Vittoria Di Palma, *Wasteland: A History*, (Yale University Press, 2014)

Vittoria Di Palma's *Wasteland: A History* proposes that to understand beauty, we must look with equal care at its opposite. The study offers a radically new insight into 18th-century landscape theory and the Picturesque, but in place of beautiful or dramatic landscapes, it looks at swamps, fens, forests, wildernesses—areas of the landscape that were regarded as useless, flat, ugly, or simply unknowable. Although disdained, such lands were not without value, for as marginal spaces they permitted the emergence of alternative society and allowed for civil disobedience. Di Palma writes, "[I]t is precisely the wasteland's apparent lack of value, its marginality, that allows it to extend such a powerful utopian promise." Threading her way from the 17th- and 18th-century drive to classify natural history, to maps and surveys that made land measurable and visible, and to policies and technologies that eventually allowed previously marginal land to be converted to new use, she explains how the values placed on landscape in the 18th century continue to resonate today.

Artfully produced by Yale University Press, elegantly written and persuasively argued, *Wasteland* is a remarkable book that charts new territory with its unusual "anti-Picturesque" topic.

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