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41. Mandeville, *The Fable*, II, p. 452.
42. Friedrich von Hayek, 'Dr Bernard Mandeville', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 52 (1966), pp. 125–41.
43. Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods* (London, 1996); Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London, 1988); Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things. The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2000); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982); John Brewer and Roy Porter eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (New York, 1997).

3

Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age in Theory and Practice

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Locating the origins of modern consumerism within the seemingly timeless pool of luxury consumption is becoming for modern historians something akin to the search for the Holy Grail. At least three bodies of literature now exist each proclaiming to have located the wellspring of modern materialism in as many eras stretching from the eighteenth century to the present day.[1] This essay proposes that modern consumer behaviour made a decisive advance earlier still, in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. In order to make this argument, I find it necessary to work backward from the eighteenth century to the seventeenth, and from British theory to Dutch practice. My thesis, put simply, is that theory followed practice with long and curious delays: that a modern form of consumer culture emerged before a means to describe and defend it existed.

The Old Luxury

Pre-commercial societies deployed a discourse of 'luxury' to discuss consumer behaviour, and luxury consumption was generally a prerogative of the privileged classes of rulers, warriors, churchmen and landowners. Their desire for luxury was by far the most important source of support for the craftsmen, artists and performers who produced society's non-quotidian goods and services. It was luxury production that supplied the elites with the markers of their status and authority, and that embodied the definitions of refinement of taste, elegance of design and power of expression. In short, luxury production was the material embodiment of high culture. Its production depended on the appropriation of surplus resources by elites whose fitness for rule was visibly justified by their patronage of the suppliers of luxurious goods and services. Luxury consumption in this context was profoundly conservative, in the sense that it reinforced the prevailing society and culture.

Luxury was an essential prop upholding the established order, yet at the same time luxury was universally understood to be fraught with moral danger. The seven deadly sins and all the vices of concern to us were implicated in it: gluttony, lust, avarice, malice, anger, greed, vanity, sloth, pride. Only a thin line separated the noble patron of the arts from the vain, prideful self-aggrandiser; the

refined palate merged effortlessly with gluttony; the admiration of a fine garment easily turned to lust. The pursuit of luxury could bankrupt one's family, undermine one's health and submerge a healthy personality in debauchery.

Nor were the dangers of luxury purely personal. The individuals whose vanity, pride and gluttony drove them to an arbitrary and limitless pursuit of the sensations of pleasure formed an elite that could become so incapacitated in character (effeminate) and depleted in purse as to bring about the downfall of the state. The comforts and pleasures of a luxurious life left men unfit for military service and averse to taking the hard decisions needed to defend the state. The study of ancient history made these lessons accessible to every educated European. A 'Dance to the Music of Time' led society through a seemingly unavoidable cycle leading from poverty via hard work to riches, and from the luxury supplied by riches to decadence and back to poverty.

This rich complex of associations, between luxury and high culture and between luxury, personal decadence and societal ruin drew upon both the Christian and classical traditions. It took shape in the pre-capitalist societies of feudal Europe, when luxury was associated with – indeed, largely defined by – princely and episcopal courts. But even in later centuries, as a far more complex society, with large commercialised and urbanised sectors, emerged in western Europe, court cultures long exercised a dominant role in defining 'civilisation' via their cultivation of luxury.

Norbert Elias's *The Process of Civilization* explored this phenomenon, arguing that 'civilisation' (polite manners, elevated tastes, etc.) flowed via emulation from the princely courts to the aristocracy and gentry, and so to the bourgeoisie. Later, the concept of emulation was implanted into British historiography via the influential thesis of Harold Perkins (in *The Origin of Modern English Society*) that the aim of English trading people was to leave their bourgeois origins behind. There was, he argued, no authentic commercial culture in the eighteenth century. Emulation of the aristocracy, rather than an autonomous bourgeois materialism, must have been the prime mover of consumer behaviour.[2]

Earlier, in 1913, Werner Sombart, in his *Luxury and Capitalism*, had also denied bourgeois origins to the rise of consumer cultures. Indeed, he saw capitalism more generally, as emerging not from frugality, savings and investment (as Max Weber had had it), but from luxury spending – a spending incited by the example of the court and by the 'rule of women' in such environments, which led men into the reckless pursuit of sensuous pleasure: all those things which 'charm the eye, the ear, the nose, the palate, or the touch'.[3]

Earlier still, Montesquieu had also emphasised the strategic position of women, although he assessed their role quite positively. They functioned as the intermediaries between the luxury of the old nobility and the more frugal culture of the new commercial classes. Competition for their favours created the emulative link, triggering consumption among those endowed with a work ethic, and setting the stage for a temperate, moderate progress.

All these interpretations focus on the power and influence of an 'Old Luxury' of the pre-capitalist society living on to influence – perhaps even to shape – the more commercial society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This type of luxury lives on today, most obviously in the high-fashion apparel and accessories of designers whose authority and influence is secured by the patronage of elites – preferably non-bourgeois elites. It remains associated with ruinous expense and moral questions. It would not impress us so much if these dangerous associations were absent.

The New Luxury

There is another kind of luxury, let me call it the 'New Luxury', for which there was no established place in the pre-capitalist economy, but which is dominant today. In making this crude distinction I appropriate a rhetorical device deployed repeatedly by eighteenth-century writers seeking to identify that which required a re-examination of the old moral strictures concerning luxury consumption. Sir James Steuart, in 1767, distinguished Ancient Luxury (arbitrary and limitless) from Modern Luxury (systematical and beneficial); Montesquieu distinguished Persian Luxury (wasteful and degenerate) from what, ironically, I am forced to call Parisian Luxury (where the influence of women meets the work ethic).[4] Adam Smith had it, more generally, over the savage state of 'baubles' and lavish hospitality and the higher state of commercial society, and, among modern commentators, Colin Campbell distinguished the Traditional Consumer (whose utility derived from the immediate sensation of [corporal] pleasure) from the modern consumer – new to the eighteenth century – who substitutes illusory for real stimuli, and depends therefore on a never ending stream of new products to sustain the illusions.[5] If the Old Luxury satisfied a natural appetite, the new depended upon the cultivation of an addiction.

My New Luxury, rather than being defined by a royal court, is generated by urban society. Rather than presenting a coherent style and hegemonic cultural message, it consists of heterogeneous elements. The Old Luxury, striving for grandeur or exquisite refinement, could be emulated, if at all, only by burlesque or parody – obvious falsifications. The New Luxury, striving more for comfort and enjoyment, lends itself to multiplication and diffusion. Where the Old Luxury served primarily as a marker, a means of discriminating between people, times and places, the New Luxury served more to communicate cultural meaning, permitting reciprocal relations – a kind of sociability – among participants in consumption.[6]

The New Luxury was a product of the commercial and urban societies that Europe possessed by the sixteenth century, and which grew in size and influence in the following centuries. Its promise and its dangers differed from the Old Luxury. It was accessible to a much larger portion of society, which raised new dangers of social confusion and the erosion of established hierarchies as diffusion and emulation subverted the marker function of luxury consumption. Sumptuary laws regulating dress were promulgated more frequently, but could not restore the old patterns. Moreover, because the New Luxuries had a broader reach, their aggregate consumption supported larger groups of producers who came to form

significant industries. In many cases, the luxury products were imported, and on such a scale that they visibly affected the balance of trade. This attracted the attention of the state and the development of Mercantilist doctrines, which linked luxury with imports, and imports with the shipment of gold and silver abroad, to pay for the luxuries. A drain of coin abroad to pay for needless luxury, the theory went, struck directly at the economic health of the state. Thus, in the seventeenth century, the old arguments about the moral and social dangers of luxury came to be joined by new, political ones.

The luxury debate

Luxury consumption had much to answer for, and yet the experience of the most advanced economies of the time spurred a succession of philosophers from the 1690s to the 1770s to raise up a fundamental challenge to the arguments against luxury that I have just rehearsed, with their ancient pedigrees and godly endorsements.

The 'great luxury debate' of the eighteenth century exercised some of the best minds of the time and led to the fundamental new insights in political economy of Adam Smith. At its heart was the new understanding, based on experience rather than theory, that consumer aspirations – the desire for luxury – formed a powerful wellspring of economic improvement. In fact, it led to what we would come to call economic development.

In 1691 Sir Dudley North wrote, in his pamphlet *Discourses upon trade*,

> The main spur to trade, or rather to industry and ingenuity, is the exorbitant appetites of men, which they will take pains to gratify, and so be disposed to work, when nothing else will incline them to it; for did men content themselves with bare necessities, we should have a poor world.[7]

Steuart, over 70 years later, claimed that:

> The moment a person begins to live by his industry, let his livelihood be ever so poor, he immediately forms little objects of ambition. [He] compares his situation with that of his fellows who are a degree above him . . .[8]

Between these two observers are any number of others who noted the recent appearance of some combination of new desire and new incitements to desire.

David Hume, beginning with the axiom that 'everything in the world is purchased by labour', and asserting further that our passions are the only cause of labour – that is, motivation to action – concluded that a society of sufficient specialist producers causes all to apply themselves since, 'the superfluity which arises from their labour is not lost; but is exchanged . . . for those commodities which men's luxury now makes them covet'.[9]

The appetites of men, the little objects of ambition, the coveting of luxuries: aren't these the seat of the vices – of lust and gluttony, pride and vanity? Could the unashamed indulgence in these vices lead to the social good of economic prosperity and growth? Bernard Mandeville, the Dutch emigrant to England, affirmed precisely this in his scandalous poem of 1705, *The Fable of the Bees*.[10] He describes there a human society disguised as a beehive, in which the self-seeking, vain, envious, lustful behaviour of individuals has the net effect of producing a productive, prosperous society.

> The Root of evil Avarice
> That damn'd ill-natured baneful Vice,
> Was slave to Prodigality,
> That Noble Sin; whilst Luxury
> Employed a million of the poor
> and odious Pride a million more.

He concludes:

> Thus every part was full of Vice,
> Yet the whole Mass a Paradise.

With this challenge to conventional wisdom, a sustained debate of consumer behaviour and its relationships to society and morality was well and truly launched. But the social and economic reality to which the debate referred – the development of a New Luxury – had taken shape earlier, and had developed most fully not in England, but across the North Sea in the Dutch Republic. Thus, rather than pursue in greater detail the English debate launched in the generation after the Glorious Revolution, this essay will turn backward, to inquire into the society that pioneered the New Luxury in the seventeenth century. Did it also develop a discourse on luxury that corresponded to the new consumer behaviour of this society? Or do we have here a situation in which practice outpaced theory, where what people said about Dutch consumer behaviour was outmoded and misleading, being based on antiquated social categories.

Dutch luxury in theory

Did the Dutch develop a body of theory about luxury consumption? To answer this question, we might turn first to the social thought of Calvin and of the Reformed Church, which laboured to put its stamp on Dutch society in the wake of the Revolt and Reformation of religion.

For most people today, access to Calvin's thought is mediated by Max Weber, or by a potted version of Weber's argument in the *Protestant Ethic*. So it may not hurt to go directly to the source. However, diligent readers of Calvin's *Institutes* and his several *Commentaries* will be disappointed in what they find. Rather, they will be disappointed in what they do not find, for Calvin's views on the material world did not really differ from those found more generally in sixteenth-century humanism. With Erasmus and Aristotle he recommended the *via media* – moder-

ation in the use of God's gifts – rather than abstinence. For example, in his explication of the Lord's Prayer, Calvin writes about the request 'Give us this day our daily bread':

> By this petition we ask of God all things in general that our bodies have need to use under the elements of this world, not only for food and clothing but also for everything God foresees to be beneficial to us, that we may eat our bread in peace.

In his discourse on Christian freedom, Calvin gives evidence that the range of goods 'God foresees to be beneficial to us' might be quite broad: 'Let every man live in his station, whether slenderly, or moderately, or plentifully, so that all may remember God nourishes them to live, not to luxuriate.'

The message is clear, but without specific guidance about practical implementation. As our means increase, more of what God foresees to be beneficial is available to us. We are not forbidden to use and enjoy these things. But, Calvin goes on to warn:

> those who, not content with daily bread but panting after countless things with unbridled desire, or sated with their abundance, or carefree in their piled-up riches, nonetheless supplicated God with this prayer [give us this day our daily bread] are but mocking him.

'Unbridled desire' turns one's attention away from the source of one's material comforts. That is the line one cannot cross, and Calvin did not think most people were capable of detecting and honouring that line:

> There is almost no one whose resources permit him to be extravagant who does not delight in lavish and ostentatious banquets, bodily apparel, and domestic architecture; who does not outstrip his neighbor in all sorts of elegance . . .[11]

Calvin did not counsel otherworldliness, an escape from the temptations of prosperity. Nor did he demand what we would call 'Puritan abstemiousness'. Such a course was playing it safe – staying far away from the line. Calvin actually recommends something much more difficult to implement: station or income-specific moderation – i.e. keeping material goods in a proper perspective.[12]

Calvin's views on luxury were not really exceptional. It is more likely that the indirect impact of Calvinism, rather than its specific teachings on luxury, had the greater impact on consumer behaviour, and perhaps the best place to look is in Calvin's emphasis on what we might today call the examined life. The beginning of Christian knowledge was to know one's true self – that is, one's own sinfulness and one's dependence on God's grace. It is here where the Heidelberg Catechism – the introduction to the faith used by the Reformed Churches – began with its first questions and answers. The Christian was to possess authenticity, in the psychological sense, and this raised a vigorous objection to a 'culture of appearances' such as would be fostered by a fashion industry, or even to the theatre, where the declared intention was to pretend to be what you are not. The use of luxury goods to project a power, wealth or status one does not possess – to exploit the anonymity of urban society to deceive strangers through theatrics and the grand gesture, as an actor fools a (willing) audience – was anathema.

A second intellectual tradition capable of giving shape to a Dutch posture towards luxury is Republican theory. The most influential – indeed, almost the only – developed argument in the seventeenth century is found in the work of the De la Court brothers, Johan and Pieter.[13] Their argument, presented in the 1660s, is premised on the belief that all persons seek their own interest, motivated by the passion of self-love. In monarchies this pursuit is unbridled, uninspected and unresisted, leading inevitably to decadent luxury – the Old Luxury. In republics, they reasoned, the human passions are checked by the evident need for cooperation with others. Consequently, they are subject to self-examination and therefore they are more likely to be governed and directed towards virtuous, moderate consumption and prudent frugality.

Just how self-love is channelled in a republic is not developed in their work, but not long thereafter Jansenist thinkers developed more fully the concept of a non-vicious self-love channelled by commercial society to become a civilising agent. Jansenism, a Catholic theology based on the Augustinian tradition that also shaped Calvinism, emerged first in the Netherlands, North and South, and attained its greatest influence via the scholars associated with Port Royal, a female monastery near Paris. *Amour-propre*, or self-love, they defined as a desire for the recognition of others. Rather than being a 'pre-social' passion of natural man – base and uncontrollable – self-love in Port Royal philosophy was viewed as a passion that emerges (providentially, they would say) at a certain stage in societal development. Only in a commercial society could self-love be directed, via the civilising mechanisms of reputation and opinion, and by mirroring one's needs through the eyes of others.[14] Material goods had a new and honourable role in this new context (and Port Royal philosophy had become familiar to Mandeville before he moved to England in the 1690s).[15]

Two conclusions may be drawn from these observations. The first is that one should not be too quick to align Calvinist teachings with abstemiousness. Like all Christian theologies, it denounced hedonism, but unlike some it could accommodate readily to the material world of a commercial society so long as this did not undermine 'authenticity'. Second, republican theory and the Jansenist concept of self-love combined to lead to an early recognition that some societies could harness otherwise sinful and harmful human passions to the support of a healthy polity and dynamic economy. The Dutch Republic appeared to be such a society, and its hallmark was a self-examined, sociable consumerism.

The religious and the secular strands of this discussion had much in common, but it cannot be said that they mingled to activate a fruitful, public debate. One notable exception emerged in the 1730s as Dutch republican thought theorised a concept of the virtuous citizen that was entirely compatible with, indeed predicated on the existence of, a commercial society. Classical republicanism viewed

commerce, luxury and economic specialisation (i.e. dependence on others) as destructive of virtue, and republican states as inherently unstable and short-lived. Even late in the eighteenth century Rousseau continued to uphold such views. In Holland, Justus van Effen, publisher of the *Hollandsche Spectator* (1731–35), argued that free and commercial societies were the necessary basis for civilised communication and sociability (what we might call an information-rich society). In monarchies, such as France, sociability led too easily to *politesse* ('a refined and elegant form of behaviour that was pleasing to others, a capacity for smooth and cultured conversation, a stylish presentation of self'). To Van Effen such a 'culture of appearances', with its hypocrisy, deceptions and dependence on the whims of fashion, was far removed from the true (republican) politeness based on reason, virtue and sociability.[16] In sum, *amour-propre* led to a theatricised public sphere in monarchical societies, such as France, but it could also lead to the establishment of a new foundation for republican virtue – reasonable and sociable – in commercial societies such as the Netherlands.

Still, the two strands of thought I have identified did not develop into a full-blown body of theory capable of defending and explaining the 'real existing' commercial society that was the Netherlands of the seventeenth century. This may be because of the conspicuous absence of a third strand: a determined opposition. Across the North Sea, in England, the re-examination of obsolete social prescriptions concerning luxury got underway later than in the Netherlands, after the Glorious Revolution. It led almost immediately to a vigorous debate because of the strength of the conservative opposition. Joyce Appleby speculates that this debate was triggered by a practical political struggle focused on the East India Company's importation of cotton textiles. The defenders of the Company – and of the consumption of imported luxuries more generally – had to attack the balance of trade doctrines. In doing so, according to Appleby, they stumbled upon a defence of domestic consumption as a positive and vital force.[17]

Nothing like this happened in the Netherlands. There, too, Indian calicoes were imported on a large scale. The VOC was only slightly behind the English company in the volume of its imports, and, since a large portion of the cotton goods landed at London were re-exported to Holland, their impact on Dutch society must have been great.[18] Dutch textile producers duly protested this new competition, to be sure, but the Republic did nothing to intervene in the importation of cotton goods. In the absence of a body of theory or state policy to argue against there was no need to develop an explicit theory in defence of innovative consumption. What became explicit in England long remained implicit in Holland.

Dutch luxury in practice

A vocabulary to describe adequately the consumer behaviour of a commercial society shaped by the 'New Luxury' took time to develop. Consequently, the contemporary commentaries on the material culture of seventeenth-century Holland – whether written or visual in form – require a careful interrogation on the part of the modern reader and viewer.

The written records are primarily the observations of foreign visitors, and these are nearly unanimous in their verdict. But, in interpreting these documents we must be mindful of the heavy ideological baggage that attached to this subject, and the propagandistic purposes for which the 'Dutch Example' was paraded before foreign readers.

Visual images appear to offer a rich alternative source of information about this society. Indeed, Dutch paintings easily seduce us into believing that they offer framed views of society, where we employ a historian's gaze, poking about the paintings for evidence as an amateur sociologist today might by walking down a Dutch street and glancing into the uncurtained front windows of the houses. This, too, is a temptation to be resisted, for the new material world revealed in many of these paintings is typically enveloped in moral and iconographic conventions steeped in the vocabulary of the Old Luxury.[19]

The writings of contemporary visitors were unanimous in celebrating what Constantijn Huygens called 'Holland's glorious simplicity'. The English ambassador in the years 1668–70, Sir William Temple, wrote *Observations upon the United Provinces*, a book that has long been accepted as an authoritative account of Golden Age society, if for no other reason than the fact that so many later writers corroborated, or simply appropriated, his views.[20] Temple was concerned to explain the amazing economic power and prosperity of the Republic to his envious English readers, and he placed great emphasis on

> The simplicity and modesty of their magistrates in their way of living, which is so general, that I never knew one among them exceed the common frugal popular air.

He described every social class in turn, and except for the small corps of noblemen, whom he regarded as poor imitations (of French fashion) rather than good originals, he concluded with the observation:

> There are some customs and dispositions that seem to run generally through all these degrees of men among them; as great frugality and order in their expense. Their common riches lye in every man's having more then he spends; or to say it more properly, in every man's spending less than he has coming in, be that what it will.

Of course, a rich person could save a good deal and still have plenty left to indulge in extravagance, but Temple thought that such luxury expenditure in the Republic

> . . . is laid out in the fabrick, adornment, or furniture of their houses; things not so transitory, or so prejudicial to Health and to Business as the constant excesses and luxury of tables; nor perhaps altogether so vain as the extravagant expenses of clothes and attendance.

Here is an observation – insightful, in my opinion, of the character of the New Luxury relative to the Old – to which we will return.

But, for the most part, Temple stressed frugality to the point of self-denial.

> By this we find out the foundation of the Riches of Holland . . . For never any Country traded so much and consumed so little. They buy infinitely, but this to sell again . . .
>
> They are the great masters of the Indian spices, and of the Persian silks; but wear plain woollens and feed upon their own fish and roots. Nay, they sell the finest of their own cloath to France, and buy coarse out of England for their own wear. They send abroad the best of their butter . . . and buy the cheapest out of Ireland . . . for their own use.
>
> In short, they furnish infinite Luxury, which they never practice, and traffique in Pleasures which they never taste.[21]

Now, no one who has spent an afternoon viewing Dutch genre paintings or still-lifes can lend full credence to Temple's observations. Did they really 'traffique in Pleasures which they never taste', and then, for added measure, hang on their walls paintings of those very pleasures – just to remind themselves of what they were missing? (See Plates 1a and b.)

Temple's words alert us to a special feature of Dutch society – it was more than ordinarily frugal and sober in the face of more than ordinary access to all the world's luxuries and pleasures. As Dutch trade expanded, her ports filled with the precious cargoes brought from the Levant, Russia, Africa, Asia and the New World. Amsterdam, the foremost port, could be described by 1648 as: 'The warehouse of the world, the seat of opulence, the rendezvous of riches, and the darling of the gods.'[22]

This unique accessibility to the goods of the world was paired with a growth in the productivity of domestic agriculture and industry to raise the purchasing power of broad segments of society as well as make many merchants, investors, property owners, and industrialists very, very rich. Here, for the first time – on such a scale and on so enduring a basis – was a society in which the potential to purchase luxuries extended well beyond a small, traditional elite. A substantial tranche of society was now in a position to exercise choice – to enter the market and spend money to fashion a consumer culture.

Interpreting Dutch consumer behaviour

Choice gives freedom, and freedom exposes one to moral dilemmas. Now these dilemmas were faced by large numbers who earlier, and in other societies still, had had their consumer choices constrained by the heavy hand of scarcity and custom, and whose extravagances were channelled narrowly into well-choreographed displays of excessive eating and drinking.

Simon Schama, in his celebrated book *The Embarrassment of Riches*, draws with relish on the venerable arguments about the moral pitfalls that surround luxury consumption – which he (wrongly, in my view) ascribes to Calvinist preaching – to evoke a society caught on the horns of a dilemma: its own singular virtues, producing prosperity, lead inexorably to the vices of luxury. He relies heavily on paintings and other visual images in making his evocation, and these, I believe, relied in turn on the ancient themes of luxury's dangers that derived from pre-capitalist, pre-market societies – the Old Luxury.

An ally in his project was the view of many historians of earlier generations that the Republic's decline after the 1670s was closely associated with, if not caused by, the onset of a cultural over-ripeness which befell a decadent generation accustomed to luxury and, therefore, without the character and determination of their forefathers. On their watch, French fashion overwhelms Calvinist simplicity, classicism pollutes the fresh spring of Dutch artistic genius and the burgher families succumb to the blandishments of aristocratic life-styles. This argument, owing far more to the contemplation of the fall of Rome than to the reality of seventeenth-century Dutch society, was once uncritically embraced by historians eager for simple explanations of a difficult subject. (See Plates 2a and b.)

Rather than succumbing to the seductive vision of republican society in the grip of the Old Luxury, we should set this venerable, but derivative, imagery aside and attempt to see the new consumer culture being constructed by the innumerable choices of an enlarged population newly endowed with discretionary income. In discussing their choices, the old discourse remained influential for the simple reason that it was the only vocabulary available, but the reality of their behaviour brought into being a distinctive material culture in which the luxuries were directed towards the home more than the body, and adorned the interior – of both home and body – more than the exterior. They tended to achieve comfort more than refinement.[23]

Mandeville, that notorious champion of prodigality as the road to prosperity, rejected the conventional wisdom about the sources of Dutch prosperity, as he also rejected the arguments about Dutch republicanism harnessing and redirecting the passions.[24] 'The Dutch may ascribe their present grandeur to the virtue and frugality of their ancestors as they please,' he wrote in the early eighteenth century. In fact, he retorted with characteristic hyperbole: 'In pictures and marble they are profuse, in their buildings and gardens they are extravagant to folly.' He conceded that there were no great palaces and courts, but '. . . in all of Europe you shall find no private buildings so sumptuously magnificent as a great many of the merchants' and other gentlemen's houses in Amsterdam and in some of the great cities of that small province.'

The papal nuncio to Cologne, Pallavicino, made a more penetrating observation during his visit of 1676. After visiting Amsterdam, where the system of radial canals around the old medieval city was nearing completion, he noted that 'only a nation that does not squander its wealth on clothes or servants could have succeeded in doing all this with so little fuss.' 'All this', of course, was the erection of many thousands of comfortable bourgeois homes, restrained by a 30–40-foot exterior frontage from blatantly advertising the occupants' wealth, but endowed

by a 190-foot depth with ample opportunity to achieve a new form of private domestic comfort.

Exotic luxuries from the four corners of the world found their way into these homes. Indeed, in 1697 Peter the Great travelled to Holland, among other reasons, to acquire a fabulous collection of preciosities.[25] The bourgeoisie also possessed costly products of high craftsmanship such as tapestries and furniture. These often came from the southern Netherlands, where craft traditions of long standing were sustained by the patronage of local and Spanish courts.

What the cities of Holland themselves offered were New Luxuries. These products required real craft skills, to be sure, but the objective was not to fabricate something unique. New Luxuries were products capable of multiplication, or capable of being offered in a gradated range of qualities and prices. The canal houses, just as more humble abodes, were decorated with Delft tiles of varying qualities, just as their kitchens and tables made use of the orientally inspired Delft faïence.[26] Similarly, the canal houses were filled with the work of cabinetmakers' wardrobes and linen chests – and much else. Here again, the great pieces were the highest expression of a furniture tradition that came up from below, for even farmers had – albeit more modest – versions of these same items. (See Plate 3.)

Then we come to the paintings. Dutch art, as is well known, was reconstructed after the Reformation from an Old Luxury to a New Luxury as elite patronage gave way to a market economy. By developing both product innovations and process innovations (new themes in the paintings and new techniques of painting), Dutch artists opened new markets, allowing by mid-century some 700–800 masters to be active simultaneously, producing over the course of the century many millions of paintings ranging in price from hundreds of guilders to the *'dozijnwerk'* – work by the dozen – that fetched a guilder or two at the fair. Indeed, if the possession of paintings in Delft can be generalised to all of Holland – the province – then something like three million paintings must have hung on the walls of Holland's houses by the 1660s.[27]

One could go on to discuss clock- and instrument-makers – by 1700 a solid majority of farmers had pendulum clocks hanging on their walls; book publishing – the Republic had 781 printers and sellers in operation by the 1660s, a far higher density than elsewhere in Europe; popular luxuries like tobacco pipes, and decorative and utilitarian silver. In contrast to the exotic extra-European objects, or the most refined material possessions from Brabant or further afield in Europe, the New Luxuries were usually produced in Dutch cities. Some were imitations and adaptations of foreign luxuries, such as Delftware, responding to Chinese porcelain; some were cheaper versions of European luxuries, such as Delft and Gouda's tapestry works, or Amsterdam and Utrecht's silk industry.

Craft production everywhere in Europe depended on specific skills that could be transferred successfully only by the migration of artisans. Thus, the Republic's new crafts and industries inevitably find their origin in diffusion from abroad. Still, in their new home, they developed a particular form, shaped by the nature of Dutch demand – urban, *burgerlijk*, broad-based – and by the prevailing cultural imperatives. These imperatives could be stamped with the label Calvinist, but it might be better to invoke the concept of 'Confessionalisation'.[28] Calvinists, Lutherans, Catholics – every Christian denomination – were concerned in the era of the Dutch Golden Age to consolidate their projects of religious revitalisation. to penetrate to the broad base of society with programmes of education, institutionalisation and greater social control. The cultural dimension of this multi-centred movement left a deep mark on the design of everyday articles, on accessible luxuries, on interior decoration and on clothing. This movement was European rather than specifically Dutch, but it resonated with Holland's social and economic structures more fully and more creatively than elsewhere, which caused the output of Dutch ceramics, paintings, prints, maps, books, furniture, glass, and the dyeing and printing of textiles to be seen as particularly well suited to the temper and purpose of the Confessional era. The integrating rather than differentiating impact of these New Luxuries – their socialising rather than status differentiating function – is revealed in the broader study of material culture. By the late seventeenth century the striking feature of Dutch material culture is its uniformity. The basic forms of expressing status and achieving comfort were remarkably similar between city and country, and between rich and poor. It was the cost and specific quality rather than the types of objects and their general form, that differed.[29]

From the perspective of the outsider, Dutch society seemed to eschew luxury altogether, for the Old Luxury was thin on the ground and hidden from view. But a New Luxury, one we might call modern, or proto-modern, was in fact taking shape – but could not be easily 'read' by the cultural outsider. Nor had Dutch society itself developed a vocabulary or theory to express it adequately.

Its modernity was, however, in some sense premature. By the third quarter of the seventeenth century a new cultural movement spread across Europe, emanating from royal courts, associated with aristocracy, and featuring classical and rococo forms which idealised gallantry and refinement. It affected the Republic too. Its outward manifestations in the Netherlands are often held up as evidence of decadence (the inevitable consequence of a prosperity-fuelled addiction to luxury), but that can be argued only if the Netherlands is studied in complete isolation from the Europe of which it was part. It remains true, however, that the Republic was poorly endowed – whether in social structure, craft skills, mentality or life-style – to offer much that was original to this new cultural project. A European movement that had interacted with Dutch society to create something original and powerfully appealing gave way, after 1670, to another European movement that interacted weakly and derivatively with that same society.

Luxury consumption was not the undoing of the Dutch at the end of the seventeenth century, as is still sometimes claimed by traditional cultural historians. It wasn't even a more than ordinary source of anxiety or embarrassment. Instead, a consumer culture had been established, prematurely perhaps, so that its eighteenth-century development would seem derivative in comparison with its seventeenth-century novelty.

But the Dutch did not fashion its bits and pieces of religious and republican thought into a new discourse to describe and theorise the new reality. Perhaps

this was because the new commercial society was too self-evident, and the opponents with whom battle had to be waged were too weak: no political elite to rail against imported luxuries; no Court against which to wrest the power to define fashion; no episcopal hierarchy with the power to add bite to its bark.

It was Adam Smith's achievement, according to Donald Winch, to open up the prospect of a stable way of living in a world in which the wants of the imagination were infinite.[30] He showed that there only appeared to be a conflict between morality and wealth, and that moral choice could sidestep the hitherto inevitable cycles of prosperity and decay. But, in the Dutch Republic they may already have been living this life, harnessing self-love in practice as philosophers later would describe in theory.

Notes

1. The claims for an eighteenth-century consumer revolution are most vigorously made in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, 1982); Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford, 1990). A late-nineteenth century rise of consumerism is charted in John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880–1980* (New York, 1994); Richard W. Fox and Jackson Lears, eds, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980* (New York, 1983); Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth Century France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982). The emergence of a post-World War II consumer society is analysed in many works. See Gary Cross, *Time and Money. The Making of Consumer Culture* (London, 1993); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York, 1979); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream. Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985).
2. Norbert Elias, *The Process of Civilization* (London, 1981; original German edition, 1939); Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society* (London, 1968).
3. Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor, 1967; original German edition, 1913), pp. 2–5, 60.
4. Sir James Steuart, *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Œconomy*, 2 vols (London, 1767), ch. 22, p. 325; On Montesquieu, see Tjitske Akkerman, *Women's Vices, Public Benefits. Women and Commerce in the French Enlightenment* (Amsterdam, 1992), p. 16.
5. Adam Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Chicago, 1976; reprint of Cannan Edition of 1904; originally published, 1776), see esp. Book III, ch. IV, pp. 432–45; Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987).
6. These are the two cultural purposes of consumption proposed by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York, 1979).
7. Sir Dudley North, *Discourses upon Trade* (London, 1691), p. 27.
8. Steuart, *Inquiry*, ch. 21, p. 315.
9. David Hume, 'On Commerce', *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, eds., vol. 1 (New York, 1898), p. xx.
10. Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (Oxford, 1924, republication of the 1732 edition). Mandeville's poem was first published, as *The Grumbling Hive*, in 1705. In 1714 he republished it, now furnished with explanatory 'remarks'. Successively more elaborate editions appeared in 1723, 1728, and 1732. He died in 1733.
11. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Atlanta, 1973; 1536 edition), pp. 109–10, 246.
12. Constantijn Huygens offers a nice illustration of the moral choices before which the Calvinist stands in his satirical poem about the excesses of court life, *The Costly Folly*. Written while Huygens was on a diplomatic mission to the court of King James in England, he reveals his own temptation to use the necessity of dressing for high state office as an excuse to indulge in dandyism. The elaborate and costly dress appropriate to his station was not the problem; rather, it was the unleashing of 'unbridled desire' that the occasion seemed to encourage. Cited in Anne McCants, 'Meeting Needs and Suppressing Desires: Consumer Choice Models and Historical Data', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 26 (1995), p. 196.
13. Pieter de la Court, *True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland* (London, 1702) [*Het Interest van Holland, ofte Grond van Hollands welvaren* (Amsterdam, 1662)]; Johan and Pieter de la Court, *Politieke Discoursen*, 2 vols (Amsterdam, 1662); Anonymous, but attributed to the de la Courts, *Zinryken fabulen* (Amsterdam, 1685), translated as *Fables Moral and Political, With Large Explications*, 2 vols (London, 1703).
14. On Port Royal philosophy, see Akkerman, *Women's Vices, Public Benefits*; see also William Doyle, *Jansenism* (London, 2000).
15. Mandeville left the Netherlands soon after earning his doctorate at Leiden in 1691. He and his family had been implicated in the 'Costerman Riot' of 1690, an anti-tax riot in Rotterdam. The Mandevilles appear to have authored and distributed a satirical poem directed at Rotterdam's *schout*, or bailiff, whose unpopularity had been intensified by his insistence on applying the death penalty to Cornelis Costerman, a member of the town militia, who stood accused of fatally stabbing a tax collector who had detained a group in possession of a cask of wine on which no excise had been paid. Mandeville's career, even his liberty, were under a cloud, and he decided to leave the country, eventually settling in England. For more on this interesting pre-history of the author of the *Fable of the Bees*, see Rudolf Dekker, '"Private Vices, Public Virtues" Revisited: The Dutch Background of Bernard Mandeville', *History of European Ideas* 14 (1992), pp. 481–98.
16. Wyger R.E. Velema, 'Ancient and Modern Virtue Compared: De Beaufort and Van Effen on Republican Citizenship', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30 (1997), pp. 437–48.
17. Joyce Appleby, 'Ideology and Theory: The Tension between Political and Economic Liberalism in Seventeenth-Century England', *American Historical Review* 81 (1976), pp. 499–515. 'A consumption-oriented model of economic growth threatened major interests of the ruling class that had coalesced in Restoration England. Dangerous leveling tendencies lurked behind the idea of personal improvement through imitative buying' (p. 511).
18. Imports of Indian Cotton Goods (in thousands of pieces per year)

	Dutch East India Co.	*English East India Co.*
1661–70	88	199
1671–80	137	578
1681–90	348	707
1691–1700	278	296

From 1701 to 1740, English cotton goods re-exported to the Netherlands rose from 36 to 51 per cent of the amount brought to England.

19. The possibilities and pitfalls of using visual images as historical sources is discussed in: Jan de Vries, 'Introduction', Jan de Vries and David Freedberg, eds, *Art in History; History in Art. Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Culture* (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1991), pp. 1–6.
20. Sir William Temple, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands*, Sir George Clark, ed. (Oxford, 1972; orig. pub. London, 1673).
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 86, 87, 119.
22. In the view of Bruce Lenman, 'the Dutch had entered an era of consumerism . . . a good generation before the English.' He supports this view by invoking the astonishment of

Samuel Pepys upon being shown round the hold of a captured Dutch East Indiaman in 1665. 'It affected him like a trip to Aladdin's cave,' Lenman relates, for his guides '. . . did show me the greatest wealth lie in confusion that a man can see in the world – pepper scattered through every chink you trod upon it; and in cloves and nutmeg I walked above the knees – whole rooms full – and silk in bales, and boxes of copper-plate, one of which I saw opened.' And then there were the tales of the bags of diamonds and rubies that the English captors had 'taken from the Dutch Vice Admirals neck'. Bruce P. Lenman, 'The English and Dutch East India Companies and the Birth of Consumerism in the Augustan World', *Eighteenth Century Life* 14 (1990), p. 51. Robert Lathan and William Matthews, eds, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London: 1972) 6: 300.

23. For a stimulating discussion of the origins of domesticity, see Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York, 1986), p. 77.
24. Mandeville, *Fable*, the quotations that follow are from Remark Q, pp. 185–9.
25. See: Renée Kistemaker, Natalja Kopaneva and Annemiek Overbeek, eds, *Peter de Grote en Holland. Culturele en wetenschappelijke betrekkingen tussen Rusland en Nederland ten tijde van tsaar Peter de Grote* (Bussum, 1996).
26. In view of the great success of Dutch ceramics, it is instructive to contemplate their failure in developing a porcelain industry. No porcelain industry arose comparable to those of Meissen, Vienna, Copenhagen, Sèvres or Worcester. The technical skills were not missing; rather, the missing element was the court associations essential to design and market what was, in essence, a new 'Old Luxury'.
27. Ad van der Woude, 'The Volume and Value of Paintings in Holland at the Time of the Dutch Republic', in De Vries and Freedberg, eds, *Art in History, History in Art*, pp. 285–330.
28. On this concept, see Heinz Schilling, 'Confessionalization in the Empire', in Heinz Schilling, ed., *Religion, Political Culture, and the Emergence of Early Modern Society* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 205–46; Philip S. Gorski, 'The Protestant Ethic Revisited: Disciplinary Revolution and State Formation in Holland and Prussia', *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1993), pp. 265–316.
29. Hans van Koolbergen, 'De materiële cultuur van Weesp en Weesperkarspel', in Anton Schuurman, et al., eds, *Aards geluk. De Nederlanders en hun spullen* (Amsterdam, 1997), p. 152; Jan de Vries, 'Peasant demand patterns and economic development: Friesland, 1550–1700', in William N. Parker and Eric L. Jones, eds, *European Peasants and their Markets* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 234–6.
30. Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty. An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 89.

Plates

1a. Jan Jansz. Van de Velde, 'Still-life with a Pipe-lighter', 1653.
1b. Jan Daridsz. De Heem, 'Still-life of a Banquet Side-table', 1646.
2a. Jacob Backer, 'State Dinner', 1633/34.
2b. Adriaen Backer, 'State Dinner', 1683.
3. Pieter de Hooch, 'Two Women at a Linen Chest with a Child', 1663.

4

Aestheticising the Critique of Luxury: Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*

Michael McKeon

The Expedition of Humphry Clinker (1771) (Plate 4) is the last – and many would say the best – of the novels of Tobias Smollett. As with all great works of literature, its critics have diverged on its interpretation in significant ways; and yet they have tended to agree on one point whose implications for how to read the novel are fundamental. This is the conviction that Smollett's central character, Matthew Bramble, speaks for its author and therefore articulates *Humphry Clinker*'s social and ethical norms. As John Sekora puts it, 'the acceptable views expressed in the novel radiate from Bramble'.[1] Sekora's reading is particularly relevant to the concerns of this volume because it comes in the context of an authoritative account of western attitudes towards luxury, in which it assigns *Humphry Clinker* a place of special importance: 'By literary standards *Humphry Clinker* is, among other things, the most successful conservative attack upon luxury in any genre during the 1750s and 1760s . . .'[2] In this essay I hope to show the vulnerability of this view, most of all if we read Smollett's novel 'by literary standards'. By this I mean several things. First, I aim to attend to the way Smollett's attitude towards luxury is clarified if we compare it to his use of other controversial categories of the day – enthusiasm, sensibility, pastoral, romance – which have a notably literary resonance. Second, and more important, I will suggest how the volatility of these categories infiltrates the formal dimension of *Humphry Clinker*. Formality – the dense network of techniques by which novels, poems and plays implicitly establish their meaning by situating themselves in relation to existing genres, styles and traditions of writing – is the hallmark of literary discourse, not the means by which literary works transcend socio-ethical issues, but the means by which they take a socio-ethical position. To read *Humphry Clinker* within the history of literary forms is to read it most persuasively as a historical artifact.

That *Humphry Clinker* contains a powerful critique of luxury is, of course, not to be doubted. And early on in the narrative, we have good reason to anticipate the sort of novel that Matt Bramble's obsessive preoccupations suggest: namely, an affirmation of the backward-looking values of the paternalistic country gentleman, who scours the face of modern Britain lamenting the world we have lost and railing against its replacement. Matt's letters home evince a familial and 'feudal' care for the tenants of Brambleton-hall, evoking an organic community