

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

Volume 21

Article 1

2014

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(2014) "FRONT MATTER," *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*: Vol. 21, Article 1.

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1650–1850

**Ideas, *Æ*sthetics, and Inquiries
in the Early Modern Era**

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1650–1850

Ideas, Æsthetics, and Inquiries
in the Early Modern Era

Volume 21

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Book Review Editor

AMS Press, Inc.

New York

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BH
151
A17
V.21

1650–1850

Volume 21

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ISSN:1065-3112

SET ISBN-10: 0-404-64400-7

SET ISBN-13: 978-0-404-64400-0

VOLUME 21 - ISBN-10: 0-404-64421-X

VOLUME 21 - ISBN-13: 978-0-404-64421-5

All AMS books are printed on acid-free paper that meets the guidelines for performance and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

AMS PRESS, INC.

Brooklyn Navy Yard, 63 Flushing Ave – Unit #221
Brooklyn, NY 11205-1073, USA

www.amspressinc.com

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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FOREWORD

From the Editor

The most overworked word of the early twenty-first century is surely “strategic.” Universities promulgate strategic plans; “units” within universities “think strategically”; persons who once protested Pentagon strategies for the conduct of foreign wars now routinely aspire to administrative positions in which the prosecution of “strategic initiatives” absorbs the majority of their “strategic” efforts. Corporate giants with lilliputian products such as Domino’s Pizza promise their shareholders the *annual* delivery of a *long-term* strategic plan; the United States Department of Agriculture notches it down another level by publishing—in the plural—an array of “pest management strategic plans” so that even cockroaches and boll weevils can experience at least the receiving end of the new strategy mania.

Strategic activity would seem to be minimal in a discipline such as eighteenth-century studies in which the phenomena to be managed have already occurred. Strategy, however, was an important if now overlooked topic during the long eighteenth century, indeed was so much a concern that, like the trees within the proverbial forest, it is easily overlooked. Our contemporary obsession with strategy derives from our post-Enlightenment, neo-Baconian assumption that for every problem or goal there must be not only some suitable means of achieving the desired end but

also a full menu of options and approaches, some of which are more effective or cunning—more strategic—than others.

Addressing the origins and early applications of strategic thinking is central to this volume of *1650–1850*. Continuing a tradition of outreach to the distant precincts of eighteenth-century studies, the volume opens with an exploratory essay by “HRM” (Human Resources Management) executive A. G. Monaco, who explores the early history of the loyalty oaths that many academic professionals must sign in order to work at public universities. With his signature but scholarly wit, Monaco wonders whether the oath signed by Benedict Arnold provided comfort or security to the early American revolutionaries. Florian Vauleon explores the philosophical, literary, and psychological strategies appropriate to the more confined space of the chess board in his devilishly clever exploration of the role of that game in the writings of Diderot. From Murray Brown we learn of Samuel Richardson’s multi-pronged strategies for dealing with the religious diversity of his day, especially with that large-scale complication called “Catholicism.” Similarly, Norbert Col explains how an urbane orator such as Edmund Burke found strategies for sustaining elegant and informed political discourse in a time when revolutionary shrieks were replacing harmonic debates. Strategy can be personal, too, as Ashley Marshall demonstrates in her irreverently erudite exposé of the stresses and strains in the Swift-Temple relationship.

To the extent that a journal, which depends on the unpredictabilities of human wit, can adopt a strategic plan, *1650–1850* has always affirmed the key role of special features: of sets of essays organized by prominent or promising guest editors who detect contemporary scholarly trends and who anticipate the next collective turn of thought. Hailing from both the familiar field of history and also the unexpected area of aerospace engineering, Jessika Wichner, archivist for the DLR (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt), has come—or, perhaps, paddled or sailed or slipped—forward with an astounding ensemble of essays concerning unorthodox transportation in the Enlightenment. In essays covering modes of motion from skating to rowing, Wichner and her authors celebrate yet another strategic effort: the figuring out of ways to get from point A to point B under any conceivable circumstances, whether confronted with an icy expanse or whether handed a splintered oar.

Given the rich selection of essays in this volume, strategic planners may want to stand down from innovation long enough to read the book in the conventional fashion, one page at a time, from cover to cover. That, of course, is the best way to reach the abundant review section, where the best of scholars survey the best (and sometimes the worst) of scholarship, keeping colleagues up-to-date and thereby able to form strategic plans for learning.

1650–1850