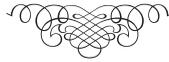


INTRODUCTION



Making Waste

IN 1772 the Frenchman Pierre Jean Grosley's *Tour to London; or, New Observations on England and its Inhabitants* praised London as Europe's most sophisticated metropolis: well-paved, well-lighted, convenient and modern. The best passages, however, leave us with an altogether different impression of the capital, a dirty, difficult place, darkened by pollution and contaminated with filth:

In the most beautiful part of the Strand and near St. Clement's church I have, during my whole stay in London, seen the middle of the street constantly foul with a dirty puddle to the height of three or four inches; a puddle where splashings cover those who walk on foot; fill up coaches when their windows happen not to be up, and bedaub all the lower parts of such houses as are exposed to it. In consequence of this, the prentices are frequently employed in washing the fronts of their houses, in order to take off the daubings of the dirt which they had contracted overnight. The English are not afraid of this dirt, being defended from it by their wigs of a brownish curling hair, their black stockings, and their blue surtouts which are made in the form of a nightgown.¹

This visitor starts describing one of the most beautiful ecclesiastical monuments in London, St. Clement's Church, but he is diverted by the filth that surrounds it. Waste animates his prose. The "dirty puddle" is a primordial lake, chaotic and unformed, spawning the life of Grosley's

tableau. Animation comes from abjection, not from the divine splendor of St. Clement's, which remains static and aloof. The verbs all describe defilement—"cover," "fill up," "bedaub." Dirt, vital and moving, coats the church, the citizens, the coaches and buildings, the elements that would compose a static eighteenth-century London "view"—that pictorial idiom for urban description to which Grosley is paying prose homage. But in this view the splendid buildings, London's ecclesiastical and secular facades, are eclipsed, literally, by a different kind of abundance: proliferating filth. In a contest between the divine splendor and abject surplus, abjection wins out.

The apprentices wash the housefronts each morning to efface its traces, but the very repetitiveness of their task gives it a ritualistic quality—reverent, even—especially in a passage where a description of secular defilement and purification takes over from that of a sacred monument. Londoners "are not afraid of this dirt," and yet their courage depends on their being fortified against it: they are encased in weatherproof armor. This same abjection gives London its life, not just the life-affirming beat that runs through Grosley's prose, but the cultural life of eighteenth-century London too: its fashions, its quotidian rhythms and patterns emerge, in this account, from befoulment. The "foul and dirty puddle" next to St. Clement's Church insists on abjection persisting beside divinity. This proximity of waste to divine splendor is no coincidence of urban geography but paradigmatic, providing vital clues for a literary history of eighteenth-century waste.

A glut of waste matter fills the pages of eighteenth-century literature, not just in minor texts but in canonical works such as *Paradise Lost*, *The Tale of a Tub*, "A Modest Proposal," and *A Journal of the Plague Year*. The waste is nothing if not memorable: Milton's infernal dregs, Swift's odious excrement, Pope's pissing contests, Defoe's corpses. It catches the eye all the more because it is matter that, at the time, was supposed to be ignored. But English writers did not neglect their waste. Dung, guts, and mud, dead dogs and turnip tops, sweep through the pages of eighteenth-century writing—putrid scraps that become perverse signs of metaphoric meaning and successful representation. Bernard Mandeville, praising English prosperity in *The Fable of the Bees*, told Londoners to

treasure the dunghills in the streets, the running drains, animals, and crowds of beggars as daily reminders of London's wealth.² This book takes Mandeville's adage seriously and asks what, exactly, it meant for eighteenth-century English writing to treasure its waste.

Writers in eighteenth-century London and Dublin who described dust and decay, excrements and rotting corpses, were already reaching toward the psychoanalytic, philosophical, and anthropological insights of Freud, Kristeva, Aurel Kolnai, Mary Douglas, and other twentieth-century theorists of abjection. Without their language or analytical methods, eighteenth-century writers understood waste by way of idioms harvested from material conditions and philosophical and theological debates, finding imagery to describe the phenomenon Kristeva would call the abject, in which looms "one of those violent, dark revolts of being."³ Twentieth-century waste theory is a subject I return to; here I want to note the overlap between early modern and modern philosophy.

The first chapter of *Making Waste* begins with descriptions of physical waste: the debris that filled the streets of London after the Great Fire. It was oppressive and superfluous, a threat to London's very existence because it took the place of houses and public buildings. It was shocking and traumatic for its citizens. But it also provided rich and promising imagery for literary texts: the literal wasteland of London after the fire evolved into the literary wastelands of modern literature; real debris was converted into the desolate, alienated urban landscape in which urban writing unfolds from *MacFlecknoe* to *The Waste Land*. Real waste thus became valuable in a quite straightforward way: it provided the imagery for describing a new sort of urban consciousness, and it provided the landscape details for a new literary setting. Literary metaphors and figurative language derive from the material conditions of history.⁴

But literal waste, visible and real, transformed by the literary imagination, is not the only sort of residue in eighteenth-century texts. Another kind of waste, which wasn't lying around in the streets, was the subject matter of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century philosophical and theological debates about matter, examples of which include the cosmic materials that went unused at Creation, the residues of human digestion,

and the terrestrial flesh discarded at the resurrection. Some of this waste was in plain view, to be sure, but it was primarily of philosophical and theological interest, which is to say that it was attended to because it showed what was important and interesting about the concept, the very notion, of waste. The waste matter of eighteenth-century philosophy was usually seen as valuable *because* it was a leftover: a sign that something important had happened, leaving a residue behind.

Waste was a subject of intellectual inquiry for another reason, too: natural philosophers were interested in the problem of how substances were differentiated—why one was waste and another had value—when materially there appeared to be no distinction between them (which is to say, late seventeenth-century science had not yet grasped the difference). The process of differentiation between waste and value happened in places both seen and unseen: the human body in the case of digestion; the cosmos in the case of Creation; the Day of Judgment in the case of resurrection. My chapters on Pope, Swift, and Defoe explain the details of such debates. My larger claim is that the imaginative terms of seventeenth-century philosophy and theology generate literary metaphors for describing distinction. Intellectual debate, as much as material and social conditions, gives writers the language with which they write.

There is yet a third kind of residue, neither material nor “philosophical,” which I describe. This is a type of leftover best described as literary, because it is waste that exists only in the pages of literary texts. By this I mean the waste that is the fallout of representation itself, leftovers created by the fact that objects in literary texts have symbolic meaning, meaning differentiated from the natural object itself. Take Sophia Western’s muff in *Tom Jones* as an instance of what I mean. At the beginning of the novel the muff is fresh and new, so vivid to the imagination that the reader can imagine the silky feel of its pelt as Tom Jones strokes his hand across its surface. By the end of the novel it is filthy and worn, unwanted and forgotten—but it is nonetheless the symbolic vessel that has carried Tom and Sophia’s mutual attraction and affection safely from one end of the novel to the other, in the face of betrayal, indifference, and neglect. The muff is freighted with a complex narrative that outstrips the meaning of the object in itself, which Fielding draws attention to by having the muff look so dejected and un-mufflike by the end of the book. Objects,

the vessels of symbolic meaning, become leftovers, kernels of reality that remain behind after fictional meaning has been made.⁵ Like all waste, these residues provoke both pleasure and anxiety; they are reminiscent of life and death at the same time. While the waste produced by symbolic meaning takes us far from the literal dust and ashes of postfire London, I am arguing that symbolic residues in later eighteenth-century texts emerge formally from the real debris of Restoration writing.

In the broadest sense the formal connection between fire literature and Sophia's Western's muff is that both are Protestant narratives, with shared assumptions about the relationship of material object to symbolic meaning.⁶ All the texts discussed in *Making Waste* belong to the Protestant tradition in the sense that they depend on there being a distinction between objects and their meanings: in Protestant hermeneutics, objects are vessels with symbolic referents, not relics endowed with innate value. But the connection between the literal waste of chapter 1 and the symbolic waste of the afterword is a matter of historical as much as notional continuity. The Great Fire put real waste into eighteenth-century literature, and established the wasteland as a crucial landscape in modern urban writing. As the eighteenth century goes forward, however, literary waste becomes increasingly abstract. Instead of dead dogs and morning toasts, we have muffs and fans; later still we have the circulating objects of it-narratives; and eventually, by the time Austen was writing, for example, we have Fanny Price's topaz cross in *Mansfield Park*, an object which, in being made a leftover by the adulterous and incestuous narratives mediated through it, also makes a leftover of Fanny, the heroine to whom it belongs. My study, which tracks the enormous power and capaciousness of waste in eighteenth-century literature, describes the slow turn waste makes from the literal to the notional, from being the residue created by historical events to being the leftovers created by literary narrative. In each chapter waste is three things at once: it is literal, manifest in material culture; it is philosophically charged, meaningful by virtue of its role in intellectual debate; and it is literary, which is to say that it is created by the very text in which it appears.

While this is not primarily a book about the real conditions of London and Dublin, it is important to point out that in the early eighteenth century waste was both constantly visible and seemingly ineradicable.⁷

When London expanded in the late seventeenth century after the fire and the plague, it was dubbed the “great wen,” and an “overgrown monster.”⁸ At this point it was inconceivable that urban prosperity could exist without the accompaniment of degraded remnants and filthy leftovers. Nobody could get away from dirt, as Emily Cockayne points out in a vivid description of life in the early eighteenth-century capital:

The poorest were doomed to trudge through the mire, their darned stockings soaking up water admitted through their leaking shoes. Wheels of carriages holding richer citizens splashed the threadbare coats of the street-level poor. However, on a daily basis both rich and poor endured discomfort—the rich in the name of fashion, the poor out of necessity. While the rich donned itchy ruffles and cumbersome wigs for show (scrubbed and powdered by the hired help), the ragtag poor wore patched clothes for warmth and protection.⁹

In everyday culture waste was already metaphorical as much as literal; it described the wasted lives, the waste people, the wasteland, which were vividly present. Cockayne observes that “to some, the destitute and street filth were synonymous—to cleanse the environment the authorities needed to expunge both.”¹⁰ The term “slum” was first coined in the early 1700s to describe the festering poorhouses of St. Giles, Whitechapel, and Clerkenwell.¹¹ Bills of mortality from the Restoration and early eighteenth century show that far more people died in London than were born there. Beggars and cripples lolled in doorways and passages. A visitor to London in the 1730s complained that one needed a servant to walk ahead, sweeping the vagrants out of the way with a broom. Open sewage swilled down the middle of London’s streets, animals were slaughtered in the city center, and hogs, dogs, and dead cats were left to rot.

Just how far off England was from anything like modern sanitation in the later seventeenth century is suggested by the fact that when Charles II’s court abandoned their temporary apartments in Oxford after the plague, they left piles of feces in the corners of every room and staircase, a common enough practice in the Restoration. People were outraged

by it, to be sure, but the proposed solution seems to us absurdly over-elaborate: to build spiral staircases instead of angular ones, so that people couldn't stop in corners to defecate. The notion that people could simply stop defecating in public was not yet self-evident.¹² It was no matter of mere theoretical curiosity but literally true to say that at the beginning of the eighteenth century prosperity and affluence still appeared to be inseparable from their opposites, waste and desolation.¹³ Alain Corbin, writing about the French resistance to hygiene in the same period, notes a "loyalty to filth," manifest in riots against cleanliness in the midcentury. Corbin's analysis is that filth had psychological value, untheorized but important:

A better understanding of this loyalty to filth depends in part on the role played by excrement in infant psychology and the importance of anality in the development of the psyche. It was by odor that the babe in arms experienced the mother's presence, before even seeing her. . . . The odor of the baby's feces was a summons to the mother; in his dealings with her the baby "produces something to smell from below and submits to something to smell from above": breast or bottle.¹⁴

As I've suggested, twentieth-century theoretical writing helps explain the complex imagery of waste in the eighteenth century by showing why it generates such ambivalence and anxiety in its beholders. The relatively underexamined essay *On Disgust* (1927) by the Hungarian psychoanalytic theorist and philosopher Aurel Kolnai, takes a phenomenological approach to the experience of disgust, a defense reaction to perceived threats. Kolnai's essay, which established parameters for abjection theorists whose work became more famous (Georges Bataille, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Julia Kristeva, among others), demarcates and defines the characteristics of "objects of disgust" and offers a working definition of the abject matter that comprises waste.

Disgusting objects provoke defensiveness by being linked to death and decay. But as Kolnai shows, putrefaction is reminiscent of both death and life and is therefore endlessly ambiguous and confronting. Decay *is* "deathly life":

[S]omething dead is never disgusting in its *mere non-functioning*, for then even fresh meat would be disgusting, which is definitely not the case. Rather, substantial decomposition is necessary, which must at least seem to put itself forward as a continuing process, almost as if it were after all just another manifestation of life. Already here we encounter the relation of disgust to what is positively vital, to what is animated. And indeed there is undoubtedly associated with the extinction of life in putrefaction a certain—quite remarkable—augmentation of life: a heightened announcement of the fact that *life is there*.¹⁵

Generally, the spectacle of “life in the wrong place,” characteristic of putrefaction, is only one of two signs of the disgusting object. As Kolnai observes, abject matter can also be marked by indistinctness or satiation, a quality of oozing diffuseness that makes no distinction between life and death or proliferation and rot: a “soft, gushing type of life which resists all solid formations, all discrimination, selection, all following up towards a goal and towards significance.”¹⁶ Indistinctness (as opposed to misplaced animation) is important to my argument because undifferentiated fullness is the material quality that permits waste and valuable abundance to be confused or conflated in literary texts. Each is marked by an “indecent surplus of life” that perversely causes them to resemble one another.

The waste matter in this book includes dirt and refuse, excrement and rotting corpses, but it also includes things that aren’t inherently abject: tears, money, books, and paper. These belong to a second category of non-biological, “morally disgusting objects,” which are capable of stimulating disgust because they are reminders of the excess and satiation of putrefaction. Objects of moral disgust have “excessive vitality or vitality whose unfurling is misplaced”; they arouse the feeling of “life in the wrong place.”¹⁷ Kolnai describes this connection between physical and moral disgust as a “physiological reminiscence,” a phrase that resonates powerfully for me because “reminiscence”—a recollection, often imperfect—is almost always present where there is waste: waste consists of leftovers that contain the memory or echo of the matter they used to be. Waste, even if it does not putrefy, is abject because it is characterized by misplaced, animating excess, inflecting it with the physiological reminiscence of decay.

But though waste almost always consists of matter connected to putrefaction, abjection is not enough to classify an object as waste. Waste is a form of pollution, marked as such by having participated in a process; that process is one wherein substance stops being acceptable or even valuable and becomes unwanted or taboo. This is important, because as Mary Douglas pointed out in *Purity and Danger*, pollution exists when a substance has crossed a border and become threatening to the system to which it now, improperly, belongs. “There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder,” Douglas quips.¹⁸ “Our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications,” upsetting social, cultural, and personal stability.¹⁹ Dirt is taboo not for its inherent qualities but because it is anomalous; it “is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained.”²⁰ And the fact of its being an anomaly itself signals the presence of a narrative that determines its “proper” place and polices the boundaries of that location. Dirt exists in the aftermath of a border crossing.

A crucial argument of this book is that waste is always *made*, not found—created by political and social processes, and, most importantly, by language itself. The fact that waste is a product, of language, politics, and society, means that its appearance in literature always marks the spot where a troubled process of making has occurred. But it is a process that readers frequently do not see, because all that remains is a leftover figured as abject matter. In eighteenth-century literary texts, the narratives connected to waste and its production have often been made to disappear; I rehabilitate them, showing that the appearance and disappearance of waste narratives is almost always politically motivated. Suzanne Raitt, a contemporary waste theorist influenced by Freud, Kristeva, and Lacan, argues that the presence of a narrative of its production is what distinguishes waste from all other types of leftover:

Detritus has its own taxonomy: “rubbish,” “garbage” and “litter,” for example, construct it as an essentially random, cumulative phenomenon, a by-product of our daily domestic lives. To call something “waste” on the other hand, is to invoke its history. Nuclear waste, bodily waste, and medical waste are all the result of specific

processes: they gesture back to the productive economies that generated them. Even in these days of recycling, waste is almost always disposed of or repudiated, sometimes indifferently, sometimes contemptuously, and even, on occasion, violently.²¹

My assumption here is that the meanings of eighteenth-century waste matter are to be found in the narratives, explicit or suppressed, that surround literary leftovers.

The most insidious instances of waste making occur where individuals or groups of people are positioned as abject. Eighteenth-century examples include the edible Irish babies in Swift's "A Modest Proposal" and the hairy, filthy Yahoos of *Gulliver's Travels*, seen as a contaminated subspecies by the compassionless Houynhymns. Mary Douglas argues that persons in a marginal state are vulnerable to being positioned as dangerous because they are "left out in the patterning of society," safer when identified as pollution (she uses the example of babies in primitive societies, reminding us again of Swift).²² Martha Nussbaum's explanation of the phenomenon is that the feeling of disgust justifies bias and social exclusion because it is treated as though it were a universal, "true" emotion. She argues, however, that disgust is "always suspect or problematic, in need of special scrutiny":

Because disgust embodies a shrinking from contamination that is associated with the human desire to be non-animal, it is more than like to be hooked up with various forms of shady social practice, in which the discomfort people feel over the fact of having an animal body is projected outwards onto vulnerable people and groups. These reactions are irrational, in the normative sense, both because they embody an aspiration to be a kind of being that one is not, and because, in the process of pursuing that aspiration, they target others for gross harms.²³

The most important contribution psychoanalytic theory makes to my study is to explain why waste simultaneously fascinates and disgusts, why it elicits simultaneous, competing desires to preserve and discard it. Kolnai's account is that "in its full intention it is death and not life that announces itself to us in the phenomenon of disgust,"²⁴ but that

the announcement of death stimulates aversion through its proximity to life—a proximity that often dissolves into exchangeability. “In the decomposition-products of life not only the withering of life but also the presence of life itself has a disgusting effect.”²⁵ Kristeva extends Kolnai’s analysis by claiming that the confusion, or conflation, of life and death is the very confusion of which the abject consists. Abjection is “a border that has encroached upon everything”; “abjection is above all ambiguity.”²⁶ According to Kristeva, abjection is terrifying because it has only the appearance of being an object. In reality it is the boundary that marks the passage from life to death, the very border of the self, and so it threatens the self because it is at once indistinct and alienated from it. “The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*.”²⁷

Each of these studies is animated by the perception that the pathology to which waste speaks is a fear of loss. In Freud’s analysis, fear of loss, which threatens the very state of being human, drives the desire for cleanliness and order: “dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization,” Freud writes. “Order is a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing shall be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision.”²⁸

A story from the Renaissance court provides a vivid historical background for my readings of eighteenth-century waste. In the late sixteenth century, John Harington, Queen Elizabeth’s godson—a brilliant but eccentric courtier, one of England’s most promising diplomats, scholars, and wits—designed an automated water closet. The author of a lavishly produced *Orlando Furioso* translation, as well as poems, essays, and epigrams, Harington seemed destined to become one of England’s most important intellectuals. But in 1596 he circulated his long and erudite manuscript, classical in style and full of ornate prose and complex allegory, named *The Metamorphosis of Ajax*. It is a Homeric parody that describes the invention and cultural significance of an automated water closet, and it includes a do-it-yourself manual for building one. Harington’s book became one of the most notorious courtly publications to circulate for the next 150 years.²⁹

As Harington’s Ovidian title implies, the proposal might have effected a domestic and civic transformation. Harington was imagining

two fundamental alterations in the fabric of England's social life. First, he pictured a metamorphosis from filth to cleanliness in the realm of domestic hygiene. Second, he imagined a transition whereby effluence stopped being public and became a private, hidden affair. Harington was, in essence, designing domestic privacy, asserting that a person's filth was his own business and that it was no longer something to be shared with others (even if those others were only the servants who emptied the chamber pots).

Harington's treatise includes an apocryphal story about a dung carrier, a hermit, a beautiful woman, and an angel. This dung carrier is walking through a great city in the evening, pushing a steaming barrow full of excrement in front of him. Coming the other way is a hermit, led on his journey by an angel. When the hermit smells the dung cart he retches, stops his nose, and crosses the street to avoid the stench of such a "sour carriage." The angel, who's made of steadier stuff, doesn't blanch. But a few moments later a beautifully dressed aristocratic woman comes rumbling through the street in a fine coach lit by blazing torches, on her way to a forbidden assignation with a gentleman. The angel stops his nose in disgust: this, not the dung cart, is for him the real "sour carriage." Harington glosses the tale cheerfully: "I wish all the readers may find as sure a way to cleanse, and keep sweet, the noblest part of themselves, that is their souls; as I shall show them a plain and easy way to keep sweet the basest part of their houses, that is their sinks."³⁰ In Harington's allegory the toilet was a figure for cleansing the soul.

But people didn't want to avail themselves of Harington's plan to "keep sweet the basest part of their houses." Like the angel, the sight of real excrement doesn't appear to have offended them as much as the fear of hidden pollutants. The dung cart left human filth openly displayed to public sight; the fine lady conceals her corruption beneath a surface of cleanliness. It seems at first surprising that readers would have found Harington's narrative seditious rather than consoling. But in fact the allegory of the hermit sounds a caution that Harington probably hadn't intended. The fine lady warned, inadvertently, of the social perils of personal hygiene. When filth couldn't be seen, it meant that a much more toxic pollution must be festering out of sight. To put it plainly: people didn't want to seem too clean.

England was in the middle of two centuries of political and religious conflict, seditious intrigue, and insecurity. The objects of persecution and paranoia were alternately Catholics, Puritans, royalists, republicans, and again Catholics. Political sectarians and religious dissenters were treated as the nation's excrement and flushed away. England's political elite and uneducated masses alike were worried about the existence of hidden menaces and festering traitors: no one was entirely safe in a world where political and religious boundaries were constantly shifting. When Harington described a contraption that made unwanted effluence disappear, and when he implied that his treatise was social allegory, it is hardly surprising that English courtiers were wary of his reforms, nor that subsequent generations remained suspicious of the hygienic efficiency he proposed. He seemed to promise exactly the kind of political cleansing that England had learned to dread.

The automated toilet of Harington's invention would have been far more than just a domestic gadget. The subtext of *The Metamorphosis* was that the efficient disposal of excrement was an allegory for England's social and political hygiene too. Harington's book met with a storm of criticism and anger. The court regarded his proposals as outrageous, and the treatise cost him his favor with the monarch.³¹ But while critics have argued about the precise nature of Harington's political and rhetorical blunders in writing the treatise, nobody has taken seriously the role played in the furor by the subject matter itself: the suggestion that toilets should flush. It is crucial to note that the Elizabethan court rejected Harington's proposal: there was something perversely undesirable about the idea of making waste disappear.

English society did eventually become less filthy. There still were no automated water closets, but eighteenth-century writers, politicians, and philosophers set out to create social and intellectual institutions that might conceivably efface England's polluted, uncivilized past. The coffee-house, the periodical, the public ball, the private assembly: these embodied the awakened ideal of a polite society—and the hope that public civility could cover over private conduct, to be penetrated only by the all-seeing gaze of the eighteenth-century novel. This, at least, was the idea.³²

As scholarship has shown, the cult of English politeness was not as dedicated to civility and regulation as might initially appear to be the

case—and it certainly did not secure them. When Ned Ward, the grubby, irreverent, scatological satirist, parodied the emerging cult of politeness at the beginning of the eighteenth century, he showed that abjection and civility were much harder to keep separate than people realized; he perceived what Kolnai would call the “physiological reminiscence” between them. In 1709 he printed a collection of satiric essays, *A History of the London Clubs*, including a sketch called “The Farting Club,” a satire on private clubs. In Ward’s travesty, a group of gentlemen (a “perfumed assembly”) gather weekly to host a farting contest: “The Liquors that they usually drank to Tune their Merry Arses, were new Ale and Juniper Water, till everyone was swell’d like a blown Bag-Pipe, and then they began to thunder out whole Volleys like a Regiment of Train’d Banks . . . till the Room they sat in stunk ten times worse than a Tom-Turd Man’s Bucket.”³³ When their farting becomes too vigorous, performers are sent into the next room to have their breeches examined by the lady of the house, lest the “nasty Bird had befoul’d his own Nest.” In Ward’s satire, it is a sign of gentlemanliness that these farters check their breeches, and a sign of the artifice of politeness that they are holding a farting contest at all. The habits of civilized society—fine clothes, elaborate manners, complicated social rituals—are visions of excess, like the farts themselves. It’s easy for Ward to substitute a farting competition for the activity that normally goes on in private clubs because both are superfluities: literally and figuratively hot air.

Jonathan Swift’s description of a chamber pot opens up the unstable meanings of literary waste in the period still further. There are many brimming chamber pots in Swift; this one is from *Directions to Servants*, his parody of a housekeeping manual. Mockingly encouraging servants to behave negligently, Swift’s pompous speaker imagines a scene in which a maid exposes her mistress’s excrement to a party of arriving guests:

I am very much offended with those ladies, who are so proud and lazy, that they will not be at the pains of stepping into the garden to pluck a rose, but keep an odious implement, sometimes in the bed chamber itself, or at least in a dark closet adjoining, which they make use of to ease their worst necessities; and you are the usual carriers away of the pan, which maketh not only the chamber, but

even their clothes offensive, to all who come near. Now, to cure them of the odious practice, let me advise you, on whom this office lieth, to convey away this utensil, that you will do it openly, down the great stairs, and in the presence of the footmen; and, if anybody knocketh, to open the street door, while you have the vessel in your hands.³⁴

The joke is that if servants behave badly enough, they will be saved the trouble of working at all. But it's more complicated than that, as it always is with Swift. What we're seeing is another instance of people holding on to waste. It's treated like a precious substance: first saved in a porcelain receptacle and then displayed, ceremonially, if maliciously, to visitors. Excrement is two things at once: a leftover so secret that it must be produced somewhere unseen (a dark closet) but also the object of ceremony. Even though this is a joke, the joke turns on the fact that filth and splendor are alike. The servants themselves are muckrakers, to be sure, but they are also officeholders, "carriers away of the pan," the persons "on whom this office lieth." There's even a quasi-liturgical feel about the ritual, a hint—underscored by Swift's calling the pot a "vessel"—that the turds have become, in the servants' hands, sacred objects.

On the one hand, a private residence is a place where shameful and pleasurable acts can be conducted in secret (the excreting and fornicating that go on in the bedchamber), but on the other hand it is where visitors get to see evidence of a family's prosperity and success (the files of footmen, the formal opening of the door by a servant). The juxtaposition is contained in the spectacle of the chamber pot, and the guests are shown the turds as though they were canapés, little signs of hostly generosity. The servants bear the utensil "in the presence of footmen," as at a dinner; in a small household these might even be the same servants who serve food, as detailed in other sections of the *Directions*.

The scene is already doing what we know novels were about to do: the narrator penetrates private spaces—in this case both domestic and digestive interiors—to emphasize the formal power of literature to cross social and architectural boundaries. And in crossing boundaries, it causes confusion. Domestic waste gets glorified, converted into something magnificent and ceremonial, and yet it remains abject and taboo. Part of Swift's

joke, indeed, is that people go to visit one another's houses precisely because they are hoping to take a peek at others' secret shame—to see their excrement. These visitors must, after all, already know what they will find behind their friends' closed doors, since they share the same dirty secrets. Waste inhabits both sides of the boundary between private production and public display.

Whenever there is a remnant, a leftover, there is also abundance. In the instance of the Great Fire, the debris of burnt-out London supplied the imagery for describing a new kind of urban experience: degraded, alienated, but profoundly resonant and meaningful. But waste signified something more complicated too, as this example from Swift reveals. It is the remnant that marks the place where meaning has been generated. The turds are carried as if in a sacred vessel, but here the sacramental offering is not glorious but repulsive, base matter being treated as though it were divine. The scene models a parody of the sacrament that Swift will repeat in *A Tale of a Tub*, in *Gulliver's Travels*, and in his patriotic polemics: one of his most common satiric tricks is to describe abject matter that gets mistaken for something precious. In *A Tale of a Tub*, the parody is explicit: the brother Peter carves a loaf of bread, declaring that it is a haunch of flesh. In *Directions to Servants*, the abjection of ordinary matter is emphasized in the process of turning it into a secular offering. Transubstantiation isn't only at issue in church; it can happen in literary texts as well, where the metamorphosis of base matter to splendid abundance is always at stake in the process of making literary meaning.

The first two chapters of *Making Waste* are about literary wastelands, the landscape in which remaindered matter is most visible. Like waste itself, wasteland has a paradoxical volatility. It is filled with debris, but described as though it were empty; it often has enormous value, both cultural and commercial, but it gets talked about as though it were worthless. Wasteland began as a biblical setting, but it became a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary landscape via *Annus Mirabilis* and *Paradise Lost*.

It is not only theoretically but also historically appropriate to begin a full-length study of waste with the wasteland setting. The term “waste” was first introduced into English writing in 1267 with the Statute of Marlbridge, which established the wasting of property, whether land or

goods, as an actionable offense. The statute set out to protect property from being made valueless as a result of negligence or malice. The creation of wasteland was one of the earliest offenses to be addressed by English statute law, establishing it as the most threatening and potentially dangerous of England's literal and literary landscapes.

In the chapters that follow, I describe the degraded matter with which literary wastelands are filled. For Pope, Grub Street, filled with the debris of thousands of hack publications, was a secular reincarnation of Milton's wasteland in Chaos. Swift's wastelands are mostly Irish, saturated with goods that the English deem valueless: coinage, manufactures, and, notoriously, the babies of the Irish poor. In Defoe's case, waste takes the form of bodies, too, the corpses that turned London into a ghastly desert during the Great Plague.

On the one hand, publications like the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* took it upon themselves to clean up English culture, and to usher in a new age of sophisticated, civilized living. Addison and Steele eschewed embarrassing and hard-to-explain residues; in their account of civic culture, all aspects of daily life ought to yield valuable social meaning. Similarly, the literature of sentimentality and sensibility generated novels, essays, and poems that were frequently eccentric and strange, but nonetheless emphasized the essentially generative, recuperative power of literature. If everything, and everybody, could be sympathized with and felt for, nothing need remain behind. Take, for instance, the bizarre eighteenth-century genre of "it-narratives": stories in which inanimate objects acquire feelings and rational powers. No object, however base, need be relegated to the category of uselessness.

But Swift and Pope and the other writers in this book would not accept this. They insisted on the debasement and abjection of waste matter, refusing to concede that literature could recuperate everything. They insisted, in other words, that writing plays a crucial role in preserving waste, not eliminating it. This turns out to be for an important reason. The largest claim of this book is that writers who preserve the abjection and debasement of filth show us something absolutely fundamental about literature itself. Material leftovers and abject residue are signs of the peculiar transformations that take place in literary texts; perversely, they show us that meaning has been made.