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SOCIAL MACHINES: TEXTUAL TECHNOLOGIES IN ENLIGHTENMENT BRITAIN

Emily D. Spunaugle

Novel Machines: Technology and Narrative Form in Enlightenment Britain by Joseph Drury. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 272 pp. Cloth $85.00.

In *Novel Machines: Technology and Narrative Form in Enlightenment Britain*, Joseph Drury reads the narrative techniques deployed by eighteenth-century novelists as machines developed to contend with fluctuating social and moral landscapes within the Enlightenment. He places his work in line with science and technology studies in order to examine the social anxieties about new machines but foregrounds, specifically, literary forms. Drury stresses not the newness or emergence of literary techniques, or "technical codes," in his eighteenth-century context, but through defamiliarization, Drury answers the call to historicize the techniques that have become "some of the most distinctive formal features of realist fiction" (4). For its successful engagement with broad periods of philosophy, history, and literary criticism, and for a compelling intervention in New Formalism, *Novel Machines* will find admirers among scholars from periods outside the eighteenth century.

Drury grounds his study in a sophisticated historiography of literary theory and contemporaneous philosophers of technology in order to critique the machinery of the Enlightenment. Within and outside of literary studies, scholarship has metaphorized eighteenth-century technology according to power or play: Foucault's *Panopticon* has long

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supported suspicious theoretical readings, and the whimsy of eighteenth-century clockmaker Christopher Pinchbeck's musical *automata* has come to represent a polarized alternative. To motivate the move beyond the techno-suspicious and techno-neutral positions, Drury employs New Formalism as the middle ground, revealing the eighteenth century's cultural penchant for using machines to model human physiology, which construed humanity as cyborg long before the advent of hyperlinks and algorithms. Using an anthro-agnostic approach that erases ontological distinction, Drury examines the relationships between authors, texts, and their readers, as "[t]he machines featured in eighteenth century fiction are also occasions for self-reflexive commentary on the formal dimensions of narrative fiction and their effects on readers" (3).

As case studies, Drury's chapters explore the extended representation of the deliberating mind in Eliza Haywood's amatory fiction; Henry Fielding's performative, self-conscious narrator; Laurence Sterne's digressive, non-linear narration; and Ann Radcliffe's atmospheric descriptions of acousmatic sound. While the literary texts are organized chronologically across the long eighteenth century from Haywood to Radcliffe, Drury suggests not a cumulative and progressive linkage between his four examples but insists on the engagement of each author with philosophy and popular opinions of each historically situated technological innovation. In the chapter "Libertines and Machines in *Love in Excess*," for example, Drury pits the amatory fiction of the Earl of Rochester against that of Eliza Haywood, teasing out the gendered debates in mechanical philosophy that inhere therein. Drury differentiates the properly Hobbesian regard for the materiality of the soul from the "Hobbists'" argument that externally motivated actions absolve the responsibility of the individual, supporting the libertine dismissal of civil and moral laws. Drury holds that Haywood's Hobbesian engagement disrupts this libertine logic by showing that when a woman struggles for morality against her own sexual desire, "the automatism of desire does not deprive the individual of either freedom of action or responsibility" (54). Drury's close reading of Haywood's seemingly contradictory treatment of Amena's "volition and culpability" in *Love in Excess* ultimately reveals a kind of protofeminism, wherein Haywood leverages the predictable, mechanical nature of the novel as a disciplinary machine to reveal a sexual double standard that inevitably entraps women as immoral (56). Drury lands on a kind of essentialism that concedes to women a

"narrowly prudential moral superiority to men" (69).

Just as Haywood's representation of arousal-and-abeyance applauds rational introspection before action, so does chapter 3, "Realism's Ghosts Science and Spectacle in *Tom Jones*," show fiction's development alongside the production of the scientific discourses of engineering and credible knowledge. Drury stresses natural philosophers' work in the period to differentiate burgeoning scientific inquiry from mere magic trick, although each relied on sensational optics for its buy-in: natural philosophy, within the project of the Enlightenment, however, instrumentalized its showmanship as "philosophical rather than superstitious, enlightened rather than credulous" (5). As an example, Drury shows how the performative nature of *Tom Jones* is "constitutive, rather than disruptive" in establishing the "epistemological utility of narrative fiction" (86), useful for manipulating the public's refined taste for spectacle into a literacy of discernment. Drury shows that Fielding replicates the mechanics of charlatanry, while altering the "initially visceral wonder into a cooler, more reflective appreciation of its orderly design" (98).

The most compelling of the chapters not previously published is chapter 4, "The Speed of *Tristram Shandy*," wherein Drury—contra the thrust of extant literature on Sterne's novel, which underscores the novel's deconstructive rejection of a linear, progressive narrative—reads the digressions as intentional braking devices on Sterne's narrative machine. Drury focuses on Tristram's famous coach race against death as a special case of a larger trend of fictive literature of the eighteenth century, including it-narratives, tending toward the digressive as a means of slowing the immoral, gluttonous consumption of texts. Buttressed with Tristram's/Sterne's continual asides and addresses in favor of deep, attentive reading, Drury reveals the rooted suspicion that novels shaped "subjectivity in the wrong way and obliged conformity to the wrong moral norms" (119). Drawing on contemporaneous travel writers, coachmakers, and Sterne's own journals, Drury reads the speed of the post-chaise as a cultural vehicle for disrupting social relations while facilitating other kinds of intimate liaisons and elopements: the sexual temptation represented by the stationary coach, as well as the suggestive personalized pleasure afforded by the coach's jolts and jostles. Slowing the speed of the narrative Tristram is writing, as well as the corresponding time for readers to consume the text, introduces a new reading poetics, as the recounting of Uncle Toby's sexual exploits is forever in abeyance. In this way, Drury holds that just as moving pell-mell in a post-chaise must inevitably shorten its duration, so

Sterne is "teaching readers to look for their pleasures somewhere else than in the discharge of closure"—in the digressions and anticlimactic deferral of Uncle Toby's exploits (140).

Given the necessary mediation of the texts of Fielding, Sterne, Haywood, and Radcliffe through one particular machine, the printing press, its absence in *Novel Machines* is conspicuous—especially on the verge of remarkable changes in printing technology at the outset of the Industrial Revolution. Drury's studied omission of contemporaneous textual awareness to printing technologies in *Novel Machines*, however, gives way to his innovative readings of literary form as technology. The engagement of *Novel Machines* not only extends science and technology studies of the eighteenth century but also shares affinities with other scholarship showing books and texts acting upon the body, such as Kathleen Lubey's *Excitable Imaginations: Eroticism and Reading in Britain, 1660–1760* (Bucknell, 2012) (specifically, Drury's chapter 2), or the mechanics of contrived control over readers argued in Christina Lupton's *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). For its clarity, literature-forward intellectual history, compelling close readings, and engagement with science and technology studies, *Novel Machines* will find readers from within and outside its historical period.

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