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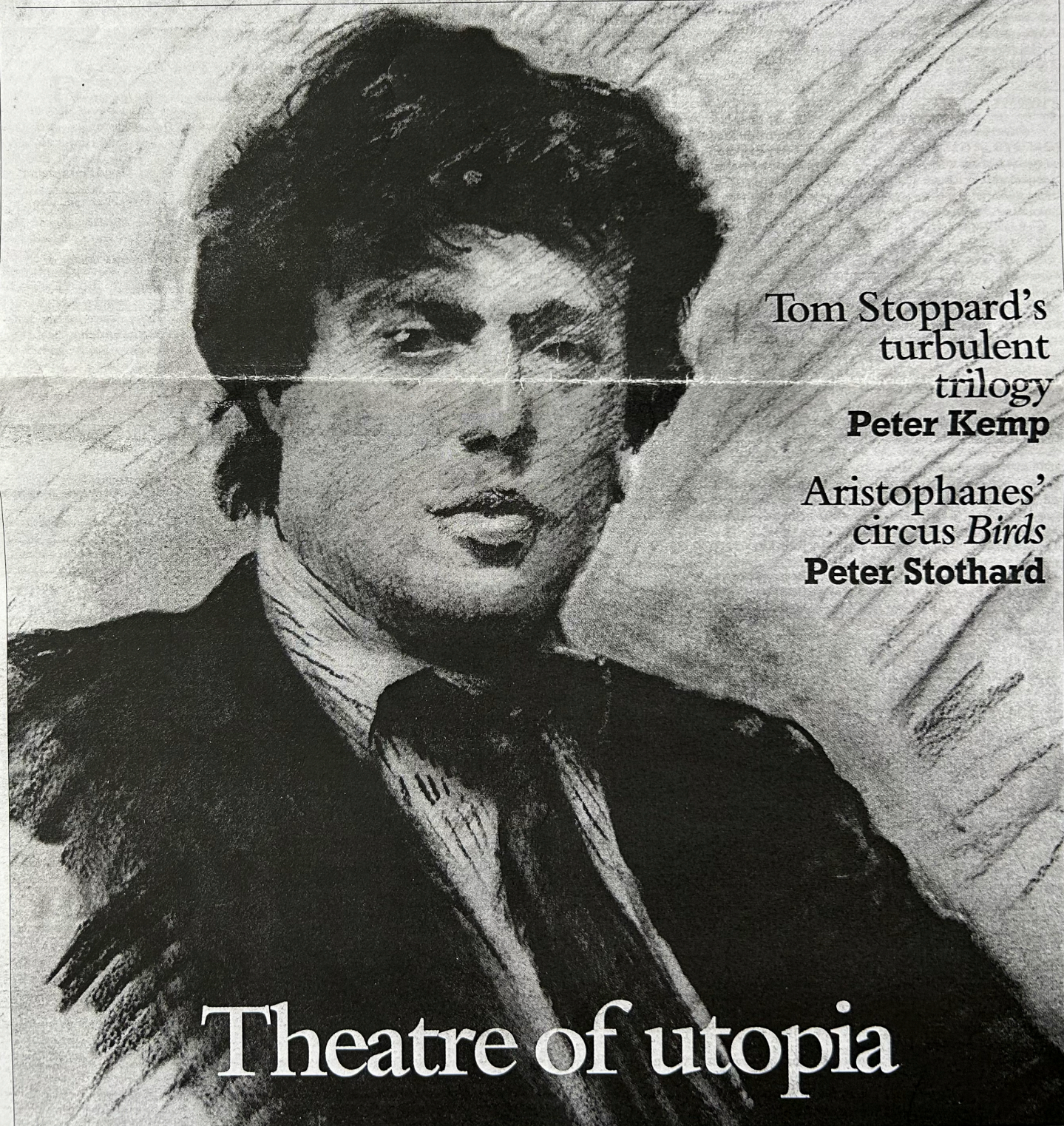
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Peter Stothard

Theatre of utopia

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University of York
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Memoirs

D. Graham Burnett

A TRIAL BY JURY

211pp. Bloomsbury. £14.99.

0 7475 5474 9

Few democratic responsibilities prove as levelling as jury service; or, perhaps, as frustrating. D. Graham Burnett, a young historian of science at Princeton University, initially viewed his call to duty as an unwelcome interruption to his studies. What was to follow proved richly, and extra-curricularly, educative.

In *A Trial by Jury* Burnett recalls the three days and four nights of the trial for murder of Monte Virginia Milcray, who was arrested after the severely lacerated corpse of Randolph Cuffee was found in Milcray's New York apartment in 1998. Cuffee had been stabbed twenty-five times, mostly in the back. Burnett opens with a description of the victim's injuries and the scene which the Manhattan police discovered, before revealing that the final verdict was "Not Guilty". He then describes the more prosaic procedures of jury selection and service. Added theatrical pizzazz is provided by a parade of glamorous transvestites.

Burnett is a neat, earnest figure, who sits apart during breaks and reads Wallace Stevens. He could easily appear an unreconstructed snob, if this tale (unlike in Britain, the reporting of the deliberations of an American jury are not legally gagged) wasn't about his own reconstruction, as much as the facts of the case. The prosecution's contention was that Milcray had knowingly murdered Cuffee, because he was unable to maintain his double life (he had a fiancée). Milcray claimed, however, that Cuffee had dressed as a woman, lured him into his flat and then tried to rape him. The pressing issue facing the jury, who were hindered by inadequate police work, was whether Milcray, whose story was riddled with inconsistencies, acted in self-defence. Burnett admits an ingrained bias towards defendants, though he proves less charitable towards his fellow jurors, particularly those of a lesser intellect, some of whom are periodically petulant or irrational and, much to his consternation, seem blithely nonchalant about their civic and intellectual responsibilities. He decides to push for a unanimous acquittal, but evidently is not entirely happy with this choice. In the writing of this book, and in rearticulating his thoughts, he found some solace. He has also turned out a delightfully scrupulous and penetrating book.

DAVID VINCENT

History

Colleen Reardon

HOLY CONCORD WITHIN
SACRED WALLS

Nuns and music in Siena, 1575-1700

289pp. Oxford University Press. £50.

0 19 513295 5

Nuns are now big business in the academic world, partly because they seem to provide abundant material for feminist investiga-

tions into oppressed communities, and the daily details of their cloistered lives readily suggest "alternative" accounts of the past which can be read "against" mainstream, patriarchal histories. Colleen Reardon, though, comes to this subject as an expert on Siena, and her robust, contextualized view of convent life subtly deconstructs these simplistic views.

First, she shows that the nuns played anything but a minor role in seventeenth-century Siena. Moreover, a good number of them were well connected: in the 1670s, for example, Agstino Chigi (nephew of Pope Alexander VII) "decided to consign seven of his daughters to the Sienese nunnery of S. Girolamo" where his sister was waiting to greet them. In such circumstances, "the supposedly impregnable cloister was actually quite permeable", and when Cesti's *L'Argia* was performed in the town, Agstino's sister wrote without a hint of shame that "yesterday I took all my girls out of the convent and escorted them to the opera".

The church authorities subdued postulants such as these "only very slowly": the nuns frequently invited male teachers into the convents and found ingenious ways of making public what should have been private musical performances. Only in the realm of composition does this female empowerment seem to break down, since "Siena produced not a single nun who published her music during the Seicento". Instead, attention is lavished on motets written for the nuns by the nobleman Della Ciaia.

Perhaps Reardon's boldest move, though, is to treat the surviving autobiographical accounts of the lives of individual women musicians with strong scepticism. Caterina Vannini, for instance, claims that she "prayed for and was granted crippling deformities", so as to rein in her musical pleasures. In such cases, we are told, we must question "the roles of memory and will" played in the autobiographical process, and the degree to which "self-fashioning" extended beyond writing into the "actual conduct of life". Not a politically correct thought, but a historically acute one – especially if we are to understand the past better than it wanted to be understood.

ANTHONY PRYER

Biography

Blair Fuller

ART IN THE BLOOD

Seven generations of American artists
in the Fuller family

352pp. Berkeley, CA: Creative Arts Book

Company. \$27.50 (paperback, \$19.50).

0 88739 305 5

This is a chronicle of seven artistic generations in an American family, from the late eighteenth century to the present. Only two are well known: George Fuller (1822-84), whose muted, golden-toned landscapes were much admired in the 1880s, and his son, Henry Brown Fuller (1867-1934), a neo-classical painter, one of the artists at the Cornish Beaux Arts Colony at the turn of the century. But a remarkable collection of family papers and works of art has allowed the author, grandson of Henry Brown Fuller, to recount the art life of the men and women in his extended family.

The Fuller family wove its history into the fabric of American life in fascinating ways. One progenitor painted a Creek chief who became an American general in the 1820s; another participated in the famous "Conversa-

tions" of Margaret Fuller, a distant cousin. George Fuller experimented with the daguerreotype, met John Ruskin, and was a friend of William Dean Howells. Henry Brown Fuller associated with genteel artists at Cornish and raucous expatriates in Paris in the 1920s. The author's father was an architect, his mother a sculptor; their friends included the poet Archibald MacLeish. Encounters with better-known figures in the American and international art world enliven this account, yet a troubling question persists: with so much talent and so many opportunities, why did this family produce so few memorable works of art? Its high-water mark in public acclaim came at the end of George Fuller's life, when he was celebrated as "Boston's Greatest Artist". But New York, not Boston, had become the hub of American art life. After generations of sacrifice to keep the family farm in Deerfield, Massachusetts, the Fullers found themselves in a cultural backwater (and later, with the emergence of Historic Deerfield in the 1940s, a living museum). Ironically, however, it was Deerfield's rebirth as a tourist destination that ensured the preservation of the thousands of letters and scores of paintings by members of the family, which made this book possible.

Blair Fuller, an editor and novelist, is a clear and compelling writer. He has not completely solved the organizational challenge of integrating dozens of vignettes into a continuous narrative, nor does he find the larger themes and issues in the Fullers' story, but he has produced a likeable and informative family history.

JOY KASSON

Donald Matthew

KING STEPHEN

302pp. Hambledon and London. £25.

1 85285 272 0

The stream of studies of the reign of Stephen initiated by J. H. Round's *Geoffrey de Mandeville* (1892) has continued unabated in recent years. This is the latest. Donald Matthew presents it as no more than "reflections from the classroom", the fruit of years of special subject teaching, but it is much more than that. One of its most interesting and worthwhile aspects is a survey of historians' treatments of Stephen up to the mid-twentieth century. Professor Matthew often reiterates that assessments of the reign (1135-54) must be shaped by present concerns. He draws a stark contrast between the civil war of those years, which, in his view, had no ideological motor, and the civil war of the seventeenth century, which, in his view, did. It is, therefore, a pity that he does not say more in his survey about the forgotten early modern assessments.

The main argument of this book is that the magnitude and consequences of the conflict between Stephen of Blois and Henry I's designated heir, Matilda, have been exaggerated by contemporary clerical writers and later academic historians; that the business of royal government continued much as usual; and that where there was slack, the in any case more important institutions of local government took it up.

The conventional interpretation of Stephen's reign as the antithesis of the main trend in English history – that of centralized royal government – is therefore, in his view, mistaken. All of these points have been made before by others, but Matthew combines them into what is

very much his own case. The problem is that, perhaps because he envisages a general readership, he intersperses his analysis with long, sententious reflections on government in general, and on other matters, which add little to his argument. Revealing anecdotes and details garnered from a lifetime of reading the sources are, by contrast, too often confined to the end-notes. The reflections sap his argument of the drive necessary to counter R. H. C. Davis's *King Stephen* (1967) at which Matthew takes many swipes. Still, after 110 years, *Geoffrey de Mandeville* remains unsurpassed.

GEORGE GARNETT

Literary History

Klaus Benesch

ROMANTIC CYBORGS

Authorship and technology in the

American Renaissance

246pp. University of Massachusetts Press;

distributed in the UK by Eurospan. £32.

1 55849 323 9

There is something very 1980s about the notion of the cyborg. It belongs to an era in which the term "techno" was still a glittery new addition to the vocabulary of popular culture. A fascination with the notion of the cyborg clearly marked the end of the romantic/organic outlook of the late 1960s and 70s, and the start of an avant-garde interest in the freedoms of new technology. This is a pattern which has played itself out in multiple, overlapping cycles throughout the modern period. And it is the nascent presence of the cyborg in the thought and work of the first generation of American Romantic writers in the nineteenth century that provides Klaus Benesch with his topic. Benesch, Professor of English at the University of Bayreuth, re-examines the classic writers of the American Renaissance – Hawthorne, Melville, Poe and Whitman – along with Rebecca Harding Davis, seeking to tease out their interest in, and admiration for, the technological advances of their time. He specifically contrasts his own study with earlier readings by critics whom he sees as misrepresenting or overlooking this theme, because of their overwhelmingly Romantic, anti-technological frameworks. This concentration on the literary treatment of the machine during the period when America made its great change from a rural to an industrialized urban culture is a productive one.

The problem is that Benesch has difficulty in holding on to his definition of the cyborg, and his book, like so many academic studies, is thickened with references to previous critics and their views, turning a good number of the book's potentially interesting commentaries into lists of acknowledgements. None the less, Benesch keeps some intriguing topics in play, such as the literary use of the daguerreotype and its relation to the age-old trope of the *Doppelgänger*, and the popular nineteenth-century exhibition of the "Chess-Turk", a machine purported to play chess but actually operated by a man hiding inside the apparatus. Best of all is Benesch's sensitivity to the reliance of the authors in question on the rise of new technologies of literary production, such as changes in printing and distribution, and their ambiguous attitude to industrialization. These changes both made it easier for their work to reach readers and provided them with a target which they rarely failed to attack.

KATE FULLBROOK



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From the issue dated January 31, 2003

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The Soul of a New Machine

Once a speculative idea, the cyborg is now a familiar subject in the humanities

By SCOTT McLEEMEE

Cyborgs are hacking into the intellectual mainframe. They have taken over cultural studies, established a colony in the English department, and -- wet circuits glistening -- started to invade anthropology. (The media-studies people never had a chance.) Intimate couplings of flesh and technology, cyborgs dismantle old ideas about "nature" and "culture," "man" and "machine," scrambling them together in encrypted patterns that can scarcely be imagined by "humans" -- to use another terribly old-fashioned word ...

ALSO SEE:

[A Reading List for the Posthumanists](#)

[Colloquy: Join an online discussion on humanities research on cyborgs.](#)

Not so fast! After all, there are at least a few meat-based hominids left in academe. But outsiders curious about recent developments in the humanities may be excused for thinking they have wandered onto the set of a science-fiction movie. A scan of recent titles reveals an abundance of books drawing on what might be called "the cyborg concept" -- the idea that people and technology are converging and merging, perhaps even already inextricably fused. What was once a speculative notion about the shape of things to come has become a normal part of the conversation, at least in some quadrants of scholarly life.

The term (itself a hybrid of "cybernetics" and "organism") was coined more than 40 years ago by scientists working in the space program. "A cyborg is essentially a man-machine system in which the control mechanisms of the human portion are modified externally by drugs or regulatory devices so that the being can live in an environment different from the normal one," explained *The New York Times* in 1960. By a neat coincidence of intellectual history, that was shortly after C.P. Snow's famous University of Cambridge lecture on "The Two Cultures," which inspired an outpouring of worry over the gap between the sciences and the humanities.

That gap is wider than ever. Experts rarely talk outside their specialties, much less across the cognitive divide. Yet musings about "the post-human future" among humanists are now as commonplace as e-mail. Interest isn't limited to scholars studying cyberpunk fiction, either.

During the early 1990s, the cyborg emerged as a trendy theoretical notion within cultural studies -- the conceptual equivalent of a tattoo and a pierced lip ("transgressive," perhaps, but mostly just baffling to the uninitiated). But today, references to the cyborg concept are far too routine to be cool. Literary historians interested in 19th-century authors are as likely to explore the notion of human-machine fusions as film scholars analyzing the *oeuvre* of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Cultural critics find in the cyborg a perfect metaphor for how we live now, a world in which information technology is everywhere, the human

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genome has been digitally mapped, and many people feel anxious if they can't spend a little time online every few hours.

Indeed, the strangest thing about interest in cyborgs in the humanities may be that scarcely anyone now finds it strange.

Manifest Destiny

Explorations at the frontier between the human and the technological span at least three centuries. In *Man a Machine* (1748), the French physician and amateur philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie proposed that the human soul was a byproduct of physical processes: "Everything depends on the way our machine is running," he wrote. The theory infuriated theologians and won the author exile. In 1818, a novel by Mary Shelley introduced the world to its first bioengineer, Victor Frankenstein. And in 1909, F.T. Marinetti published "The Futurist Manifesto," which called for artists and writers to forget the past and draw inspiration from the speed and violence of modern technology.

More-recent speculation within academe also has a manifesto: "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," by Donna J. Haraway, a professor of the history of consciousness at the University of California at Santa Cruz. In 1982, as Ms. Haraway recalls, the editors of *Socialist Review* asked her for a brief article on the issues facing feminist thinkers in the Reagan era.

Her landmark essay, first published in 1985, ended up setting the theoretical agenda long after the Gipper withdrew from public life, and it has been reprinted more than a dozen times. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, the "Manifesto" runs some 30 closely printed pages, including annotations to guide students through Ms. Haraway's dense network of allusions to poststructuralist thinkers and contemporary science.

Calling the cyborg "a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality" and "an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings," Ms. Haraway saw the mixture of organic and mechanical elements in the science-fiction image as a way to challenge conservative attitudes about gender, while also unsettling leftist attitudes toward science and nature. "Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic replication," she wrote.

She also pointed out that a creature whose womb, so to speak, was a laboratory would cast into doubt traditional ideas about the roles of "father" and "mother." At the same time, she argued, the cyborg would make an unlikely hero for radicals, for high-tech research is typically financed by corporate interests, often with grants from the Defense Department. Cyborgs may be "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism," wrote Ms. Haraway. "But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential."

The suggestion that feminists and leftists might have a stake in what Ms. Haraway called "technoscience" strongly influenced scholars in cultural studies -- and irritated their opponents. In *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels With Science* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), Paul R. Gross, a professor emeritus of life sciences at the University of Virginia, and Norman Levitt, a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University at New Brunswick, quoted passages from Ms. Haraway's work and declared themselves simply baffled.

The provocative quality of her work (stimulating to some, annoying to others) comes through most clearly in a single line from the "Manifesto": "The boundary between science fiction and social reality," Ms. Haraway declares, "is an optical illusion."

Generation Cyborg

"Part of the impact of that essay was the timing," says Rob Latham, an associate professor of English and American studies at the University of Iowa. "The cyborg idea was in the air. People were entering more-intimate relationships with technology. Intellectuals started having big computers on their desktops, for one. And the cyborg was becoming a major element of popular culture. Haraway gave you a grip on why it was so fascinating. A lot was happening in the image of a metallic body beneath the flesh and muscle of *The Terminator*."

Mr. Schwarzenegger's film opened in 1984, not long before Ms. Haraway's "Manifesto" reached the rather smaller audience of *Socialist Review*. And readers of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), the first of the cyberpunk novels, were discovering a future in which information wars were fought on computer networks that plugged directly into the nervous system.

Countless variations on such themes have emerged over the past two decades. In *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption*, Mr. Latham interprets the social reality within those powerful science-fiction images.

For Mr. Latham, the contemporary fascination with human-machine synthesis reflects deep changes in the economy: the shift from the primacy of the factory (in which the routines of mass production and consumption shaped much of ordinary life) to a postindustrial system emphasizing innovation, flexibility, and speed. Those are values all associated with young people, whose knack for adapting to technological change is matched only by their insatiable desire to consume. Which, in turn, helps keep the wheels of postindustrial commerce turning.

Immersion in technology and the mass media provides youth with access to power while also threatening to subject them to domination, whether through electronic surveillance or plain old credit-card debt. In Mr. Latham's reading, the cyborgs in popular fiction and film offer an imaginative reconfiguration of the experience of being plugged into the postindustrial system. Another such image, he says, is that of the unquenchable consumer par excellence: the vampire.

Brave (and Kinky) New World

Mr. Latham's work draws on Karl Marx, who called normal life under capitalism a matter of "commodity fetishism." For Amanda Fernbach, an independent scholar, the cyborg embodies a different sort of fetishism, the kind that Freud discussed. Blurring the lines between the natural and the artificial, the cyborg transforms the limits of what people can imagine, and desire.

In *Fantasies of Fetishism: From Decadence to the Post-Human*, Ms. Fernbach, who works for an Internet company in New York, uses psychoanalytic theory to discuss the often strangely eroticized quality of cyborgs -- the imagery, for example, of "jacking into a system" by plugging wires into electronic sockets in the body.

For Freud, a fetish was a way of dealing with the uneasiness aroused in the fetishist

by sexual difference. A man might become obsessed with a woman's high heels, say, to avoid Oedipal anxieties about castration. Whatever else might be said about that theory, it is ultimately rather conservative in its notions of gender and desire. The power and "otherness" implied by cyborg imagery go well beyond anything a Eurocentric patriarch of Freud's generation could imagine.

"Cloning is part of cyborg imagery, a means of creating our future selves without a heterosexual origin," says Ms. Fernbach. "What happens to differences of gender when they become fluid thanks to technology? If people can't deal with differences in skin color, what happens when we can proliferate bodily differences even more -- when you can have a third ear constructed, perhaps?"

Old-Time Cyborgs

Not all of the scholarly writing inspired by the cyborg concept tries to peer into the not-too-distant future. In *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance*, Klaus Benesch, a professor of English at Germany's University of Bayreuth, examines traces of the cyborg in authors of the antebellum United States.

"As a scholar of American literature, you can't avoid the question of technology," says Mr. Benesch. "But traditionally, you would talk about these authors as being obsessed with it because they hate it and want to fend it off." Mr. Benesch finds a rather more ambivalent relationship with technology, and a surprising number of images merging human and machine.

In Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Man That Was Used Up" (1839), a garrulous war hero turns out to be constructed entirely of artificial parts; even his voice emanates from a "somewhat singular looking machine." (Three years earlier, Poe had used his considerable analytic skills to prove that a much-discussed mechanical chess player was actually operated by a midget hidden inside it.) Works by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville also contain images of automatons, prostheses, and human beings with machine-like qualities.

"This recurring theme of biomechanical hybridity," as Mr. Benesch calls it, reveals an effort by early American writers to work out the terms of the relationship between the fine arts (including literature) and the useful arts (a term subsuming the products of craftwork and manufacture). "In the early American Republic," says Mr. Benesch, "when authors were trying to establish themselves as a full-fledged profession, they had to compete for respect with others like engineers and scientists." Their complex feelings about the undeniable impact of machinery on society appeared in their work in the form of cyborgs.

In short, they were a little like scholars in the humanities today, anxiously trying to figure out their place in a world shaped by strange new forces of technology. As a reminder of just how new, Mr. Benesch points out that the very word "technology" seems to have been introduced to America by Jacob Bigelow, a Harvard professor whose *Elements of Technology* appeared in 1829.

Cyborgs 'R' Us

One effect of reading a lot of scholarly work on cyborgs is that you begin seeing them everywhere. And rightly so, according to *The Cyborg Handbook*, a collection of essays and documents by scientists and people in the humanities. In their introduction, the editors write: "The range of these intimate human-machine

relationships is mind-boggling. It's not just RoboCop, it's our grandmother with a pacemaker ... Not just the cyberwarriors of a hundred militaristic science-fiction stories, but arguably anyone whose immune system has been programmed through vaccination to recognize and kill the polio virus."

For David Hakken, an anthropologist at the State University of New York Institute of Technology at Utica, interest in the cyborg concept seems like a very roundabout way of coming to terms with the nature of humanity itself. In *Cyborgs@Cyberspace? An Ethnographer Looks to the Future*, he calls for "an anthropology of cyborgs." That turns out to be less futuristic than it sounds, for he also writes that "humans have been quite 'cyborgic' from early in the history of the species."

"There is this peculiar attitude that anthropology has toward technology," he continues. "On the one hand, defining man as 'the tool maker' is a classic kind of statement in our discipline. But there is also a tradition that locates tools outside of culture -- a sense that whatever is properly human is not technological. Once you say that the unit of study is the human *and* the technological as a unified whole, then anthropology has to be rethought -- which is what I'm trying to do by repositioning the human as a cyborg."

His peers' response, he says, has been underwhelming. "The people I thought would really want to take me on were the physical anthropologists, who tend to want a purely biological definition of what constitutes the human." But the bursting of the dot-com bubble, he says, left many of his colleagues feeling that the whole topic may be one of those cutting edges now permanently blunted.

The steady expansion of "cyborg discourse" -- so that it now covers human history from *Australopithecus* to the latest *Star Trek* spinoff -- could certainly render it a concept that, applying to everything, defines nothing. But scholars might yet want to ponder another matter: Even if we are all cyborgs now, and have been since the dawn of time, might there not be some deep need within us to see "the human" as essentially distinct from technology?

"Probably," says Mr. Hakken. "We can feel helpless in relation to these monoliths that we've created. It's as if the balance between the biological and the technological elements might tip so overwhelmingly toward the machine side. But that's a nightmare, not a prediction."

A READING LIST FOR POSTHUMANISTS

Neil Badmington, ed., *Posthumanism* (Palgrave, 2000)

Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Duke University Press, 1996)

David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, *The Cybercultures Reader* (Routledge, 2000)

Klaus Benesch, *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2002)

Rodney A. Brooks, *Flesh and Machines: How Robots Will Change Us* (Pantheon Books, 2002)

Christopher Dewdney, *Last Flesh: Life in the Transhuman Era* (HarperCollins, 1998)

Gary Lee Downey and Joseph Dumit, *Cyborgs and Citadels: Anthropological Interventions in Emerging Sciences and Technologies* (School of American Research Press, 1997)

Amanda Fernbach, *Fantasies of Fetishism: From Decadence to the Post-Human* (Rutgers University Press, 2002)

Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit, eds., *Cyborg Babies: From Techno-Sex to Techno-Tots* (Routledge, 1998)

Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture* (Rutgers, 2002)

Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (Routledge, 2002)

Chris Hables Gray et al., *The Cyborg Handbook* (Routledge, 1995)

Bruce Grenville, ed., *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture* (Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002)

David Hakken, *Cyborgs@Cyberspace? An Ethnographer Looks to the Future* (Routledge, 1999)

Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991)

Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (Routledge, 1997)

N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (University of Chicago Press, 1999)

Gill Kirkup et al., eds., *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader* (Routledge, 2000)

Rob Latham, *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption* (Chicago, 2002)

Steve Mann and Hal Niedzviecki, *Cyborg: Digital Destiny and Human Possibility in the Age of the Wearable Computer* (Doubleday Canada, 2001)

Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio, *Robo Sapiens: Evolution of a New Species* (MIT Press, 2000)

Philip Mirowski, *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Marie O'Mahony, *Cyborg: The Man-Machine* (Thames & Hudson, 2002)

Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating With Bodies and Machines in the*

Nineteenth Century (University of Michigan Press, 2002)

Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film* (Chicago, 1995)

Claudia Springer, *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (University of Texas Press, 1996)

Joanna Zylińska, *On Spiders, Cyborgs and Being Scared: The Feminine and the Sublime* (Manchester University Press, 2001)

Joanna Zylińska, ed., *The Cyborg Experiments: The Extensions of the Body in the Media Age* (Continuum, 2002)

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representatives of the mythographic disagree on their general interests; they all walk lock step into the domain of non-mastery.

Perhaps that lack of disagreement is one reason that Gourgouris has disdain for conventional ethics and is satisfied to assert all philosophy is political philosophy (thus ignoring the likelihood that we would then have to have political ontology, political epistemology, etc). One does not need ethics if one avoids from the start any need to arbitrate specific conflicts or assess how particular justifications might pass the muster of appropriate communities. But without this respect for particular conflicts whatever history one encounters will be the stuff of mythology in the old sense. And literary thinking comes dangerously close to being a mode of evasion because the mythographic has little respect for how thinking can articulate and defend particular positive values.

Charles Altieri

University of California—Berkeley

Klaus Benesch. *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002. \$34.95 cloth.

Many readers will immediately react to the title of Klaus Benesch's book as both anachronistic — the cyborg *strictu sensu*, namely a human whose "organic" parts have been significantly replaced or supplemented by cybernetic prostheses, is identified with contemporary technological developments rather than with those of the nineteenth century — and oxymoronic, since a defining ideology of Romanticism upholds the organic, holistic, and transcendental nature of imagination and authorship. Benesch tackles both objections head-on in his introduction. The latter problematic is precisely the reason for this book, which corrects (following classics such as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*) the oversimplified notions that American ante-bellum authors rejected technology in favor of Nature and the organic. By tracing the appearance both of cyborg figures and of other references to the commercialization of "literature" and to the reproducibility

of texts and ideas in the works of canonical U. S. authors of the nineteenth century, Benesch shows that these authors were in fact more obsessed with the dialectic between Nature and technology, organicity and mechanization, than would allow them to align themselves purely with either column of the opposition. In terms of the anachronism, Benesch does admit that the link he wishes to establish between "cybernetic images" of man-machine in early nineteenth-century literature enters "more of a symbolic than an ontological lineage with their postmodern, posthuman relatives" (27).

The book's second chapter surveys the attitudes of a number of antebellum American authors — all of them male, most of them canonical — towards the technological developments of their era, especially with an eye to the role such developments played in the creation of a mass literary market that turned the writer at best into a professional, and at worst into a "hack." Some readers will no doubt be familiar with Herman Melville's "Dollars damn me!" outburst in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Benesch explores the extent to which developments such as the steam printing press and steel-rimmed spectacle, indeed the rise of a middle-class readership in the United States, conditioned such a statement. (Walt Whitman closes the chapter as the only major author to unambiguously embrace technological developments as conducive to literary innovation.)

Hawthorne is the subject of the next chapter, which centers on a reading of cyborg images in "The Birth-Mark" (the lab assistant) and "The Artist of the Beautiful" (the mechanical butterfly) by inserting them in the context of other writings such as "The Celestial Railroad," "Monsieur du Miroir," and *House of the Seven Gables* (in the plot of which daguerrotypes play a key role). Benesch reads Hawthorne's as arguments not against technology as such, but for technology-plus-inspiration. Artists must not turn away from technological developments, but supply these with imaginative and transcendental aspects.

The next chapter's focus on Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man That Was Used Up" and "Maelzel's Chess-Player" (portrayed on the book's dust-jacket) allows the cyborg figure to emerge more forcefully as the book's focus. On the other hand, Benesch successfully ties the cyborgs of these sketches to other writings by Poe, from "The Purloined Letter" to "The Philosophy of Composition," and he also draws out the implications of Poe's fascination with technology for his views on history, politics, and literature. To the chapter's provocative title, "Do Machines Make History?" Benesch gives a qualified "yes" answer in the reverberations of Poe's writings with each other.

If Poe was concerned with the problem of knowing whether an idea was original, Melville was more concerned with how original ideas and

writing could survive in an era "damned by dollars." Pieces such as "The Bell-Tower," "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," "Bartleby the Scrivener," and *White-Jacket* are all mobilized to show the "modern division of labor and its disabling effects on the work of the writer" (156). The final chapter, "The Author in Pain," compares Rebecca Harding Davis with Walt Whitman as authors who took physicality, including its more torturous aspects in the fragmentation caused by industrialization and war, as their object of writing. Davis's "Korl-Woman" features a robot or *golem* figure, whereas Whitman's democratic body electric "explodes the boundaries of his poetic identity, thereby conjuring up a constructivist, cybernetic vision of the modern self" (170). The chapter ends with a three-page conclusion to the book that, for some reason, leaves the American context to feature Samuel Butler.

Benesch has provided an enlightening analysis of the relationship between issues of technology and of authorship in ante-bellum American writing, and his book is to be recommended to scholars of the period and to those interested in the role of technology in cultural production. The playing out of the title in the argument of the book, however, is in my opinion not fully achieved. Cyborg figures are alluded to repeatedly, but not often examined in detail or compared with modern definitions or critiques. Where these figures are more directly presented, as in Poe, the analysis becomes more original and interesting, whereas for those authors where they are more indirectly invoked (such as in Whitman and Melville) it becomes difficult to discern Benesch's contribution. There is also a curious contradiction between Benesch's recurring mention of his authors' fear of the breakdown between elite and popular culture due to the technological advancements in reproducibility, and the canonical status of all authors treated in the book, which shows that the wall of separation they themselves feared to be crumbling has in fact been maintained. It is interesting to speculate on what the book might have yielded if the canonical authors treated had been compared with more ephemeral writing of the period on similar themes, and if more attention had been paid to comparing the attitudes of the American Renaissance towards the cyborgization of life with our own.

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1942-1962 (ed., with Robin Clifton; Palgrave, 2002) and *Marks of Distinction: American Exceptionalism Revisited* (ed.; Aarhus University Press, 2003). He is currently working on a full-length study of the music of Van Dyke Parks.

Yonjae Jung is assistant professor of American Literature at Konkuk University in South Korea. Major teaching and research interests include Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture, Literary Criticism, and Film Theories. His recent articles on diverse critical issues have appeared in *American Studies International* and *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*. He is currently working on a book-length study on theories of film adaptation.

Reviews

Klaus Benesch, *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002. 246 pages; ISBN 1-55849-323-9; \$37.50.

The main title of *Romantic Cyborgs* might at first sight (mis)lead potential readers to overlook the fact that Klaus Benesch's book is thoroughly grounded in the literary works of a number of American Renaissance "bestsellers": Hawthorne, Poe, Melville and Whitman and the less widely known Rebecca Harding Davis. On that basis alone it should awaken the interest of US literature teachers. However, because technology – as an important factor for culture – is too often neglected in the context of understanding literature, this book deserves interest for bringing this fact to the fore.

Benesch uses the term "cyborg" – unusual in a nineteenth century context – to "realign discourses" on the interfaces of technology and authorship in antebellum American literature – revaluing amongst other standard conceptions, the inanimate above the usual emphasis in Romantic binary thinking on the values of the animate or nature.

Is it reasonable, enlightening or confusing, one might well ask, to introduce the concept "cyborg" to label "various transgression of the biological that readers of American Romanticism repeatedly encounter" and to "use this strikingly oxymoronic term" is meant to designate a variety of meanings"? Whether this is striking or not, I find it hard not to take issue with the "backdating" of a rather postmodernly inflected term like cyborg and whether this term suitably or usefully covers Hawthorne's "mechanician-turned-artist figures", "Poe's narrative machinery", "Melville's cyborgear scrivener" and the "vampirish forces of early capitalist production" of Rebecca Harding Davis.

However, to reread especially American writing from that period as less anti-machinist, anti-modernist, technophobic or even ambivalent about the material progress of industrialization than often assumed is a very reasonable project. Given the specific climate within which writers like those Benesch has chosen worked the general admiration and enthusiasm for progress in society at that time is frequently overlooked – as is the extent to which creative writing addressed or even incorporated new attitudes to the nature of machinery.

Benesch does not claim that writers wholeheartedly approved of mechanization but that the fact that technology encroached on the body can be shown to have been absorbed and expressed at deeper, poetic levels as well as accommodated as part of the material reality of book-making and -selling: the "tainting" spheres above which authors are at times mysteriously assumed to have soared]

The struggles of Melville to survive economically between international book pirating and his failure to cater to popular cultural demands with *Moby Dick*, should be well-known, but as an expression of a dominant cultural-industrial complex rather than a personal author tragedy requires a change of focus, though not a revolutionary one, given directions already taken by new historicists whose efforts to place writers in their proper social and cultural historical reality has helped uncover their awareness of changes in the literary trade and their willingness to adapt to survive.

Benesch, however, claims that studies of the economic conditions and demands of the marketplace, resulting from technologically advanced means of production, lost sight of the symbolism of the machine as well as the individual achievement of authors. Retreating from ideological directions of past readings Benesch offers to revalue and establish authorship as a modern ideology imbedded within an increasingly technology-driven framework.

Romantic Cyborgs may not present itself with flashy new theorizing but is justly described, by Benesch himself, by using the term discourse realignment, and is a solid piece of work with more emphasis on engaging theories than on deep readings of the texts. Benesch relies on well-trodden pastures where texts and theories are concerned (Leo Marx is unavoidable when rereading technology and literature in this period), but the focus on cyborg and authorship ideologies makes it a suitably refreshing of familiar texts.

Inger H. Dalsgaard

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Hans Bak, ed. *Uneasy Alliance: Twentieth-Century American Literature, Culture and Biography*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004. Costerus New Series 150. 360 pp; ISBN 90-420-1611-6; \$91.00.

The essays in this volume have been written as a tribute to G.A.M. Janssens at the University of Nijmegen, who for more than thirty years has been a pioneer of American literature in the Netherlands. Of the twenty-one contributors to the volume, almost two thirds teach at universities in the Netherlands, and many of them are former students and colleagues of Professor Janssens', who has reason to be pleased and proud of the range and quality of the legacy collected in this volume. The editor, the prolific Hans Bak, has also provided an umbrella under which the many disparate essays can be seen, in his invocation of Professor Janssens' inspirational practice as both scholar and literary *aficionado*: "Together [these essays] testify to the ongoing pertinence of an approach to literature that is open, undogmatic, sensitive and sophisticated and that seeks to do justice to the complex interaction and uneasy alliance of literature, culture and biography in twentieth-century American writing." While many books of the *Festschrift* variety will tend to be uneven and problematically *ad hoc*, the essays in this collection, which range far and wide across the landscape of American literature and other cultural manifestations, are generally extremely well-

written, with an impressive linguistic sophistication and coherent clarity, free of esoteric academic jargon, that make them accessible to the general reader as well as experts in the field. Thus the book's heterogeneity does not constitute as much of a handicap as one might have feared, since the great majority of the essays are able to create and sustain the reader's interest on their own particular premises.

Inevitably, wholeness and integration must necessarily be a problem in a collection of essays that contains no formal sub-divisions or other attempts to create an overarching structure. The title of the book does provide a clue, however, to an approach to reading the various efforts in the light of our current literary situation. The editor invites the reader to subsume the disparate essays under the ongoing debate about the relationship between esthetic formalism and cultural studies in the field of literature. Speaking about the immediate past, he reminds us that "this recanonization of American literature—perhaps the most striking development of American writing of the 1980s and 1990s—was predicated on a redefinition of the role and function of literary criticism, a revaluation of ideology and cultural politics, and (a hallmark of what was sometimes referred to as 'the postmodernist breakthrough') a blurring of boundaries between high and low forms of art, between center and margin, between literature and other disciplines." Situated at a vantage point beyond the polarization of these turbulent decades, Bak sees new opportunities for *détente* and symbiosis at the beginning of the 21st century: "Recently, we have been witnessing a search for a new interface between textual and contextual readings, between a literary and a cultural approach in the awareness that a literary (as opposed to a non-literary) text 'has the power even to subvert its own ideological complicity' and that 'the aesthetic does not deny its political, ethical, or historical dimensions of literary texts but engages them and mediates between them.'" This search for a compromise and a synthesis between the extremes of the various traditions of literary formalism on the one hand and the desire to see literature as wholly subservient to political, ideological, and cultural concerns on the other represents the "uneasy alliance" of the book's title, which is seen as promising the opening up of "opportunities for enriching interactions and new insights."

This is clearly a philosophy and a game plan that is as ambitious and difficult to fill as it is welcome and desirable for any number of readers and scholars tired of canon wars and other aspects of life in the academic trenches, and as one would expect, the different essays live up to such challenges with varying degrees of success. Among the essays that best fulfill the volume's ambition to create a bridge between formalism and "culturalism," my own preference is for Gert Buelens' "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Ethics in *The Portrait of a Lady*," C.C. Barfoot's "Edgar Allan Poe's *Sonnet to St. Vincent Millay's Sonnets: Putting 'Chaos into Fourteen Lines'*," Jan Bakke's "Saul Bellow and the Actual," Kathleen M. Ashley's "Toni Morrison's *Trickster* and Hans Bak's "Site of Passage: The City as a Place of Exile in Contemporary North-American Multicultural Literature." In their very different ways, all of the essays provide the reader with new and illuminating insights into the relations between text and context, literary form and social history, resulting in a greater app-

verloren. Es ist nun ein System neben anderen möglichen auch. Das Zeitalter der heuristischen Epoché wäre dann die Phase seiner analytischen Bewusstwerdung. Hinter diese Phase lässt sich kreativ nicht mehr zurückgehen, nur noch würdigend. (190)

Damit bestimmt Peper im Grunde auch Status und Funktion des eigenen Denkens und seiner geistesgeschichtlichen Verankerung. Wenn dieses Denken Positionen besetzt, die der Poststrukturalismus hinter sich gelassen hat, so bestätigt es umgekehrt (und entkräftet so zugleich) die Relevanz poststrukturalistischer Theorien dadurch, dass es sie, die sich der Geschichte verweigern, geschichtlich erklärt und ihnen in der "großen Erzählung" heuristischer Epoché einen Platz zuweist. Gerade hierin zeigen sich Erklärungspotential und Leistungsfähigkeit der Peper'schen Kulturtheorie und -geschichte. Doch die glanzvolle "Würdigung" des eigenen historischen Denkens deckt auch dessen Grenze auf. Es markiert gewissermaßen einen Endpunkt, dem es sich zwar immer wieder nähern, dessen Geschichte es zwar immer aufs Neue abschreiten, den es aber nicht überschreiten kann.

Berlin

Heinz Ickstadt

KLAUS BENESCH, *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2002), 246 pp.

Technology had a firm grounding in eighteenth-century American culture despite the country's agrarian orientation. Long before the term was introduced into the public discourse by Harvard professor Jacob Bigelow, author of *Elements of Technology*, in 1829, the American Constitution had empowered Congress "to promote the progress of science and useful arts" (Art. I, sec. 8), as technology was commonly called in the eighteenth century. Societies promoted these arts and manuals propagated their advancement in an age in which mechanization increasingly took command. They guaranteed progress and futurity, two of the key-terms, which helped define the new nation's political and cultural identity. The Romantic writers with their technophobic rhetoric, who detested the "dark Satanic Mills" and the machines invading the garden of nature, the legitimate domain of Romanticism, saw

themselves as the controlling forces of a rapid development that, in their opinion, threatened to run out of hand.

Klaus Benesch avoids this traditional approach which would have yielded hardly new results since the field has been sufficiently explored. What he attempts instead is an investigation of the tangled relationship that exists between "the profession of authorship" (William Charvat) in the Romantic era and the rapidly changing conditions of technology. Covering the period of a century from the pre-romantic Benjamin Franklin to the proto-modernist Walt Whitman, Benesch can show how the organicist notion of art as propagated and practiced by Romanticism is continuously under attack, how it is subverted and eventually supplanted by technological concepts of art, and how this affects the author, whose status becomes increasingly precarious and whose authority significantly dwindles. Time and again, Benesch maintains, this contested authorial status is explored in American Renaissance writings which abound with technological references and with hybrid figures, blurring man and machine, in which the organic interfaces with the inorganic, the spiritual with the material. Benesch calls these hybrids "Romantic cyborgs," an aptly chosen oxymoronic term that brings out the tensions and paradoxes inherent in Romantic authorship. For Donna Haraway the cyborg is "a hybrid of machine and organism," cyborgs "populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted." They are constructs that articulate the complex and paradoxical status of authorship and provide an ideal arena for the "border wars" to be fought out "between natural and artificial, mind and body, male and female, organism and machine" (29).

The first chapter shows how contested authorship and technology were in the time period under investigation. While for Benjamin Franklin, a printer and writer in one, the artist and the artisan could still coexist peacefully in one and the same person, and while Franklin could still elegantly integrate the fine and useful arts, the Romantic writers with their organicist orientation increasingly questioned such a peaceful coexistence. "The machine unmans the user," Emerson argued in *English Traits*, a series of essays written when he was still under the influence of a country that was among the technologically most advanced at that time. "Machinery & Transcendentalism," however, agreed better than Benesch is ready to admit. Leonard Neufeldt in *The House of Emerson*

(1982) and, more recently, Dieter Schulz in *Amerikanischer Transzendentalismus* (1997) could convincingly show that, despite occasional technophobic remarks, Emerson was far from detesting "the economic entanglement of his art," as Benesch maintains (61). By adopting technological metaphors, Emerson, in a subtle way, strove to reconcile the materialist with spiritual realms. Inclusion rather than exclusion of the technological was one of Emerson's lifelong attempts as a late journal entry impressively demonstrates. The "habit of writing by telegraph," he was convinced, "will have a happy effect on all writing by teaching condensation,"¹ a stylistic ideal which he pursued and so elegantly mastered.

The chapters that follow are devoted to the three major fiction writers of the antebellum period—Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville. Benesch concentrates on a number of their tales rather than their novels, which, I think, was a wise decision. Works of short fiction, on the one hand, allow a much closer, subtler, more holistic look at the textual intricacies than longer works of fiction; on the other hand, as marketable products tales owed their nineteenth-century popularity to the marketplace with its technological innovations in the printing business. Tales therefore seem to offer an ideal site where one expects questions of authorship and technology to be self-reflexively examined. The discussions of such tales as Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" and "The Artist of the Beautiful," Poe's "Maelzel's Chess Player" and "The Man That Was Used Up," Melville's "The Bell-Tower," "The Tartarus of Maids," and "Bartleby," or Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" are among the highlights in Benesch's study. Though they all belong to the literary canon, can be found in the major anthologies, and have been examined from various angles, Benesch is able to shed new light on them by reading them as metafictional discourses in which the authors reflect about their increasingly precarious status in a technological culture. Without exception, the authors in these tales become "aware of the pitfalls of an idealist aesthetic severed from its cultural, economic, and technological context" (80-81). The cy-

bernetic images which they so frequently enlist in their tales help them to negotiate and, as Benesch puts it, "cautiously navigate the tensions and paradoxes inherent in modern authorship" (78). How obsolete the antebellum idealist aesthetic had become, Walt Whitman and Rebecca Harding Davis demonstrate with their writings published during and after the Civil War. Hugh Wolfe, the artist figure in Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" utterly fails to instill life into his Korl-woman, the latest of the cyborg figures discussed in the book which anticipates many a (post)modernist piece of ready-mades and junk art.

Poststructuralist thinkers like Michel Foucault or Roland Barthes have been concerned with "the death of the author as inventor and proprietor" (180). Benesch's study sees "the death of the author" already emerge as a topic in antebellum America; he dates it back to a time when mechanization took command and authors began an intensive search for a place of their own vis-à-vis the machine. After William Charvat's unfinished *The Profession of Authorship in America 1800-1870*, a purely historical examination of the topic, Benesch's book, containing a number of fascinating revisionist readings of major antebellum tales, brings the topic to a finish.

Hamburg

Joseph C. Schöpp

MARIETTA MESSMER, *A Vice for Voices: Reading Emily Dickinson's Correspondence* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2001), 280 pp.

"Placing 'correspondence' at the core of Dickinson's literary production" (3), Marietta Messmer's book might pose a challenge to the reader whose Dickinson is primarily, if not exclusively, "the poet." I count myself among those readers, but, having been confronted with this challenge, I find myself rewarded with a new Dickinson, contextualized, politicized, expanded into yet a bigger literary scope. Messmer requires of her readers to suspend the traditional notion of letters as subsidiary autobiographical background material. Rather, she argues, Dickinson's letters must be acknowledged as a constitutive part of her literary art and poetics. In order to do justice to the significance of Dickinson's epistolary output, which constitutes more than 60% of her complete textual production, one has to get rid

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, ed. William H. Gilman et al., vol. 16 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) 45.

paradoxically demanded that his commitment to the revolution remain a secret'. The novel, he argues, 'dramatizes both the appeal and the threat of democracy's relationship to monarchism: Cooper's post-revolutionary America finds itself in debt to a figure of radical independence whose sovereign obscurity can only be claimed for democracy via the perpetual reassurance of its dissolution'. Arguably this 'over-theorizes' Cooper's essentially melodramatic use of the conventions of masks, confused identities, and divided loyalties, but, as with so much of Downes's analysis in this book, one finds familiar works cast in a new and often intriguing light.

► 3. American Literature, 1830–1900

In *Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance*, Klaus Benesch investigates the attitude of antebellum writers towards the developing machine age by examining the works of major writers of the Renaissance period. As writers sought to redefine their place within a culture in which technology was growing in power and importance, Benesch argues that they conjured up 'cybernetic' self-representations. Such images helped writers to construct a hybrid identity that sought to reconcile new modes of technological production with established models of professional writing. In 'Contested Ideologies of Authorship and Technology' Benesch examines texts by Benjamin Franklin, Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman, progressing to a study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Artist(s) of the Beautiful' and Edgar Allan Poe's 'Technology of Discourse'. In 'Figuring Modern Authorship', Benesch discusses Melville's narratives and his representations of technological encroachment. The tension between creativity and technology is most powerfully discussed, however, in the concluding chapter, 'The Author in Pain: Technology and Fragmentation in Rebecca Harding Davis'. What Benesch offers is a fresh perspective on antebellum literary discourse in tension with technological development, presenting the implications of what it meant to write under the conflicting conditions of modernity.

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Charting the role of sympathy in American literature from the colonial era to the Gilded Age, Kristin Boudreau, in *Sympathy in American Literature: American Sentiments from Jefferson to the Jameses*, illustrates the relationship between national and personal crises and the recruitment of the sentiment of fellow feeling. Avoiding radical or conservative explanations of sympathy, Boudreau focuses on a range of texts, from John Winthrop's *Model of Christian Charity* [1630] to William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902], incorporating studies of works by Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Alice James, Henry James, and William Dean Howells along the way, exploring the complex inheritance of sympathy in America, a sympathy that did not end with the onset of the civil war. Examining texts from both inside and outside the canon, as well as a variety of theorists, notably Sigmund Freud, Jürgen Habermas, and Adam Smith, Boudreau considers the 'cultural fiction' of consanguinity—shared blood—in American sentimentality, as an integral feature of social and political concord as well as conflict, in a broad, detailed account that will be of interest to the student of American studies as well as the more general reader.

In Justin D. Edwards's *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* photographic images

emblemize the public good? "Can an act within the confines of the Oval Office *ever* be private?" Shannon asks. Like Mary Beth Rose, Laurie Shannon is re-narrating a story that has been told before in different terms. But Shannon differs from Rose because all of her key terms remain subject to speculative redefinition as she moves from text to text. She uses contemporary concerns about identity and sexuality not simply to find their Renaissance foreshadowing, but as prompts to recover the quite different ways in which both same-sex and different-sex relationships were once imagined. The argument is dense and richly evidential; her prose (though rarely jargon-ridden) is sometimes less generous to the reader than it might be. But this is a powerful and important book that changes the way we see both amity and sovereignty.

Benesch, Klaus:

Romantic Cyborgs:

Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance.

Amherst: U. of Massachusetts Press, 2002. 246 pp.

Reviewed by: David Toomey

(Department of English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

In the past few weeks (I write this in May 2002), two developments have occurred in the realm of human endeavor called cybernetics. In the United States, the Pentagon is supporting efforts to learn whether rats, with electrodes implanted in their brains and carrying tiny video cameras, might be used in military operations. Meanwhile, a British cybernetics professor named Kevin Warwick has had a silicon chip spliced on to his nervous system, with the intent of transmitting nerve impulses associated with certain emotions from the chip to a computer. Those readings might then be transmitted back to the professor's nervous system, at which time he would experience the emotions again. Assuming no complications, he plans for a similar chip to be implanted in his wife; his intent is to use a computer to transfer emotions between them by radio waves. These items from the newswires present a rather interesting range of possible cybernetic futures: the first an army from a child's nightmare, the second electronics at the actual service of human love, circumventing the language of music and poetry and, for all we know, doing a better job of it than either. Events that come this quickly very nearly overwhelm our ability to analyze them (developments in technology plague the glacial pace of book publishing), and it may be some consolation that we may look backward, discovering their roots and finding some small comfort in the knowledge that, at least in some ways, it has always been thus. Klaus Benesch's *Romantic Cyborgs* makes convincing claims that cyborgs – that is, beings that are part human and part machine – have been with us since the Industrial Age, if not in actual fact, then at least in the cultural and (especially) the literary imagination.

It is a truism that American Romantics regarded technology as pernicious (the infamous train whose rumblings despoiled Thoreau's idyll is nearly a cliché); there are widespread conceptions of antebellum literature as purely Romantic. There were

contemporaneous ideas of literary creation as a process that was essentially organic; the works of the period are replete with seeds and flowers as metaphors for the creative process, and Thoreau's familiar critique of mindless uncritical citizens as machinelike ("wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well") seems very nearly a part of the period's refrain that machines and creative thought exist in uncompromising and eternal opposition. These rather well-entrenched stereotypes are challenged by Benesch's investigation of many authors of the period. He explores images of the human-machine hybrid called the cyborg as the signifiers for a set of interests and anxieties surrounding the machine and its vexed relation to authors and authorship, and he uses these images as "heuristic tools" through which he seeks psychohistorical themes in discourses on technology and its relation to the author and his or her putative "death." The cultural and psychological landscape Benesch uncovers in this process is, as we might expect, rather nuanced: against the well-known technophobic anxieties (the machine replacing the human, the printing press removing production process from the author's hands) ran a distinct counter-current of outright admiration for machines and excitement for the creative possibilities they presented the artist. Benesch suggests many reasons for the admiration, beginning perhaps in the cyborg as an improvement over the human body. Cyborgs, after all, were well-regulated and eminently controllable, and thus spoke to the Puritan ideal. But there are other sources of this sensibility, some from surprising sources: Whitman, for instance, was exhilarated by thoughts of the democratizing force of mass production of texts.

A number of authors Benesch discusses used cyborgs in the sense we usually mean by the term: the prosthetic protagonist of Poe's *The Man That Was Used Up*, for example, is a man whose body parts are gradually replaced by prostheses. But Benesch also uses the word broadly, including both machines that have human aspects and humans that are mechanical or aspire to the mechanical; ultimately, his definition includes both Hawthorne's scientist/artist figures as well as Melville's *Bartleby*. A reader approaching such a radical revisioning of literary culture might legitimately expect a focus on "forgotten" or "neglected" works, and indeed Benesch does recover some rather interesting short pieces (Hawthorne's *The Old Apple Picker* and James Kirke Paulding's *The Man Machine* among others). But by far the most impressive sections – and these comprise the bulk of the text – are discussions of cyborgs and "cyborgian themes" in the literary canon. Benesch makes persuasive cases for the importance of such figures in the much-anthologized work of Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Rebecca Harding Davis, as well as the poet we might regard as among the most "organic" of authors: Whitman. His reading is both wide enough to include lesser known works such as those mentioned above, and deep enough to mention probably the only cyborgian reference in Melville's *Typee*. At a few points he may be looking a little too hard to find a cyborg (as in the case of Melville's *Bartleby*), and the primary referent of "the Author" in Franklin's epitaph is not Franklin himself (as Benesch seems to imply), but Franklin's Deity. On the whole, though, his claims are creditable.

Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) appeared some years after the period Benesch describes, but it seems relevant here, if nothing else, as a commentary. In Verne's imagining, the men who design and build the means to reach the moon are

members of an organization called the "Gun Club." Veterans of the Civil War, all have artificial body parts, a fact that Verne conveys with no small humor: "Béquilles, jambes de bois, bras articulés, mains à crochets, mâchoires en caoutchouc, crânes en argent, nez en platine, rien ne manquait à la collection, et le susdit Pitcairn calcula également que, dans le Gun-Club, il n'y avait pas tout à fait un bras pour quatre personnes, et seulement deux jambes pour six." The suggestion seems to be both that they are cyborgs because they are Americans, and American because they are cyborgs: only Americans would have the audacity to fly to the moon; only cyborgs would have the means. It is an interesting observation, and it is precisely the observation that Benesch's work goes a long way in untangling.

McKillop, A. B.:

The Spinster & the Prophet:

Florence Deeks, H. G. Wells, and the Mystery of the Purloined Past.

Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 2000. 477pp.

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In this fascinating study, A. B. McKillop retells the story of the Deeks-Wells plagiarism trials of 1928–30. Deeks was a Toronto spinster who devoted many of her middle years to the writing of a feminist history of the world. Inspired by the outbreak of the Great War and the carnage that came with it, Deeks wrote 'The Web' as a universal history portraying the development of civilization and woman's place in advancing peace and democracy. She began with the cooling of the earth, traced the appearance of sub-humans and finally told the story of human advancement from nomadism to the development of farming and stable communities and the growth of industrial societies around large urban centres. As McKillop demonstrates, although Deeks relied entirely on secondary sources and her own opinions about events in writing her book, hers was the first history of its kind, taking in the broad sweep of the whole human past and showing the systematic development of modern civilization through a long, slow but progressive process of change. Despite her patience and originality, however, Deeks was unsuccessful in placing 'The Web' with a publisher. The closest she came was with Macmillan's of Canada, who retained her manuscript for over a year before finally rejecting it in 1919.

Given such a reaction to her endeavours, one can imagine the surprise Deeks felt in reading a review of H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History* in 1920, a book which appeared to tackle the same breadth of history as 'The Web', albeit rejecting the feminist perspective which was central to her work. On reading the review, Deeks immediately set out to obtain a copy of *The Outline* and was shocked by the apparent similarities of that text to her own unpublished manuscript. Indeed, so angered was she that she set out with amazing vigour to pursue Wells through four trials, both in the Ontario Supreme Court and the British Privy Council, but alas! to no avail. In all four trials, the judges threw out her case, and often with a contempt unworthy of their profession.

modus operandi. By "deliberately and dialogically disrupting language and philosophical system" (Larry H. Peer) or by creating poetic personae that are "portraits of himself, quite as much as being portraits of historic persons" (John Clubbe), Byron forces the reader/critic to negotiate with him for space in a Romantic world. This strategic bullying became the center of Byronism, as his philosophical practices became camouflaged protagonists and essential subject matter of other writers' attempts to out-Byron Byron, for example Poe (Katrina Bachinger). And in *Fair Exotics: Xenophobic Subjects in English Literature, 1720-1850* (U of Pennsylvania P, 2002), Rajani Sudan conducts a revisionist reading of the British Enlightenment and the development of Romanticism by arguing that British Romantic tenets (inwardness, subjectivity), first of all, were forged before the 1790s and, secondly, developed as a direct consequence of the urge to colonize and to discover the unknown, both of which urges embrace exoticism and reveal a British sense of their own otherness. This book unmasks in a new way the xenophobia at the heart of British imperialist culture as well as the xenodochy of British Romantic literature.

In a forceful study of the formative period in American literary and cultural history, Klaus Benesch (*Romantic Cyborgs: Authorship and Technology in the American Renaissance* [U of Massachusetts P, 2002]) makes an interdisciplinary examination of the emergence and mutual dependency of representations of authorship and technology in American Romanticism. He shows how, by envisioning modern technology as either infused with life of its own or as interfering with organic life, antebellum authors adumbrate the imagery of the cyborg as it populates so many narratives of our own time. These early, Romantic representations of a concept that has since solidified into a full-fledged cultural industry (cyberfiction, cyberpolitics, cyberspace, etc.) are striking probings of the space where the human body interfaces with the nonliving and the technological. The Romantic man-machines of James Kirke Paulding, the hybrid organisms created by Hawthorne's scientists (or mechanism-turned-artist figures), Poe's narrative machinery, Melville's cyborgian scrivener, and Rebecca Harding Davis's lament on the vampirish forces of early capitalist production, are examples of American Romanticism's negotiating anxieties about the technological and reveal a complex mesh of heretofore unrecognized significations.

An interesting study of Romanticism in the German-speaking world is provided by Frederick C. Beiser, in *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Harvard UP, 2002). There is much in