

Gall and Guts: Entrails and Digestion (Paris, 21–22 Mar 14)

Paris

Deadline: May 31, 2013

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GALL AND GUTS

ENTRAILS AND DIGESTION IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In his recent book, *Versailles, l'ordre et le chaos*, Michel Jeanneret describes the representations of Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. The play wittily mixes the underbelly and the underworld: Parisian purse-snatchers confront provincial narrow-mindedness in a farce whose emblems are the clyster and the "obscure and polluted area of the entrails." The farcical catharsis is enabled by the purgation of Pourceaugnac's allegedly diseased body. Jeanneret underlines the close relation between this play and *Le Malade imaginaire* (The Imaginary Invalid), another of Molière's comedies in which the bowels and their evacuation are at the very centre of the scatological farce. At Versailles, *Le Malade imaginaire* was played in front of the setting of the artificial cave of Thetis and Jeanneret sees the valetudinarian obsessed with his entrails as being echoed by the man-made grotto "which opens onto marine depths, buried in the bowels of the earth, imitating the labyrinth of the viscera."

The representation of the entrails, the belly and the bowels is not limited to the anatomical descriptions that have influenced the caricatures and the apprehension of the body in the eighteenth century (Mandressi, 2003). The bodily functions associated with the bowels – digestion and evacuation – were used as metaphors throughout the period. They are also linked to medical practices that rely on entrails for diagnosis and treatment. The examination of excrement or the frequent prescription of enemas and emetics also confirm the central position of the belly in the perception of the body. Untainted by metaphors, patients' narratives and case-descriptions underline the materiality of digestion.

If digestion has long been associated with the slow and selective assimilation of knowledge, in cases of hypochondriac melancholy – Cheyne's English malady – excessive study is described as indigestion. More generally, the whole century is obsessed with indigestion and excess: the rapid development of knowledge, the impossibility of encompassing new information or of digesting the rapidly growing number of printed documents of all kinds preoccupied the Republic of Letters, while medical practitioners worried about the effects of such products as tea, coffee or spices on digestion and on the general economy of the body (Burton, Mandeville, Cheyne, Tissot). Indigestion and deprivation play a prominent part in the treatises on hypochondriac melancholy, whose objects and demonstrations echo philosophical reflections on luxury and consumption (Forth, 2005).

Winds, defecation, purgation and diarrhoea are also recurring motifs and metaphors in satirical lit-

erature, the farce and the grotesque, whose political role in Enlightenment culture has been underlined by Barbara Stafford (2011).

While the bodily machinery, internal and invisible, is exposed to caricature, satire unravels the uglier sides of institutions and uses the bowels to reveal the malfunction of the social and political body. In his descriptions of the putrid muck of kitchens, underground passages, hospitals or sewers, Tobias Smollett shows the hidden, derelict face of public baths, palaces, or military vessels, and the violence they exert over minds and bodies (Vasset, 2009).

These various aspects of bowels and digestion are as numerous in literary works as they are in medical writing: fictional or real correspondences, medical or not, are rich in descriptions, remarks and commentaries on the functioning or ill functioning of the belly.

This cross-disciplinary question is also pertinent to other areas of study: eighteenth-century visual culture (from caricature to anatomical plates), architecture and town planning.

The subterranean imagery of the bowels plays a prominent part in the representation of the urban landscape. The labyrinth of the expanding sewer-networks echoes the real or imagined "passages" connecting places of power and of resistance. The underground tunnels of Paris, for instance, are made of communicating cellars, stone quarries and an ossuary created at the end of the century to shelter the

bones transferred from the Saints Innocents graveyard. How were these underground cities built? Which elements were recycled, reorganised or evacuated? From sewers, cellars, and crypts to the first urban archaeological excavations, studies of the entrails of French and British cities will be particularly welcome.

You are invited to send proposals relating to the following areas:

Literature; History (especially History of Medicine); History of Ideas; Art history; Cultural history; Material and visual culture; Architecture and town planning.

Languages: French and English

The selected proposals will be presented at an international conference held in Paris on March 21 and 22, 2014. The deadline for the final articles is July 15, 2014. Proposals are to be sent with a short resume (300 words) and a list of recent publications to Sophie Vasset (sophie.vasset@univ-paris-diderot.fr) and Sylvie Kleiman-Lafon (Sylvie.kleiman-lafon@univ-paris8.fr) before May 31, 2013.

Reference:

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