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Textualizing the Future:

Godard, Rochefort, Beckett and Dystopian Discourse

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Textualizing the Future:

Godard, Rochefort, Beckett and Dystopian Discourse

by

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For Greg, Hannah, Matisse, and Camille

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Textualizing the Future:

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Dystopic fiction is often a soap box for the transgressive, speculative, and anti-establishment discourses of its creators. During a time of social and political unrest in France, three outstanding dystopian works appeared by three unconventional artists: Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville: une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* (1965), Christiane Rochefort's *Une Rose pour Morrison* (1967), and Samuel Beckett's *Le Dépeupleur* (1970). This study analyzes the dystopic nature of these works and establishes the significance of identifying them as such. It is an investigation of the ways that these works not only imitate canonical dystopian narratives but also the methods they use to transform and subvert them. In my readings, three well-known novels serve as paradigmatic examples of dystopian discourse: Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and George Orwell's *1984*. Additionally, in chapter one I

contrast *Alphaville* to the first cinematic dystopia, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and in chapter

three I read *Le Dépeupleur* alongside the first literary dystopia, E. M. Forster's *The*

Machine Stops. Because there are almost no critical studies on French dystopian

literature and film, my methodology is an extrapolation of the well-established critical

material by English and North American scholars: M. Keith Booker, Tom Moylan, Chad

Walsh, David W. Sisk, and Alexandra Aldridge. Throughout the analysis, I indicate the

ties between the social criticism contained in these three dystopias and that carried out by

important modern social and cultural critics Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and

Theodor Adorno. This dissertation lays the foundation for future investigations in

Francophone dystopian literature and film.

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Introduction: Classical Dystopian Narrative:
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Dystopia: A Critical Overview

In this study, I will explore the plots, scenarios, and concerns of Jean-Luc

Godard's *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* (1965), Christiane

Rochefort's *Une Rose pour Morrison* (1967), and Samuel Beckett's *Le Dépeupleur*

(1970). My research establishes the dystopian nature of these three works and the

importance of identifying them as dystopic. Additionally, I examine the ways that these

works not only imitate classic dystopian narratives but the ways in which they transform

or subvert them. Until now, there has been almost no critical attention given to dystopian

works in French and in this dissertation I hope to make the case for the role of dystopias

in twentieth-century French literature. My methodology is an extrapolation of the long

and well-established critical material on dystopia by English and North-American

scholars. I use the definitions, boundaries, and guidelines offered by these critics to set

up my own criteria and to reach my own conclusions about French dystopias.

I decided to look at dystopias written in the 1960s because it was a time of

tremendous social and political change in France and because of the significant number

of dystopian works that appeared during this decade. Why does this sudden production

of dystopias occur at this time in France? Perhaps, it is for the following reasons: global social and political unrest, the reality of nuclear arms, the Algerian War, disillusionment with De Gaulle and Gaullism, the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, the fear of automation, conspicuous consumerism and advanced technology, the turn to new-age Eastern philosophies that preach inner peace, love and compassion. Possibly, it is due to the utopian economic ideals of the fifties—that every family would own a home, a car, and a television set—that were not realized in the sixties. Or, maybe, dystopias sprang from latent guilt felt over the French collaboration with the Nazis during World War II and for the torture and executions of *les collabos* in the years immediately following France's liberation. It is impossible to pinpoint one cause of the dystopian turn in French literature and film in the 1960s, but it is clear that the anxieties of the twentieth-century did, indeed, finally reach the collective conscious of the French people and the writers and filmmakers who through their creations, reflect and represent the mindset of the culture in which they live.

I selected *Alphaville* because of its status as the first dystopic film ever in French and because of Godard's reputation as one of the founder's of the famous French film movement, *la nouvelle vague*. I decided to analyze *Une Rose pour Morrison* for its unique feminist perspective and because it is one of the few dystopias written by a woman. I evaluated *Le Dépeupleur* because it is an interesting example of experimental and minimalist dystopian writing. I also believe that Beckett bridges the gap between English and French, which is what I hope to achieve between English and French criticism of dystopias. Finally, I picked these three artists for their unconventional

methods that at once reflect on and expand the genre of dystopia: Godard was part of an avant-garde film movement, the *nouvelle vague*; Rochefort participated in the second-wave feminist movement; and Beckett was a beacon for a group of avant-garde, experimental writers. All three were icons of non-traditional art forms and movements that defined and re-shaped the culture of France and the western world. I maintain that their contributions helped the genre of dystopia to become one of France's leading literary and cinematic forms of the twentieth century.

I have included film as well as novels in my study because of the important role cinema plays in twentieth-century culture. Increasingly, twentieth-century French films and literature are being studied and taught together, in the same courses, in our schools and universities because of their complementary natures. Although there are many differences in the interpretation strategies of films and novels, in my dissertation I attempt to read the film narratives in much the same way as those of the novels. I refer to Godard as an *auteur* and to the films as *narratives* and *texts*. I also use the filmic terms, *images* and *scenes*, to describe parts of the written works. In the pages that follow, I will rely upon the analyses of English and North American critics of dystopian film to inform my study due to the lack of critical material in French.

Surprisingly, there are no lengthy studies of French dystopias or even ones of the canonical dystopias by critics in French. The reason for this may be that the classical works of dystopia are not French. *We*, almost universally recognized as a foundational dystopic text, was originally written in Russian by Yevgeny Zamyatin, but was first published in English. (The author died in exile in Paris without seeing it circulated in his

homeland.) Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984*, also

considered classics of the genre, were both written in English by their British authors.

The first dystopic film, *Metropolis* (1927), was directed by the German filmmaker Fritz

Lang and was based on the novel, written in German, by his wife at the time, Thea von

Harbou. The second wave of canonical dystopic texts, Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*

(1952), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's

Tale* (1986) were penned by North American authors. The three most famous dystopian

novels, *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984* are not rivaled in French literature. Perhaps, for

this reason, critics of French literature and film have not concentrated their efforts on the

genre of dystopia.

French critics mention dystopian fiction, but only briefly—they add little original

or new criticism. In the *Dictionnaire des Utopies*, *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984* are

discussed in the entry "*contre-utopies.*" The French titles of these works are,

respectively, *Nous autres*, *le Meilleur des mondes*, and *1984*. The article also posits three

other terms in French besides counter-utopias: *anti-utopies*, *utopies négatives*, and

dystopies, but no examples of French *contre-utopies* are mentioned here.[1] One French

critic, Armand Mattelart, in his extensive study of utopian thought and its connection to

real-world political and social events entitled, *Histoire de l'utopie planétaire*: *de la cité

prophétique à la société globale*, briefly touches upon the subject of dystopia. He asserts

that the first dystopia appeared in France in the seventeenth century with Cyrano de

Bergerac's *Histoire comique contenant les Etats et Empires de la lune*. He suggests, as

do the English and North American critics, that dystopias grew out of skepticism for utopian models:

> Comme la mise en utopie de la science et de la technique est aussi sa mise en mythe, les premières dystopies ne tardent pas à s'en gausser. En inaugurant dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle le cycle de la critique par dérision de la raison géométrique des narrateurs utopiques et de leur modèle de vie tracé au cordeau, le doute s'insinue sur la bonté à l'état de nature.[2]

Furthermore, Mattelart agrees with English and North American critics that the "récit dystopique de Zamiatine fonde un genre." He also cites Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* as classics that form, along with Zamyatin's *We*, a "triptyque des dystopies du XXe siècle" (294). He attributes the motif in these canonical texts that the people are living in the best of all possible worlds to Voltaire's *Candide*. And, he notes that the title given to the French edition of *Brave New World* (*Le Meilleur des mondes*) comes directly from the adage "Tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possibles" (280). Mattelart links twentieth-century dystopian classics to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French satires of utopian thought, but he overlooks the French dystopian works of the 1900s.

French literary and film critics may have neglected the study of dystopian fiction in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, but the English and North Americans have

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[1] *Dictionnaire des Utopies*, Ed. Michèle Riot-Sarcey, Thomas Bouchet, and Antoine Picon (Paris: Larousse, 2002) 64-69.
[2] Armand Mattelart, *Histoire de l'utopie planétaire: de la cité prophétique à la société globale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000) 54-55.

not. Lengthy criticisms of the genre appeared in the 1960s, beginning with Chad Walsh's

seminal study, *From Utopia to Nightmare* (1962). In this original work, Walsh borrows

the term *dystopia* from J. Max Patrick who uses it in 1952 in his anthology written with

Glenn Negley entitled *The Quest for Utopia: An Anthology of Imaginary Societies*.[3]

Walsh's principal argument that utopian literature is waning and being replaced by a

more pessimistic, dystopian fiction in a century marked by disillusionment, is upheld by

most present-day theorists of dystopia. He asserts, "I submit that the shift from utopian

to dystopian fiction is important. Quite possibly, it foreshadows one of those really

massive psychological shifts that sometimes occur over a whole culture."[4] His thoughts

on the fate of utopia are of key interest to modern critics of dystopia:

> When I say that utopia has failed, I mean simply that the 20th century has
>
> cruelly disappointed the expectations of the 19th century. When I say that
>
> utopia has succeeded, I mean that many things that seemed utopian a
>
> century ago have now come to pass—but the result is not utopian. (117)

Throughout his book, Walsh uses the terms *dystopia*, *inverted utopia*, and *anti-utopia*

interchangeably.[5] He does, however, make a distinction between dystopias that are

reactions to specific literary utopias (which in this study I will refer to as anti-utopias)

and those, such as *Brave New World*, that are reactions to popular utopian ideals of the

average person (which I refer to as dystopias). Walsh makes another major contribution

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[3] Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick, eds., *The Quest for Utopia: An Anthology of Imaginary Societies* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1952).

[4] Chad Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962) 117.

[5] Walsh uses the term *inverted utopia* most often which might signal his preference for one that contains the word *utopia* but is not against the concept of utopias, and is more readily understood than the more uncommon *dystopia*.

to the study of dystopian literature by further cementing the reputations of *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984* as archetypes of the genre. Although Walsh considers Huxley's *Brave New World* to be the most famous dystopia, the most widely read, and "the most perfect from a literary viewpoint" (92), he concedes that Zamyatin's *We*—less familiar to the general reader—is a novel "distinguished by a high literary quality and characters who have some reality and psychological depth—literary luxuries in both the utopia and dystopia" (104). He views Orwell's *1984* as "the composite dystopia" (107) because it is 100% nightmare and it is feasible with our present science and technology. Walsh contends that dystopists have more endurance than utopists: "It seems that sometimes the mildly neurotic, who know that all men move through varying and elusive shadows and that terrors lurk by every path, are tougher than the well-adjusted cheerful men who laugh at them" (117). He is one of the first in a long line of critics to defend the genre of dystopia.

Five years later, in 1967, another study of canonical dystopian texts appeared: Mark R. Hillegas's *The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*. Hillegas's study begins, "It is a truism that one of the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of our age is the great flood of works like Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*."[6] This sentence echoes Walsh's sentiments and sets the tone for the rest of his text that compares these works to the scientific romances, utopias, and future histories of H. G. Wells. Hillegas claims that all of these works, from Wells to Orwell, fall under the rubric of science fiction (5). While he

acknowledges the existence of the term *dystopia*, he prefers to use the term *anti-utopia* to describe *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984* because, he claims, this is the term most often used (3). He refers to the major anti-utopians as Forster, Zamyatin, Huxley, C. S. Lewis, and Orwell (5). The problem with his study, though informative, is that Hillegas attributes directly to Wells almost all of the themes and devices used by the dystopists as if they had no original ideas of their own.

The subject is not taken up in any length until more than two decades later when, in 1983, Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander edit a collection of essays entitled, *No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction* containing articles on, among others, the dystopic novels *We, Brave New World*, *1984*, *Player Piano*, and *Fahrenheit 451*.[7] A year later, in 1984, another book length study by Alexandra Aldridge appeared entitled, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia*. Aldridge focuses on H. G. Wells and his legacy and two of the three classical dystopian novels, *We* and *Brave New World*. In her book, she primarily explores the relationship between science and technology and dystopian fiction.[8] In 1987, Krishan Kumar's *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* appeared.[9] His study is cited more often by dystopian critics than the others published in the 1980s, probably for its wide scope and depth of research.

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[6] Mark R. Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians* (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 3.
[7] Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph Olander, *No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983).
[8] Alexandra Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984).
[9] Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

David Sisk's *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias* appeared in

1997 and focused on language in dystopias, with an interesting chapter on feminist

dystopias,[10] but criticism of the dystopian genre of the 1990s is dominated by the

enormous contributions of M. Keith Booker who published two books on the subject,

including a lengthy theory and research guide comprised of dystopic novels, plays, and

films from around the globe. Both of Booker's books, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern*

Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism and *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research*

Guide appeared in 1994.[11] In these works, Booker parallels the pessimistic turn in

cultural criticism and literary theory to the dystopian impulse in twentieth-century

literature and film. His work was an impetus and point of departure for my study.

Two significant critical works on dystopian fiction have already appeared in the

twenty-first century: Tom Moylan's *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction,*

Utopia, Dystopia[12] in 2000 and Erika Gottlieb's *Dystopian Fiction East and West:*

Universe of Terror and Trial[13] in 2001. Moylan categorizes the different types of

dystopias in a detailed, interesting, and orginal (yet somewhat confusing) schema in his

text. Gottlieb introduces even more Eastern European dystopian works than Booker did

in his research guide, and compares them to their more well-known, classical

counterparts from western literature. Her focus on tragedy in dystopian fiction is a new

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[10] David W. Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997).

[11] M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994) and *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994).

[12] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

and unique one. It is clear that critical attention in English of dystopias that began in the latter half of the twentieth century shows no sign of slowing down. My work extends the above corpus on dystopia by identifying the French works *Alphaville*, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, and *Le Dépeupleur* as dystopian and demonstrating the ways in which they imitate, transform and subvert classical dystopian discourse.

Toward a Working Definition

What then is dystopian literature? *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides us with a very broad and somewhat muddy definition of dystopia: "An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible."[14] Nanelle and David Barash in their article entitled, "Biology, Culture, and Persistent Literary Dystopias," clarify this definition and tell us that literary dystopias contain "imagined societies in which the deepest demands of human nature are either subverted, perverted, or simply made unattainable."[15] Additionally, they assert that all dystopian literature shares a dominant theme, "the horror of a society that runs roughshod over our instincts, forcing people to be, literally, inhuman." While their definition focuses on the aspect of human nature in dystopia, M. Keith Booker, in his theory and research guide, *Dystopian Literature*, points to utopianism and political and social critique as key elements of the form. He observes:

> Briefly, dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates
> itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential

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[13] Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2001).
[14] See "dystopia" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989).

negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian

literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions

or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian

premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through

the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different

contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (3)

According to the *OED*, the term "dys-[u]topia" was first coined by the British

philosopher John Stuart Mill in 1868; however, it did not become widely used until the

mid-twentieth century. And, although one can find texts with a dystopian impulse prior

to this date, literary dystopias are largely considered to be products of twentieth-century

political events and social conditions. According to Tom Moylan in *Scraps of the*

Untainted Sky, dystopian literature emerged alongside imperialism, totalitarianism, and

post-capitalism. He claims:

Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth

century . . . . Although its roots lie in Menippean satire, realism, and the

anti-utopian novels of the nineteenth century, the dystopia emerged as a

literary form in its own right in the early 1900s, as capital entered a new

phase with the onset of monopolized production and as the modern

imperialist state extended its internal and external reach. (xi)

The appearance of dystopian novels, observes Booker, parallels the pessimistic vein

popping up in twentieth-century cultural criticism as well. He affirms, "Dystopian fiction

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[15] Nanelle R. Barash and David P. Barash, "Biology, Culture, and Persistent Literary Dystopias," *The*

is more like the projects of social and cultural critics: Nietzsche, Freud, Bakhtin, Adorno, Foucault, Althusser, and many others. Indeed, the turn toward dystopian modes in modern literature parallels the rather dark turn taken by a great deal of modern cultural criticism" (*Dystopian Literature* 4).

Additionally, Frances Bartkowski argues in *Feminist Utopias*, that advanced technology along with WWI and WWII contributed to the emergence of this cynical literary form. She states:

> The nightmare fears of technology which often led to regressive, pastoral, anti-industrial images in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are confirmed by a realization that the machine will not be banished from the garden. The two global wars early in the twentieth century produced strong dystopian strains in popular and pulp science fiction as well as the popular success of novels such as *Brave New World*, *1984*, and *Walden Two*, all deeply cynical visions of where social planning could take the white, Western world.[16]

Another critic, Gorman Beauchamp, insists on the significant role that modern technology plays in the dystopian imagination. He argues that dystopic writers are typically technophobes who view technology as an uncontrollable autonomous force that will eventually control its creator and society, dictating future ideology in a negative way:

> Rather, I want to argue only that technological determinism is the dominant philosophy of history found in the dystopian novel and that

Chronicle of Higher Education, 3 Dec. 2004: 10, *LexisNexis*, 20 June 2005.

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dystopists are generally technophobic, viewing the technology of dystopia

not as a neutral tool misused by totalitarian rulers but as intrinsically

totalitarian in itself, a futuristic Frankenstein's monster.[17]

In addition to being linked to the twentieth century and advanced technology,

most critics agree that dystopian fiction is characterized by its ties to and tension with

utopian thought. Lyman Tower Sargent explains in his article, "Utopia—the Problem of

Definition," that the label dystopia is derived from utopia, a term used by Thomas More

in the work that gave the genre of utopian literature its name. He affirms, "While *eu*-

topia (and *u*-topia) names texts that render the 'good place,' *dystopia* names those which

explore the 'bad place' and yet remain within the purview of *utopian* expression."[18] Sisk

defines utopian fiction as that which "explores perfectibility of human society through

hypothetical advancements in technology, philosophy, and social structures, resulting in

perfect or near-perfect communities located in distant lands or in the future." He argues

that utopists focus their efforts on constructing models of ideal societies and planned

communities, and that utopias typically symbolize an escape into fantasies of the

imagination (2). Utopian literature, containing the author's subjective vision of *the* ideal

society, generated responses from the literary world that became known as anti-utopian.

The notion that "one man's heaven is another's hell" comes to life in these imaginary

parallel worlds that are in direct dialectical response to utopian thought. In his text

entitled *Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*, Mark Hillegas points to

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[16] Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Utopias* (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1989) 7-8.
[17] Beauchamp goes on to say that Orwell's *1984* is an important exception to this generalization. Gorman Beauchamp, "Technology in the Dystopian Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 32.1 (1986): 55.
[18] Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopia—the Problem of Definition," *Extrapolation*, 16.2 (1975): 137.

four representative utopian narratives as having inspired much anti-utopian literature:

Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia*, Andreae's *Christianopolis*, and Bellamy's *Looking*

Backward. He sees anti-utopias as "a sad, last farewell to man's age-old dream of a

planned, ideal, and perfected society. . . ." (3-4). Sisk claims that utopists typically create

new and unique societies that have no historical prototypes. He asserts that dystopias on

the other hand recall history, warning against repeating past mistakes, unlike utopias. He

argues:

> Dystopia, by contrast, embraces history, affirms it, proclaims it, arguing
>
> that the same horrors that have gone before can, and will, come again
>
> unless we learn to understand and prevent them. If dystopia could be said
>
> to have a motto, it would be George Santayana's warning writ large—
>
> 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' In
>
> some sense, all dystopian fiction aims at reminding us of the past to ensure
>
> that we do not make the same mistakes again. (11)

Walsh elegantly describes the relationship between utopia and dystopia, emphasizing the

important role the latter plays:

> In the history of human thought, the utopian is primary, the dystopian is
>
> secondary. The utopian is like the artist, the dystopian is the art critic.
>
> The utopian's proper job is to dream dreams and prod the imagination and
>
> conscience of mankind. The dystopian's job is to take a long look at the
>
> dreams, handle them, look for defects, try to imagine everything that could

go wrong. This is a secondary job, critical rather than creative. But it is

important and in some times and places it can be crucial. (177)

It is clear that the relationship between utopias and dystopias is an important and

necessary one. Dystopias force us to approach utopias thoughtfully and with care to

prevent society from certain consequences that may not be ideal. After all, one person's

utopia is another person's dystopia. Satire is one device used to warn against arrant

utopianism.

Before the term dystopia was used to describe *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984*,

they were simply referred to as satires because of the predominance of the attacks on

folly and vice found in the novels. According to Aldridge, formal verse satire is

identified by two principal elements: "the predominating negative part, which attacks

folly and vice, and the understated positive part, which establishes a norm, a standard of

excellence, against which folly and vice are judged" (6). She also argues that utopian

satire is the antecedent of dystopia.

The term anti-utopia is often used interchangeably with the term dystopia, even

though dystopian fiction's goals do not parallel those usually designated as anti-utopic.

Some critics, such as Booker, Bartkowski, and Gottlieb make no distinction between the

two, while others, such as Moylan, Sargent, and Sisk see them as two separate descriptive

categories. Moylan suggests that utopia and anti-utopia are at opposite ends of a

spectrum, while dystopia lies somewhere in between. He states, "I would argue that it is

more consistent with the developing paradigm in utopian/dystopian studies to name the

text that refuses all utopian hope and effort an *anti-utopia* and the one that enters the fray

between Utopia and Anti-Utopia (coming down in a different position in each text) a *dystopia*" (139). Additionally, he sub-categorizes dystopia into two even more specific forms—anti-utopian dystopias and utopian dystopias:

> In the anti-utopian dystopia, the best that can happen is a recognition of the integrity of the individual even when the hegemonic power coercively and ideologically closes in; whereas in the utopian dystopia, a collective resistance is at least acknowledged, and sometimes a full-fledged opposition and even victory is achieved against the apparently impervious, tightly sutured system. (xiii)

Sisk prefers the term dystopia to anti-utopia and claims that dystopias are successful because they advocate the ideas of their authors rather than directly criticizing utopian thought and that "anti-utopias may succeed merely by criticizing utopian ideals: dystopias, however, always reveal (usually by ironic contrast) attitudes and suggest actions that can prevent the horrors they depict" (6). While the most common terms used are utopian satire, anti-utopia, and dystopia, Arthur O. Lewis has organized a more extensive list to describe such fictions: "reverse utopias, negative utopias, inverted utopias, regressive utopias, cacoutopias, dystopias, non-utopias, satiric utopias, and . . . nasty utopias."[19] Another critic adds two more odd denotations not on Lewis's checklist: "sour utopias in the apocalyptic mode" and "negative quasi-Utopias."[20] According to Sisk, what separates dystopias from utopian satires and anti-utopias is that dystopias

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[19] Arthur O. Lewis, "The Anti-Utopian Novel: Preliminary Notes and Checklist," *Extrapolation: A Science –Fiction Newsletter* 2.2 (1961): 27.
[20] Aldridge 5.

critique "contemporary social structures without direct reference to utopias," while utopian satires target specific utopian ideals and anti-utopias mock more generalized utopian visions (5). In the study of dystopian fiction, it is practical to distinguish dystopias from anti-utopias as well as other genres such as science fiction, utopian, and fantasy literature and film.

Dystopian fiction is often considered a sub-genre of science fiction. Booker observes that although science fiction and dystopian fiction have much in common, they are distinct in a significant way. He affirms, "There is clearly a great deal of overlap between dystopian fiction and science fiction, and many texts belong to both categories. But in general dystopian fiction differs from science fiction in the specificity of its attention to social and political critique" (*Dystopian Literature* 4). This seemingly small and insignificant distinction is really what makes dystopian literature so unique and fascinating. Dystopias are set in futuristic, imaginary worlds, but are also firmly planted in the here and now, which makes them so accessible to contemporary audiences. Readers can relate their experiences to the ones in the novel. Many works of science fiction can and do contain social and political critiques, however, many of them focus on worlds that are so unfamiliar, their content becomes pure fantasy.

Bartkowski considers utopian, dystopian, and science fiction to fall under the all-encompassing rubric of speculative fiction. She confirms, "During this period, from 1900 to 1950, the genres of utopian and science fiction are no longer so easily separable, leading later to the more inclusive term, speculative fiction" (8). Speculative is a useful term for dystopias because they take risks in hopes of a later gain. Dystopias are

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cautionary tales that warn the reader of impending doom for humanity if we do not change the direction in which we are headed. Walsh even considers dystopia to be the "prophetic form of our age" and dystopists to be "the prophets of our times." He explains:

> I use the word prophet in something of its biblical sense, to mean one who observes society, evaluates it in accordance with principles he considers eternal, and offers messages of warning where he sees it going astray; messages not merely of warning but predictions of the wrath to come unless society renounces its false turnings. (135)

Dystopias resist labeling because they embrace many different genres: utopian fiction, political satire, science fiction, speculative fiction, resistance literature, travel literature, and more. Moylan agrees, "The typical dystopian text is an exercise in a politically charged form of hybrid textuality, or what Raffaella Baccolini calls 'genre blurring'" (147). This postmodern hybridity makes dystopias timely, interesting, and able to touch upon many themes relevant in our postmodern world.

Dystopian fiction, though often misnamed a sub-genre of science-fiction or utopian fiction, is a genre that deserves recognition for its own merits. Sisk agrees, "Because of these altruistic and didactic intentions, *dystopia* connotes a genre actively defining itself" (6). And Aldridge concurs, "The dystopia is not merely 'utopia in reverse' as it has often been called, but a singular generic category issuing out of a twentieth-century shift of attitudes toward utopia" (ix). A third critic, Walsh, upholds dystopia's status as a genre and as such, he claims, it has its own strategies. He asserts,

"The inverted utopia has become a standard literary *genre*, and as such has acquired a stock-in-trade of devices and gimmicks" (136). He identifies the following as devices of dystopian fiction: an anti-nature bias, i.e. hostility toward nature and the body; the loss of identity through the substitution of numbers for names, uniforms, and non-traditional alterations of sex and family life; the enduring quality of religion, i.e. idolatrous adoration of society, the life force, evolution, or the deified leader or a substitute deity such as the American Way of Life, Free Enterprise, the arts, or sex; euthanasia; the repression of literature and arts in favor of stability and safety; the Law of Reverse Effect; the inseparability of the Ends and the Means; the limits of the physical universe, the moral structure of reality, and human nature; and a creative minority, or "saving remnant" who rebel against the nightmare.[21]

In this study, I analyze *Alphaville*, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, and *Le Dépeupleur* by taking into account the devices noted by Walsh above. Additionally, I compare their forms to the paradigmatic dystopian ones which are often written as memoirs, diaries, or journals. The protagonists write to make sense of their world or to keep a record of their existence. Next, I contrast the settings in my primary texts to the ones found in canonical dystopias which are similar to the world we live in today, but not what we see when we look out our front door. The dystopian world is often an island or other isolated or enclosed space that restricts or requires travel. Lastly, I study the themes of sexuality and language in these three works. In most dystopias, they are used as both weapons of repression by the ruling elite and as tools of subversion by the oppressed.

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[21] Walsh 164.

For the purpose of this study, I have extracted the most significant aspects of the aforementioned explanations of dystopia to establish my own definition that I apply to my research in the following chapters. Dystopias are, above all, cautionary tales set in imaginary, futuristic worlds. They warn against the inevitable negative consequences, especially dehumanization and depersonalization, that will occur if society does not change the direction in which it is headed. Secondly, they are in dialectical opposition to utopian thought. For example, to demonstrate the possible dangers of the utopian ideal of equality for all people taken to the extreme, a dystopist may portray a colorless city where all the homes are identical and where the inhabitants are dressed in plain, drab uniforms. Thirdly, dystopias are political and social critiques. They are satires of real-world events and situations that the author or filmmaker finds disturbing, such as totalitarianism or conspicuous consumerism. Lastly, I consider dystopists to be, for the most part, technophobic. There is a tendency in dystopian fiction to blame societal ills, such as the destruction of nature, on advanced technology run amok. Along with this fear of technology, there is a general distrust of science and a disbelief in the idea that it will always progress in a positive direction. These are the guidelines I use to analyze and interpret the primary works in the chapters to follow.

In addition to clarifying my position on the definition of dystopia, it is important to explain my views on the problematics of genre, labels, and categorization. I classify dystopian fiction as a genre in and of itself. Even though it is inspired by utopian literature and contains many themes, motifs, and devices of science fiction, I judge that dystopia can no longer be considered a sub-genre of either one. When the anti-utopia

first emerged, its works were direct reactions to the utopian works so popular in the late nineteenth century, but the dystopias that emerged in the twentieth century transformed from reactions to particular works of utopian fiction, to ones against general utopian ideals of the average person. Dystopias should not be considered a sub-genre of science fiction because they contain important elements of political and social critique that are missing from science fiction. Additionally, dystopias are didactic and most science fiction is not. In my dissertation I maintain that *Alphaville*, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, and *Le Dépeupleur* are important French representatives of the twentieth-century genre of dystopia.

Furthermore, I refer to my principal narratives as dystopias, not anti-utopias, utopian satires, inverted utopias, or any other of the numerous labels mentioned previously. Dystopias are not mere inversions of utopias, even though they do oppose one or several utopian ideals. The terms anti-utopia and inverted utopia are better suited for those works that are direct reactions to specific utopian ones. The term dystopia will only be used in this study to refer to works written after 1900 as I consider them to be products of twentieth-century anxieties.

Foundational Dystopic Fiction

Although none of the aforementioned classics of dystopian literature are from France, the closely linked genre of science fiction dates back further in French than in English. France is, after all, the birthplace of Jules Verne, the author of many of the seminal classics of science fiction and has a long historical connection to the genres that are dystopia's cousins: science fiction, utopia, anti-utopia, speculative fiction, political

satire, travel literature, and resistance literature. Precursors of modern French dystopian fiction, containing social and political critiques of Western society coupled with advanced technology, can be traced as far back as the seventeenth century. Cyrano de Bergerac's imaginary trip to the moon, *Voyage dans la lune* (1657), satirized the belief that the Earth and humankind were the center of the universe and derided Descartes's idea that animals are soulless. In Voltaire's early science-fiction story, *Micromégas; Histoire philosophique* (1752), influenced by *Voyage dans la lune*, two alien ambassadors study society on earth. Voltaire mocked religion, government censorship, and imperialism as well as the idea that humans are the center of creation. Although not a work of science fiction, Voltaire's intellectual satire *Candide* (1759) contains a scene that mocks the utopic vision of *Eldorado* that can be viewed as a precursor to dystopian cities. In addition, Walsh observes that the anonymous *L'Ile de Naudely* is a satiric reaction to Fénelon's utopic *Télémaque* (74). The religious cynicism and emphasis on the individual of the Age of Enlightenment, yielded to the collective and idealized societies and utopian thought that ruled France after the Revolution.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, French utopian socialists, such as Charles Fourier (1772-1837) and Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) put their faith in socialism and science to save humanity. Fourier, a radical feminist, creator of *Le phalanstère* and proponent of the idea of turning work into play, enjoyed quite a large following of his utopian ideals. Saint-Simon, considered to be the founder of French socialism, believed that the heads of industry should control society and that the spiritual direction of society should fall to the men of science and not the church. He dreamt of an

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industrial age that would save mankind and a united Europe that would end injustice.

Saint-Simon believed in natural evolution that was leading mankind down a path to

happiness, or the best of all possible worlds. It was these utopian ideals that paved the

path for the anti-utopian writings at the turn of the century.

The anti-utopian literature of the beginning of the twentieth century is not within

the scope of this study. Instead, I will begin with E. M. Forster's dystopic short story,

The Machine Stops (1909). Although Forster is best known for his lengthy novels,

Howards End, *A Room with a View*, and *A Passage to India*, that critique contemporary

British society, it is his futuristic short story, *The Machine Stops*,[22] that literary critics

credit as the first work of the emergent genre of dystopian fiction, and a precursor of its

canonical texts. Moylan asserts: "Forster's story therefore stands as an early example of

the dystopian maps of social hells that have been with us ever since" (112). Beauchamp

agrees, "Except perhaps for Wells's *When the Sleeper Awakes*, "The Machine Stops" is

probably the first modern dystopia" (57). And another critic claims, "*The Machine Stops*

has come to be hailed as influential, the earliest of the twentieth-century dystopias

exploring attitudes toward science and technology."[23] This novella will be discussed in

further detail in chapter three when I compare it to Samuel Beckett's *Le Dépeupleur*.

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[22] According to Frederick P. W. McDowell in *E. M. Forster* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), *The Machine Stops* was written during Forster's highly creative period. He states, "In any event, the years from 1905 to 1910 were wonderful years of creative release and achievement for Forster, years in which his very inability perhaps to express himself emotionally to the fullest and to achieve sexual fulfillment provided him with a means whereby he could distance himself from his materials and attain an objective expression of his powers as writer and analyst of human behavior" (8).

[23] Marcia Bundy Seabury, "Images of a Networked Society: E. M. Forster's *The Machine Stops*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 34.1 (1997): 61-62.

The first dystopian novel in French, Anatole France's *L'Ile des pingouins*, appeared two years before Forster's dystopia in 1907 but remains overlooked by most English and North American critics. Although written in 1907, it was not published in English until 1968. It is almost as obscure to French readers as it is to English ones because it is not an easy read. The book traces the historical development of the penguins, who have been transformed into people, through medieval, Renaissance, and modern eras. The author depicts the decline of civilization as the penguin people revert back to their premedieval ways and he indicates the cyclical nature of history as the last paragraph is identical to the first. The fable is a cautionary one about capitalism and a satire of bourgeois society in France, Catholicism, and industrialization. It is a precursor to future French dystopias concerned with degeneration, resulting from the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution, that also portray the metamorphosis of humans into animals, such as Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinocéros* (1960) and Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes* (1994). Although it is thought-provoking and amusing, *L'Ile des pingouins* is not widely considered a canonical dystopian text.

The three most often cited examples of dystopian literature are, as noted above, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). M. Keith Booker describes them as "the great defining texts of the genre of dystopian fiction, both in vividness of their engagement with real-world social and political issues, and in the scope of their critique of the societies on which they focus" (*Dystopian Impulse* 20-21). Zamyatin's *We* is credited as the archetype of modern dystopia as well as one of the best works of science fiction ever written and the

inspiration for Orwell's *1984*. It is a cutting satire of the belief in a technological

paradise, written against scientific utopias depicted in the works of H.G. Wells, an author

Zamyatin knew well. This cautionary tale, set in twenty-sixth century A.D., predicts the

horrors of Stalinism and the totalitarian state. In this imaginary world, where

mathematical equations regulate society, individual identities are abolished, and people

are reduced to numbers, the protagonist, D-503, enlightened by his love interest, I-330, of

the truth of their enslavement to the Benefactor and One State, joins her underground

movement to escape the cold, sterile world in which they live. In the end, their plans are

uncovered, I-330 is killed, and D-503 is "re-programmed" and lulled back into his

previous robotic state.

Huxley's *Brave New World*, set in a futuristic London dominated by skyscrapers

and sky travel, satirizes capitalism, bourgeois society, and an all-powerful totalitarian

state. It is a snapshot of the development of Western industrial society and where we are

headed if we do not heed the warning signs. In this scorching satire of the second

Industrial Revolution, capitalism, and bourgeois society, Ford is raised to the status of

God, babies are born in hatcheries and dress according to their social class, and a drug

called Soma becomes the "opiate of the masses." The novel questions the human

condition by contrasting two protagonists, Bernard Marx, a shallow product of this

techonologically controlled society, and John, the savage, who was raised on an

"uncivilized" reservation in New Mexico. They are both vying for the affections of

Lenina Crowne in a society where multiple sex partners is encouraged and monogamy is

deemed dangerous to one's health. Neither Bernard nor John is able to make sense of the

world in which they live. Bernard is exiled to a remote island by Mustapha Mond, the leader of the World State, and John exiles himself to a lighthouse and eventually takes his own life.

Orwell's *1984*, inspired by Zamyatin's *We*, is clearly a response to Stalin's totalitarian regime. In Oceania, Big Brother resembles Stalinist and Nazi dictatorships. Winston Smith, who works at the Ministry of Truth, falls in love with Julia and ends up betraying her and losing all hope. This novel exemplifies the power of discourse manipulation. Newspeak is invented language or propaganda used to brainwash the masses. In this completely bureaucratized and carceral society, everything and everyone is controlled and manipulated by telescreens. It is a powerful dystopia because although it is a fictional world, it is completely convincing.

In addition to these three canonical texts, Erika Gottlieb considers three other well-known novels to be representative of dystopia, as well; Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), a feminist satire of right-wing religious conservatism and theocratic totalitarian regimes; Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), a novel about the destruction of banned books and free speech; and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), the searing satire of a completely automated society that devalues all that makes us human. Gottlieb explains, "To a significant extent, each of these novels makes us ponder how an originally utopian promise was abused, betrayed, or, ironically fulfilled so as to create tragic consequences for humanity" (8). She considers the above six novels of speculative fiction to have the following aspects in common: seeds of a utopian dream that turn into a "hell on earth"; nightmarish, rigged trials; a social-political system where

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the elite conspires against its own people and against universal principles of justice; a destruction of the individual's private world of family, sexuality, thoughts and emotions by the intrusive regime; a disconnection of the present from the past due to manipulation by the regime; and, elements of satire and tragedy. For the purpose of this study, I consider *The Machine Stops*, *Metropolis*, *We*, *Brave New World*, *1984*, *Player Piano*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* as models of dystopian discourse. All of these canonical works appeared before the sixties (except for *The Handmaid's Tale*)—the decade when France witnesses a surge of dystopian works.

In order to trace the historical development of dystopian narrative in conjunction with historical developments in France, the dystopian works discussed in this dissertation have been arranged in chronological order. The 1960s in France are marked by two major events: the Algerian War of Independence and the student uprising of May '68. Charles de Gaulle was president and his ideology, known as Gaullism, that aimed at restoring France to its former glory as a world superpower, shaped political policy inside the *Métropole*, as well as outside in third-world countries. The social climate of this era was altered by several events taking place within the borders of the *hexagone*: the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*, echoing the Women's Liberation Movement in America and second-wave feminism sparked by Betty Friedan's bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963); the sexual revolution, aided by the birth control pill which was made available in 1960; and urbanization. Exterior issues that marked French society as well were the Cold War, the arms race, the civil rights movement in America, and the Vietnam War.

In chapter one I begin with an exploration of the 1965 film, *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* directed by Jean-Luc Godard. In this flagship example of French New Wave Dystopia, Lemmy Caution travels to another planet (that looks much like 1960s Paris) to save the universe from an evil scientist and his computer Alpha 60. This film is a fairly straightforward allegory of the danger of science to modern civilization. I argue that *Alphaville* is a warning against a machine-driven society that privileges logic and reason over emotions and imagination. It is also a critique of American-style consumerism, class stratification, and the sexual objectification of women. I contend that Godard's dystopian nightmare is a reaction to the utopian ideal of a stable and safe society that ultimately represses arts and literature to maintain this stability. I assert that Godard satirizes technology run amok and scientists, such as Wernher von Braun. In the second part of this first chapter I compare *Alphaville* to *Metropolis*. I argue that Godard's dystopic city imitates Lang's in many ways, but it also transforms and subverts this archetype of dystopian film.

In the second chapter I analyse Christiane Rochefort's 1967 novel *Une Rose pour Morrison*, a text that critiques the Vietnam War and Charles de Gaulle, pointing to mounting tension in Paris over social issues such as civil rights, women's liberation, urban decay, and environmental pollutants. I read her work as a warning against the destruction of the planet either through nuclear bombs or environmental pollution and argue that it is a response to the utopian ideals of De Gaulle. I maintain that *Une Rose* is a satire of De Gaulle and his parliament, bureaucrats, city planners, the *haute-*

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bourgeoisie, and the pedantic language of scholars. I further contend that it is a feminist critique of the role of women in modern French society.

In chapter three I focus on Samuel Beckett's short story, *Le Dépeupleur* (1970), which I discuss primarily as a commentary on the effects on humans living in a carceral society. The inhabitants of this futuristic world are in perpetual search for an escape route. By placing ladders along the walls and moving them from place to place, the "lost ones" repetitively climb up and down, looking for a way out, all the while conforming to rules and regulations that make escape virtually impossible. I argue that *Le Dépeupleur* is a warning against the monotony of a mechanized society. It is also a critique of urban anonymity, depersonalization, and the lack of imagination and creativity. I contend that it is a reaction to the utopian idea of the perfectibility of reason and logic and the positive progression of science. I assert that Beckett satirizes the Romantic poets who advocated escape through nature. In part two of chapter three I read *Le Dépeupleur* alongside E. M. Forster's short story *The Machine Stops*: a work considered by several critics to be *the* first dystopic text, as noted above. In these three chapters I discuss the themes that connect these two novels and the film to each other and to the classics discussed previously.

Together, the three chapters that follow provide an exploration of the above-mentioned dystopic novels and films in French. They provide a reaffirmation of the dystopian nature of the works and the importance of identifying them as dystopic as well as discussing the ways that these works not only imitate classic dystopian texts but the ways in which they transform or subvert them. In addition, these discussions indicate the

ties between the social criticism contained in dystopian fiction and that carried out by

important modern social and cultural critics such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes,

Theodor Adorno, and Jacques Lacan.

Chapter 1: *Alphaville*:
Jean-Luc Godard's Strange Dystopian Adventure

"Godard constate sa participation à notre monde, et il y réagit".[24]

"The eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of his work are a decades-long howl of protest against cinema that contents itself with reflecting instead of questioning the assumptions of the society around it."[25]

Dystopic films are often celluloid soap boxes for the transgressive, speculative, and anti-establishment discourses of their creators. Jean-Luc Godard, *l'enfant terrible* of French cinema, has "always worked in opposition to the established ideology and outside of the established film industry."[26] It seems apropos, then, for Godard to make use of classical dystopian themes, symbols, and motifs in one of his most interesting films, *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution*, created during his most productive period, 1960 – 1966.[27] David Sterritt points out that *Alphaville* has become "one of his most frequently revived works" (10), while another critic observes that it is "un des films les moins vus de Godard et pourtant il a déjà largement reçu sa part institutionnalisée

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[24] Gilles Delavaud, Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, and Marie-Françoise Grange, eds., introduction, *Godard et le métier d'artiste: Actes du colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001) 8.

[25] David Sterritt, *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard: Seeing the Invisible*, Cambridge Film Classics (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999) 23.

[26] Maureen Kiernan, "Making Films Politically: Marxism in Eisenstein and Godard," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 10 (1990): 106.

[27] He averages two films and one short per year during this period according to Colin MacCabe in *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at 70* (Great Britain: Bloomsbury, 2003) 140.

d'hommage cinéphilique."[28] Although Allen Thiher denies the influence of classic

dystopian authors on Godard, others attest to his film's strong ties to dystopian tradition.

Thiher claims, "*Alphaville* is Godard's most consistently pop film in this respect, and it

does a great disservice to the film to try to interpret it as a vulgarization of, say, Orwell or

Huxley."[29] While MacCabe, a leading critic on Godard, agrees with Thiher's assertion of

Alphaville's pop qualities, he also notes the film's indebtedness to its dystopian

precursors. He asserts, "Much of *Alphaville* is derivative of other dystopian futures (the

obvious reference, which Godard never makes, is to George Orwell's *1984*). But it is

difficult to think of any parallel work which so successfully shows the future in the

present, and which can sustain viewings forty years after it was made" (*Portrait* 168).

And Chris Darke places *Alphaville* among the top dystopian films ever made. He states,

"Along with *Metropolis*, *Blade Runner*, and *Akira*, *Alphaville* is one of the definitive

works in the cinema of dystopian cities. Each film proposes its vision of a dehumanized

society as the corollary to technological progress within the style of its period."[30]

Similarly, Maxime Scheinfeigel refers to the film as "une fable politique," a French term

synonymous with "une dystopie" (218). This diversity of opinion is due, in part, to the

inherent difficulty in classifying dystopias because of their hybrid nature. *Alphaville*

should be labeled a dystopia first and foremost because it showcases Godard's keen

awareness of the sterile underbelly of the bourgeoisie and the dehumanizing effects of

consumerism, capitalism, and irresponsible science on twentieth-century Western society.

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[28] Maxime Scheinfeigel, "Leçon de mémoire" in *Godard et le métier d'artiste: Actes du colloque de Cerisy*, Gilles Delavaud, Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, Marie-Françoise Grange, eds., (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001) 216.
[29] Allen Thiher, "Postmodern Dilemmas: Godard's *Alphaville* and *Two or Three Things That I Know about Her*," *boundary* 4.3 (1976): 949, *JSTOR*, 13 Sep. 2005 <http://www.jstor.org/search>.

In this way, it imitates classical dystopian fiction. In this chapter, I will not only identify

those elements of the film that reiterate canonical dystopian texts and thereby earn it the

right to be labeled dystopian, and not merely science fiction, but I will point to the ways

that Godard transforms and subverts classical dystopian discourse as well.

Like the genre of dystopian literature, Godard and his oeuvre are deeply rooted in

the twentieth century but admit a vision toward the future. According to Thiher, he is

"the most influential avant-garde film maker in the world" (948). David Sterritt also

praises Godard for his unique voice that distinguishes him from other filmmakers. He

exclaims:

> His love for the productive collisions of montage and collage anchors him
>
> as solidly in twentieth-century discourse as any modernist or
>
> postmodernist around; yet his wish to view existence from a standpoint
>
> transcending all limited notions of logic, causality, and representation
>
> places him in a visionary realm no other contemporary artist has occupied
>
> in quite the same way. (37)

Godard's career can be separated into three distinct periods according to most

critics: the *nouvelle vague* period, when he joined other young filmmakers in France to

revolutionize the film industry by discarding traditional Hollywood ways of

moviemaking; the Dziga-Vertov period, when he joined with Maoist filmmaker, Jean-

Pierre Gorin to fight against capitalist-imperialist ideologies; and the Maoist period, when

most of his political films, punctuated by self-analysis, commitment to the Third World

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[30] Chris Darke, "It All Happened in Paris," *Sight and Sound* 4.7 (1994): 11.

and political activism, were made. *Alphaville* appeared during his *nouvelle vague* period.

The core filmmakers of the *nouvelle vague* were Godard, François Truffaut, Jacques

Rivette, Eric Rohmer, and Claude Chabrol, all of whom began their careers as young

critics for André Bazin's emerging film magazine, *Cahiers du cinéma*. These young and

talented directors of the late fifties and sixties broke with traditional, conservative

cinematic rules in order to create their own new paradigms of moviemaking. Their films

were often made on small budgets and shot, not in traditional studios, but outside, and

usually in Paris. Godard's first internationally famous film, *A bout de souffle* (1959), was

filmed in the streets of Paris without any retakes. Unwanted scenes were simply cut out

of the middle of takes. This made for a choppy film that adds to the discomfort the

viewer feels while watching the film, generally understood to be Godard's intent. These

nouvelle vague filmmakers are also connected to auteur theory, whereby directors are

considered authors of their own works: their camera is their pen, and they leave a distinct

imprint on all their films. These film experimenters were also greatly influenced by the

social and political unrest in France at the time. Finally, the sway of other twentieth-

century modern and postmodern critics, movements, and philosophies are apparent in

Godard's films. Echoes of Barthes, Brecht, Foucault, Pop Art, Surrealism and

Postmodernism abound, particularly in *Alphaville*.

Roland Barthes, whose *Mythologies* appeared on the literary scene just six years

before *Alphaville* was made, was a dominant influence on Godard. Godard even asked

the very shy Barthes to be in his film, but he declined (MacCabe, *Portrait* 165).

Mythologies, a collection of essays that analyzes different components of contemporary

culture—from fashion to children's toys to wine—demonstrates how society's value

system creates and reflects modern myths. In a similar vein, Godard satirizes pop culture

and political regimes in *Alphaville*. As Yevgeny Zamyatin, the father of modern

dystopian literature, has argued, satire is a common tool of the genre, for laughter can be

a devastating weapon. Indeed, the power to raise a reader's consciousness in dystopian

literature often comes from its author's clever use of irony, wit, and humor. Like all

great satirists, Godard projects from present trends to an encompassing vision of the

society to come.

Godard's hero, Lemmy Caution (American actor, Eddie Constantine), chosen for

his reputation as a terrible actor and well-known in France for his popular role in *les

polars* [detective films], becomes a symbol of both "high" and "low" culture. He is a

gun-toting, trench coat-wearing, whiskey-drinking, violent secret agent/comic strip hero

who quotes Eluard, Borges, and Céline, and values love and affect above all else. The

entire film is a re-working of popular myths and discourses that substantiates Godard's

sharp perception of hidden ideologies in consumer society. *Alphaville*'s happy ending

also confirms Godard's belief that, with help, these ideologies can be uncovered and

society can change for the better. Thiher explains:

> At the same time Godard is in revolt against the destruction that popular
>
> myths work on language and image. No film maker shows greater
>
> anguish when confronting the popular mythologies and those forms of
>
> popular discourse that manipulate us and undermine our capacity for
>
> perception. The discourse of comics, magazines, popular films, and

advertising images, this discourse of simple violence, sexual exploitation, and created desires, is, for Godard, the discourse of a totalitarian world in the original sense of the word: it is a totalizing discourse that excludes all others as, in its total coherence, it places all language in the service of an economic system that functions with no other end than it own perpetration. (951)

While Barthes' contribution to Godard's viewpoints is clear, it is the German playwright, Bertolt Brecht, who is credited as being the primary influence on early Godard. Sterritt claims, "The first to assume major importance in his thinking was Brecht, who called for an 'epic' theater (and cinema) that refuses to entice us with propulsive narrative and psychology but rather induces thought and reflection through 'alienation effects' that encourage a critical distance between the spectator and the spectacle" (36). In *Alphaville*, Godard makes use of Brecht's "theatre of alienation" by creating a "realistic" film that does not imitate reality. Flashing lights, signs, and annoying Morse-code beeps remind the audience continually that they are watching a film. One of the characters tells a joke in the middle of the drama, while another laughs hysterically, further disrupting the viewer's ability to get comfortable and "lose herself/himself" in the film. Another critic, emphasizes Brecht's imprint on *Alphaville*. He states:

His films will clash together close-ups and long shots, abrupt cutting and long takes, the natural light of a scene and the artificial light of the image, the unrehearsed and the composed, the unexpected and the predictable,

words and pictures, sounds and sights. Like Brecht, Godard separates

elements that are usually blended together and discordantly juxtaposes

them, so that, in an effect of reciprocal alienation, by their discordance

they make one another strange.[31]

These defamiliarization strategies are often found in classical dystopic narratives to jar,

jolt, and generally shake up the reader/viewer, prompting them to think critically about

the society in which they live and where that society is headed if things do not change.

Godard's representation of people of contemporary Western society as slaves on a distant

planet, controlled by a giant computer is an effective way to show audiences to

themselves without making them defensive. "There are no Lemmy Caution figures to

save us from the Alphavilles we have constructed," observes Thiher, "—only bewildered

film makers who, having seen that we do not even see what is about us, must struggle to

find ways to represent our own reality to us" (956).

Godard's concern for depicting modern social discourses in his film and his

interest in relationships of knowledge and power link him to another social philosopher,

Michel Foucault. Sterritt confirms that Foucault's analysis of contemporary society has

much in common with Godard's views, especially his critique of power/knowledge

relationships. He clarifies:

Godard's tendency to examine human issues on a large, sweeping scale

makes him less a cultural critic than a social philosopher, concerned not

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[31] Gilberto Perez, "Godard's Tenderness," *Raritan* 6.1 (1986): 70.

with details of the moment but with what Foucault calls the 'episteme,' the

epistemological grid that underlies the thinking of a historical era. (23)

Like Foucault, Godard is conscious of the hidden ideologies that produce and maintain

power in society, while also remaining aware of the influence his own films, as part of

the media that creates popular discourses and myths, has on his viewers. Thus, in

Alphaville Lemmy visits a theatre where a short time before the condemned inhabitants

of the city were electrocuted while watching movies and whose seats tilted to dump their

bodies into trash bins. While reminiscent of the Holocaust, this scene also reveals

Godard's paradoxical belief that movie-watching can have a negative effect on society.

In another execution scene, bathing beauties finish off bullet-ridden enemies of the state,

in a swimming pool, while Professor Von Braun and other privileged members of

Alphaville's society look on. Sterritt confirms, "This truth is that *anything* can be turned

into entertainment, and *will* be if the results are profitable for a privileged élite behind the

scenes. . . . Show business, it tells us, can be *bad* for you" (12). The effect his films have

on the audience is crucial to Godard whose self-reflexivity in his films is well-known.

Sterritt concludes:

> By delving into Hollywood's bag of tricks to assemble this clever
>
> entertainment, Godard knows he is in danger of promoting a set of
>
> traditional movie values that he deeply opposes: voyeuristic spectatorship
>
> as opposed to critical thinking, vicarious problem solving as opposed to
>
> engagement with reality, passive consumption as opposed to active
>
> dialogue with the movie's ideas. Deftly skirting these traps, he proceeds

to undermine the conventions that give rise to them, fragmenting the story
and stylizing the visual so flamboyantly (e.g., freezing a kinetic fistfight
into a series of motionless shots) that they lose their ability to lull the
audience into its accustomed state of receptive daydreaming. (14-15)

Alphaville is enriched by the political and philosophical influences of Barthes,
Brecht, and Foucault, but it is its intertextual dialogue with other twentieth-century works
of art, film and literature that make it a technically stellar dystopic film. Surrealism and
Pop Art, leading movements of the fifties and sixties, shaped both the form and content
of *Alphaville*. The entire film is structured in the form of a detective story and shot in
film noir style. Lemmy Caution swaggers like John Wayne, the Western cowboy, but is
dressed like Sam Spade, the hard-boiled detective, and is identified in the film as a
descendent of Dick Tracy. Comic strip heroes were often used as subject matter in the
pop art paintings of Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. The use of comics and
advertising was common in pop art to bring "low" culture into the elitist world of "high"
art, a conceit also employed by Godard. There are industrial symbols in *Alphaville* that
were favorites of pop artists: arrows, street signs, and flashing lights.

Additionally, *Alphaville* is punctuated with Paul Eluard's masterpiece of French
surrealism, *Capitale de la douleur*. One critic confirms, "The selection of texts and the
fact of their presence is hardly incidental; their inclusion gives evidence of a literary
dimension to Godard's cinematic imagination; and particular texts are chosen to
comment upon Godard's preoccupations, his fascinations and themes."[32] Godard's

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[32] Margo Kasdan, "Eluard, Borges, Godard: Literary Dialectic in *Alphaville*," *Symposium* 30.1 (1976): 2.

fascination with surrealist texts jibes with the main struggle in *Alphaville* between rationality and anti-rationality. Also, the title *Capitale de la douleur*, suggests that not only is Alphaville, the capital city of this far-off planet, filled with pain, but that capital goods and capital gains will not bring contentment, but pain to consumerist societies. Alphaville is governed by logic and reason, determined by Alpha 60. This computer, created by the exiled evil scientist and inventor of the death ray, Professor Von Braun, is Lemmy Caution's enemy and ideological opposite. While Alpha 60 speaks the language of logic, reason, and rationality (a technocratic utopia), Lemmy poeticizes about love, affect, and humanity. In the end, Lemmy defeats the artificial brain with his illogical responses during his interrogation. When asked what turns night into day, Lemmy answers, "La poésie." Kasdan affirms the relevance of Godard's union between surrealist narrative and the cinema. She explains:

> Godard, it is clear, contemplates in Eluard a poet whose work can be
> related to cinema, a poetry that explores essential elements of film—
> lighting, the glance into and within the image, reflexivity, the
> multiplication of the image—and relates them in turn to love, one of
> cinema's traditional narrative concerns. (7)

Alphaville is also a love story between Lemmy and Professor Von Braun's daughter, Natasha. Eluard is the love poet par excellence and Lemmy uses his poetry to bring Natasha back to humanity by releasing her from the computer's control through memory, emotions, and the value of love. Lemmy reminds Natasha of who she used to be before she moved to Alphaville. As Natasha reads from *Capitale de la douleur*, she is

made conscious of words, emotions, and feelings that had been erased from her

vocabulary and her mind by Alpha 60. Two other critics underline the importance of

surrealism in the picture. They concur:

> For Godard, on the other hand, therapeutic speech produces affect; reason
>
> is the illness, and love the cure. The words Natasha speaks make clear
>
> that it is finally less the teachings of psychoanalysis than those of
>
> surrealism, with their valorization of chance, drift, and unconscious
>
> thought processes, which are at the heart of this film.[33]

Not only are surrealist energies evident in *Alphaville*, but a postmodern pull is

noticeable as well. Thiher points to Godard's affinity for self-analysis in his work as

evidence of his postmodern connection: "Jean Luc Godard is perhaps the most

representative of postmodern film makers, at least in so far as his works reflect the

anguish and contradictions of an artist who, motivated by the highest ethical seriousness,

has attempted to go beyond the impasse of his own beliefs" (947). Sterritt underscores

his hybrid filmmaking techniques, "This goes a long way toward explaining Godard's

penchant for quotation, combination, and pastiche, all indispensable tools in the

postmodern enterprise" (33). Godard's self-critique, intertextuality, and mixed bag of

genres, styles, and techniques blend to make *Alphaville* a postmodern dystopian motion

picture.

Dystopias' ties to postmodernism are significant since both embrace hybridity.

"The typical dystopian text," according to Tom Moylan, "is an exercise in a politically

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[33] Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, *Speaking about Godard* (New York: New York UP, 1998) 78.

charged form of hybrid textuality, or what Raffaella Baccolini calls 'genre blurring'"

(147). Several critics point to Godard's fundamental opposition of fiction and

documentary in the film. Perez observes that the film is a "designedly implausible

science-fiction secret-agent movie and, at the same time, a tellingly uncommon

documentary of Paris and of the actors" (66). Sterritt agrees, "Indeed, much of his work

can be understood as a sort of dialectical wrestling match between documentary and

fiction, setting fabricated plots and characters against vivid real-world backgrounds" (17).

He refers to this type of film as an "essay film"—one that puts forth its director's non-

fictional ideologies in a fictional and creative way. According to Sterritt, this genre is

ideal for the unconventional Godard because it is, "devoted not to the spinning of

fantasies but to the weaving of ideas, chosen less for their clarity or transparency, as in

conventional movies, than for their suggestiveness, allusiveness, and open-endedness"

(16). Thiher claims that it is not so much fiction and documentary at dialectical play in

the film, but pop and documentary. He affirms:

>At the same time his works attempt to represent the daily bric-à-brac and
>
>destructive trivia that make up our urban civilization, they are also films
>
>about other films. Humphrey Bogart and automobiles, Buster Keaton and
>
>brassieres—pop and documentary: these are the two inextricably
>
>interrelated poles of Godard's imagination. (948)

An additional critic, Kasdan, suggests that *Alphaville* is actually a pop and romance

movie. She exclaims, "On the narrative level, the film enacts two intermingled stories: a

thriller-spy plot (*film noir*) and a love story" (7). Lastly, MacCabe concludes that Godard

has, indeed, intertextualized all of the popular genres of the twentieth century in his work as did many of his fellow filmmakers:

> The use of Lemmy Caution allows Godard a final homage to the genres which had seemed so crucial to the young *Cahiers* critics. Eddie Constantine was a star of 'polars' (cop stories), and the film in which Lemmy comes to Alphaville to discover what has happened to the secret agents who were his predecessors would probably be best characterized as a 'spy movie', a popular genre during the Cold War. But Godard also talks of Constantine in terms of a Western hero, and the dominant genre is science fiction. It is as though Godard has brought together all the popular genres of the century, in a style which mixes comic strip and high modernism, Eddie Constantine and Paul Eluard. (*Portrait* 168)

Even though MacCabe and most critics agree that science fiction is the dominant genre of *Alphaville*, I will argue that it belongs in the category of dystopian fiction because of its devotion to social and political critique. As mentioned in the introduction, M. Keith Booker tells us that although there is often much overlapping, dystopia differs from science fiction in its attention to political and social critique. What is Godard warning his audience against and how does he accomplish it? It is the shallow and conservative ideologies of the bourgeoisie, according to Kiernan, that dominate Godard's thoughts. She confirms that the cultural framework that Godard is working against in the 1960s is consumer society (93). It is the dehumanizing effects of this society that Godard is emphasizing in his film. One of these effects, urban expansion, is a chief concern in

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the movie. "In its despair over 60s urbanisation," writes Darke, "*Alphaville* was part of a wider concern about the perceived dehumanising effects of mass-scale housing and contemporary renovation of the city" (12). By shooting the film in the suburbs of Paris, Godard brings these housing projects to the attention of the audience. These buildings, or *HLM*s, are referred to mockingly in the film as "hôpitaux de la longue maladie" 'convalescent homes.' They are used to re-program resistant, but not hopeless, inhabitants of Alphaville. Godard's film presents these renovations and buildings as dull, gray, and aesthetically unpleasing. It also shows the boring repetition and cold sterility of the new landscape. The circular staircases that seemingly lead to nowhere and the never-ending labyrinthine corridors give the viewer the uncomfortable feelings of being lost and alienated.

Another dehumanizing effect associated with consumer society in the film is prostitution. Godard has long been preoccupied with prostitution[34] and uses it in his films as a metaphor for all types of exploitation—not only the exploitation of women. As he puts it, "In order to live in Parisian society today, at whatever level or on whatever plane, one is forced to prostitute oneself in one way or another, or else to live according to conditions resembling those of prostitution."[35] For Godard, prostitution serves as a metaphor for different kinds of work in a capitalist economy, the functioning of capitalism itself, for the degradation of women and even the degradation of language. In the film, the phrase "Je vais très bien, merci. Je vous en prie" is perfunctorily repeated by the citizens of Alphaville and has lost all meaning. The logical but inadequate discourse

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[34] For a closer look at prostitution in Godard's works see *Vivre sa vie* and *Une femme mariée*.

forced upon the people by the computer is a means of oppression. Lemmy's poetic

language on the other hand is one of transgression and liberation.

Like much science fiction, *Alphaville* takes place on another planet and deals with

interplanetary war, and the threat of science and technology run amok. However, unlike

much science fiction and fantasy, there are no tentacled aliens or half-lizard, half-humans

creating havoc on Earth. Silverman claims, "The science fiction plot is only a premise

for a complex meditation upon temporality and affect" (67). The fight between good and

evil in this film, is one between reason and affect—between the computer and our

surrealist hero of antirationality, Lemmy Caution. Silverman explains:

> As Lemmy escapes from the central computer complex, his voice-over
>
> rounds out the science fiction parable: Alphaville allows no exceptions to
>
> its rule of conformity. Outsiders are quickly assimilated, and dissidents
>
> either executed or rehabilitated. But Godard is not so interested in all of
>
> this. What is important here is something which seems at first quite
>
> marginal to the narrative of totalitarianism and intergalactic warfare:
>
> Alpha 60 is suffering a breakdown, and the site of the problem is its
>
> memory system. (74)

Memory is important in the film as it is a reference point for humans who would be lost

without it. According to Scheinfeigel, the relationship between mankind and history is

essential in all of Godard's works. He claims:

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[35] *Godard on Godard*, ed. Narboni and Milne (New York: Viking, 1972) 239.

L'historien Godard est mémorialiste. En saisissant la vie contemporaine

comme elle ne fait sa preuve que sous forme de bribes, d'éclats, d'instants,

de fragments mélangés et accumulés, il filme la relation de l'homme à

l'histoire, cette 'historicité de l'homme' dont parle Michel Foucault pour

qui 'l'être humain n'a plus d'histoire: ou plutôt, puisqu'il parle, travaille et

vit, il se trouve en son être propre, tout enchevêtré à des histoires qui ne

lui sont ni subordonnées ni homogènes'. (221)

In addition to science fiction, dystopian fiction is characterized by its ties to and tension with utopian thought. As a dystopic film, what are *Alphaville*'s ties to and tensions with utopian ideals of the twentieth century? In the post-WWII era, despite Hitler's plan to use advanced technology for world domination, faith in science and technology soared. Advances in rocket-science and space travel had everyone dreaming of utopian societies on the moon. However, it was also a cold war period. Atom bombs, nuclear holocaust, and technology run amok turned utopian dreams of the perfect society into dystopian nightmares of an unfeeling automated one, for skeptics such as Godard. In *Alphaville*, the evil scientist, Professor Von Braun, is fashioned after the figurehead of irresponsible science, Wernher Von Braun, a German rocket-scientist who aided the Nazi regime and later worked in the U.S. and became known as the father of the U.S. space program. The tension between faith and mistrust in advanced technology manifested in Godard's film in the tension between reason and affect, between artificial intelligence and humanity. Silverman discusses this fight between good and evil in the figure of Von Braun:

The prototypical man of science, he cared more for the development of his

theories than for the good of his country. Now amorality has mutated into

unqualified evil. Vonbraun's creature, Alpha 60, has declared war on the

world as we know it. Only one solitary man can prevent this catastrophe:

a man from the older, less technically advanced culture. He alone can

muster the weapons sufficient to defeat a machine capable of solving such

problems as train plane schedules, the supply of electrical power, and the

logistics of war: love, poetry, and violence. (74)

In *Alphaville*, Godard warns his audience against materialism, exploitation,

irresponsible science, indifference, and other societal and political concerns paramount in

the late fifties and early sixties in France. It is in this way that *Alphaville* becomes a

cautionary tale, another tell-tale sign of dystopia. Sterritt reinforces this viewpoint:

The movie has other cautionary messages, too, warning that technology

can deaden thought and feeling, and that materialism can stifle love and

compassion. Obviously, high-tech pitfalls like technocracy and

materialism are not just fictional devices in a fantastic tale but regrettably

real tendencies in our own modern world. (14)

Alphaville's social-political critique, tension with utopian thought, and

hybridization of genres all contribute to its dystopian energy. But, what specifically in

the film underlines its "dystopian impulse," to borrow a term from M. Keith Booker?

What are its similarities and differences with the classical dystopian narratives that

preceded it?

Dystopian narrative is often written in the form of a memoir, diary, or journal: the protagonist writes to make sense of her/his world or to keep a record of her/his existence. It is often a subversive act, even if it begins as an innocent one. In Zamyatin's *We*, the archetype of modern dystopia, the protagonist, D-503, chief architect of the spaceship Integral, writes down his thoughts in the final days before the launch for the benefit of less advanced societies: "My pen, accustomed to figures, is powerless to create music of assonance and rhyme. I shall attempt nothing more than to note down what I see, what I think—or, to be more exact, what we think (that's right: we; and let this WE be the title of these records)" (4). His title suggests a society whose citizens have surrendered their individual identities to some collective technocratic dream. And even though D-503 claims to be recording the thoughts belonging to his fellow citizens of OneState as well as his own, it is clear that his act is subversive in that he alone is creating his journal. He continues:

> I feel my cheeks burning as I write this. This is probably like what a
> woman feels when she first senses in her the pulse of a new little person,
> still tiny and blind. It's me, and at the same time it's not me. And for
> long months to come she will have to nourish it with her own juice, her
> own blood, and then—tear it painfully out of herself and lay it at the feet
> of OneState. (4)

He equates writing to creating life—both acts crucial to sustaining humankind. The reader senses his regret that one day he must give up his creation to the State. His face is burning as he writes, another sign of his transgressive act. In *Alphaville*, Godard

transforms the classical transgressive act of writing into a more technologically advanced and modern one of picture taking. Lemmy Caution snaps photos of everything and everyone around him, not only to maintain his cover as a journalist for *Figaro/Pravda*, but also to provide images to those people, present and future, unable to witness firsthand this strange, computer-controlled environment. His camera becomes a pen that records his existence, as well as that of those around him, and helps him make sense of his surroundings. If he disappears, as did the secret agents sent before him, he will at least leave a record behind, that he did, indeed, exist. His picture taking, unfamiliar to those around him, causes them anxiety and pleasure at the same time. They are equally amused by and afraid of the camera. Photos can be used as tools of suppression, such as the huge, ominous ones of Big Brother in *1984* and the ubiquitous ones of Professor Von Braun in *Alphaville*, but they can also be used subversively against those governments and societies that repress individual freedoms by enlightened protagonists such as Lemmy Caution and even by young, enlightened filmmakers such as Godard himself.

As is common in dystopian fiction, *Alphaville* takes place in the not-so-distant future. The setting is similar to the world we live in today, but marked differences are apparent. The setting in *Alphaville* was very familiar to its Parisian audiences in 1965 because it was shot in the suburbs of Paris. And, because it was not filmed in a studio, the setting boasts a realism and contemporary air rarely seen in the Hollywood films of the forties and fifties. This strategy works well for effective dystopias to keep audiences grounded in the present while envisioning a not-so-perfect future. If the challenge of the dystopia is to nudge audiences toward a different and better future, then it must be

relatable to their present-day experiences. The more the viewers connect with the film, the more likely the film will be able to effect a change in its viewers.

Yet, at the same time, to be an effective dystopia, the setting should have a slight air of the unreal, or give audiences the feeling that something is not quite right. The inhabitants of Alphaville have been reduced to grinning semi-morons by the artificial brain that controls the city even though they look normal and are dressed similarly to Parisians of the sixties. Alphaville resembles Paris but it also brings to mind cold, gray East Berlin, the Nazi regime, and fascism: the street signs have Italian and German names such as "rue Enrico Fermi" and "Heisenberg Boulevard"; the city is divided into a North Zone and a South Zone; and, the cab driver's name, emphasized several times, is Karl.

To give the film an arcane, futuristic feel, Godard contrasts light and dark. In the opening scene, the hero arrives in Alphaville in the middle of the night, on an interstellar highway, in a Ford Galaxie (really a Ford Mustang). The darkness surrounding him is contrasted by his cigarette lighter that eerily brightens his face. In another scene between Lemmy and the other secret agent he has been sent to find, Henry Dickson, a swinging lightbulb flickers on the faces of the two men in a dark corridor. In addition to lighting contrasts, there is a utilitarian look to the city that lacks aesthetically pleasing décor. The pictures on the walls are almost all photos of Alphaville's leader, Professor Von Braun.

Classical dystopias have famously alienated protagonists whose love interests either enlighten them or are enlightened by them to the oppressive circumstances in which they live: Winston and Julia in *1984*, D-503 and I-330 in *We*, and John the Savage and Lenina Crowne in *Brave New World*. In *Alphaville*, Lemmy Caution is the alienated

protagonist, whose love interest, the beautiful Natasha Von Braun, is the daughter of the man Lemmy is sent to bring back, or kill. Lemmy's love interest, Natasha, also becomes alienated from the other citizens of Alphaville as Lemmy enlightens her on the importance of love and emotions through Eluard's poetry.

Lemmy is alienated from society, not only because he is from another planet, but also because his beliefs directly oppose those of Professor Von Braun and the computer. "He stands for everything within humanity which is resistant to Alphaville's technocratic vision," states Silverman, "whether it is commensurate with what we usually think of as goodness or not: affect, danger, finitude, the unpredictable" (62). Lemmy's rough exterior and violent behavior contrasts significantly with the passive behavior of Alphaville's residents. His actions also point to Godard's belief in the importance of rugged individuality and independence of spirit to guide society toward a better future. In this way, Godard subverts classical dystopias in which the protagonist is physically weak and sickened by the violence that surrounds her/him. They do not contibute to the violence in the society. Their rebellion is a non-violent one. Godard's violent saviour is reminiscent instead of American Westerns in which sheriffs and other "good guys" used violence to actually restore order in the towns and guarantee the safety of the inhabitants.

Lemmy is, indeed, Godard's version of humanity's saviour. He enlightens not only Natasha, but all of Alphaville's occupants to their oppressive environment. According to Godard, "Lemmy is a person who carries the light to people who no longer

know what it is."[36] Lemmy's cigarette lighter is a symbol of the light he is bringing to humanity and to Natasha and the other inhabitants of Alphaville. When he first meets Natasha she asks him for a light and he responds, "J'ai fait neuf mille kilomètres pour vous en donner." When the computer asks Lemmy about his religion, he answers, "Je crois aux données immédiates de la conscience."

Lemmy is alienated and confused by the emotional detachment of those around him. He senses right away that something is wrong in Alphaville. When he first arrives at his hotel, he notices the robot-like actions of the workers in the hotel. Lemmy thinks the Seductress assigned to him is on drugs and that Natasha is playing games with him until he realizes that they have been turned into unquestioning automatons by Alpha 60. Confused, Caution observes, "D'ailleurs c'est toujours comme ça. On ne comprend jamais rien et un soir on finit par en mourir." His commentary attests to Godard's belief that our lack of knowledge or incomprehension of how power structures work in society will eventually lead to our own demise.

There is a dehumanizing social system or political regime in classic dystopias. While the oppressive political regime in *1984*, popularly known as Big Brother, resembles Stalinist and Nazi dictatorships and the one in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a theocracy, ruled by religious right-wing conservatives, *Alphaville*'s is closer to those in *We*, in which mathematical equations regulate society, and in Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, where engineers and computer technology govern the American people. Human nature is not taken into account in these technocracies. Alphaville is run by Alpha 60,

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[36] Quotes by J.-L. Godard about *Alphaville* in *Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Editions Rivage, 1989), 161, by

that, like Big Brother and the telescreens, is omnipresent. The computer's disembodied

voice can be heard in both public and private spaces. In an enlightening scene, Dickson

lets the confused Caution, as well as the audience, in on what is really going on in

Alphaville. He asserts, "Alphaville, c'est une société technique comme celle des termites

et des fourmis." Its creator, Professor Von Braun, is a mad scientist bent on destroying

the world and all those who disobey him. Just like the posters of Big Brother in *1984*, the

ubiquitous images of Professor Von Braun are symbols of his regime's constant

surveillance of its subjects.

There is an underlying lack of faith that science and technology can save

humanity in dystopias. In *Alphaville*, it is Lemmy who will save humanity, not the

computer. The computer is destroyed in the end and Lemmy and Natasha escape.

Silverman upholds, "Now, more than ever, it is clear that this is a battle not so much of

man against machine, as of spirit against what can perhaps best be characterized as a

rational materialism" (81).

Godard does not offer either communism or capitalism as an acceptable

alternative to a technocratic State. Instead, he mocks both of them. Filmed during the

Cold War era, *Alphaville* does not subscribe to either socio-political regime since neither

one is going to save humanity. Lemmy's pseudonym, Ivan Johnson, is a combination of

popular Russian and American names and he pretends to be a journalist for

Figaro/Pravda—two well-known newspapers from France and Russia, respectively. In

one scene, Alpha 60 is lecturing to a group of students at the Ministry of Semantics in

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Jean-Luc Douin.

defense of capitalism and communism. The computer claims that although communism's ideologies and capitalism's materialism are oppressive to mankind, they are to be forgiven, for their intent is not malicious but "natural" because each one is guided by logic, reason and rationality. The computer asserts:

> Que ce soit dans le monde dit capitaliste ou le monde communiste il n'y a pas une volonté méchante d'assujettir les hommes dans la puissance de l'endoctrinement et celle de la finance mais uniquement leur vision naturelle de toute organisation de planifier son action.

Alpha 60's comment on war, "Il ne serait pas logique d'empêcher des êtres supérieurs d'envahir le reste des Galaxies," presents a critique of the Cold War and both Russian and American government's disturbing belief that superior technology is justification for policing the world. Godard underscores both communism's and capitalism's love affair with advanced technology during the Arms Race era, a romance that only brought fear and suspicion to mankind.

Another common motif of dystopias is the use of sexuality as both a weapon of repression and a subversive tool. There is no dystopian text in which women are exploited for their bodies more than in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this feminist dystopian novel, sexuality is repressed throughout society. The Handmaids, made up of a dwindling numbers of women who still have viable ovaries, are forced to have sex with their Commanders, under the supervision of their wives, during humiliating "ceremonies." The narrator, Offred, describes her experience:

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My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the

Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body.

I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating

too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one

is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't

signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is

what I chose. (94)

These rituals are devoid of intimacy, love, and feelings. The act itself is a mechanical

one. Offred concludes:

What's going on in this room, under Serena Joy's silver canopy, is not

exciting. It has nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of

those other notions we used to titillate ourselves with. It has nothing to do

with sexual desire, at least for me, and certainly not for Serena. Arousal

and orgasm are no longer thought necessary; they would be a symptom of

frivolity merely, like jazz garters or beauty spots: superfluous distractions

for the light-minded. Outdated. It seems odd that women once spent such

time and energy reading about such things, thinking about them, worrying

about them, writing about them. They are so obviously recreational. (94)

Offred is oppressed through her sexuality, but it is also a means of liberation for her. In

an act of subversion, Offred has illicit sex with her Commander's chauffeur, Nick. She

writes:

Being here with him is safety; it's a cave, where we huddle together while

the storm goes on outside. This is a delusion, of course. This room is one

of the most dangerous places I could be. If I were caught there would be

no quarter, but I'm beyond caring. (269-70)

In *Alphaville*, human sexuality has also become a weapon of oppression and it is no

longer associated with love and emotion. It has been degraded to the level of a

commodity. Love and emotions are considered illogical behavior by Alpha 60 and are

punishable by death, but sexual relations are encouraged. In the same way, in *Brave New

World*, sex is purely recreational, monogamy is discouraged, and parenthood is

considered obscene, since children are born and raised in Hatcheries. In Alphaville,

intimate physical contact has become commonplace and routine. Natasha expresses

physical affection with everyone in the same way, which surprises Lemmy. He is also

shocked by the Seductresses who are used to appease outsiders and to pacify potential

rebels and those who might be starting a resistance movement. Sexuality (and

tranquilizers) is used to control the masses, keep them happy, and to keep their minds off

of the truth and what is really going on in society and who is really controlling their

behavior. However, sexuality is also used by Lemmy as a subversive tool against the

control of the computer. He seduces Natasha back into the emotional world. By

appealing to her emotions, he elicits her help in gaining access to and killing her father

and in destroying Alpha 60.

Feminist critics often see a two-fold problem with female representation in

Godard's films. On the one hand he criticizes the objectification of female bodies in the

media and advertising, but on the other hand he infantalizes them. According to Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe, "More than any other single filmmaker Godard has shown up the exploitation of woman as an image in consumer society."[37] In one scene, while the Engineers are showing Lemmy around the Computer Centre they pass by a naked woman kneeling in a lighted, glass case as if she were an object for sale. They walk by her without noticing her, as if she were invisible. To further emphasize the objectification of women in a consumer society (and also reminiscent of Naziism), large code numbers are noticeable on the necks, backs, and shoulders of Alphaville's female residents; one woman even has it tattooed across her forehead. The men do not sport such symbols of oppression and commodification. Not surprisingly, the women in this patriarchal society hold inferior positions in the workplace. Most of the Engineers are men and most of the women in the film are either prostitutes or knife-wielding water ballet dancers.

Although Godard points out female exploitation, his leading lady, Natasha, (played by Anna Karina, Godard's first wife) acts more like a child than a grown woman. She does not wear long, seductive gowns, as did many Hollywood actresses of the time. Instead, she wears short, school-girl dresses with peter pan collars and Mary Jane shoes with tights. She acts like a wide-eyed innocent child. There are no grown men in the film who dress and act like little boys. Even Natasha's speech imitates that of a child learning new words. At the end, she says slowly, "Je . . . vous . . . aime," like a toddler

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[37] Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe, "Images of Woman, Images of Sexuality," in MacCabe's *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980) 85.

saying it for the first time. Perhaps this infantalization comes from an oppressive

consumerist society, but this connection is not made in the film.

In canonical dystopian fiction, class stratification and hierarchies are predominant

and often seen as natural or common-sense divisions of society. In *Brave New World*,

one's social status is predetermined at birth and different classes are identified by

different colored clothing. This helps to clarify who holds power and, more importantly,

who does not. Class color coding is used in *The Handmaid's Tale* also: the Handmaids

wear red, the Commander's Wives wear blue, the Econowives wear orange, and the

Marthas (maids) wear green. In *Player Piano*, there is a strict division between

managers and labor. Their lives never intersect in private spaces, only public ones. In

Alphaville, people are placed as first, second, third, etc. of whatever job they hold.

Natasha is a Programmer, Second Class. The Seductress who escorts Lemmy to his hotel

room is a Seductress, Third Class. The Seductresses all wear the same identifying gowns

that look like aesthetician's robes. Society's rejects are found at the Red Star Hotel

where Lemmy goes to find Henry Dickson. The hotel is dingy, dirty, and dimly lit, very

much in contrast to the rest of the city. These hierarchies of class help to ensure the

dominance of the ruling elite.

Another method used by the elite to further subject the masses in classical

dystopias is the suppression of individual identity, while making the people believe that it

is for the common good. Personal and familial relationships are discouraged or even

outlawed. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred's daughter is taken from her and her

Commander's wife, Serena Joy, holds out promises of a reunion as a carrot to make

Offred submit to her requests. In Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the authorities encourage the protagonist's wife to turn her husband in for his transgressive behavior. She is happy to do so, as long as her own security is ensured. In *1984*, neighbors are not only encouraged and rewarded for spying on and policing each other, they are punished if they do not engage in such activities. In most dystopias, any prolonged personal contact or conversation between two individuals is seen as subversive. In *Alphaville*, Natasha is not close to her father and she even tells Lemmy that she has never met him. In the public ceremony/execution scene at the pool, a man is shot for weeping over the loss of his wife. Individuals are even encouraged to commit suicide for the benefit of the community. The Red Star Hotel owner pushes Dickson to hasten his suicide because they need his room. He asks, "Quand voulez-vous vous suicider? Dépêchez-vous! Nous avons besoin d'une chambre pour notre cousin du Sud." The computer justifies its decisions to Lemmy: "Mon jugement est juste. Je travaille pour le Bien Universelle."

Usually in dystopias, the people live in a carceral society where they are under constant surveillance and where the penal system lacks due process of law. However, this imprisonment is often subtle and goes unnoticed by the inhabitants of the society. As Foucault suggested in his treatise on the panopticon, order is enforced through internalized fear. If that does not work, there are always external methods. Signs of a police state are abundant in Alphaville. Like the drug, *soma*, used to control World State's populace in *Brave New World*, tranquilizers are swallowed regularly by the occupants of Alphaville, and they are offered repeatedly to Lemmy, who refuses them. The citizens are constantly reminded by the omnipresent, disembodied voice of the

computer that they are being watched. Public executions show the people what awaits them if they disobey. There are interrogation rooms used to curtail transgressive behaviors. Natasha tells Lemmy that she was ordered to remain at his service, i.e. police him, throughout his stay in Alphaville by the Authorities. There are intercom devices in each hotel room from where the computer's electronic voice can be heard at any time. When Lemmy leaves his hotel room, the computer beeps as if it is recording his activities somewhere. Travel to and from the city is strictly controlled. All newcomers are interrogated in the Computer Unit and must register at Residents Control upon entering the city. The residents are restricted from travelling outside the city. There are only two ways out of Alphaville: execution or suicide. Lemmy asks Natasha if she has ever been to "les pays extérieurs" 'the Outerlands.' She says no and that it is forbidden to even think of them. One Seductress claims that she has never even heard of the Outerlands.

Most dystopian fictions share a common theme—the importance of language in shaping human thought. The tension created between a dominant discourse and a repressed one helps clarify language's influence on society. Sterritt confirms that Godard understands the power of language as both a weapon of repression and a tool for positive change. He states, "He sees language as both a stumbling block for freedom—when ideologues use it as a power/knowledge tool—and a potentially liberating force for those wishing to investigate and heal the human condition" (26). In *Alphaville*, Eluard's *Capitale de la douleur* is contrasted with Alphaville's so-called Bible that turns out to be a dictionary. This bible/dictionary, found in all of the hotel rooms, changes daily as more and more emotional and poetic words are erased from existence and replaced with a

logical lexicon, much like Newspeak in *1984*. It is also a symbol of the degradation of language taking place in Parisian consumer society about which Godard felt so strongly. The phrase, "Je vais très bien, merci. Je vous en prie." repeated throughout the film by Alphaville's residents is a rational one. Silverman explains:

> The residents of Alphaville engage in a form of utterance composed mostly of endlessly reusable formulas, which attest to the predominance of the type over the individual, and to *langue* over *parole*. Language is rationalized and stabilized to an almost mathematical degree. (62)

Emotional phrases, such as *I love you* no longer make any sense to Alphaville's inhabitants. The word *why* has been stricken from their vocabulary, also. The Chief Engineer tells Lemmy that, "Il ne faut jamais dire pourquoi mais parce que. Dans la vie des individus comme dans celle des nations tout s'enchaîne, tout est conséquence." This bible/dictionary is the only book in a society where literature and the arts are repressed, another common theme in dystopic fiction. There is no room for artists or writers in this ultra-rational society. Dickson tells Lemmy that there are no longer any artists or writers in Alphaville, "Il y avait des artistes. Oui, des artistes, romanciers, musiciens, des peintres. Aujourd'hui plus rien. Rien comme ici."

Often in dystopias, there is a rejection of the past. It is most notable in Orwell's *1984* where the protagonist, Winston Smith, works at the Ministry of Truth destroying and/or changing document after document to make the past only what the ruling Party wants it to be, not how it was in reality. After Winston betrays the Party, he is tortured until his mind only accepts reality in the way that the inner party members of Big Brother

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want him to believe it. He must trick his own mind into believing that two plus two

makes five, if that is what the Big Brother wants him to believe. This power over reality

and the past is what keeps Big Brother in power and the others from having a successful

revolution. This rejection of the past is lead by the computer in *Alphaville*. Lemmy

meets Natasha at the Institute of General Semantics where the computer is lecturing on

programming and memory. The hollow, sinister voice of Alpha 60 drones on:

> La mémoire centrale est appelée ainsi à cause du rôle primordial qu'elle
>
> joue dans l'organisation logique de l'Alpha 60. Personne n'a vécu dans le
>
> passé, personne ne vivra dans le futur. Le présent est la forme de toute
>
> vie. . . . Le temps est comme un cercle qui tournerait sans fin.

This idea of circular time is disturbing to Godard who indicates often in his work that

time is more like a straight line, always moving forward, and that mankind should

advance along with it. Additionally, the computer asserts, "Avant nous, il n'y avait rien

ici, ni personne. Nous y sommes totalement seuls. Nous y sommes uniques,

épouvantablement uniques." Silverman observes that the computer's rejection of the past

is detrimental since understanding the past is essential to society's survival. She

reasserts:

> Unlike Lemmy Caution, who is in a perpetual dialogue with earlier stories
>
> and legends, Alpha 60 hears only the echo of his own voice in the void.
>
> And to inhabit only the present means never to be able to think
>
> relationally. When one cannot compare what one sees and hears with
>
> what one has previously seen and heard, 'one isolated word or an isolated

detail in a drawing can be understood. But the comprehension of the

whole escapes us'. (69)

According to Tom Moylan's classificaton system of dystopias, *Alphaville* would

be labeled a utopian-dystopia because of its optimistic denouement, contrary to *1984*'s

tragically hopeless conclusion. In the last scene, Lemmy and Natasha escape from

Alphaville in Lemmy's car. Natasha asks Lemmy if all of Alphaville's residents are

dead. Lemmy responds confidently:

> Non, pas encore. Mais, ils vont peut-être guérir d'ailleurs. Qu'Alphaville
>
> deviendra une cité heureuse comme Florence…comme Angoulême
>
> City…comme Tokyorama. Ne vous retournez pas!

MacCabe agrees that Godard's ending is a hopeful one. He contends, "It is also the last

of Godard's film of this period and it ends on an explicit note of optimism—Anna Karina

mouths 'I love you' as Misraki's music swells to a sentimental climax" (*Portrait* 168).

Perez agrees with MacCabe, adding that this upbeat ending is clearly a fictional one and

that in reality our society's happy ending has yet to be fulfilled:

> For Godard's conclusion remains inconclusive: his closure of the form
>
> does not pretend to have settled the content. Without asking us to suspend
>
> our disbelief in the fiction, he draws us into the undeceived wonder, the
>
> sense of sought possibility, expressed in this light-lined ending—but
>
> without asking us either to see in this beautiful formal resolution, on the
>
> highway that doubles as interstellar space, the figurative road to a
>
> proposed actual solution. Figuratively construed, the unbelievable fiction

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implies the unlikelihood of an actual solution, which, as allegorized in the

incongruous pairing of Lemmy Caution and Karina, would require an

improbable combination of tough violence and tender love; and yet this

unreal happy ending, not merely ironic, has about it a genuine hopeful

happiness. Godard's allegory does not put forward an answer but a

flashing, inciting question. The tough guy has rescued the princess from

the capital of dehumanization; Godard has rescued the signifiers of

tenderness from their common sentimentalization; the real rescue is yet to

be accomplished. (82-3)

The tone of the entire film is more upbeat and hopeful than in most classical dystopias,

even though the society depicted can only be seen as a nightmarish one.

Technology, Politics, and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*

In the first part of this chapter, I identify the elements in Godard's *Alphaville* that

reiterate, transform, and subvert classical dystopian discourse found in the genre's

emblematic works of Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell, and Atwood. In this second section, I

refer specifically to another film, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927),[38] considered to be the

last expressionist film and regarded by Booker as "an important forerunner of many

modern dystopian fictions and films" (*Dystopian Literature* 347), such as Ridley Scott's

Blade Runner (1982), George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977),[39] Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*

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[38] *Metropolis*, Dir. Fritz Lang (1927), Restored (New York: Kino, 2002).
[39] Holger Bachmann, "The Production and Contemporary Reception of *Metropolis*," in *Fritz Lang's "Metropolis": Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, Ed. Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann (New York: Camden House, 2000) 44.

(1985),[40] and Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* (1997).[41] According to Elsaesser,

Metropolis has metamorphosed from a commercial failure to a critically acclaimed and

popular model of an emergent genre: "In a turn of events as paradoxical as it was

unpredictable, *Metropolis* has now become the veritable archetype for a new movie

genre: post-Fordist kitsch techno-noir" (123). The dystopian motifs in *Metropolis* derive

from various literary sources. The underground world of workers is reminiscent of H. G.

Wells's *The Sleeper Wakes*, and the inventor creating artificial life resembles those of

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Villiers d'Isle Adam's *L'Eve Future*, and Karl Capek's *R.

U. R.*.[42] *Metropolis* recalls Weimar culture and the 1920s when Berlin was the avant-

garde capital of Europe, just as *Alphaville* reflects pop culture and the 1960s when Paris

was the avant-garde capital of the world. Although *Metropolis* emerged during the silent

film era, its dystopian discourse is worth examining in parallel to that of Godard's

Alphaville, that appeared forty years later. Comparing and contrasting similar dystopic

themes, *topoi*, and motifs enhances the viewer's understanding and appreciation of both

films that thematically link technology, politics and sexuality. This study explores the

dichotomies mobilized in both filmic narratives such as man and machine, labour and

capital, virginity and overt sexuality, tradition and modernity, nightmare and dream. The

juxtaposition of a German expressionist film of the 1920s with a French *nouvelle vague*

film of the 1960s may appear somewhat arbitrary. It is not my intention to reduce the

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[40] Thomas Elsaesser, "Innocence Restored?: Reading and Rereading a 'Classic'," in *Fritz Lang's
"Metropolis": Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, Ed. Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann
(New York: Camden House, 2000) 123.
[41] Wolfgang Jacobsen and Werner Sudendorf, "*Metropolis*. Decades ahead—millennia behind," *Metropolis*
Ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen and Werner Sudendorf (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2000): 39.
[42] Bachmann 9.

rich complexities of either film to a limited generic denominator. My analysis of the

parallel elements of classical dystopian fiction focuses on their representation of a genre

committed to political and social awareness. According to one critic, the successful

dystopia not only frightens the reader, but motivates her/him as well. He asserts, "It

behooves dystopian writers to base their hellish societies on concepts that will make most

readers simultaneously feel personally threatened and empowered to resist."[43] Within the

larger landscape of the twentieth century, there is good reason to fear the consequences of

the urge for scientific control. The predominance of Cartesian rationality and its

authority of science and reason over nature have inflicted chaos in the twentieth century.

Chemical and nuclear warfare, overpopulation, and environmental hazards have vitiated

the utopian ideal of perpetual progress. From this perspective, my comparative approach

appears appropriate.

Metropolis, the City of Mothers, the Mother of all cities, based on a novel of the

same title by Thea von Harbou,[44] illustrates Lang's vision of the urban landscape in 2026

A.D.[45] It is a city ruled by the capitalist tyrant, Joh Fredersen (suggestive of *Jehovah*),

father of the film's protagonist, Freder (the *brother*, the son of Fredersen). *Metropolis* is

a love story between Freder and Maria (*Mary*, the virgin-mother), an anonymous woman

of the working class, who preaches peace and compassion to the laborers who live

underground in the gray and dreary Worker's City. In stark contrast, the sons (and

[43] David W. Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias* (Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1997) 11.
[44] Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis* (Berlin: August Scherl, 1927).
[45] According to Bachmann, "To be sure, even the most superficial glance at *Metropolis* confirms the profound influence New York had on the film's visual design (the swirling lights, the sky-high buildings are all there in the breathtaking vistas towards the skyline of Metropolis)" (5).

daughters) of the wealthy capitalists reside in luxurious skyscrapers, exercise in magnificent athletic stadiums, relax in the beautiful Eternal Gardens of Pleasure, and play in the entertainment district, Yoshiwara. Freder falls in love with Maria at first glance and after hearing her talk, he joins her cause. Freder's father, Joh, fears Maria's influence over the masses, so he plots with the mad scientist, Rotwang, to destroy her. Rotwang, inventor of the Machine-Man, kidnaps Maria and in one of the movie's most memorable scenes, steals her subconscious and transforms his android into Maria's evil twin. The true Maria is held captive in Rotwang's attic, while the false Maria wreaks havoc in Metropolis, ushering the rich men to homicide and suicide with her erotic, hypnotizing dance, and inciting rebellion and self-destruction among the workers. In a scene of oedipal crisis, Freder discovers false Maria in the arms of his father and, mistaking her for his love, he collapses with brain fever. Meanwhile, the workers, guided by fembot Maria, destroy the Heart Machine, thereby releasing a flood that threatens the lives of the workers' children. Virgin-mother Maria escapes from Rotwang's attic and, upon witnessing the breakdown of the M-Machine, descends into the Worker's City to rescue the children. Freder, having recovered from his illness, joins her there and together they transport the children to safety, to the Club of the Sons. At the same time, the workers burn the false Maria at the stake as a witch, for they believe that their children are drowned and that she is to blame. During the fire, cyborg Maria's outer layer melts away, revealing her robotic core. In the final scene, the true Maria completes her task by delivering the savior, Freder, who serves as mediator between the state and

the people, and enjoins his father with Grot, the foreman of the workers. A male trinity analogous to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has been formed.

Metropolis is New York, and Alphaville is Paris: two of the world's most prominent, architecturally advanced cities of the twentieth century. *Alphaville* was filmed at different locations around Paris, and *Metropolis*, though not filmed in New York, was modeled after the Manhattan skyline that inspired its director.[46] Metropolis and Alphaville are like the cities they replicate, yet different. The striking feature of both settings is their utopian air of the ideal society, of planned communities, and of escape into fantasies of the imagination. They are the brain-children of the architects who dreamt them into existence, Joh Fredersen and Professor Von Braun. Lang and Godard satirize the endeavors of these two tyrants, that are hopelessly removed from reality. According to Sisk, "These writers, 'dystopists,' desire a better world, but view utopian schemes as distracting at best, and often misguided" (11). Joh Fredersen's construction of his beloved Metropolis is a misguided utopian scheme, as is Von Braun's. Their carefully planned communities reveal themselves to be dystopias in the end. One critic concurs, "In *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang implies that an utopia that is founded on exploitation and suffering is closer to dystopia than utopia."[47] Jacobsen and Sudendorf underscore the city's dystopian atmosphere, "There is almost no place here that does not turn into a nightmare. A more inhospitable city cannot be imagined" (25). Rotwang's house turns into a prison for both Maria and Freder, the Worker's City is flooded by a raging,

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[46] "Later Lang insists his first impression of New York inspired him to make the film *Metropolis*," recount Jacobsen and Sudendorf (9).

underground river, the Machine Halls crumble as the machines explode and catch fire, and Yoshiwara is destroyed by the frenzied revellers under the spell of the evil Maria. Jacobsen and Sudendorf argue further that Lang and Harbou present utopic visions of a Fordist society, one based on America and its advanced technology, but remain ambiguous about the true identity of their vision. They confirm:

> America, industrially prosperous, was the Promised Land of technology. The epitome of the new mass production, which is of course also reflected in the images of the film *Metropolis*, were Henry Ford's innovative working techniques: simplification and standardization of work routines, boosting mechanical know-how, and cutting back on the human labor force. Lang and Harbou take up these utopian visions of a 'white socialism,' but they remain sitting on the fence, for the picture of an integral, mechanized world in which social differences seem to have been abolished appears side by side with the blueprint of a future world that seems to establish a hierarchic structure. (19)

Similarly, Alphaville, though it appears neat and orderly on the outside, turns out to be a true dystopia upon closer investigation. Godard's futuristic city looks more like East Berlin than Paris in all its grayness and desolation. And, Von Braun's palace is sinister elegance, more like a building in New York. There is more darkness than light in this futuristic, bleak world and Godard's dystopic vision of a machine-ruled city leaves no room for ambiguious interpretation.

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[47] Deirdre C. Byrne, "The Top, the Bottom and the Middle: Space, Class, and Gender in *Metropolis*,"

Metropolis addresses the question of the role of technology in society, which was a widespread concern, and cause for both celebration and anxiety in post-World War I Germany. According to Sisk, "Dystopian didacticism borders on the hortatory polemic: anti-utopian fiction may (or may not) address the existing problems of its writer's world, but dystopia must always do so" (7). Lang speaks to the machine-cult aesthetic of his time in his dystopic, machine-driven world. Jacobsen and Sudendorf maintain, "Many things in Lang's and Harbou's film turn out to be not so much science fiction than a direct reflection of political and cultural trends of the period" (19). Technological advancement is one of those popular movements. According to Jacobsen and Sudendorf:

> Rationalization and mechanization are the catchwords of the day.
> Transportation and communication are the areas whose technical
> development makes the greatest strides. The production of automobiles
> and aviation expand, but the development and increasing popularity of
> radio in particular sets new standards. The Tempelhofer Feld airport is
> officially opened in October 1923; in December of 1924 the first German
> Radio Exhibition opens its doors; the inauguration of the Deutsches
> Museum in Munich (the world's largest museum of technology up to that
> point) takes place in May 1925; in April 1926 the first wireless
> transmission of a picture, from Berlin to Vienna, is successfully carried
> out; and the Berlin Funkturm (Radio Tower) is inaugurated in October of
> the same year. (19)

Metropolis's central opposition of human versus the machine, with its underlying skepticism in the progress of technology, is recycled in Godard's *Alphaville*. Andreas Huyssen underscores the importance of technology to the avant-garde by suggesting that the whole of the twentieth-century avant-garde may be defined by its experience— positive or negative—of technology.[48] While the capitalist ruler and evil inventor of *Metropolis* are two separate individuals, they become one in the figure of Professor Von Braun in *Alphaville*. The prototypical mad scientist, Von Braun, ruler of Alphaville, mistakenly believes he has control over his creation, Alpha 60, as does Rotwang over his cyborg, Maria. But, their power is illusory and in the end they realize their ultimate impotence and are destroyed by this knowledge. This motif of uncontrollable, artificial intelligence echoes that of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

In *Metropolis*, the notion of technology is dystopic as it emphasizes the chaotic and destructive side of technology, not its functionalist conception. Elsaesser tells us that this perspective was not well-received by the social progressivists in Germany: "Generally, the dystopian vision of man's use of machines to aggravate exploitation and oppression rather than alleviate misery and want highly irritated social progressives."[49] Lang portrays machines as vigorous, irrational, and almost lusty. The film historian, Enno Patalas, describes the opening scene, in his commentary to the film:

> City and film are both machines: fly wheels, a crankshaft, an eccentric
>
> disk, a machine without workers, devoid of function, pure movement,

[48] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 10.
[49] Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000) 43.

rotating, thrusting, a machine of desire. Round shapes and jerking

movements become one in the image of two clocks, one twenty-four-hour

and one ten-hour clock.[50]

Godard's negative perception of technology corresponds to Lang's dystopian vision. His

computers move in evil circular motions, not positive straightforward ones. They emit

annoying beeping sounds and the voice of Alpha 60 is inhuman and offensive to the ear.

Images of round clocks and the jerking movements of their hands are ubiquitous in

Alphaville also. Alpha 60, portrayed as a dynamic and greedy computer, has utopian

plans of domination over the universe that are thwarted by the film's humanist hero,

Lemmy Caution.

The workers in *Metropolis* are alienated from the utopian ideals of the city's

architect, Joh Fredersen, as are the inhabitants of Alphaville from Von Braun's and the

computer's. One critic notes the mechanized movements of the masses in *Metropolis*:

This dismembered or fragmented social body is seen as inorganic,

technological, dead. The workers appear robotic and zombie-like, lacking

the spirit and emotions that define human life. Fredersen himself is shown

as rigid and mechanical, as lacking a human spirit and human emotions

(e.g. the firing of his secretary).[51]

Joh Fredersen, though he created the machine, is also a part of it. Through his pacing and

impatience, he embodies Metropolis's restless energy. He does not have patience for his

[50] Enno Patalas, Commentary, *Metropolis*, Dir. Fritz Lang (1927), Restored (New York: Kino, 2002).
[51] R. L. Rutsky, "The Mediation of Technology and Gender: *Metropolis*, Nazism, Modernism," *New German Critique* 60 (1993): 5.

inefficient assistant, Josaphat, whom he exiles from the class of the powerful to the class

of the powerless. Freder, the son, watches his father's cold act with horror and

disbelief—a reaction to which the audience was clearly able to relate.[52] Similar to

Fredersen, Von Braun lacks a human spirit and human emotions. For example, he stands

rigidly by in an execution scene as a man is shot and killed for showing emotion when his

wife dies. Additionally, Von Braun is father to the one who will eventually help save

humanity, Natasha, just as Joh Fredersen is father to Freder, who as mediator between his

father and the workers, saves Metropolis. However, unlike Joh, Von Braun does not

learn from his mistakes and he perishes along with Alpha 60 and the rest of Alphaville's

inhabitants.

The visual style of both films is painful, menacing, and anxiety-ridden. Although

Godard does not use the trick shots and special effects that are used by Lang, he is still

able to translate visually the anguish-ridden world that is Alphaville. This haunting

vision is most vivid in the scenes of the workers. In *Metropolis*, they are the slaves of the

M-Machine, similar to the inhabitants of Alphaville who are the slaves of Alpha 60. The

image of the god-machines, the idols to which human beings sacrifice their lives is

obvious. Jacobsen and Sedendorf compare the subordinate workers of Metropolis to the

ones in Huxley's classic dystopia:

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[52] One of the goals of dystopian fiction is to create an imaginary world unlike the reader's/viewer's, but
with a thread to the real world that will provide the reader/viewer a way to identify with the work.
Jacobsen and Sedendorf highlight one of the ways that the film is made relatable to its audience: "The
nightmare of constantly being on the brink of losing one's secure existence, of being plunged into poverty,
was a threat the audience in the Weimar Republic, shaken by inflation and crises, understood and identified
with only too well" (27).

Human beings as the slaves of machines, without a will of their own: That

is how they are shown in certain scenes of the film, subject to the mostly

anonymous rule of mechanical industrial devices—in this respect

Metropolis, too, contains a kernel of the same criticism of our civilization

as that expressed in Aldous Huxley's 1932 vision of a *Brave New World*.

(19)

In Alphaville, the Capital of Pain, the citizens appear robotic and zombie-like also. They

remain in a perpetual passive state with the help of tranquilizers. Booker claims that

Metropolis's imagery of the enslaved worker is an enduring one that is significant to the

dystopian imagination. He asserts: "The film's columns of downtrodden workers,

trudging mechanically to and from their workplaces, heads down and spirits broken, have

remained a vivid part of the dystopian imagination for more than six decades" (*Dystopian

Literature* 349). Elsaesser points out that *Metropolis* has taken on "the status of an *Urtext*

of cinematic postmodernity" and that the imagery of the film is reproduced in

contemporary music videos, such as Madonna's "Express Yourself" (*Innocence* 124).

In dystopias, individual freedom is implacably suppressed, especially the freedom

to exchange ideas that are deemed subversive by the ruling class. The workers in

Metropolis are not allowed into the playgrounds of the elite: Yoshiwara, the red-light

district, the Eternal Gardens of Pleasure, and the Sports Stadium. They have no money to

spend, even if they were to gain access to the recreational areas above them. Their

attempts to communicate through plans on pieces of paper are ironfistedly suppressed as

are their attempts to gather in a group to listen to the preachings of Maria. Her voice is

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perceived as a subversive one by Metropolis's master, Joh Fredersen, who quickly wields his power to subjugate her. The centrality of language as the key to both repression and rebellion remains a constant in dystopias, and is a major motif in this not-so-silent film. Language is also used as a weapon of repression in *Alphaville* by the state. A new Bible/Dictionary is issued to the inhabitants of Alphaville daily with added words that are legal and omitted ones that are no longer permitted to be spoken. Lemmy uses the surrealist poet, Paul Eluard's work, *Capitale de la douleur*, as a tool of subversion to combat the ruling elite. He tells Natasha to read the poems aloud to bring her out of her stupor and to make her remember the past and who she was before she became subjugated by her father's computer.

Not only is individual freedom repressed in the two films, but individualism as well. The workers in *Metropolis* are anonymous. Byrne describes them as "a mass of indistinguishable cyphers, all clad in identical uniforms and all identically downcast" (4). They are identified by numbers, which erase their individuality, like the characters in Zamyatin's classical dystopia, *We*. The individuals in Alphaville are steeped in anonymity as well. They all have the same hypnotized mannerisms, they all repeat the same circular phrases that lack meaning, and they all exhibit the same lethargic gestures and empty facial expressions.

The way people move or are moved is highly significant throughout *Metropolis*, as it is in *Alphaville*. The workers of Metropolis do not walk, they shuffle as though they are part of a funeral procession. Their lethargic movements are contrasted with the liberated, carefree, and self-determined movements of the wealthy capitalists. The

clockwise turns of the costumed women in the Eternal Gardens of Pleasure are juxtaposed with the straight, horizontal course of the young men racing in the Sports Stadium. Their circular movements are echoed by the false Maria during her erotic dance that whips the rich sons into a frenzy. Freder's gestures, unlike those of his father, display trust and seek contact with others. After they have destroyed the Heart Machine, the workers dance around in two concentric circles as though they were still under the spell of the machines. In *Alphaville*, there is a contrast between horizontal, forward movement and circular movement. Circular movement is negative, while forward movement is positive. The condemned martyr at the pool shouts out that a man must go straight ahead, before he is executed. The evil computers move in circles. The staircases are spiral. Lemmy's hotel room is circular, and he is forced walk around in circles to go between the bathroom and the bedroom. Similarly, the inhabitants are forced to move circularly through the city: they never take a direct route, straight through the city. The computer, Alpha 60 says that time is an endless circle. Lemmy, the film's hero and voice of authority, preaches that one must always go straight ahead, toward what one loves. In the final scene, Lemmy and Natasha, in love, escape from the crumbling city on a straight highway, toward freedom.

Sexuality, in *Metropolis*, is used throughout the film to relay important, underlying meanings that are significant to the comprehension of it as a whole. The most obvious symbol of overt sexuality is the female robot, the false Maria. The real Maria and the false one are symbolic of the two traditional images of femininity—the virgin and the whore. Both of these images are based on sexuality. In his influential article, "The

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Vamp and the Machine," Andreas Huyssen explores sexuality and male fantasies about women in *Metropolis* and their connections to the visions of technology. He argues that the more recent cultural trend of technophobia is translated onto the age-old fear of out-of-control female sexuality: "The fears and perceptual anxieties emanating from ever more powerful machines are recast and reconstructed in terms of the male fear of female sexuality, reflecting, in the Freudian account, the male's castration anxiety."[53] Thus, the female robot, the false Maria, represents the dual male fear of technology and of woman. Huyssen notes that the first conceptions of robots were male, until society's perception of technology turned from a positive one to a negative one. At that time, evil, female robots replaced the good, male ones. He confirms, "Historically, then, we can conclude that as soon as the machine came to be perceived as a demonic inexplicable threat and as harbinger of chaos and destruction . . . writers began to imagine the *Maschinemensch* as woman" (203). The point of *Metropolis* is to subdue female sexuality and, in turn, tame technology and its destructive potentional on humanity. At the conclusion of the film, the robot is destroyed, along with the machine's threat to society and her man-eating sexual appetite. Elsaesser concurs with Huyssen's reading of female sexuality and technology in the film, and he asserts that though Huyssen points out the misogynistic and anti-socialist underpinnings in *Metropolis*, Lang succeeded in assisting the anxious male psyche. He states, "In a society where paternal authority had been undermined by the lost war and the humiliating conditions of the subsequent peace, such a scenario was anti-socialist and anti-feminist, but served deep-seated collective psychic needs" (*Metropolis*

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[53] Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine," in *Fritz Lang's "Metropolis": Cinematic Visions of*

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55). Another critic, Anton Kaes, interprets Huyssen's reading of the harmonious ending a bit differently. He views the inventor Rotwang as the film's symbol of technology and cold rationality and the female robot as its representative of the femme fatale. He reads the conclusion, where labor and management reconcile and the virgin Maria triumphs over the whore Maria, as a renewed faith in technology and the ability of the German people to triumph *über alles*! Kaes reaffirms:

> Eliminating the double threat of a 'scheming Jewish scientist' and the new woman as femme fatale (both marked as menacing outsiders) means, within the narrative logic of the film, eliminating the archetypes of cold rationality and uncontrollable sexuality, both seen as mortal dangers to the spirit of the community. What remains is a transformed community that again embraces technology that is now free, the film insinuates, from 'Jewish control' and infused instead with German spirituality.[54]

The evil robot Maria seduces men and women, bringing out their violent and self-destructive natures that would otherwise stay dormant in their subconscious minds. It is Joh Fredersen's plan to destroy the true Maria and the workers' independent thought. In *Alphaville*, the seductresses seek to pacify the men, to lull them into a false sense of well-being, so that Alpha 60 can proceed without resistance on its course of universal domination. In both films, the dreams of progress of the inventors, Rotwang and Von Braun, turn into nightmares of crumbling concrete, loss of electricity, the death of the

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Technology and Fear, Ed. Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann (New York: Camden House, 2000) 203.
[54] Anton Kaes, "Cinema and Modernity: On Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," in *High and Low: German Attempts at Mediation*, Ed. R. Grimm and J. Hermand (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994): 32-33.

inhabitants and the city, as well as their own deaths. In *Alphaville*, the Robot, Natasha Von Braun, is redeemed by Lemmy's love. In *Metropolis*, the cyborg Maria is not redeemed, but burned at the stake as a witch, thus ending out-of-control sexuality and technology run amok.

In conclusion, both films treat themes of technology, politics, and sexuality in dystopian fashion. The machines, the tyrants, and the overtly-sexual females are all destroyed in the end. The dreams of technologically advanced cities, run by machines, of orderly, stratified class sytems, and of properly repressed sexuality are finally revealed as totalitarian nightmares of technology run amok, oppressive, hierarchic class systems, and out-of-control sexuality. Both Lang and Godard envision and warn of a cold, rational society that will destroy human emotion unless humans intervene. Society must choose love and emotions over logic and reason. Sisk reminds us that the warnings of dystopists are valid ones in a world that is becoming an increasingly scary place to live: "Twentieth-century history provides an embarrassment of riches with which dystopian writers construct fictions that are as plausible as they are bleak" (10).

Chapter 2: Closing the Gaps:
Gender and Generation in Christiane Rochefort's
Une Rose pour Morrison

Une Rose pour Morrison is a remarkable dystopic novel written by one of

France's most imaginative feminist authors of the twentieth century, Christiane

Rochefort. Like Godard, Rochefort shocked audiences with her candid criticism of

French politics and society during what is now referred to as the *trente glorieuses*[55]. Her

work has been quoted as contestatory, anti-establishment, anarchic, and counter-

cultural.[56] One critic credits Rochefort's iconoclastic writing to her upbringing in Paris's

fourteenth *arrondissement*, "a neighborhood that has been viewed as ambivalent owing to

its motley population of mostly working class citizens and artisans sprinkled with a

relatively small percentage of aristocrats, plutocrats and members of the bourgeoisie.[57]

Another critic points to the primary issue of individuality in her novels: "Her writing in

general is a passionate plea for the right to be different, to deviate from the norm; it is an

appeal for respect for those that are oppressed, whether as children, as women, as

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[55] *Les trente glorieuses* refers to the thirty year time period post-World War II (1945-1975) of economic prosperity and a rapidly rising standard of living in France.
[56] Margaret-Anne Hutton, *Countering the Culture: The Novels of Christiane Rochefort* (Great Britain: U of Exeter P, 1998) 6.
[57] Pamela Fries Paine, *Christiane Rochefort and the Dialogic: Voices of Tension and Intention* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002) 23.

workers, or as sexual misfits."[58] The author herself refused to be circumscribed by any

single identity: "I would be an anarchist if that were not already a label!" she has

affirmed.[59] When pressed to categorize herself she stated, "I belong more to the *poètes*

maudits, the marginal nonconformist writers."[60] Realizing she could not be both a

housewife and a successful author, she left her bourgeois, *jeune cadre* husband and the

financial stability of his social milieu and embarked on the life of an artist.[61] Her efforts

paid off with her critically acclaimed fictional novels: *Le Repos du guerrier* for which

she won the *Nouvelle Vague* prize and which was adapted to the screen in 1962 by Roger

Vadim, starring Brigitte Bardot; *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* that inspired Jean-Luc

Godard's film *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* and won the *Roman Populiste*

prize;[62] *Les Stances à Sophie* that Moshe Mizrahi made into a film version, entitled *Cats*

Don't Care for Money;[63] and *La Porte du fond* for which she won the *Médicis* prize.[64]

Une Rose pour Morrison was written after Rochefort had already established herself as

one of France's leading female novelists. In this innovative, cautionary tale that

prophesies the civic unrest of May 1968,[65] Rochefort not only maintains the paradigm of

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[58] Micheline Herz, "Christiane Rochefort," *French Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, eds. Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman (Westport: Greenwood, 1991) 371.

[59] Christiane Rochefort, interview with Georgiana Colvile, *Women Writers Talking*, Ed. Janet Todd (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983) 209.

[60] Christiane Rochefort, trans. Carrie Noland, *Shifting Scenes: Interviews on Women, Writing, and Politics in Post-68 France*, eds. Alice A. Jardine and Anne M. Menke (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 187.

[61] In her interview with Colvile in *Women Writers Talking*, Rochefort asserts, "That gentleman couldn't understand that I wanted to write at night, he kept asking me to come to bed, so I had to choose: obviously, I wasn't going to give up my writing. I have never regretted it" (210).

[62] Paine 26.

[63] Colvile 219.

[64] Herz 370.

[65] According to J. E. Flower, "In May 1968, after ten years of stable Gaullist rule, France woke up in turmoil. The country came to a standstill, the regime itself was threatened. Everything seemed to be questioned: parliament and political parties, trade union bureaucracies, the educational system, the mass

preceding archetypal dystopian novels to create a clearly dystopic text, she also

challenges it with current and controversial themes of conspicuous, American-style

consumption, urbanization, equal rights for women and children, environmentalism, and

the generation gap.

According to Diana Holmes, Rochefort's works parallel those of Anglophone

female writers, such as Margaret Atwood, Marge Piercy, Toni Morrison, and Doris

Lessing, who appeal to a female readership, and who combine realism with fantasy,

science fiction, and satire, more than those of her French compatriots. She contends

"Christiane Rochefort and Annie Ernaux have more in common with many Anglophone

women authors than with the writers designated 'French feminists', though their work

also reveals a significant convergence of interests with the latter group."[66] Rochefort

acknowledged herself that she was influenced by American feminist literature and that,

ideologically she considered herself a feminist.[67] Her favorite authors, however, were

American male writers.[68] Indeed, Rochefort was not a champion of Hélène Cixous's

theory of *écriture feminine*, as she did not perceive a significant difference, in style or

form, between male and female writing.[69] Holmes concludes, "Whereas for *écriture*

féminine the work of the feminine text is to find new linguistic forms to articulate a

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media, bourgeois culture. In spite of the ensuing swing to the right, France has not been quite the same
since." in *France Today: Introductory Studies*, Second edition (London: Methuen & Co., 1971) 17.
[66] Diana Holmes, *French Women's Writing 1848-1994* (London: Athlone P, 1996) 247.
[67] *Magazine littéraire*, 180 (1982): 41.
[68] In a conversation with Marianne Hirsch, Mary Jean Green, and Lynn Higgins, Rochefort claims, "All my
favorite writers except the modern ones (Marguerite Duras, Virginia Woolf, Natalie Sarraute) are American
male writers, like Faulkner. Faulkner was a kind of master, a teacher. I was fascinated by his construction,
not by the style, however. Joyce, Kafka, and now Heller, Saul Bellow, and Salinger, these are my people,
and they are all male. And in France, Boris Vian, Queneau, Diderot and Laclos" in *L'Esprit créateur* 19
(1979): 118.
[69] Colvile 212.

female sexuality, and a female imagination, unsymbolized by existing language, Rochefort's model is more optimistic about the adaptability of the language we have" (254). Herz concurs, "Her literature feeds on the symbolical and a unisex imagination" (376). In an interview with Monique Crochet, Rochefort reveals her distaste for the practice of lumping all female writers together. She asserts:

> Moi, j'aime pas ça le style féminin, ce qu'on appelait comme ça. Et quand on voit dans les journaux 'ouvrages de dames', ou bien les critiques qui foutent tous les livres des femmes ensemble dans la même rubrique! Moi, je me suis retrouvée avec Simone de Beauvoir, Françoise Sagan; donc je les aime bien, j'étais très contente d'être avec elles. Mais quel rapport y avait-il entre ce qu'on avait fait? Absolument rien![70]

Rochefort's brand of feminism, and not her writing style, more closely mirrors that of Simone de Beauvoir, whom she admired and whose philosophies on women's issues she often turned to for guidance.[71] She actively participated in the women's liberation movement in France—the *Mouvement de libération de la femme*. In 1970, beside other feminists such as Monique Wittig, she helped carry banners reading, "Un homme sur deux est une femme" and "Il y a plus inconnu encore que le soldat: sa femme," during the symbolic wreath-laying at the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe. In 1971, she signed the *Manifeste des 343*—a front-page feature in the *Nouvel observateur* stating that all those who signed had had illegal abortions—along

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[70] Christiane Rochefort, Interview with Monique Y. Crochet, "Entretien avec Christiane Rochefort," *The French Review* 54 (1981): 428.
[71] Colvile 211.

with de Beauvoir, Catherine Deneuve, Marguerite Duras and Violette Leduc.[72] She

wrote several articles for the feminist paper *Le Torchon brûle* in the early seventies.[73]

Feminism and young women are common themes in Rochefort's novels in which her

female readers are frequently warned against losing their identities as strong, independent

women. Herz proclaims, "Her work is a constant attack on patriarchy. It is also a

continual warning to women to maintain their independence, to free themselves from

their own desires and to avoid the dominator/dominated polarization that is common

throughout society" (376). Herz underscores Rochefort's ethics of desire that could be

contrasted with more conventional, worn-out notions of love. Rochefort rejects the

intellectuality that distorts desire into an exercise in subjection. Another critic highlights

the author's view of sexuality that privileges its political and societal implications over

desire:

> For Rochefort more important than desire, feelings, and emotions and the
>
> body in its purely sexual manifestation, are the themes of socialization,
>
> oppression, alienation, exploitation, sublimation and recuperation that
>
> surround sexual relationships.[74]

Une Rose pour Morrison was written during what Paine identifies as the Middle

Period of Rochefort's stylistic development (1966-1978), along with *Printemps au*

parking, *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant*, and *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*: novels

distinguished by their increased element of fantasy and attention to social and political

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[72] Hutton 4.
[73] Colvile 211.
[74] Paine 28.

critique and marked by the socio-political *Sturm und Drang* in France during this time.[75]

Holmes, on the other hand, divides Rochefort's novels into two main categories: "the utopian/dystopian texts set in an imaginary past or future, in which contemporary conflicts are projected on to the wide screen of fantasy, and those written in the mode of satirical social realism and set in contemporary France" (247). *Une Rose pour Morrison* falls into the utopian/dystopian category because it predicts a dystopic future for Paris. It has been aptly described as "a futuristic caricature of modern society,"[76] "a paean to youth and young love pitted against a death-dealing society,"[77] and a "dystopic"[78] novel that "reveals the potential for cultural indoctrination run riot as citizens living in the atomized society so deplored by mass-culture theorists fall prey to the 'cybernéma' and state-controlled 'mégavision.'"[79] Rochefort herself categorized it as a "politics-fiction."[80] (Dystopic novels are often categorized as *fiction-politique* in France.)

In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, in classic dystopian fashion, Rochefort critiques existing social conditions and political systems, revealing the flaws and contradictions of their utopian premises. The novel is a dialectical response to the ideals of American-style democracy and capitalism that opposed communism and led to the war in Vietnam. Norman Morrison, commemorated in the title of the work, was a Quaker who lit himself on fire on the steps of the pentagon in 1965 in protest to America's involvement in

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[75] Paine 15-16.
[76] Paine 27.
[77] Herz 372.
[78] Hutton 6.
[79] Hutton 6.
[80] Colvile 219.

Vietnam.[81] Rochefort dedicates her book to Bob Dylan, a rebellious folk-singer, popular

with younger audiences, whose politically charged anti-war lyrics penetrated the

airwaves in the sixties and made their way onto the pages of her text. Rochefort reveals

in her semi-autobiography, *Ma Vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, that *Une Rose pour*

Morrison began as an experiment in automatic writing—advocated by André Breton,

author of the *Surrealist Manifesto*—and that she was influenced by what she heard on the

radio in the background at the time:

> Donc je me consolais avec l'écriture automatique, en écoutant Dylan et en
>
> inventant des mots. Et qu'est-ce qui se passe? Voilà Norman Morrison
>
> qui se fait brûler devant le Pentagone, la guerre qui fait rage au Vietnam
>
> entre les mangoustes et les serpents najas, de Gaulle qui fait un discours
>
> dans le poste, ils viennent jusque dans mes bras, s'infiltrent dans mes
>
> phrases et en font autre chose, on ne peut jamais être tranquille même en
>
> vacances.[82]

The author punctuates her writing with bits of actual speeches given by Charles de Gaulle

on the radio during this time.[83] The main topic of these speeches revolves around De

Gaulle's desire to bring back France's former political glory and economic strength, to

further France's cultural prestige, and to propagate his belief that service to the state is

the best way to achieve self respect.[84] In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, Rochefort satirizes

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[81] Paine 27-28.

[82] Christiane Rochefort, *Ma Vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur: à partir d'entretiens avec Maurice Chavardès* (Paris: Stock, 1978) 269.

[83] J. Hurtin, "Christiane Rochefort: l'écriture c'est la distance," *Magazine littéraire*, 111 avril 1976, 11.

[84] Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1986* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 280, 302.

De Gaulle's utopian vision as well as his manipulative, autocratic, and essentially unparliamentary government through the voice of Sénile, the egomaniacal President of her alternate world. Like De Gaulle, Sénile assures his people that happiness, economic stability and a higher standard of living can only be achieved through structure, order, and maintenance of the status quo. This structure must begin in childhood. He maintains,

> La jeunesse doit être élevée spartialement. Les enfants et les adolescents doivent être tenus serrés. Leur psychophage doit connaître la moindre de leurs secrètes pensées. La jeunesse est un dangereux passage qui peut conduire à la nevrose, mais aussi au bonheur si on la guérit à temps par une discipline de fer.[85]

Une Rose pour Morrison is a critique of a totalitarian political system ruled by an older generation that does not tolerate nor listen to the ideas of an "unruly" younger generation. This is different from the totalitarian regimes in classical dystopias that, although run by middle-aged or older men, are not critiqued for their oppression of others based on age. Rochefort wrote extensively on the oppression of children in western society,[86] and she extends this theme of childhood as a state of grace if unspoiled by the powers that be, in her novel where the generation gap is the leading source of political and social discord. The historian Maurice Larkin remarks on the generators of this ever-

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[85] Christiane Rochefort, *Une Rose pour Morrison* (Paris: Grasset, 1966) 94.
[86] See her philosophical pamphlet that examines children as an oppressed group, *Les Enfants d'abord* (Paris: Grasset, 1976).

increasing fissure between youths and adults that touched most industrialized nations in the sixties. He claims:

> The affluence of these years had given young people the material wherewithal to create and develop distinctive styles of life, while the sexual liberation of the 1960s and current trends in popular psychology had undermined parents' confidence in their ability to give effective guidance to adolescent children and exercise parental authority of the traditional kind. At the same time, the active concern of the young with alleviating domestic and overseas problems of poverty, disability, and old age was uncomfortably felt by some parents as a sharp if tacit indictment of their own generation for failing to do as much. (321)

Rochefort's narrative transforms the classic dystopian paradigm wherein the protagonist is an alienated individual who is enlightened to the inhuman conditions in which s/he lives either through a love interest, a gnawing feeling, or a discovery such as a recovered history in a book. In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, one alienated voice becomes the alienated voice of an entire generation. The voices of the youth rise up in protest against a dehumanizing social system and a repressive, old-fashioned government. In one telling scene, two brothers commiserate over the lack of communication between the generations and the resulting feelings of loneliness and confusion:

> --C'est si rare de se rencontrer entre générations, dit Galice. J'essaye de dire tout d'un seul coup.

> --C'est pour ça que je suis venu, dit Ricin. Pour causer avec une autre
>
> génération. On se sent tout seul. Personne ne sait rien. (164)

Here, Rochefort works from the assumption that communication will help to lessen the generation gap that is undermining a progressive and healthy humanitarian social system. In fact, according to the author, communication is subversive in that it can aid in the liberation of the oppressed. She contends:

> Ce qui est subversif, c'est pas l'immoralité et c'est pas de faire les choses
>
> défendues; ce qui est subversif, c'est de communiquer avec des autres
>
> êtres. . . . Ce qu'ils appellent moral, je ne l'appelle pas comme ça non
>
> plus. Moi, je l'appelle simplement: nous faire taire, de façon à pouvoir
>
> nous exploiter. Ce que je peux dire, c'est que ce qui défend la vie, là où
>
> on défend sa vie, où on essaie de rester vivant, c'est subversif; là où on
>
> essaie de communiquer horizontalement entre nous, et non pas
>
> verticalement avec un pouvoir, c'est subversif.[87]

The rulers of this oppressive regime, Sénile, the President, and his cronies, Séminolle, Ruines, and Décombres, come under attack for their folly and vices that result in wars and create a society distrustful of its youth. Rochefort underscores the illogical fear of young people that paralyzes the elderly, with her usual caustic humor. Décombres is sitting in his office, thinking about the President's fragile state of mind, "Sénile tient énormément aux Milices, il a une terreur panique de tout ce qui lui est puîné, il parlait même de napalmer les sous-sol, alors" (126). Because of his age and physical infirmity,

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[87] Crochet, *Entretien* 430.

Sénile makes bad decisions that have grave consequences for his people. One young character, Sereine, a university professor, describes one such miscalculation to one of her students, Théostat, who is woefully ignorant of the current events in his country. She paints a very negative picture of Presidents in general:

> Ce sont toujours des gens vieux, qui ont oublié la vie. . . . Souvent malades, atteints de préférence dans des organes conducteurs d'humeurs comme le foie ou les reins, certains ont des ulcères, et vous savez comme ces maux rendent grognons, illucides, et de mauvais poil. Je connais une décision qui a été prise par un calcul vésiculaire; une quantité de pauvres gens en sont morts, dans une île. On a ôté le calcul mais les morts le sont restés. (14-15)

Additionally, Rochefort targets the older generation's obsession with maintaining a youthful appearance. Before giving a televised speech, Sénile receives a treatment that keeps him looking young and vital. The narrator illustrates, "On lui fait son injection de serum de taureau avant de passer à la Mégavision" (92-3).

The fear, infirmity, and vanity of the older rulers contribute to a hatred and distrust of youth (in particular, teenagers) that leads to police brutality and punishments that do not fit the crime that are common in classical dystopias. In one scene, Théostat stops himself from saying a swear word in front of an older character, a secret agent of the government, Cléoporte. The narrator explains his quick action, "Un Tinageur s'adresser grossièrement à un Adulte c'était absolument inconforme et il y risquait une peine de dix ans sans sursis commuée en travaux renforcés avec pourvoi rejeté sans

recours ni appel" (77). The author ridicules the hypocrisy of adults who swear

themselves, but will not tolerate it in teenagers.

There are scenes of police brutality throughout the novel that are reminiscent of

the similarly chilling ones in *1984*. However, Rochefort's tone is lighter than Orwell's,

and the police are often painted as ridiculously incompetent, unlike those in *1984*. For

example, in this scene, upon leaving a university lecture, Théostat directs Cléoporte to

run quickly to escape the police waiting outside. The narrator describes the usual chain

of events:

> Les étudiants étaient poussés dehors par les agents avec les matraques,
>
> afin d'éviter les rassemblements, et pour se garer des coups ils couraient
>
> de toutes leurs jambes, sautant par dessus ceux qui s'étaient fait étendre;
>
> leurs camarades reviendraient les chercher, quand tout serait fini et les
>
> serviteurs de l'ordre à la cantine. (70)

The police, who cause so much disorder, are sarcastically referred to by Rochefort as "les

serviteurs de l'ordre." Desensitized to their own violent behavior, they proceed directly

to the cafeteria to eat and drink after beating the students. In one particularly heinous

government plot, the students are lured under false pretenses in front of a police station,

where they are mercilessly mowed down by machine guns. The narrator describes the

execution scene: "Les jeunes gens s'effondrèrent comme un achélème" (178). Here,

Rochefort compares their motion of falling lifelessly to the ground to that of an *HLM*

crumbling from shoddy workmanship. All of the needless deaths in the novel are

attributed to a cruel and dehumanized government that puts the needs of the state ahead of the individual lives of its people.

Rochefort presents a very negative view of the police and other authority figures who take pleasure in their positions of power and in belittling those who have little or no authority in society. She recounts the thoughts of the police agents in pursuit of a criminal against the state:

> La coupable retrouvée serait une satisfaction du Devoir, **le plaisir** de la mettre à poil, **le plaisir** d'être encore les plus forts, **le plaisir** de sa honte et de sa peur, **le plaisir** de montrer aux voyous autour qu'on les tenait, les félicitations des chefs, la jalousie des camarades, la fierté de leur femme, la prime, le rab de sèches. (106, emphasis added)

The inhabitants of this carceral society, like those in *1984*, are psychological prisoners, contained through fear of being imprisoned, beaten, and killed without due process of law. The narrator elucidates the alarm of the average citizen when they hear dogs barking, "Ceux qui entendaient le hurlement des chiens se rapprocher dans la nuit, ne savaient absolument rien du tout. Et chacun pensait, c'est pour moi peut-être" (106).

The Gaullist regime, police brutality, and the generation gap are targets of Rochefort's satire but perhaps her greatest irritant is one that opens the novel, senseless urbanism. She devotes much of her writing to what we would now call

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environmentalism.[88] When queried by Crochet about her opinion of contemporary

society, Rochefort exclaims:

> C'est surtout de la société de destruction que j'ai horreur! Elle détruit, elle
>
> gâche; c'est des Attila et des Vandales. C'est la destruction surtout qui me
>
> frappe là-dedans, moi. Et la destruction vers laquelle on va. . . Moi, j'aime
>
> la planète. . . Vous me demandez ce que j'aime, j'aime la planète, je suis
>
> chauvine de cette planète. Je l'ADORE. Je la trouve formidable, j'aime
>
> bien être là-dessus et ils sont en train de la bousiller pour rien. (434)

The narrative begins *in medias res*, a common strategy in dystopias, with a

critique of urbanization and suburban sprawl. The lack of nature in everyday life is a

common theme in classical dystopian fiction. Rochefort is the first to stress, not only the

causes for this deficit, but also the psychological toll that destroying the environment has

on human beings. She not only addresses the new, ugly, gray landscape caused by

construction of *les grands ensembles*, but the effect it has on the human soul.[89] The first

sentence of her narrative signals the beginning of the end for one of the central

characters, Philibert Morloiseau. "Ce matin-là, Philibert Morloiseau se sentait

particulièrement en travers de sa peau" (9), she writes. It foreshadows his eventual fall

from grace in society and ultimate emotional descent into insanity. Morloiseau, or

"Deadbird", is a city planner, a *Réalisateur Responsable devant les Autorités*, and

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[88] Her title, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, points to her love of nature, in addition to paying tribute to Norman
Morrison.
[89] Anne D. Cordero writes, "Christiane Rochefort is one of the first French writers to have captured the
atmosphere of the new cities that have sprung up on the periphery of Paris" in her chapter entitled, "Effects
of Urbanization in the Novels of Christiane Rochefort," in *Faith of a (Woman) Writer*, ed. Alice Kessler-
Harris and William McBrien (Westport: Greenwood P, 1988) 83.

Président du Gang des Bâtisseurs for the new buildings sprouting up in and around Paris. This high-profile position provides him and his family entry into *la Classe Trois* and *la haute bourgeoisie*. Although he lives in the lap of luxury with servants, a personal helicopter, and long vacations on the French Riviera, Philibert is in a constant state of high anxiety due to the unsafe structures he is helping to build. He ponders the deaths caused by these perilous conditions, "Avec les morts arrivaient les experts, qui découvraient que la maison était construite sur des trous, des anciens marais, ou pis, ou que le ciment était de la qualité inférieure, qui s'époudre en séchant, ou qu'il y avait une faute dans les calculs" (10). Philibert is the most selfish character in the novel and is concerned, not for the families of the victims of his mistakes and shoddy work, but for his own job security. He is afraid of losing his helicopter and vacations on the Mediterranean. He is also worried about the long distance he must travel to work as suburban sprawl forces him to build further and further outside of Paris and closer to the borders of foreign countries. His fear of those countries is a reflection of the xenophobic society in which he lives. Rochefort attacks suburban sprawl with her customary teasing sarcasm, indicating that soon Philibert will have to go to work in a rocketship. She writes,

> Les nouvelles Cités étaient implantées de plus en plus loin en exécution du Plan de Lavage Electoral Urbain et Orbain, lequel n'était jamais pleinement achevé puisque dès que les Cités étaient remplies elles formaient une nouvelle Ceinture Rouge et il fallait les repousser encore. . . Bientôt la Ceinture se trouverait sur les frontières ce qui serait encore plus

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dangereux et Philibert, qui prenait déjà son hélico, devrait aller travailler

en fusée. Si pas avec un passeport. (10-11)

Later in the text, she equates the "forced" movement of Paris's city dwellers to

the suburbs with deportation. She uses the verb *déporter* with all of its negative

connotations to describe Théostat's living situation as a child. When asked by another

character if he is from the country, because of his lack of street smarts and his country-

bumpkin, naive mannerisms, he replies that he is from *la banlieue* and he adds, "Ma

famille a été déportée à l'Epoque Zupiste. Mais je suis né en ville" (21)! The OED

defines the word "deport" as a verb meaning, "force a foreigner or immigrant to leave a

country." Rochefort underscores the injustice and inhumanity of a government that

would "deport" its own citizens to unfamiliar and often isolated surroundings and the

ensuing separation of the poor from the rich. In a 1979 interview in *L'Express*, Rochefort

explains her position on social segregation:

> Qu'il y ait des riches et des pauvres dans une société, cela ne relève pas de
>
> l'urbanisme. Mais lorsque tous les riches se retrouvent dans certains
>
> quartiers et les pauvres dans certains autres, le problème prend une
>
> dimension urbaine. La segregation sociale appelle l'affrontement. . . . Les
>
> habitants des grands ensembles subissent leur exil comme une injustice.[90]

The mental illness that came to be known as Sarcelle's disease is a direct result of living

in isolated government housing projects. Hilary Winchester observes:

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[90] *L'Express* 20 Oct. 1979: 12.

The Parisian *grands ensembles*, built from 1956 onwards, suffered from

many initial problems and failings as a result of the scale of their

construction. They epitomized the problem of suburban living; people

isolated while living among great numbers of others, in cramped

apartments, without facilities for shopping or child-care, with 'dead'

indefensible space between the blocks. The *grand ensemble* at Sarcelles

in the northern suburbs gave its name to an illness based on depression

caused by these very difficult living conditions.[91]

Rochefort associates the subjects of deportation, isolation, and depression to those

immigrants who live in constant fear of being deported and to the xenophobia in society

that oppresses them. She transforms the common theme in classical dystopias, alienation,

into one that includes immigrants—a marginalized group in French society. The plight of

immigrants in France is exemplified in the character of Milina, who is the nanny for

Philibert's children, Clou and Pina. She is *sfaraturque* and is working in France to

support her six brothers and sisters who are dying of hunger in a third world country.

Milina is aware of her fate and that of all immigrants if they are not passive, obedient

citizens in their adopted countries. She knows, "S'ils ne sont pas sages, ils seront

renvoyés dans leur pays et leur famille mourra de faim" (190-91).

Moreover, Rochefort links deportation and xenophobia to the alienating effects

felt by immigrants who have no voice in their adopted countries nor any in their native

ones. Milina explains to Pina and Clou the economic disparity between industrialized

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[91] Hilary Winchester, *Contemporary France* (Essex: Longman Scientific & Technical, 1993) 187.

nations that are "laids et riches" and third-world ones that are "pauvres et beaux." She

tells them that the poor have no voting rights and therefore no representative voice in the

government. She complains, "Alors nous y venons pour gagner de quoi faire vivre nos

familles. Evano mon fiancé qui est Ouvrier de Maisons, dit que tout ça c'est bien

pratique parce que de cette façon ils ne votaient ni ici ni là-bas: d'un seul coup on s'était

débarrassé de toutes les voix des pauvres" (203). Immigration is an uncommon theme in

canonical dystopian fiction, even though alienation is a dominant one. Rochefort

spotlights an issue that warrants closer attention in dystopian literature because of its

increasing social and political significance.

In another image of society's lack of concern for the environment, Sereine and

Théostat make their way through a futuristic, urban jungle marred by air pollution, debris,

and general neglect. They must don *respiratoires* to breathe the outside air and to cross a

square that was once, ironically, a park. The narrator sets the scene:

> Ils mirent leurs respiratoires pour traverser la Place de la Miséricorde, où,
>
> par suite de son contrebas, les vieilles émanations d'essache deux, trois,
>
> quatre et la suite étaient restées à traîner après la disparition de leurs
>
> causes suffisantes et même excessives. En se glissant entre les épaves, ils
>
> parvinrent de l'autre côté. Ils montèrent les marches noires de temps et
>
> d'érosion potassique, et retirèrent leurs tubes. Il y avait eu là jadis un
>
> Jardin, mais il était mort. (15-16)

As the two continue on their cross-town journey, Rochefort resumes her condemnation of

society's failure to care for the planet: people act out of fear and panic during a time of

crisis, but as soon as the crisis is past, they return to their old habits of trashing the earth. The narrator illustrates:

> Ils arrivèrent devant une grande cloque de plastiglace, qui avait été édifiée
>
> pour protéger les gens de l'air et du ciel dans un moment de panique.
>
> Maintenant tout allait bien. Néanmoins, il était tombé entre temps des
>
> choses diverses, des papiers gras, des capsules et des conditionnements
>
> jetés des hélicos, les gens ne sont pas soigneux, et la cloque était couverte
>
> de toutes sortes de leurs débris, qui faisaient sale. (16)

This is a warning, in a classic dystopic vein, of where society is headed if we persist in polluting the earth.

Rochefort's dystopic picture of Paris's future also warns against the utopic city envisioned by contemporary architects, whom she despised. The modern architect appears in almost all of her novels.[92] Historian Maurice Larkin compares the architectural dreams of Le Corbusier to the first and most disturbing vision of dystopia in film, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. He acknowledges the depletion of nature and the ugly, concrete high-rises built in the sixties, that instigated Rochefort's battle with urban spoliation. He affirms:

> And those who regretted the desecration of well-loved vistas by the
>
> monstrous creations of the 1960s could take some consolation in the
>
> knowledge that appalling though they were, they were as nothing
>
> compared with what the architects wished to do, had they been allowed.

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[92] Herz 376.

The visionary Swiss, Charles Jeanneret ('Le Corbusier'), whose genius

created the chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp (1950-5),

entertained for much of his life a chilling plan for the rebuilding of Paris,

beside which Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* would have resembled an

inoffensive garden suburb. (214)

However, it is doubtful that Rochefort took any comfort in knowing that things could

have been worse. The heroes in *Une Rose pour Morrison* are all would-be

environmentalists, while the antagonists are those who deface the earth.

Théostat is an environmentalist at heart and complete opposite of Philibert, who

destroys the environment to put up housing projects. He is also competing with Philibert

for Sereine's affections, even though Sereine's feelings for Théostat are legitimate and

she is just using Philibert in her plot to destroy the government and its plans for urban

renewal. Rochefort's use of alliteration in the following passage, where Théostat is

recounting his love of nature that began as a child, not only accentuates his enthusiasm

for the plant world, but also the author's fervor for language and her stream-of-

consciousness style. Théostat confesses, "Quand j'étais petit je voulais devenir

herboriste. J'aimais beaucoup les plantes, les arbres, les fleurs, les feuilles, les tiges, les

racines, les radicelles, les radicules, et les radis. Et les animaux, et les étoiles" (20-21).

Rochefort privileges Théostat's child-like, genuine nature over those in the text who have

lost the unprejudiced attributes of youth such as curiosity, wonder, and imagination.

Rochefort subverts the classic dystopian paradigm by inscribing a female,

Sereine, and not a male, into the role of alienated protagonist, and leading voice of

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opposition to the totalitarian government.[93] Sereine is an interesting name choice for this

character who is peaceful and tranquil when she goes into her semi-trances during her

lectures, and yet is also inciting revolution in her young students. Yet, her name conceals

her rebellious nature in the same way that her speeches hide her agenda of a student

uprising. She is ludicly referred to as a "professeur de téléologie" whose language is

reminiscent of Rochefort's own taunting and bellicose narrating voice. Sereine's stream-

of-consciousness lectures echo Rochefort's style of automatic writing and surrealist

practices. During one of her classes, Sereine covertly encourages revolution when she

discusses the key subjects of the weak overcoming the strong and the power of the

unexpected. She exclaims, "Placé en un de ces points, le faible devient plus fort que le

fort. . . . L'Inattendu est le ventilateur de l'inconcevable, le contrebandier de l'inconnu, le

pirate de l'impossible" (66). Here, as in all of her novels, Rochefort translates her

personal vision into fiction.

Unlike Margaret Atwood's heroine, Offred, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Sereine is

not desexualized; on the contrary, she is hypersexualized, but her sexuality does not

preclude her brilliance. She is one of the few women who still have breasts (that drive

men into a sexual frenzy) in this alternate world where girls take hormones to suppress

secondary sex growth. Philibert wonders how Sereine managed to avoid taking these

pills. He thinks to himself, "Comment avait-elle fait pour garder ce trésor, où s'était-elle

cachée pendant sa formation? Il songeait avec humidité à la formation de Sereine, en

train de se former, ses seins qui poussaient loin des hormones de synthèse" (52).

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[93] In Margaret Atwood's canonical feminist dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*, the protagonist is, indeed, a

Although she is alluring, she is not presented by the author as merely a sexual object.[94]

Instead of being objectified by her breasts, she acquires phallic aggressiveness and

dominance through them. In one scene, the narrator describes Sereine walking into a bar

after a successful lecture: "Elle pénètre, avec ses seins. Elle est accueillie par une

ovation" (32). Rochefort uses the verb "pénétrer" and not "entrer" to depict Sereine's

entrance in which her breasts become phallic symbols of penetration.[95] She appropriates

the phallus from patriarchal symbolism, imbuing new symbolic meaning into female

breasts. In the first sentence her sensual flesh is emphasized, but in the proceeding one

she is lauded for her cerebral accomplishments. In Rochefort's alternate world, female

sexuality and intellect are not mutually exclusive, even though women are discouraged

from displaying both.

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woman, however, in *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984*, the heroes are all males.

[94] Eventually, Rochefort ended her love affair with the surrealists because of their misogynistic objectification of the female body, "They hate women in such a sophisticated way" (109), she claimed, and their sexist ideology that prevented them from doing the same to the male body. She explains, "I hate the poem by Eluard where he talks about his blue-eyed, long-legged woman. It's a worship of his woman on his own pedestal. She is a golden object, but still an object, and this is what repulsed me" (110). She also accused male surrealists of stealing ideas, works, and energy from female surrealists:

> You know, there were women surrealists. They were so good, you can't imagine. They were writing, painting, sculpting, and they were crushed, erased. One of them, Meret Oppenheim, stopped working for 17 years, and she destroyed all her works. The surrealists exhibited her sculpture, *La Tasse de fourrure*. They were so proud of it that they forgot about Meret Oppenheim: they appropriated her work. I could see clearly that the wonderful energy they had and used for themselves was given to them by their women. They put them in a wastepaper basket and stole their energy. I suspect them of taking even their genius from them, their imagination. So I was appalled, and now I don't like surrealism any more. (110-111)

In "An Interview with Christian Rochefort by Marianne Hirsch, Mary Jean Green and Lynn Higgins," *L'Esprit Créateur* 19 (1979).

[95] Rochefort admits to trying to find other symbols for the phallus and for women's sexuality to actively break patriarchal symbolism in her interview with Hirsch, Green, and Higgins. In her utopic novel, *Archaos, ou le jardin étincelant*, she transforms the link between the phallus and aggressiveness (which is not an inherent one) to one between the phallus and passivity. "You can find these meanings in a lot of natural symbols," she states, "like obelisks, steeples, trees, which are phallic symbols, granted, but which stand waiting to attract people, to gather them together" (113).

In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, Sereine is a pariah, not only for her enlightened state,

but also for her feminist streak, unlike the classic protagonists of dystopian literature who

are alienated from society primarily by their increasing awareness of the inhuman

conditions in which they live. She deflects Philibert's romantic interest in her by

reminding him of her "untouchable" status in society because she works outside the

home. She asserts, "Vous paraissez oublier que je suis une femme qui travaille, une

irrégulière, autant dire une paria, et qu'on ne me touche pas sans encourir de graves

périls, tel la descente d'organisme. Qui ne vous arrangerait pas ambitieux comme vous

êtes" (97). She repeats negative, conservative propaganda circulated in society toward

working women that they are dangerous and that their actions will lead to the destruction

of the family and eventually the downfall of society. Sereine warns Philibert that her

outcast social status will jeopardize his career if he gets too close. The archetype of the

female seductress, Eve, who lures the innocent male, Adam, into evil and gets them both

expelled from the Garden of Eden, is common in western literature and is reflected in

society's attitude toward "disobedient" women.[96] Rochefort attacks the bourgeois

ideology that women who do not become housewives and mothers are doomed to a life of

loneliness, isolation, prostitution and will end up in the gutter. The narrator explains:

> Seules les filles dédaignées à cause de leur manque de séductions, ou
>
> d'une sale mentalité, les moches, les mauvaises têtes, se rabattaient sur des
>
> labeurs ingrats, et moins payés que ceux des hommes, y perdant le respect

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[96] Rochefort studied at a convent school, the Cours Lacordaire, when she was a young girl and many of her literary characters are fashioned after Christian archetypes. She fiercely derides Christian patriarchal orthodoxy throughout the novel. See Paine 23.

et la protection de celui-ci que sans nul doute malgré les airs qu'elles se

donnaient d'avoir choisi l'indépendance elles pleuraient chaque soir en se

retrouvant dans leur chambrette, vouées à la solitude et à l'abandon moral,

privées de la joie du foyer et d'être mères, et vivant dans l'insécurité de

l'Avenir, lequel ne manquerait pas de se présenter un jour ou l'autre sous

l'aspect dégoûtant de la Prostitution puis du Ruisseau. (115)

Rochefort attacks the bourgeois belief of her era that well-bred women do not work

outside the home and that married women who do are eschewing their wifely and

motherly obligations.

In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, Rochefort's feminist critique of the institution of

marriage in patriarchal society subverts the classical dystopic one in which marriage has

become either obsolete, as in *We* and *Brave New World*, or is maintained only to serve

the needs of the totalitarian government, as in *1984*. And, Rochefort focusses more on

the theme of marital discord than do the authors of canonical dystopian texts. She targets

the traditional, Judeo-Christian, and bourgeois belief systems that prevent women from

becoming educated wives and mothers and enslaves them in loveless, sexless marriages.

Men do not want to marry bright, well-educated women, according to Triton, a fugitive

from the "Ecole de Prénuptialité." She confirms, "On doit être inéduquées pour se

marier, les maris n'aiment pas sinon. C'est dans le manuel" (143). The "Ecole de

Prénuptialité," also known as the "Maison Prénuptiale," is where young men go to "try

out" women before privileging one with a coveted wedding ring. Here, young girls are

raised to please men, in the same manner that Sophie is educated in Rousseau's *Emile, ou*

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de l'éducation. Rochefort pokes fun at Rousseau, whom she disliked for his egotism,[97]

and his infamous line that woman is made specially to please man.[98] She sarcastically

points out that girls are even luckier than boys because they can improve their social

status simply by being pleasant, whereas young men must work long and hard to move up

the social ladder. Girls, unlike boys, have only one preoccupation and that is to prepare

themselves for the most important day of their lives, their wedding day. The narrator

explains:

> Les jeunes filles, sélectionnées dans les familles honorables, étaient ici
>
> dans l'antichambre du bonheur, dans l'attente duquel elles étaient
>
> déchargées de tout autre souci que celui de s'y préparer, et entretenues
>
> dans de sains plaisirs et études; elles en sortiraient au bras d'un homme
>
> bien situé ou assuré de l'être, et même, si elles étaient particulièrement
>
> douées à plaire, d'un rang très supérieur au leur. C'était là une ambition
>
> exaltante, et leur chance dans la vie, chance magnifique à laquelle même
>
> les hommes ne sauraient aspirer puisqu'ils, eux, ne pouvaient grimper que
>
> par leur travail, de la veine, des appuis, du temps, et parfois pas du tout,
>
> alors qu'aux femmes il suffisait de plaire! Chacune d'elles avait grandi
>
> ses vertes années dans ce doux projet d'alliance, et du reste il n'y en avait
>
> point d'autre. (114-115)

Rochefort mocks the outdated and useless curriculum at the school that does not prepare

women for the real world. Although the plot takes place in the future, the lessons are

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[97] Hirsch, Green, and Higgins 118.

reminiscent of those prescribed for young girls of nobility in the sixteenth century. The narrator affirms: "A l'Ecole Prénuptiale, on apprend aux jeunes filles les langues étrangères, la musique, la broderie-tapisserie-plumetis en tous genres, et maintenant ça lui était très utile, sauf la broderie-tapisserie-plumetis" (192).

Women raised in this repressive environment eventually find themselves in marital nightmares, as exemplified by the character of Girofle, Philibert's wife. Her lack of desire for the opposite sex provenates from her sexual exploitation at the home for unmarried women. The narrator explains:

> Elle n'aimait pas l'amour Girofle: ce truc ni dur ni mou qui vous entre là et manoeuvre, de son côté, tout seul, pour soi, bête aveugle poursuivie et qui cherche une brêche dans un mur à coups de museau, pour s'échapper, (elle exagère peut-être Girofle, mais c'est ce qui lui reste de quand elle était en classe Prénuptiale, avec les Postulants qui viennent faire les essayages. Et les types n'enlevaient même pas leur cravate. . . .), vite vite plouc plouc et puis floc, flasque et blet sur le bord, cadavre de petite souris. Non Girofle n'aime pas baiser. . . . (49)

Her mental image of sexual relations between men and women is a loveless, sterile, utilitarian one that does not conclude in orgasm (for her). Later, she does achieve orgasm, not with a man, but in her sleep. Girofle escapes her unhappy marriage through her sexuality that refuses to be suppressed.

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[98] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (Paris: Garnier, 1866).

Rochefort imitates the classic dystopian paradigm of sex being used as both a tool of repression and a weapon of subversion, but she also challenges it, by foregrounding women as the key players of sexual repression and subversion, by critiquing sexual repression in children, and by including the taboo subjects of homosexuality and gender bending. Female sexual exploitation in *Une Rose pour Morrison* is redolent of Atwood's in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In Rochefort's novel, young men are forcibly "milked" for their sperm, but their exploitation is not nearly as extensive or traumatic as that of young women. At the all-female *Ecole Prénuptiale*, young girls are victims of "l'excision (en cas de 'relations coupables' entre filles ou seule), et l'élargissage (en cas de malformation)" (114), in addition to being sexually exploited. When Triton is caught with Théostat on the verge of having her first orgasm by *Madame la Directrice* of the *Maison Prénuptiale*, she is sent away to be "cured" of experiencing pleasure during intercourse. The headmistress of the school gives the order for her punishment: "Vous lui passerez la râpe, dit Madame. Sous bromure" (85). After this, Triton escapes from the home and finds Théostat. He tries to finish what he started, but Triton does not have any sensation left in her vagina. She cries, "Je ne sens plus! Ils m'ont abîmée pour toujours. Ils me l'ont tué!" (158). Here, Rochefort ascertains that women experience desire for completion, as do men. Triton complains, "J'ai commencé une fois, et je ne finirai jamais" (158).

The most positive scene of lovemaking is one between Sereine and Théostat because of its nature of reciprocity. The narrator illustrates, "Théostat put enfin posséder Sereine, amplement, et réciproquement" (36). Although Rochefort writes that Théostat is

"possessing" Sereine, the adverb "réciproquement" affirms the mutual reciprocity of their act. Her role in lovemaking is not the typically passive one for women in a profoundly androcentric society. Here, Rochefort re-defines conventional, worn-out standards of desire. Holmes concurs, "Positive sexual experiences in Rochefort's novels includes tenderness and generosity towards the sexual partner, but never demands reciprocal fidelity, nor focuses solely on the body of the lover, opening instead on to a feeling of intense vitality and communion with a wider, extra-social world" (262).

Women are sexually repressed in the *Maison Prénuptiale*, but they subvert it also. In spite of losing her sexual desire and, in turn, her female identity, Triton sublimates her desire into music. The narrator asserts, "Elle avait toujours envie. Surtout quand elle pensait à son truc. Quelque chose lui montait et il fallait qu'elle chante" (194). She becomes a famous singer which allows her access to the President, whom she assassinates at the end of the text. She also uses her sexuality to lure powerful men into bed where she murders them.

Children in the novel are sexually oppressed by a system that brainwashes them from birth. However, they subvert this repression in scenes that also poke fun at the feckless sexual education they receive at school. They learn only about the mating habits of worms, snails, and spiders, and thus are ignorant of human sexual behavior. In a scene typical of curious adolescents, Clou and Crème are caught in the broom closet looking at each other's naked bodies. In this society, where the punishment does not fit the crime, Clou and Crème are not mildly punished but sent to a hospital for a "Cure Lethé," or brainwashing. Pina is worried about her brother, Clou, when he does not return to class.

However, she does not make the connection between Clou's sexual curiosity and the lacuna in information they receive about sex in their sexual education films that show spiders copulating: "Curieusement, elle n'établit aucun rapport entre ce qui se passe sur l'écran et la cause des malheurs de Clou. Absolument aucun. Elle n'y songe même pas" (129). At the hospital where Clou and Crème are taken, and reminiscent of similar scenes of subliminal mind manipulation made famous in Huxley's *Brave New World*, children are given medication to make them sleep, are chained to the beds by their wrists and ankles, and undergo psychological manipulation from subliminal messages piped in through holes in the walls. When they awaken the children are docile citizens. In *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (1975), Michel Foucault examines the system set up in western society that remakes individuals into docile workers, or automatons, who do as ordered without question, through constant observation and punishment for the smallest infractions of the rules. Sénile thinks about his plan with great satisfaction, "Diabolitique astuce ce lavage précoce, après on aura moins de mal avec" (126). Pina sneaks into the hospital and attempts to save her brother and friend by countering the state's propaganda with her own voice and tells them not to listen. She realizes that she is fighting an insidious psychological war, "C'est une sacrée guerre, pensa Pina, Se battre à l'intérieur de la tête de Clou, non, tout de même" (172)! This type of brainwashing and subliminal messaging is common in classic dystopian fiction, however, Rochefort underscores the particularly harmful effects they have on children—the most vulnerable, marginalized group in society.

Rochefort expands the classic dystopian paradigm by broadening the theme of sexuality to include the taboo subjects of homosexuality and gender bending which have not been examined in previous dystopic texts.[99] One of the main male characters, Théostat, is characterized as having typically feminine traits: "Théostat était très beau, avec ses cheveux bouclés qui descendaient en souples ondulations sur les épaules, et sa robe blanche, fendue sur le côté, très sexy" (13). Long hair on young men was popular in the sixties, but it does not diminish the fact that it was considered a feminine style and that men who sport this style may still be considered to be gender bending. In addition to long hair, Théostat is very emotional, he cries often and considers himself weak. "Je suis trop faible, je n'existe que depuis deux jours" (136). These characteristics are commonly ascribed to women in western literature.

Triton's female-to-male gender bending complements Théostat's male-to-female gender bending. While Théostat grows his hair to his shoulders and wears "une robe," Triton cuts her hair extremely short and wears pants. The narrator describes her transformation:

> Triton prit des ciseaux et coupa cruellement ses longs cheveux, tout près
>
> de sa tête. Elle mit une blouse et une culotte qui étaient là, celles laissées

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[99] There is no doubt that Rochefort's personal sexuality influenced her interests. In her interview with Monique Crochet she admits to having homosexual affairs at the end of her marriage (as does the female protagonist in *Les Stances à Sophie*). She confesses:

> J'ai commencé à me libérer, à me sortir de là, et c'étaient vraiment des rencontres d'opprimées où le type de 'on se raconte nos malheurs' était tout de même transcendé en 'Mon Dieu, mais qu'est-ce qui se passe, qu'est-ce que c'est que ça, de quoi c'est fait? Comment ça se fait que ça marche si mal? Quelle est la façon dont les hommes abordent la sexualité et qui ne va pas?'. Même si on en est contente, il y a quelque chose qui ne va pas là-dedans. Et c'était finalement des espèces d'embryons de groupes de conscience, à deux, si on veut, et qui en fait débouchaient sur des rapports de complicité, en antagonisme de nos mecs. (433)

109

par Sereine la veille, et suivit Théostat. Avec ses cheveux courts, son

vêtement de tinageur, et, surtout, son nouveau visage, personne n'aurait pu

la reconnaître. Et elle était si belle qu'elle faisait peur. (159)

Triton is happy that she is no longer a "woman". The narrator observes, "Elle souriait à

la pensée de la jalousie qu'elle aurait souffert si elle était restée une femme. . . . De toutes

façons, elle n'avait jamais été si heureuse" (186). It is interesting to note that Théostat

and Amok wear "robes" while Sereine and Triton wear pants. The younger generation do

not adhere to a dress code with gender bias. This fluidity of dress suggests a desire

among the younger generation to not be constricted by conventional dress codes

dichotomized by gender.

Homosexuality is another way in which the younger generation subverts the

conservative and repressive sexual practices of the older, more traditional generation. In

addition to Sereine, Théostat is in love with Amok, a young, black, American man who

deserted the military and is travelling around the world on a peace crusade. While in

church, Théostat ponders his love for Amok: "Entre autres Théostat se demanda s'il

n'avait pas commis le péché de Simonie avec Amok; si c'était le cas, il s'en réjouissait.

Il aimait beaucoup Amok, surtout depuis qu'il était parti, et l'idée d'avoir péché avec lui

était agréable" (179). Théostat is unable to define his relationship with Amok, although

if it is a sin, as he is told by the priest at church, then he does not regret his actions.[100]

Dystopian narrative is often written in the form of a memoir, diary, or journal: the

protagonists write to make sense of their world or to keep a record of their existence. In

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[100] Rochefort explores the world of two young male lovers in her novel *Printemps au parking* (1969).

Une Rose pour Morrison, Rochefort subverts this strategy. Instead of using a journal to keep a record of events, Sereine's students take notes during her lectures to help them make sense of her directions for political action. Additionally, Triton and Amok write song lyrics containing hidden messages to document the horrors of war, to disseminate secret passwords, and to remind the youths of important dates such as "Le Dernier jour de mai." Anti-war lyrics, such as the ones written by Bob Dylan, to whom the novel is dedicated, and songs of empowerment were powerful mediums of pop culture of the sixties that not only influenced Rochefort's writing, but swayed public opinion and encouraged political action around the globe. The young characters in the narrative appropriate this new means of communication and documentation along with an original language that serves to unite them and to undermine the hidden ideologies of the master-narratives of the ruling class.

In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, as in classic dystopian fiction, language is used as both a weapon of repression and a subversive tool. There is tension, with regards to language, between a dominant discourse, one that is propogated by a ruling elite class or oppressive government, and a repressed discourse, one that is used subversively by the lower classes or by a rebellious collective group. The government in Rochefort's alternative world propogates the use of Doublethink, a contradiction of ideas made famous in *1984*. In one scene, Philibert laments the nonsensical laws that prevent him from building safe structures. He thinks to himself, "De toutes façons construire dans les Normes était impossible. Et construire sans les Normes était défendu" (10). And, in another scene, a student defends his right to film Sereine during one of her classes, but is

immediately rebuked by an authority figure who tells him, "Tout ce qui n'est pas permis est interdit. Et tout ce qui n'est pas interdit n'est pas permis" (18).

The language of the ruling elite is subverted by Sereine, with her esoteric lectures, and her young followers. She manipulates dominant discourse to her advantage by using the scientific discourse of the educated elite to thinly veil her revolutionary messages to her students. At the same time, she mocks this discourse, used by those who control knowledge, for its purposeful non-clarity. She states:

> Les particules potentiellement échappées du système par
>
> quadridimensionalisation, ou particules hétérogènes, sont évidemment
>
> douées d'un intertropisme positif, qui les porterait à se rassembler et à
>
> conjuguer leurs énergies en vue d'un renversement d'équilibre. . . .Il suffit
>
> pour cela que l'énergie potentielle de chaque particule hétérogène soit de
>
> la même qualité. C'est ce que nous appelons Affinité Interparticulaire, et,
>
> en langage humanalogique, Amour. (150-51)

The term "discourse" is a central one in Foucault's writing which he uses, not only in its broadest sense of anything communicated (through writing or spoken) using signs, but also more specifically, to indicate the writing of specialists in an area of technical knowledge, using specialized or technical vocabulary. According to Foucault, this scientific discourse has profoundly shaped the structure of our society as specialists of the human sciences such as psychologists, sociologists, economists, linguists, and even medical doctors have had ever-increasing power over people. The central mechanism of their power is deciding who is normal and who is abnormal. With the help of institutions

such as schools, hospitals, prisons, factories, and courts of law, they define the roles of

normalcy that we all take on. Rochefort attacks scientific discourse, with its constructed

Truth, in an attempt to reveal its hidden power that oppresses individuality as she

redefines the borders of normalcy and abnormalcy, what is acceptable and what is not.

Rochefort imitates the paradigmatic language strategy of classic dystopias in *Une

Rose pour Morrison*, but she also transforms it through her own unique subversive vision

of language that aims to purge androcentric discourse of its gender bias, and to construct

new and more meaningful discourse from an existing, insufficient one. She deconstructs

dominant discourse in her typical humorous fashion to reveal the hidden ideologies of

those who control language in society.[101] The narrator explicates:

> Les Verbologues étaient très forts, ils avaient une longue pratique. Ils
>
> avaient inventé le Mot Espaces Verts pour supprimer les arbres, le Mot
>
> Chaos Intérieur pour supprimer les libertés, le Mot Stabilité pour se
>
> maintenir au pouvoir, le Mot Prospérité pour faire croire que c'était celle
>
> de tout le monde, le Mot Maternité Volontaire pour avoir des tas de
>
> lardons, le Mot Pays pour nier les citoyens, le Mot Monde Libre pour
>
> cogner sur le reste, le Mot Sous-Développé pour faire croire qu'ils
>
> l'étaient et le Mot Bonheur pour endormir le désir. Et cetera. Ils n'étaient
>
> jamais à court. Le Mot 'La Chanson A Message' entra vaillamment en
>
> lutte contre sa chose, la chanson telle qu'elle était, bref contre la vie. (217)

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[101] Rochefort reveals her contempt for institutions such as the Académie Française that control language in her interview with Colvile. On the subject of contemporary female writer and poet, Marguerite Yourcenar's election to the Académie Française she comments, "It is shameful and grotesque that any

Here, Rochefort points to the power of language to control thought and impose ideology, thus upholding the belief of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralists that people come into existence through language and that one is not "free" to think anything outside the rules of one's language.

Additionally, she deconstructs gender bias in language to reveal hidden ideologies in patriarchal discourse that lead to the inequality of power between women and men. In one scene, Sereine leads her class in "prayer" as dictated by the government. She recites:

> Papa et Manman.
>
> Qui m'avez fait dans le bonheur . . .
>
> Merci de la vie que vous m'avez donnée. . .
>
> Dans ce monde parfait admirable. . .
>
> Rond ordonné insécable. . .
>
> Pic et pic et colégram. . .
>
> Men. . . (64)

The word *maman* has been jocularly changed to "Manman." Rochefort, who spoke English fluently,[102] doubles the English word "man" and also changes the word "Amen" to "Men," to emphasize the ubiquitous male presence, subjectivity and authority in patriarchal discourse. Paine agrees that Rochefort's writing contains examples of Luce Irigaray's concept of mimicry whereby "male discourse is mimicked ironically to point out its bias and reduce or eliminate its insidious but forceful attempt to control" (9).

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woman (even more so than a man) should agree to become a member of such a reactionary institution as the Académie Française" (215).
[102] Herz 370.

In another interesting scene that takes place in the wine cellar of a bar where the younger generation go to hang out, Rochefort repeatedly uses indefinite personal pronouns and the pronoun "on" that is free of gender bias. Although this anonymity is common in the *nouveau roman*, Rochefort's usage displays a more feminist intention.[103] Rochefort utilizes this strategy to emphasize the equality of the people in the cellar and their common voice, without gender bias. The narrator recounts:

> Quelqu'un craqua une allumette et demanda si quelqu'un avait une
> cigarette. Ils étaient en effet dans la cave du Tu Bar, et pas propres.
> Quelqu'un tendit une cigarette. Quelqu'un d'autre en voulut aussi.
> Quelqu'un donna du feu. Quelqu'un proposa des cigarettes au gingembre,
> et il y eut un petit silence. Quelqu'un accepta. Chaque fois que quelqu'un
> donnait du feu, on voyait un visage. C'était très joli. . . . On est en prison!
> On la rassura. On était dans la cave du Tu Bar, Calande avait été épatant,
> il avait actionné les trappes à temps. . . . Quelqu'un demanda si quelqu'un
> avait une cigarette. Quelqu'un en offrit. Quelqu'un proposa au
> gingembre. Quelqu'un accepta. Quelqu'un donna du feu, et chaque fois,
> un jeune visage sort de l'ombre, beau et silencieux. (41-43)

Paine agrees that indefinite personal pronouns are, indeed, ubiquitous in the novels of this period. However, she argues that in *Une Rose pour Morrison*, "the accumulation of indefinite pronouns tends to underscore the loss of personal identity among characters

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[103] Rochefort's contemporary, feminist author, Monique Wittig, encouraged other feminists in her collection of essays, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon P, 1992), to use the gender-free pronoun "on," as illustrated in her seminal work of fiction, *Les Guerrillères*.

who seem lost in meaningless activity" (80). Yet, in the above scene, the characters have not lost their identities, rather they have united in fear of the police from whom they are hiding and are comforting each other and sharing cigarettes. Reassuring each other is not a meaningless activity. Rochefort does not present a negative image here, but a positive one. "C'était très joli," she argues.

In addition to the large amount of gender bias in language, Rochefort points out the insufficiency of language to express new ideas for a new generation. During another lecture, Sereine tells her students that the fundamental questions in teleology are, "D'où vient l'Esprit? Et où va-t-il?" She explains to them that if they do not have the answer it may be due to a lack of useful language and not because they do not know the answer. She affirms, "Et si vous ne trouvez pas la réponse, dites-vous bien que vous n'êtes pas les premiers, et en tous cas une absence de réponse ne signifie pas l'inexistence du fait. Elle signale tout au plus l'inexistence du langage" (149). Paine concurs that Rochefort "was acutely aware of the inadequacy of language as an instrument of expression and communication" (10).

Her creation of neologisms in the narrative supports her awareness of this inadequacy and demonstrates her bold and unorthodox use of language in an attempt to correct this insufficiency. Several of these neologisms pertain to the destruction of the environment—"la Place de la Miséricorde," "le crottoir" instead of *le trottoir*; while others pertain to the government and disparate social classes—"le Champ de Marche," "Sinistre" instead of *Ministre*, "les cantines burocrativores," "le Pantygone" instead of the Pentagon; and others satirize American-style conspicuous consumption—"le cona-

cula" instead of coca-cola, "Saint Esfric"; and others to a futuristic technology-driven society—"cybernéma," "le télévip".

In addition, Rochefort's creation of a new language plays up the dystopic qualities of her narrative as well as engages the reader to participate in the game of her writing. According to Constant:

> Dans le cas d'*Une Rose pour Morrison*, les néologismes s'appliquent aussi à désigner les éléments dystopiques du roman. Le néologisme agit, entre autre, comme révélateur de l'étrangeté, que ce soit du point de vue des 'verolutionnaires' ou de celui des dirigeants, il signale le regard d'un groupe sur un autre, d'une classe sur une autre et le passage d'un point de vue à l'autre. En conclusion, on peut dire que le néologisme est marqué systématiquement d'ironie et donc de la marque idéologique de l'auteur. (88)

Crochet concurs that Rochefort's neologisms are part of a defamiliarization strategy prevalent in the dystopian genre. She asserts, "Par les mots qu'elle invente, Rochefort dépayse le lecteur en le plongeant dans un monde dont le décor, les structures sociales, politiques, pédagogiques, et même les habitudes quotidiennes sont insolites, voire inquiétants."[104] Rochefort, like Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell, creates an alternative world that, although similar to our own, is not what we see when we look out our front door.

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[104] Monique Y. Crochet, "La création lexicale dans *Une rose pour Morrison* de Christiane Rochefort," *Modern Philology* 83 (1986): 391.

As well as being a classic dystopic strategy, Rochefort's copious use of neologisms italicizes her break with "standard" written French and the ideologies of the establishment that it expresses. Hutton describes Rochefort's unique style, the *écrit-parlé*, that combines colloquial or "spoken" French with a more literary or "written" language:

> Rochefort's very individual style, which first emerged in *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, a style which she dubs the 'écrit-parlé' ['written-spoken mode'], breaks down these binaries—formal/informal; spoken/written—as informal language characterized by incorrect grammar, slang and vulgarity co-exists with standard or even hyper-standard French. (12)

Crochet agrees that the author's original lexicon breaks free from a constrained one that serves to express contemporary ruling thought only. She observes:

> La création lexicale qui consiste, dans *Une rose pour Morrison*, en néologismes variés, est essentiellement et dans le même jet créateur, une rupture d'avec le langage poli et policé de la collectivité occidentale contemporaine et donc le mode de pensée régnant qu'il exprime.
>
> (*Création lexicale* 380)

And finally, Rochefort's creation of new vocabulary attests to her writing talent, her imagination, and her sense of humor. Crochet concurs:

> D'un point de vue linguistique, la néologie révèle, par l'extrême diversité des procédés d'invention et des sources langagières, le haut degré de

maîtrise de Rochefort, son érudition, son imagination, son sens du

comique, en un mot, son talent d'écrivain. (*Création lexicale* 394)

Rochefort's skill at language manipulation is one of the most interesting aspects of her

work.

Like the classics of dystopian literature, *Une Rose pour Morrison* is a biting satire

that attacks the established order, but Rochefort's humor contains feminist sensibilities

and an awareness of women's issues absent in male-authored works. It is rare to find any

satirical literature written in the twentieth century by women. According to Alice

Jardine, *Les Stances à Sophie* was the only novel that she and the other participants on a

panel discussion entitled, "Feminism, Women Writers, and Humor," could think of that

contained comedic passages and was sensitive to the plight of women in twentieth-

century patriarchal society (190). Rochefort's belief in the power of change is directly

linked to her faith in humor to effect that change. She argues, "There can be no

revolution or change without a sense of humor. If it's humorless, it's meaningless."[105]

The vulgar humor, scatological allusions, word play, puns, and jokes in *Une Rose*

pour Morrison rival those found in Rabelais' satiric novels.[106] Rochefort's view of

laughter as an impetus for change echoes that of Rabelais whose mockery serves to

appropriate the verboten and to eradicate hierarchies, privileges, and taboos. His humor

helps to overcome fears of the sacred, of power, and of established norms by attacking

convention, cliché and established "truth." According to Paine, "This voice of the

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[105] Rochefort claims that she tried to bring humor into the Women's Liberation Movement, but was unsuccessful. (Jardine 191)
[106] Rochefort's writing was also influenced by the linguistic games of Raymond Queneau. (Todd 214)

people, by its grotesque laughter serves to push aside convention to insist on a new look at the world and a consideration of other possibilities for existence" (8). In the following passage, Rabelais, one of the leading satirists of French literature, amusingly illustrates a typical day in the life of the young Gargantua:

> Puis il fientait, pissait, se raclait la gorge, rotait, pétait, bâillait, crachait, toussait, sanglotait, éternuait, se mouchait en archidiacre et, pour abattre la rosée et le mauvais air, il déjeunait de belles tripes frites, de belles grillades, de beaux jambons, de belles pièces de chevreau et de force tartines matutinales.[107]

Rochefort's imitative style, expressions of crude bodily functions, and her own satirical skills are apparent in her depiction of Belette's daily routine. The narrator details, "Ainsi chevauchant et pensant il arriva chez sa Manman, manmangea, pipissa, externua, excetera, puis se remit à sa Thèse, 'La banalitique de la Parlition, Essai de Verbiologie Conarrative'" (30). She also deftly copies Rabelais' skill for alliteration in the following passage: "Il pense à son collègue le Vénérable Ravale et à son Opération Léthé pour enfants avancés, dévoyés, déflorés, mal programmés, mal menés, mal appris et mal polis" (126). Rabelais' lengthy list of "les jeux de Gargantua":

> . . .
>
> à la cute-cache,
>
> à la maille bourse en cul,
>
> au nid de la bondrée,

[107] François Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973) 141.

aux pétarades,

à la grolle,

à la grue,

à taille coup,

aux nasardes,

aux alouettes,

aux chiquenaudes. (153)

is imitated but transformed by Rochefort into a list of expressions that have been

penetrated by the English language:

Après le Fox-Wolf ils dansèrent le Cat-Snake, le Camel-Lion, le Bitter-

Jurg, le Duck-Dream, le Paper-Tiger, le Ferry-Tail, le Home-Rule, le

Animal-Craqueur, le Marche-ou-Crève, le Terra-Pax, le Club-Sandwich,

et le H-Rackett. (36)

Rochefort's comedic writing incites not only laughter, but a feeling of complicity in her

readers against a ruling elite. Crochet agrees, "Il est évident que Rochefort s'amuse

énormément, invite le lecteur à rire avec elle et, ce faisant, le met de son côté dans la

bataille qu'elle engage contre l'ordre établi" (CL 391).

Rochefort satirizes literary critics, linguists, and their theories and is especially

critical of semiotics. (But she does embrace social literary criticism.) According to

Colvile, Rochefort

sees [literary] criticism as a malignant tumor that is poisoning French

culture and compared it to advertising, which appropriates a product

before making it available to consumers. . . . Christiane Rochefort does

however approve of the idea of a sociology of literature, which she finds

to be almost totally lacking except in the works of certain American

feminists such as Kate Millett, and to a degree in those of Michel

Foucault. (215-216)

One of the most offensive characters in the novel, Belette, is a linguistics student who

obsesses over the structure of language and its relationship to meaning as the product of

certain shared systems of signification, or signs. In one scene, Belette's other love, his

moped is described as symbolic of his manhood: "Quant à la moto, il avait lu dans **les**

Maîtres que c'est un **signal signifiant** de la virilité, laquelle sienne ne **se signalait** pas

autrement" (30 emphasis added). Rochefort highlights, in a feminist tone, men's affinity

for fast-moving modes of transportation and the link between a man's sexuality and his

car, motorcyle, or moped.[108] Also, she humorously derides, not the founder of modern

structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, and his theory of the arbitrary relationship

between the signifier and the signified, but the literary structuralism that flourished in the

1960s as an attempt to apply his methods and insights to literature, and to objects and

activities other than language itself. She mocks those intellectuals who view everything

in life as a system of signs, and who analyze all human meaning in terms of linguistics.

Rochefort might be considered a forerunner of post-structuralism for she saw her works

as having not stable, fixed meanings, but a more web-like complexity that took on

different meanings with each new reader and each new reading.

In another scene, Belette is working on his thesis. Rochefort cleverly veils his efforts to explain language as an act of masturbation. She writes, "Belette relut le passage afin de le bien assimiler, et plus il lisait plus il comprenait. A la cinquième reprise il finit par jouir sur le miroir du miroir se reflétant lui-même. Alors il se coucha, apaisé" (32). Here, Rochefort pokes fun at the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (who believed the phallus to be the chief signifier in language) and his most famous contribution to psychoanalysis, the concept of the mirror stage. In *C'est bizarre l'écriture* (1970), Rochefort compares literary criticism to masturbation, both narcissistic activities that culminate in deliriums of power rather than mutuality between two people:

> On sait, je sais, je crois que la seule relation vraie à la littérature est d'en faire et d'en lire, deux façons équivalentes de faire l'amour avec, et tout le reste est, excusez-moi je dois aller au bout de mon analogie, masturbation, d'ailleurs c'est on ne peut plus exact (voire un peu optimiste). (18)

Rochefort echoes classic dystopian literature's anti-consumerist stance, although her target is American-style consumerism in particular. She critiques a greedy society that places an absurd amount of importance on material wealth. In one passage, Sereine leads her students in prayer and takes a jab at consumerism. She prays, "Au nom du Père qui produit, du Fils qui consomme, et du Saint Esfric qui circule entre eux, Ainsi soit-il" (64). And, Rochefort attacks those in the corrupt entertainment industry by referring to them as pockets. She writes:

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[108] In *Les Stances à Sophie* Rochefort reveals her contempt for the automobile. She refers to the act of driving as "masturbation with the sole of one's foot" and "a delirium of power."

Des poches énormes béaient toute la journée devant Amoking Bird, un

micro en bandouillère. Amoking Bird dégueula une fois dans une pour se

faire rire. **La poche** ne moufta pas et resta là à béer. **Les poches** ne sont

pas dégoûtées. **Les poches** veulent de la monnaie et se foutent du reste.

Les poches étaient même prêtes à partager la monnaie avec Amoking Bird

si elle consentait à en produire. (215-16, emphasis added)

Rochefort challenges the traditional dystopic paradigm by emphasizing the

detrimental effects that conspicuous consumption has specifically on women and

children. Although both men and women are victims in a consumerist society, they are

victimized in different ways in daily life. In the sixties, daily life becomes a favorite

subject to analyze by many critics as evidenced in Roland Barthes' famous social critique

entitled *Mythologies*. This collection of essays demonstrates how society's value system

both creates and reflects modern myths. In one chapter on toys, Barthes illustrates the

role they play in socializing children to the hierarchical adult world in which they will

eventually conform. In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, the games marketed to children at

movie theatres for "la Fête des Frères" imitate the adult business world and project adult

daily life into children's recreation time. The narrator describes the game:

Après, ce fut l'annonce de la Fête des Frères avec les idées de cadeaux, le

Grand Echangeur Automatique, et le Jeu du Travail avec les petits

Ouvriers de Plomb, peints en couleurs naturelles, de l'ocre à l'ébène, avec

leurs petits outils, et qu'on devait arriver à placer chacun à sa place avec

sa fonction, avec des pénalités, une prison et cetera, tout un truc bref,

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comme la vie. Jouet très cher, à la portée seulement des quatre Classes

Supérieures. (187)

This game, aimed at little boys, is contrasted with a toy popular with little girls,

"Barbette"—Barbie's alter-ego. In the following passage, Rochefort describes the

mindless and monotonous Barbie world:

Elle se mettait des rubans dans les cheveux, et jouait avec Barbette, la

poupée modèle, qui a des jouets de chien, sa vachine machine sa télé, et

fait vivre 95 psychophages et 250 agents de presse, ce qui fait du travail à

inventer à l'infini si on veut car tout ce monde-là peut avoir ses poupées

qui peuvent avoir des agents de presse qui peuvent avoir des chiens. (201)

Rochefort attacks Barbette and her accouterments for their inability to spark the

imagination of young girls in a positive way. Barbette has a washing machine, to

perform repetetive boring domestic labor, a television, to watch passively, a doll and dog

to care for to hone her nurturing skills and that keep her tied to the home and away from

jobs reserved for men, such as world leaders, lawmakers, and city planners. She has 95

psychotherapy sessions for her fragile mental state and 250 press agents that help her run

her life.

Rochefort demonstrates the negative effects of this so-called childsplay on an

adult female, Girofle, who sleeps most of the time and acts like a robot when awake. The

narrator confirms, "Il fallait la lever, quand Philibert avait besoin de la montrer dans le

monde. Elle faisait son boulot, comme une poupée Barbette bien remontée" (174).[109]

Isabelle Constant signals the importance in Rochefort's text of joining the alternate,

dystopian world to the reader's own society. She observes, "Rochefort en comparant

Barbette et Barbie, implicitement met en équation la dystopie et notre société. Les

vocables de la dystopie empruntent au registre du vocabulaire de la consommation à sa

fin dernière: l'excrément."[110]

Another concern in Rochefort's text that is common to all dystopias, is a focus on

the alienating effects of science and technology.[111] One critic points out that, "Dystopia

aims to critique the scientific world view which stimulated its utopian predecessors and

upon which utopia, 'the dream of reason,' was built."[112] She adds:

> Where it can be said that utopia and much utopian thought are the brain
>
> children of the scientific world view in their attempts to 'scientifically'
>
> restructure society, dystopia always aims to critique and ridicule that
>
> worldview for its adherence to instrumental values, its elevation of
>
> functional and collective ends over the humanistic and individual. (17)

In one scene in *Une Rose*, Décombres, "le Vénérable des Mineurs et Débiles,"

thinks to himself in his office, "A l'Avenir les choses seront plus faciles, l'Avenir a

toujours toutes les veines, le temps et la science travaillent pour lui" (126). His vision of

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[109] This "problem that has no name" of women's feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction with being housewives and stay-at-home moms is explored in Betty Friedan's seminal feminist text, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).

[110] Isabelle Constant, *Les mots étincelants de Christiane Rochefort, langages d'utopie* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) 84.

[111] In her conversation with Hirsch, Green, and Higgins, Rochefort confirms her distrust of modern scientists, "I believe that 'science' is often a bluff. People claim to be scientific, but most of the time it's just prejudices and psychology, not science at all" (113).

the future and the important role that science plays in it is representative of an older generation who have forgotten what is really pertinent for the future of mankind—love and humanity. The nation's leaders promote false propaganda, suggesting that modern science has purged all diseases from society.

In another similar scene, Philibert, who has been demoted to *Classe Cinq*, mulls over the unfairness of society, his bad luck, and his workers who no longer remind him of pleasant vacations spent on the Riviera, as they did in the beginning of the novel, but of disease and illness and "toutes sortes de choses déplaisantes. Et ils étaient malades, alors que la science avait triomphé de la maladie! Les hypocrites" (230). He blames the government for giving people the false impression that they have wiped out all illness with science and technology. Rochefort also points out here that in an elitist system sickness is eradicated for those who can afford the expensive medications but not for poor people who cannot afford everything that modern science and technology have to offer. The science benefits those at the top, but not the working poor, eeking out their existence, invisibly, at the bottom of society.

Rochefort's solution to this disparity between the oppressor and the oppressed is *l'esprit*, a popular concept to the youth of the sixties. Théostat, having learned about the power of spirit from Sereine's lectures, passes on this knowedge to other young people. He avows, "Quand on est les plus faibles, c'est l'esprit qui fait la force" (156). Additionally, Sereine lectures on the endurance of the human spirit despite the development of advanced technology. She assures:

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[112] Alexandra Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984) 79.

> L'Esprit mille fois chaque jour consumé sur les brasiers de la conardise
> renaît chaque fois de ses cendres. Il se réveille de tous les sommeils et
> survit à tous les charmes. Il se relève dans le sang des victimes. Il se
> reforme dans chaque germe nouveau. C'est le Phoenix, la Belle au Bois,
> c'est la Vie. C'est l'incertitude. C'est l'Espérance. L'Esprit, c'est le
> Mouvement. (150)

Love and friendship are all that is left in a technological and scientized world, according to Chantal, "la Prostituée-Mère." She affirms, "L'amitié, l'amour, c'est tout ce qui reste" (141). This symbol of the older generation who do not possess any power in society is toothless, poor, homeles, and dressed in dirty rags. She is an outcast, like Triton, and becomes a mother figure for her. Triton is surprised by the language Chantal uses that is sprinkled with references to the animal world which is strange in this world where animals are all working animals, such as ferocious police dogs, but not pets. Here, Chantal and Triton are discussing Triton's love life:

> On va te le retrouver ma caille, ton beau blond. T'en fais pas mon
> poulet. Tout s'arrange dans la vie.
>
> C'était une espèce de langage auquel Triton n'était pas habituée.
> Avec plein d'animaux. Elle était déroutée, ça avait quelque chose de, de, -
> --Ça a quelque chose quoi, ce que vous me dites?
>
> Chantal demeura perplexe. Elle n'en savait diable rien.
> --C'est tout naturel ce que je te dis là mon petit lapin!
>
> Naturel, ça devait être ça. Triton sourit. (132)

Rochefort supports the "back-to-nature" idea popularized in the sixties as she writes

against the science and technology that has contributed to the destruction of nature.

In classic dystopian literature, the ruling elite circulate the myth that the people

are living in the best of all possible worlds. Rochefort reproduces this strategy in her

critique of bureaucrats who readily swallow the State's progaganda that the the moral

satisfaction they get from serving their country is a reward in and of itself and, therefore,

they have no reason to complain about their monotonous *vie quotidienne*. The narrator

underlines the regularity of their *métro-boulot-dodo* existence:

> Les journées étaient très régulières, surtout celles des Bureaucrates, qui
>
> vivaient dans leur tranche de vie. Après le travail les Bureaucrates
>
> achetaient leur journal, le Journal des Bureaucrates, descendaient dans leur
>
> métro, et rentraient dans leurs Cités, chacun logé selon son échelon, son
>
> ancienneté, et son nombre d'enfants, très convenablement, avec une
>
> femme de salaire unique et les Services de Bloc, et parfois une Serve, en
>
> plus de celle des enfants qui est fournie gratuitement par l'Etat. Pas à se
>
> plaindre. Les Bureaucrates du reste ne se plaignaient jamais. Ils avaient il
>
> est vrai de nombreuses satisfactions morales dans l'exercice de leur
>
> mission, et dans l'exaltante pensée qu'ils étaient au service d'un Etat Fort.
>
> (140)

Les Bureaucrates, watched from afar by Triton, Chantal and company, resemble little

ants coming and going from an ant hill. They observe:

Un fleuve de formes noires avec une bordure blanche en haut et par dessus

une tête rigide sans bouche et sans yeux, recouverte de noir ou de gris

fendu à bords, les pieds dans des grandes chaussures, sortaient du

souterrain et se divisaient en sombres rivières plus petites, chacune

remontant à sa source de revenus, un des Bildings du Boulevard Saint

Vénérien, et s'y engloutissait. (132-33)

Ant and other insect colonies are common metaphors in dystopian narratives used to
illustrate industrious, but functionally-minded people in society, privileging a scientific
ethos over a spiritual one. They also represent a society in which individual identities are
suppressed in favor of a common good, decided by a ruling elite.

One bureaucrat, appropriately and absurdly named Dumou Salive, holds
Théostat's fate in his hands. He is a "Rédacteur Principal de sixième classe" who works
at the "Bilding de la Famille et Prolifération." He decides that Théostat's profession,
faiseur d'anges, is not useful to the Nation. Dumou, similar to the police, takes
advantage of his authority over others. The narrator agrees, "Dumou Salive avait une
haute idée de ses fonctions et du pouvoir de l'Etat sur le simple citoyen dont le destin
était suspendu à son visa comme à une petite ficelle" (134). He feels powerful even
though it is without merit. Rochefort also points out that bureaucrats are slaves to the
clock. The narrator describes Dumou getting ready to leave his office:

Ainsi pénêtré de sa puissance et ayant totalement oublié la source de son

revenu, située dans le citoyen même, coulait-il la tête haute sous son

chapeau mou vers la pointeuse horloge son unique maîtresse, tandis que

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Chantal et ses amis, Charonne, Octobre et Saint Denis, se gaussent de tout

cela. (134)

Flower comments on the effects of bureacracy in France during this time:

The old conflict between the worker and the capitalist, which had been at

the root of the economic division between left-wing and right-wing parties

for many decades, was being overshadowed by a new, or new-seeming,

conflict between the worker and the manager. This change in the nature of

economic conflict was paralleled by the proliferation of large bureaucratic

structures outside the sphere of production: in the professions, and

education, in business, in administration, and, of course, in politics itself.

The individual at the base more often than not found himself or herself in

conflict with remote and impersonal authority. (57)

Rochefort points to both the bureaucratic and the public school systems as

dehumanizing institutions that suppress human creativity. She writes, "Une terreur

mutuelle règne dans les écoles, quelle que soit la Classe Sociale" (125). The problems at

French universities during this time included overcrowding, deficient library facilities,

centralized administrative control, outdated teaching methods, rigid course structures that

did not allow any autonomous freedom of movement or adaptation.[113] The narrator

confirms:

Il n'y avait même pas assez de professeurs et de places dans les salles à

cause de la démographie, qui était d'autre part encouragée à croître. Et les

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[113] Flower 109.

professeurs étaient misérablement payés, c'était une profession

déconsidérée qui vous menait rarement au delà de la classe six. (47)

The dire circumstances at the universities in France led to the student uprising in May

1968, that is foreseen in the novel. Larkin describes the new university campus at

Nanterre as an "*alphaville* of concrete, far from the amenities of Paris, and surrounded by

depressing apartment blocks as far as the eye could see" (320).

In classic dystopias, there is a rejection of the past. In Rochefort's dystopia, those

connected to the past are treated as either "untouchables" or they are imprisoned.

Chantal, Denis, Octobre and Charonne are poor, homeless humanists who are outcasts of

society because they are not young, they continue to discuss past events, and they are not

part of the ruling elite. The bureacrats are afraid of the past because of the propaganda

they are fed by the government. For them, "les Hommes du Passé" are ghosts to be

feared and avoided. They are afraid to walk by an old monument, when they hear voices

coming from inside. They think it is haunted so they walk on the other side of the street

and cross themselves when they go by. What creates such fear in them? According to

the narrator:

> Ces murmures spectraux évoquaient, pour les Bureaucrates, le Funeste
>
> Retour aux Errements Anciens, le Déséquilibre Budgétaire, la Faillite de la
>
> Monnaie, l'Incertitude, la Subordination Etrangère, l'Instabilité, le Chaos
>
> Intérieur et l'Impuissance Extérieure et la Retombée dans les Ornières du
>
> Passé. (234-35)

The story ends on the last day of May, with a funeral cortege for the massacred students including bureaucrats, laborers, servants, students, and even children. Triton assassinates Sénile, and the police, whose chief has been murdered, have dispersed and gone home. Sereine, taking a leadership role, steps up to the podium and tells the crowd that they will be able to begin anew from zero. Meanwhile, back at CIA headquarters, Séminolle presses the button that releases a nuclear bomb. However, in a tunnel nearby, a saboteur attempts to deflect it. The reader does not learn the results of this attempt. We do not know if humanity has been saved or destroyed. The narrative ends with the word "COMMENCEMENT," (250) leaving the reader with uncertainty, but hope for the future of this dystopic world. According to Tom Moylan's schema of dystopian literature, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, would be categorized as a utopian-dystopia because of its hopeful conclusion. This optimistic ending even surprised Rochefort herself. She confesses, "Mes adolescents se sont mis à casser la baraque alors que je croyais faire un livre désespéré, et en le lisant j'ai compris que j'étais plus optimiste que je ne croyais. Oui, on se surprend soi-même".[114]

This study attempts to fill a void of critical material on *Une Rose pour Morrison* in particular and all of Rochefort's work in general. Paine agrees that there is a lack of critical studies on her works:

> Although Rochefort's importance as a twentieth-century writer is
>
> increasingly evidenced by her presence in anthologies, academic journals,

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[114] *C'est bizarre l'écriture* 31-32.

and the press, and although she received literary awards, what is lacking is

the all-important backup of critical material. (13)

Her novel is an important addition to the genre of dystopian literature as well as a

significant contribution to the social sciences. Rochefort's work teaches us about life in

France from the late 1950s to the late 1980s: from life in the housing projects to life as a

gay man to the social upheaval of the late 1960s.

Chapter 3: Samuel Beckett's *Le Dépeupleur*:
Dystopia in a Flattened Cylinder-City

According to Nanelle and David Barash, literary dystopias are "imagined

societies in which the deepest demands of human nature are either subverted, perverted,

or simply made unattainable."[115] This definition describes the fictional world in Samuel

Beckett's novella, *Le Dépeupleur*,[116] perhaps better than any other work in this study.

The characters, or "corps," have been stripped not only of their clothing, but of all human

dignity and their activities have been reduced to an interminable search for a way out of

the over-crowded, inhuman conditions in which they live. The majority spend their time

fruitlessly waiting in slow-moving lines to climb broken ladders, reaching niches and

tunnels that lead to nowhere. There is no mention of sustenance or sleep but the

shriveled, gray bodies of the unnamed wretches, their irritability combined with the lack

of space to lie down, lead the reader to imagine that there is very little of either going on

in this dantesque purgatory. These "petit peuple de chercheurs," as they are called by the

narrator, reside in a flattened cylinder-city where dramatic changes in temperature,

constant insect-like buzzing, and dim, yellow lighting causes stress and blurred vision

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[115] Nanelle R. Barash and David P. Barash, "Biology, Culture, and Persistent Literary Dystopias," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 3 Dec. 2004: 10, *LexisNexis* 20 June 2005.

[116] Samuel Beckett, *Le Dépeupleur* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970) 55. All proceeding quotes come from this edition.

that eventually degrades into total blindness. This harsh and unbearable environment is in entropic decay and is gradually deteriorating into a state of stasis and frozen death.

Beckett's vision of life as a futile attempt to escape from a futile condition is a common theme in his novels and plays. Most of them include images of people who are trapped, repeat useless gestures, and engage in meaningless rituals. His most well-known play, *En attendant Godot*, and the one that brought Beckett world-wide acclaim and attention in 1953, involves two characters, Gogo and Didi, who wait for someone who never appears. In another play, *Fin de partie*, first performed in 1957 and considered by many critics to be his greatest single work, Hamm and Clov, in the face of approaching death, perform the same tasks daily, until each action takes on an almost ritualistic quality. One critic suggests that Beckett's dismal view of the human condition stems from lamentable events in his own life and his time working as an orderly in a mental hospital. He claims, "His sympathy for the sick and incurable had been crystallized by the deaths of members of his own family, and in the environment of the hospital he became consumed with sadness at the human condition in general."[117] When Beckett settled in Paris permanently, he was stabbed by a stranger for no apparent reason.[118] He witnessed additional suffering at the hands of the Nazis in WWII when he joined a French Resistance cell with the code name *Gloria*.[119] He narrowly escaped capture, but his good friend, Alfred Péron, did not, and died in Switzerland a short time after the camp in which he had been held was liberated by the advancing Allied forces.[120] Beckett was

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[117] John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge, 1976) 8.
[118] Pilling 10.
[119] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 16.
[120] Gerry Dukes, *Illustrated Lives: Samuel Beckett* (London: Penguin, 2001) 74.

also aware of the irony in the coincidence of the events ocurring on his birth date, Friday, April 13, 1906. He was born on Good Friday (the day Jesus died on the cross) and Friday the 13th, both symbols of the connection between life and death, joy and sorrow, hope and pessimism. The imagery drawn from his birth would punctuate his later works: the image of crucifixion, but no resurrection, and the number "13".[121] The pessimistic vein in Beckett's works may stem from his negative personal experiences, but his literary style and form provenate from a positive one: his meeting and consequent relationship with James Joyce.

Joyce, a leading literary figure, and his coterie influenced Beckett's non-traditional writing style and literary form during his first considerable period abroad, from 1928-1930, while teaching at the Ecole Normale in Paris. According to Ben-Zvi:

> Their emphasis on new forms of language, rejection of traditional modes
> of literature and art, advocacy of imagination over intellect, and absolute
> belief in the possibilities of creation played an enormous part in molding
> Beckett's attitudes. (21)

Another of Beckett's noted biographers, John Pilling, also acknowledges Beckett's close ties to Joyce. He affirms, "With Joyce he shared a liking for arcane facts and figures, a love-hate relationship with Ireland, an interest in experimental literary forms, and a strong affection for alcohol."[122] He adds however that while Joyce was mainly concerned with himself, Beckett was troubled by the world in general (8). Beckett, one of the greatest writers of our time has also been called the "most unconventional playwright of

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[121] Ben-Zvi 8.

the 20th century."[123] He combines his feelings of helplessness about the human condition with his gift for creating new and unique forms of language into one of his compressed cylinder works, *Le Dépleupleur*, originally written in French and translated into English by Beckett himself as *The Lost Ones*.[124]

Any attempt to interpret Beckett's experimental work is difficult at best and *Le Dépeupleur* is no exception. One critic acknowledges this global concern: "Accordingly, most discussions of Beckett's work begin by admitting that it discourages interpretation, for this discouragement, in fact, is a large part of Beckett's meaning."[125] Nonetheless, many scholars' endeavors have resulted in varied and interesting readings of this novella, comprised of fifteen paragraphs, fourteen of which were written in the early sixties and the last finished in 1970.[126] *Le Dépeupleur* was written during a time of political and social upheaval in France when a younger generation of artists, writers, filmmakers, students, and laborers were searching for new identities that would differentiate them from the those in the older generation whose legacy was air pollution, nuclear arms, and an unrealistic, utopian vision for France. This quest for a better world is exemplified in the novella. Most critics try to answer two questions about the text: what is going on in this desiccated world, and what are these cylinder-dwellers searching for so feverishly?

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[122] Pilling 3.

[123] Ben-Zvi 14.

[124] Samuel Beckett, *The Lost Ones* (New York: Grove P, 1972).

[125] Steven J. Rosen, *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U P, 1976) 6.

[126] According to James Knowlson and John Pilling in *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (London: John Calder, 1979), "Beckett did indeed abandon *Le Dépeupleur* because he could not see how to bring to an end a world that was going about its business almost without reference to him, and which grew more elaborate and complicated with each attempt he made to describe it, but partially remedied this situation in 1970 by the addition of a final paragraph divorced in time from the events that occupy the main body of the text" (157).

Many scholars interpret the text allegorically, while others take a more literal approach, based on what is actually written.

The critics who give allegorical meaning to *Le Dépeupleur* often point to the myth of the androgyne, the allegory of the cave from Plato's *Republic*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* as interpretative tools. Ben-Zvi contends that Beckett's cylinder world is a "mythical universe," a "Dantean hellscape," and "the most allegorical of Beckett's works" (116-18). Todorov's reading of Beckett's cylinder world alongside Plato's figure of the cave is perhaps the most interesting. He proclaims that Beckett recognized the imperfections in this myth of the human condition and that he rewrote it in a more realistic fashion. Todorov maintains:

> Pour être un tableau fidèle de la condition humaine, il lui manque d'abord de la vraisemblance, à certains égards tout au moins. . . . Enfin, le mythe n'entre pas assez dans le détail, et il soulève une série de questions qui restent sans réponse. Beckett se serait alors mis à réécrire le mythe à sa façon."[127]

Todorov concludes that even though there is no way out for the inhabitants of Beckett's world without illusions, it is not a hopeless one, because of the narrator who does not share the same fate as the searchers. In the narrator's and reader's world, according to Todorov, there is still hope. The only proper name mentioned in the text is that of Dante, whom Beckett loved since he was a child.[128] Several critics emphasize the *Divine Comedy*'s author's influence on Beckett's work. One confirms, "Like the rest of the late

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[127] Tzvetan Todorov, "L'espoir chez Beckett," *Revue d'Esthetique* (1986): 27.

prose, it is a vision of Purgatory, but busier, more conventional and also considerably less allusive."[129] Additionally, Brater compares Beckett's cylindrical purgatory to Dante's conical one: "Whereas Dante's purgatory had been 'conical' and Joyce's 'spherical,' Beckett's is cylindrical, albeit flattened and rubbery and marred by twenty niches 'quincuncially' disposed," and the futile searching of its inhabitants to purgatorial limbo between paradise and hell: "Beckett confronts us with a pure image diagramming the desire to progress vs. the impossibility of progression. Movement is, as usual in Beckett, a frustrated purgatory."[130] Finally, Cohn describes the world of Beckett's *Dépeupleur* as: Dantesque, for it recalls Dante's conical Inferno and rumors of a way out to the stars; Miltonic, for Milton's pandemonium is echoed though not tolerated; and contemporary, because it mirrors our earth.[131] The myth of the androgyne is often mentioned by scholars due to the opening sentence, "Séjour où des corps vont cherchant chacun son dépeupleur,"[132] and in the English version, "Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one." Though it is just as often dismissed because the narrator later negates this hypothesis by telling us that the women and men are not searching for each other and that they would not be able to recognize each other even if they were. Those critics who read the text allegorically are inspired by not-so-subtle intertextual clues that echo Plato, Dante, and Milton, while others are informed by Beckett's pursuit, especially

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[128] Ben-Zvi 22.
[129] A. Alvarez, *Beckett* (London: Fontana P, 1973) 135.
[130] Enoch Brater, "Mis-takes, Mathematical and Otherwise, in *The Lost Ones*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 29.1 (1983): 94.
[131] Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 259-262.
[132] According to Cohn, "The French title is a Beckett neologism which leans on a line of verse from Lamartine's 'L'Isolement': 'Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé!' (You miss a single being, and the world is depopulated.)" (257).

in his later prose work, to attain harmony between what it is and what it says, to fuse form and content.

Two critics, Brienza and Guest, opt for a more literal rather than allegorical intepretation of the text. Brienza argues, "The reader, like the searcher, is trapped by a paradox: the harder he searches for an allegorical meaning to the story, the farther away he gets from the meaning the text offers."[133] She views *Le Dépeupleur* as a work in which form and content are one. The cylinder is a metaphor for the text and the reader is seeking meaning in the text in the same way the "chercheurs" of the cylinder are searching for a way out of their dilemma. Brienza explains:

> Thus the cylinder becomes a metaphor for the work as it surrounds the
> reader; the structure of the abode torments the searchers as the structure of
> *The Lost Ones* frustrates the reader's need for order. In *The Lost Ones*, the
> repetition, the precise language, and the convoluted sentences involve the
> reader in an activity analagous to that of the searchers. (167-8)

Guest uses reader-response theories to interpret Beckett's seemingly antagonistic relationship with his reader and to explore the reader's role in producing a mental image based on what is actually written. "As the narrator tells about the cylinder," Guest states, "the narratee builds up the aesthetic object; the cylinder thus comes to assume a form that is the symbolic manifestation of one's real activity of reading."[134] Both of these readings underscore the importance of the relationship between the form of the narrative and its

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[133] Susan D. Brienza, "*The Lost Ones*: The Reader as Searcher," *Journal of Modern Literature* 6.1 (1977): 168.
[134] Michael Guest, "Beckett versus the Reader," *Samuel Beckett today/aujourd'hui* 11 (2001): 229.

meaning as well as warning critics against seeing things in the text that are not there, as did Beckett.[135]

Some of the more unique interpretations teased out of Beckett's cylindrical parable at the plot level highlight the political and social aspects of it. Although they may be guilty of seeing "symbols where none intended," they are extremely interesting and thought-provoking readings. They include renderings of the cylinder as a metaphor for Ireland, a vagina, a game, and a withering garden. Balzano compares the cylinder world to Beckett's birthplace, Ireland: a country divided by religion. Additionally, she equates the plot of the exiled searchers in *Le Dépeupleur* to the author's own expatriation and adoption of France: a more unified country than Ireland.[136] According to Balzano, Beckett is writing in a bleak future for Ireland. She exclaims:

> If one really takes the cylinder as a metaphor for Ireland, a new Atlantis or
> 'Irelantis,' then Beckett as the narrator of the story is summoned to
> represent one of the ex-inhabitants of this apocalyptic asylum, one of *the
> lost ones* who has escaped from a remote past . . . abandoning the others to
> their destiny in order to write an account of their wretched search still in
> force.[137]

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[135] In the Introduction to a Beckett reader entitled, *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On* (New York: Grove P, 1976), the editor Richard Seaver states, "Still, one should be careful not to mistake the means for the end, and I maintain that to read Beckett with no advance preparation, no prior perusal of those who warn of the difficulties ahead or the dangers of missing the deeper meaning, is still the best approach. At the end of the Addenda to *Watt* is written, small but clear:
  no symbols where none intended
Let us take the man at his word" (xliv).
[136] Beckett spent most of his life in France and is buried next to his wife, Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil in Montparnasse. (Dukes 136)
[137] Wanda Balzano, "Searching for Beckett's Real Worlds in *The Lost Ones*," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 11.1 (2001): 28.

Bryden suggests a feminist reading of the text and views the cylinder as a vagina, and the searchers as sperm. She asserts, "Like spermatozoa released into the cylinder of the vagina, these squirming bodies compete to reach the quiet cavities where nesting might be possible."[138] Further, she notes the ubiquity of the image of the womb in Beckett's works:

> Similarly, many a Beckettian consciousness seeks refuges, holes, cavities which seem to offer at least a semblance of womb-like enclosure . . . the cylinder of *Le Dépeupleur*, Willie in his hole in *Happy Days*, and the jars, containers and urns of *Fin de partie*, *Play*, and *L'Innommable* all provide examples of such habitats. (167)[139]

Additionally, Bryden explores the odd mother/child imagery found in the text that shows a lack of any real tenderness between the two.[140] Similarly, Adelman equates Beckett's universe to a sort of prehistory of humans, and the searchers to sperm. He writes:

> Thus, the cylinder world also might suggest the next step back before human life: people seen as some lower life form that is distinguished only by its numbers—no will, no consciousness—a blind and furious searching,

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[138] Mary Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama: Her Own Other* (Lanham: Barnes & Noble, 1993) 143.

[139] It is interesting to note here that Beckett claimed he could remember being in his mother's womb. According to John Pilling, "Beckett's very acute memories of life in his mother's womb (an area Otto Rank explored in the 1920s) will in any case continue to be of interest to psychoanalytically orientated critics" (130).

[140] Beckett was much closer to his sports-loving and jovial father than to his domineering and moody mother, according to Ben-Zvi. The father figures in his works are affectionate ones, while the mother figures, of which there are many, are ambiguous. (9)

drying up and dying, in a hostile environment, without connection—like

sperm.[141]

Two other scholars, Murch and Seaver, analyze Beckett's world as a game that mimics

human life. The latter observes, "There is, in the endless permutations and mathematical

explorations, a gamelike quality" (xxx). Murch views Beckett's game-world as

labyrinthine, where the goal is to find a way out, however, paradoxically, there is no

escape (the ladders lead only to new prisons) and there are no winners. The searcher, or

"joueur-prisonnier," as Murch refers to her/him, is trapped in a dream that turns into a

nightmare, marked by obsessional behaviors and forced labor. It is not a team game, but

one of individual achievement: *chacun pour soi*.[142] This is not a fun game.[143] Another

expert on Beckett's works, P. J. Murphy, compares the cylinder to a wasteland that is

reminiscent of our world today. He argues:

> *The Lost Ones* may initially appear to be a type of 'closed garden' (or
>
> paradise) in which the fictional world seems to possess an order that can
>
> be easily identified with the world outside it. The 'cultivation' is,
>
> however, unsuccessful and only produces a *hortus siccusi* or arrangement
>
> of 'withered ones'.[144]

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[141] Gary Adelman, "Fearful Symmetry: Beckett's *The Lost Ones*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 26.2 (2002-2003): 168.

[142] *Le Dépeupleur* was originally titled, *Chacun son dépeupleur*, according to Knowlson and Pilling (1979) 156.

[143] Anne C. Murch, "Tirer l'échelle? *Le Dépeupleur*, de Samuel Beckett," *French Studies* 27.4 (1973): 429-39.

[144] P.J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990) 96.

These intriguing viewpoints all suggest that upon closer inspection Beckett's seemingly absurd universe may not be so divorced from social reality and daily life after all.

Another important and inventive interpretation worth noting is one in which the cylinder world is considered a skullscape. Eyal Amiran argues that there are no characters and no plot, only a snapshot of a world. He asserts:

> The wanderers are themselves features of a landscape that seems made for their use; their automatic death-in-life announces the place of unity—for *The Lost Ones* participates in Beckett's ongoing metaphysical argument. It depicts a cylinder of solid rubber, recalling Endon's padded cell, whose floor is divided, like Murphy's mind, into three unmarked 'zones'. . . . These rudimentary parallels with Murphy suggest that the world of the cylinder is—not surprisingly—a microcosmic mind.[145]

Here, too, the Beckett scholar interprets a social critique in the text's message. Amiran affirms, "*How It Is* and *The Lost Ones* show that the mind and the world of generation work in the same way, that they are similarly constituted. They also show that if the mind did not participate in the world, did not allow for emanation, but was closed in upon itself, as the cylinder is, then all life would end" (169). Beckett's "petit peuple" are admonished for their lack of imagination. They remain lost because they follow a ridiculous climber's code, instead of thinking creatively and originally. Ben-Zvi agrees that Beckett's later prose underscores the significance of the mind as a place for reconciling the internal and the external. She states:

There is still travel—the Beckettian requisite for continuation—but the direction is inward, back to the skullscape home. The skull becomes the circumscribed center from which the fictions emanate, a place from which the speaker attempts the triple task of defining the inner and outer world and of coalescing the two. (104)

Another critic views the theme of travel as a predominant one, but not an inward journey, rather an outward exploration.

Abbott puts *Le Dépeupleur* in a new light when he parallels it to *fin-de-siècle* adventure romances, such as Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. He contends:

Many of the prose works that Beckett wrote in the late fifties and in the sixties—*How It is, All Strange Away, Imagination Dead Imagine, Lessness, The Lost Ones*—read like the exploration of worlds. They are reports of distant places, the news of which only now is coming to us from the one who stumbled across them.[146]

In this case, the narrator becomes the explorer and the "petit peuple" his discovery of a new world, with new habits and customs to be reported back to the narrator's own world. He concludes that Beckett reworks the generic structure of those exploratory texts that belong to a utopian/dystopian tradition. I agree with Abbott and argue further that Beckett drew upon classical dystopian structures and themes found in Fritz Lang's

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[145] Eyal Amiran, *Wandering and Home: Beckett's Metaphysical Narrative* (University Park: The Penn State UP, 1993) 166.

[146] Porter H. Abbott, "Beckett's Lost Worlds: The Artful Exhaustion of a Nineteenth-Century Genre," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 11.1 (2001): 1.

Metropolis, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and George

Orwell's *1984*. These similarities will be discussed later in the chapter.

Several critics link a predominant theme of dystopian fiction, that of technology

run amok, to *Le Dépeupleur*. Weiss categorizes Beckett's cylindrical-city as a

technotopia, along with his other cylinder works written in the sixties, because of the

narrator's mechanical treatment of the text, the frequency at which technological images

appear, and its saturation by a technological discourse.[147] Her research follows Porush's

1986 study that posits *Le Dépeupleur* as an exemplar of its class of postmodern,

cybernetic fictions because, he confirms, it uses a machine to stand for the act of writing

itself, it is concerned with the difference between mechanical language and human

experience, it delights in structure for structure's sake, and it diminishes the role of

humans in favor of a deterministic, clockwork fictional universe operating apparently

through its own agency.[148] I explore this theme later in the chapter when I read *Le

Dépeupleur* alongside E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops*, considered by several critics to

be the first modern dystopian fiction. I agree with Levy that, "awareness of what has

gone before enriches the understanding of what follows, just as the significance of

predecessors is completed or even formed by their followers."[149]

What is needed first is a reading of *Le Dépeupleur* capable of uniting all of the

preceding different hypotheses into one coherent interpretation. I believe that studying

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[147] Katherine Weiss, "De/composing the Machine in Samuel Beckett's *The Lost Ones* and *Ping*," *Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature* 1.1 (2004): 4-22.
[148] David Porush, "Beckett's Deconstruction of the Machine in *The Lost Ones*," *L'Esprit créateur* 26.4 (1986): 92-3.
[149] Eric Levy, "Looking for Beckett's Lost Ones," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas* 12.3 (1979): 163.

the novella as an illustration of dystopian literature will accomplish this goal. In order to do this, one must examine its ties to and tension with utopian thought, its social and political critiques, its themes, tropes, motifs, symbols and elements that parallel those found in canonical dystopian novels. Also, it is beneficial to incorporate allegorical and literal readings of the text along with a dystopic one to answer the two main questions that critics have been trying to answer for decades about the text mentioned above: what is really going on in this cylinder world, and what are these *lost ones* seeking? The answers to these questions may help reveal Beckett's perception of the human condition, as well as the main message of the text.

This study is not the first to refer to *Le Dépeupleur* as a dystopia. Balzano, in addition to reading Beckett's world as a metaphor for Ireland, recognizes the dystopian impulse in the work. She claims, "Beckett's cylinder-world—a dystopia of a geometrically perfect and self-sufficient place, a monad or uterus that contracts rhythmically—is a minimalist statement where chaos blends with logic, fiction blends with reality" (26). This critic points to Beckett's social critique in the novella to support her dystopic reading of it. She maintains, "It is through the negative expression of dystopia that he analyzes the frustrated aspirations of contemporary society" (17). While her point is a valid one, she does not explore any other dystopic aspects of the work, of which there are many. Instead of focusing on a dystopian reading she interprets the text as a postmodern one, a science fiction, a fantasy, a utopia, a cybernetic fiction, a *gedanken* experiment, and an allegory of Dante's and Joyce's purgatories. She concludes, "*The Lost Ones* has not yet found an unproblematic classification" (32). It is

this hybrid textuality and difficulty of classification that supports the reading of *Le Dépeupleur* as a dystopia, for genre blurring is a main element of the dystopian fiction. An expert on dystopias, M. Keith Booker, suggests that *The Lost Ones* be read in one of two ways: either as "one of the most abysmally pessimistic of all dystopian fictions" or as a parody of this pessimistic vein found in dystopian literature.[150] His informative yet short, four-page explanation is clearly meant as a guide for further study, and not a complete analysis of *Le Dépeupleur*'s dystopic qualities. In this study, I attempt to provide a more extensive dystopian interpretation of the novella. I do not claim to pen the definitive reading of the text, only to suggest one that is, hopefully, as thought-provoking as those that preceded it. Abbott rightly observes, "One of the features of Beckett's extraordinarily compressed art is that it generates conflicting readings that are often equally powerful" (12).

The structure of the dystopian narrative is often that of a memoir, diary, or journal: the protagonist writes to make sense of her/his world or to keep a record of her/his existence. In *Le Dépeupleur*, it is the narrator-observer of Beckett's "petit peuple" who is recording their existence and trying to understand the world he is observing from a distance, perhaps, in turn, to better understand his own world. We know that he does not belong to this desiccated universe, for he is a witness of its final destruction. He begins his narration by describing, in a logical and mathematical manner, the cylinder's topography, then the different types of inhabitants, and finally the rules and codes that govern their behavior, in much the same way that a journalist or social

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[150] M. Keith Booker, *Dystopian Literature* (London: Greenwood P, 1994) 87.

anthropologist might depict their subjects. While describing what he sees, the narrator

often repeats the phrase, "Cela n'est pas tout à fait exact" (12). He changes his language

to be more precise and to help order what he observes for the reader and for himself.

Brienza agrees that the narrator's backtracking indicates a clarification process similar to

the one writer's often endure. She acknowledges:

> This searching for the correct word, this fluctuation of language between
>
> the exact and the approximate shows a creator in the process of changing,
>
> of composing, of narrating. . . . Thus, like Malone, the narrator of *The Lost*
>
> *Ones* is giving birth to the story as he writes, clarifying the rules of the
>
> climber's code (for example) for himself as he clarifies them for the
>
> reader. (155)

In addition to his system of elucidation, the narrator, mirroring the author, realizes the

entropic nature of this world and composes a warning, or cautionary tale for future

generations. He notes:

> Une saturation de la zone intermédiaire n'est-elle pas à craindre et quelles
>
> en seraient les conséquences pour l'ensemble des corps et spécialement
>
> pour ceux de l'arène coupés ainsi des échelles? Le cylindre n'est-il pas
>
> voué à plus ou moins longue échéance au désordre sous la seule loi de la
>
> rage et de la violence? A ces questions et à bien d'autres encore les
>
> réponses sont claires et faciles à donner mais encore faut-il l'oser. (45-46)

The inhabitants of this community are vaguely aware of their entropic environment, yet

they are only concerned with the continuation of their obsession, searching, and they are

indifferent to the end of their world. The narrator writes, "D'où chaque fois la même vivacité de réaction comme à une fin de monde et le même bref étonnement quand le double orage ayant repris ils se remettent à chercher ni soulagés ni même déçus" (48). The narrator maintains that if only the inhabitants would dare to question their existence, they would readily receive answers to their problems. Brienza connects the inhabitant's ignorance in Beckett's fictional world to his concern for the fate of modern society in the real world. "The searchers do not dare to question the consequences of their absurd system, however," adds Brienza, "and Beckett's question for the reader becomes 'Do you dare to face the real conditions of your own world?'" (158). Thus, the purpose of the narrator's scientific journal is twofold: to make sense of this new world's landscape and "petit peuple," and to warn readers of imminent disaster in their own world.

Dystopias are cautionary tales that warn readers of impending societal doom if effective changes are not made. It is this unique motif that differentiates dystopias from other genres such as science fiction and fantasy, underscores their relevance and political commitment, and impels the reader to take action, or at the very least, contemplate her/his own fate and that of mankind. In *Le Dépeupleur*, Beckett warns, parodying Leibnitz's idea that this is the best of all possible worlds, and echoing one of his favorite novels, *Candide*, that this cylinder world is closer to the worst of all possible worlds, and that all cannot be well in a world based on cruelty.[151] Initially, the narrator observes, "Tout est donc pour le mieux" (37) in this cylinder world. However, in the final paragraph, when all is coming to an end, he changes his viewpoint and states the obvious,

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[151] Pilling affirms, "Voltaire's *Candide* was one of the earliest important texts in Beckett's thinking" (119).

"Mais la persistance de la double vibration donne à penser que dans ce vieux séjour tout n'est pas encore tout à fait pour le mieux" (53). The inhabitants of the cylinder, except for the vanquished, are indeed cruel to each other. Prone to violent outbursts, they unite only for the beating of those who break the rules or, as in the case of the sedentary ones, they attack those who step on them. Theoretically, there is a trapdoor in the ceiling of the cylinder that may lead to a way out, but the inhabitants are incapable of cooperating with each other in order to find this escape hatch. The narrator shows his awareness of their chance for freedom and his disappointment at their inaction to change their predicament. He explains:

> Il suffirait d'une vingtaine de volontaires décidés conjuguant leurs efforts
>
> pour la maintenir en équilibre à l'aide au besoin d'autres échelles faisant
>
> office de jambes de force. Un moment de fraternité. Mais celle-ci en
>
> dehors des flambées de violence leur est aussi étrangère qu'aux papillons.
>
> Ce n'est pas tant par manque de coeur ou d'intelligence qu'à cause de
>
> l'idéal dont chacun est la proie. Voilà pour ce zénith inviolable où se
>
> cache aux yeux des amateurs de mythe une issue vers terre et ciel. (18-19)

Instead of changing their reality, these wretched creatures evade it through constant climbing and through their elaborate and precise rules for this activity. Ben-Zvi suggests that there are two constants in Beckett's work: the awareness of nihilism, and the evasion of such awareness. She asserts, "The characters avoid despair by singing, joking, dancing, walking, adding, thinking, and above all talking" (3). Here, Beckett forewarns the reader of the hazards of avoiding reality and of believing that we live in the best of all

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possible worlds. In a rare interview in 1961 Beckett addressed himself to the centrality of chaos in modern life: "It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of."[152] Beckett translates this warning into disturbing, dystopian images of a cold, distant, and sterile cylinder world.

The setting in *Le Dépeupleur* is similar to the often isolated settings in classical dystopian novels that involve an island or other isolated place that restricts or requires travel. Travel is a common theme throughout Beckett's work and his cylinder-world may be seen as a self-contained structure on a distant planet from which there is no escape. It is futuristic, another defining feature of dystopias, in its imagery that prophesies the end of humanity, yet it resounds with echoes of today, of realism, and of the reader's own experience. Pilling argues that Beckett's image of a futuristic and desolate landcape came from his time spent in London. He affirms:

> But it was most of all the depressing landscape of the poorer parts of
> Chelsea, leading down to the Embankment, ruled over by Lots Road and
> its power station, that dominated his imagination. They compose the
> background for the opening of his novel *Murphy*. . . and one can perhaps
> be forgiven for finding the conjunction of arbitrary divine justice (in the
> story of Lot) and the World's End strangely prophetic of his later interests.
> (8)

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[152] Interview with Tom Driver, reprinted in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* Ed. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge, 1979) 218-19.

Murch supports the idea that the cylinder world is a futuristic one and explains Beckett's playful method of inserting the future in the present. She explicates:

> Une des méthodes favorites de la prospective est l'invention et la pratique de jeux ou scénarios. Une situation dont la possibilité théorique existe dans l'avenir est postulée dans le présent. . . . Le <<modèle>> ainsi construit projette l'avenir dans le présent et permet l'élaboration d'une action cohérente anticipant cet avenir en le préparant ou en s'y opposant, selon qu'il est consideré ou non comme souhaitable. (429)

Although futuristic, it is important to distinguish dystopian worlds from those found in science fiction and fantasy by their close ties to realism, especially to the reader's own experiences. It is essential that the reader feel a presentness in the futuristic narrative to understand the author's social critique, central to dystopian fiction. In *Le Dépeupleur*, the reader detects the here and now, as if it were a snapshot of life. Brater concurs, "Except for a possible determinate future posed in the final paragraph, the frames we see in *The Lost Ones* exist in an agonizing presentness, the kind of presentness we feel when we stare at a picture" (94). This picture is familiar, yet strange. The defamiliarization process of making present reality strange to point out certain societal flaws is common in dystopias. Booker considers defamiliarization to be the principal literary strategy of dystopian literature. He proclaims, "By focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable" (3-4). Graver agrees that the peculiar practices in the

cylinder may not be so fantastic after all. He confesses, "Phantasmagorical, but—as often in Beckett—firmly linked to ordinary life. Time and again, the alien events inside the cylinder (the mysterious law-making, the mechanical questing, the sudden explosions of violence) send chills of recognition out to more familiar spheres" (327). Cohn adeptly summarizes the illustrations from the text that mirror scenes of decay and stagnation not unfamiliar to twentieth-century readers. She states:

> Dantesque, Miltonic, contemporary, the world of Beckett's *Dépeupleur*
> blends single striking images into his desiccated mannered prose: bodies
> that rustle like dry leaves, a substance impervious to the life it contains,
> fifteen ladders each with an acrobatic climber and a queue at the foot,
> contortions of dry coition, and two vanquished women seated like
> Belacqua against the cylinder wall, the one with white hair and an infant in
> her lap, the other with heavy red hair curtaining her body. All these
> cylinder images are haunting concentrates of our own world. (262)

These images of a similar-yet-different world are accompanied by post-nuclear environmental scenes that echo fears in French society fanned by the atom bomb and the destruction of nature to make way for new construction in and around Paris.

Often in dystopias, nature is absent due to apocalyptic events such as nuclear war, global warming, or major technological advances. There is no mention of nature in the cylinder, only outside of it. There is a secret passage branching from one of the tunnels that leads "aux asiles de la nature" (17), and a trapdoor hidden in the ceiling leading "au bout de laquelle brilleraient encore le soleil et les autres étoiles" (17). The cylinder-

dwellers, reminiscent of those in Dante's *Inferno*, are completely cut off from the natural world. Alvarez accentuates Beckett's career-long adherence to bare, gloomy dystopian settings: "So there can be no question of *The Lost Ones* being simply a mistake, at least as far as Beckett himself was concerned. Instead, it was yet another attempt in yet another style to pin down that vision of sterile desolation which always haunted him" (136).

In canonical dystopian literature, people live in a carceral society where they are under constant surveillance and where the penal system lacks due process of law. The cylinder-dwellers are no different. They are prisoners in a hermetically-sealed container where light and temperature are artificially controlled and where they are continually watched by the narrator-observer and by each other. As mentioned previously, Beckett's "corps" resemble the chained figures in Plato's cave allegory, who like them, sense that there is a reality outside their prison walls. This motivates them to search for a way out or for someone who can put an end to their quest. Prieto agrees with this interpretation. He confirms:

> Pour les habitants du cylindre, comme pour les prisonniers de la caverne
> de Platon, l'existence est une captivité: ils sentent obscurément qu'il y a
> une réalité plus large qui dépasse les confins fades du cylindre. C'est
> pourquoi ils se sentent obligés de chercher soit une sortie au cylindre, soit
> l'identité de celui ou celle qui pourrait mettre fin à leur quête. Ils

cherchent à percer la croûte des apparences (la paroi du cylindre; les traits

d'un visage) pour atteindre l'essence des choses.[153]

However, unlike Plato's troglodytes, the inhabitants of Beckett's cylinder do not even

have the luxury of darkness in which to conceal their naked bodies. They preserve their

modesty either with a strategically placed hand or by using another body as a shield from

the omnipresent light. The narrator relates the shame of the incarcerated:

> Seules ombres par conséquent celles que se créent les corps obscurs en se
>
> pressant les uns contre les autres exprès ou par nécessité comme lorsque
>
> sur un sein par exemple pour qu'il ne soit plus éclairé ou sur un sexe
>
> quelconque vient se plaquer la main opaque dont du coup la paume
>
> disparaît aussi. (35-36)

This ubiquitous light cruelly shines on these "petit peuple," with no distinction between

day and night. As witnessed by the narrator, "Son omniprésence comme si les quelque

quatre-vingt mille centimètres carrés de surface totale émettaient chacun sa lueur" (7).

And strangely, the narrator cannot perceive the source of the light. There is no sun or

moon, no candle or lamp, yet there is light everywhere. The narrator attempts to explain

this mystery, but cannot:

> Les premières surprises passées enfin cet éclairage a encore ceci
>
> d'inhabituel que loin d'accuser une ou plusieurs sources visibles ou
>
> cachées il semble émaner de toutes parts et être partout à la fois comme si

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[153] Eric Prieto, "Des extrêmes qui se rejoignent: solipsisme, réalisme, et le récit beckettien," *French Forum* 27.2 (2002) 111.

l'endroit tout entier était lumineux y compris les particules de l'air qui y

circule. (35)

There is an external force of which the inhabitants and the narrator are ignorant.

In addition to its unceasingly glaring on the prisoners, like an interrogator's light that blazes on her/his unfortunate victims, the light produces an incessant buzzing noise, a constant murmur in the cylinder. It is heard by the narrator who recounts, "Parmi tous les composants dont elle est faite l'oreille finit par distinguer un faible grésillement d'insecte qui est celui de la lumière elle-même et le seul qui ne varie pas" (33-34). It is common in dystopian literature to equate the world in the text to that of an insect's—to the constant activity, order, and buzzing of beehives and anthills. The flickering light causes not only a constant, annoying sound, but also a slow descent into blindness for the cylinder-dwellers. The narrator illustrates the eventual destruction of sight as the eye slowly degrades into uselessness:

Bref un éclairage qui non seulement obscurcit mais brouille par-dessus le marché. Rien n'empêche d'affirmer que l'oeil finit par s'y adapter sinon que c'est plutôt le contraire qui se produit sous forme d'une lente dégradation de la vue ruinée à la longue par ce rougeoiement fuligineux et vacillant et par l'effort incessant toujours déçu sans parler de la détresse morale se répercutant sur l'organe. (34)

The light's brutal shame-causing omnipresence, its annoying, unending buzzing and its cruel flickering that causes sight to deteriorate into total blindness, reflects the confining and inhuman conditions found in classical dystopian fiction.

Temperature inside the cylinder, as well as the light, is out of the control of its occupants, as is the case in prison-like settings. It oscillates between hot and cold and torturously passes from one extreme to the other in about four seconds. From time to time, there are momentary lulls when the temperature remains constant, neither hot nor cold, and the buzzing from the light stops, when, according to the narrator, "tous se figent alors. . . . Au bout de quelques secondes tout reprend" (7). However, these brief and rare respites do not bring relief to these jailed bodies, only greater shock and anxiety when the vibration begins anew. According to Brienza, "The members of the abode are subjected to the torment of extremes of temperature and light, but the most excruciating torment is the rekindling of hope" (150). Her viewpoint echoes that of the narrator who witnesses not only the desiccation of the bodies, but also the hopelessness of the spirit, due to these regulated yet unpredictable environmental conditions. He sadly acknowledges, "L'effet de ce climat sur l'âme n'est pas à sous-estimer" (46). This artificial climate is reminiscent not only of a jail cell, but also of modern-day working conditions that are often either stuffy and hot or over-air conditioned and freezing for those who slave away daily in offices or schools, under fluorescent lighting that buzzes. This too reminds the reader of our own world and alerts us to the dystopian state we have created on earth.

Another indication of the character's confining existence is the lack of space in the cylinder. There is only one square meter per person, we are told, which is not even enough room to lie down. The narrator describes their crowded living arrangements:

> L'allongement est inconnu dans le cylindre et cette pose douceur des
> vaincus leur est ici refusée à jamais. Privation qui en partie s'explique par

le peu de place au sol soit un mètre carré à peine dont chaque corps

dispose et auquel ne peut suppléer l'espace uniquement de chasse des

niches et tunnels. (53)

The bodies, although perpetually in motion, are not allowed freedom of movement. They

are restricted by the climber's code that dictates who may climb, and when, and in which

direction they may move. "Car autant chaque corps est libre de grimper ou de ne pas

grimper," observes the narrator, "autant l'obligation est stricte de faire jusqu'au bout la

queue librement choisie. Toute tentative de la quitter prématurément est vivement

réprimée par ceux qui en font partie et le fautif ramené à sa place dans le rang" (40).

Those who leave the line for the ladder early are quickly reprimanded. Others are

severely beaten for not following the code, without due process of law. The narrator

confesses, "Il est des infractions qui déchaînent contre le fautif une fureur collective

surprenante chez des êtres si paisibles dans l'ensemble et si peu attentifs les uns aux

autres en dehors de la grande affaire" (19). These beings are indifferent to each other's

movements until a rule is broken. Beckett mocks those who, without authority, enforce

laws on moral grounds. One critic concurs, "In *The Lost Ones*, the image even takes on

social connotations when Beckett wittingly satirises the ethical pretensions of those who

find it profitable to uphold the law."[154] Brienza also interprets the regulatory system in

the cylinder as a parody of our own legal system. She exclaims:

The futile search for a physical escape is governed by a procedure far

more orderly than the search deserves. To compensate for forces over

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which they have no control . . . the bodies create and enforce a ludicrous

climbers' code which is a parody of a legal system. (158)

Although they enforce the climbers' code, the inhabitants do not remember where it

originated or who set it down. "L'emploi des échelles est régi par des conventions

d'origine obscure," claims the narrator, "qui dans leur précision et par la soumission

qu'elles exigent des grimpeurs ressemblent à des lois" (19). They have internalized them

in the same way that the prisoners in Michel Foucault's treatise on the panopticon

internalize their fear of authority and therefore follow the rules. These cylinder-dwellers

are under constant surveillance by themselves as well as by each other. According to

Ben-Zvi, there is a common fragmentation in Beckett's work between the inner I and the

outer I and that, "because of the disjunction of our inner and outer selves, people have a

continual sense that they are being watched, if only by themselves" (6). This confining

environment, with its omnipresent light, oscillating temperature, constant buzzing, and

severly limited space, is the setting for the nightmarish hell on earth found in classical

dystopias.

Beckett's nightmare is reminiscent of the human misery in George Orwell's *1984*.

Though the narrator does not reveal the thoughts of the cylinder-dwellers, his clinical

observations assure the reader that pain and suffering are everywhere. Touching is

painful, yet lack of space forces constant contact, the climbers regularly beat each other

and themselves, and lovemaking is frenetic, not enjoyable. These descriptions add to the

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[154] Rubin Rabinovitz, "The Self Contained: Beckett's Fiction in the 1960s," *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, Ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (New York: St. Martin's P, 1987) 59.

hellish atmosphere of the abode. Adelman parallels the prevalent anguish in the cylinder world to the history of fascism in Europe. He contends:

> No cattle cars, crematoria, factories, no lethal gas, or I. G. Farben, no SS, or thirty-eight camps attached to the main Auschwitz camp, no *Arbeit Macht Frei*, no death begins with the shoes, or parades, or striped rags, or tattoos, or ersatz coffee, or cutaneous edemas, no boils, leg ulcers, abcesses, suppurating sores, no dysentery, no roll calls. Yet that world is called into being by the cylinder, as by its adherent and spokesman, who probably is not a monster, or idiot, or pervert. (167)

A dehumanized social system, one in which the individual's identity is suppressed in favor of the common good, is a common motif in classical dystopian fiction. In Beckett's cylinder, the "corps" have been reduced to their physicality, grouped by sex and by age. The narrator notes, "Un corps par mètre carré de surface utile soit deux cents corps chiffre rond. Corps des deux sexes et de tous les âges depuis la vieillesse jusqu'au bas âge" (26) None are named and only four of the 205 inhabitants are singled out by the narrator. There is a vanquished, older woman who, because of her fixity, represents the north, another younger woman holding a small child, and the last man who searches in the eyes of the old woman for salvation. They have no relationships with each other, even though they are all acquainted, in theory, and they cannot distinguish one from the other because of the press and gloom. "Parents proches et lointains ou amis plus ou moins beaucoup **en principe** se connaissent," the narrator writes, "L'identification est rendue difficile par la presse et par l'obscurité" (12, emphasis added). Their obsession

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with climbing and the quest prevent them from forming an identity. The narrator

describes the bodies and souls of the inhabitants, yet they are mindless. No original ideas

or imaginative thoughts spring from their brains. In the cylinder, there are two myths

circulating concerning a way out: a hidden trapdoor in the ceiling or a tunnel leading to

an external world. The inhabitants waiver between believing one theory or the other,

without giving either much thought, or thinking creatively for themselves. As mentioned

previously, Beckett, like Joyce, favored the power of imagination over the primacy of

rational thought. Due to their lack of imagination, the cylinder-dwellers remain lost.

In canonical dystopian fiction, class stratification and hierarchies predominate and

are often viewed as natural or common-sense divisions of society. In *Le Dépeupleur*,

classes are divided by movement and the amount of searching they perform. The reader

learns through the narrator that there are 205 bodies in all: 120 constantly in motion, 60

sometimes pause, 20 sedentary, and 5 vanquished. Paradoxically, it is the vanquished

who are the most revered for they have found peace from the furious searching. Even

though the word "vaincus" suggests losers in a battle or contest, here they are the winners

and the ones who have overcome their futile activity. There are only five of them and

they do not react to the others, even when walked upon. The narrator explains, "Collés

ou mur également les quatre cinquièmes des vaincus tant assis que debout. On peut leur

marcher dessus sans qu'ils réagissent" (25). They are not bothered by the others. The

narrator suggests that, instead of calling them "vaincus," one should simply refer to them

as blind. He proclaims:

Et pour l'être pensant venu se pencher froidement sur toutes ces données

et évidences il serait vraiment difficile au bout de son analyse de ne pas

estimer à tort qu'au lieu d'employer le terme vaincus qui a en effet un petit

côté pathétique désagréable on ferait mieux de parler d'aveugles tout

court. (35)

Many of Beckett's characters, throughout his works, are in various stages of blindness. In *Le Dépeupleur*, those who are completely blind can no longer climb the ladders. Therefore, they lose their desire to search and, in turn, find salvation. Brienza further points out that, "The idea that man can be at peace only when all expectations have died runs through nearly all of Beckett's works and appears with special force in *The Lost Ones*" (150). The secondary class of citizens in the cylinder are the sedentary, who, for the most part, no longer search though they have momentary bursts of energy from time to time when they continue searching. They are referred to as "demi-sages" (25) and have not quite attained the peacefulness of the vanquished. They react violently when they are treated disrespectfully by their co-habitators. The narrator exclaims, "Ils y tiennent comme à un hommage qui leur est dû et sont maladivement sensibles au moindre manque d'égards. Un chercheur sédentaire à qui l'on marcherait dessus au lieu de l'enjamber peut se déchaîner au point de mettre tout le cylindre en émoi" (25). The rest of the "chercheurs," those who move continuously and those who pause sometimes, are third- and fourth-class citizens. Brienza agrees that there is indeed a hierarchy in the cylinder and that the vanquished and the sedentary are the ruling elite. She asserts, "The people of *The Lost Ones* need physical stasis only as a means to mental transcendence;

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the only true escape is through the mind. Hence the sedentary searchers are admired as 'semi-sages' and the vanquished are objects of curiosity and envy" (164). Their status allows them certain privileges in the cylinder, but they too share the fate of all the cylinder-dwellers—frozen stasis.

In this society of climbers, the symbolism of the ladder points to class hierarchy and upward social movement, in addition to recalling Jacob's ladder in Genesis that serves as a link between humans and God. The ladders in the cylinder are broken as are the social systems that create elite classes of citizens. There are only fifteen of them for 200 people that, like the laws of supply and demand in a consumerist society, creates a huge desire for an object that is ostensibly of no use to them. The rules governing waiting in line for ladders are complicated and many and the wait is long considering that there are fifteen ladders to accomodate 200 climbers. According to Ben-Zvi, "The theme of waiting is not unique to Beckett; it is one of the dominant motifs of modern drama" (141). This is not surprising in post-industrial societies where waiting in lines at the bank, in stores, for buses, trains, and airplanes, is a part of everyday life. It is also a society where everyone is compelled to conform or suffer the consequences. Even the climbers are not allowed to go against the stream, "en sens interdit" (42). The reader associates life in the cylinder with the regimentation of social mobility, the difficulty of making progress, or the unjust division of labor in a stratified society—our own world.

Movement is the primary organizing category in the cylinder, not gender, yet it is a secondary classification that merits attention. Gender is the principal theme in *The Handmaid's Tale*, but plays only a small part in other classical dystopias. In *Le*

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Dépeupleur, the women play a traditional role and are still the caretakers of children. Of the few individuals described in any detail, a woman and her child are included. Even though she is not a nurturing female, she is the one responsible for the child, not a male figure. The two females mentioned by the narrator are also differentiated by the long hair that drapes their bodies. Traditionally, in literature, this is a sign of sexual availability. This is odd, given the fact that sexual intercourse in the cylinder is nearly impossible due to dry mucous membranes and lack of desire. Most males cannot even get an erection. This is expected, given the desiccated environment in which they live. The narrator recounts, "Les muqueuses elles-mêmes sont touchées ce qui serait sans gravité n'était la gêne qui en découle pour l'amour. Mais même à ce point de vue le mal n'est pas grand tant dans le cylindre l'érection est rare" (47). Though sexual intercourse is rare, the female "corps" are still the ones objectified by their sexuality, and not the males, when the narrator illustrates the sex act in the cylinder. He affirms, "N'empêche qu'elle se produit suivie de pénétration plus ou moins heureuse dans le tube le plus proche" (47). Here, the word "tube" has a double meaning and can be a metaphor for a woman's tube-like vaginal canal, or it can depict one of the many tunnels found in the walls of the cylinder. If one considers the phrase, "dans le tube le plus proche," and construes the "tube" to be a vagina, then the female body is demeaned—as if any vagina will do. Although gender is not a main preoccupation in the text, it is significant to the genre of dystopian literature as gender issues become increasingly important, resulting from the women's liberation movement in the 1960s, and as evidenced in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Another common theme in dystopian novels is the use of sexuality as both a weapon of repression and a subversive tool. In *Le Dépeupleur*, sexual intercourse is rare and, when it does occur, frenzied and unpleasant. The inhabitants must overcome many oppressive elements in order to copulate. The narrator observes:

> Conséquences pour les peaux de ce climat. Elles se parcheminent. Les corps se frôlent avec un bruit de feuilles sèches. Les muqueuses elles-mêmes s'en ressentent. Un baiser rend un son indescriptible. Ceux qui se mêlent encore de copuler n'y arrivent pas. Mais ils ne veulent pas l'admettre. (8)

Even husbands and wives do not enjoy making love with each other. The narrator states, "Il arrive même à des époux en vertu de la loi des probabilités de se rejoindre de cette façon sans s'en rendre compte" (47). Neither marriage nor skill can ameliorate lovemaking in this dystopic abode. According to the narrator:

> Le spectacle est curieux alors des ébats qui se prolongent douloureux et sans espoir bien au-delà de ce que peuvent en chambre les amants les plus habiles. C'est que la conscience est aiguë chez chacun et chacune de combien l'occasion est rare et peu probable son retour. (47)

Despite the cold, sterile habitat that represses sexual desire, these "petit peuple" continue to put forth effort, subverting their oppression, into sexual activity. Pilling suggests that the characters' aversion to intercourse is linked to a manichean philosophy. He contends:

> It is the gnostic/manichean context which explains Beckett's characters' emphasis on abstention from intercourse, and his obsession with the battle

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of darkness and light. For the manichean aim is to extract all that is good

from the world, and sexual relationships only retard the liberation of the

light into the realm of the spirit. Every conception and every birth, which

was the double birth of Cain and Abel from the coupling of Satan and Eve.

(119)

Sexuality is repressed in the cylinder, but subversive sexual acts occur occasionally,

demonstrating the underlying force and perseverence of desire in human nature.

The protagonist, in dystopian literature, is often an alienated individual who is

enlightened to the inhuman conditions in which they live either through a love interest, a

gnawing feeling, or a discovery such as recovered history in a book. In *Le Dépeupleur*,

all of the individuals are alienated. Each figure is in actuality an alienated protagonist

since each is entirely alone, without the benefit of resources and companions—a lost one.

There is a sort of *mise en abyme* in the text as the narrator is also an isolated protagonist

since he does not belong in the cylinder and there is no mention of a companion for him

either. The alienation of the inhabitants is acute, though they live in an overcrowded

abode that lacks privacy. Bryden clarifies, "Loneliness is not dependent on alone-ness,

and, just as the oppression of self in a crowd is illustrated starkly in *Le Dépeupleur*, a

similar yoked solitude is apparent in *Imagination morte imaginez*"[155] (148). Even the

snapshot of the woman and her child lacks usual tenderness, for the baby is straining to

look away and, perhaps, be free from his caretaker. The narrator writes, "Détail

pittoresque une femme aux cheveux blancs encore jeune à en juger par les cuisses

appuyée contre le mur les yeux clos dans l'abandon serrant machinalement contre son

sein un bambin qui s'arc-boute pour mieux tourner la tête et voir derrière lui" (27).

Mother and child are alienated as are husband and wife. Though they may recognize

each other, they still turn away from one another. The narrator recounts:

> A deux pas de distance mari et femme s'ignorent pour ne parler que du
>
> lien intime entre tous. Qu'ils se rapprochent encore un peu jusqu'à
>
> pouvoir se toucher et échangent sans s'arrêter un regard. S'ils se
>
> remettent il n'y paraît pas. Quoi qu'ils cherchent ce n'est pas ça. (32)

In spite of their solitary existence, they continue to bother one another, to be each other's

hell. This Beckettian hell is reminiscent of Sartre's existentialist one in *Huis Clos* where

"L'enfer, c'est autrui."

In most dystopias, there is an oppressive power such as capitalism, communism,

fascism, or totalitarianism. In *Le Dépeupleur*, Beckett speaks powerfully to the somber

post-war years, when questions of responsibility and its denial held center stage in

politics in France. As for the 'dehumanizer' itself, it is never identified in the text. Two

critics agree that there is an unknown power that created this cylinder world and rules

over it. Brater suggests, "The possibility therefore exists that some external force

literally transfigured this 'flattened' cylinder into the compressed geometric shape

currently under investigation" (98). And Alain Bosquet, one of Beckett's close friends,

concurs:

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[155] *Imagination morte imaginez* (1965), a novella, is another one of Beckett's cylinder works written in the sixties.

Let us say, in a more general way, that there is here a perspective at the heart of which man—with his flaws—no longer plays the only role: not even that of the straight man. The object—here a ladder—takes on an importance man never suspected. Behavior is organized—or disorganized—as a function of laws and presences unfamiliar to us. We no longer derive our anguish from ourselves alone. We are submissive, and without knowing to what order. It is the end of those habits that allowed us to assimilate various phenomena in the universe! Something reigns over us. Form reduces to insects: the form of what and a form destined for what enigma? (*Critical Heritage* 320)

In addition to an unknown or hidden oppressor, one can also read habit as an oppressive force in the cylinder. Beckett states in his essay on Proust that, "Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit."[156] And, according to Ben-Zvi, "The habits of life provide safety; however, they preclude the possibility that people can change or alter in any way their self-induced fossilized positions" (24). The oppressive power here, though not as straightforward as in classic dystopias, is just as forceful and dehumanizing.

Most dystopian fictions share a common theme—the importance of language in shaping human thought. There is often a tension created between a dominant discourse and a repressed one that helps clarify language's influence on society. These cylinder-dwellers do not speak, or if they do, the narrator never documents it. Beckett makes no

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[156] Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove P, 1957) 24.

secret of his desire as a writer to compress language, to squeeze out the essential, and

leave off the unnecessary or incorrect. He confirms:

> As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave
>
> nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. . . . To
>
> bore one hole after another into it, until what lurks behind it—be it
>
> something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher
>
> goal for a writer today.[157]

According to Balzano, *Le Dépeupleur* is an example of the breakdown of

communications. She proclaims, "While *The Symposium* is a dialogue among wise men

at a dinner party, *The Lost Ones* experiences the sombre breakdown of dialogue and the

loss of all communicability" (21). If one discusses language, it is the language of the

narrator we are analyzing. Brater parallels the language of the narrator to the language,

newspeak, made famous in Orwell's *1984*. He maintains that the reader has, "seen a part

of Christ's Sermon on the Mount rendered in curious **newspeak** ('It is enjoined by a

certain kind of ethics not to do unto others what coming from them might give offence')"

(107, emphasis added), in the text. Beckett demonstrates, through the language of the

narrator that is at times very elegant and sophisticated and at other times colloquial and

low-brow, the acceptability of both in his world. Pilling agrees, "Erudition is, however,

clearly a cast of mind, and it frequently infects the diction of even Beckett's later work.

The ludicrously high-flown and inflated rubs shoulders with the pathetically trivial" (49).

Above all, according to several critics, the narrator is having fun playing with language

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[157] As quoted in Ben-Zvi 30.

and he does not take his own work too seriously. Rather, he is able to laugh at it. Ben-Zvi claims, "Rhymes, plays on words, puns, inversions, verbal games are found throughout the writing, bringing humor to the bleakest situations" (6). Brienza concurs:

> Meanwhile, Beckett laughs at his verbal creation, at the conventions of fiction, and at the assumptions of readers. . . . Constantly playing with the form of the novel, the narrator periodically stresses the artificiality and ludicrousness of his cylindrical creation. (157)

Cohn argues that Beckett's language is comic, yet tragic as is the human condition. She acknowledges, "A poet and not a philosopher, Beckett had to work through his own creations to attain his bleak, comic vision of the human condition."[158] She continues, "But through the obsessions of Beckett's heroes, we understand our own deepest humanity. . . . We laugh at the leg ailments, verbal difficulties, ignorance, and passion of Beckett's heroes, but our laughter is nervous and anxious" (296). Beckett demonstrates that language can be used by the upper classes, those who control it, to oppress the lower classes, but this can also be subverted through comic language and laughter.

Another commonality among dystopian novels is that they are biting social and political satires. In *Le Dépeupleur*, Beckett ridicules the Romantic poets for their ideas of escape through nature. He writes, "Pour les uns il ne peut s'agir que d'un passage dérobé prenant naissance dans un des tunnels et menant **comme dit le poète** aux asiles de la nature" (16-17, emphasis added). It is common knowledge among critics that Beckett had a love-hate relationship with the Romantic poets. Additionally, the author laughs at

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[158] Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1962) 290.

these poor creatures who go to such extremes to battle the monotony and meaninglessness of their existence. The "privileged" ones are those who can temporarily knock themselves unconscious. The narrator recounts:

> Les échelons manquants sont entre les mains d'un petit nombre de
> privilégiés. Ils s'en servent essentiellement pour l'agression et pour se
> défendre. Les tentatives solitaires pour s'en défoncer le crâne
> n'aboutissent au mieux qu'à de brèves pertes de connaissance. (10)

In addition to romanticism and escapism, Beckett mocks twentieth-century society and politics.

According to Tom Moylan, "Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century."[159] Beckett's work clearly illustrates this dystopic turn in the twentieth century. Ben-Zvi exclaims, "A mirror held up to twentieth-century nature, Beckett's writings reflect the nature of the century: chaotic and contradictory" (210). Cohn comments on Beckett's skill at addressing the varied ills of the mid-twentieth century. She explains:

> By the middle of the twentieth century we have become skeptical about
> expansion, and Beckett writes from the cultural context of the mid-
> twentieth century. All faiths are tottering—religion and science,
> personality and ideology, family and nation, freedom and imperatives,
> subject and object—and Beckett's prose totters with them; he even plays
> up the slapstick comedy, like any competent clown. (*Comic Gamut* 4)

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[159] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Boulder: Westview P, 2000) xi.

Like the genre of dystopian literature, Beckett and his oeuvres are deeply rooted in the twentieth century but admit a vision toward the future. Bosquet appreciates Beckett's visionary style that jibes with the space age—a dominant theme in comics, advertising, movies, television shows, music, and the media in the sixties and seventies. He notes, "It [*The Lost Ones*] translates certain anxieties that are singularly in accord with the atomic era" (*Critical Heritage* 320). These anxieties of a coming apocalypse are apparent in much of Beckett's later prose work. Bosquet continues, "*The Lost Ones* describes, in a sort of post-cubist, or post-human, hallucination—Space Odyssey 2002—the efforts of our ancestors, transformed into our pitiful descendants, to get out of a cylinder with the help of a ladder" (*Critical Heritage* 320). And, finally, he concludes:

> This decade aspires to being the space age. Here Beckett is no longer attacking man, but the very myth of man propelling himself out of his natal habitat. Or rather, he makes of the astronaut and the cosmonaut the symbols of our enslavement: to weight and weighlessness, to the infinitely great and the infinitely small, to paralyzing introspection and to self-transcendence. (*Critical Heritage* 321)

Another critic, Prieto, supports Beckett's connection to twentieth-century philosophical thought. He admits, "Ce mode de pensée interstitielle, qui tente de dépasser les limites inhérentes aux vieilles antinomies philosophiques entre sujet et objet, idée et chose, semble particulièrement caractéristique de la pensée du vingtième siècle" (100).

Beckett is clearly connected not only to twentieth-century post-nuclear anxieties and philosophical thought, but also to the mid-twentieth-century art world. Several

critics note the link between Beckett's writing and Pop art. Balzano parallels Beckett's

canned world in *Le Dépeupleur* to Andy Warhol's soup can. She avows, "In Beckett's

canned world all idealisms are banned. As in Andy Warhol's famous *Campbell Soup*

can, only the tangible experience is certain—an experience of the ordinary and not of the

extraordinary, an experience of defeated, of 'vanquished' and not of victors" (20).

Beckett's dystopic vision of everyday life is congruous with the ordinary, everyday

objects found in Pop art. Brater recognizes another dystopic motif found in Beckett's

writing and in Warhol's art—lack. He contends, "Beckett and Warhol present us with

artifacts which make us cry out for their definition. After all, art is supposed to have

some meaning, even if that meaning is in its lack of meaning."[160] Lastly, Oppenheim

relates Beckett's belief in Hegel's theory of the "end" of art to Warhol's art

demonstrating this same theory. She states that the evident links between Beckett and

Pop Art are, ". . . the outward focus on the world, as opposed to an affective response to

it; the challenge to the modernist institutionalization of the purity of art; and the drawing

of inspiration from the ordinary."[161]

Another twentieth-century strategy, central to postmodern texts as well as

dystopian ones, is hybridity. "The typical dystopian text," according to Moylan, "is an

exercise in a politically charged form of hybrid textuality, or what Raffaella Baccolini

calls 'genre blurring'" (147). Beckett's story in *Le Dépeupleur* acts on many levels: as an

allegory, as a cybernetic fiction, as a *gedanken* experiment, as an adventure romance, as a

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[160] Enoch Brater, "The Empty Can: Samuel Beckett and Andy Warhol," *Journal of Modern Literature* 3.5 (1974): 1262.

[161] Lois Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000) 59.

technotopia, and as a fantasy. Guest claims, ". . . to choose not to write within defined genres has an unsettling effect on the reader" (228). It is this unsettling effect that makes *Le Dépeupleur* and dystopian literature so compelling.

Perhaps the most disquieting impact on the reader provenates from *Le Dépeupleur*'s perturbing conclusive paragraph in which the last man in the cylinder world takes a last frozen breath. The narrator describes, "Lui-même à son tour au bout d'un temps impossible à chiffrer trouve enfin sa place et sa pose sur quoi le noir se fait en même temps que la température se fixe dans le voisinage de zéro" (54-55). The world has seemingly come to an apocalyptic end, "Voilà en gros le dernier état du cylindre et de ce petit peuple de chercheurs dont un premier si ce fut un homme dans un passé impensable baissa enfin une première fois la tête," (55) except for the last phrase of the paragraph, "si cette notion est maintenue," (55) that raises doubt about the narrator's observations. There are many different interpretations of the ending: from a pessimistic, hopeless one that the world and all its inhabitants are doomed, to a more optimistic one where hope for humanity lies with the narrator/survivor of the holocaust. Three of the more convincing readings are from Ben-Zvi, Brienza, and Todorov. Ben-Zvi argues that the ending is completely hopeless, as in Orwells' *1984*, and that there is no escape for mankind from complete annihilation. She concludes:

> With this last human act, silence descends, and darkness finally comes, along with cold. The most allegorical of Beckett's works, *The Lost Ones*, is also one of the most final. No 'perhaps' lingers on; the story, although

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without a beginning or middle, is brought to a clear close: all are

vanquished even in this inner world. (118)

And Brienza maintains that the ending is so ambiguous that the reader is as lost at the end

as at the beginning of the narrative. She explains:

The story ends 'if this notion be maintained,' thus putting in doubt all that

came before; the conclusion of *The Lost Ones* is lost, just as the story is

declared not how it was at the end of 'How It Is.' Present-day readers,

like the ancestors of the inhabitants, manage only partial paths through the

cylinder. . . . The reader, like the searcher, is trapped by a paradox: the

harder he searches for an allegorical meaning to the story, the farther away

he gets from the meaning the text offers. (168)

While Todorov opts for a more hopeful conclusion, avowing that although Beckett's

world is one without illusions, the hope it contains means more because it is not

abundant. He asserts that hope is there, "Il est dans la perfection de l'oeuvre d'art, dans

le souvenir à peine avoué, dans le sourire partagé" (36). Todorov believes that the hope

lies within the narrator who has not perished along with the cylinder-dwellers. Perhaps,

Seaver's conclusion of Beckett's world is the most fitting of all. He affirms:

For in his dimming landscape, peopled with clowns and misfits, has-beens

and ne'er-do-wells, the malformed and the deformed, those on the

threshold of death or already on the other side ("I don't remember when I

died"), he has created a stark world far different from our own, hardly

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recognizable, a nether world, a purgatory, or perhaps Antepurgatory,

having nothing whatsoever to do with us. Our world. (xiv)

Technological Determinism, Mechanomorphism, and Entropic Evolution in E. M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* and in *Le Dépeupleur*

In his preface to the 1949 edition of his *Collected Short Stories*, Forster defines these works, including *The Machine Stops*, as mere "fantasies" written during a different era—before WWI, WWII, and the atom-bomb. He contends that, in light of these haunting events, his earlier fiction is no longer relevant, and that one could no longer write in the same vein.[162] However, a close reading of *The Machine Stops* reveals its relevant critique of modern society and its timeley significance as an interpretative tool, warning us of the dangers of technology run amok, that continues to cause anxiety and fear throughout the globe. One critic contends that *The Machine Stops* is "not a mere indulging in fantasy, but a serious intellectual engagement: by proposing a perverted and paradoxical version of future reality, his imaginative exaggerations and deformations provide us with an interpretative key that helps us to read our present more correctly."[163] It is particularly helpful in interpreting more recent dystopic texts with technological themes such as Beckett's *Le Dépeupleur*. Reading *Le Dépeupleur* alongside *The Machine Stops* opens Beckett's cylinder-world to interpretation from a new and different perspective informed by dystopian themes common to both imaginative narratives. However, if there is reasonable grounds for the case that *The Machine Stops* is, either

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[162] E. M. Forster, *The Machine Stops and Other Stories* Ed. Rod Mengham (London: André Deutsch, 1997) xv. All subsequent references are to this edition.

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consciously or unconsciously, a source for *Le Dépeupleur*, the point has little more than passing interest unless it puts the text in a new light. I believe it does, and in much the same way as Beckett's more obvious or salient intertextual signs.

The Machine Stops is Forster's futuristic vision of a technology-driven society whose inhabitants live underground in small, individual cells. The story focusses on the lives of a mother, Vashti, and her son, Kuno, who are contrasted through their opposing beliefs in the power of technology. Vashti is a faithful disciple of the Machine that controls all of society's needs including clean air and water, food, light, and desires, such as entertainment and communication with others. She is content with the status quo, spending all her time on repetitive, meaningless tasks that she performs in a single room, from which she almost never ventures out. In contrast, her son, who doubts the efficiency of the Machine and the benefits of a completely automated society, transgresses the law and societal notions of decency and escapes to the earth's surface. He searches for a way out of the inhuman conditions in which he lives much like the searchers in Beckett's *Dépeupleur*. He, too, uses a ladder, symbolic of man's desire to escape earthly sins and misery and ascend to a better place. Kuno, like most protagonists of dystopian fiction, is alienated from those around him by his enlightenment to the underlying problems of a society out of touch with its human side.

Both *Le Dépeupleur* and *The Machine Stops* have been described by critics as technotopias because of their mechanistic, clockwork worlds that contain humans who act more like automatons through their repetitive motions and unimaginative thought

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[163] Silvana Caporaletti, "Science as Nightmare: 'The Machine Stops' by E.M. Forster," *Utopian Studies:*

processes, language that is more technical and mechanical than lyrical and poetic, and artificially controlled environments. Beauchamp stresses the importance of the role of technology in dystopian fiction, over that of social and political critique. He defines the dystopian novel as "a uniquely modern form of fiction whose emergence parallels, reflects, and warns against the growing potentialities of modern technology" (53). According to Beauchamp all of the classics of dystopian fiction,—Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (except Orwell's *1984*)—are dominated by a technological deterministic philosophy whereby technology is held to be "an autonomous force that dictates the ideology of the future" (57). Moreover, he argues that authors of dystopias are technophobes who view technology "not as a neutral tool misused by totalitarian rulers but as intrinsically totalitarian in itself" (55). He sub-categorizes such dystopias as "technotopias": "Thus the dystopian imagination posits as its minatory image of the future an advanced totalitarian state dependent upon a massive technological apparatus—in short, a technotopia" (54). While Beauchamp refers to *Brave New World* as a "hedonistic technotopia" (55), *The Machine Stops*, for him, is a true technotopia, "a push-button paradise of mechanical marvels" (57) and Forster's technophobic moral—that a technology-based society cannot survive—pervasive in dystopian fiction. He concludes that dystopias explore the master/slave dichotomy inherent in technologically advanced societies:

> Technology, that is, like the Sabbath, should be made for man, not man for
> technology; but whether it is possible to maintain that proper relationship

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in the face of the technological imperative, to keep the slave from

becoming the master, is the question that haunts dystopia. (58).

Weiss interprets Beckett's *Dépeupleur* as a technotopia also. She asserts, "Although the

narrative suggests that we cannot approach this text as a mechanical thinker, nevertheless

the narrator treats the text mechanically in order to create his technotopia."[164] She

underscores the significance of technology in the novella:

> The frequency at which technological images appear in Samuel Beckett's
>
> cylinder fictions constitute more than just a minor theme in these works.
>
> Their consistency reveals an overarching concern over authority as
>
> represented by these technologies. (22)

Weiss is not the only critic to make the connection between Beckett's cylinder world and

one that is ruled mechanically. Porush claims that *Le Dépeupleur* is exemplary of a sub-

genre of postmodern fiction that he terms "cybernetic fiction." He includes in this genre

texts that "disguise themselves ironically as a cybernetic device and at the same time

undermine their own cybernetics."[165] He and Weiss both view the cylinder composed by

the narrator as a "machine" or "factory" because of its "striking mechanical properties"

(Porush 90, Weiss 7). However, unlike in Beauchamp's and Weiss's technotopias,

Porush's cybernetic fictions use a machine to stand for the act of writing itself, create a

congruence between form and function, and they delight in structure for structure's sake

(92-3). While Beckett's novella does not reproduce Forster's, it suggests that it and

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[164] Weiss 16.
[165] Porush 89.

Forster's stories are machines of fiction, functioning to provide their audiences with a temporary mythical escape from the monotony of routine.

The setting in *The Machine Stops* is similar to that of *Le Dépeupleur*. They are both futuristic, self-contained communities, geometrically arranged with circularity being their unifying theme, artificially lit and temperature-controlled, and with limited space. Caporaletti adeptly describes Forster's underground setting:

> The reader is directly introduced into a strange artificial ambience, a wide space of geometrical proportions fragmented into billions of small metallic regular cells, all self-enclosed and bare, but full of buttons, screens and marvelous mechanisms (electronic we would say today) that transform them into complete and autosufficient microcosms. (34)

Beckett's cylinder world is similarly geometrically balanced. The narrator observes, "C'est l'intérieur d'un cylindre surbaissé ayant cinquante mètres de pourtour et seize de haut pour l'harmonie" (7). The circular shape of the cylinder along with the circular movements of its inhabitants echo the cells in Forster's underground abode, described as a beehive. The narrator states, "Imagine, if you can, a small room, hexagonal in shape like the cell of a bee" (87). In addition to hives, both habitats could be described as tombs since both stories end in the death of the entire population. Caporaletti describes Forster's "death world" that parallels Beckett's tomb-like enclosure. She asserts, "The hive resembles a huge metallic mausoleum, cold and impenetrable, whose many walls each reflect an identical image; it is like a sealed labyrinth, threatening and sinister in its infinite circularity" (40).

The lack of objects in these futuristic, dystopian worlds, helps set the barren,

desolate landscape of a post-nuclear society. The subterranean rooms in *The Machine*

Stops contain only a chair, a desk, and a bed that comes out of a wall at night. The

narrator describes Vashti's room, that is essentially empty and the same as all the other

rooms in the "hive": "The room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all that

she cared for in the world" (90). And, similarly, in *Le Dépeupleur*, the only material

goods are ladders. The narrator tells us, "Echelles. Ce sont les seuls objets" (9). It is

interesting to note that although his setting resembles a post-nuclear one, Forster wrote

The Machine Stops before the invention of the atom bomb. Forster's civilization lives

below the surface of the earth for reasons, according to Seabury, that are eerily prophetic,

given its pre-World War II publishing date. She asserts:

> Then the environment was somehow poisoned, made uninhabitable for all
>
> higher life forms, so that people had to move underground—all this
>
> written decades before nuclear fission, bomb shelters, and the Swiss's
>
> reputed ability to house their entire nation in shelters under their
>
> mountains. (62)

Although Beckett's flattened cylinder is never described as being underground, its

conditions are the same as if it were: the lighting, climate, and sounds are all as artificial

as in Forster's subterranean world. In Beckett's world, as in Forster's, there is no

difference between day and night. Forster's narrator notes that, in order to sleep, Vashti

must turn off her communication system, "Vashti isolated herself—it was necessary, for

neither day nor night existed under the ground" (91). In both surroundings, artificial light

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is omnipresent. In *The Machine Stops*, "Everything is light, artificial light; darkness is the exception" (101), the narrator observes. The narrator of Beckett's world describes its light similarly, "Son omniprésence comme si les quelque quatre-vingt mille centimètres carrés de surface totale émettaient chacun sa lueur" (7). However, unlike the cylinder-dwellers, Forster's characters have control over the lights in their environment: they can turn them off to sleep, for example. Though, in the end, this control turns out to be illusory as the Machine breaks down and the inhabitants can no longer regulate the light in their rooms. Additionally, Forster's figures have access to sunlight, but choose, instead, artificial light. Furthermore, they do not want to be in the dark, unless they are sleeping. The narrator describes the scene on the air-ship: "'Are we to travel in the dark?' called the passengers angrily, and the attendant, who had been careless, generated the light and pulled down the blinds of pliable metal" (95). And, later, Vashti is petrified that the sunlight will touch her and she has no desire to see, what the narrator illustrates as, the beautiful sunrise:

> So when Vashti found her cabin invaded by a rosy finger of light, she was
> annoyed, and tried to adjust the blind. But the blind flew up altogether,
> and she saw through the skylight small pink clouds, swaying against a
> background of blue, and as the sun crept higher, its radiance entered
> direct, brimming down the wall, like a golden sea. . . . Unless she was
> careful, it would strike her face. A spasm of horror shook her and she
> rang for the attendant. The attendant too was horrified. (96)

They want to escape from nature as strongly as the Romantics of the nineteenth century

desired to escape to it. Forster reflects on Romanticism, in his usual sardonic tone, as he

paints his scientifically advanced world: "Night and day, wind and storm, tide and

earthquake, impeded man no longer. He had harnessed Leviathan. All the old literature,

with its praise of Nature, and its fear of Nature, rang false as the prattle of a child" (94).

Beckett, too, satirizes the Romantic poets in *Le Dépeupleur*, as discussed previously, for

their advocacy of escape through nature.

Both mechanical worlds are filled with a constant, insect-like humming noise that

conveys further their dystopian qualities. While Vashti sleeps, the narrator affirms,

"Above her, beneath her, and around her, the Machine hummed eternally; she did not

notice the noise, for she had been born with it in her ears" (92). And when Kuno is

telling his mother of his exploits on the surface of the earth, he theorizes that the

humming noise from the machine is somehow hypnotizing the underground inhabitants.

He recounts, "The light helped me for a little, and then came darkness and, worse still,

silence which pierced my ears like a sword. The Machine hums! Did you know that? Its

hum penetrates our blood, and may even guide our thoughts" (102-103). The humming

does not stop until the Machine stops and when it does, tragically, there are those who die

from the complete silence. Correspondingly, the noise in Beckett's cylinder only varies

during the momentary lulls, and has mechanical properties (it is cut off as though by a

switch). According to the narrator:

> La rumeur qui s'était tue comme coupée au commutateur remplit de
>
> nouveau le cylindre. Parmi tous les composants dont elle est faite l'oreille

finit par distinguer un faible grésillement d'insecte qui est celui de la

lumière elle-même et le seul qui ne varie pas. (33-34)

Weiss argues that the narrator turns the sound off and on with his voice. She claims:

Using this word as a simile, Beckett implies that the narrator's voice is

like an electrical current turning on and off the textual machine. His voice

both deactivates the murmurs within the cylinder when he switches off,

and when he switches on, he activates 'life' within this machine. (7)

The mechanical murmur in both texts affects the behaviors of the characters negatively.

Both environments are divided into zones which emphasizes an effort to order the

world in a rational way and to construct borders or frontiers to either keep people in or

lock them out. In the case of *The Machine Stops*, Kuno is sent to the northern

hemisphere, while his mother remains on the other side of the earth, in the southern

hemisphere, to discourage them from visiting each other, for, as the narrator informs the

reader, parenting ends at birth: "'Parents, duties of,' said the book of the Machine, 'cease

at the moment of birth. P. 422327483.'" (93). In *Le Dépeupleur*, the zones demarcate the

different areas that separate the searchers and serve to keep them in line. If a searcher

turns in the wrong direction, or is in the wrong zone, s/he is severely punished by the

others. These artificial borders serve to regulate behavior, but they also give the

inhabitant a false sense of order and security. The narrator observes:

Si à ces trois zones on donne des numéros d'ordre il apparaît clairement

que de la troisième à la seconde et inversement le chercheur passe à

volonté alors que pour accéder à la première comme d'ailleurs pour en

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sortir il est tenu à une certaine discipline. Exemple entre mille de

l'harmonie qui règne dans le cylindre entre ordre et laisser-aller. (39)

Interestingly, Beckett highlights the artificiality of the zones. The narrator declares, "Le fond du cylindre comporte trois zones distinctes aux frontières précises mentales ou imaginaires puisque invisibles à l'oeil de chair" (38). The zones in both worlds are socially constructed, and the authors make sure their readers are aware of it.

Everything in these worlds is artificial, including peace. During Kuno's escape to the surface of the earth, he is caught by the Machine's mending apparatus and dragged back to his cell. He relates the event to his mother: "The worms had vanished, I was surrounded by artificial air, artificial light, artificial peace, and my friends were calling to me down speaking-tubes to know whether I had come across any new ideas lately" (108). He equates his environment, not to a peaceful sanctuary, but to hell. Kuno recounts:

They were searching it in all directions, they were denuding it, and the

white snouts of others peeped out of the hole, ready if needed. Everything

that could be moved they brought—rushwood, bundles of fern, everything,

and down we all went intertwined into **hell**. (107 emphasis added)

Beckett, also, invokes images of hell when he refers to Dante in his text.

In addition to similar settings, the fictional machine-worlds in both Beckett and Forster are created by an impersonal voice, external to the story, who authoritatively relates events and situations to the reader. Beckett's narrator uses a technological discourse that is mechanical, scientifically accurate, and mathematically precise to deliver data about the cylinder including the nature of the inhabitants and the machinery of their

social conduct. This computerized language parallels the language of the user's manual

for the Machine in *The Machine Stops*. The Book of the Machine is the only reading

material still in existence and its importance in the eyes of the subterranean dwellers

increases with the passage of time. The narrator describes its usefulness for Vashti:

> By her side, on the little reading-desk, was a survival from the ages of
>
> litter—one book. This was the Book of the Machine. If she was hot or
>
> cold or dyspeptic or at a loss for a word, she went to the book, and it told
>
> her which button to press. The Central Committee published it. In
>
> accordance with a growing habit, it was richly bound. (91)

Gradually, the Book becomes much more than a how-to manual; It serves as a Bible to a

civilization that, paradoxically, proudly professes to be most advanced because they have

rid society of religion and the fear and superstition related to it. Vashti, at first, worships

the Book in the privacy of her room, according to the narrator:

> Sitting up in the bed, she took it reverently in her hands. She glanced
>
> round the glowing room as if someone might be watching her. Then, half
>
> ashamed, half joyful, she murmured 'O Machine! O Machine!' and raised
>
> the volume to her lips. Thrice she kissed it, thrice inclined her head, thrice
>
> she felt the delirium of acquiescence. (91)

But, eventually, this secrecy is no longer necessary as the re-establishment of religion

takes place, although the word "religion" is carefully avoided. The religious connotations

of the language added to the Book are clear, nonetheless. The narrator affirms:

'The Machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition: the

Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine.' And before long

this allocution was printed on the first page of the Book, and in subsequent

editions the ritual swelled into a complicated system of praise and prayer.

(110-11)

When the world is coming to an end, Vashti looks for salvation in the words of the Book.

The narrator observes, "She whirled round, praying to be saved from this, at any rate,

kissing the Book, pressing button after button" (116-17). The handbook becomes a

religious symbol similar to the Dictionary in Godard's computer-controlled city of

Alphaville. One critic notes that organized religion is verboten in classical dystopian

literature because it competes with their totalitarian governments:

To a certain extent Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell all depict religion as

inimical to the dystopian conditions depicted in their books, and it is

significant that conventional organized religion is strictly forbidden in all

three of the major defining texts of the dystopian tradition. But all three

authors also draw significant parallels between their oppressive dystopian

governments and the historical abuses of institutional religion; it is clear

that one reason why religion has been banned in these dystopias is that it

competes for the same space as the dystopian governments themselves.[166]

This is true of Forster's Committee who further deny individual freedom of the people by

banning the respirators that make outside travel possible at the same time that religion is

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[166] Booker, *Dystopian Impulse*, 32.

re-established. Thus, the technical language of the owner's manual, the Book, is undermined by its treatment as religious dogma, like Beckett's mathematical language is undercut by it approximations and corrections.

The narrator of *Le Dépeupleur* mocks what we may have read as the scientific description of some technical manual with phrases such as "plus ou moins" and "cela n'est pas tout à fait exact," as well as academic phrases and postures that mathematics and technical texts tend to adopt. He also uses clichés and colloquialisms to weaken the accuracy of the "scientized" vocabulary. This language of doubt and imprecision, so common in Beckett's work, replaces mathematical certainty and computer-like order. Thus, a human, fallible voice is interjected into the technological discourse underscoring the impossibility of a world free of human ambiguities and inaccuracies. Knowlson asserts that it is Beckett's emotional discourse that piques the reader's interest in the story. He professes:

> It is this mania for completeness and accuracy which drives Beckett to adopt the pedantically dry and remote voice of *The Lost Ones*, and it is a new confidence in his ability to describe things more fully and more plainly which accounts for the increasingly frequent admissions of emotional involvement which give the text its haunting quality and engage the reader's almost anaesthetized sensibility. (158)

Forster, too, interjects spectral voices into his otherwise realistic world of practical speech. Kuno hears the voices of his ancestors, urging him on in his escape to the surface of the earth. He tells his mother:

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Then the voice said: 'Jump. It is worth it. There may be a handle in the

centre, and you may catch hold of it and so come to us your own way.

And if there is no handle, so that you may fall and are dashed to pieces—it

is still worth it: you will still come to us your own way.' So I jumped.

(103)

However, in addition to engaging the reader, the different dialects of the narrator also

make it difficult for the reader to find a point of reference in this constantly shifting

linguistic landscape. Knowlson agrees:

As the work proceeds the oscillation between dispassionate description

and passionate involvement increases to the point where one is no longer

certain quite which is which, and one begins to ask oneself whether the

former is not in fact a more genuine commitment to the 'lost ones'

situation than the latter. (160)

Language instability is common in most dystopias, and in *The Machine Stops* it

reflects the political and social instability of the Machine-ruled society. The language of

the people echoes that of the Machine in its logical, rational precision. Ideas that cannot

be computed by the Machine, because they are irrational and illogical, are eventually not

understood by its worshippers. Vashti does not understand her son when he tells her that

he found a way outside on his own and without permission from the Committee. The

narrator states, "The phrase conveyed no meaning to her, and he had to repeat it" (99).

The notion of revolt is so foreign to her that she cannot comprehend her son's language.

Toward the end, Vashti relates Kuno's warning that "The Machine stops" to a friend.

"'The Machine is stopping?' her friend replied. 'What does that mean? The phrase conveys nothing to me'" (112). Her friend cannot understand the reality that the Machine is breaking down because she is no longer able to decipher the language that would allow her to acknowledge the pending catastrophe. Additionally, because they stay underground and rarely venture out of their rooms, the people have forgotten the names identifying the objects they rarely see, especially those in nature. During a conversation in the air-ship, Vashti and the attendant see snow on the mountain tops but they do not remember the name for it, nor do they appreciate its beauty. The narrator relates their conversation:

> 'And that white stuff in the cracks?—what is it?'
>
> 'I have forgotten its name.'
>
> 'Cover the window, please. These mountains give me no ideas.' (97)

They have forgotten nature's beauty just as they have forgotten its nomenclature. Their language has become limited, emotionless, and unoriginal like the Machine's. The language of the air-ship attendant has become rough because she still speaks directly to others, instead of through electronic devices. Vashti is offended by her "original" way of speaking. The narrator recounts:

> People were almost exactly alike all over the world, but the attendant of
> the air-ship, perhaps owing to her exceptional duties, had grown a little out
> of the common. She had often to address passengers with direct speech,
> and this had given her a certain roughness and originality of manner. (96-
> 97)

This breakdown of communications in *The Machine Stops* is similar to the one in *Le Dépeupleur*. Forster stresses the significance of language in society in a final scene where the end of their communication system signals the end of the world for these network-dependent beings. The narrator describes the horrible event: "But there came a day when, without the slightest warning, without any previous hint of feebleness, the entire communication-system broke down, all over the world, and the world, as they understood it, ended" (115). Beckett's world, too, ends in silence.

Beauchamp underscores another subtle yet alarming consequence of technology run amok seen in *The Machine Stops* and central to most dystopias—mechanomorphism. He defines mechanomorphism as "the technological conversion of organism into mechanism" and claims that the best example of it can be found in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, where the inhabitant's rhythmic motions echo those of an engine so well they appear mechanized, as the machine, in turn, seems humanized (61). Beauchamp suggests that the greatest fear in technologically advanced societies is not the master/slave dichotomy between man and machine, but the ambition of man to become a machine. He affirms:

> The greatest threat posed by technology, these dystopists suggest, is not that man's mechanical creations will come to rule over him like some alien power but rather that he will so completely introject the ethos of technology that his highest aspiration will be to become a machine himself. (62)

Dystopists explore the mysterious connections between humans and machines to better understand all the aspects of technological progress, not just the positive, utopic ones.

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Beckett's factory-like environment parallels the machine-ruled underworld of

Forster's in its images of the repetitious and pointless, but compulsive movements of the

inhabitants and its theme of the search for a mythical escape from the monotony of

mechanization. Like cogs in a machine, Beckett's "chercheurs" are unable to abandon

determined, mechanical rituals. The zones they move in and out of resemble conveyer

belts and the "corps" must follow regulations as they wait in lines, move the ladders from

niche to niche, and climb from ladder to tunnel to ladder again. Their mechanical

movements echo the mechanical language of the narrator who reverts to clichés and

colloquialisms while describing the innerworkings of the machine. Beckett underscores

the perfunctory behavior of the bodies by referring to their "sablier intérieur" (23) that

regulates time spent on the ladders. The narrator notes: "Cette docilité de l'abuseur

montre bien que l'infraction n'est pas volontaire mais due à un dérèglement temporaire

de son **sablier intérieur** facile à comprendre et par conséquent à pardonner" (23

emphasis added). Beckett, in his English version, *The Lost Ones*, interestingly translates

"sablier" not as hourglass, but as the more contemporary and mechanical "timepiece,"

with its strong connotations of routine and monotony. The hourglass is associated with

cyclical movement and notions of the "eternal return" since it must be continually turned

over to function. The movement of the cylinder's inhabitants mirror the cyclical,

continual movement of the hourglass that seems eternal. Time is a precious commodity

in Forster's clockwork society. There never seems to be enough of it even though the

activities of the subterrestrial citizens are, for the most part, repetitive and ultimately

meaningless. The inhabitants have a strong desire to be seen as being efficient and

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advanced, of being on time and in command of their time. In actuality, they are slaves to the clock for they must fill up every minute with cursory activity for fear of wasting time. Vashti's excuse for not wanting to visit her son is that she does not have the time (91). When he calls her on the phone, she can only spare him five minutes (88). "Be quick!" (87), Vashti says to Kuno when he asks to speak with her, and even though it only takes him fifteen seconds to connect with her visually, she berates him for "dawdling" (88). Although the activity in Beckett's cylinder is seen as frenzied and hurried as in Forster's underground society, there is no real sense of precise time, no night and day, no changing seasons, only the oscillations in temperature and the erratic, momentary lulls. Forster prophesies the present-day preoccupation with time-management and mocks it as an impossible, utopic dream that is inhuman and doomed to fail.

The mechanomorphism of Beckett's world parallels that of Forster's. Vashti's actions are repetitious and mechanical as are the machinations of an automated assembly line. The narrator describes her habitual movements that mirror those of the previous day: "She made the room dark and slept; she awoke and made the room light; she ate and exchanged ideas with her friends, and listened to music and attended lectures; she made the room dark and slept" (91-2). Her behaviors, and those of all the underground dwellers, are inveterate and as unimaginative as those of the Machine. Caporaletti illustrates the meaninglessness of their lives: "Wrapped in swaddling bands, in their impotent immobility they rather resemble larvae whose existence, entirely consumed inside their cocoons, never reaches the threshold of life" (35). Forster's characters are as depersonalized as the Machine that rules them. Everyone is like everyone else, "People

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were almost exactly alike all over the world," (96) the narrator affirms, and their world, just as bland, "Few travelled in these days for, thanks to the advance of science, the earth was exactly alike all over" (93). As discussed in the first part of this chapter, Beckett's characters in *Le Dépeupleur* are depersonalized and dehumanized also.

One positive aspect of machines, touted by technophiles, is that they never sleep, unlike their ineffecient human counterparts. Forster concedes in his seminal text entitled, *Aspects of the Novel*, that man has not yet learned how to survive without sleep.[167] In *The Machine Stops*, the inability to sleep marks humankind's undoing. The narrator illustrates:

> There came a day when over the whole world—in Sumatra, in Wessex, in the innumerable cities of Courland and Brazil—the beds, when summoned by their tired owners, failed to appear. It may seem a ludicrous matter, but from it we may date the collapse of humanity. . . . But the discontent grew, for mankind was not yet sufficiently adaptable to do without sleeping"
> (114).

Beckett's characters are sleep-deprived, as are Forster's, and they only find peace and rest when they become one of the vanquished ones. The sleep-deprivation prevalent in today's society due to overwork, overactivity, and a materialistic ethos links Forster's and Beckett's worlds and ours. In its rapid technological evolution, our era begins to appear perilously similar to their hypothetical worlds.

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[167] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Harcourt, 1927) 47-56.

In their problematic worlds, the inhabitants are unaware of the mechanomorphism taking place. In *The Machine Stops*, Kuno is the only one who recognizes that humans are becoming part of the Machine, and are no longer masters of it. He tries to enlighten his mother, but is unsuccessful. He tells her, "The Machine proceeds—but not to our goal. We only exist as the blood corpuscles that course through its arteries, and if it could work without us, it would let us die" (106). Additionally, he warns her as well as all the members of this society against the dangers of technology run amok. He implores:

> Cannot you see, cannot all you lecturers see, that it is we that are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine? We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralysed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it. The Machine develops—but not on our lines. (105)

Kuno's speech foreshadows Martin Heidegger's critique of the entire concept of technology in his 1953 essay entitled, *Die Frage Nach der Technik* ("The Question Concerning Technology") and what Heidegger calls *Ge-stell*, "enframing."[168] He explains humankind's submissive role in the totality of enframing: "As the essence of technology, enframing would be absolute. It would reduce man and beings to a sort of "standing reserve" or stockpile in service to, and on call for, technological purposes" (4).

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[168] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 4.

The true danger, according to Heidegger, is that technology leads mankind even further from being. He contends:

> Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we
> passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst
> possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception
> of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly
> blind to the essence of technology. (4)

Heidegger's solution to the problem of safeguarding the being is to be found in art and poetry. Forster and Beckett echo this humanist sentiment in their imaginative solutions to a rational world that will be discussed later in the chapter.

If we interpret Beckett's cylinder as a machine and its inhabitants as automatons, it follows that their search, then, is for an escape from the monotony of mechanization. Kuno, too, is searching for a way out of his dehumanized surroundings. In both dystopias, ladders are used as a means of escape. In *The Machine Stops*, Kuno describes the ladder that leads him outside, "There was a ladder; made of some primaeval metal. The light from the railway fell upon its lowest rungs, and I saw that it led straight upwards out of the rubble at the bottom of the shaft" (102). He sees the light on the ladder and, at the same time, grasps his chance for enlightenment on the earth's surface. The ladder not only symbolizes a path to enlightenment and knowledge but also is a sign of his ancestors and all those who came before him, seeking a better life. "Perhaps our ancestors ran up and down it a dozen times daily, in their building" (102), he tells his mother. The ladder is an emblem of hope for Kuno in the present, as it was for his

ancestors in the past. He maintains, "I seemed to hear the spirits of those dead workmen who had returned each evening to the starlight and to their wives, and all the generations who had lived in the open air called back to me, 'You will do it yet, you are coming'" (101). Kuno feels compelled by an unknown force, or spirit, to find a way outside, or a way back to his ancestors. Perhaps, he feels badly because he cannot have progeny of his own. The narrator explains, "For Kuno had lately asked to be a father, and his request had been refused by the Committee. His was not a type that the Machine desired to hand on" (102). And later Kuno says to his mother, "I felt, for the first time, that a protest had been lodged against corruption, and that even as the dead were comforting me, so I was comforting the unborn" (102). Kuno is linked to the past and to the future through the ladder that also connects him from his underground prison to the outside world. His search for a way out is seen as degenerate by his mother, the Machine, and his compatriots, whereas the search for a way out in *Le Dépeupleur* is not, though they are both futile.

Parallel to the inhabitants themselves, sexual reproduction is depersonalized and dehumanized in both *Le Dépeupleur* and *The Machine Stops*. It is seen, as in classical dystopias, as obscene, grotesque, and absurd. However, the very persistence to penetrate is subversive in a mechanized environment. In these texts, there exists the classical paradigm of sexual reproduction used both as a weapon of suppression by the oppressive power and a tool of subversion by the oppressed. One critic compares sexual intercourse in Beckett's novella to the mechanical reproduction of the sexual act in film. She asserts:

The bodies partake in the act of reproduction longer than talented lovers *in camera*—in their chambers or niches. Beckett's use of the word 'camera' is also a play on *on camera*. It is important to remember Beckett's own interest in photographic technologies, and in particular film, as well as his interest in archaic language. Here he merges the two in order to contrast frantic, unrestrained reproductive acts with those mechanised and reproduced *on* screen. Beckett, in effect, exploits the myth of precision, pointing out that it too is an illusion. Cameras capture calmly with a 'cruel precision' the hopeless and frantic lovers and mechanises them into objects to be gazed upon. (14)

The human objects to be gazed upon in *The Machine Stops* and in *Le Dépeupleur* are sexually unappealing. Vashti is described as a "swaddled lump of flesh" and has a face as "white as fungus," and we are asked by the narrator to imagine her without teeth and without hair (92). Similarly, Beckett's "little people" are described by the narrator as having gray, desiccated skin: "Ce dessèchement de l'enveloppe enlève à la nudité une bonne partie de son charme en la rendant grise et transforme en un froissement d'orties la succulence naturelle de chair contre chair" (47). And, they are in different stages of blindness, their hair is unkempt, tarnished by the light, and hangs over their faces. The narrator observes, "Les cheveux roux ternis par l'éclairage arrivent jusqu'au sol. Ils lui cachent le visage et tout le devant du corps y compris l'entrejambes" (50). Lastly, the bodies are scarred and birthmarked. According to the narrator, "Il arrive bien sûr qu'un corps soit obligé d'en immobiliser un autre et de le disposer d'une certaine façon pour

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examiner de près une région particulière ou pour chercher une cicatrice par exemple ou une envie" (52). They are emotionally, as well as physically, unattractive.

It is difficult to imagine sexual reproduction in a society where human touch is repulsive and painful. One consequence of the lack of human contact is irritability in a mechanistic world without gentleness and caring. In *The Machine Stops*, Vashti along with her fellow cell-dwellers are becoming more and more disagreeable. The narrator affirms, "To most of these questions she replied with irritation—a growing quality in that accelerated age" (90). Vashti is increasingly "annoyed" (96) by small disturbances, such as the light in her cabin peeking through the blinds. Beckett's inhabitants loathe human contact also. According to the narrator, "Aussi le prosternement de ces desséchés obligés de se frôler sans cesse et qu'habite l'horreur du contact ne va-t-il jamais jusqu'à son terme naturel" (53). Similarly, Forster's narrator illustrates his characters' aversion to touch: "The passengers sat each in his cabin, avoiding one another with an almost physical repulsion and longing to be once more under the surface of the earth" (98).

Sexual intercourse is simply a carnal act in Forster's society and solely for the purpose of perpetuating the species, not for pleasure or as an expression of love and affection. One of the passengers on the air-ship with Vashti had been sent to Sumatra for the purpose of propagating the race (98). Kuno, on the other hand, is denied this privilege for his athleticism and unconventional thoughts. Here, technology leads not only to the destruction of nature, love, and affection, but also to social engineering. This eradication of pre-selected physical and personality traits is a motif found in dystopian literature, most notably in Huxley's *Brave New World*.

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Commonly, in canonical dystopian texts, children are either born in incubators, or hatcheries as they are called in *Brave New World*. They are typically not raised by their biological parents, but in government-run institutions, and they either do not know their biological parents, or they have limited contact with them. In *The Machine Stops*, the Book of the Machine discourages relationships between parents and their children. 'Parents, duties of,' said the book of the Machine, 'cease at the moment of birth. P. 422327483.' (93). Nonetheless, the relationship between Vashti and her son, Kuno, transgresses the isolationism that is imposed by the Machine and social convention. Vashti visits Kuno in the public nursery and teaches him how to push his own buttons. In adulthood, their roles are reversed. Kuno teaches his mother about the stars and he warns her that the Machine is breaking down. However, their relationship is an ambiguous one.[169] Kuno looks to his mother for hope and salvation, but realizes that she cannot help him because of her absolute devotion to the Machine and social convention. He tries to enlighten her about the inhuman conditions in which they live, but she is only disgusted by his "mad" behavior that is "unmechanical," or unlawful. He abandons his efforts to connect with her until the end when they die in each other's arms, yet still with differing opinions on humanity's fate. Kuno is optimistic whereas his mother's vision of the future is a more pessimistic one. Kuno places his hope in those homeless ones he believes to be living on the surface of the earth, but his mother is skeptical. Kuno tells her, "I have seen them, spoken to them, loved them. They are hiding in the mist and the ferns until our civilization stops. To-day they are Homeless—to-morrow—" (118). We learn Vashti's

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[169] Forster's relationship with his mother has also been described as ambiguous by McDowell (1-17).

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reply: "Oh, to-morrow," his mother interrupts, --some fool will start the Machine again, to-morrow" (118). And Kuno rebuts, "Never. Humanity has learnt its lesson" (118). Their bond is tenuous, as is the one between the mother and child in *Le Dépeupleur* where the mother holds the child out of habit, not affection. Their relationship is superficial and mechanical. She never looks at the baby. The narrator illustrates:

> Détail pittoresque une femme aux cheveux blancs encore jeune à en juger
> par les cuisses appuyée contre le mur les yeux clos dans l'abandon serrant
> machinalement contre son sein un bambin qui s'arc-boute pour mieux
> tourner la tête et voir derrière lui. (27)

The memory of birth is significant to both authors. In his essay entitled, "What I Believe" (1939), Forster argues that "The memory of birth and the expectation of death always lurk within the human being, making him separate from his fellows and consequently capable of intercourse with them."[170] As mentioned previously, in the first part of this chapter, Beckett had memories of being in his mother's womb. In both short stories, the tunnel is associated, metaphorically, with reproduction: the tunnel is a kind of Fallopian tube and both Beckett's cylinder-world and Forster's subterranean space are womb-like enclosures. The maternal symbolism with its connotations of comfort, warmth, and nurturing are contrasted with the cold, distant, and sterile underbelly of highly rationalized, technologically-dominated societies.

In their book entitled, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the neo-Marxist social theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno question the validity of rational thought in

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[170] E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 84.

general and Enlightenment science that privileges practical application and information over genuine knowledge and understanding. The two critics theorize that a society that wishes to dominate nature only creates humans who desire to dominate each other. Additionally, they critique a rationalism that uses mathematics and logic to explain all aspects of life, thereby producing people who are incapable of original and independent thought. They claim: "With the abandonment of thought, which in its reified form of mathematics, machine, and organization avenges itself on the men who have forgotten it, enlightenment has relinquished its own realization."[171]

Beckett's advocacy of imagination over intellect, and Forster's denouncement of a technological ethos that creates spiritual and emotional barrenness by repressing imagination, originality, and spontaneity, inform both of their respective dystopian short fictions. In an essay written in 1925, Forster underscores the importance of imagination in writing. He affirms, "Imagination is our only guide into the world created by words."[172] In *The Machine Stops*, the author critiques technological utopias that reduce ideas to empirical data and knowledge to everyday, practical utility.[173] Forster invites his reader to put reason aside and think imaginatively and, at the same time, highlights the imaginative nature of it, with his first words of the story, "Imagine, if you can," (87). His underground inhabitants, with the exception of Kuno, are incapable of original thought for they have exchanged imagination for second-hand ideas. Their ways of thinking come from those who preceded them. Forster mocks the lack of imagination of

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[171] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury P, 1972) 41.
[172] Forster, *Two Cheers*, 90.

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academics through the voices of his characters. The narrator recounts the speech of one

of the more prominent lecturers in this mechanized world:

> 'Beware of first-hand ideas!' exclaimed one of the most advanced of them.
> 'First-hand ideas do not really exist. They are but the physical
> impressions produced by love and fear, and on this gross foundation who
> could erect a philosophy? Let your ideas be second-hand, and if possible
> tenth-hand, for then they will be far removed from that disturbing
> element—direct observation. Do not learn anything about this subject of
> mine—the French Revolution. Learn instead what I think that
> Enicharmon thought Urizen thought Gutch thought Ho-Yung thought Chi-
> Bo-Sing thought Lafcadio Hearn thought Carlyle thought Mirabeau said
> about the French Revolution'. (109)

Similarly, Beckett satirizes the language of academics with his juxtaposition of elegant

language and clichés, as detailed earlier in the chapter.

Both Forster and Beckett are well known for their compassion for the human race

and their privileging of human matters over divine or supernatural ones. According to

Pilling, Beckett "rests his case on a qualified humanism" that has been variously

described as "defensive," "quietist" and "graveyard" (24), whereas Forster's humanist

views are more engaged and were influenced greatly by his participation in the

Bloomsbury group. One critic confirms:

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[173] *The Machine Stops* is a direct response to the technological utopianism of H.G. Wells, according to
Mark Hillegas.

Most of what Bloomsbury came to represent, Forster also valued:

friendship, love of discussion, irreverence toward tradition and

convention, agnosticism, the inevitability of social change, and

appreciation of the new and the innovative in the arts, and a questioning of

ready-made concepts to accord with the searching premises of a Moorean

'realism'.[174]

He continues: "Always the point of view was that of the engaged humanist, whereas the

stance varied from objective analysis of a situation, problem, or book to exhortations for

engaging in a specific action" (12). Both authors stress the dehumanization of mankind

in a technologically-driven world. Caporaletti concurs:

The ethical message of the author is equally clear: if not counterbalanced

by a careful preservation of spiritual values, science will not lead to the

elevation but to the degradation of mankind, and an uncontrolled

technological progress, pursued as a goal in itself, will in the end result in

human regression and involution. The Machine era may have eliminated

hardship and injustice, but it has dehumanized people, deprived them of

emotion, desire, passion, thought, and excised their capacity for love. (41)

The Machine Stops and *Le Dépeupleur* are satires of the alienation of individuals

in upper-middle class society. This is the world in which Forster was raised and he was

able to write about this social milieu through first-hand experience, but also with a

critical eye. Forster's fiction of subterrestrial society is a critique of the class system in

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[174] McDowell 5.

general, as well as the bourgeoisie—a milieu in which the author was so adept at describing. McDowell explains his paradoxical position in bourgeois society:

> Forster was both intensely immersed in upper-middle-class life in the
>
> Edwardian age and, in moments of honesty, intensely critical of it. The
>
> privileges of this society he enjoyed, but its repressive nature and its
>
> materialistic values he detested. (7)

Forster was committed to the society of his mother and her relatives, though he was satiric at its expense. His ambivalence is revealed in the text: the reader cannot help pitying these poor creatures, but it is done through gritted teeth. He also gained insight into race and class differences during his travels abroad. Most importantly, he observed the arrogance and intolerance of British administrators toward the Other.[175] According to Seabury, class is not an issue in *The Machine Stops*. She asserts:

> Moreover, the issue of class, so important in those other works and in
>
> Forster's own novels, is nonexistent here. People's cells, their
>
> technological appurtenances, will not increase in size or sophistication
>
> depending on their birth or accomplishments. Thus our attention is
>
> focused not on how this brave new world affects its various classes but on
>
> how it affects everyone. (63)

While she makes an interesting point, I believe that, on the contrary, Forster depicts a world where class divisions exist *despite* increased comfort and a generalized higher standards of living due to increased technological advances. This is apparent in the

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[175] McDowell 11.

speech and actions of the characters. Although they all possess the same material goods,

some feel more privileged than others. Vashti is infuriated when she does not get the best

cabin on the air-ship during her trip to visit Kuno. The narrator exclaims, "Some cabins

were better than others, and she did not get the best. She thought the attendant had been

unfair, and spasms of rage shook her" (95). Her tone of voice also reveals Vashti's

disdain of the attendant: "'Where are we now?' asked Vashti haughtily" (97). While

Vashti feels that she is above the air-ship attendant in class, the attendant, on her part,

considers herself to be too good to repair a broken blind, for Vashti's convenience,

because it is beneath her. Instead, she recommends that Vashti change cabins. The

narrator explains, "The attendant too was horrified, but she could do nothing; it was not

her place to mend the blind" (96 emphasis added). Additionally, the narrator uses the

word "well-bred" to describe Vashti, with all of its strong connotations of class

differentiation. He states, "She was too well-bred to shake him by the hand" (99). The

different Committees that enforce the laws of the Machine further illustrate class

stratification in this underground society, as well as the disparate levels of importance

given to lecturers. Vashti belongs to the class of "advanced thinkers" (109), though she

is not considered one of the "famous" ones. The "famous lecturer" guides the masses

who applaud him from "thousands of miles away" (114). Upward mobility, symbolized

by the ubiquitous references to mountains—the Himalayas, the hills of Wessex, and the

Caucasus—, and by the ladder that carries Kuno to the surface, is as important in this

technological, push-button paradise, as it is in Forster's own, highly-stratified society.

Beckett's cylinder world reflects the same class disparity and tensions between those who

feel privileged over those beneath them. The elite in Beckett's society are paradoxically the "vanquished" ones, and the "sedentary" seek violent retribution from those who transgress their space, as described in the first part of this chapter. Even in these barren universes, humans are grouped in a hierarchical class structure.

The theme of alienation is central in both *The Machine Stops* and *Le Dépeupleur*. In both societies people are in constant contact with each other, yet they are characterized by lack of understanding, selfishness, and emotional isolation. In Beckett's world, the inhabitants do not recognize each other because of the gloom in the cylinder, even though they are pressed up against each other. Similarly, in Forster's underground cells, people usually only see each other on fuzzy, blue screens and they are barely recognizable. There is little interfacing with each other, though they speak to each other "electronically" every day and are in constant communication through a complex network of speaking tubes that prophesies the world wide web of contemporary society. Until she took the public air-ship to visit her son, Vashti had not seen another human for months. The narrator observes, "One other passenger was in the lift, the first fellow creature she had seen face to face for months" (93). Public lectures had long since been stopped for the people realized that it was easier to bring things to them in their cells, rathen than to venture forth and go to public events (87). As in *Le Dépeupleur*, there is no true feelings of fraternity among women and men. When a man on the air-ship drops his book and is too weak to pick it up again, none of the other passengers offers to pick it up for him, in fact, they proceed to tramp all over his book, proclaiming their desire to get aboard quickly (94). There are appropriately named "isolation knobs" in all of the

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subterranean rooms so that the inhabitants can isolate themselves from the outside world and it also prevents others from interrupting them through the tubes (87-88). As mentioned previously, the inhabitants of this world have become accustomed to living without any direct physical contact and have even become repulsed by it. When an air-ship attendant grabs Vashti's arm to prevent her from falling, Vashti berates her angrily, "'How dare you!' exclaimed the passenger. 'You forget yourself!'. . . People never touched one another. The custom had become obsolete, owing to the Machine" (97). Isolation is for civilized people, only the uncivilized touch each other. The alienation central to *The Machine Stops* and to *Le Dépeupleur* is similar to the pervasive problem of urban anonymity in today's world.

The apocalyptic endings in *The Machine Stops* and in *Le Dépeupleur* are analogous in their darkness, silence, and ambiguity. In Forster's underground world, where darkness had been relegated to small corners, just as all of nature had been harnessed by the Machine, the light is extinguished as are the lives of the inhabitants. The narrator confirms, "And at last the final horror approached—light began to ebb, and she knew that civilization's long day was closing" (116). Beckett's ubiquitous, inescapable rays of light perish taking the last man with them. The narrator recounts, "Lui-même à son tour au bout d'un temps impossible à chiffrer trouve enfin sa place et sa pose sur quoi le noir se fait en même temps que la température se fixe dans le voisinage de zéro" (55). Both worlds suffer a torturous silence in the end. In Beckett's cylinder, the silence is louder than the insect-like buzzing. The narrator contends, "Se tait du même coup le grésillement d'insecte mentionné plus haut d'où subitement un silence plus

fort que tous ces faibles souffles réunis" (55). In *The Machine Stops*, the silence is as

physically painful as the asphyxiation caused by the polluted air. The narrator paints

Vashti's harrowing experience:

> Then she broke down, for with the cessation of activity came an
>
> unexpected terror—silence. She had never known silence, and the coming
>
> of it nearly killed her—it did kill many thousands of people outright. Ever
>
> since her birth she had been surrounded by the steady hum. It was to the
>
> ear what artificial air was to the lungs, and agonizing pains shot across her
>
> head. (116)

Both texts have ambiguous endings, and as one critic argues, it is this uncertainty that

creates a lasting dystopia. He maintains:

> I am arguing, also, that the most enduring utopian texts (both eutopias and
>
> dystopias) are those which highlight textual ambiguity and aporetically
>
> retreat from the sort of textual closure which would suggest that the author
>
> is entirely satisfied with the utopian vision he/she has created.[176]

Beckett's and Forster's conclusions are not beyond hope, as is the ending in Orwell's

1984. In *Le Dépeupleur*, hope lies with the narrator, who has not perished with the rest

of the frozen cylinder-dwellers, and in *The Machine Stops*, it rests with the homeless who

Kuno believes to be roaming the surface of the earth. One critic points to the utopian

impulse in Forster's conclusion:

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[176] Richard Toby Widdicombe, "Eutopia, Dystopia, Aporia: The Obstruction of Meaning in Fin-de-Siècle
Utopian Texts," *Utopian Studies* 1.1 (1990): 98.

The following analysis argues that the reconciliation between Vashti and Kuno, once the Machine has stopped, describes a transgressive notion of love that is also related to the need for imagination within an otherwise rationalised existence. In other words, while the social setting of Forster's story is dystopian, the narrative retains a residual utopian element.[177] March-Russell also recognizes its ambiguity. He concludes:

Kuno's response that 'humanity has learnt its lesson' is simultaneously shattered by the city breaking 'like a honeycomb' (146). Forster resists both the resignation of dystopian fiction, as in *Brave New World*, and the romanticism characterised by Kuno which, in its optimism, elides with an Hegelian belief in progress: the same principle that, in other words, motivates the world-state. Instead, in its inconclusiveness, the text gestures towards an imaginative return that will not only compensate the present but also radically transform it. The form of this return can be described as the recognition of love. (68)

According to Tom Moylan's schema of dystopias, *Le Dépeupleur* and *The Machine Stops* would both fit into the category of utopian-dystopias for their somewhat hopeful and open-ended conclusions.

The Machine Stops is an appropriate work to use in the interpretation of *Le Dépeupleur* not only because of its similar dystopian elements that emphasize a mistrust of technology and overrationalization, but also for its belief in the power of love, caring,

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[177] Paul March-Russell, "'Imagine, If You Can': Love, Time and the Impossibility of Utopia in E. M.

and human contact that are missing in alienated, post-industrial societies. By revealing

the social and political critiques found in Forster's short story and linking them to similar

ones contained in Beckett's writing, I hope that my study has given the reader a better

understanding of *Le Dépeupleur*: an experimental work not readily comprehended. In

sum, the ills of twentieth-century society that connect Forster's underground dystopia to

Beckett's cylindrical one are death of religion, alienation, general irritability, physical

deterioration, selfishness, and lack of human understanding. All of these disturbing

issues are a part of the authors' fictional worlds as well as our own, which is another

distinguishing feature of the genre of dystopian literature as Sisk reaffirms, "A dystopian

work fails if it does not move its readers to compare his or her 'real world' to the fictional

society and consider how the latter could arise from the former."[178]

Forster's 'The Machine Stops,'" *Critical Survey* 17.1 (2005): 56.
[178] David W. Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias* (Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1997)
8-9.

Conclusion: The Future of Dystopia

In the preceding chapters I determined that the French *auteurs* created dystopic worlds using similar devices and strategies as those common in classical dystopian literature and film. They warn of cold, sterile societies as outcomes of the direction in which we seem to be moving. Their anxieties are shared fears of science and technology run amok, totalitarianism, consumerism, urban anonymity, and arrant utopianism. Satire is their preferred weapon to battle society's ills. Though *Alphaville*, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, and *Le Dépeupleur* adeptly imitate the themes and strategies of canonical dystopian discourse, they transform and subvert dystopian narratives in ways that can only be concluded as being influenced by French culture and its unique literary tradition.

Godard, Rochefort, and Beckett create dystopias that reflect their unconventional, anti-establishment, and avant-garde styles. Firstly, Godard's non-traditional methods of filmmaking, such as filming in the streets of Paris instead of on an artificially constructed movie set, and his *mélange* of film noir, science fiction, western, and popular art transform his dystopian city, Alphaville, into a uniquely French one. His appreciation for his native city, and his desire that it not become another Alphaville are as transparent as Woody Allen's devotion to New York City. Secondly, Rochefort, also well-known for her transgressive methods of re-constructing fiction and her iconoclastic language, imagines Paris as a polluted city of concrete skyscrapers that has spread to the borders of

France. Urbanization and the destruction of the environment is a global issue, but Rochefort appeals to a French sensibility by setting her novel in the country's beloved capital. Although she critiques the Vietnam War, her main target is a French one— Charles de Gaulle. She attacks his conservative policies and his bureacratic government for not improving the lives of the French people, but making them worse. Lastly, Beckett chose to construct his cylindrical dystopia in French even though his maternal language was English. Clearly, he found the French language better suited for his minimalist writing style and for his mechanized microcosm. By the time he wrote *Le Dépeupleur*, Beckett had lived and worked in France for over forty years. The social critique in his dystopia was surely influenced by the French culture and language in which he was immersed. Beckett's dystopia is unique in its minimalist, avant-garde writing style. All three dystopists contribute notable themes and devices to the dystopian literary tradition in a distinctive French manner. Furthermore, they all leave space for hope that humanity will survive and rebuild a better world, which is not a strategy found in all dystopian narratives.

I classify all three, *Alphaville*, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, and *Le Dépeupleur*, as utopian-dystopias for their hopeful conclusions, based on Tom Moylan's schema of dystopian fiction in his study, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. Chad Walsh refers to this optimism as the "saving remnant" that allows an escape from the apocalypse for a rebellious few who will perpetuate the human race. As I noted in chapter one, Lemmy saves Natasha from the destruction of Alphaville and together they flee to a better world to warn others, we imagine, against technology-driven societies. In the second chapter I

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mentioned Rochefort's hopeful ending: Sereine successfully leads her youthful followers in a revolt against the ruling elite, the incompetent dictator is assassinated, and Rochefort hints that the nuclear bomb has been deflected, though that point is left open-ended. In the third chapter I cite Todorov's article on Beckett's hopeful element in the power of art and imagination to change the world in *Le Dépeupleur*. I also wrote that the survival of the narrator/observer is a hopeful sign for humanity. The hope for humanity located in these three works echoes the optimism of the counter-culture in France in the sixties that societal change was possible through manifestations, sit-ins, and consciousness-raising and that, ultimately, the world could become a peaceful, compassionate one.

This study of the dystopian impulse in French literature and film in the sixties provides the framework for future investigations of French dystopian fiction in the seventies and beyond. Specifically, I invite scholars to examine the two dystopic films of Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, *Délicatessen*, and *La Cité des enfants perdus*. Additionally, I suggest that future studies include Marie Darrieussecq's novel, *Truismes*, and Michel Houellebecq's three dystopic texts, *Les Particules élémentaires*, *Plateforme*, and *La Possibilité d'une île* (2005). This dissertation may be used as a point of departure, but future researchers should be aware of the changes that occur in dystopian works of the eighties and nineties as observed by English and North American critics.

During the mid-1980s one notices a shift in the content of many dystopias. Lyman Tower Sargent claims that it is the beginning of the "critical dystopia," which he defines as "a textual mutation that self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional

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spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive

imaginative sustenance and inspiration" (141). Tom Moylan affirms that

poststructuralism and postmodernism affected this change to a new dystopia as well as

post-capitalism and the power struggle between conservatives and liberals. He states:

> Challenging capitalist power as well as conservative rule—and refusing
>
> the false 'utopianism' of reformist promises from neoliberals and
>
> compromised social democrats with their bad-faith exercises in 'third
>
> way' solutions—the new dystopias have rekindled the cold flame of
>
> critique and have thereby become a cultural manifestation of a bread-scale
>
> yet radically diverse alliance politics that is emerging as the twenty-first
>
> century commences. (142)

It is Michel Houellebecq's three turn-of-the-millenium dystopian novels that best

exemplify this type of critical dystopia in French literature.

At present, Houellebecq is the *enfant terrible* of French literature and his best-

selling novels have created much controversy over their anti-Muslim sentiments, sexually

explicit content, politically incorrect language, and jabs at liberal political views. He has

been compared to Jean-Marie Le Pen, the right-wing politician intent on deporting Arab

immigrants, the Marquis de Sade, Céline, and Albert Camus. He has been labeled a

misanthropist, an *agent provocateur*, a misogynist, and a racist. His fans, on the other

hand, consider him a brilliant novelist, a prophet, a breath of fresh air. Houellebecq is the

leading figure of a new movement in France known as "*déprimisme*." This trend appears

similar to the dystopian turn in literature in the twentieth century described by Walsh in

his study, *From Utopia to Nightmare*. All three of Houellebecq's novels are part of the

increasing popularity of dystopian fiction in France. *Les Particules élémentaires*, a

condemnation of the sexual revolution and the *Soixante-Huitards*, has been called a

"dystopian, quasi-pornographic" novel.[179] Another critic attests to the novel's dystopic

energies, even though she inaccurately refers to them as "science fiction":

> In *The Elementary Particles*, it was a science fiction ending in which a
>
> DNA physicist eliminates natural selection, mutation, disease, decay and
>
> death. This was represented as a utopian escape from bodily limitations,
>
> but was obviously a tragicomic vision of a post-Christian, scientifically
>
> fabricated hell.[180]

She also refers to the novel as "disgusting though brilliant." *Les Particules élémentaires*

is a long view of the human condition as is *Plateforme*, his prophetic novel that eerily

anticipates the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 and the terrorist

bombing of a tourist hangout in Bali. One critic points to its dystopic "cautionary

message" and "string of essay-ready peregrinations on darkening world affairs and

dismal human nature."[181] In *La Possibilité d'une île* almost all living humans are clones

who have almost no contact with each other, in a world devastated by environmental

disaster. One critic parallels this work to science fiction, but it is, more accurately, a

dystopia. He states, "Houellebecq's ambition has been to mingle the libertinage of

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[179] Emily Eakin, "An Unabashed Extremist of Sex and Violence," *New York Times on the Web* 2 March 2003, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article.html>.

[180] Judith Shulevitz, "The Dark Side of France," *New York Times on the Web* 2 June 2002, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html>.

[181] Janet Maslin, "Tourism, Sex and a Generous Dose of Contempt," *New York Times on the Web* 21 July 2003, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html>.

Laclos with the science fiction of Philip K. Dick, and thereby show us the apotheosis of the self as a totally antisocial entity."[182] There are several classical dystopic devices in the novel: euthanasia, satire, the protagonist is writing his memoirs to make sense of the world around him and to reinscribe himself in history, and there is a "saving remnant"—a few "savage" real humans who have somehow survived. Houellebecq's three dystopian novels have received both negative and positive critical responses—they are undeniably the most talked about novels of the twenty-first century in France.

Another dystopist who deserves further study is Marie Darrieussecq. Her bestseller, *Truismes*, a political satire of a young woman's metamorphosis into a sow, was nominated for a *Prix Goncourt*. One critic discusses its dystopian setting:

> Marie Darrieussecq's ham-fisted fable, *Pig Tales*, is set in a **dystopic** future Paris where the euro may be the official currency but sexual favors are a young woman's preferred asset in the hunt for what really matters: ointments, emollients, perfumes and other pleasures of the flesh. It is hell's very own health spa, Canyon Ranch as imagined by Hieronymus Bosch.[183]

It is written as a memoir by the protagonist as proof that, before she transformed into a pig, she was, indeed, a woman. In *Truismes*, Darrieussecq condemns the beauty industry, satirizes right-wing politicians, ruthless corporate executives, and religious fanatics.

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[182] Stephen Metcalf, "Clones Behaving Badly," *New York Times on the Web* 11 June 2006, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/11/books/review/11metcalf.html>.
[183] Tobin Harshaw, "Fiction," *New York Times on the Web* 6 July 1997, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html>. (emphasis added)

Interestingly, another dystopist, Jean-Luc Godard, has bought the film rights to this increasingly popular story.

Dystopian films, as well as novels, are finding an enthusiastic audience in contemporary France. *Délicatessen*, set in a post-nuclear future, is similar to *Alphaville* in its hybrid nature. One critic claims that it is a peculiar mix of "apocalyptic rubble and 1940's American kitsch."[184] It has been compared to one of the definitive dystopian films, *Brazil*, for its elaborate visuals and black humor that comines biting satire with slapstick. One critic agrees, "The movie's debts to Terry Gilliam's futuristic *Brazil* are evident."[185] *Délicatessen* won three Cesars (the French Oscars) for best original screenplay, best first film, and best production design in 1991 and it was the number one film in England in 1992. Three years later, in 1995, another dystopian film, *La Cité des enfants perdus*, by the same co-directors, Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, opened in Paris. It is a warning of "the loss of imagination in an overly technologized world," according to one critic.[186] It also won a Cesar for best production design. It is evident that the status of dystopian films, in parallel with dystopian literature, in France is on the rise.

In sum, French dystopian literature and film are not going away. On the contrary, the dystopian genre has become the pre-eminent one in France at the dawn of the twenty-first century. For this reason, more than any other, further examination of French

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[184] Janet Maslin, "Please, How Many Lentils for Your Musical Saw?," *New York Times on the Web* 5 Oct. 1991, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html>.

[185] Caryn James, "This 'Deli' Thrives On Its Blender," *New York Times on the Web* 3 May 1992, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html>.

[186] Stephen Holden, "Out of the Fever Dreams of a Child," *New York Times on the Web* 15 Dec 1995, 30 Oct. 2006 <http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html>.

dystopias needs to be done by critics and scholars. As shown above, there are many

significant works of dystopia left to be explored. What is clearly missing is a theory and

research guide of dystopian literature and film similar to Booker's, but with a focus on

Francophone works. Perhaps, my study will motivate others, as Booker's research

inspired my own, to look closer at a key literary genre of the future.

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