

1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era

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1650–1850

Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries
in the Early Modern Era

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1650–1850
Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries
in the Early Modern Era
Volume 1

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FOREWORD

From the Editor

ELASTIC as art itself, the terminology of “eighteenth century studies” has long stretched the taxonomies as well as the imaginations of intellectual historians. The interval defined by the years “1700–1800” begins and ends with an ahistorical abruptness, leaving John Locke on the cusp of irrelevance and Henry Fuseli peering into an undefined future; the exciting word “Enlightenment” conjures images of the taking of the Bastille but barely applies to the regime of Catherine the Great; even the inclusive term “early modern” reverberates more of the flourishes of Elizabethan trumpets than of the abstruse inquiries of Benjamin Keach, John Heydon, or Emanuel Swedenborg.

The exploding of convenient chronologies and easy nomenclature under pressure from “early modern” culture diversity is a phenomenon both new and old. The old masters of early modern studies—the Hallers, the Nicolsons, the Fries, the Bates, the Patrideses—were always pushing to the limits of historical and literary-canonical categories. William Blake looked back to John Locke or even Plotinus; a dip into John Bunyan led to a plunge into the deep, obscure pool of pulpit oratory. Today, the siliconization of the scholarly profession allows for ready access to thousands of titles and artifacts, to an abundance of information that the classic critics could never have dug up in a lifetime of traditional, manual research.

1650–1850 will showcase new responses to the ever-revising picture of modernization that is unveiling before us. Rather than searching out an elusive “middle ground” between familiar and unfamiliar artists or between focussed and general studies, this journal will bring forward the best scholarship on major artists, writers, and philosophers as well as the most adventurous new inquiries into overlooked figures. Dedicated to the early modern *era*, this journal will investigate both the idea of modernity and early modern ideas, whether those ideas are

parading in the pageant of political culture, rattling in the alchemist's test tube, or expanding in the mind of a literary genius. It will amplify rather than evade the problem of periodicity, looking at the interval from Cromwell to Coleridge as a whole rather than bisecting it along an arbitrary axis.

Interdisciplinarity is something of a fashion in contemporary scholarship. *1650-1850* will explore this vogue, asking after its origins in early modern thought and tracking its progress into our own critical dialogue. In recent years, interdisciplinary scholarship has tended to favor some disciplines more than others. Music and art, indeed aesthetics generally, have proved less than susceptible to the various approaches awkwardly conjugated under the heading "New Historicism"; semiotics has had trouble dealing with the utter sincerity of Christopher Smart's public prayers. This journal will make every effort to peer into these peerless realms, to ask questions about how the early modern era experienced itself, its texts, its art, and its artful philosophy. Studying the reciprocal relation between ideas and evaluations, it will explore aesthetic presentations of ideas, including social and economic ideas, as well as ideas about aesthetics. Each issue will also include a selection of expert reviews of provocative books in this burgeoning field.

1650-1850 welcomes contributions from its readership. Essays of five to fifty pages in length are welcome; brevity is prized. Candidate contributors should bear in mind the foci of the journal: (i) early modern aesthetics, in theory in practice; (ii) the history of ideas; (iii) the idea of and ideas on modernization; and (iv) the intersections of these areas of emphasis—for example, an essay on Adam Smith's prose style. All articles are subject to peer evaluation by qualified referees. Scholars seeking additional information should contact the editor, in care of the Department of English, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70803, U. S. A. The editor wishes to express special appreciation to editorial board member Stephen Bretzius, of Louisiana State University, who formulated part of the title of this journal and who has been a great supporter of its goals.

This first issue covers a remarkable array of topics, from the forgotten cheerfulness of skeptical David Hume to the arrant gall of whimsical James Boswell, from the snarling witticisms of Thomas Hobbes to the gentrified heroism of the sentimentalized Ossian. Enjoy, and let the present volume be a prologue to future visions of the past!