



Edison's Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life

Gaby Wood

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A rich and informative exploration of our age-old obsession with “making life.”

Could an eighteenth-century mechanical duck really digest and excrete its food? Was “the Turk,” a celebrated chess-playing and -winning machine fabricated in 1769, a dazzling piece of fakery, or could it actually think? Why was Thomas Edison obsessed with making a mechanical doll—a perfect woman, mass-produced? Can a twenty-first-century robot express human emotions of its own?

Taking up themes long familiar from the realms of fairy tales and science fiction, Gaby Wood traces the hidden prehistory of a modern idea—the thinking, hoaxes, and inventions that presaged contemporary robotics and the current experiments with artificial intelligence. Informed by the author’s scientific and historical research, Edison’s Eve is also a brilliant literary, cultural, and philosophical examination of the motives that have driven human beings to pursue the creation of mechanical life, and the effects of that pursuit—both in its successes and in its failures—on our sense of what makes us human.

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