

Introduction

DANGER, DELIGHT, AND
VICTORIAN WOMEN'S SHOPPING

When Rochester takes Jane Eyre to a silk warehouse in Millcote and insists that she select six boldly colored dresses for her trousseau, his governess proves an unwilling and resistant shopper. Refusing the “brilliant amethyst dye, and a superb pink satin” he would foist upon her, Jane persuades Rochester to accept her choice of a more understated palette of “a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk.”¹ The shopping excursion does not end here, however. It continues at the local jeweler’s shop, where Rochester continues to ply Jane with purchases she does not want. “[H]arassing” rather than leisurely, this morning of shopping is also an affront to Jane’s quest for autonomy. “It would, indeed, be a relief,” she thinks, “if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester.” When her protestations are met with Rochester’s sultanlike smile, a smile like that of a master for his slave, Jane threatens to wear gingham for her wedding. His rejoinder—that he still would not

exchange Jane “for the grand Turk’s whole seraglio” (355)—provokes more defiant words from his fiancée. Refusing the implicit terms of possession that the harem signifies to her, Jane replies that she would “stir up mutiny” among any other “inmates” that Rochester might similarly buy and confine (355).²

The shopping expedition in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) suggests that the struggle for female autonomy and independence, a motif in much Victorian domestic fiction, is a very economic matter. Shopping at Millcote is not merely an anecdotal moment in the novel, a momentary diversion from the main interests of the plot, but a significant scene wherein the material nature of sexual politics is staged. The dictates of fashion are in this instance male-authored, and marriage, cast here as another form of commercial and imperial exchange, conceals the ways in which men may come to regard women as commodities. In the face of Rochester’s insistence, the novel’s protofeminist heroine seems to garner her agency through forms of renunciation; his apparent generosity is that which Jane must refuse. Rochester’s aggressive attentions cast shopping as a scene of temptation, as this dangerously enticing figure threatens to subsume Jane to his vision of what she should desire. While Rochester is the object of Jane’s own libidinal interests, he is also a force that Jane must carefully manage precisely because he is so seductive.

Jane’s cautious negotiation of the commercial sphere is emblematic of the vexed condition of the woman shopper who goes to market only to risk becoming an object of exchange herself. Set in a provincial town in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the episode anticipates the ways in which the dangers and delights of women’s consumerism would become amplified through a new metropolitan experience that was to unfold in Britain by the 1860s, when shopping emerged as a fully articulated form of middle-class women’s leisure. This midcentury historical moment, one that marked Britain’s revolution in retailing, has often been formulated as one that also ushered in cultural anxieties about the woman shopper’s relationship to the vicissitudes of consumer appetite. Increasingly figured as a particularly female pursuit, shopping could be associated with idleness on the one hand and compulsion on the other, forms of excess that were best managed through careful self-regulation. In *Unto This Last* (1860), for example, John Ruskin suggests that consumption has its proper place when he links the economic clout of Britain with the buying power of its citizens, a balance between supply and demand and between production and consumption. “[T]he wealth of a nation,” he writes, “is only to

be estimated by what it consumes”; such wealth “is finally measured by the mouth.”³ While Ruskin thus acknowledges a legitimate role for a consumer class, he is troubled by what he sees as the excessive appetites of women and goes so far as to link women’s consumer demands with the deteriorating industrial health of the nation and its laborers. In “The Nature of Gothic” (1851–53), Ruskin compares British workers to slaves whose monotonous toils in the manufacturing of glass beads can never fulfill women’s desire for this trifling commodity: “Glass beads are utterly unnecessary, and there is no design or thought employed in their manufacture. . . . The men who chop up the rods sit at their work all day, their hands vibrating with a perpetual and exquisitely timed palsy. . . . [E]very young lady, therefore, who buys glass beads is engaged in the slave-trade.”⁴ Women’s insatiable appetite for mass-produced beads threatens to reduce factory labor to the economics of slavery. Apparently poised to deform the decorum of domestic middle-class femininity, which could in turn destabilize the manufactures of Britain, the woman shopper seemed a potential danger not only to herself but also to the nation as a whole.

Arguing that the new conditions of Victorian consumer culture linked the commercial interests of British imperialism to female appetite, Nancy Armstrong comments that “[i]t is difficult to imagine one of Jane Austen’s heroines . . . endangered by shopping.”⁵ Indeed, while Jane Eyre’s shopping trip is underscored by the danger that she may be traded on an orientalized marriage market, a danger that cultural fears turned back onto the figure of the Victorian woman shopper, such a threat does not seem to exist in the world of Austen’s novels. A visit to the provincial shops of Regency England in *Emma* (1816), for example, poses no apparent threat to that novel’s women. Indeed, the shop in Highbury is a kind of haven for Harriet Smith, who takes “shelter at Ford’s,” the town’s “principal woollen-draper, linen-draper, and haberdasher’s shop united,” when it suddenly begins to rain.⁶ Once inside, Harriet encounters Mr. Martin and his sister, Elizabeth, with whom she exchanges pleasantries. This shopping trip is a safe and innocuous precursor to the later courtship between Harriet and Martin and thus stands as another moment of the organic sense of community that typifies Austen’s world. During the Victorian age, however, the consumer experience was fundamentally altered in scale and scope through the coming of the mass market and related developments such as the institutionalization of the department store and the wealth generated by imperial expansion. Armstrong’s provocative claim about the dangers of

Victorian shopping is part of her contention that the female consumerist compulsions that emerged in Britain a few decades after *Emma* encode an anxiety “about a desire that earlier generations simply could not have felt.”⁷ Although Armstrong organizes her discussion of consumer appetite around *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the argument about the formation of a new anxiety over desire also recalls Jane’s impulse to refuse. The notion that Victorian femininity is characterized by the need for self-regulation suggests not only Alice’s realization that she must curb her oral fixations over consumables such as orange marmalade—that “[a]ppetite gives way to an equally compulsive desire for self-control”—but also Jane’s stoic refusal to purchase flamboyant clothing or to have it purchased for her.⁸ That is to say, voraciousness is not the absence of discipline, but its correlative. Organized around poles of compulsion and restraint, Victorian middle-class femininity has often been characterized as such an economy, a system of oppositions that circulate and exchange in a regulatory fashion.

Literary studies of recent decades that address Victorian consumer culture (notably, those of Thomas Richards, Andrew H. Miller, Christoph Lindner, and Rachel Bowlby) have begun significant and illuminating work in discussing issues related to women’s consumption and consumer appetite.⁹ But in their various and intriguing approaches, they have tended to suggest a similarly regulated system of femininity, one in which Woman is subject to exchange because of her associations with the commodity. Women’s symbolic role in the marketplace has historically relegated her to the status of being what Walter Benjamin described as “saleswoman and wares in one.”¹⁰ Karl Marx also suggestively genders the commodity as passively female when he writes that one can “use force” to “take possession of them.”¹¹ Such descriptions, while usefully foregrounding the extent to which women were vulnerable under capital and the law, and also revealing that the nature of women’s exploitation was often economic, do not fully account for women’s historical condition. To emphasize only their affinity with the commodity is to risk leaving women mired as no more than objects of exchange. Similarly, literary critics have often seen only limited forms of agency and subjecthood in the act of consumption, ultimately reinscribing the predicament of women as vacillating, with women serving as both subjects and objects of consumption who seem unable to alter the economic constructions of femininity.¹²

Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace’s work on eighteenth-century shopping, however, has both identified this predicament and considered the productive

possibilities of women's consuming subjectivities.¹³ In *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, she situates the rise of shopping as a women's activity in the eighteenth century, when the verb *to shop* first appeared and the noun *shop* came to refer increasingly to a discrete interior space in which trade is carried out.¹⁴ During this century, she argues, discursive ideologies of the feminine were being constructed alongside the formation of commodities as consumable luxury imports of coffee, tea, tobacco, and sugar became more widely available throughout Britain in the relatively new and accessible venue of the shop, where women (not merely consumer goods) were subject to new kinds of surveillance. Kowaleski-Wallace considers how the notion of a gendered consumer appetite first appeared at this historical moment, as appetite "was diverted toward goods, . . . shopping became gendered as feminine, and . . . women's bodies became configured in relation to consumption."¹⁵ In this, she not only identifies but also calls into question an essentialist conflation of women's bodies, appetite, and consumption to reveal how these connections were ideologically and historically constructed. By considering that women were not victims of their perceived excesses but acceded to the active status of "consuming subjects" in the context of the modern shop, she demonstrates how the discourse of commercial seduction that might construct women customers as compliant or vulnerable before male shopkeepers could also permit them to disrupt gendered codes of female propriety. Kowaleski-Wallace thus disturbs the tendency to align Woman with the commodity and reveals that normative femininity in the eighteenth century was produced as a natural fact through the operations of consumer exchange. In doing so, she extends Mary Poovey's contention that although culturally prescribed femininity is an effect of ideology, gender is not continuous but uneven and in its unevenness is "always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations."¹⁶ The symbolic economies that sought to regulate and therefore conceal the intersections of femininity, appetite, and the commodity were therefore not discrete or homogenous.

The Victorian woman shopper was, in this sense, a continuation of the eighteenth-century shopper, who embodied early concerns over women's appetites. During the nineteenth century, these concerns came increasingly to be mapped onto larger anxieties over the integrity of middle-class women's bodies and the ways in which their shopping excursions outside of the bounds of domesticity might affect the solvency of the bourgeois household and the

economic health of the nation. But the cultural meanings and tactical possibilities of women's shopping also began to proliferate following the eighteenth century, as a distinctive set of discourses and material practices significantly refracted and multiplied the forms of identity that were available to the Victorian middle-class consumer. If the agencies of the eighteenth-century shopper obtained through her subversion of existing gendered norms, the shopper of the next century is notable as a site for the production of forms of consumption that exceeded the norms of self-regulating femininity.

Although shopping does not seem to have been pleasurable to Jane Eyre, might we believe that this would be different if she were to go shopping on her own in the decades to follow, without the impositions and meddling company of a Rochester? Without his influence and his figuration as a version of the marketplace that dictated the terms of transaction and threatened to subsume women, what other modes of consumption would become possible for the reluctant shopper? Jane does declare that she would like to "furnish [her] own wardrobe" using her own capital after she marries, indicating a desire to consolidate a form of economic agency that would be inclusive of the sphere of consumption.¹⁷ For in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was becoming possible to formulate shopping as a form of urban leisure rather than something one did out of necessity or, as for Jane, under duress.

The material conditions of Victorian shopping were an effect of an expanded industrial and commercial age, including nineteenth-century developments in mass production and circulation, new practices in advertising, an increase in the flow of capital associated with imperial expansion, and the growth of the middle classes and their unprecedented access to expendable income. However, not only the profusion of goods but also the embodied and visual nature of the shopping experience were already changing by the 1830s, when such innovations as the wider availability of plate glass and the introduction of gas lighting were bringing shopwindows to life. By midcentury, the consumer experience in Britain's metropolitan centers, particularly in London, was eclipsing smaller-scale shopping such as that of the provincial silk warehouse of *Jane Eyre*. Lynda Nead has identified 1855–70 as the crucial period during which London "became part of a highly concentrated discourse on the modern" as it was "fashion[ed] . . . into a modern metropolis."¹⁸ The middle decades of the century saw the conversion of many small draper's shops into larger, multifloor emporia. As Erika Rappaport has shown, London's West End in

particular emerged during these decades as an urban consumer destination for middle-class women, becoming all the more accessible through the supporting infrastructure of women's tea shops, affordable mass transit, and public lavatories. Following the opening of Britain's first department store in 1863, the first of many purpose-built modern department stores, the notion of shopping as a leisure activity was becoming fully institutionalized. Featuring delightful displays of goods, department stores presented a carefully executed feast for the eye that offered customers an unprecedented encounter with consumer goods. Whereas goods in conventional shops remained largely behind the counters under the watchful eyes of an owner or assistant, shoppers in a department store could not only look at the wares but at times—and sometimes transgressively—handle them as well. This new proximity to commodities in the department store also created new identifications with commodity objects. If shopping had come to be defined more broadly with reference to a larger sphere of urban leisure, so too would the consuming subject, for her borders were no longer discrete, as her desires were formed in and through a world of goods.

Come Buy, Come Buy considers how middle-class women's shopping after mid-century enabled a variety of cultural and discursive constructions rather than the prescription, imposition, and regulation of a single identity. Underlying this contention is an approach that follows Michel de Certeau's discussion of consumerism as one of a range of everyday practices that, far from trivial, constitute the ways in which one can respond to one's inscription within capitalism. Along with other ordinary pursuits such as walking, playing games, speaking, and reading, de Certeau addresses shopping as a "tactic" by which subjects come to resist and reformulate their cultural condition. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau rejects the disciplinary emphasis of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, which "privileges the productive apparatus (which produces the 'discipline')," and goes on to propose the often overlooked and underestimated activity of consumption as a potentially transformative form of cultural production.¹⁹ This is not to say that consumerism is emancipatory, only that consumer practice makes visible the ways in which the subject may respond to and even resist her condition under capitalism.²⁰ In contrast to a Foucauldian scheme, wherein the state and institutions do not impose themselves directly but ensure power through subjects who have internalized the propensity to regulate themselves, de Certeau considers how shoppers

formulate agency through what he calls the activity of “poaching,” that is, through a variety of interventions, derailings, and disorders in the consumer marketplace.²¹ Not to be confused with what is certainly the illusion of consumer choice, a fiction manufactured by capitalism, de Certeau’s “ways of operating” or “ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order” are the tactical means by which subjects may leave their imprint on the dominant order “without leaving it.”²² Distinguished from what de Certeau terms a “strategy” that “postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own*,” tactics do not assume an exteriority or stable locus from which one can launch attacks against the state; instead, one mines it from within.²³ “Pushed to their ideal limits,” writes de Certeau, “these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline.”²⁴ Rather than being subjected to the prescriptions of consumer capitalism, women’s uses of consumption (including such practices as window-shopping, shoplifting, or even setting up shop themselves) became the basis for their formation as active and resisting subjects within the Victorian marketplace.

De Certeau’s notion of consumption as an engaged cultural practice—as a form of “antidiscipline” in which subjects fashion the world around them rather than regulate themselves according to it—is useful in an additional way, for it suggestively opens up a space for an alternative model of female identity beyond that of the self-regulating subject who keeps her appetites in check. Victorian women shoppers were fashioning forms of subjectivity predicated on the possibilities of pleasure in the marketplace rather than disavowal. Women’s perceived vulnerabilities to both their own compulsions and the seductions of the marketplace, then, did not alone define the nature of Victorian women’s consumer experience. For as other discourses of women’s shopping—ones that revealed the proximity of the marketplace to such related scenes as the spectacle of empire, the bourgeois domestic sphere, aesthetic culture, and later the suffrage campaigns—had begun to circulate by the 1860s, they inflected and complicated the idea that consumer appetite was a feminine impulse that could be managed only when it was mastered. Together, these alternative discourses of consumption open up and complicate notions of desire by emphasizing the agencies and mobilities that women obtained through their consumer practices and lived relationships to consumption, rather than their prescribed affinities with and purported vulnerability to the seductions of the commodity.

An article published in the *Saturday Review* in 1875 opens up one such discursive space by constructing shopping as a pleasurable pursuit rather than one to be regarded with caution. The likely author of “The Philosophy of Shopping,” Eliza Lynn Linton, might seem an unexpected advocate of consumption, given Linton’s condemnation of “the extravagance of fashion” in “The Girl of the Period” only a few years earlier.²⁵ Nevertheless, the article delights in formulating an understanding of shopping that distinguishes this activity from the ways in which one consumed out of necessity in the past. “Shopping,” it begins, “is popularly supposed to belong to the useful and necessary occupations of life, and no doubt this was its character in its earlier stages. Going to a shop with a definite sense of want, and with a clear determination to purchase something, is of course quite correctly named doing business.”²⁶ As the article explores the new ways in which the Victorians had come to regard shopping, we can clearly see that a peculiar value lies in the ways in which shopping falls outside of conceptions of what is thought to be necessary or useful:

But this [setting out to buy with a particular want in mind] is not the common form of what is styled shopping. In its mystical feminine meaning, to shop is to pass so many hours in a shop on the mere chance of buying something. A lady every now and again makes up her mind to do a day’s or an afternoon’s shopping, just as she would decide to pass a similar period in driving through the Parks. Her resolve is not at all the result of a previous discovery of something wanting, but springs immediately from a taste for novel and various entertainment. . . . [I]f anyone should unkindly suggest that shopping is a prodigious waste of time, or that the greater number of articles purchased in the course of an afternoon’s shopping are wholly unnecessary, or, finally, that women waste time and money in shopping just because they have no method in their domestic management . . . it would be enough to reply that, shopping being an amusement sought for its own sake, it is quite irrelevant to judge of it as part of ordinary business procedure.²⁷

Shopping is no longer a chore that must be endured, the means by which to procure the necessities of life such as food, but an enjoyable diversion. Consuming for pleasure extends the sphere of middle-class women’s activity beyond “the monotony of more strictly domestic pursuits” and therefore is distinguished

from a form of labor to be conducted under the auspices of the daily running of the domestic household.²⁸ Rather, one can set out for a day of shopping with no particular end in mind other than the pursuit of enjoyment.

The article posits an almost aesthetic defense of shopping, in which a surplus of pleasure figures not as voracious appetite but as that which exceeds the norms of usefulness. In a gesture that recovers appetite and waste as “amusement sought for its own sake,” pleasure is constituted as a value in itself. As shopping is conducted for its own sake, utility comes to be displaced by diversion or leisure, a seemingly limitless resource. Thus, the open-ended and itinerant pleasures of consumption, rather than its perceived risks, characterize the arrival of the Victorian woman consumer as an object of cultural interest.

Through their uses of consumerism for pleasure rather than utility, middle-class women shoppers inscribed forms of improvised, expansive identity premised on the unique material conditions of the Victorian shopping experience.²⁹ As we have seen, such a mode of being became possible as never before through the spaces and spectacles of urban consumption, through its plate-glass and gas-lit windows, and through the bountiful goods and amenities of its ever-expanding emporia. In locating where women consumers exceeded the cultural script of self-contained bodies whose compulsions must be kept in check, we uncover other possible ways of being that form through their supposed excesses. Rather than signaling victims of appetite, such surpluses may be revalued as forms of subjectivity that were commensurate with the roving opportunities of a consumer sphere that had come to include the commodity spectacle and tactile pleasures of the department store.

The forms of subjectivity that the Victorian shopper inscribed also enable a different understanding of desire, one that is constituted through the lived practices and materialities of consumption. As the condition of exorbitant selving, pleasure is of no small political importance. Following Regenia Gagnier, one can argue that desire is as important a category as labor, for example, has been in materialist critiques of capital. Gagnier writes that the “defense of desire is as justified as the earlier marxist defense of the value of labor. . . . Surely people are *both* producers and consumers, workers and wanters.”³⁰ The politics of a materially constituted desire, then, must be brought to bear on an analysis of women’s shopping. Consumer desire has the potential to disrupt the limits placed on women by gendered norms and to reformulate the ideologies of gender that were manufactured by the machinery of capitalism.

Figured not as voracious appetite but as tactical practice and discourse, women's desire is central to the making of subjectivities that are written through the acts of consumption. Evading her cultural inscription as object of exchange with an appetite that must be curtailed, the Victorian women shopper contested a traditional understanding of the self as distinct from objects. Rather than eliding the female subject, however, the breakdown of the boundaries between subject and object enabled a radical reformulation of the constitution of identity. Challenging the equation of feminine virtue with self-renunciation and the regulation of appetite, this consuming, desiring subject formed through her fluid, tactical operations in and through a new world of consumerism.

This mode of excessive subjectivity constitutes a useful departure from normative models of Victorian femininity, which depend on a careful observance of boundaries and appetites. De Certeau's practitioners of the everyday resist the rationalist logic of institutions and fashion their own ways of operating within the state. Consumers trace their own movements or "'indeterminate trajectories' that . . . do not cohere with the constructed, written, and prefabricated space through which they move."³¹ Consumer tactics not only reimagine space and how to negotiate it but also collapse the usual distinctions between space and time. As both spatial and temporal tacticians, shoppers are always oriented toward the possibilities of "future expansions."³² Without fixed destinations or goals in mind, they operate only according to leisure time, an excess that resists measure. "[C]irculating, com[ing] and go[ing] . . . over an imposed terrain," the shopper does not obey the authorized cultural script dictating the norms of femininity under capitalism.³³ The itinerant, even errant behaviors that were coming to be associated with the mid-Victorian shopping excursion, in which the shopper could go about browsing for pleasure without having necessarily to purchase anything, are both a cause and an effect of this new expansive consumer subjectivity.

The woman shopper, in this sense, can be understood according to what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have termed "becoming," a way of being in the world that Elizabeth Grosz has extended to mean a form of feminine identity that is not predicated on the absence of desire but is always in the process of being made.³⁴ Within the Deleuzian/Guattarian conception, one can begin to imagine forms of identity that are predicated on fluidity and discontinuity, ones, as Grosz notes, "without a psychical or secret interior, without internal cohesion" that reinscribes universalizing myths of self.³⁵ This

form of subjectivity as becoming, which exceeds the limits historically placed on women's desires and spheres of activity, is thus an alternative to a Lacanian formulation in which women constitute a lack.³⁶ Without possession of the phallus as signifier—in this case, without historical representation in the masculine sphere of production—Woman stands as Other, an empty cipher in her historical identification with the commodity in relation to man in order to guarantee both his masculine subjecthood and economic mastery. Forming a self through the improvisations of consumption, and apart from the usual calculus of time and space, the shopper's consuming credits her with a futurity and inaugurates a new economy of plenitude and expenditure toward which this self-in-making is always directed.

The consumer practices that produce this mode of subjectivity are engagingly represented in literature written by Victorian and Edwardian women: poetry, fiction, and political journalism of the period imagine the possibilities of women's becoming through consumption. Focusing on the discursive construction of the shopper in British women's writing from 1862 until 1914, a period that saw the rise of the department store and the institutionalization of a women's urban sphere of consumption, this book examines the ways in which literary and popular writing represented the woman shopper as going to market on her own, not as an object of exchange but as a subject, and the expansive forms of identity that became possible when she took her desire with her. Recovering discourses of shopping that emphasize delight rather than dangers, it argues that these decades saw the formation of what de Certeau calls "*lignes d'erre*," or "sentences that remain unpredictable within the space ordered by the organizing techniques of systems."³⁷ Rather than a moment of rupture that inaugurated gendered forms of self-discipline, the emergence of modern shopping culture in the 1860s is better characterized as the proliferation of discourses of shopping and the female shopper. Challenging self-renunciation as the dominant mode of femininity within systems of exchange, women writers of this period often construct female shoppers as active, even transgressive agents in the marketplace. Together, these discourses reveal the constructed nature of prescribed domesticity and, in exceeding it, often enable the formation of transgressive and dissident identities.

The five chapters of this study trace a genealogy of the woman shopper from transgressive domestic spender to aesthetic connoisseur, from curious shop-gazer to political radical. Consistent with the idea of genealogy—and Michel

Foucault's concern that any approach to history must always invite "discontinuity into our very being"—the chapters do not offer a decade-by-decade, progressive narrative of the shopper in literature; rather, the structure of the book is designed to resist the tendency to reproduce history as continuous and totalizable.³⁸ Chapters 1 through 3 focus on literary texts and cultural practices that emerge and recur from the 1860s through the 1880s, as a female sphere of urban consumption is institutionalized. Chapters 4 and 5 consider a women's consumer culture (established from the 1890s until just before World War I) while showing how the shopper at the end of the nineteenth century is often an iteration of the mid-Victorian consumer.

Together, these chapters demonstrate how women's lived relationships to consumption are materialized as discourse, as forms of narrative and poetic inscription that intervene in cultural representations of shopping to emphasize consumerism as productive of pleasure rather than seduction or loss. Addressing literary texts that represent a range of generic interests—from the sensuousness of Pre-Raphaelite and aesthetic poetry to the realism of the domestic novel, from the arresting scenes of sensation fiction to the urgent cries of suffrage journalism—these chapters attest to the extent to which literature contended with the figure of the woman consumer. By moving, moreover, between literary texts and cultural documents, including women's fashion periodicals, advertisements, shopping guides, and suffragette parlor games, this volume illustrates that the discourses of middle-class women's consumption make visible the porous boundary between so-called high and low culture and often traffic freely between them.

In one turn-of-the-century shopping guide, *Olivia's Shopping and How She Does It*, a persona named Olivia notes the absence of a guide that goes beyond merely listing the shops of London and distinguishes her book as one that will properly evaluate shops for a readership of discerning, middle-class women shoppers. Claiming that women are not being well served by "the vapid flatteries of shops to be seen in ladies' papers," she seeks to fill this gap in the market with a serious and sustained critique of shops that will document the merits and shortcomings of their various goods and services.³⁹ When she remarks that "[s]hops should be criticized like pictures or plays," Olivia does not reiterate the suspicion of the consumer marketplace that characterizes *Jane Eyre*.⁴⁰ Instead, she begins to anticipate a critical practice that neither dismisses women's shopping as trivial nor valorizes it as simply emancipatory. Similarly,

Come Buy, Come Buy maintains that the shops surely must be read and the discourses of consumption examined. By doing so, we may come to understand the degree to which gendered, historical subjects are inscribed within the operations of a marketplace that beckons them to “Come buy, come buy” and how, through acts of consumption, women might exceed their cultural prescriptions and make visible the many meanings of their spending and desiring.