

Abstracts

- 460 **Eleanor Johnson**, *The Poetics of Waste: Medieval English Ecocriticism*
 Waste has been a recognizable socioeconomic problem since at least the late Middle Ages. In England, because of land and labor shortages, wars, famines, and especially changes in legal and penitential discourses, waste became, by the mid-fourteenth century, a critical concept. But a fully fleshed-out vocabulary for thinking through the meaning and consequences of the practice of committing waste does not yet exist. This essay argues that two fourteenth-century poems, *Wynnere and Wastoure* and *Piers Plowman*, address the lack of such a thinking through, tackling the problem of waste in all its vicissitudes. They deploy the formal resources of poetic language—from personification to episodic structure—to draw together the various ideas of waste from other discourses and to raise medieval readers’ consciousnesses about the seriousness of waste’s consequences. The essay calls their use of formal resources in creating this critical discourse a “poetics of waste.” (EJ)
- 477 **Tobias Menely**, “The Present Obfuscation”: Cowper’s *Task* and the Time of Climate Change
 Climate change, I argue, is a catastrophe that resists the revelation promised by apocalyptic narrative. My case study is William Cowper’s poem *The Task* (1785), which I situate in two climatic contexts: the year of its composition, which saw meteorological extremes caused by the eruption of an Icelandic volcano, and an era of geologic modernity, the Anthropocene, which commenced with the industrial combustion of fossil fuels in the late eighteenth century. As volcanogenic haze migrates in Cowper’s descriptions from the countryside to the greenhouse and the imperial city, the poet fails to identify a meteorology with which to distinguish nature’s seasonal “revolvency” from eschatological presages or from the modernization process itself—the historical “revolution” embodied by worsening urban pollution. Climate change poses a crisis, in the dual etymological senses of a decision and a turning point, because it unsettles the duration of the present, what returns and endures and so measures alteration. (TM)
- 493 **Melissa E. Sanchez**, “Use Me But as Your Spaniel”: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Early Modern Sexualities
 In this essay, I take *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Faerie Queene* as case studies that show how critical commonplaces may become so entrenched that they limit the horizons of what we can see in a given text, genre, or period. The essay has two purposes. The first is theoretical. I aim to make explicit the often unspoken (perhaps even unconscious) theoretical subtexts that have shaped readings of female sexuality, and I propose some historical reasons for the dominance of certain strains of feminism—those best known as “subordination feminism” and “cultural feminism”—in criticism of early modern literature.

The second purpose is hermeneutic. I explore the alternative readings that become available if we approach Shakespeare's and Spenser's work through the lens of one competing strand of feminist thought, described by its practitioners as "prosex" or "sex-radical" feminism. In this essay, my reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Faerie Queene* limits its interpretive frameworks to those offered by sex-radical feminism and the strands of queer theory that emerged from it. Drawing on these often overlooked frameworks, I explore the tensions and hierarchies among women in the play and the poem to challenge the assumption that women's relationships are always egalitarian and nurturing; I propose that homo- and heteroerotic desires are not mutually exclusive but may coexist in these works; and I argue that female masochism is not always a pathology that enables patriarchy but can be a legitimate form of desire that challenges traditional ideas of normal and proper female behavior. (MES)

- 512 **Mary Ann O'Farrell, Blindness Envy: Victorians in the Parlors of the Blind**
Despite their tendency to metaphorize and disembodiment blindness, the sighted have used it to represent the body's experience of coming to knowledge in a world of things. The vibrant intensity of the attachment to things in Victorian literature makes this writing a rich site for exploring the way represented blindness comes to figure what a body articulated by materiality knows and does not know of itself and of the world. Reading works by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, among others, this essay accounts for an impious strain in representations of blindness and examines how the Victorian literary imagination of blindness evinces a palpable desire for it, grounded in the fantasy that it permits enviable access to a way of knowing and experiencing things from among them rather than from the abstracting distance imposed by sight. Alongside its imagination of the buffeting distress of thingly encounters, blindness envy fantasizes an aesthetics of disorientation and surprise. (MAO'F)
- 526 **Raymond Malewitz, Regeneration through Misuse: Rugged Consumerism in Contemporary American Culture**
This essay charts the emergence of "rugged consumers" in contemporary American culture: skilled laborers who confront the disappearance of manufacturing jobs during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the accompanying sense of labor's marginality in American society. Although they are alienated from sites of industrial productivity, rugged consumers find alternative means of practicing their skills by creatively misusing, repairing, and repurposing the commodities in their environments. At the same time, they ennoble such actions by modeling them on the intertwined American myths of primal nature and rugged individualism. Whether in literature or in the broader culture, American rugged consumers thus mediate between the mythic models of self-sufficiency celebrated by the country's older, frontier

capitalism and the postindustrial realities of the present. The essay posits four provisional categories of rugged consumerism, ranging from the hyper-masculine weaponization of unlikely objects to the (re)creation of environmentally sustainable interior designs. (RM)

542 **Nora Gilbert, Thackeray, Sturges, and the Scandal of Censorship**

In the wake of Foucault's influential retelling of the history of sexuality, a new school of censorship theory emerged that was devoted to exposing and unpacking the paradoxically productive effects of censorious practices. This essay traces a particular strand of that paradox, labeled here the logic of scandal: the logic wherein discourse is authorized and amplified by feelings like shock and moral condemnation rather than stymied by them. To explore the ramifications of this logic for and within narrative art, I take as my subjects a novel written during the famously prudish Victorian era and a film produced under the famously stringent Production Code—W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve*. In each the "scandalous" discursive acrobatics performed by the text's morally ambiguous heroine reflect the strategies of censorship evasion employed by the morally ambiguous artist who created her. (NG)