



Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words

The Social Life of Goods

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The Nineteenth Century Series

October 2008
192 pages
978-0-7546-5578-7

234 x 156 mm
Hardback
£55.00



In 1850, Charles Dickens founded *Household Words*, a weekly miscellany intended to instruct and entertain an ever-widening middle-class readership. Published in the decade following the Great Exhibition of 1851, the journal appeared at a key moment in the emergence of commodity culture in Victorian England. Alongside the more well-known fiction that appeared in its pages, Dickens filled *Household Words* with articles about various commodities—articles that raise wider questions about how far society should go in permitting people to buy and sell goods and services: in other words, how far the laissez-faire market should extend.

At the same time, *Household Words* was itself a commodity. With marketability clearly in view, Dickens required articles for his journal to be 'imaginative,' employing a style that critics ever since have too readily dismissed as mere mannerism. Locating the journal and its distinctive handling of non-fictional prose in relation to other contemporary periodicals and forms of print culture, this book demonstrates the role that *Household Words* in particular, and the Victorian press more generally, played in responding to the developing world of commodities and their consumption at midcentury.

Contents

Introduction; Advertising fictions; The genuine article, the sham and the problem of authenticity; 'The key of the street'; 'Men made by machinery'; Worldly goods; 'Trading in death'; 'Fashion in undress'; Bibliography; Index.

About the Author

Catherine Waters is a senior lecturer in English at the University of New England (New South Wales). She is the author of *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (1997) and various articles on Victorian fiction and journalism.

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