INTRODUCTION

# Consuming Splendor

Beginning in 1607, three years after the repeal of England's last sumptuary law, James I enthusiastically endorsed a domestic silk industry. In 1608, borrowing French policy, the King ordered all those of ability

> to purchase and plant 10,000 mulberry trees at the rate of six shillings the hundred containing five score plants. There shalbe published in print a plaine instruction and direction for the increasing of the said mulberry trees, the breeding of the silkworms, and all other things needful for the perfecting of a work every way so commendable and profitable.[1]

Although James claimed that he would lose revenues because of reduced customs duties on imported silk, the King dismissed such concerns in the name of industry, science, honor, and plenty.[2]

*The Perfect Use of Silk-Wormes and their Benefit*, translated by Nicholas Geffe, appeared in 1607. A projector with ties to the Attorney General, Francis Bacon, Geffe argued that an English silk industry "will clothe our backs sumptuously and fill our purses royally . . . our private profits and public benefit are deeply interessed therein . . . we may as well be silke-masters as sheepe-masters."[3] Both Geffe's work and William Stallenge's *Instructions for the Increasing of Mulberie Trees* of 1609, which included the King's order, contained woodcuts showing readers how to cultivate mulberries, raise silkworms, and spin silk. The project to create a domestic silk industry became, by the 1620s, a colonial enterprise, fervently pursued into the 1660s and beyond. Within this discourse, silk was described as rich and solid, not vain and luxurious. Yet the Jacobean goal of swathing

[1] PRO SP 14/26/6.
[2] William Stallenge, *Instructions for the Increasing of Mulberie Trees* (London, 1609, a translation of Jean-Baptiste Letellier's *Memoires et instructions pour l'establissement des meuriers* [Paris, 1603]). Olivier de Serres, *The Perfect Use of Silk-Wormes and their Benefit . . . Done out of the French original of D'Olivier de Serres Lord of Pradel into English by Nicholas Geffe Esquire* (London, 1607).
[3] De Serres, *The Perfect Use of Silk-Wormes and their Benefit*, pp. 10–11.

English bodies in silk while promoting trade and industry contrasted vividly with the classical and biblical discourses that condemned luxury. Instead, these tracts anticipate Nicholas Barbon's *A Discourse of Trade* (London, 1690) and Bernard Mandeville's *The Grumbling Hive, or, Knaves Turn'd Honest* (London, 1705) which argued that private vices produced public benefit.

The story of seventeenth-century England is often told as a tale of the unique triumph of Protestantism, parliamentary sovereignty, and law over absolute monarchy and Counter-Reformation Catholicism through civil war and glorious revolution. *Consuming Splendor* tells a different story: of new ways to shop; of royal sponsorship of luxury trades and manufactures; of new aspirations, shaped by print and travel, which found expression in buying, building, furnishing, and collecting; of the reinvention of identities through new artifacts; of the transformation of meaning as objects moved across cultures and into new contexts; and of the way in which early science underpinned luxury consumption. Analyzing luxury consumption from the perspective of the early seventeenth century, *Consuming Splendor* stresses continuities across the usual divide of the Civil War and Interregnum. It offers an additional narrative for seventeenth-century studies,[4] one that focuses on the cultural mentalities and political strategies that supported luxury consumption and sponsored cultural borrowing throughout court, city, and countryside.[5] The result helped propel England from the margins to the center of European growth, improvement, and innovation.

Luxury commodities circulated throughout society from the merchant who imported them, to the retailer who sold them, the purchaser who bought them, the client who presented them to his patron, and the poor who wore them as second-hand goods. English demand for luxuries imported from Europe and Asia grew strongly from the 1540s. Sir Thomas Smith complained about imports in 1549 in ways that resembled complaints seventy-five years later.[6] William Harrison's *The Description of England* (London, 1587), documented in striking detail the growth in the

[4] Timothy Hampton quotes Jean Rousset "one might see drawn several parallel seventeenth centuries," in "Introduction: Baroques," in "Baroque Topographies: Literature/History/Philosophy," *Yale French Studies*, 80 (1991), 6.

[5] See R. Malcolm Smuts, "Material Culture, Metropolitan Influences and Moral Authority in Early Modern England," in C. Curtis Perry (ed.), *Material Culture and Cultural Materialisms in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001), pp. 203–24.

[6] Sir Thomas Smith, *A Discourse of the Commonweal of this Realm of England*, attributed to Sir Thomas Smith, ed. Mary Dewar (Charlottesville: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by the University Press of Virginia, 1969).

consumption of goods for the body as well as for the home. Travelers such as Thomas Platter in 1599 wrote in awe of jewelry and gold and silver plate on display at the goldsmiths in Cheapside.[7] Demand for new goods and openness to other cultures challenged the negative identifications of luxury goods with the foreign, the popish, and the decadent, staples of Elizabethan prescriptive literature.[8] Under James I, the contest between moralizing prescription and legislation on the one hand and demand on the other tilted in favor of luxury consumption.

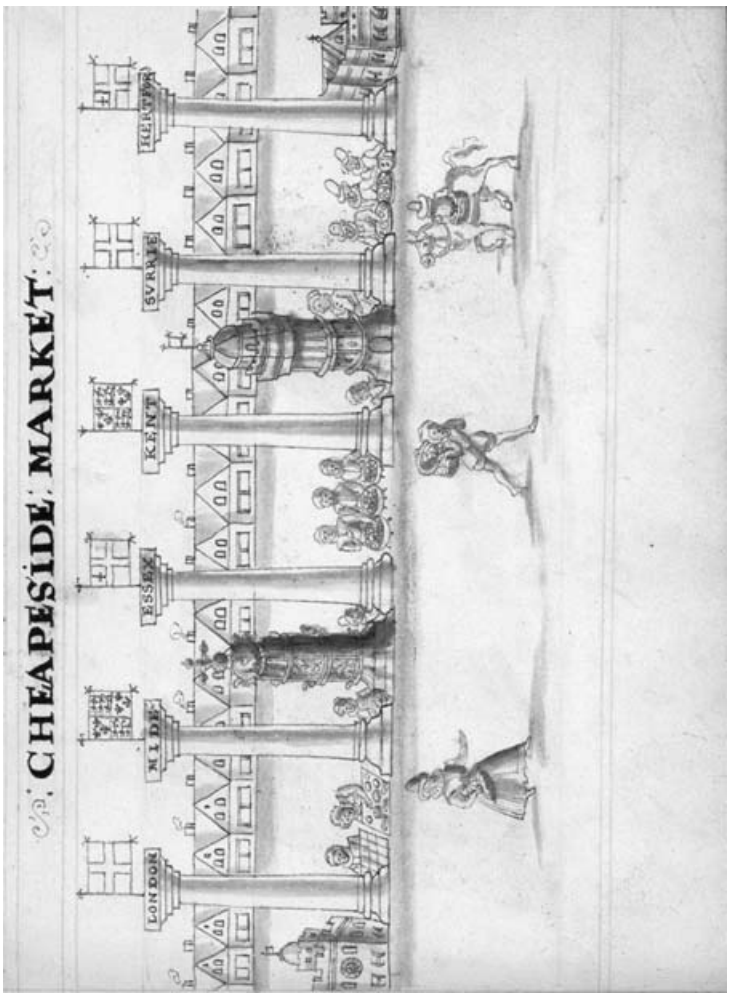
This book addresses why the English became enamored of foreign wares and how they appropriated artifacts and skills from abroad in ways that transformed their economy and culture. It studies the acts and meanings of consuming, the knowledge and agents that made it possible, and its effect on the expression of the self, gender, social relationships, ideology, and the economy. Examining the period from *c.* 1600 to *c.* 1670, before "the long eighteenth century," it offers a new time frame and a different set of agents to explain this transformation.[9] Within this larger agenda, *Consuming Splendor* focuses on London, the hub of national and international networks of exchange, the center of political power, the locus of luxury shopping, and promoter of technical and scientific improvement. It draws attention to but does not address in detail the very important issues of local consumption of luxuries, already studied by Joan Thirsk, Craig Muldrew, Margaret Spufford, Ronald Berger, and Nancy Cox.[10] Furthermore, the significant relationship of luxury and the church warrants closer study than has been possible here. As we shall see, the church's teachings were generally hostile to luxury consumption. Yet in the early

[7] Clare Williams (ed.), *Thomas Platter's Travels in England, 1599* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 157.

[8] Sara Warneke, *Images of the Educational Traveler in Early Modern England* (Leiden: E. G. Brill, 1995), analyzes the negative image of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century traveler. See, for example, Joseph Hall, *Quo Vadis? A Just Censure of Travel as It Is Commonly Undertaken by the Gentlemen of Our Nation* (London, 1617).

[9] Woodruff D. Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London: Routledge, 2002); Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Social Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Mary Douglas and Baron C. Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: Basic Books, 1979). John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[10] Ronald M. Berger, *The Most Necessary Luxuries: The Mercers' Company of Coventry, 1550–1680* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1993). Nancy C. Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550–1820* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2000). Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998). Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hambleden Press, 1986).




1. Cheapside, filled with goldsmiths' shops, was the most important shopping street in the City of London. Hugh Alley, who painted the food markets of London at the end of Elizabeth's reign, shows vendors selling food in the middle of the avenue.
The Folger Shakespeare Library Ms. V. a. 318, f.15, Hugh Alley, *A Caveatt for the city of London.* "Cheapside," Manuscript, 1598.

2. Silver vessels exhibited on the buffet displayed the status and wealth of their owners. These flagons, once thought to have belonged to Sir Edward Coke, were represented in the famous painting by Gerritsz, "Still Life of the Paston (Yarmouth) Collection."
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Metalwork, Silver-English, London, 16th century, pair of flagons, silver gilt, H. 12 1/4 in. (1597), that belonged to the Coke and Paston families. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1968 (68, 141, 142, 143). Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Neg. #193576.

seventeenth century, clerical emphasis on the "beauty of holiness" and church building, and the laity's practice of donating silver plate and lavish textiles for worship and building elaborate pews and tombs for display, made the church an important site for the consumption of luxury goods. Finally, throughout this work, luxury denotes "the habitual use of, or indulgence in what is choice or costly, whether food, dress, furniture, or appliances . . . or surroundings," definitions that were current in the seventeenth century.[11]

[11] See the definition of "luxury" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Vol. IX, p. 128. Daniel Roche, "Between a

## THE LANGUAGE OF LUXURY

The ancients and early Christians subjected luxury and luxury goods to withering attack as the scourge of virtue: decadent, effeminate, sinful, and subversive. In *The Idea of Luxury*, Christopher Berry points out that the traditional moralistic view, from Aristotle to the early seventeenth century, differentiated between needs and wants, privileging the first and casting a dubious eye on the second.[12] The Stoics located luxury in a discourse of war and peace, arguing that luxury took root at a time of peace and prosperity marked by the influx of goods from Asia to fill houses and banqueting tables. Pliny the Elder worried that luxury goods brought by conquest might lead to corruption and the decline of the Roman Empire.[13] Classical and biblical sources associated luxury with the subversive influence of the "other": women, favorites, foreigners, and upstarts.

At the same time, Roman moralists believed that luxury undermined office and hierarchy. Because luxury raised fears of both social mobility and the corruption of the state, sumptuary legislation from the Romans to the Elizabethans sought to maintain sharp distinctions between status groups. Thus, in 1337 no man was allowed "to wear any facings of silk or furs but such as could expend an hundred pounds a year." Two centuries later in 1566 "No man under the degree of a knight or of a lord's room . . . shall wear any hat or upper cap of velvet . . . on pain to forfeit ten shillings."[14]

The condemnation of luxury because it undermined virtue, military strength, and hierarchy continued into the seventeenth century and beyond. For instance, English writers expressed unease about collecting arts and antiquities, even those, such as the diplomats Sir Henry Wotton and Sir Thomas Roe, who were its keenest promoters. Wotton feared that interest in continental art and architecture would be thought popish, morally corrupt, and identified with Counter-Reformation Italy. Roe expressed concern that collecting might be perceived as effeminate.

'moral economy' and a 'consumer economy': clothes and their function in the 17th and 18th centuries," in Robert Fox and Anthony Turner (eds.), *Luxury Trades and Consumerism in Ancien Régime Paris: Studies in the History of the Skilled Workforce* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 1998), p. 227, "Need varies according to different economic, social, and cultural status – mimetic values were not reserved to the rich."

[12] Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[13] Sorcha Carey, "The Problem of Totality, Collecting Greek Art, Wonders and Luxury in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*," *Journal of the History of Collections*, 12 (2000), 1–13.

[14] Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Drane's, 1921), p. 626.

Sending antiquities to the Earl of Arundel, he wrote defensively that the Ottomans "deliver them to us for our corruption to divert us from the thought or use of arms. But they are absurdly mistaken; for civility and knowledge do confirm, and not effeminate good and true spirits."[15]

To many contemporaries, the peace and prosperity of the Jacobean regime that began in 1603 proclaimed weakness rather than strength. Thomas Mun, the most famous contributor to the economic debate in the 1620s, wrote that "silks, sugars, and spices" were "unnecessary wants . . . piping, potting, feasting, fashions, and mis-spending of our time in idleness and pleasure contrary to the law of God, and the use of other nations hath made us effeminate in our bodies, weak in our knowledge, poor in our treasure, decline in our valour, unfortunate in our enterprises, and condemned by our enemies."[16]

Yet even among the Stoics, the notion of decorum called for appropriate consumption according to status. By the sixteenth century, Roman decorum, or what the English called "state," created a space for magnificence and splendor. Magnificence became a term of praise associated with office, title, and state in which elaborate buildings, clothing, plate, and retainers defined high-ranking nobles and officials, almost always male.[17]

Magnificence, praised by fifteenth-century Northern humanists, continued to be celebrated in the seventeenth century.[18] Indeed, magnificence and splendor were matched virtues: "magnificence is manifest in public architecture, splendor expresses itself in the elegance and refinement with which one lives his life within buildings."[19] Giovanni Botero's *The Magnificence of Cities* was translated into English in 1606.[20] In 1634 Giles Fleming exhorted contributions for the repair of St. Paul's in a sermon

[15] Quoted in David Howarth, *Lord Arundel and his Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 88.

[16] Quoted in Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, pp. 103–104. Charles Davenant, writing in the second half of the century as a defender of the East India Company, agreed that silks "serve 'luxury' and, as such, they are not only superfluous but also pernicious in that they stimulate vanity and an illimitable desire for their possession." John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism*, trans. W. R. Dittmar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967).

[17] Mary E. Hazard, "A Magnificent Lord: Leicester, Kenilworth, and Transformation in the Idea of Magnificence," *Cahiers Elizabethains*, 31 (1987), 11–35; John Newman, "Inigo Jones and the Politics of Architecture," in Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds.) *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 270.

[18] Simon Thurley, *The Royal Palaces of Tudor England: Architecture and Court Life, 1460–1547* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 11.

[19] Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 249.

[20] Giovanni Botero, *The Magnificence of Cities* (London, 1606), Title page, p. 13, and dedication. F. J. Fisher cites Botero in "The Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *TRHS*, 4th series 30 (1948), 37–50.

entitled *Magnificence Exemplified*.[21] In 1654 John Ogilby appropriated "magnificence and splendor" to advertise his new edition of Vergil.[22] Balthazar Gerbier, Caroline tastemaker, merely repeated this language forty years later in his *On Magnificence in Buildings* (London, 1662).

If magnificence, signifier of high estate and office, called for the public display of lavish clothes, retainers, houses, and plate, luxury goods, often available to anyone who could pay, remained suspect to critics. Did luxury, as a product of an expanding economy, undermine magnificence and splendor, the marker of hierarchy? Such a simple developmental model appears problematic when we listen closely to contemporaries, as we shall see throughout this book. Instead, as the range of luxury goods expanded alongside the section of the population who felt entitled to use them, luxuries found acceptance when they were re-labeled as rich, new, innovative, curious, rare, fine, refined, polite, comfortable, and imported.

Christopher Berry argues that a demoralization of luxury took place in the second half of the seventeenth century as it was increasingly placed in a discourse of trade and commerce. As luxury loses its immoral overtones, Berry suggests, "luxury and fashion are acceptable because they stimulate consumption, which in turn generates trade and employment."[23] Thus, in 1690 Nicholas Barbon criticized Thomas Mun for upholding sumptuary legislation. Barbon stressed the economic importance of consumption, especially the clothing and the building trades. Clothing, Barbon wrote, provided work for "the glover, hosier, hatter, seamstress, tailor, and many more, with those that make the materials to deck it; as clothier, silk-weaver, lace-maker, ribbon-weaver, with their assistance of drapers, mercers, and milliners, and a thousand more." Building offered work for even larger numbers: "the chiefest promoter of trade; it employs a greater number of trades and people, than feeding and clothing."[24]

This study demonstrates that the demoralization of luxury had already begun in Jacobean England. Luxury and necessity, wants and needs, which stirred theoretical debates in the eighteenth century, were, after all, always matters of interpretation. Elizabeth, Lady Compton, heiress to Sir John Spencer the City merchant and Lord Mayor, saw luxury goods as

[21] Giles Fleming, *Magnificence Exemplified: and the repair of St Paul's exhorted unto* (London, 1634).
[22] Katherine S. van Eerde, *John Ogilby and the Taste of his Times* (Folkestone, Kent: Dawson, 1976). Sarah L. C. Clapp, "The Subscription Enterprise of John Ogilby and Richard Blome," *Modern Philology*, 30 (1932–33), 365–79.
[23] Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, pp. 104, 112. Berry cites Sombart, *Luxus und Kapitalismus* (Munich, and Leipzig, 1913), pp. 138–41.
[24] Quoted in Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, p. 117.

a carefully calibrated expression of wealth, status, and personal autonomy, available to women as well as to men. She specifically identified her own honor with clothing, servants, coaches, jewelry, charity, and splendid interiors, many of which usually formed the trappings of magnificence.

When her father died in March 1609/1610, Lady Compton wrote a long letter to her husband describing the change in spending that their new wealth required. She wanted a larger allowance of L1,600 a quarter, twenty gowns, "six of them excellent good ones, eight of them for the country, and six other of them very excellent good ones," and L600 quarterly for charity. She wanted horses of her own and additional servants, two gentlewomen, eight gentlemen, and two footmen. She required two coaches drawn by four horses: her own coach had to be lined with velvet and laced with gold, her gentlewomen's coach laced with scarlet. Her gentlemen usher required his own horse so as not to crowd her in her coach. Lady Compton requested L2,200 in cash, payment of her debts, and new jewelry. "I would have L6,000 to buy me jewels, and L4,000 to buy me a pearl chain." Then she turned to house and home to describe rich and elaborate furnishings far from the gloomy interiors often labeled "Jacobean."

> Also I will have all my houses furnished, and all my lodging chambers to be suited with all such furniture as is fit; as beds, stools, chairs, suitable cushions, carpets, silver warming pans, cupboards of plate, fair hangings, and such like. So for my drawing chamber in all houses, I will have them delicately furnished, both with hangings, couch, canopy, glass, carpet, chair, cushions, and all things there unto belonging.

She concluded "I pray, when you be an earl, to allow me L1000 more than now desired, and double attendance."[25] It is said that, shortly after he inherited his father-in-law's wealth, Compton had a nervous breakdown. He recovered to become Earl of Northampton in 1618. One observer noted that Compton had transformed his father-in-law's house in Bishopsgate "into a gay court, the old usurer himself being forgotten."[26]

In addition to labeling luxuries as excellent, suitable, and delicate, contemporaries re-labeled some luxury imports as staples of the English economy instead of foreign commodities. Indeed, in 1641, in a debate on trade in the House of Commons, Sir Thomas Roe, longtime ambassador to

[25] Godfrey Goodman, Bishop of Gloucester, *The Court of King James the First*, ed. John S. Brewer, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), II, pp. 127–32. When traveling, her laundresses, chambermaids and grooms would be sent ahead "that the chambers may be ready, sweet, and clean." Lady Compton advised her husband to pay his debts, build Ashby House, buy land, and never to loan money to Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk.

[26] *CSPD 1603–10*, p. 602, 19 April 1610, Francis Smith to John Nicholas.

the East Indies and to Turkey, praised the East India direct and re-export trade as the key to England's economic health. "Nothing exported of our own growth hath balanced our riotous consumption at home but those foreign commodities which I call naturalized, that is the surplus of our East India trade, which being brought home in greater quantity than are spent within the kingdom, are exported again and become in value and use as natural commodities."[27]

In contrast, some contemporary moralists continued to rail against luxury, effeminacy, and the commodification of honor from the pulpit to city comedies despite the increasing importance of worldwide trade to the economy. Sumptuary bills continued to be introduced in parliament up to 1640. One member of parliament in 1621 argued on behalf of sumptuary legislation by saying that "God did not attire our first parents with excrements of worms."[28] But none passed. Instead of statute, the Crown turned to prescription. In 1610 James I noted "the necessity of taking some politic order gainst excess of apparel."[29] While Francis Bacon advised the reintroduction of sumptuary legislation, the Privy Council in 1622 settled for hopes of "less vanity in the expence of silks and foreign stuffs."[30] The King's subjects eagerly embraced the new, the rare, the curious, and the modern in the early seventeenth-century England with the partial blessing of the Crown.

## LUXURY AND THE HISTORIANS

The history of consumption has been connected to issues of power, gender, colonialism, construction of the self, the transformation of the domestic and public spheres, and the relationship of art and the economy.[31] Werner Sombart famously argued that luxury consumption led to the rise of capitalism in early modern Europe.[32] European historians, such as Richard Goldthwaite and Lisa Jardine, have placed luxury consumption

[27] *Sir Thomas Roe, His Speech in Parliament. Wherein he Sheweth the cause of the decay of coine and trade in this land, especially of merchants trade. And also propoundeth a way to the House, how they may be increased* (London, 1641).

[28] Quoted in Negley Boyd Harte, "State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England," in D. C. Coleman and A. M. John (eds.), *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays Presented to F. J. Fisher* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 149.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 150. [30] *Ibid.*, pp. 150–51.

[31] See note 9 above and Michael North and David Ormrod (eds.), *Art Markets in Europe, 1400-1800* (Aldershot, Hompshire: Ashgate Publishing, 1998); Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

[32] Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism*, pp. 58–171.