

Introductory Comments

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Welcome to the Twelfth Annual Bloomington Eighteenth-Century Studies Workshop. As Director of the Center for Eighteenth-Century Studies, I have the great pleasure of welcoming you to Bloomington. It is also a great pleasure to thank our administrator, Barbara Truesdell, who coordinates and manages all the logistics for the conference; we will probably thank her again tomorrow and Friday, because her help is ongoing and we cannot thank her enough. The same must be said of the College, which has generously supported the Center over the past dozen years. And I also want to thank this year's Steering Committee: Hall Bjørnstad, from French and Italian; Fritz Breithaupt, from Germanic Studies; Richard Nash who, like myself, is in the English Department; and Rebecca Spang, from History. And a special "thank you" to Scott Juengel, from Vanderbilt, who agreed to come back to another workshop in Bloomington and serve this time as our final respondent, telling us at the end of the workshop what we have and have not accomplished. And thank you, too, to our visiting participants, for sharing your work with us and joining into our conversation.

The title of our workshop is "For Instance: Eighteenth-Century Exemplarity, Its Practice and Limits" but I was recently reminded that the initial proposal that led to this topic was actually about Experience and Experiment, two very eighteenth-century sounding concepts (whereas Exemplarity might sound much more like a seventeenth-century concern). I cannot reconstruct how we got from the two Ex's to Exemplarity, but there may have been a feeling that we couldn't understand experiment or experience without grappling first with the legacy of exemplarity in the life of the eighteenth century. You will notice I referred to the "life" of the eighteenth century rather than to its "mind" or "thought." Because what made exemplarity—along with its relatives: exemplum, example, model, type, or standard—fascinating was the way it promised to fasten together ideas and ideals with lived practice. I can follow, or try to follow, your example.

I think we hoped too that exemplarity could hold together the past and the present, with a notion of history that precedes historicism. In fact, exemplarity has a particularly stubborn resistance to linear time. We hoped that thinking about examples could help us think in new ways about such phenomena of consumer culture as patterns, series, and indeed multiply reproduced copies such as the Workshop readers we all have. But as the front cover of your reader suggests, such high-mindedness often entails sacrifices, even brutal ones. Yes, Brutus is a fine, if shadowy, example for us all—especially if we are men, fathers, and citizens of the republic. Who can follow his example? And if we all did that—if we all handed over our rebel sons to be killed—then the legacy of exemplarity, from generation to generation, would end rather abruptly! Unless, of course, we look to the other side of the painting. We could read David's painting as offering two exemplary responses: that of the stoic Brutus, and that of his wife and daughters, grieving for what has been lost. What do we make of these bifurcated possibilities; are we secure in locating the good and the bad example? More crucially, I encourage us all to think about the various, presumably less fatal, sacrifices or losses that our discussion of exemplarity entails. Who and what has been carted off-stage so that our discussions here can take place? You'll notice, for instance, that we have no one talking directly about visual culture this year. This seems to me a loss. We have few historians in the mix as well. Intellectual and literary history, legal history, take center-stage. Questions of gender, and more surprisingly race, appear only in the shadows of the rich

studies we have before us. But that does not mean these modes of inquiry need to be exiled from our discussion.