**Mark Coeckelbergh *New Romantic Cyborgs: Romanticism, Information Technology, and the End of the Machine* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017). 320 pp. (£14.00,ISBN. 9780262035460)**

*New Romantic Cyborgs* is a philosophical work about the persistence of Romantic ideals and thinking. Machine innovation increased hugely during the Romantic period, and we are now allied to new machines, like the smartphone, as ‘romantic cyborgs’. Mark Coeckelbergh argues that humanity will only get beyond romanticism, to the ‘nonmachine’, when new technologies emerge that are so integrated with humanity, they are no longer machines. This is an ideas book rather than a work that concentrates on close-readings of Romantic period texts; nonetheless, it convincingly argues that we still live in a Romantic machine age.

Coeckelbergh repeatedly states that ‘Romanticism is not necessarily hostile to science and technology.’ (97) This is a long-established notion and *Romantic Cyborgs* is related to other works that unite romanticism and technology, such as: *Pandemonium* (1950) by Humphrey Jennings; J. David Black’s *The Poetics of Enchantment: Romanticism Media and Cultural Studies* (2002); Allison Muri’s *The Enlightenment Cyborg: A History of Communications and Control in the Human Machine, 1660–1830* (2007); and John Tresch’s *The Romantic Machine* (2012), where he states that ‘romanticism and mechanism have defined the modern world.’ (1)

For Coeckelbergh ‘Romanticism has a present and a future, and it is a technological one.’ (124) Emphasising the importance of romantic period philosophies, Coeckelbergh cites Isaiah Berlin’s contention that romanticism is ‘the greatest shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred.’ (2) In essence Coeckelbergh holds with J. David Black that Romanticism is a thriving and ‘vital philosophical tradition’ (*The Poetics of Enchantment*, 5). This is, as Kierkegaard would say, a story that makes sense backwards. The argument is that ‘a current in Romanticism viewed science and the arts as entwined and tried to fuse the organic and the mechanic, life and science.’ (13) It is a notion that Percy Shelley secures with ‘Science, Poetry, and Thought/Are thy lamps’ (lines 254-55) in ‘The Mask of Anarchy’, but this is not quoted.

Coeckelbergh utilises few examples of Romantic period texts. *Frankenstein* is cited frequently and *Moby Dick* (1851) is marshalled, before moving onto Heidegger and late C.20 literature. Some of the literary evidence for arguments gets stretched at times. For example, Ahab ‘has a prothesis--thus uses technology in a way that is very much connected with his body, perhaps he can be called a “cyborg”: a combination of human and machine’. (89) However, Ahab is allied with an animal rather than a machine; the leg is made of whalebone. Aside from Mary Shelley, Coeckelbergh references romantic period engagements with technology such as Schelling’s interests in chemistry, electricity and magnetism; and Swedenborg the engineer, mathematician, scientist, and ‘mystic’ (32). But literary references are slight. The book passes over to Nick Cave, Sisters of Mercy, Joy Division and the gothic to demonstrate that romanticism persists.

There is much on 1960s hippie romantic mentality, drugs, experimentation, and the rise of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. For Coeckelbergh ‘today’s technologies are beautifully designed romantic devices that afford indulgence in mystery and magic’ (135). Apple is fetishized. A smartphone is a ‘postmachine […] overlaid with romantic beauty and enchantment’ (258-261). It is a cyborg technology. Steve Jobs is cited as a ‘typical Romantic […] an heir to nineteenth-century Romanticism’ who created ‘romantic technology for romantic people’ (130). There are ‘romantic hackers […] heirs of the arts and crafts movement’, who, with programmers ‘become romantic artists.’ (138) Coeckelbergh pushes this further: Victor Frankenstein would set up a dot-com today (139). The new ‘romantics write not poetry or novels to change the world but code. […] the romantic hero-genius has a degree in computer science.’ (139) What kind of change ‘romantic’ coders are trying to effect is not examined. There is a rapidity to these assertions and there could be more examination of what, if any, the social, political, personal or aesthetic aims are for these ‘artists.’ Arguments on the importance of personal experience work better as Coeckelbergh asserts that ‘Internet technology and technomusic are new means of romantic liberation. The cybernaut (and the techno/drug user) is a neo-Platonic and romantic figure’ (140), which might be true.

For Coeckelbergh we are near to ‘the dream of a fusion of human and machine […] the summit of the new technoromanticism […] cyborg romanticism.’ (179). The pacemaker, nerve stimulation implants, body and mental enhancement technology, all exist. For Coeckelbergh this is evidence of our living in a romantic age as ‘Romanticism has always aimed at transformation: self-transformation and transformation of humanity.’ (191) These ideas towards transhumanism, ‘the longing for transcendence and immortality’ (192) can easily be found in Romantic period writings, such as in Godwin’s *Political Justice* where he asks:‘In a word, why may not man one day be immortal?’. However, Coeckelbergh does not rely on romantic period texts to make the arguments. Coeckelbergh asks if we can move beyond dualism, ‘beyond modern-romantic machine *thinking*, which would really take us to the end of the machine.’ (252) The separateness of humans and machines will disappear and what is being achieved is ‘is one romantic-technological-economic totality.’ (238) This is the summation of our romantic journey.

There are no new or in-depth readings of Romantic period texts in this book. Nonetheless, this is a useful book in furthering engagement between romanticism, the machine and coming technology. Coeckelbergh convincingly asserts that the romantic machine age ‘is not over yet’. The book ends by stating that until there is a new language and new technologies ‘we have to try to live with our romantic machines. […] we are romantic cyborgs too.’ (279)