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ABSTRACT -

Literary analysis is emerging as a major focus of contemporary marketing and consumer research. This paper aims to contribute to this growing body of scholarship by examining consumption behaviour in two best-selling "sex 'n' shopping" novels, Scruples and Scruples Two by Judith Krantz. Although the sex 'n' shopping sub-genre is renowned for its brand name-dropping and celebration of conspicuous consumption, the analysis reveals that the two Scruples novels offer contrasting visions of consumer behaviour. In appropriately post-structuralist fashion, the underpinning binary oppositions - sacred/profane and male/female - are transposed and self-cancelling in the course of both books.

INTRODUCTION

Although they were revolutionary statements at the time, few contemporary commentators would disagree with Stern's (1989a, p.322) contention that, "literary criticism...may provide an additional way of learning about consumers", or Belk's (1986, p.27) ringing declaration that, "art can be a useful way of generating knowledge...art has much to contribute to consumer behaviour...art may be seen to provide an attractive alternative to more traditional 'scientific' means of consumer research". Indeed, as a consequence of the latter-day "interpretive turn" (Sherry 1991; Hirschman and Holbrook 1992), the analysis of artistic artifacts in general and works of literature in particular has become a firmly established, if not exactly mainstream, approach to marketing and consumer research (see Holbrook and Hirschman 1993).

This growing interest in literary analysis is made manifest in a variety of ways, but for the purposes of explication these can be divided into two main categories: "marketing in literature" and "literature in marketing". The former involves the study of marketing and consumption phenomena as portrayed in various works of literature. Examples include Friedman's (1985) analysis of brand names in post-war popular fiction; Belk (1987) and Spiggle's (1986) explications of consumption behaviour in diverse comic books; and Holbrook and Hirschman's (1993) meditations on Homer's Odyssey, Virgil's Aeneid, Goethe's Faust and Joyce's Ulysses amongst others. The latter category, by contrast, applies the tools and techniques of literary criticism to marketing artifacts, advertising in particular. Analyses of allegory, prosody, rhetoric and resonance in effective marketing communication have been undertaken (Stern 1989a, 1990b; McQuarrie and Mick 1992), as have explorations of the many and varied schools of literary criticism - psychoanalytical, reader-response, marxist, new criticism, feminist and so on (e.g. Stern 1989a, 1993; Scott 1994).

Pathbreaking though the "marketing in literature" and "literature in marketing" perspectives have proved to be, there remains ample scope for additional investigation. The exponents of the marketing in literature school, for example, have only explicated a minute fraction of the literary canon and, more importantly perhaps, have tended to employ a comparatively limited number of methodological and critical approaches (content analysis, structuralism and abduction in the main). Devotees of literature in marketing, on the other hand, have been assiduous in their application of the manifold schools of literary criticism, but they have tended to concentrate on a single aspect of the marketing mix, namely advertising and promotion. There are, admittedly, a number of important exceptions to these statements, nevertheless it is arguable that the "marketing in literature" perspective could be enhanced by a greater diversity of critical approaches and...
that the "literature in marketing" perspective would be enriched by applications outside the advertising arena.

The present paper aims to extend the overall scope of literary analysis by examining consumption behaviour in the Scruples novels of Judith Krantz. It contributes to the literature in marketing perspective by moving beyond advertising to the study of retail stores, albeit a fictional (if verisimilar) retailing organisation, and adds to the marketing in literature perspective by adopting a critical posture predicated on post-structuralist literary theory. In addition, it addresses an aspect of popular culture - romantic fiction - which possesses considerable, though largely unexplored, research potential (however, see Serr 1991; Scott 1993; Serr and Hollbrook 1994). As the generic term for the sub-genre amply testifies, "sex 'n' shopping" novels are likely to contain much of intrinsic interest to marketing and consumer researchers.

The paper to follow commences with a discussion of romantic fiction and the latter-day advent of the "sex 'n' shopping" novel; continues with a plot summary of Scruples and Scruples Two; culminates in a post-structuralist reading of some of the novels' key themes, particularly those that pertain to extant investigations in the "marketing in literature" and "literature in marketing" traditions; and concludes with a very brief outline of some broader research issues.

ROMANTIC FICTION AND THE SEX 'N' SHOPPING NOVEL

Although the term "romance" has been applied to all manner of literary endeavours, from medieval tales of questing and heroic knights to novels which begin on dark and stormy nights in deserted gothic mansions (see Radford 1986), it is usually associated with the, "kind of love story found next to the candy bars in supermarket checkout lanes [with] titles like Always Love or Pagan Adversary" (Elam 1992, p.5). Written by, for and about women, such works of romantic fiction are enormously popular. Sales figures in the industry are notoriously suspect, but it is estimated that 250 million copies of "trademark romances" (Harlequin, Silhouette and Mills and Boon are the best known imprints) are sold each year and the market for second-hand volumes is reputed to be equally brisk (Dubino 1993).

Despite their undoubted popularity, works of romantic fiction are rarely short-listed for literary awards or are the recipients of critical acclaim (Berger 1992). On the contrary, they are routinely dismissed as mass produced fantasies that are atrociously written, mindlessly consumed and concocted according to the same tired and tiresome recipe. Albeit a commonplace, such disparagement is not simply a reflection of literary critics' traditional hostility toward the popular - the "if it sells it must be devoid of merit" school of thought. Nor is it merely a manifestation of misguided male commentators, such as the much-maligned Margolies (1982), who are quick to condemn "the things women enjoy, from soap opera to melodrama to romance fiction, as superficial and over-emotional trash, while football and detective fiction are elevated to semi-mystical heights" (Moore 1991, p.86). The disdain, in fact, is also attributable to first generation of radical feminist writers who regarded romantic fiction as sugar-coated instantiations of oppressive patriarchal ideology. The phallocentrism in the novels' basic premise, that the attainment of consummation bliss is the principal aspiration of contemporary womankind, was not only inaccurate, outmoded and simplistic, but it also served to reinforce the very structures of androcentric subordination that the women's movement sought to overthrow. As Germaine Greer (1971, p.188) pointed out in The Female Eunuch, romantic fiction is "the opiate of the supermenial...[which]...sanctions drudgery, physical incompetence and prostitution".

If the first generation of feminist critics regarded romantic fiction as politically regressive, the second generation has adopted a much more positive stance. As a result of the pioneering investigations by Tania Modell (1982) and Janice Radway (1987), which respectively comprised a comprehensive re-assessment of "mass produced fantasies" and an empirical study of the reading habits of 49 married women, the emancipatory function of romantic fiction is now frequently acknowledged, albeit not necessarily of its own small way romances are making a meaningful contribution to the gratification of female emancipation (Pearce and Stacey 1995).

Strangely, the perspective of the second generation of feminist critics is still largely confined to Scruples and Scruples Two. In addition, it addresses an aspect of popular culture - romantic fiction - which possesses considerable, though largely unexplored, research potential (however, see Serr 1991; Scott 1993; Serr and Hollbrook 1994). As the generic term for the sub-genre amply testifies, "sex 'n' shopping" novels are likely to contain much of intrinsic interest to marketing and consumer researchers.

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Alongside this change in critical temper, the nature of the books themselves has been radically transformed. Although the style, structure and settings of the novels remain decidedly conventional, contemporary romantic fiction tends to be much more sexually explicit than before (traditional trademark romances of the Mills and Boon or Silhouette variety were - and are - exceptionally chaste). Exemplified by the bestselling works of Jackie Collins, Shirley Conran and Jube Burchill, and variously referred to by the disparaging epithets "sex 'n' shopping" novels, "humping and hoarding" romances or the "shopping and fucking" sub-genre, they are invariably characterised by strong, aggressive, self-made female protagonists who seek sexual, economic and social independence, though not necessarily of that particular order of priority. On the contrary, sexual gratification is often treated as secondary to successful personal development, the attainment of career objectives and, above all, revelling in the material rewards of their hard-earned endeavours. As Lewallen (1988, p.89) emphasises, "profitable commodities and designer names drip through the pages as indicators of the heroines' increasing wealth and success".

The origins of the "sex 'n' shopping" novel have been traced back to Flaubert's Madame Bovary, the "bodice-ripper" sub-genre, of which Winstone's Forever Amber is a prime example and the latter-day era of female sexual emancipation epitomised by Jong's Fear of Flying and Susann's Valley of the Dolls (de Bottone 1994). It is generally accepted, however, that the works of Judith Krantz comprise the apotheosis of this particular literary form. According to Cadogan's (1994, p.304) recent history of the romantic fiction genre, "the dismissive 'shopping and fucking' (S and F) tag has probably been tied on Judith Krantz's novels more than those of any other romantic block-busting best-sellers".

Born in Manhattan, educated at Wellesley College and married to a Hollywood movie and television producer, Krantz began her literary career as a fashion editor and contributor to various women's magazines. Her first book, Scruples, was published in 1978, to considerable popular if not critical acclaim, and she has since written seven further works of romantic fiction, most of which became No.1 best-sellers and were made into television mini-series. While all of her novels, portraying the glamorous, hyper-affluent lifestyle that Krantz knows at first hand, have proved extremely popular (career sales to date have been calculated at more than 50 million copies), perhaps her most celebrated creation is Scruples, the self-proclaimed "best fashion store in the world". Scruples, in fact, is turning into something of a literary mini-series in itself, since no less than three of Krantz's (1978, 1982, 1994) eight novels feature the characters associated with the fictional boutique.

However, as the third and most recent of these volumes, Lovers, does not deal directly with the trials and tribulations of the retail store, the present investigation is confined to Scruples and Scruples Two.

PLOT SUMMARY

The protagonist of Scruples is Whilhelmina Hunnenwell Winthrop Ikehorn, or Billy for short. Born into the impoverished wing of a rich Boston family, Billy is a grotesquely over-weight and unloved child who fails to get into college and is sent to Paris for a year. This ugly duckling, however, returns to the United States as a beautiful and sophisticated swan having lost weight, learnt French, had a doomed love affair with an impoverished aristocrat and, most importantly of all, having developed an acute fashion sense. She enrols in secretarial college in New York, joins an affair with and then marries its fabulously wealthy seat-uponanerparatorian founder, Ellis Ikehorn, and after his death inherits his entire fortune. As an extremely affluent young widow, she indulges in an orgy of compulsive consumption, but due to Rodeo Drive's inability to satisfy her needs, she decides to establish her own specialty clothing store, the...
eponymous Scruples. Although it is the last word in retailing luxury, the store is unsuccessful and is only rescued by the appointment of marketing authority, Spider Elliott, and haute couture specialist Valentine O’Neill. Between them, they completely re-organise, re-arrange, re-stock, re-position and, eventually, re-launch the new, improved Scruples to enormous acclaim, instant success and unparalleled profitability. Secure in her position as a fashion retailing superstar, Billy is invited by one of her regular customers to the Cannes film festival. There she meets, is charmed by, falls in love with and subsequently marries a dynamic, wheeler-dealing, somewhat unscrupulous film producer, Vito Orsini. She assists with the making of his next film, Mirrors, which wins the Oscar for best picture, despite the studio’s attempt at sabotage. The book ends on Oscars night with Billy pregnant, Vito triumphant and Spider and Valentine in love.

Scruples Two opens on Oscars night with Billy pregnant, Vito triumphant and Spider and Valentine in love, but the euphoria does not last for long. Billy quickly realises that she takes second place to Vito’s career and discovers that he has a sixteen-year-old daughter from a previous marriage, Gigi Orsini. Outraged at Vito’s neglect of his offspring and traumatised by a miscarriage, she initiates divorce proceedings, takes Gigi under her wing and is emotionally devastated by an accidental fire which kills Valentine O’Neill and completely destroys the original store. Shattered by the death of his wife, Spider Elliott buys a yacht and sets off to sail around the world. Billy closes down the entire Scruples operation, flees to Paris where she has a passionate fling with a sculptor, only to retreat to New York after his abrupt termination of the relationship. There she catches up with the progress of her step-daughter, Gigi Orsini, who has developed a passion for collecting antique lingerie and shares an apartment with Sasha Nevsky, an avid catalogue shopper and self-styled “Great Slut of Babylon”. Not the most reticent of individuals, Sasha suggests to Billy that they develop a Scruples mail order catalogue featuring Gigi’s antique creations. Outraged at the very thought of debasing Scruples’ good name, Billy flies in high dudgeon to Los Angeles, and calls to see Spider Elliott, recently returned from his travels. Spider recognises the potential of the catalogue shopping concept and persuades Billy that it might just work. After the development of an appropriate format, Sasha and Gigi relocate to Los Angeles and the book ends with Spider and Billy in love and, needless to say, the Scruples Two catalogue a triumphant success.

DECONSTRUCTING SCRUPLES

As the foregoing synopsis indicates, the Scruples novels are suffused with designer labels, brand names, marketing institutions and consumption activities-cum-pathologies. It is impossible to do justice to the books’ content in the present paper, but it is possible to offer a partial post-structuralist interrogation of the texts. Post-structuralism, as several leading exponents of the “literature in marketing” perspective have shown, differs from its more familiar predecessor in so far as it eschews the notion of deep, stable, unique, universal structures of underlying meaning (Scott 1992; Stern 1993). On the contrary, it maintains that the meaning of any textual artifact (and, according to post-structuralists, almost anything can be considered a “text” whether it be a haircut, holiday, motion picture or work of literature) is extremely difficult if not impossible to tie down. Meaning is contingent, unstable, temporary, suspended, deferred and very much dependent on both the specific use context and the interpretive preconceptions brought to the text by individual readers (Brown 1995).

There are a number of schools of post-structuralist thought and several methodological procedures associated with the movement (Selden and Widdowson 1993). Perhaps the best known of these is the deconstructive technique of Jacques Derrida (Broadbent 1991). Although it has entered popular parlance as a chic synonym for “subversion”, “investigation” or “analysis”, and although it is a methodology that eschews its methodological status, deconstruction is a procedure for interrogating texts which seeks to expose their inconsistencies, contradictions, unrecognised assumptions and implicit conceptual hierarchies. To show, as Norris (1991, p.35) aptly puts it, that a text “cannot mean what is says...or say what it means”. In theory, deconstruction involves the identification of binary oppositions, or polar antitheses, within the text (as per the structuralist orthodoxy), demonstrating that each pole is inherent in and dependent upon the other, and ultimately that neither is privileged or preferable. In practice, however, deconstructive readings of a Derridian kind invariably seize upon a small, seemingly inconsequential, aspect of the narrative in question and show how it reflects, infects and unlocks the entire textual edifice (Norris 1991).

With regard to the Scruples novels, the deconstructive key is inscribed in the four movies that are “made” in the course of the overall narrative. Apart from the obvious parallelism between both books - two movies are made in the first and two in the second - and a notable inclination towards inversion in their respective “performances” at the box office (a moderate failure and massive success in Scruples versus a massive failure and moderate success in Scruples Two), every single film involves some sort of transposition or reversal whether it be in time, space, actor and/or character. The same is true of the Scruples novels themselves in that they are mirror images - complete opposites - of one another. What is celebrated in Scruples One is disdained in Scruples Two, what is condemned in the former is lauded in the latter and issues that are overlooked in the first novel are central to the sequel. The books, in effect, cancel each other out. Like most works of literature, according to the notorious post-structuralist critic Paul de Man, the Scruples novels self-deconstruct.

When the books are examined in detail, a host of intriguing binary oppositions can be discerned. These include up/down, in/out, production/marketing, past/present and fake/real, all of which effectively transpose and erase themselves in the course of both novels. For the purposes of the present paper, however, discussion will be confined to two dichotomies that have been identified in previous investigations of “marketing in literature” and “literature in marketing”: namely, sacred/profane and male/female.

Sacred/Profane

In what is perhaps the nearest published equivalent to the present study, Elizabeth Hirschman (1991) has conducted a literary analysis of Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol. The fundamental underpinning structure consisted of a sacred/secular (or profane) duality, which was made manifest in the characters, settings, possessions, and overall consumption activities portrayed in the book (and which, according to Hirschman, is evident in numerous other works of popular culture). This sacred/profane antithesis is equally apparent in the Scruples novels, though it is somewhat less pronounced than in Dickens’ much-loved masterpiece. Indeed, such is the extent of the mendaciousness, coueteness, maliciousness, deceitfulness, selfishness, lasciviousness and gross moral turpitude portrayed in Krankz’s best-sellers, and so pervasive is obscenity and blasphemy, that a casual reader might reasonably conclude that the books are paeans to profanity rather than celebrations of the sacred. As is well known, however, one of the key premises of structuralism and post-structuralism is that textual signs derive meaning from what they are not. Hence, the unremitting inventory of the seven deadly sins, only serves to throw the sacred side of the Scruples novels into particularly sharp relief.

This sacredness is made apparent in many small acts of kindness, generosity and nobility perpetrated by the principal characters - for example, Aunt Cornelia’s early concern for her unloved and unlovable niece, Billy’s devotion to Ellis Ikehorn after his incapacitation and her self-appointed role as Gigi Orsini’s godmother - but it is most clearly marked in the personal achievements of the protagonists. Virtually every figure in the books is an embodiment of the American Dream and a monument to the adage that it is necessary to suffer in order to succeed. Whether it be Billy Ikehorn, Vito Orsini, Valentine O’Neill, Maggie McGregor, Gigi Orsini or whomever, each and every one emerged from a poor, dysfunctional or in some way underprivileged background and attained the pinnacle of personal accomplishment, financial well-being and social status by dint of sheer hard work and a determination to make it regardless of the odds, obstacles or setbacks. They thus earned the right to indulge in various forms of conspicuous consumption - dressing in the most elegant outfits, dining in the most exclusive restaurants, boasting the most extravagant displays of jewellery, driving the most expensive automobiles, staying in the very best suites in the very best hotels, or purchasing apartments, aeroplanes, vineyards or retail stores on the merest whim.
In recent years, a number of prominent marketing and consumer researchers have argued that meaningful insights can be obtained by treating men as sexual playthings and readily disposable commodities (see Hirschman and Stern 1994). Apart from its apparent lack of focus on the heroine, the advertisement provided a classic illustration of the various elements of formula romances - courtship, consumption, love, fantasy, matrimony and sexual decorum - though this interpretation is predicated to some extent on the gender of the reader.

Even when allowances are made for gender induced distortions, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Scruples novels do not offer a conventional portrayal of romantic love. As noted earlier, the entire sex ‘n’ shopping sub-genre is distinguished by its abandonment of the traditional Harlequin or Mills and Boon style heroine - passive, flighty, loving and subordinate to the aggressive, pagan, domineering, often brutal, qualities of the heroic male. In actual fact, Scruples comprises a complete reversal of the archetypal romantic fiction schema, in that the female protagonist is endowed with the “standard” male characteristics. She is tall, dark, handsome, temperamental, unpredictable, impetuous, driven and totally indifferent to wedded bliss, parenthood and pleasures of procreation. “To a stranger who might have seen her for the first time at that moment, and assessed her height, her proud walk, her strong throat, as a very special knack for moving through a woman’s mind, trading easily in her idiom, ...” (p.26). Endowed, moreover, with a voracious sexual appetite (cf the succession of nurses during Ellis Ikehorn’s incapacitation), the heroine is more than capable of treating men as sexual playthings and readily disposable commodities (see Hirschman and Stern 1994).

If, as her name implies, Billy is a female embodiment of the masculine qualities of the romantic hero, Spider Elliott exemplifies the traditional romantic heroine. Although he is a man among men, a rampant heterosexual in the notoriously homosexual milieu of high fashion and glamorous photography, he is endowed with numerous ostensibly “feminine” characteristics. He is intuitive, creative, sensitive, artistic, trusting, empathetic, caring, desperate for romantic fulfilment and determined to find the one true love of his life. This quest ultimately proves successful when he marries Valentine O’Neill, though it is noteworthy that she is described as “boyish” and, indeed, that her first sexual encounter is with Alan Wilton, a leading fashion designer and closet homosexual. Be that as it may, the feminine side of Spider’s nature figures prominently in the narrative. “He had a passion for everything and anything that was part of the female element in the world...[and possessed a]...very special knack for moving through a woman’s mind, trading easily in her idiom, speaking directly to her, cutting across the barriers of masculinity and femininity” (pp.14, 84).

Set against this usurpation of romantic fiction conventions, Scruples continues to adhere to one particularly important aspect of the genre - its preoccupation with consumption. As the foregoing plot summary indicates, the entire narrative is suffused with the celebration of consumption behaviour. It reeks of luxury, influence, profligacy, pampered self-indulgence and, indeed, aspiration. The book contains numerous detailed descriptions of complete outfits, interior designs, social mores and fashion advice for, presumably, the super-rich aspirants among the readership. So much so, that one reviewer, the renowned feminist writer and critic Angela Carter (1982, p.153) concluded that, “the final effect of the novel is of being sealed inside a luxury shopping mall whilst being softly pelted with scented sex technique manuals”. True, the negative consequences of unbridled consumption are referred to at length and in no uncertain terms. Nevertheless, compared to the eschewal of excess, the consuming rectitude, the abandonment of wasteful extravagance that is exhibited in Scruples Two, it is undeniable that the first novel is an extended, occasionally ecstatic, encomium to the hedonistic joys of irresponsible, irrepressible, unrestrained consumption behaviour.

Ironically, the distaste for conspicuous consumption that typifies Scruples Two is unconventional in itself, in so far as the entire book represents a reversion to romantic fiction norms. Whereas the first book comprised an innovative break from the traditional formula, the sequel regresses to the same. It is a relatively traditional, comparatively chaste, very orthodox work of romantic fiction. The novel is replete with references to flower arranging, cookery, gardening, courtship, parenthood, sensible clothing, school choice and teenage emotional trauma, topics which simply do not feature in the first book. Billy, moreover, becomes preoccupied with “traditional” female concerns of finding true love, familial responsibilities, monogamous relationships and her soft, gentle, generous, vulnerable side is on display throughout. Spider Elliott, by contrast, is transformed into a “real man” by dint of his stoic forbearance after the death of Valentine and his abandonment of the effete world of fashion retailing for the archetypal “masculine” aspiration to circumnavigate the globe (on his return, Billy even refers to his “pagan” qualities). Indeed, the book actually concludes with that most cliched of romantic fiction clichés - Spider proposing to Billy on bended knee in a secret garden. This, needless to say, is swiftly followed by the sort of culminating embrace that is known in the romantic fiction industry as “the big clinch” (Jones 1980).

CONCLUSION

In recent years, a number of prominent marketing and consumer researchers have argued that meaningful insights can be obtained by
means of literary analysis. This paper has attempted to further the "marketing in literature" and "literature in marketing" research traditions by exploring the consumption behaviours in two best-selling sex 'n' shopping novels of Judith Krantz. Although it comprises a small portion of a more extensive research programme, which deals with Scruples' explication of compulsive consumption, materialism, gift-giving, hedonic consumption, acculturation and theories of retail change (not to mention a straightforward content analysis of brand name citation), the paper highlighted the marked differences between the two novels. A historicist interpretation of these differences might seek to explain them in terms of the contrasting socio-economic climates in which the books were written (late '70s versus early '90s), but the present paper argues that they represent an instantiation of post-structuralist literary theory. Two previously established binary oppositions - sacred/profane and male/female - were identified in the novels, as was their inversion, erasure and ultimate self-deconstruction.

REFERENCES

Hirschman (1993), Berlin: de Gruyter, 286-295.
Define sexual inequality in various societies. Discuss theoretical perspectives on sex and sexuality. Introduction to Gender, Sex, and Sexuality. When Harry was born, his parents, Steve and Barb, were delighted to add another boy to their family. We will also explore various theoretical perspectives on the subjects of gender and sexuality.

12.1. The Difference between Sex and Gender. Figure 12.2. In his 1948 work Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, Kinsey writes, â€œMales do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats â€œ' The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspectsâ€ (Kinsey et al 1948). Figure 12.4.