



Steampunk, Alternate-History, and Nineteenth-Century Digital Humanities (Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature)

Roger Whitson

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Demonstrating how nineteenth-century literary history works when confronted by technological repurposing, electronic-based object work, alternate history, and non-human temporalities, this is the first book to theorize approaches to steampunk's histories and technologies as tools that can be appropriated in a research context. This book examines how the development of steampunk parallels similar developments in the digital humanities, such as an interest in computational forms of temporality, a turn towards hands-on material research, and an embrace of conjectural or "what-if?" thinking. Whitson argues for a properly digital and conjectural approach to nineteenth-century literary history, emphasizing the alternate possibilities derived from steampunk technology, literature, and culture. Showing the interplay between the present and the past, Whitson presents a range of authors, programmers, and technological designers navigating the complexities of alternate history. Some of these complexities include confronting colonialist technological design, investigating alternatives to ecological sustainability narratives dominating technological development, exploring the role of quirky practices like constructing Babbage's analytical engine using Lego parts, illustrating the use of Victorian authors in addressing academic labor issues in the digital humanities, and creating a computer using only the technological affordances found in the nineteenth century. This book turns to the alternate histories and materialities of steampunk as a model for engaging in nineteenth-century digital humanities as a form of inquiry combining literary scholarship, material tinkering, and conjectural exploration. The volume constructs a digital humanities methodology incorporating the historical potential found in the nineteenth century, while also exploring the power of history to conjecture alternatives to the present.

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