

# Romantic Cyborgs

Authorship and Technology in  
the American Renaissance

Klaus Benesch

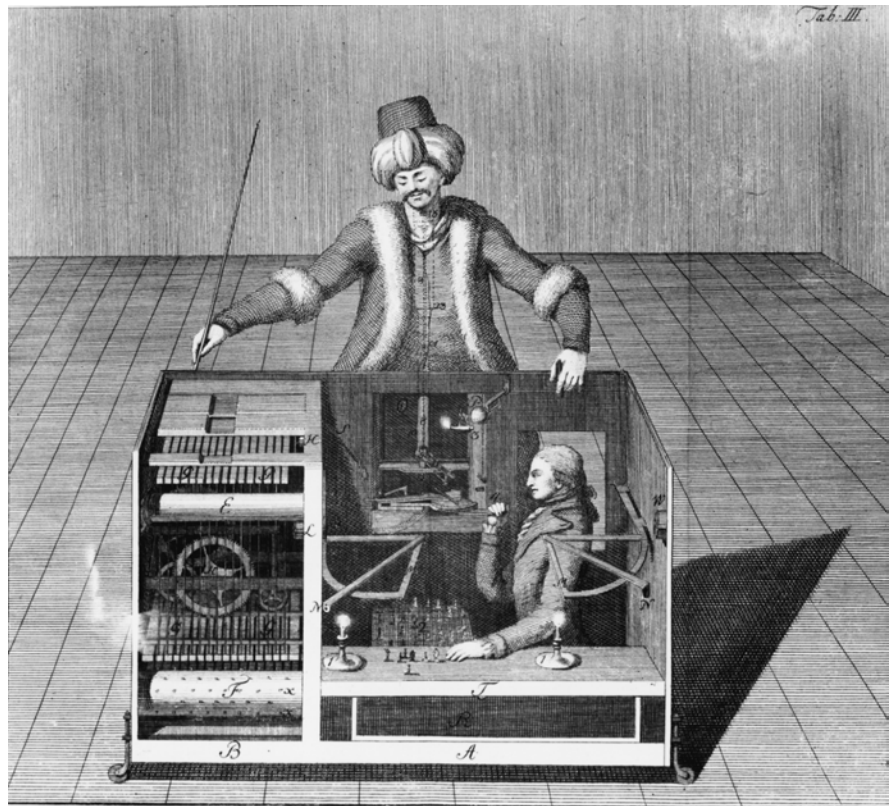
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Explores the relationship between  
authorship and technology in  
nineteenth-century America

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Literary critics have long regarded the rejection of technology as a distinguishing feature of American Romanticism. Yet as Klaus Benesch shows in this insightful study, the attitude of antebellum writers toward the advent of the machine age was far more complicated than often supposed. Although fraught with tension, the relationship between professional authorship and evolving technology reflected a pattern of adjustment rather than opposition, as writers sought to redefine their place within a culture that increasingly valued the engineer and the scientist.

According to Benesch, major writers such as Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Whitman, and Rebecca Harding Davis recognized technology as a powerful engine of social change—a driving force that threatened to subordinate their creative faculties to the inexorable dictates of industrial production. In response, they conjured up “cybernetic” self-representations that attempted to preserve the autonomy of the



individual author in the face of ongoing technological encroachment. These biomechanical images helped writers construct a hybrid identity that reconciled new modes of technological production with older, more organic models of professional writing.

In the end, Benesch argues, Romantic literary discourse is marked as much by admiration for the technological as by strains of resentment and cultural anxiety about its negative effects. As such, it prefigures in important and previously unacknowledged ways the modernist and postmodernist sensibilities that would follow.

“Benesch’s reading of the canonical authors uncovers a dimension of these writers—and this period—that is strikingly original. One finishes this study feeling that cyborgian imagery is central to any consideration of the new nineteenth-century culture of technology. His scholarship is most impressive.”—Miles Orvell, author of *After the Machine: Visual Arts and the Erasing of Cultural Boundaries*

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