

This study examines the relationship between British fiction and the tradition of mechanistic science derived from Isaac Newton, and provides a bridge between the mechanical philosophy of the eighteenth century and present-day habits of thought. Tracing the evolution of the concept of mechanism among science writers and novelists of the past 200 years, it shows how the pre-mechanistic world of *Pride and Prejudice* and the relatively unproblematic empiricism of *The Bride of Lammermoor* were succeeded by the quandaries of *Bleak House*, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, and *The Egoist*, and how alternatives to the mechanistic tradition were worked out in *The Secret Agent* and *Women in Love*. Analysis of Doris Lessing's *Canopus in Argos: Archives* identifies features of the tradition which still survive.