

Sophie Gee. *Making Waste: Leftovers in the Eighteenth-Century Imagination*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. x+196pp. US\$26.95. ISBN 978-0-69113984-5.

The book jacket announces the subject with a glorious, full-colour reproduction of a scene from William Hogarth's *The Election: Chairing the Member*. Cropped to omit a complicated human scene, this framing features some agitated swine who are about to plunge off a footbridge. The pigs, then, appear to carry the semiotic weight for "waste" and to proclaim the book's subject. Sadly, the pigs never reappear within the book. In this way, *Making Waste* does not quite live up to anticipation. Where the jacket sets up the expectation for a wide-scale cultural analysis or perhaps for a historical exploration of actual material waste—stuff such as rubbish, excrement (pig feces?) and so on—Sophie Gee's real focus is more abstract, namely the philosophical nature of waste in the long eighteenth century. Though actual waste is sometimes referenced—the ruins of the Great Fire of London, for instance—the overall trajectory of the book is, according to its author, to track the motion of waste as it changes from being "the literal" to "the notional," or from being "residue created by historical events" to "being the leftovers created by literary narratives" (5).

To be sure, the book has its virtues. It works especially well when it explores the deeply paradoxical nature of waste, as succinctly and elegantly summarized in a late chapter: "[Waste] is empty but full. Abject but life-intended. It putrefies, and it proliferates ... We want to dispose of it, and we long to hold on to it. Waste is a sign that our lives are beset by loss ... our instinct is to banish waste from sight, but our deeper desire is to memorialize it, to forestall loss ... Waste, a sight of decay, disaffection, disgust, dismay, refusal, is the physical manifestation of the human experience of loss, the closest we get to death on a daily basis" (108). Working off these paradoxes, the chapters on Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe have their special strengths. In the chapter "The Man on the Dump," Gee maintains that Swift prized waste "because, in its abjection, it told a story of Englishness that he particularly wanted to have told" (91). Unlike Joseph Addison, Swift ridiculed the idea that waste could be made to look like plenitude (97), and for him madness absolutely lies in the inability to tell the difference between waste and plenitude. Gee locates this concern in Swift's rejection of Roman Catholic doctrine, and in particular in the idea that base matter can be made divine (99). Swift's insistence on the "reality" of waste serves to rebuke his political adversaries (107). None of these arguments are entirely new, yet framed within the wider context of the book, they have a special coherence. Gee's reading of the much-discussed "A Lady's Dressing Room" adds poignancy to the

poem by perceiving the paradoxical nature of Strephon's condition, the ways in which "desire and disgust are usually directed toward the same object," and the fact that "the things we most love threaten to decay into the putrefaction of which we are most afraid" (111).

The Defoe chapter, "Holding on to the Corpse: Fleshly Remains in *A Journal of the Plague Year*," is arguably the strongest and most original, as Gee focuses on the human remnants and leftovers that fill the narrative. She argues that the corpses crowding the landscape as a result of the plague are waste, yet they are waste that is loved: Defoe's narrative captures the tension between desire to retain and desire to dispose of the corpse. His narrative also emphasizes proximity of vitality to waste and taps more broadly into a deeply paradoxical human response to waste.

Earlier chapters serve to explore the linguistic nature of "waste," and, though they cannot be faulted for their erudition, they can appear to belong to a somewhat different project, one that sounds like the dissertation from which they appear to have issued. The opening chapter argues that John Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis" creates "a 'hybrid wasteland' that 'synthesized the material and ideological failures of Restoration urban culture'" (34). The actual experience of the burnt-out city seemed to match biblical imagery of rubble familiar from Puritan pamphlets, but it was experienced as an uncomfortable fullness that was perversely pleasurable for the commercial possibilities it afforded. It is as if—anticipating the philosophy of Bataille—Dryden struggles to understand how "wasteful excess" and valuable surplus could be dialectically related (36).

The discussion turns next to *Paradise Lost*, read here as a polemic about the Restoration. Tapping a pervasive anxiety about waste in John Milton's writing, Gee argues that "Miltonic waste is often surprising, counterintuitive, perplexing" (43). She reads him against other contemporary pamphleteers who were preoccupied with changing the meaning of the rural wasteland from a term of geography to a word denoting the worthlessness of land and people, which in turn made it a place ripe for improvement (49). But Gee's Milton is a "radical monist" who rejects the notion that matter is dead or inanimate and that its value is ultimately subject to economic concerns.

Chapter 3 finds Alexander Pope paralleling Milton in his commitment to unfashionable politics. Along with Milton, Pope insists that matter is arranged in a hierarchy that cannot be manipulated arbitrarily but must be evaluated according to the determining authority of an external force (80). Gee finds this idea most clearly in the *Dunciad*, which, when read intertextually with *Paradise Lost*, expresses an interest in unwanted surplus and appears preoccupied with the distinction between waste and profitable abundance in the print market of Grub Street (77). Pope responded to Milton's vitalistic materialism, especially as the South Sea Bubble modelled the dangers of an economic theory based on alchemical change (83).

Thus, though the methodology of the second part of the book owes much to cultural criticism—showing a special debt to Joseph Roach, among others—the first part of the book draws more heavily on a broad historicism and fairly traditional close-reading practices. The book appears layered, then, as if the author were still in the process of discovering her topic and her methodology while she wrote. The book ends rather oddly, with a scant, six-page afterword covering the topic of “the leftovers created by literary narratives,” despite the introduction’s promise that this topic will be a major aspect of the overall argument.

Waste, along with the related topics of garbage, recycling, and so on, shows every sign of rapidly becoming a “hot topic,” so this is unlikely to be the last book exploring the subject in an eighteenth-century context. Gee starts this conversation in fruitful and enlightening ways.

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Jan Herman, Adrien Pachoud, Paul Pelckmans et François Rosset, éd. *L'Assiette des fictions: Enquêtes sur l'autoréflexivité romanesque*. Louvain: Peeters, 2010. vi+490pp. 45€. ISBN 978-90-429-2196-2.

Cet ouvrage réunit les actes de deux colloques tenus aux universités de Lausanne et de Leuven en 2007 avec de nombreuses contributions dont la diversité et la qualité font tout l'intérêt d'une recherche consacrée à l'autoréflexivité des romans d'Ancien Régime. Ainsi qu'il est annoncé, nombre de ces fictions, « tout en construisant des univers artificiels entre expérience du réel, investigation des possibles et produits de l'imagination, renvoient au lecteur une interrogation pluridimensionnelle sur les constituants, le statut, la motivation, les valeurs heuristiques de la fiction elle-même ». L'autoréflexivité prend des formes multiples: figures incarnant la réflexivité elle-même, scènes ou décors mettant en valeur la dimension spatiale des fictions, séquences narratives, objets signalant fictionalité (ainsi la subtile analyse de F. Rosset concernant les faux-monnayeurs), dimensions génériques. Aussi les contributions abordent-elles des perspectives aussi fécondes qu'originales. Les œuvres exemplaires sont bien présentes: *Don Quichotte*, le *Roman comique*, *Gil Blas*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Jacques le Fataliste*, le *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, mais également des œuvres moins attendues comme *La Prétieuse ou le mystère des ruelles*, *Clélie*, les *Nouvelles françaises*, *Paul et Virginie*, etc.