

Struggle to maintain humanity when confronted with social change



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Utilizing multidisciplinary knowledge gained from analysis of both George Orwell's novel 1984 and Fritz Langs' Metropolis grants the individual the ability to better understand the ways in which both texts portray that a major concern is the struggle to maintain what makes us human when confronted by overwhelming social change. Both Orwell and Lang explore this confrontation in light of their differing contexts. Behind Metropolis, Lang foregrounds his own Christian values as the counter to economic pragmatism, ultimately reflecting the influences of his own Catholicism along with the emerging technological advancements of the Weimar Republic. Whilst, Orwell advocates the values that make us human in the face of social changes in political powers, reflecting his fears regarding totalitarian regimes emerging out of WWII.

In Metropolis, Lang presents this confrontation through specific reference to the implications of a social change that privileges values that make the struggle to maintain what makes us human difficult. Maria, being the ultimate depiction of the values that makes us human, foretells to the working class, revealed in the inter-titles, that ' the mediator between the head and the hands must be the heart'. By metaphorically representing this process as a person i. e. Freder, Lang is accentuating the role of human values in reforming the societal structures' power, ultimately reflecting his intentions of Metropolis being a contextual message to the German people for a peaceful revolution. This foregrounds Langs Catholic values as central to the continuation of what makes us human. This is contrasted against the intertextuality of the original Tower of Babel story where a long shot displaying the exploited slaves reveals the implications of the misuse of

power of the upper class and how such power ultimately leads to the struggle to maintain human values. In further exploring this confrontation, Lang employs a symbolic exclamation from a worker “ someone has to stay at the machine”, emphasizing the influence of the machine age upon the selfish morality dictating current society. Lang further employs a medium shot portraying Freder replacing the worker which makes evident Freder’s willingness to relieve the oppression of the worker; that the preservation of their lives is Lang’s privileging of the values that make us human that would otherwise be lost in the midst of the party’s control. A long shot then portrays the religious iconography in the crucifixion pose of Freder working the machine. This reinforces Lang’s Catholic values and his idea of Freder as a christ like savior who will restore the values that make us human.

Orwell similarly makes this confrontation evident in 1984 where social change that privileges power ultimately deprives any forms of emotional human connections. The installation of the party into power creates a new hierarchical structure where their unilateral desires are for ‘ power...power, pure power”. The repetition of ‘ power’ reinforces that its preservation is the driving force behind their oppressive crushing of the values of love that make us human as metaphorically conveyed in ‘ power is tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together”. This diminishing of values is reflected through the restrictions on emotional relationships, based on Orwell’s fears of the continuity of totalitarian states and their devaluing of humanity. In hopes to counter the struggle to remain human he presents love as the antithesis to these structures through Winston and Julia’s relationship: “ a battle, the climax a victory... a blow struck against the

party” as Winston believes they ‘ could not alter (their) feelings’. The metaphorical military imagery aligns the relationship with the revolt implicit in it, but also their love that conflicts with the party’s control. However, O’Brien highlights the ineffectual nature of their opposition to authority in the metaphors “ You are a flaw in the pattern...a stain that must be wiped out”. Their inconsequential revolt and struggle is further reinforced through Winston’s torture as he exclaims: “ Do it to Julia! Not me!... Tear her face off, strip her to the bones”. The graphic imagery within the imperative possesses violent connotations of suffering and evokes the horror of what Orwell is foreshadowing; that such totalitarian regimes destroy what makes us human. This further reflects O’Brien’s statement to Winston: “ We do not merely destroy our enemies, we change them” foreshadowing Stalin’s totalitarianism where the Party’s fabrication of reality; “ Who controls the past controls the future.” contributes to the demise of human morality, metaphorically rendering Winston a “ lonely ghost uttering a truth”. In Metropolis, Lang presents a resolution through a return to human values, Orwell presents no such resolution, and only a struggle, as O’Brien metaphorically asserts: “ We shall squeeze you empty ... fill you with ourselves”, highlighting the irrelevance of attempting to oppose the struggle.

In Metropolis, Lang continues to portray the same confrontation between what makes us human and the social change that diminishes that. Freder’s symbolic hallucination depicts a long shot portraying the workers being consumed as a sacrifice to ‘ Moloch’ for the economic desires of Frederson. In Personifying the workers’ actions as an act of satiating the machines: “ Who feeds the machines with their own flesh?”, Lang is reflecting on his

warnings that the values that make us human are lost as a result of embracing new technology arising from social change as he found through his experiences of the Weimar republic's privileging of automation. That for the sake of the 'revolution of a mechanical wheel', as revealed through the intertitle describing the Son's club, these values are ultimately diminished. In alluding to the tradition of child sacrifice through the Moloch image, the workers are metaphorically made into "the living fodder for the machines". This highlights Lang's warning about the innate dangers of oppression, as he saw emerging out of the economic imperatives within the Weimar Republic. Despite this, Lang foregrounds mediation so that the struggle to maintain humanity is countered. The reverse angles between Grot and Frederson that suggest a space between them is contradicted against the subsequent two-shot of them standing on level ground on either side of the frame, with Maria in the middle facilitating mediation between their respective values. Lang is attempting to offer a positive reconciliation so as to counter the oppression of what makes us human arising from the social change in political powers.

Orwell portrays no such mediation in 1984, only a valuing of power that engenders a similar disregard for others as it does in Metropolis. Orwell evokes the significance of the values of love that make us human, identified by Winston as the 'human heritage'. Winston reflects this through recalling his mother's gestures: "the enveloping protecting gesture of the arm..." The present participle verbs "enveloping" and "protecting" suggest that her gestures, even when taken away through social change, extend beyond the ordinary parameters of time. This reinforces Winston's hope of the preservation of these values, that "if the object was not to stay alive but to

stay human”, the goal is the continuity and preservation of the human heritage foregrounded in his mothers gestures. However, Orwell presents the struggle of the diminishing of this ‘ human heritage’ to a mindless loyalty in the midst of the party’s oppression through reference to his mother again who ‘ had sacrificed herself to a conception of loyalty that was...unalterable’. The past tense ‘ sacrificed’ foreshadows the self-sacrifice she represented that has been lost which is further echoed in the drowning metaphor of his mother and sister ‘ in the saloon of a sinking ships, looking up at him through the darkening water’. This recurring motif and the present participle “ darkening” further reinforce the irrevocable struggle to maintain the values that make us human. These ideas are ultimately foreshadowing Orwell’s fears of the control of totalitarian dictatorships he found emerging out of WWII.