

Comparative study of the intertextual perspectives in metropolis and 1984



A comparative study of the intertextual perspectives in George Orwell's political satire *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Fritz Lang's expressionist film *Metropolis* provide a deeper understanding of rebellion, manipulation and power in a highly conformist society. These dystopian texts accentuate the similar values of individuals whilst facing moral decay of humanity that reflects different contextual influences. Orwell's distaste for Hitler's Nazi regime and Stalin's USSR is unveiled through the individual rebellion against the totalitarian regime and the post world-war 1 hyper-inflation that reduced Germany to poverty shapes Lang's film. The iconography in *Metropolis* reflects the mechanical German zeitgeist that demonizes industrialism.

The desire for liberation in 1984 is evident in response to the enigmatic presence of Big brother and the ubiquitous placement of tele screens, that create a constant atmosphere of fear and isolation. The architecture in the novel represents power as the four buildings that divide the entire apparatus of government ' dwarf' the other buildings. The high social control of Oceania is evident in the counterintuitive slogan ' FREEDOM IS SLAVERY WAR IS PEACE IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH' thus provoking the desire for liberation from the protagonist Winston Smith.

What is revealed in the comparative study in the opening sequence of *Metropolis* also sends a message that existing power structures are in the need of reform, as the audience views the industrial enslavement of humans. The first view of the workers is a lethargic, uniformed mass with slow, staccato movements leaving and entering a shift of labour-intensive work. This is paired with somber lighting and depressing music that mirrors the sound of machinery. The motif of the 10 hour clock represents that the

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workers lives are dictated and governed by their 10 hour shifts. The second sequence juxtaposes the first as the audience is introduced to the erotic playground of the rich. The biblical allusion to the ' Edenistic' gardens expresses the vast gulf between social classes. When Maria exposes the decadence and sensuality of the Eternal gardens to the sons of the workers, her presence threatens to destabilize the equilibrium Jon Fredersen has created.

The manifestation of manipulation as an agent of social control in Orwell's novel is in the propaganda and information delivered in Hate Week. Hate Week escalates into anarchic behavior as the falsified atrocities committed against Oceania are read aloud, perpetuating the psychological manipulation of the citizens. The population is driven to " wild beast-like roaring" as the enemy switches from Eurasia to Eastasia and " the enemy has always been Eastasia!". Winston commits thoughtcrime through reading Goldstein's book which further liberates him as an individual. Winston is dramatically different to the participants of Hate Week that are deliriously brainwashed, which illuminates Orwell's view of the human condition and reflects Stalin's effort to replace religion with devotional services to the State.

The oppressive power of the government and/or upper classes in both texts emphasizes the moral degradation of society through political allegory.

Violence as a result of social control and manipulation as a catalyst of rebellion are themes integrated in the Robot Maria sequence in Metropolis.

The value of the femme fatale is exacerbated in the voyeurism of the stares of the workers as the robot Maria dances, pulls back her clothing to reveal

flesh and convinces the workers of rebellion. The exaggerated acting and <https://assignbuster.com/comparative-study-of-the-intertextual-perspectives-in-metropolis-and-1984/>

dramatic lighting accentuates this scene's message that mechanization and the oppression of the lower class will only end in revolt. Criticism of the capitalist modernity is mirrored in the blankness and automatic character of Robot Maria.

The dehumanization of Robot Maria in *Metropolis* can be connected to the dehumanization of the population of Oceania in *1984*. This carries a heavy warning from Orwell for readers to not be blinded by propaganda. The utopia and rebellion in *1984* is seen through the paperweight that is a symbol of Julie and Winston's love. When the paperweight breaks and shatters to pieces it expresses how small and unachievable individual rebellion is. The futility of rebellion manifests in Orwell's attitude of hopelessness as the ending states "He had won the war over himself. He loved Big Brother". Orwell's values of privacy, individuality, freedom of thought and free will are displayed in the dramatic ending that expresses that there is no hope against a totalitarian regime.

In contrast to *1984*'s negative ending, *Metropolis* carries a message of hope and reconciliation despite the contextual Weimar period that emphasizes the large gap between social classes. The closing sequence has the workers walking up the stairs of the church in a triangular formation which represents cooperation. When the equal synergy between the rulers and those being ruled is established it fulfills the epigram, as "the mediator between the head and the hands must be the heart". The closing of *Metropolis* illustrates Lang's values of hope, reconciliation, unity, cooperation and the importance of freedom from high social control. It also carries a message that the undoing of modernization will only bring destruction.

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Through *Metropolis* and *1984* it becomes abundantly clear that despite different contexts and different values being addressed in the ending, both texts allow for a deeper insight into the desire of freedom, based on similar themes that created such unbearable conditions for humanity to survive. Both texts provide a deeper understanding of the values and attitudes of the composer, that are orchestrated through texts for the audience to engage in the moral allegory and to be aware of the dire warnings being communicated.