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When V21 and the V21 manifesto first appeared a few years ago, I was very excited and something of a cheerleader from the sidelines of social media. Who doesn't like a group of younger scholars standing up and telling the older generation that it has gotten it all wrong? And at the time and still to this day, I'm supportive of anyone in literary studies who is irritated by historicist orthodoxy—the orthodoxy of the baby boom generation that taught me, and against which scholars like my friend Sandra and I have been grating for some time. That and the interest in form and aesthetics, the demand for more conceptually grounded criticism, all seemed and still seem terrific. So, go V21! I said that then, and I'll say that now.

For today's roundtable, Gena and Kasia asked us to consider a question. Does ASECS need its own version of V21? Given what I just said, my answer may be a bit surprising. It is no, or a qualified no, or a no, not really, or a no but also in one specific, lower case way yes. The V21 manifesto advocated for a turn away from what it called "positivist historicism" toward theory (especially) and form (sort of, really more of a turn to that catch all chimera "new formalism"). I have had a lot to say in print lately about the category of form, so I won't belabor that just now, except to say that V21 in practice I think turned out to be less interested in form than it purported to be, or was unable or unwilling to distinguish form from politics and so from the history it ostensibly wanted to bracket. (I believe Sandra is going to have more to say about this. I'm echoing some of her own ideas as well some of what Anahid Nersessian and I had to say last year in our *Critical Inquiry* article "Form and Explanation" and in the subsequent exchanges that article produced.) So I won't say much more about that now. But I do want to note how the broad currents of this kind of talk and these kinds of debates, that is the broad currents of what the V21 manifesto was after—the limits of archivism and historicism, reconsiderations of form and formalism, possibilities for presentism—have run strong in eighteenth-century studies for some time. In fact they have run parallel with, if not preceded, conversations our Victorianist colleagues have been having. I argued in my *SEL* year's work in review essay of 2010, for example, that "historicism had perhaps run its course" and that not only did it fail to provide a rationale for what we do but that that best work I had read seemed to be cutting against the historicist grain. Just after that, ASECS had the first of several panels on form, another on close reading, and soon after that Sandra's notorious, "against history" panel, colloquially named by everyone there as simply "fuck history." This discussion continues apace, tracking and anticipating developments in the profession at large (lately over method—method being the great common discussion of our present moment, that is, how we read, why, following what disciplinary protocols or points of style, etc.). So when I say "no," I'm saying in part that I think we don't need our own manifesto to keep the conversation alive.

As far as I'm concerned, moreover, a kind of anti-manifesto pluralism and respect for heterogeneity and the work of others better fits our straightened times. Despite my opening gambit about youth movements, about impatience with orthodoxies, historicist or otherwise, all of which I believe entirely, I've never liked telling people to stop

doing what they're doing, or when anyone else does that either. Every time I come to ASECS I'm just bowled over by the commitments our colleagues bring to whatever corner of the world commands their interest, whether that's Edward Young's "Night Thoughts" or the development of the conversation piece or the history of calico.

I've come to think that heterogeneity and pluralism *within* the field of literary studies is essential to a defense *of* the field of literary studies, considered as a discipline with its own way of accounting for the world, its own distinctive methods and points of style, its own way of telling truths about the parts of the world with which it is concerned. I think if you peel back from the surface divisions that might be expressed in manifesto-language you find a bed of common method, common purpose, and common explanatory rigor variously expressed in diverse form. I've come to call this the "ordinary science" of literary studies, and I think it ought to be defended, given especially the perilous state of the discipline, given that is the existential threat to the humanities, to literary studies, and to the study of older periods, the eighteenth century one among them.

In preparatory chat over email among the panelists and co-chairs, and in the chatter at the conference over just the past day and half, I've been again excited by all the talk about presentism, perhaps the piece of the V21 program most currently in circulation, that is currently, this very second. Again, I think there's much to commend here, and I've found the high-caliber discussion of models of historical time and past-present relations done under the auspices of V21 quite thrilling. The desire here seems palpable: Who doesn't want to find ways to address our deplorable political moment with resources from the materials we know well? And, given the overall context of shrinking enrollments, shrinking resources, and the sense that our materials can be a hard sell, who doesn't want to find a way to get students interested in older works by teaching them in such a way that makes them seem relevant or, well, relatable? Having said that, I do want to sound a counter note to the desire for presentism, however, not in the name of antiquarianism or positivism, but merely to underscore the context of disciplinary expertise and common explanatory method that makes presentism curious. The making of things relevant risks, as I think we sometimes see, a kind of default to intelligent banter about urgent contemporary issues, from climate change to #metoo to of course Trumpism. None of us have any particular expertise in these issues. Rather, we bring our expertise and our methods of explanation to political or ethical matters as they take shape in materials with which we are intimately familiar and about which we have something to say particular to our expertise and training. This ought to put some interesting limits on the desire to make everything present, or on how we think about the quiddity of our objects of concern, located as they are in some discrete temporal corner of the universe. At the very least, we ought to be cautious I think about the critique of periodization that comes along for the ride of presentism, strategic or otherwise. For reasons that should be obvious to anyone paying attention to what's happening in English departments across the academy, now is a bad time to be getting rid of periods. It just leads to the question, who needs an eighteenth-centuryist anyway?

With these sorts of institutional matters in mind I want to close on an upbeat note, the part that is a qualified or lower case “yes” to Gena and Kasia’s question. What V21 as a loose network has excelled at it seems to me is providing platforms for intellectual exchange and scholarly community. Their various seminars, online fora, meet ups, conferences, book symposia, and so on have been, so far as I can tell, a real boon for scholars of the period. ASECS really should emulate that. We need semi-formal occasions and platforms for discussion about the texts and topics that matter to us. I think it would be terrific if our exchange with the V21 collective today led to some emulating on our part of their infrastructural prowess, modest but real achievements like summer reading groups or online colloquies about recent books in the field, get together outside of the annual organizational ones. This would be a great thing indeed.