

# Communion, Communication, Sacrifice in the Eighteenth-Century Novel

Sophie Gee, Princeton University



Thursday, November 10: 4pm

Board Room, Mosher  
Alumni House

This is a paper about the evolving meaning of the sacrament of the Eucharist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its significance for understanding identificatory practices in novels. The Eucharist commemorates Christ's human sacrifice, a loss that enables the salvation of humanity. My paper takes one model of miraculous identification as a template for interpreting another— that is, I'm using the Eucharist as a way to investigate the claim novels make to represent, and even to enable, various forms of identification between individual subjects. I'm interested both in the Calvinist interpretation of the sacrament, which constructs it as a ritual memorializing sacrifice or radical loss in order to enable identification between God and man through the intermediate figure of the passionate, suffering human Christ. And I'm also interested in the more Socinian model of Eucharist as a ritual that diminishes and even overlooks Christ's passion and instead pays attention to identification without suffering as a miraculous event *per se*, capable of transforming human into divine. Through a reading of a late scene Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, I explore sacrificial resonances in scenes of fictional identification, substitution, and the imagining of others' suffering. I note that identification with and among fictional characters, like the sacramental ritual, is a necessarily transient or impermanent transaction.

Sophie Gee is a specialist in Restoration and eighteenth-century British literature from Milton to Jane Austen. Her first book *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* is published by Princeton University Press. Sophie is particularly interested in Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and Jane Austen, as well as in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural philosophy and theological writing.

