



The Waste Books (New York Review Books Classics)

By Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

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German scientist and man of letters Georg Christoph Lichtenberg was an 18th-century polymath: an experimental physicist, an astronomer, a mathematician, a practicing critic both of art and literature. He is most celebrated, however, for the casual notes and aphorisms that he collected in what he called his Waste Books. With unflagging intelligence and encyclopedic curiosity, Lichtenberg wittily deflates the pretensions of learning and society, examines a range of philosophical questions, and tracks his own thoughts down hidden pathways to disconcerting and sometimes hilarious conclusions.

Lichtenberg's *Waste Books* have been greatly admired by writers as very different as Tolstoy, Einstein, and Andre Breton, while Nietzsche and Wittgenstein acknowledged them as a significant inspiration for their own radical work in philosophy. The record of a brilliant and subtle mind in action, *The Waste Books* are above all a powerful testament to the necessity, and pleasure, of unfettered thought.

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Editorial Review

From Scientific American

Odd title, unusual book. Lichtenberg (1742-1799) was a German polymath: astronomer, experimental physicist, mathematician and critic of art and literature. In his student days he began the lifelong practice of recording his thoughts, observations and reminders in notebooks that he called *Sudelbücher* after the "waste books" in which English business houses of the time entered transactions temporarily until they could be recorded in formal account books. By the end of his life he had accumulated 11 *Sudelbücher*, which he labeled as volumes A through L (skipping I). Hollingdale, a translator of Nietzsche, Goethe and Schopenhauer, has translated the notebooks. Here he presents excerpts, focusing on what he says are best called aphorisms. Lichtenberg turns out to be quite an aphorist, repeatedly surprising and entertaining the modern reader. Examples: "Whenever he was required to use his reason he felt like someone who had always used his right hand but was now required to do something with his left." "You can make a good living from soothsaying but not from truthsaying." "The book which most deserved to be banned would be a catalog of banned books." "Astronomy is perhaps the science whose discoveries owe least to chance, in which human understanding appears in its whole magnitude, and through which man can best learn how small he is."

EDITORS OF SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

Review

"Among the great achievements of the German spirit." -- *Gordon Craig, author of The Germans*

"One of the most compulsively readable books to come out of the 18th-century German Enlightenment." -- *The Vancouver Sun*

Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Patti Wooden:

Do you have favorite book? In case you have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to know everything in the world. Each publication has different aim or perhaps goal; it means that reserve has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their time for you to read a book. They are reading whatever they acquire because their hobby will be reading a book. How about the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, particular person feel need book when they found difficult problem as well as exercise. Well, probably you will need this *The Waste Books (New York Review Books Classics)*.

Harold Fleming:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information currently can get by anyone on

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