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Woodruff D. Smith. *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800.* New York: Routledge, 2002. x + 339 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-93329-2; $120.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-93328-5.

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The literature on the history of consumption has become increasingly vast in recent years. It sometimes seems that including the words "consumption" or "consumerism" in the title has become *de rigeur* for publishers hoping to increase a book's profitability. However, the current rage for consumption is something more than the intellectual fad. Consumption studies are an important historiographical force, making scholars rethink strategies for approaching their historical narratives. This has been most powerfully demonstrated in recent work on the history of gender, class, and race by historians such as Timothy Burke, David Kuchta, and Erika Rappaport.

For those attempting to familiarize themselves with the literature on consumption, the task can seem daunting. However Woodruff Smith's book makes the undertaking easier for students of the early modern period. *Consumption and the Making of Respectability* synthesizes the current historiography on early modern European consumption into a functional, but pliant, theoretical model. The question that drives Smith's analysis is not "what did early modern consumers want? " but "why did they want it? " Specifically, what were the causes of an unprecedented demand for sugar, tea, coffee, and imported fabrics between 1600 and 1800? The author believes the answer to this question lies only partly in economic explanations that emphasize improved technology, commercial organization, slave labor, or amount of disposable income. Rather, he cites the cultural development of the complex ideal of "respectability." Smith writes, "Respectability gave meaning–moral and political as well as social and economic–to consumption, thereby permitting the construction of a host of connections between purchasing commodities and thinking and acting appropriately" (p. 3).

Smith's emphasis on respectability should be understood in the context of a second historiography, that of politeness and manners. This historiography has a long pedigree, traceable to Norbert Elias's work on manners and more recently represented by Lawrence Klein, Philip Carter, and Helen Berry. By employing research on respectability as a heuristic from which to analyze consumption, Smith has effectively merged the historiographies of politeness and consumption. Respectability, Smith argues, allows him to avoid the pitfalls of slipping into an anachronistic class-based analysis of consumption in the style of Veblen's theory of emulation or Bourdieu's theory of distinction. In his first chapter, Smith suggests a model derived from cultural anthropology that he refers to as "cultural contexts" as a corrective to other approaches. A cultural context is "an assembly of factors or traits that make 'sense' as an ensemble to people living in a particular time and area, as elements of their world *meaningfully* linked to one another" (p. 13). Smith identifies five elements to any cultural context: the cognitive, the discursive, the behavioral, the structural, and the material. In this nexus, he argues that commodity exchange can best be understood in its historical situation.

Having created a somewhat complex theoretical model in his first chapter, Smith explores five cultural contexts in subsequent chapters. Each of these contexts–gentility, luxury, virtue, masculinity, and femininity–have their own extensive historiographies from which Smith synthesizes his argument. Using the example of Samuel Pepys for instance, the author contends that notions of gentility were transforming in the seventeenth century. The gentleman, always an uncertain social category, was increasingly defined by behavior rather than by birth. Pepys's interest in fashionability was driven by this concern, which, by the eighteenth century, was further refined by the creation of the aesthetic category of taste. Ideally, taste rationalized consumption by restraining excess, an important innovation in a world in which luxury items were becoming increasingly available to more members of society. Many imagined that taste arose from good breeding, and, as a result, social elites continued to police fashion.

Correlative to taste's limits to consumption, the language of virtue, emphasizing self-restraint, provided a moralistic justification for consumption, and, according to Smith, it "was the glue that made respectability coherent" (p. 105). Smith points to "comfort" and "convenience" as central aspects of eighteenth-century virtue. Consuming for comfort (innocent pleasure) and convenience (the termination of unnecessary work) allowed one to be a more efficient and constructive participant in the public sphere. According to the author, these virtues were particularly relevant to an emerging bourgeois consciousness, represented in the writings of Benjamin Franklin.

The chapters on masculinity and femininity center on the consumption of coffee and tea respectively. Coffeehouses were spaces for exercising a rational masculinity in the public sphere. There, men could transact business and debate politics, ideally to come to a sort of Habermasian consensus. On the other hand, tea was a domestic commodity, central to the construction of female domesticity. For example, patrolling the ritual of tea consumption, including its discursive formalities, women were, in a sense, the "civilizers" of the family (p. 175). They upheld the virtue of the household and thereby the moral health of the nation.

By the nineteenth century, Smith claims that the five cultural contexts had merged to various degrees into the bourgeois language of respectability. The standards of respectability defined the social hierarchy and provided a perspective from which it could be reformed. It had consequences beyond transforming individual behavior or forming the domestic ideal. For instance, it provided criteria for judging the status of professional institutions and businesses.

The strengths of *Consumption and the Making of Respectability* include its readability and nuance. The author's explanation of the eighteenth-century coffeehouse is particularly illuminating, and his discussion of cleanliness and undergarments does an excellent job of tying together many of the book's themes. Smith's study works best as an introduction to consumption and respectability in an advanced undergraduate or graduate-level seminar. Readers already familiar with the historiography will recognize the author's debt to the secondary literature, especially that of British studies. However, astute readers will also notice that the author's emphasis on respectability as a mode of early modern behavior overlooks other important behaviors which both challenged and shaped the language of respectability. For instance, a discussion of libertinism and sexuality, such as that articulated by Anna Bryson and Randolph Trumbach, would have provided an important counterpoint to Smith's discussion of virtue. And scholars such as Helen Berry and Dena Goodman have shown how complicated women's roles could be in the early modern public sphere, affecting both their participation as consumers and as makers of respectability. Nevertheless, Woodruff Smith has tackled a complicated subject, synthesizing its most important aspects into an approachable and enjoyable volume. For any reader hoping to enter into a study of early modern consumption, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* would serve them well.

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