

**Laura Miller, Reading Popular Newtonianism: Print, the Principia, and the Dissemination of Newtonian Science (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 226 pp. US \$71.95 (cloth) ISBN 9780813941257**

Jennifer J. Connor

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America, as well those who work on print culture, book history, and interdisciplinary humanities. Its span is wide, moving, for instance, from seventeenth-century sermons on ships to 2013 land protectors in Elsipogtog; from the postcolonial theory of Frantz Fanon to the stories of Passamaquoddy tribal historian Donald Soctomah; and, from the bumbling attempts of colonial powers to locate the St. Croix river to mid twentieth century sedentarization of the Innu. As Bryant explains, the intent is not simply to incorporate supplementary texts into dominant literary paradigms but to transform the problematic standpoints from which Settlers have deafened themselves to Indigenous voices. Grounded in close readings, clear explanations of intricate historical details, and a clear sense of justice and community, *The Homing Place* is a compelling call to nation-to-nation literary relations.

ANDREA BEVERLEY  
*Mount Allison University*

Laura Miller, *Reading Popular Newtonianism: Print, the Principia, and the Dissemination of Newtonian Science* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 226 pp. US \$71.95 (cloth) ISBN 9780813941257

The first paragraph of the introductory chapter of *Reading Popular Newtonianism* provides an abstract for the book, which scrutinizes the eighteenth-century print reception of Sir Isaac Newton's works (primarily his *Principia Mathematica*, published in 1687) "in a context framed by authorship, print, editorial practices, and reading" (1). The chapter then expands this abstract to describe what author Laura Miller acknowledges is the "ambitious task" (8) of combining history of science and literary history while also employing analytical approaches of print history and critical bibliography. One anticipates a novel and thorough study from this discussion. Indeed, through its delineation of all the many themes, disciplinary approaches, theory, and scholarly traditions for this study, this introductory chapter affords a useful literature review for expert and uninformed readers alike.

Such wide-ranging scholarship, however, requires not only unusual expertise and talent on behalf of the author, but it implicitly demands full treatment in a large monograph—as is the norm especially in history of science. The brief length of *Reading Popular*

*Newtonianism* (169 pages) immediately indicates that the author's declared ambition would be difficult to achieve. The temporal, linguistic, and geographic scope of the study alone is broad, as it includes the dissemination of Newtonian representation and concepts over a century and two continents. In five chapters, Miller aims to show the importance of print in the *Principia*, a book that Newton carefully monitored through its production with the same printer the Royal Society employed for its *Philosophical Transactions*, Joseph Streater. She explores the subsequent popularization of Newton and his masculinity first through the reevaluation of two poems about him: the "Ode" that prefaced the *Principia*, by Edmond Halley, Newton's astronomer colleague who read the *Principia* in proof; and the poem in James Thomson's eighteenth-century book, *The Seasons*. Miller then reexamines eighteenth-century English-language editions of Francesco Algarotti's *Newtonianism for Ladies*, and the spread of popular Newtonianism by the late eighteenth century into books borrowed by members of the New York Society Library.

The use of "critical bibliography" in Miller's book relates mainly to the four editions of Algarotti's *Newtonianism for Ladies*, a popularization that has been studied but not previously understood by some scholars as unique editions. In this examination, Miller therefore describes and compares the editions, their concept of translation (from the original Italian), the lack of intellectual property recognition for footnote authors, and the modifications that potentially reoriented Algarotti's readership from women to men. Elsewhere in Miller's book, granular analysis of typography, pages, binding, and spine titles, lacks bibliographical sophistication. For instance, the typographical comparison between Newton's book and the earlier book by Robert Hooke (*Micrographia*, 1665) seems empty without fully demonstrating that the print choices and purported distinctions were those made solely by the authors not the printers. With the exception of Newton's own discussion of print strategies in his book's front matter, and his addition of elements in the book's second edition in 1713 to aid readers' accessibility (leading to contents and index pages in subsequent editions), Miller's considerations of the print strategies of Newton and others in particular often rest more on content analysis than on the contemporary context of actual printing practices.

Chapter five of *Reading Popular Newtonianism* is more recognizable to bibliographers, book historians, and librarians. Here Miller analyzes the charging records of the New York Society Library from 1789 to 1792 to reveal the popularity of works with Newtonian content.

Her study, as she tells us, follows the “book historical tradition” (141). Indeed, in its straightforward approach, this chapter is the most satisfying read in the book, including a table of borrowing records for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* that actually has a reference in the discussion (151). Nevertheless, it would have been helpful to provide brief background information on this library, including the fact that the accounts of male borrowers were shared within families—especially given Miller’s additional focus on gender and gendered works. One needs to hunt and peck to find this information, which is provided later in the chapter, or in an endnote.

Apart from its informative introductory chapter and these discrete yet often problematic examinations of the impact of print on Newtonian concepts, *Reading Popular Newtonianism* remains a study that does not achieve its own aims. Its difficulty lies not in the esoteric subject matter of a foundational book of mathematics, written in Latin in the seventeenth century, and reception of its famous scientist-author and his concepts traced through eighteenth-century publications, but rather difficulty rests in Miller’s writing style, organizational structure, and intended audience for her study. Most troubling, her discussion repeats assertions about its approaches and claims to originality to such an extraordinary degree that they detract from the actual analysis. Every chapter of this book, at beginning and punctuated throughout, tells us what it will do, what its particular focus is, what has been done, where we are going in the remainder of the book, and what the book itself contributes to our knowledge. The discursive endnotes often do the same. The book also lacks a complementary concluding chapter, tagging on a brief two pages to chapter five on an entirely different topic of library history in order to conclude the whole wide-ranging study of reading popular Newtonianism. Such extensive repetitive signalling rather than strong interpretive summations and a relative lack of conclusion creates an overall impression that the author felt unusually compelled to deflect the reader’s attention from the weaknesses perhaps inherent in such an ambitious task.

Other problems of organizational structure affect clarity. All six illustrations (images of title pages etc.) are examined in detail without any references in the text to their figure numbers. The reader might flip pages to and fro either for illustrations, or even for concepts, before realizing that neither had been introduced: a transaction’s “blank” is noted in passing from Wolfgang Iser, for instance, but described in a preceding endnote (9); or a title (*The Mind Is a Metaphor*) is identified before alluding in the next sentence (and in the endnote)

that it refers to a database and not to another book (akin to *Illness as Metaphor*) (121). Short explanatory references and phrases within the discussion would ensure that the reader does not trip into unrelated lines of thinking and have to backtrack. One wonders whether the production of *Reading Popular Newtonianism* itself may be a factor: if discursive footnotes in the manuscript were converted to endnotes for Miller's book, more re-arrangement and rewriting of text had to occur to achieve readability after publication.

Unfortunately, this elliptical stylistic tendency is accentuated by lengthy quotations from literature either with unanalyzed overt metaphoric allusions (132-3) or with belaboured explanation of the obvious (66-7). As well, something discussed by Miller too often "gestures," tending to increase a modern reader's sense of having to look elsewhere for the necessary background or interpretation. Discussion also frequently connects this study to its subject authors in ironic ways: unlike Newton, its prose is not "lucid" (76), and its integration of image and text does not allow "for greater ease of reading" (49); but perhaps similar to Algarotti, its "signaling would alert those who were only interested in [book history] to skip ahead" (113).

Perhaps the analysis of books borrowed from a late eighteenth-century library in New York will inspire similar studies to expand our knowledge of the spread of European science in a formative period in North America. Otherwise, *Reading Popular Newtonianism* unfortunately is likely to disappoint book historians.

JENNIFER J. CONNOR

*Memorial University of Newfoundland*

Sara Jeannette Duncan, *A Social Departure: How Orthodoxy and I Went Round the World by Ourselves*, ed. Linda Quirk with Cheryl L. Cundell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1890; Ottawa, Ont.: Tecumseh Press, 2018), 556 pp. \$19.95 (paperback) ISBN 9781896133638

On September 17, 1888, "Miss Sarah [sic] Jeannette Duncan (Garth Grafton) of the Montreal *Star* left Brantford"<sup>2</sup> for a journey "round the world the wrong way around" (175). During their travels, she

<sup>2</sup> Montreal *Star*, 18 September 1888, quoted in Marian Fowler, *Redney: A Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan*, 1983 (Markham, ON: Penguin, 1985) 151.