

Wendy Beth Hyman, ed. *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*. Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011. x + 210 pp. \$99.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6865-7.

This collection of essays, published in the Ashgate Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity series, discusses literary — as opposed to scientific — examples of automata in the English Renaissance. The collection usefully recalls the existence of automata, both real and fictional, long before the eighteenth century and the coming of age of the new science. Common questions most often discussed among theologians, such as: how did mind and matter work? Where was the soul located? What constitutes animated life? take on a new resonance when one studies automata, as suggested by Wendy Hyman in her introduction.

Part 1 contains essays more loosely connected with the collection's topic. Scott Maisano attempts to prove that Descartes's philosophy was closer to Milton's theodicy than is usually thought. If Descartes is usually remembered as the philosopher who disembodied intellect and claimed animals were automata, Maisano argues that Milton depicted his Adam as a semi-automaton, created fully-formed and only partly capable of free will. Justin Kolb discusses a similar example of automated creatures in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* by exploring the various meanings of "creatures" (created beings, natural or artificial) and the importance of stage properties (including children, considered as semi-rational automata) in the play, in order to claim that "Hermione and Perdita are broken down into parts . . . and are reunited and reassembled in the play's final scene" (48), effectively highlighting the work of *poiesis*, but seemingly stripping both characters of volition altogether. In the following chapter, Lynsey McCulloch examines the example of Talus, Sir Artegall's automated servant in *The Faerie Queene*, which is "both subhuman and superhuman, war-machine and wondrous spectacle" (62). McCulloch further suggests a parallel highlighting Spenser's ambivalent behavior toward the violent colonization of Ireland.

Part 2 contains more convincing and enjoyable essays, perhaps because they deal with motion, which one readily associates with automata. Leah Knight compares Vulcan and Orpheus, both makers of automata, making the inanimate animate. Discussing the links between motion and emotion, notably in the botanical realm, she concentrates on the *topos* of the moving trees, which she playfully calls "the slowest-moving robots ever invented" (91). Brooke Conti describes the ambivalent interpretation of mechanization in religion. Celebrated by some, automation is most often condemned, notably by Protestants, who claimed that automata such as the Rood of Boxley (a head of Jesus which could move its eyes, famously mentioned in Foxe's 1583 *Acts and Monuments*) to be Catholic contraptions meant to gull the superstitious. She then examines the ambiguities of Lancelot Andrewes's 1616 Whitsun sermon, in which he compares "pneumatic" automata with the faithful Christians who possess divine "inward power." Michael Witmore studies the example of the coronation pageant of Edward VI in 1547, using modern-day dance theory to describe the interplay of "metakinesis," "position," and "transition" (113). Meaning is derived, he claims, from the connection of "the pageant's moving parts in a meaningful way" (125), although the dearth of documentary evidence and the elusiveness of the concepts used to describe the pageant obscure his analysis.

While the previous parts do much to analyze the philosophical and cultural context, only part 3 truly concentrates on literary examples of automata. Todd Andrew Borlik compares the brazen head in Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* with various medieval romances as well as earlier Renaissance texts with similar contraptions. In Greene's play, the brazen head becomes proof of Roger Bacon's necromantic powers, rather than an example of his scientific experiments and method. Borlik interestingly argues that the head's oracular pronouncement ("Time is, Time was, Time is past") proves it to be an ingenious clock, such as those found in Strasbourg or in Greene's hometown, Norwich. Rather than being an

example of magic, it is a practical artifact, pointing out the Protestant veneration of time and recalling the Protestant work ethic. The next two chapters discuss automata found in literary gardens. In chapter 9, Wendy Hyman extensively discusses examples of mechanical birds common in medieval and Renaissance gardens. Tokens of both *techne* and magic, the birds elicit contrasting reactions: Thomas Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller* marvels at the workmanship required to produce the automata; Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* emphasize their deceptive powers; and the Bower of Bliss in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* provides yet another example of contrasted reactions. These are further developed in Chapter 10 by Nick Davis, who underlines the manner in which the Bower illustrates the workings of desire and the "libidinization of illusion" (166) and compares the automata in Spenser's poem with a famous French real-life garden at Hesdin (pronounced Eden), and with Guyon's need to destroy the artificial garden to denounce its underlying hedonism, reintroducing a separation between art and nature.

This collection contains several worthy contributions, but they are occasionally marred by spelling mistakes and other typographical inconsistencies, as well as by occasionally distended links with the central topic.

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