

ABSTRACTS

Nicholas Hudson, “The Social Utility of ‘Literature’: The Genesis of a Modern Idea, 1780–1800”

During the last two decades of the eighteenth century, English authors began to stress the utility of literary “pleasure” as a source of unity, refinement, and progress during a period of increasing political division. This idea of pleasure differed from the older understanding of literary pleasure as merely the vehicle of moral, religious, and philosophical truths. It differed as well from the belles-lettristic understanding of literature as a means to improve the speech and taste of ambitious individuals. While differing in many ways from recent defenses of a literary education, this rehabilitation of literary pleasure is the foundation of the nineteenth-century mission to establish English education in universities and schools.

Sarah Marsh, “Changes of Air: The Somerset Case and *Mansfield Park*’s Imperial Plots”

Mansfield Park (1814) is Jane Austen’s reckoning with Lord Mansfield’s decision in *Somerset against Stewart*, a 1772 slave trial in the King’s Bench. The novel’s transatlantic plotline dramatizes the Mansfield decision’s jurisdictional limits and, ultimately, its incoherence with English ideals of sustainable agriculture and free labor. Britain’s 1807 abolition of its slave trade, *Mansfield Park*’s immediate historical context, is equally dubious: both interventions, while legally distancing Britain from some elements of slavery, ultimately permitted it to flourish overseas. Because British slavery continued abroad, Austen shows, colonial social customs were now altering the domestic lives and racial identities of the English.

Rahul Markovits, “The Prophet and the Ambassador: Said Efendi’s Visit, the Delayed Production of Voltaire’s *Mahomet*, and the Universality of the Law of Nations”

In December 1741, as Voltaire was preparing for the performance of *Le fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophète* at the Comédie-Française, Ottoman ambassador Said Efendi reached Paris. This article focuses on this previously overlooked coincidence through the lens of new scholarship on the Ottoman presence in eighteenth-century Europe in order to demonstrate how the ambassador’s stay interfered with the creation and reception of Voltaire’s tragedy. By uncovering how the delaying of the performance of *Mahomet* was framed in the language of the law of nations, it aims more broadly at putting into historical perspective our understanding of the Enlightenment’s legacy.

Lindsay Dunn, “Creating Napoleon’s Dynasty: Marie-Louise, House of Habsburg-Lorraine, and the Art of Statecraft”

The marriage between Marie-Louise, House of Habsburg-Lorraine (1791–1847), and the divorced Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) presented several iconographical challenges to contemporaneous artists. They needed to convey Marie-Louise’s fundamental importance to the imperial regime without marginalizing Napoleon’s positions as monarch and founder of a new dynasty. The resulting artistic innovations portrayed a culturally engaged queenship, one that emphasized Marie-Louise’s abilities to paint and draw while underscoring her potential power of dynastic creation, thanks to her rich Habsburg bloodlines. Through an analysis of paintings created during the first year of the imperial marriage, this study provides insight into the life of Marie-Louise and other aristocratic women who navigated essential, if sometimes invisible, roles in the political sphere.

Jane Wessel, “‘My Other Folks’ Heads’: Reproducible Identities and Literary Property on the Eighteenth-Century Stage”

This article examines George Alexander Stevens’s attempts to monopolize the performance of his popular one-man show, the *Lecture on Heads* (1764). Stevens performed his show during a century that increasingly valued literary property, but during which there was no legal protection for the medium of performance. As pirates created printed texts of the work and other performers staged their own versions, Stevens launched an advertising campaign to establish his exclusive right to perform the work. By emphasizing the authenticity of his *Lecture* and of his own performing body, and by comparing the labor of writing and performing his show to the manufacture of physical goods, Stevens laid claim to the immaterial, unfixed medium of performance. Moreover, in his revisions to the work, he played on the show’s subject matter—his collection of “other folks’ heads”—to develop an early articulation of the idea-expression dichotomy that remains central to intellectual property law today.