"objects to move in and out of the commodity phase across their life cycles" (7). If we identify coins with money, this interpretation works well. James was using an originally financial object in a nonfinancial manner, thus illustrating the new materialist contention that the meaning of objects varies with cultural context. But if we distinguish between financial value and the coins that symbolize it, we can see that James's fetishistic deployment of money is in perfect accordance with its economic function. Money is quite literally magic, and this is as true of its financial as its medicinal properties.

This book is worlds apart from the frequently dull fixation on objects that plagues the new materialism's less lively practitioners. Deng describes the debate between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" theories of value with precision and acuity. He shows how the "clipping" of coins to extract some of their *specie*, along with the great sixteenth-century inflations and debasements of the currency, gradually established the idea that value was independent of the coins that represent it. The relation between state and subject is a vital element of early modern economic practice, and this book breaks new ground through its treatment of money's political implications. Its only significant drawback is that the analysis remains at the level of what money appears to be, rather than penetrating to what it actually is.

That is a problem for the new materialism in general, however, and the many, various strengths of Deng's book comfortably outweigh such theoretical snags. *Coinage and State Formation* is an indispensible text for anyone seeking to understand the relations among money, subjectivity, and political authority in early modern England. Given the continued pertinence of these issues in our own time, it will undoubtedly attract numerous enthusiastic readers. Anyone feeling slightly weary of the new materialism's infatuation with objects will be grateful for Deng's bracing, long-overdue return to political engagement.

David Hawkes, Arizona State University

Simon Dickie. *Cruelty & Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. 384. $45.00 (cloth).
doi:10.1017/jbr.2013.7

Cruelty & Laughter plunges the reader into an often funny but nevertheless disturbing element of eighteenth-century culture. Focusing predominantly on literature from the period 1740–70, Dickie shows that jokes about cripples, poverty, violence, and rape were widespread and in a complex relationship with the polite and sentimental elements of the culture with which they might (mistakenly) be juxtaposed. Tackling the apparent tension between an increasingly dominant politeness and the ubiquity of cruel laughter, Dickie draws upon Raymond William's model of cultural change in which there are residual, dominant, and emergent forces. Different things were happening at different speeds, and humor, Dickie suggests, displayed the slowest pace. Thus, the distinctive feature of this midcentury period, according to Dickie, is the instability of the different emotional reactions, where "[p]ity coexisted with indifference; sympathy was fleeting, unstable, and easily transformed into malice or delight" (11). Perhaps the central question of the book is this: how could "polite and well-heeled consumers" enjoy such vicious and cruel jokes?

Cruelty is carefully delineated, then, but it is allied with other impulses such as sympathy, kindness, and benevolence. Thus, Swift's brutal humor at the expense of women, the poor, and the crippled is placed alongside his charitable activity (73). Dickie astutely points up how sentiment is partnered with "less admissible impulses": jealousy, cruelty, and insecurity. In accounts of the cruelty in letters, this discourse seems to operate as an important linguistic currency within literary networks. Frances Burney describes one woman as "most exceedingly ugly" and another as "very short & fat, & squints"; Oliver Goldsmith was known to many as

"monkey face" (84, 85). This is not a culture of the plebs and the uneducated but a shared culture among people of letters.

Herein lies one of Dickie's most significant contributions to our understanding of eighteenth-century literature. The book draws on a mass of literary sources characterized as "popular" and that have not attracted much scholarly attention. Yet the jestbooks that Dickie examines in chapter 1 and throughout are patently more important than this professional dismissal would suggest. He shows that their readership was broad and their content enjoyed and reproduced by men and women, rich and poor, polite and impolite. Subsequent chapters trace this tenor of jestbook humor into the theater, novels, diaries and letters, and court proceedings. There was, argues Dickie, a widespread "indifference to reform." All delighted not only in the sophisticated witty playfulness of humor but also in the crude jokes about shit pies, deformity, and sexual assault.

Yet this book goes further than a study of these literary sources. Dickie wants to study experience, the "reality" behind the jokes (69), and to this end he complements his literary analysis with social history. He does a masterly job of using the shreds of evidence to reconstruct not only a culture of cruel jokes but also the society from which these sprung. In chapter 1, for example, it was people's everyday interaction with the disabled and its real risk to all, for example, that drove the impulse to laugh (78).

Chapter 3 explores the class contexts of this culture in closer detail, showing the persistence of jokes that provoked laughter at the expense of dirty, ignorant plebeians and the quite remarkable upper-class pranks that generated the same pleasure. Chapter 4 provides a close analysis of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, a novel that dramatizes ethical debates about malicious versus good-natured laughter largely through the complicated character of Parson Adams. This chapter is the strongest in showing the ambiguities of humor and the complex relationship between sensibility and cruelty. Chapter 5 considers "everyday comic perspectives on rape," and in so doing it adds significantly to our understanding of the prosaic attitudes toward this crime and its victims in both literary and judicial sources (190). Here there could have been a more searching analysis of the impulses behind these jokes, as in other parts of the book. The academic register and viewpoint is perhaps too circumscribed to appreciate the popularity (and pleasure) of these jokes. But pleasure they must have held, given their ubiquity and repeated reenactment. It is this chapter, however, that shows most clearly how jokes were embedded in a contemporary culture, drawing extensively on the work of the many women's historians who have reconstructed sexual assault cases in the English courts.

The final chapter examines the nearly one hundred "forgotten best-sellers of early English fiction," and in so doing it brings the distasteful back to the literary-historical record (250). Is the reference to Robert Darnton's work on the "forbidden best-sellers" of eighteenth-century France intended? It is certainly tempting to discuss Dickie's book in the light of Darnton's important study of "the Great Cat Massacre," which examines—specifically—why the French printers who tortured their cats found it funny. Yet the political contexts of Darnton's work—of workers' protests and the French Revolution—is missing from Dickie's book; as he says of the chapbook jokes, "[t]hey do nothing to challenge the ideology of a hierarchical and deferential society" (145). For all its shock value, this culture of cruelty was profoundly conservative and shored up the position of the privileged. Given the political and cultural changes that took place later in the century, and more than with any other historical book I have read, I wanted to know what happened next. Yet Dickie has given us a terrific account of the unsentimental eighteenth century, deepening our understanding of how malicious laughter was an enduring element of British culture.

Karen Harvey, University of Sheffield

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2013.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press