From the Editor

JESSE MOLESWORTH

Four years have passed since the publication of the last volume of *The Workshop*, "Number, Measure, Scale," in June 2019. The publication of the current volume, "Bodily Autonomies, Autonomous Bodies," under the directorship of a new editor, might therefore be looked upon as a relaunch, or even as a rebirth.

Indeed, much has changed, both in the world and in the realm of eighteenth-century studies, since the publication of the last volume. March 2020 saw the rise of a pandemic that re-ordered seemingly every priority. May 2020 saw the death of George Floyd, whose murder at the hands of the white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin sparked a series of nationwide protests under the slogan "Black Lives Matter." January 2021 saw an assault on American democracy the likes of which might once have been considered unimaginable. It would be difficult to pretend that scholarly endeavors like *The Workshop* might remain aloof to such dramatic events, as well as the cultural and political attitudes that gave shape to them. The relaunch of this journal therefore signals not so much a "return to normalcy," for that would presume that there is some "normal" to which one might return. Rather, this relaunch signals a return to once-cherished priorities that have now grown to accommodate a new sense of normal.

The theme of this volume, "Bodily Autonomies, Autonomous Bodies," reflects this new sense of normal. When the United States Supreme Court, on June 24, 2022, issued its decision Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, which struck down the longstanding legal precedents of Roe v. Wade (1973) and Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey (1992), guaranteeing the right to an abortion prior to fetal viability, the event served to energize discussions of legal personhood, women's reproductive rights, and the status of the unborn that date to the eighteenth century, and certainly before. We, as members of the Bloomington Center for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the organization that sponsors this journal, wished to host a conference that would contribute both to such ongoing discussions as well as those animated by the events mentioned above. The result was our twenty-first annual Spring Workshop, "Bodily Autonomies, Autonomous Bodies" (2023), the event that served as the springboard for most of the essay abstracts, comments, and discussions assembled in this volume.

As we noted in the call for papers (included in this volume), it is perhaps anachronistic to apply the concept of "autonomy," derived from the Greek (αὐτο + νόμος) meaning self-law, in the context of the eighteenth century, which favored terms and concepts like "self-governance" and "self-sovereignty." Yet rather than rejecting this anachronism, we embraced it, since it might serve to direct the participants in the Workshop to draw both connections and contrasts with the past, between the time we study and the time in which we live. As the late Srinivas Aravamudan (whose words once graced these pages) wrote, anachronism when willfully deployed serves as an antidote to "dead" historicism, wherein the historian must balance the dry recording of historical facts against the simultaneous "desire to be free of history."[1] Many if not most of the papers described in this volume toggle between these two scholarly desires: to observe history and to be free of history.

Before turning to this discussion, however, it is perhaps worth reflecting on some of the activities undertaken by the Center since our last issue. From 2019 to 2022, the Center hosted

[1] Aravamudan, "The Return of Anachronism," *Modern Language Quarterly* 62.4 (December 2001): 331-53; at 350.

Spring Workshops on the following topics: “Falsehood, Forgeries, Fraud: The Fake Eighteenth Century” (2019), “Connections: Eighteenth-Century Networks and Ecologies” (2020-21), and “The Collaborative Eighteenth Century” (2022). During this period the Center also hosted annual symposia recognizing the scholarly monographs that won our book prize, the Kenshur Prize, awarded to the year’s best book in eighteenth-century studies: William Deringer’s *Calculated Values, Finance, Politics, and the Quantitative Age* (Harvard University Press, 2018), Lynn Festa’s *Fiction without Humanity: Person, Animal, Thing in Early Enlightenment Literature and Culture* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), Vincent Brown’s *Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Harvard University Press, 2020), and Henrietta Harrison’s *The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators between Qing China and the British Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2021). In recognition of these outstanding works of scholarship, the first part of this issue consists of a forum featuring selected remarks and comments drawn from those various prize symposia.