

Etienne Lopicard, 'An Alternative to the Cosmic and Mechanic Metaphors for the Human Body? The House Illustration in *Ma'aseh Tuviyah* (1708).' *Medical History* 52 (2008): 93-105

In the Early Modern period, the new mechanical philosophy profoundly influenced the way people imagined their bodies. Descartes' striking description, in his *Traite de l'homme*, of the body as 'an earthen machine' echoes around the contemporary literature, lingering into the twenty-first century. Over the past fifty years, and provoked by the ubiquitous presence of the computer, cyborg literature has revisited the idea of the machine-man and considered its sinister ramifications. It is not surprising then that so-called mechanical bodies have been a key discussion point in recent years for inter-disciplinary scholars of the arts and sciences, and that the research of early modern scholars has been prominent in cross-period discussions. At the last conference run by the Association for the Medical Humanities, in September 2006, Margaret Healy delivered a plenary on 'Writing, Illness, and Contemplating Machine Bodies Prior to Descartes' in which she discussed Montaigne's fascination with water technology in relation to his trouble with the stone. A year later, at the conference held by the Research Centre for Literature, Arts and Science at the University of Glamorgan, Jonathan Sawday gave a stimulating lecture on anti-machines, with special reference to John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester's thoughts about his body as a malfunctioning sex-machine.

Etienne Lopicard's article does not challenge the importance of the machine-body in pre-enlightenment thought, but it does offer evidence to complicate the discourse. Tobias Cohen's *Ma'aseh Tuviyah* (*The Work of Tobias*), published in 1708, is a Hebrew medical treatise; as Lopicard cites David B. Ruderman, it is 'the most influential early modern Hebrew textbook of the sciences, especially medicine'. Lopicard's article focuses in on an illustration that falls at the start of a chapter on pathology, a section entitled 'A New House'. The intriguing illustration, reproduced in the article, depicts a man's opened abdomen next to an analogous four-story house. The stomach is depicted as a cauldron in the 'kitchen', with the heart a floor above in a gently ventilated chamber fit for the 'master of the house'. Lopicard explores the drawing in relation to Cohen's loyalties to the iatrochemical depiction of the body as a distillery, continuing to discuss the origins of the house metaphor in a series of lectures Harvey delivered at the College of Physicians in London in 1616, and the use of the image in John Donne's poetry. The house-man, Lopicard tells us, might have been a mnemonic device for medical students at Padua, where Cohen moved to study with Solomon Conegliano, after he and his companion suffered bad treatment at the medical school in Frankfurt-on-Oder. The second half of the article offers a close analysis of how Cohen's particular lived experience at these two medical schools could have prompted him to use the house-man illustration.

This article helpfully draws attention to one pre-enlightenment way of depicting the body that differs from the main discourse of body-as-machine – until 1923, when Le Corbusier would bring the images full-circle by describing the house as 'a machine for living in' (*Vers Une Architecture*). Whether the image and idea of the house-man is still present in the twenty-first century, dominated by a concern over posthumanism as well as the man-machine, is perhaps a topic for future research.

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