on only a handful of examples. At other places she tends to exaggerate her claims, or puts a relentlessly unidirectional spin on evidence that is more complex than her rhetoric suggests. Conceptual problems also undermine her basic categories of analysis. Her argument tends to conflate different types of goods (coffee and aristocratic palaces, perfumes and paintings) and practices (planting a garden, collecting a painting, shopping for clothes) that need finer differentiation, and thus overlooks their more complex and heterogeneous meanings.

Peck might also have profitably cut deeper into her sources and concepts. She introduces many rich texts and images but rarely pauses to read them as the complex performances they were. Her analyses of literary texts remain flat, and while she raises tantalizing questions about the baroque monument to Lady Jane Cheyne, she never gives a sustained reading of how the finished monument performed its social and aesthetic work. She repeatedly returns to the theme of self-fashioning and identity formation through luxury consumption, but she never offers a sustained analysis of
the place of consumption and display in the history of the early modern self. And her claim that seventeenth-century women “created autonomous selves through the purchase, bequest, and display of luxury goods” cries out for some consideration of the assumptions about autonomy and the self that undergird it (353).

The book’s teleological thrust and rhetoric also close off opportunities to explore in greater detail the areas of ambiguity, tension, and conflict in the material she studies. To sustain Peck’s boldest claims about the degree to which the early seventeenth century anticipates mentalities and practices usually associated with the eighteenth, we need more synchronic analysis of the earlier period. Peck may be right to emphasize the forces working towards a de-moralization of luxury consumption in the early seventeenth century, but hostility, anxiety, and ambivalence remained. A more complete picture would have to explore in far greater detail than she does here the dialectic between these countervailing forces, in, for example, controversies over male and female sartorial fashions, or in the dilemmas of Puritan gentry attempting to balance the dictates of religious conscience and the social compulsion to consume and display.

Nor does Peck explore the real costs of early modern luxury consumption, a practice whose material basis lay in the economic, social and political exploitation of others, both in England and abroad. To read this book, you would think, not just that Marxism is dead, but that it never happened.

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Lance Gabriel Lazar

Working in the Vineyard of the Lord: Jesuit Confraternities in Early Modern Italy


Considerable attention has been paid to the Marian congregations inaugurated during the 1560s by the Belgian Jesuit Jan Leunis. Earlier Jesuit initiatives have suffered from relative neglect. Lazar redresses this imbalance through a study of three of the Jesuits’ earliest Roman confraternities and the charitable institutions they oversaw. The Casa di S. Marta was a house for reformed prostitutes administered by the Compagnia della Grazia; the Conservatario di S. Caterina was a house for the daughters of prostitutes and those thought to be at risk of joining the profession, run by the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili; and the Casa dei Catecumeni was an institution for new Jewish and Muslim converts to Christianity administered by the Arciconfraternita di S. Giuseppe.