Introduction

Lydia Touchett knows her shops. When she accompanies her niece to Paris shortly after Isabel has come into her inheritance, she takes a 'rigidly practical' approach to guiding her through establishments that are 'the admiration of the world' (*PL* 220). In furnishing her 'historic' (*PL* 258) Florentine home, it seems she has been equally pragmatic. The 1882 text of *The Portrait of a Lady* captures the vaguely troubled cohabitation of 'the spirit of the past' and Mrs Touchett's 'matter-of-fact' modern influence in Palazzo Crescentini in an image of 'carven rafters and pompous frescoes of the sixteenth century' which 'looked down upon the familiar commodities of the nineteenth' (*PL* 258–59). In revising the novel in 1907 for the New York Edition, Henry James substituted 'the nineteenth [century]' with 'the age of advertisement' (*NYE* 3: 354–55), pinpointing the influence that makes commodities 'familiar' and, more importantly, retrospectively summing up the period he had lived through. The energy and skill once devoted to craftsmanship and artistry had been redirected towards the development of ever more ingenious strategies of selling, and the marketplace had been brought into the home.

By the time James made this significant revision, he had already created his own supersubtle adman. When Chad Newsome in *The Ambassadors* (1903) informs his old friend Lambert Strether that advertising, 'the great new force', is 'an art like another, and infinite like all the arts' (*AMB* 450), he reveals his author's fascinated yet uneasy consciousness of the reach and scope of this fast-developing medium, but also indicates the increasing integration and co-dependence of two supposedly separate spheres: art and commerce. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century advertising manuals bore titles like *The Art and Literature of Business* and described strategies and techniques gleaned from fiction, the theatre and the visual arts. Shops aimed at creating a theatrical atmosphere through the use of curtains, dramatic lighting and the introduction of mannequin parades, whilst theatres employed prestigious dressmakers and often led the way in terms of fashion.[1] Advertisers used paintings by well-known artists, whom

they perceived as a guarantee of taste and quality (a famous example is the appropriation of Millais's 'A Child's World' by Pears' soap), whilst shops and shop windows were appraised in aesthetic terms and even compared to paintings by great masters.[2] Indeed, articles on the subject of shop windows proliferated, as lavish commodity display provided an irresistible opportunity for extravagant and spectacular verbal displays on the part of journalists and fiction writers.[3] Meanwhile, advertisers began to recognise the effectiveness of evoking setting and social context, developing a narrative and creating sympathetic and admirable characters.[4] An article published the same year as *The Ambassadors* praises advertisements that 'tell interesting stories' about seemingly mundane products, perhaps 'by putting the suit in a drawing room scene or the shoe on the foot of a handsomely-dressed woman'. 'When such subjects can be made attractive', it claims, 'the art of advertising rises to the dignity of high art' (Sheafer 387). In periodicals, the two 'arts' were served up side by side, so that the pages of James's tales were sometimes interspersed with advertisements for Sapolio, breakfast cocoa and other consumables (Tucker 61–63). In the same conversation between Chad and Strether we learn that advertising must be 'scientifically worked' (*AMB* 450) to fulfil its potential, and sure enough, 1903 also witnessed the appearance of psychologist Walter Dill Scott's *The Theory of Advertising*, which applies contemporary psychological theories – including those of William James – to the subject.[5]

This book investigates Henry James's increasingly sophisticated understanding of these pervasive commercial structures and strategies, and of their significance in the construction of class, gender, national and artistic identities, as well as the formation of modern subjectivities. It is concerned, in particular, with changes in shop culture and the shopping experience – focal points for these persuasive energies – and with the imaginative capital James gleaned from them. Examining his figurative and literal representations of features such as shop windows, shop workers, and the social intricacies of the shopping environment, this study demonstrates how James identified key characteristics of the culture of consumption and turned them to his own narrative and dramatic purposes.

In her 1895 article 'The Ethics of Shopping', Mary Jeune, a prominent society hostess and social commentator with whom James sometimes dined, writes of 'the great change that has come over English shops and the purchasing community during the last few years' (123).[6] Twenty-five years earlier, she reminisces, '[t]here was little or no display in the windows. Each shop had its own speciality' and 'knew the need of their particular customer' (123), so that shoppers 'remained undisturbed by the intervention of any temptation to

wander beyond the legitimate wants of the moment'. 'An afternoon's shopping was a solemn and dreary affair', but now '[t]hose days . . . are gone, alas!' and 'overwhelming temptations to buy . . . besiege us at every turn':

> What is shopping in these days, but an unsuccessful struggle against overwhelming temptations? We go to purchase something we want; but when we get to our shop, there are so many more things that we never thought of till they presented their obtrusive fascinations on every side. . . . There are many shops in London into which one cannot safely trust oneself. There are the drawbacks of noise, heat, and overcrowding, but they are more than counterbalanced by the brightness of the electric light and the brilliancy of colour, and the endless variety on every side. (124–25)

An activity once perceived as dull and mundane has become an assault upon the senses, no less alluring for its violence, and the modern shopper is portrayed as a manipulated being, subject to irrational impulses. The visual violence described by Jeune is one of the effects sought by the most brilliant fictional window dresser of the late nineteenth century, Octave Mouret in Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), who insists that rather than making the displays in his great department store 'easy on the eye', he wants to 'blind' his customers (48).[7] Later, Jeune likens the 'crush' that takes place during the biennial sales to 'that of a fashionable entertainment' (128), suggesting the increased emphasis upon spectacle, but also the growing significance of shopping as a leisure activity. These new experiential phenomena correspond with Georg Simmel's famous characterisation of urban modernity in 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) as 'the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli' (175). On an economic level, they betoken what Rachel Bowlby calls the 'radical shift in the concerns of industry: from production to selling and from the satisfaction of stable needs to the invention of new desires' that occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century (*Just Looking* 2).

In tracing the causes of the disquieting growth in consumer appetites, Mary Jeune specifies two principal changes: 'One is gathering together under one roof all kinds of goods – clothing, millinery, groceries, furniture' and 'the other is the employment of women as shop assistants in the place of men' (125). Of the first, she writes:

> One sees examples of it now in nearly all the great shops in London, which are becoming vast stores, one of which, more enterprising than the others, is said to supply young men for dancing and coffins to bury them in . . . one can order one's New Zealand mutton downstairs, buy one's carpet on the ground-floor, and deck oneself out in all the glory of Worth or La Ferrier, on the top-floor, to all of which one is borne on the wings of a lift, swift and silent. (125)

The recently established department store is portrayed as an entire dreamlike world, at once fantastic and all-encompassing. The particularly 'enterprising' establishment may well have been the spectacular Whiteley's, attacked by local competitors and the press in the 1870s and after for arousing women's passions and leading them astray.[8] The 'Universal Provider', as it was popularly known, had expanded and flourished since its birth in 1863, transforming suburban Bayswater into a centre of fashion. Jeune could also have been alluding to Harrods of Knightsbridge, whose famous telegraphic address was 'Everything, London' (Sanders 61). For exclusivity and lack of choice had been replaced by quantity and variety, in terms of both goods and clientele. Jeune explains how 'the reduction of prices' allowed 'the mass of the community' to take advantage of the many 'conveniences' afforded by the great stores (126), indicating the institution of a system of ready money rather than credit as one factor in enabling this change. Other key factors in what was often perceived as the 'democratisation' of consumption included industrial advances that enabled large-scale production, the shift towards low profit margins and high turnovers, the encouragement of browsing with no obligation to buy and the move towards clearly ticketed fixed prices. Although some of these practices already existed, they became far more prevalent during the last decades of the century.

Women were also seen to benefit from the developments. As Erika Diane Rappaport has demonstrated, the new 'conveniences' offered by stores from the 1870s onwards included tearooms, writing rooms and, crucially, ladies' lavatories, all of which enabled customers to stay away from home for longer periods of time (30; 101–02). Improvements to transport systems, such as the building of new suburban rail routes and the extension of the Underground railway, also played an important part in facilitating women's access to the city centre, and in swelling urban shopping crowds.[9] Jeune explains that 'the easy means of communication brings so many more people than formerly up to London, and to the large centres, to do their shopping', and that these customers 'prefer to make their purchases' in the large stores, 'where they can concentrate their forces and diminish the fatigue' (125).

On the increasing employment of female staff, Jeune observes that 'they understand so much more readily what other women want' and 'can enter into the little troubles of their customers', which men simply cannot grasp (126).[10] Indeed, she portrays the department store as a predominantly female environment, adapted specifically for the indulgence of feminine desires. Her admission that these favourable views put her 'in a minority' (126) is an indication of the various prejudices and anxieties surrounding the figure of the shopgirl during this period. A host of investigations, articles, plays and other fictions concerned themselves with the long hours and poor working conditions

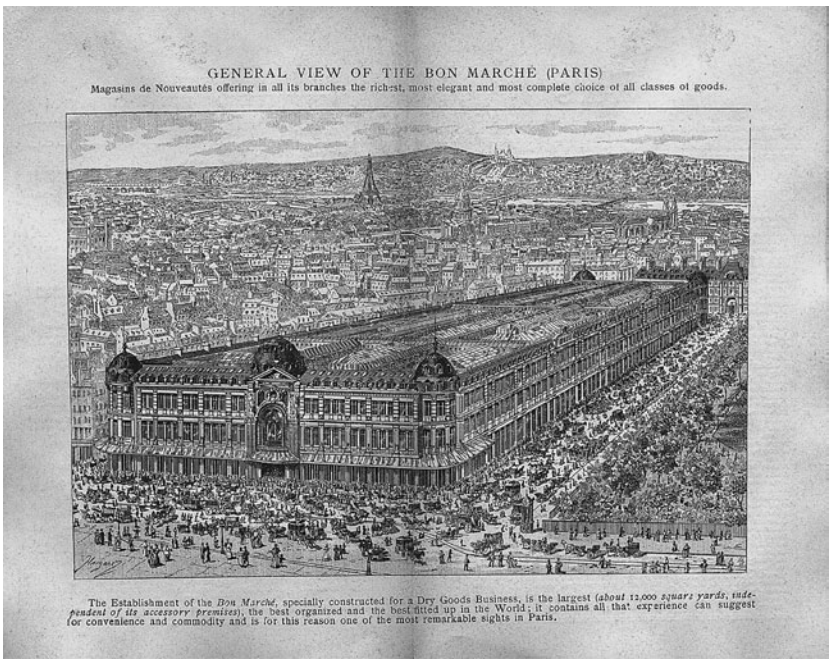

Figure 1. 'General View of the Bon Marché', c. 1896. Souvenir book. D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina, Asheville 28804.

endured by many of these girls and women (the note upon which Jeune concludes her article), whilst their conspicuous public presence, access to finery, and the sexual suspicion directed at large stores more generally meant that their moral well-being was also much discussed.[11] On the other hand, the shopgirl's comparative freedom and independence, as well as her often fashionable appearance, meant that she possessed a certain glamour, rendering her an appealing subject for musical comedies and popular fiction.[12]

Although Mary Jeune writes specifically about England, many of her observations have a far wider application. Indeed, the dramatic retail developments she describes had occurred significantly faster in France and the United States. The sparkling Paris of the Second Empire produced the immense new Bon Marché, famed for its dazzling showmanship and its pioneering glass-and-iron structure (see Figure 1). Reconstructed on a grand scale between 1869 and 1887, this palace of consumption has often been accredited as the world's first department store. The Bon Marché's main rival store was the 'Louvre', a name that seems to have appealed to James's ironic sense of the

way in which many Americans experienced Parisian culture primarily through the city's sites of consumption. Christopher Newman's attitude towards the great 'Museum of the Louvre' (*AM* 33) in the opening scene of *The American* (1877) closely resembles that of a shopper, and in *The Reverberator* (1888), the familiar name is the subject of comic ambiguity when George Flack and Delia Dosson discuss the comparative virtues of the 'Bon Marché' and 'the Louvre' (1: 7). The implied interchangeability between the *grand magasin* and the museum is appropriate in view of the fact that, as shown in Figure 1, the Bon Marché marketed itself as a cultural attraction: 'one of the most remarkable sights in Paris'. It also emulated the museum architecturally, planning one of its great salons 'in the grand style of the Louvre Museum gallery' (Michael B. Miller 168). If American tourists were drawn by the glamour and spectacle, the stores back home were still 'close followers of the whims of Parisian fashion' by the 1860s (Lancaster 58). However, the rapid economic growth that followed the Civil War meant that, by the end of the century, the United States was the world's wealthiest nation, and a leader in terms of marketing strategy and retail innovations.[13]

Mary Jeune identified many of the features of late-nineteenth-century consumer culture that have since been heralded as 'revolutionary' (Fraser 85). However, it is important to be alert to the way in which she exaggerates and oversimplifies the historical process she describes. The drastic changes she attributes to the past 'twenty-five years' had in fact been taking place over a far longer period, and her portrayal of the uniform dreariness of shops and shopping in the 1870s and before is by no means indisputable. In 1820, Leigh Hunt noted that the 'variety and brilliancy' of London shops 'can hardly fail of attracting the most sluggish attention' (87), characteristically adding that the shop-lined streets are particularly pleasant when 'the ladies are abroad' (88). Earlier still, in 1786, Sophie von la Roche described the crowding temptations of London's commercial thoroughfares: '[b]ehind great glass windows absolutely everything one can think of is neatly, attractively displayed, and in such abundance of choice as almost to make one greedy' (87). Jeune's account is also contradicted by early Victorian descriptions of the dazzling and dramatic effects of the then new gas lighting (see Nead 83–108), and other sources show that in the first half of the nineteenth century, shopping was already perceived in some circles as an 'amusement' or 'pastime' that brought women into the public sphere.[14]

The tendency to exaggerate the suddenness of change and downplay or even disregard elements of continuity has been reproduced in the dramatic and totalising pronouncements of various recent cultural critics, particularly in relation to the department store as a symbol of modernity. The continuing strands in retail history have, however, been highlighted by scholars

focusing on earlier periods. John Styles indicates an expanding trade in ready-made clothing from the first half of the seventeenth century onwards (160–64), and Claire Walsh writes about the 'large-scale and fast-selling shops of the late eighteenth century' (46). However, it is necessary to be aware that the ready-made clothes described by Styles still had major deficiencies in terms of quality and fit by the end of the eighteenth century, and that the majority of the shops that Walsh looks at were exclusive, upper-class establishments. More importantly, as both of these commentators concede, the late nineteenth century is distinguished from earlier periods by the unprecedented scale of commercial developments brought about by increasing mass production and the corresponding creation of a mass market. Mary Jeune certainly conveys this magnitude, but leaving aside issues of factual accuracy, she manages to communicate the overwhelming sense of change shared by so many of her contemporaries, and the wealth of imaginative possibilities that this presented. As this book shows, James took full advantage of these possibilities, whilst also drawing on the rich history of shops, shopping and shopkeeping.

The past three decades have seen a significant increase in scholarly interest in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century commodity cultures of the United States, Britain and France, particularly among social and economic historians. This critical trend has not been without its influence on James studies, the exploration of James's relation to this culture constituting a significant strand in the ongoing critical endeavour to counter the view of his life and writing as detached from the social issues of the age. The 1980s produced groundbreaking studies on James and the literary marketplace, including Marcia Jacobson's *Henry James and the Mass Market* (1983) and Michael Anesko's '*Friction with the Market*' (1986). Another group of critics, including William Greenslade (1982) and Jennifer Wicke (1988), fruitfully explored James's engagement with the discourses of advertising (particularly in relation to *The Ambassadors* and *The Bostonians*) (1886),[15] whilst influential articles by Jean-Christophe Agnew (1983), Ross Posnock (1987) and Gert Buelens (1999) worked towards establishing James's reputation as an effective and prescient critic of commodity culture, each taking *The American Scene* as a main text. More recent works have looked at commodity fetishism in relation to gender and sexuality.[16] Nor is it only literary critics who have become aware of the fruitfulness of reading James in relation to consumption. In their important 1979 study *The World of Goods*, anthropologists Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood highlighted the usefulness of literature in reaching a more complex, detailed understanding of consumption and its social import, and singled out James as 'particularly sensitive' to

the way in which 'goods in their assemblage present a set of meanings, more or less coherent, more or less intentional' (5). This book builds on the important insights offered by these critical works. It has drawn particularly on Agnew's rich reading of James's works as illustrative of 'acquisitive cognition', which he identifies as 'the characteristic perspective of consumer culture' (67). It has also been inspired by historicist explorations of the self's representations by Posnock and Ian F. A. Bell, and the latter's analysis of the dissolution of boundaries between surface and depth in James's fiction.

Despite the substantial body of criticism on James and commodity culture, his particular imaginative investment in the processes of shopping has seldom received more than incidental attention. One possible explanation for this is that the drive to establish what Agnew terms 'the sharpness of [James's] foresight into the commodity relations of our own time' (68) may have helped to divert attention away from his engagement with nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century retail culture. In addition, what Richard Salmon describes as the critical assumption 'that James's rhetorical opposition to the market simply conceals the truth of his own accommodation to it' (*Henry James* 5) has sometimes had the paradoxical effect of leading critics to disregard James's engagement with the concrete manifestations of this culture. Take Agnew's insistence that '[s]omething akin to a note of embarrassment runs through those rare passages in James's writings that explicitly take up the question of the commodity world' (76), an assertion that is placed in doubt by examples like the sensitive evocations of the social and sexual dynamics of department stores in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) and *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897). These influences, together with a propensity to rely on modern consumer theory, have tended to produce dematerialised accounts of an author intensely occupied with the material world. Of course, James did not catalogue material detail in the manner of Zola, and indeed, there is no late-nineteenth-century novel in the English language that can compare with *Au Bonheur des Dames* in terms of its unremittingly energetic and abundant depiction of contemporary shop culture. Nor can he be considered a social commentator in the same sense that Gissing or Wells can, and yet, in the not so 'rare' instances in which James does evoke this culture, he is remarkably attentive to its structures, strategies and social and psychological nuances. These features come to constitute intensely characteristic elements of his artistic vision and narrative apparatus. And if this historical context enables a greater understanding of James's art, the relationship also works the other way: in an age in which shopping and its attendant desires were widely regarded as 'peculiarly feminine' concerns (Hermione 341) – a bias that has been

reproduced in modern historical, sociological and cultural studies of consumption – James's depictions of characters like Hyacinth Robinson and Lambert Strether offer us valuable opportunities to consider male consumer desire.

To date, there have been no sustained explorations of James's relation to retail culture; the handful of critics who have addressed the subject have confined their attention to one or two works (usually post-1900) or themes.[17] What differentiates the present study is not only its breadth in terms of James's oeuvre and its thoroughgoing approach, but the fact that it places his representations in relation to contemporary retail practices, experiences and discourses. This context has been gleaned from Victorian and Edwardian newspapers, periodicals, guidebooks, sociological and political studies, sales catalogs and advertising manuals. I have also drawn on the various recent and not so recent studies of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century shopping and urban culture, particularly those of Rachel Bowlby, Thomas Richards, Judith Walkowitz, Bill Lancaster and Erika Diane Rappaport.

In considering James's engagement with retail culture it is important to be aware that, unlike many of the writers and social commentators of his age, he had extensive experience and knowledge of its three main centres of development: the United States, France and England. An assiduous 'student of great cities' (*LC* 2: 1169) and a self-questioning admirer of great empires, James took full advantage of his ample scope for comparison, and was able to develop an awareness of the global implications of the phenomena he observed. This book seeks to reflect this broad experiential range by examining James's responses to the changing shopping cultures of New York, Boston and Paris. The main focus, however, is on London, the 'dreadful, delightful city' (*LN* 220) in which he spent most of his writing life, and which became intimately bound up in his conception of his artistic identity and evolution. 'There are more things in London, I think, than anywhere in the world' (*LC* 2: 1126), he states simply in the preface to *The Awkward Age*, and this 'incessant appeal' – he reflects in *The Spoils of Poynton*'s preface – 'was material ever to one's hand' (*LC* 2: 1152).

If James's relations to the great cities he inhabited were living, breathing affairs, they were also infinitely enhanced by his sense of the past. Correspondingly, his acute perception of the forces of contemporary commercial change and their effects upon experience and subjectivity coexisted with a fascinated engagement with long-established shopping and shopkeeping practices, traditions and superstitions. In many cases his imagination of these elements was influenced and enriched by the depictions of a previous generation of authors which included Balzac and Dickens.

Like many shopping experiences, this study begins at the shop window. The framed commercial display constitutes for James a rich representational value, but is also finely suggestive of the very processes of perception and representation. In Alvin Langdon Coburn's two shop window frontispieces for the 1907 to 1909 New York Edition, and in early scenes in *The Princess Casamassima* and 'The Altar of the Dead' (1895), the tantalising introductory qualities of the *vitrine* serve to rouse the reader's curiosity and suggest possible narrative developments. The notion of experience and knowledge that is out of reach is also associated with childhood, social disadvantage and the beginnings of artistic consciousness. In James's record of his own childhood, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), the shop window is an important element in his exploration of the development of his artistic sensibility. The relationship between the inside and outside of the glass becomes representative of the relation between action – or 'acting' in the performative sense – and perception, and also suggests the significance of the 'other' in his conception of identity. A linked group of shop window images suggest James's anxieties regarding the position of women authors in the literary marketplace.

Whilst Chapter 1 is concerned with the spectatorial position on the outside of the shop window, in Chapter 2 the focus shifts to those condemned to a life of display on the other side of the glass. James's use of images of commodity display in his representations of women not only blurs the boundaries between human and dehumanised object, but often destabilises the opposition between commercial and artistic culture that it initially appears to enforce. Beginning with the eponymous wax heroine of 'Rose-Agathe' (1878), whose career is analysed in the context of James's ambivalent attitude towards the showy Paris of the late 1870s, this chapter charts James's increasing incorporation of elements of advertising discourse into his explorations of gender and class identities, examining a range of works including 'The Real Thing' (1892) and 'The Beldonald Holbein' (1901). By the time he wrote *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), his engagement with this discourse had reached a level of extreme sophistication and subtlety. This reading of the late novel attempts to demonstrate the aptness of advertising theory as a tool for illuminating James's complex exploration of the significations of the self and the gendered politics of vision.

One of the major consequences of urban commercialisation in the late nineteenth century was the increased presence of women in the city, as shopping became a popular leisure activity. Chapter 3 looks at James's representations of women shoppers and shopgirls and their experiences of the dangers and pleasures of the metropolis. These depictions often suggest female liberation and independence – a freedom derived not only from the dissolution