

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-10027-4 — Victorian Automata  
Mechanism and Agency in the Nineteenth Century  
Edited by Suzy Anger, Thomas Vranken  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

## VICTORIAN AUTOMATA

The relationship between lifelike machines and mechanistic human behaviour provoked both fascination and anxiety in Victorian culture. This collection is the first to examine the widespread cultural interest in automata – both human and mechanical – in the nineteenth century. It was in the Victorian period that industrialization first met information technology, and that theories of physical and mental human automatism became essential to both scientific and popular understandings of thought and action. Bringing together essays by a multidisciplinary group of leading scholars, this volume explores what it means to be human in a scientific and industrial age. It also considers how Victorian inquiry and practices continue to shape current thought on race, creativity, mind, and agency. This title is part of the Flip it Open programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

SUZY ANGER teaches English and science-technology studies at the University of British Columbia. She is author of the Rudikoff Prize-winning *Victorian Interpretation* (Cornell University Press, 2005), editor of *Knowing the Past* (Cornell University Press, 1999), and coeditor of *Victorian Science as Cultural Authority* (Pickering & Chatto, 2011). She is a past president of the Northeast Victorian Studies Association.

THOMAS VRANKEN is Lecturer in Literary Studies at the University of the South Pacific. His research explores nineteenth-century literature's relationship with technology and print culture. He is the author of *Simulating Antiquity in Boys' Adventure Fiction: Maps and Ink Stains* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and *Literary Experiments in Magazine Publishing: Beyond Serialisation* (Routledge, 2019).

# VICTORIAN AUTOMATA

*Mechanism and Agency in the Nineteenth Century*

EDITED BY

SUZY ANGER

*University of British Columbia*

THOMAS VRANKEN

*University of the South Pacific*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
 978-1-009-10027-4 — Victorian Automata  
 Mechanism and Agency in the Nineteenth Century  
 Edited by Suzy Anger, Thomas Vranken  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE  
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009100274](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009100274)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009110129

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
 of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
 place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Anger, Suzy, editor. | Vranken, Thomas, editor.

TITLE: Victorian automata : mechanism and agency in the  
 nineteenth century / edited by Suzy Anger, Thomas Vranken.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom : Cambridge  
 University Press, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2023048702 | ISBN 9781009100274 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781009110129 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: English literature – 19th century – History and criticism. | Psychology  
 and literature. | Robots in literature. | Technology in literature. | Automatism.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PR468.P68 v54 2024 | DDC 820.9/356–dc23/eng/20240116

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023048702>

ISBN 978-1-009-10027-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
 or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
 publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
 remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	viii
Introduction: The Victorian Automata/Automatism Schema <i>Suzy Anger</i>	i
An Afterthought on Victorian Automata as Afterthought (and Signifier) <i>Thomas Vranken</i>	26
PART I MECHANICAL AUTOMATA	
1 The Mimetic Faculty at Work: The Golden Age of Automata <i>Kara Reilly</i>	33
2 Black Steam: Patents, Portals, and the Counterhistories of the Victorian Android <i>Edward Jones-Imhotep and Alexander Offord</i>	48
3 A Short History of Human–Automata Interaction <i>Simone Natale</i>	70
PART II AUTOMATISM	
4 The Dialectic of Automatism and Free Will <i>Roger Smith</i>	89
5 The Poetry of Conscious Automatism <i>Suzy Anger</i>	107
6 “No Purpose, Heart or Mind or Will”: James Thomson (B.V.) and Psychological Automatism <i>Tyson Stolte</i>	132

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
7	Creative Trollope <i>Linda Austin</i>	151
8	Darwin and Agency – Intention or Automatism? <i>George Levine</i>	170
PART III LITERARY GENRE AND POPULAR FICTION		
9	The Automaton Detective: Victorian Reverberations <i>Thomas Vranken and Stephen Knight</i>	195
10	“A Doll, a Dummy, a Nothing!” The Criminal Mesmerist, His Automaton-Subject, and Debates on Criminal Responsibility in Richard Marsh <i>Shuhita Bhattacharjee</i>	208
11	The Invasion of the White Mind: Race, Automatism, and Mental Hierarchy in the Late Nineteenth Century <i>Aren Roukema</i>	229
PART IV INTERACTIONS		
12	Sublime Puppets versus Uncanny Automata: Artificial Beings in Nineteenth-Century Literature <i>Minsoo Kang</i>	255
13	The Strange Career of Topsy: The Problem of Automata in the Age of Slave Emancipation <i>Chris Dingwall</i>	272
14	George Eliot among the Machines <i>Sally Shuttleworth</i>	289
15	A Disembodied Voice, Yet the Voice of a Human Soul: Decadent Automacy in <i>L'Ève future</i> <i>Richard Menke</i>	314
	<i>Index</i>	333

*Figures*

1.1	Little Tich automaton repaired by the House of Automata in Forbes, Scotland	<i>page</i> 40
2.1	US Patent 75,874, “Improvement in Steam Carriage,” March 24, 1868	49
9.1	Rao and his automaton-double, Khokan	196
14.1	“The Logical Machine”	301

## Contributors

SUZY ANGER is Associate Professor of English at the University of British Columbia, where she specializes in Victorian literature and science-technology studies. She is the author of *Victorian Interpretation* (Cornell University Press, 2005), editor of *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cornell University Press, 2001), and coeditor of *Victorian Science as Cultural Authority* (Pickering & Chatto, 2011).

LINDA AUSTIN is Professor Emerita in the Department of English at Oklahoma State University. A specialist in Victorian literature and culture, she is the author of *The Practical Ruskin: Economics and Audience in the Late Work* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780–1917* (University of Virginia Press, 2007), and *Automatism and Creative Acts in the Age of New Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

SHUHITA BHATTACHARJEE is Assistant Professor of English and Gender & Sexuality Studies in the Departments of Liberal Arts and Design at the Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad. Her research focuses on Victorian literature and culture, South Asian studies, and sexuality studies. She is the author of *Postsecular Theory: Texts and Contexts* (Orient Blackswan, 2021), which conducts a postsecular analysis of nineteenth-century New Woman fiction, scientific romances, and Anglo-Indian novels. Her recent article “The Insurgent Invasion of Anti-Colonial Idols in Late-Victorian Literature,” in *English Literature in Transition*, is part of a monograph she is completing on representations of colonial idols in *fin-de-siècle* literature and culture. With support from a UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Research Grant, she is spearheading the formation of the Nineteenth-Century Diversities Research Network, South Asia chapter.

CHRIS DINGWALL is Assistant Professor of Design History in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in

*List of Contributors*

ix

St. Louis. His work focuses on American and African American cultural history with interests in material culture, political economy, and race. His first book, *Selling Slavery: Race and the Industry of American Culture*, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press, and he is working on a new book project about Black commercial artists in Chicago, which is under contract at the University of Chicago Press.

EDWARD JONES-IMHOTEP is Associate Professor and Director of the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IHPST) at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *The Unreliable Nation: Hostile Nature and Technological Failure in the Cold War* (MIT Press, 2017), which was awarded the Sidney Edelstein Prize (2018) from the Society for the History of Technology.

MINSOO KANG is Professor in European History at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. His research focuses on the cultural and intellectual history of France, England, and Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He is the author of *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 2010) and a coeditor of *Visions of the Industrial Age, 1830–1914: Modernity and the Anxiety of Representation in Europe* (Ashgate, 2008). Recent articles include “The Mechanical Daughter of Rene Descartes,” in *Modern Intellectual History*, and “The Question of the Woman-Machine: Gender, Thermodynamics, and Hysteria in the Nineteenth Century,” in *SubStance*.

STEPHEN KNIGHT is Professorial Fellow in the Department of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. He has held positions as Professor and Head of English at the University of Cardiff, and at the University of Melbourne, where he was also the Robert Wallace Professor of English. His areas of specialization include medieval romance literature and detective fiction – a field in which he has authored numerous books, among them *Crime Fiction, 1800–2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (Palgrave, 2004) and *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Macmillan, 1980).

GEORGE LEVINE is Professor Emeritus in English at Rutgers University. He is author of *The Realistic Imagination* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), *Dying to Know: Scientific Knowledge and Narrative in Victorian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), and *Realism, Ethics, and Secularism* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), among others. His work on Charles Darwin includes *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of*



*Science in Victorian Fiction* (Harvard University Press, 1988), *Darwin Loves You* (Princeton University Press, 2006), and *Darwin the Writer* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

RICHARD MENKE is Professor of English at the University of Georgia. He is the author of *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford University Press, 2008) and *Literature, Print Culture, and Media Technologies, 1880–1900: Many Inventions* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), as well as the editor of *Victorian Material Culture, Volume 3: Inventions and Technological Things* (Routledge, 2022), a collection of primary documents.

SIMONE NATALE is Associate Professor in Media Theory and History at the University of Turin and Editor of Media, Culture & Society. He is the author of two monographs: *Deceitful Media: Artificial Intelligence and Social Life after the Turing Test* (Oxford University Press, 2021) and *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016).

ALEXANDER OFFORD is a Ph.D. student at the IHPST at the University of Toronto, where he studies histories of race, performance, and scientific spectacle. He is also an award-winning playwright and theatre artist, and co-Artistic Director of the acclaimed performance company Good Old Neon.

KARA REILLY is Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter. She is a theatre historian and a dramaturg. Her book *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History* was published by Palgrave in 2011.

AREN ROUKEMA is a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow and sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia. He works at the intersections of popular culture, mental science, and heterodox religion in the Anglosphere. Publications include *Esotericism and Narrative: The Occult Fiction of Charles Williams* (Brill, 2018) and “Testimony, Fiction, and the Science of the Mind: Occult Empiricism and A. P. Sinnett’s *Karma: A Novel*” (*Journal of Literature and Science* 16, no. 1). He is the Editor of *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism*.

SALLY SHUTTLEWORTH is Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. She works on the interrelations of medicine, science, and culture. Her works include *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1984) and *The Mind*

*List of Contributors*

xi

*of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science and Medicine, 1840–1900* (Oxford University Press, 2010). Her most recent books are the coauthored *Anxious Times: Medicine and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019) and the coedited *Science Periodicals in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Constructing Scientific Communities* (University of Chicago Press, 2020).

ROGER SMITH is Emeritus Reader in History of Science, Lancaster University, and Honorary Researcher, Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. He is an intellectual historian of the human sciences, with published work especially on the history of forensic psychiatry, relations of mind and brain, and psychology. Books include *The Norton History of the Human Sciences* (Norton, 1997), *Being Human: Historical Knowledge and the Creation of Human Nature* (Columbia University Press, 2007), *Between Mind and Nature: A History of Psychology* (Reaktion Books, 2013), *The Sense of Movement: An Intellectual History* (Process Press, 2019), and *Kinaesthesia in the Psychology, Philosophy and Culture of Human Experience* (Routledge, 2023).

TYSON STOLTE is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at New Mexico State University. His monograph *Dickens and Victorian Psychology: Introspection, First-Person Narration, and the Mind* was published by Oxford University Press in 2022, and he has published articles on the intersections between Victorian psychology, nineteenth-century science, and literature.

THOMAS VRANKEN is Lecturer in Literary Studies at the University of the South Pacific. His research explores nineteenth-century literature's relationship with technology and print culture. He is the author of *Simulating Antiquity in Boys' Adventure Fiction: Maps and Ink Stains* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and *Literary Experiments in Magazine Publishing: Beyond Serialisation* (Routledge, 2019).