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Title

**Automation in E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909)
and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952): A Comparative
Study.**

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Dedication

I whole-heartedly dedicate this research paper to my family and all those who encouraged and supported me.

Acknowledgment

My thanks and deep appreciations go to my supervisor Dr Seddiki for her support, encouragement and precious guidance. In addition, this dissertation would not have been possible without the ceaseless support of my family and the right use of the “Machine.”

Abstract

This research is a comparative study that examines automation in E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952). It argues that the misuse and misapplication of technology leads to the triumph of automation and the denigration of man as well as society. To carry out this research paper, Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1929) and Neil Postman's *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992) stand as the theoretical framework. The analysis of this paper shows *three* main findings. Firstly, man's irrationality is a result of his blind belief in automation and distrust in his social and cultural tenets. Secondly, the exaggerated automation leads to man's enslavement since the machine takes man's jobs and controls him. Last but not least, man's irrational behavior and the machine's control merge into a third complex aspect which is man's inhuman treatment of his fellow men. Forster and Vonnegut stress the importance of a return to the abandoned social and cultural organisms amid the technological boom.

Keywords : E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops*(1909), Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (1952), automation, Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (1929), Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992).

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I. Introduction

“The spirit of our great cities *refuses* to be involuntary. Surrounded by a machine-technique that it has itself created in surprising Nature’s most dangerous secret, the “law”, it seeks to conquer history also technically, "theoretically" and "practically.”¹

The nineteenth century was characterized by profound changes socially, economically and culturally as a consequence of the emergence of automation. Even if automation seems to have brought economical prosperity, individuals were still suffering under it. By the turn of the twentieth century technology witnessed its boom. The invention of technological devices and gadgets was lauded and encouraged.

The growing dependence on automation begs the questions: to what extent is it beneficial to mankind? Does it (automation) spread social order or decadence and decay? The human and the machine and how the latter reversed the roles from being a mere creation to being the master of the master.

Many writers have tackled the consequences and the deep social changes caused by the increasing dependence of man on automation. Among them are Edward Morgan Forster and Kurt Vonnegut who affirm their worries about the mounting wave of automation. Forster’s *The Machine Stops* (1909) and Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* (1952) offer a new way of conceptualizing the relationship between man and the machine. Both writers inscribe their works in a period of a rising automation chiefly Vonnegut’s. In fact, they portray in their works the relationship between the human being and the machine and how the latter reversed the roles from being a mere creation to being the master of the master.

Review of the Literature

In the light of the above stated facts, the issue of automation has been subject to a wide debate among scholars and researchers. From my readings of Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) and Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), I have noticed that the two works have raised great debate and received a large bulk of criticism.

In his "*The Machine Stops : E.M. Forster's Esoteric Critique of H.G Wells' A Modern Utopia*"(2020), Seamus Flaherty writes that *The Machine Stops* should be read in terms of comparison to H.G Wells *A Modern Utopia*. Flaherty asserts that: "E.M.Forster's dystopian science fiction story *The Machine Stops* was conceived as a critique of H.G.Wells book, *A Modern Utopia*"² He argues that the two works are put together so as to address the issue of the conceptualization of a Utopian society in so far as instead of envisaging a solution H.G. Wells deepens the problem³

Another interesting critical study is Woody Caan's "*Chekhov Corner: 'The Machine Stops' by E.M.Forster*"(2014). Caan compares the futuristic technology described in *The Machine Stops* to nowadays advanced technology. He asserts that humans: "have constant electronic communication that resembles the Internet and Skype and can order from the equivalent of Amazon all the supplies they desire."⁴Caan compares Forster's characters in *The Machine Stops* to those of Albert Camus' *La peste*. In Camus' *La Peste*, Caan asserts that individuals: "react in many different ways to the plague, for varied motives." While "In Forster's novel, the Machine goes wrong gradually, but only Kuno suspects it will not repair itself."⁵

Vonnegut's *Player Piano* has also received substantial criticism from reviewers. The critics that analyzed it shed light on the fact that *Player Piano* is a futuristic book that deals with industrialization and relates events in an imagined dystopic world.⁶

In his “Teaching player Piano – Finding Purpose at the Meadows”(2016), Dan Gathman stresses the idea that amid the technological advancement in an age marked by the omnipresence of gadgetry, chiefly among young people, teaching a class about a book that “questions humanity’s purpose in relation to the benefits and detriments of advanced technology”⁷ is not an easy task. In fact, Gathman believes that teaching such a book to his students has turned out to be beneficial for both him and his class as it awakens the sense of humanity in their souls, the spirit of group-work and beyond all, it opens their eyes on the necessity of using their own minds.

Another interesting critical study about Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* is Peter B. High’s in *An Outline of American Literature* (2000). High believes that Vonnegut’s book relates futuristic events in an apocalyptic world governed by machinery. In it, humans are disenchanting and hopeless, which leads to riots and chaos causing the devastation of the machine’s world.⁸

It is clear that Forster’s *The Machine Stops* (1909) and Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* (1952) have received an avalanche of criticism and been approached from different perspectives. However, the aim of the present paper is to engage a comparative study between the two works leaning on the theoretical framework inspired from the German historian Oswald Spengler in his book *The Decline of the West* (1929) and Neil Postman’s theory of *Technopoly: The surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992). In their books, both Spengler and Postman stand for the idea that the Machine is a contributor in the collapse of civilizations, especially the Western one.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

The above review of literature makes it clear that many studies have been devoted to E.M. Forster’s *The Machine Stops* and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano*.

However, the two authors have not been studied together. The two works have been approached from diverse perspectives and viewpoints; as a response to some Utopianists of the era, as futuristic novels as well as books that question industrialization and capitalism. Consequently, this thesis engages in comparing Edward Morgan Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952) in terms of the irrationality of the human mind, the dehumanization caused by the Machine, the disillusionment caused by the gilded prison of technology as well as the inhumanity of man towards other men. This study focuses on how Forster and Vonnegut portray Western Civilization and Westerners in relation to the Machine. In other words, how automation is seen as a means leading to social collapse and cultural decay.

To conduct the analysis, this paper aims at highlighting Forster's and Vonnegut's skeptic views about the high-tech machinery. In fact, both authors adhere, support and epitomize the idea that the Machine has trapped the human being in the prison of the plethora of smart technological devices and accessories. Moreover, Forster and Vonnegut utilize elements that show the destruction and decay caused by the Machine to the social and cultural tissue. Clearly, this shows that the two authors foreshadow the idea that human control over the Machine has changed. They notice a reversal of roles and rules. After being the "creator" of the Machine, the human being has allowed himself to become the slave of his own creation. Hence, I intend to bring into light the fact that under the "reign of the Machine", the social and cultural fabric has and still undergoes radical changes and metamorphosis from a world perceiving reality as it is to another one blinded by virtuality introduced by the machine. Furthermore, Forster and Vonnegut shed light on the growing consumption of high-tech gadgetry which seems to be persistent until now.

Despite the importance of Forster's and Vonnegut's works, earlier criticism has not deemed it necessary to compare them. The fact that the two works share similarities in terms of thoughts and philosophy as well as themes, constitutes in my opinion a valid justification for comparison. Forster wrote his story at the dawn of the twentieth century, while Vonnegut wrote his novel during the mid-twentieth century; a period of technological invasion. Both authors deal practically with the same issues. This comparative study rests on Spengler's theory *The Decline of the West* (1929) and Neil Postman's *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992). Spengler and Postman believe that the continuous reliance on automation will inevitably result in the decay and collapse of the cultural and social spheres.

To reach my goal, I will divide this research into three sections. The first one is the Methods and Materials. In the second section, I will provide the results and findings reached. The third one will be devoted to the discussion. Last but not least, this thesis ends with a general conclusion.

Endnotes

¹ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkinson (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 152.

² Seamus Flaherty, “*The Machine Stops*’ : *E. M. Forster’s Esoteric Critique of H. G. Well’s A Modern Utopia*”, Wisely online library, History/ Volume105, Issue 366 (May 2020) : accessed on May 25, 2021. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13022>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Woody Caan, “ *Chekhov Corner : The Machine Stops by EM Forster*”, Journal of Public Health, Cambridge CB224PA, UK, Vol37, No.4, pp744-745(October 2014) : accessed on November 28, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdu081>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶Jared Moore, “*The Price of Mechanization: Vonnegut’s Player Piano in the 2010s*”, IEEE Technology and Society Magazine (December 2019) : accessed on May 20, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MTS.2019.2948436>.

⁷ Dan Gathman, “*Teaching Player Piano- Finding Purpose in the Meadows*”, Kurt Vonnegut Museum&Library (March 2016) : accessed on May 27, 2021. <https://www.vonnegutlibrary.org/teaching-teachers-to-teach-vonnegut>.

⁸ Peter B. High, *An Outline of American Literature* (New York : Longman Inc., 2000), 198.

⁹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1992) ,70.

II. Methods and Materials :

1. Methods :

To give this research work a theoretical framework, it is significant to make use of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1929) and Neil Postman's *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992) that constitute a solid foundation to maintain the two literary works under study . In this section, I will try to point out the main ideas elaborated by both Spengler and Postman in their books

Importantly, these two theories are appropriate in carrying out this research because both Forster and Vonnegut adhere to the ideas conducted by Spengler and Postman. Furthermore, Forster and Vonnegut are witnesses of an era of unprecedented technological boom in terms of machinery and sophisticated gadgetry. Indeed, they express their concern about the mounting power of the machine. They believe that humans are increasingly enslaved by automation and are losing their social and cultural values under the machine's control. The two authors support a return to the social and cultural values as well. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that despite their different backgrounds and their belonging to two different nationalities as being British and American respectively, Forster and Vonnegut oppose the enslavement of humans by the machine.

Spengler's *The Decline of the West* is relevant to the study of automation in the two works because it deals with the reasons behind the decline of the Western world. For him, automation and technology will eventually lead to the collapse of the West as he considers culture and civilization as "the living body of a soul and the mummy of it."¹ If taken care of, culture and civilization will prosper. In case the social and cultural fabrics are infected, civilization will decay. Spengler thinks that preserving culture is

the key to halt civilizations from degeneration. In this respect, he defines culture as: “the *prime phenomenon* of all past and future world-history.”²

Spengler is pessimistic about the future of Western Civilization. He asserts that like all civilizations before it, the Western one is no exception, it is going to collapse. According to him, civilizations undergo a cycle of existence that he divides into three main stages: birth, growth, decline and death. Like all the great civilizations at the image of the Roman, Egyptian, Babylonian, Mayan ... etc, the Western one is doomed. Spengler writes that “every Culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age.”³

Spengler notices that the reasons of the cultural change bifurcate mainly into two parts. The first one is man’s great interest in the artificial virtual world. The second part is mass concentration in the metropolis. Regarding man’s interest in the virtual and artificial world, Spengler thinks that it is one of the signs of the Western decline as it transforms real life into an artificial one. Clearly, at this level “reason becomes God and scientists become priests.”⁴ As far as man’s mass concentration in the metropolis is concerned, the historian believes that it changes man’s acquired cultural and social tenets to the new ones of the metropolitan life. The fact that the world’s populace is concentrated in towns and live massed in urban zones attracted by a materialistic artificial world is the same facet of the cultural change. Spengler states: “[...] a final and purely practical world-sentiment of a tired megapolitans who had a close-off Culture behind them and no future before them.”⁵ This change in the basic values in society is in fact, a visible and clear sign of cultural degradation that will lead to the decadence of civilization. In a dying civilization, according to Spengler, skepticism spreads among individuals. They lose faith in their social and cultural tenets. The greed of some people will create wars which justify violence and inhuman behavior of men towards his fellow

men. Thus, any civilization reaching this stage, according to Spengler is doomed and nothing can be done to halt its demise.

For his part, Neil Postman in his book *Technopoly: The surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992), adheres to the idea that culture is primordial for the continuity of the group and the solidity of the social tissue. It is the abuse of technology that has created humans who are alienated without realizing it. According to him, cultures are divided into three types : Tool-Using cultures, Technocracies and Technopolies.⁶ As far as the West is concerned, Postman believes that the latter is pushing itself to the ultimate extremities of technocracy⁷ because Western individuals abandoned their culture⁸. As a result, the West is becoming a technopoly: a civilization under the monopoly of technology.

As its title suggests, Postman's provocative work *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992), is a profound analysis of the cultural collapse of the West. To repeat the author's words: " Technopoly is a form of a cultural AIDS, which I here use as an acronym for Anti-Information Deficiency Syndrom"⁹. The Western world is living a cultural crisis due to the blind pursuit of technology as a result of the hypnotizing effects of machinery and gadgetry. In this sense, Postman asserts that: "In technopoly, we are surrounded by the wondrous effects of machines and are encouraged to ignore the idea embedded in them. Which means we become blind to the ideological meaning of our technologies"¹⁰.

Postman thinks that the huge advance in technology is paradoxically serving the supremacy of automation over man. As a result, technological innovation is equated with human progress¹¹. Postman's argument goes on demonstrating how technopoly, or what might be referred to as "the monopoly of technology", is controlling human

culture and society as he declares : “ It is important to remember what can be done without computers, and it is important to remind ourselves of what maybe lost when we do use them.”¹²

2-Materials :

2a-Summary of Forster’s The Machine Stops (1909)

The Machine Stops is a short story written by Forster and published in 1909. It is cast in a future determined by the control of the Machine. It is divided into three parts which Forster names respectively: The Airship, The Mending Apparatus and The Homeless. In the story, earth is described as a lifeless place. As a result of the superhuman qualities the Machine possesses, humans have become sub-terranean dwellers under the command of that Machine. Consequently, the latter provides individuals with separate chambers that look like the same all over the globe. In the story, the rooms are described as being identical in size and commodities. Likewise, the Machine supports individuals’ needs by ensuring physical as well as moral assistance. According to the Machine’s protocols, the protagonist Kuno who is a child living apart from his mother, was removed from the nursery like all infants to live on the other side of the world. Unlike his mother Vashti and the majority of humans, the boy questions the omnipotence of the Machine and strives for a world where humanity triumphs.

At the end of the story, the inevitable occurs. Kuno’s concern about the Machine’s inability to fix itself becomes real. The Machine ceases to work after a small problem in its functioning. As a result, the sub-terranean world it runs collapses as well. Humans start to seek refuge amid the decaying constructions. Air-ships not able to work, chaos is rampant. The apocalypse happens. It is the end of the Machine as well as that of the

human race. What is remarkable is Kuno's declaration to his mother as they are dying. The boy says that they finally touch not through the Machine.

2b-Summary of Vonnegut's Player Piano (1952)

Player Piano is American writer Kurt Vonnegut's debut novel published in 1952. The book is divided into thirty five chapters. It is set in a near future, after World War three. The lack and need of the workforce while most Americans were fighting in the war, pushed the engineers and managers to find the alternative in automated machines that could keep the factories operating. In the novel, Illium, New York is divided into three parts. The first part is Homestead, where the common population lives. The second one is called the other side of the river exclusively reserved for the managers and engineers to where the protagonist Paul Proteus who is the manager of the IlliumWorks belongs. The third part is the machines' territory. After their return from war, most Americans found themselves out of work. Their jobs were taken by the machines and their contribution in the active life is replaced by automation.

The almost mechanized society pushes the "Homesteaders" to react against the prevalence of the Machine by riots and chaos. After being disillusioned by the Machine and the artificial life of Illium, the protagonist Paul Proteus leads the movement. The result is the destruction of all the Machines at the end of the novel. Ironically, individuals start to repair some of these broken machines.

Endnotes

¹ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 353.

² Ibid, 105.

³ Ibid, 107.

⁴ Ibid, 304.

⁵ Ibid, 356.

⁶ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 22.

⁷ Ibid, 65.

⁸ Ibid, 63.

⁹ Ibid, 63.

¹⁰ Ibid, 94.

¹¹ Ibid, 117.

¹² Ibid, 120.

III. Results

After studying Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) and Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952) in the light of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1929) and Postman's *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992), it is noticeable that the two works have in common three main points : the irrationality of the human behavior, man's enslavement by the machine and man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Forster's story appeared in the turn of the twentieth century, whereas Vonnegut's novel is published in the mid-twentieth century: a period of technological boom in America.

At the level of irrationality of man, both works reflect Spengler's and Postman's signs of the declining Western civilization. Forster and Vonnegut devote a part of their writings to evoke man's loss of control over the Machine. Man is shown in a position that legitimizes irrationality. His blind belief in the supposedly unfettered automation made him reject his social and cultural belonging. It is man's exaggerated rationalization that makes him fall a victim of irrationality. By believing that science and technology are the unique source of rationality, he rejects his social and cultural tenets in favor of the machine's.

Secondly, the two writers adopt the idea that man's complete dependence on the Machine has imprisoned him in the gilded jail of technology. Thus, a clear justification of man's enslavement by the Machine. What is remarkable is that in Forster's *The Machine Stops*, the Machine is completely destroyed by the end of the story while in Vonnegut's *Player Piano* the destruction of the Machine is only temporary. Ironically, after all the machines are destroyed, individuals start to repair some of them. This shows a difference in Forster's and Vonnegut's viewpoints. In Forster's work, the destruction of the Machine brings about the collapse of life in the underground world, but not the

sense of humanity and hope since the protagonist Kuno sees and touches his biological mother Vashti. This reflects Forster's optimistic view that in the future humanity may prevail over the Machine. While Vonnegut's ironic ending is a way of showing his pessimistic view about the future of humanity.

Last but not least, Forster's and Vonnegut believe that man is responsible for his own dehumanization as well as others'. Both authors adhere to the idea that man denigrates his fellow man. This is seen in the two works mainly through war. Either in its physical or psychological form war causes mass destruction, disaster and dehumanization. The running leitmotifs of this research are drawn from Spengler's as well as Postman's claims that Western Civilization is collapsing socially and culturally due to the mounting pursuit of technology. Throughout the analysis of Forster's and Vonnegut's works, we understand that the signs of a decaying Western Civilization are omnipresent. The loss of the social and cultural ties as well as the prevalence of automation are the best examples.

In the light of man's limitless trust in automation, Forster and Vonnegut stress the necessity of a return to the social and cultural values instead of the Machine's. They also warn of the drawbacks of the complete adherence to technology. The authors' futuristic visions, especially Forster's, are noticeable in our modern-day society and their warning about the prevalence of the Machine is observable as well today.

IV. Discussion

Chapter One: The Irrationality of the Human Behavior in *The Machine Stops* and *Player Piano*

A. The Irrationality of the Human Behavior in Forster's *The Machine Stops*

Taking into account the influential position of the Machine, the paper under study analyses several manifestations of automation and its relevant relationship with man. This relationship has developed beyond expectations and metamorphosed into a dangerous shift of roles. In a way, man has put himself in the gilded prison of automation.

The Industrial Revolution has paved the way to a tremendous boom in industry. As a result, machinery has reached its apogee and the human demand on manufactured products grew massively. With the introduction of automation to the Western World, mainly at the turn and mid-twentieth century, the mechanic perforation into the social and cultural tissue has grown alarmingly. In other words, the Machine is no more limited to its technical assumed functioning, but it has become a more complex entity defying human capacities. Departing from this, one could argue that the concept of the machine has undergone a transition from being a creation meant to help man to a means of control. Furthermore, the massive integration of the machine into society remodulates both the cultural and social structures. The machine has created a hybrid existence whose echoes have negatively impacted society and culture.

Forster's story is set in an apocalyptic earth on which life is impossible. As a result, humans have been relocated to underground habitations. There, they live in isolation in individual cells in which all physical and mental needs are satisfied by the almighty Machine. People learn to coexist with the latter, under an automated system

that guides their lives. Focusing on the daily lives of the two main characters, Vashti and her son Kuno, one might easily see an opposition in their positions. Vashti is a typical individual who embodies the veneration of the Machine. She literally believes that the almighty Machine is a regulator of all aspects of life including education, communication and human relations. In such a society, human contact has been abolished by the Machine. Instead, every contact is conducted through the Machine by a strictly instant messaging and video conferencing. In a society run by the Machine, pain does not exist and sex is reduced to a mere biological necessity. Kuno, on the other hand, sees that the Machine is changing the social and cultural fabric. He believes that the Machine has deprived him and millions of people like him from living a real life and being with their beloved ones.

Forster deals with three main areas which are respectively: the irrationality of the human behavior, the enslavement caused by the machine to man, and the inhumanity of man to man. The blind pursuit of technological devices and gadgets might be considered as a synonym of irrationality of man's behavior. The fact that man loses his ability to control the machine makes of him a victim of his own creation. In a sense, man's loss of control over the machine has created a new kind of control: a reversed one. It is no more the control of the "creator", but the control of the "creation". Accordingly, in a society governed by automation, man tends to link everything to science and reason. As a result of the over exaggerated rationality in seeking what is rational, man finds himself trapped in irrationality. One of the fiercest opponents of the irrational use of automation is the German historian Oswald Spengler. He sees that this blind belief in science is one of the fundamental signs of a dying culture. He posits that a civilization is considered a dying one when "the tragic world-feeling succumbs to the mechanizing intellect."¹ Cultures enter into a conflict between old and new values

as a result of the mounting attachment to science and reason in explaining all phenomena. As a result of the individual's complete faith in automation, he abandons his old cultural and social values. Spengler reckons that one pivotal point showing the collapse of a civilization is when "reason becomes its God and scientists its priests."² The modern civilized world, especially the Western one, according to Spengler, is undergoing the phase of its death process. This is noticeable at the non-stop level at which people consume, interact with and follow science and the scientifically manufactured products. This, Spengler adds, develops a rupture with the old cultural and social values. When man is wholly scientifically oriented, he devalorizes and denegrates his old values such as rituals, traditions by seeing them as non scientific phenomena. Furthermore, he becomes intolerant toward them. As a result, he sees no need to safeguard them because his main interest is reason, science and scientists. According to Spengler, it is this a very false crowning of reason as "god" and scientists as "priests" that leads to irrational thinking bringing about the end of civilization.

In his work, Forster builds upon the same foundation. He maintains that excessive automation leads to enormous changes within society. This process leads to irrationality. In a world run by the omnipotent Machine, where all aspects of life are under its command, science is perfection and scientists are the initiators of perfection. The perforation of science into the social and cultural tissue tends to infect the rudimental elements of this organism. Consequently, a change is inevitable in society and culture. This shift in society leads undoubtedly to modifications in the way people live and believe.

The result of the Industrial Revolution was a huge growth and demand on manufactured products as well as a non-precedent interest in science and scientists. Despite the fact that at the dawn of the twentieth century there was not huge automation

or what we know nowadays as advanced technology, Forster pictures a world where people no longer recognize themselves as they once were. Science has reached a stage that dictates new rules in society. Belonging to the West or what Spengler calls Western Civilization, the social organization portrayed by Forster is menaced by the Machine. The shift of power from man to the Machine gives privilege to the automatic world that sustains science and men of science. However, the inevitable question that should be asked is: is there a place for rationality amid this unprecedented interest in science and automation? Clearly, the absence of rationality is an absence of social and cultural guidance.

Forster's instant warning about what is happening, and his futuristic vision of what might happen are observed in *The Machine Stops*. The mounting dependence on science, according to him is synonymous to a growing concern about man's rationality. The writer assumes that society is bewitched by science as individuals become completely dependent on it. Indeed, his great worries come not from the right usage of science, but rather from the wrong one. Forster's concern grows when seeing man's incapability to differentiate the two obviously opposing sides of science; the beneficial and the negative one. He reckons that this very inability is a right reason to get alarmed and worried. According to him, individuals neglect the careful- wise-selective use of science. As a result, man's behavior changes to serve science on the expense of his rationality. *The Machine Stops* abounds with scenes that could illustrate this. For instance when the two protagonists, Vashti and her son Kuno start a teleconference conversation initiated by Kuno, the irrationality of the mother becomes flagrant. Separated, one on the Northern hemisphere, the other on the Southern, the boy wants to see his mother. However, her answer seems to be something out of human rationality when the boy asks her to come and see him: Vashti replies: "But I can see you!" She

exclaims “What more do you want?”³ It seems that Vashti’s obsession with science turns her into a mother who does not even care about her son who wants her to pay him a visit after long years of living apart. This fact may reflect to a certain extent what the contemporary life looks like amid not only the prevalence of technology, but its misuse.

The misuse of science is considered as a factor leading to the irrationality of the human behavior. Forster believes that the blind pursuit of automation and the belief in scientific achievements regardless of the negative effects they could engender is nothing but a sign of an irrational behavior. The best example from his work is Vashti’s answer to her son Kuno when he expresses his realistic ideas about the Machine. Vashti replies: “ Oh, hush ! You mustn’t say anything against the Machine.”⁴ Vashti’s misuse of science pushes her to the limit. She venerates the Machine to the point of advising her son not to express his true ideas about the Machine’s control. Actually, as portrayed in *The Machine Stops*, individuals embody the picture of selfish beings living in individual hexagonal rooms where all their needs are fulfilled by the Machine. The misuse of automation in Forster’s story reveals the complete reliance on the machine in the slightest functions and needs. Vashti’s days are describes as a monotonous routine lifeless existence as expressed in this example : “ She [Vashti] made the room dark and slept ; she awoke and made the room light ; she ate and exchanged with her friends, and listened to music and attended lectures ; she made the room dark and slept. Above her, beneath her, and around her, the Machine hummed eternally.”⁵ Such a life makes of man a dumb idiot being on the one hand and shows the degradation of life to a mere virtual existence on the other hand. Vashti’s so called friends are all virtual ones. She has thousands without knowing a single one in reality.

In the society described by Forster, individuals live alone in a room they are never allowed to leave. In such a society, the social and cultural ties are abandoned; a sign that accelerates the process of a decaying society according to Spengler. For him: “the degree of interrelation between one’s world and another’s fixes the limit at which understanding becomes self-deception.”⁶ Based on this, it is clear that *The Machine Stops* is a picture of a world where the social ties are neglected. In the story, real relationships between individuals cease to exist. When reading the story, one feels that the gap grows more and more between individuals. Consequently, understanding becomes a real problem and the limits between individuals of the same social and cultural background become a visible hard nut to crack. Forster creates through his two protagonists an opposing duality. Vashti, the mother and role model seems to be the incarnation of the irrational individual. Paradoxically, Kuno, the son embodies the picture of an adult rational man who is completely aware and conscious of the disadvantages of the misuse of science and the exaggerated trust accorded to the Machine. It becomes clear that the rudimental element of society which is the family is infected.

This deficiency starting from society’s kernel core extends to reach the whole social organism. In this respect, when Kuno invites his mother to pay him a visit, she finds a thousand excuses to delay the meeting as if she is controlled by something commanding her not to meet her own son. Moreover, she insists that the boy must be quick when he contacts her through a video conference call as she goes on : “I do not expect anything important will happen for the next five minutes – for I can give you fully five minutes, kuno.”⁷ Vashti’s tone gets more irritated: “Be quick !”, she says, her irritation returning. “Be quick Kuno, here I am in the dark wasting my time.”⁸ Even on the teleconference call, Vashti seems to deny her son’s request. In fact, she rejects

Kuno and justifies this with her tight schedule. Due to her obsessive attachment to the Machine, she loses her rationality to the extent of neglecting her own son to satisfy the machine's needs and directions.

As a result of the interrupted relationship between members belonging to the same social and cultural tissue, communication loses sense. The absence of communication between people is a serious issue. In *The Machine Stops*, the loss of physical communication could easily be observed. The only permitted means of communication is teleconferencing or instant messaging. This, in fact, is what astonishes Vashti and makes her wonder why would Kuno ask her for a physical communication (a visit). Instead, she prefers to receive a message from her son as exemplified in the story: "Why could you not send it by pneumatic post?"⁹ Physical communication is replaced by a virtual one. The addiction to this kind of communication kills the will for the real physical communication. Forster, depicts Vashti as an addict to the virtual communication. The writer describes: "She knew several thousand people."¹⁰

Astonishingly, Forster's portrayal of virtual communication is futuristic. What he describes in the beginning of the twentieth century could be witnessed today. One can easily see how many fans and followers one might get on social media platforms. They may be counted in thousands as in Vashti's case and even in millions. The individual interacts and communicates with them (fans) without knowing any one of them physically. In this respect, Spengler declares that : " [...] individuals' worlds as lived and experienced by men of one culture or spiritual community are interrelated, and on the greater or lesser degree of communicability of intuitions, sensations and thoughts from one to another."¹¹ Forster's concern grows after he notices the absence of communication not only in its physical form, but it becomes totally virtual. Due to man's addiction to technology and its misapplication, the human being finds himself

trapped in irrationality; this urges the writer to warn individuals of the consequences of the misuse of technology.

B. The Irrationality of the Human Behavior in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*

There are three main aspects that Vonnegut deals with in his work : the irreasonability of the human behavior, the dehumanization caused by the machine to man, and the inhumanity of man to man. Accordingly, the uncontrollability of technology might be seen as an equivalent of irrationality of man's behavior since he loses his capacity to control what he himself has created. This might be seen as one of the fundamental signs of a dying culture. Spengler believes that a civilization starts to collapse when individuals worship reason and put all their faith in science and scientists¹². At the very moment when individuals are bewitched by the 'charm' of the scientific world, the vast and deep ocean of technology, according to Spengler, they reject some of their old manners. Humans become more inculcated in technology; their new world. They become alienated with their rituals and traditions. When devaluation and degradation of the old values takes place, people develop a sense of intolerance toward their old way of living.

Vonnegut departs from the same idea. He believes that the tremendous changes in society are the by-product of automation. Being applied to practically all aspects of daily life, science has made and still makes huge modifications in society. Likewise, it seems clear that the successive enormous changes such as the boom in automobile usage, the introduction of the jet plane and the television set in the American society during the mid-twentieth century came like an unexpected avalanche. Being the best representative of the Western Civilization, the American society witnessed a period of

transition in which the technological advances set new rules in society keeping no place for rationality. This means the digression of the American social and cultural values. Vonnegut warns about the negative results of man's total dependence on science. The writer believes that man's inability to recognize science's beneficial side from what is not, is a cause for concern.

To Vonnegut, science should be used prudently as well as wisely. As an illustration from *Player Piano*, one might clearly see this with the protagonist Paul Proteus' answer to the prosecutor: "Machines and organization and pursuit of efficiency have robbed the American people of liberty and the pursuit of happiness."¹³ Vonnegut expresses his own disillusionment through that of Paul Proteus' after his realization that Machines have changed one of the greatest American ideals which is the American dream.

The writer expresses his deep concern about the American society. He shows how the Americans' feverish dependence on machines contributes to the loss of rationality. The novel's protagonist Paul Proteus, the manager of the Illium works, is shown at the very beginning of the novel as a man of science who loses his rationality because of his blind reliance on it. As an example from the novel, a scene where Paul Proteus asks Doctor Bud to fabricate a sort of a device that will indicate his cat where she can find mice. Paul declares: "I want some sort of signaling device that will tell this cat where she can find a mouse."¹⁴ Such a request indicates that even the natural and instinctive abilities of the cat that consist of chasing mice are doubted because of the prevalence and control of the machine. Being influenced by automation, Doctor Bud reinforces Paul's view by answering: "You'd need some kind of sensin' element that could smell a mouse."¹⁵ What strikes more is the fact that a small mouse is capable of damaging wires and hi-tech spare parts manufactured by great engineers and put under

their own protection as well as that of the machines. Both characters miss the fact that a cat has the natural ability to smell a mouse with no need or assistance by a signaling device to do it. It seems that the two scientists are highly influenced by the machine. Their deep interest in science and technology overcomes their rational thinking to the point of doubting as well as denying the natural and instinctive functions. In a way, the two characters look like idiots rather than men of science. Vonnegut's concern about the irrationality of the American individual is described in another scene by the barber Homer Bigley : " Used to be sort of high and mighty, sort of priests, those doctors and lawyers and all, but they're beginning to look more and more like mechanics."¹⁶ Vonnegut explains how the once respected and admired elite has changed into a kind of automata due to its denial of the old social values and its bound ties to automation.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist Paul Proteus passes through three transitional phases. He develops his psyche from irrationality to questioning, then to consciousness at the very end of the novel as he becomes the leader of the revolt organized by the Ghost Shirt Society. Indeed, Vonnegut develops his character's personality to awaken his rationality and consciousness about what is happening and what might happen. In this sense, the writer asserts : " Paul sometimes wondered if he wouldn't have been more content in another period of history."¹⁷ This example stands for Paul's questioning about his present situation in which there is something wrong going on. As a third step in the development of the protagonist's personality, Paul reaches consciousness. He becomes aware of his irrational thinking. As a result, he leads at the end of the novel a revolt against the machines. In this respect he declares: " Better to be nothing than a blind doorman at the head of civilization's parade."¹⁸ He prefers to degrade himself from the artificial prestige in which he was living than to ignore his rationality and above all his sense of humanity.

Like Forster, Vonnegut also creates a duality between the main character Paul Proteus and his wife Anita. As Paul's personality develops toward consciousness, he recognizes the irrationality of his thinking as well as thousands or even millions of people like him. When he accompanies his wife to Homestead he insists : " I brought you here in order to get what we've got, Anita, we have, in effect, traded these people out of what was the most important thing on earth to them– the feeling of being needed and useful, the foundation of self respect."¹⁹ Anita's irrational thinking is well expressed in her answer: "They [Homesteaders] all look perfectly well fed to me."²⁰ Paul's intention is to stimulate his wife's rationality by introducing her to the humble life of the people in Homestead. An occasion to see with her own eyes how negative the automated life they are living is. On the one hand, machines have taken those people's jobs. On the other, life looks more vivid in Homestead than in Illium because of the absence of complete reliance on machines there.

Anita, who is under the charm of the machine's prestige of Illium takes the Homesteaders for sub-human creatures. Her irrationality pushes her to degrade even humans like her because of the simple fact of not belonging to Illium where all is run by machines. In this respect Aldous Huxley states : " In order to fit into these organizations, individuals have had to deindividualize themselves, have had to deny their native diversity and conform to a standard pattern, have had to do their best to become automata."²¹ Anita, like thousands or millions of individuals across Illium have deindividualized and conformed themselves to be human automata. Their uncontrollable faith in automation costs them the loss of their rationality.

Eventhough the physical communication exists between Paul and his wife, it seems that Anita's irrational mind prevents her from understanding her husband's rational views. As the novel develops, communication between the couple becomes

shallow. Anita withdraws herself gradually as Paul advances toward rationality. In this sense, Spengler explains, “ the degree of interrelation between one’s world and another’s fixes the limit at which understanding becomes self-deception.”²² Based on this, one might easily understand that Paul’s and Anita’s ideas are no longer turning around the same orbit. Paul’s new ideas and beliefs seem to Anita irrational. Her irrationality pushes her to see the rational irrational, and vice versa. It is out of question to her to change her lifestyle, her friends, her machines and her environment to fulfill Paul’s. Thus, being in two opposing worlds, understanding becomes a paradox. This encourages Anita to leave Paul and stick to her own irrational world.

Throughout his work, Vonnegut entertains the reader with several scenes describing the irrationality of American individuals in *Illium*. In one of those scenes he satirizes the irrationality of an engineer who manufactured a checker player named Checker Charley. The engineer asks for a contest between his checker player and Paul Proteus. After Checker Charley’s defeat and destruction, Paul asserts : “ If Checker Charley was out to make chumps out of men, he could damn well fix his own connexion.”²³ In another occasion, Vonnegut explains how hard it is to be rational among an irrational majority. He exemplifies this in his book through the character of the writer’s wife who accompanies the Shah of Bratpuhr as a prostitute. After her explanation that her husband (the writer) wrote a manuscript with an antimachine theme, he is dispossessed and there is no job left except what she is doing, the Shah replies : “ I’m proud to say that he’s (the writer) one of the few men on earth with a little self-respect left.”²⁴ The Shah understands how dangerous telling something against the machine is.

In *Player Piano*, Vonnegut warns the Americans about the negative changes brought by technology. He explains how the whole society has changed. One of these

drawbacks is irrationality caused by man's feverish use of technology and technological devices. The writer is not against technology, but against its misapplication.

Endnotes

¹ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929) ,159.

² Ibid, 304

³ E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 92.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 165.

⁷ E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London, Penguin Books, 2001), 91.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 91.

¹¹ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 165.

¹² Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 304.

¹³ Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York : Rosetta Books, LLC, 2000), 290.

¹⁴ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 190.

¹⁷ Ibid, 12.

¹⁸ Ibid, 219.

¹⁹ Ibid., 164

²⁰ Ibid, 165.

²¹ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York : Rosetta books, LLC, 2000), 22.

²² Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 165.

²³ Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York : Rosetta Books, LLC, 2000), 60.

²⁴ Ibid, 226.

Chapter Two: The Enslavement of the Human Being by the Machine in *The Machine Stops* and *Player Piano*

A-The Enslavement of the Human Being by the Machine in *The Machine Stops*

In the second chapter of this work, I intend to shed light on the aspect of the dehumanization caused to man by the Machine in the two works. In reality, after man's loss of rationality, he goes beyond that to be enslaved by the Machine. As a result of his irrationality, the individual accepts to be under automation's command and control.

Forster's *The Machine Stops* treats the aspect of the enslavement of the human being by the Machine. The writer's concern for the mounting reliance on the machine and the complete trust in it encouraged him to write *The Machine Stops*. Regarding Forster, Lionel Trilling asserts : "He is one of the thinking people who were never led by thought to suppose they could be more than human and who, in bad times, will not become less."¹ Although the degree of automation during the first decade of the twentieth century was not equal to today's, Forster's futuristic vision is remarkable in this work. In his story, he pictures a world that develops an intricate relationship with the Machine; a world in which all aspects of the human life are run by machinery.

It is worth mentioning that nowadays big businesses, government operations, industrial infrastructure, economic transactions, stock exchange markets etc are run by machines. In the light of the mounting dependence on the technological assistance, it becomes evident that almost all marketing data and confidential information are stored in computers. However, what is questionable here is the safety of the stored information and data. All it takes is a small mistake; an error in the system of a hundred computers is capable of engendering great losses to giant firms and paralyzing whole countries. In *The Machine Stops*, Forster warns

men to not rely completely on the Machine. The result is seen by the end of the story when the machine ceases to work. In this respect, Neil Postman asserts: “We are surrounded by the wondrous effects of machines and are encouraged to ignore the idea embedded in them. Which means we become blind to the ideological meaning of our technologies.”² It is clear from Postman’s declaration that the more one gets obsessed with machinery, the more he fails to discern the right from the wrong. As a result of the complete trust in automation, the individual dehumanizes himself by over exaggerating the machine’s miracles. Likewise, man degrades himself to the point of being the slave of his creation.

The Machine Stops is not only a mere malfunction in the system of the giant Machine, it is more complex than that. The end of the Machine is linked to the end of humanity. Because of the irrationality of man, his end is related to that of the machine he once created. Forster believes that the man’s dependence on automation is nothing but a dehumanization of the status of man. The writer describes in his work a world where life on the surface of earth is impossible. As a result, humans live in sub-terranean isolated individual rooms. In this world, all human needs are governed by the almighty Machine. Throughout the story, Unlike her son, who believes that the giant Machine is : “ much but it is not everything”³ , Vashti idealizes the Machine and develops a kind of fear toward it, especially when Kuno says : “ I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine.”⁴ Her answer seems to confirm a valid fear of the Machine as she replies: “Oh, Hush ! You mustn’t say anything against the Machine.”⁵ Vashti’s veneration of the omnipotent Machine confirms Kuno’s statement when addressing her: “ You talk as if a god has made the Machine. I believe that you pray to it when you are unhappy.”⁶ It seems that the supreme power that runs all aspects of life is transforming individuals into worthless beings. Likewise, the Machine is depriving individuals of their skills and is replacing them by automated ones. In this sense, Neil Postman believes that this dehumanization caused by the Machine : “ is what happens when

institutional life becomes inadequate to cope with too much information. It is what happens when a culture, overcome by information generated by technology, tries to employ itself as a means of providing clear direction and humane purpose.”⁷

The addiction to technology is illustrated in Forster’s female character Vashti. Not only does she venerate the omnipotent Machine, but she also justifies its unfettered abilities by reducing hers. The social and cultural construction created by Forster in *The Machine Stops* is partially defeated by the technological boom. In the story, individuals tend to be surpassed by the information flow generated by the Machine. They can no longer keep the same pace, which leads them to sacrifice their culture in order to justify the prevalence of automation. As an illustration from the story Forster writes: “[...] the civilization that had mistaken the functions of the system, and had used it for bringing people to things, instead of bringing things to people. Those funny old days, when men went for change of air instead of changing the air in their room !”⁸ Hence, man’s irrational behavior in his pursuit of a justification to the legitimacy of the Machine’s reign might be considered also as a clear reason leading to his own denigration. By doing so, the human being loses the status of “commander” of the machine he created to a mere commanded.

As the machine’s confiscation of man’s place grows more, his enslavement grows flagrant. Humans are no longer needed for what they are since the Machine runs all aspects of life. This might be exemplified in Forster’s depiction of Vashti’s room : “ the room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all she cared for in the world.”⁹ Throughout this short description, one might easily understand that Vashti’s empty room is run by the omnipotent Machine that connects her virtually to the world. The question that must be asked is: how could a human being live while deprived of human warmth ? Being encapsulated in an empty room day and night without a single real human existence is nothing but a dehumanization of the human being. Moreover, the fact of being given a single room, instructed with orders and

deprived of freedom is equivalent to imprisonment. Indeed, this is the gilded jail of technology. The ample example of this enslavement caused by the Machine could be noticed with Vashti who lives in the other hemisphere far from her son Kuno. Postman relates the collapse of the social ties with the uprising of technopoly as he posits : “ As the power of the traditional social institutions to organize perceptions and judgment declines, bureaucracies, expertise, and technical machinery become the principal means by which technopoly hopes to control information and thereby provide itself with intelligibility and order.”¹⁰

Clearly, the inability of the dying cultural and social systems to maintain their tenets and beliefs, according to Postman, is the main factor leading to the omnipresence of automation in humans' life. By doing so, man is facilitating the progression of technopoly, which is equivalent to the digression of his own status as a human. As shown in the story, individuals are appreciated as mere beings pushing on buttons controlled by the almighty Machine. Whether skilled or not, the community living underground is related to the Machine. Its whole existence depends on that of the Machine. In a way, the machine's replacement of man's skills is a time saving and maybe equivalent to more efficiency in performance, but the fact that mechanization takes away jobs from thousands of people could not be ignored. The logical question that should be asked is : what will these humans do ? Since all life requirements are run by the machine, what will man's role in life be ? Is man's role meant to stay enclosed, leading a lonely life in an empty room run by a Machine ? Amid the control of the Machine, the human seems to be reduced to a needless being.

Forster's depiction of the Machine in his story and the drawbacks it engenders socially and culturally goes hand in hand with Neil Postman's ideas about the impacts of what he prefers to name Technopoly. Postman believes that the continuous interest in technology leads the individual to abandon his culture and converts to Technopoly. In this respect, Postman declares,

We proceed under the assumption that information is our friend, believing that culture may suffer grievously from a lack of information, which, of course they do. It is only now beginning to be understood that cultures may also suffer grievously from information glut, information without meaning, information without control mechanisms.¹¹

It is obvious that all of these factors: the total dependence on the machine, man's replacement by the machine and the denial of his culture in favor of technology are contributors to his dehumanization process. Forster finds that amid these factors, the individual degrades himself. The machine takes control over man, who shifts his position to a slave under the Machine's mercy.

Forster believes that the individual as a user might be considered as a real threat to himself and others in case of misusing technology. In the work, the Machine is described as a giant computer-like assemblage that provides all man's needs. The writer opens his story like this: "IMAGINE IF YOU CAN! a small room [...] It is lighted neither by window nor by lamp, yet it is filled with a soft radiance. There are no apertures for ventilation, yet the air is fresh..."¹² This is Forster's description of Vashti's room, which is actually identical to all rooms world-wide. Throughout the depiction, one could sense comfort and well being, but could not forget what life might look like in such a "jail cell." Forster's choice for the expression "IMAGINE IF YOU CAN!" at the very opening of the story holds a double meaning. First, can a human being live enclosed in an underground room all his life? The Second is the connotational suggestion that the writer is questioning man's ability to live under the Machine's command. In both cases, it looks like that man is controlled by the Machine because he simply misapplies and misuses it or is addicted to it. The logical consequence is the dehumanization of the individual under the control of his own creation. A best illustration from *The Machine Stops* is Vashti's blind confidence in the Machine. She misuses concepts when referring to her old values and traditions. By doing so she, willingly or unwillingly, makes an interruption with her culture and society as she considers "All the fear and superstition that existed once have been destroyed by the Machine."¹³ Due to her addiction

to the Machine, she refers to her culture and traditions as “fear and superstition”. However, her son’s reply seems to be a more logical and rational as he tells her: “You are beginning to worship the Machine.”¹⁴

Forster postulates that despite the changes brought by the Machine in what concerns amenities, comfort and economical prosperity, its (the Machine) interference in the social and cultural fabric is destructive. The writer finds that this interference has metamorphosed the social relations and cultural ties to something that makes of man the slave of his own creation. In Forster’s story, technology contributes greatly to the negative remodeling of society and culture. In fact, technology becomes the norm that equals human progress and comfort. Regarding technopoly Neil Postman asserts that: “ it(technopoly) consists in the deification of technology, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes its order from technology.”¹⁵ Likewise, technology is the norm while culture is perceived as a subordinate matter. As portrayed in *The Machine Stops*, all aspects of life and man’s needs are dealt with by the Machine. This is a clear picture of a society seeing technology as the only salvation.

In *The Machine Stops* Vashti could be seen as the incarnation of the individual who is obsessed with technology. She perceives the Machine as a symbol of human progress. According to her, it is thanks to the Machine that the human race survives. In this respect the trio Dirk Lindebaum, Frank den Hon and Mikko Vesa assert : “[...] people have forgotten that they themselves invented the Machine. Worse still, they have come to treat the Machine as some kind of a mystic deity whose needs matter more than their own.”¹⁶ However, Kuno stands against this limitless trust and belief in mechanization. Unlike his mother, the boy says about the Machine when addressing her (his mother) :“ Men made it, do not forget that. Great men, but men. The Machine is much, but it is not everything.”¹⁷ A reality that the majority of individuals like Vashti do not understand and ignore. Consequently, the end of man is related

to that of the Machine. In the same way, the society portrayed in *The Machine Stops* is a collapsing one. Indeed, its decline is related to that of the Machine. According to Neil Postman : “ [...] it is why in a technopoly there can be no transcendent sense of purpose or meaning, no cultural coherence.”¹⁸ The fact of accepting to adhere wholly to technology is, as Postman explains, a sign of the cultural decay.

Despite the technological advances the Machine ensures to individuals, Forster warns humanity of the dehumanizing route it takes. For him linking human progress to technological success is a mistake that men should avoid. He affirms that humans are missing the actual meaning of science as they associate it with happiness. In a society inclined toward science and technological prevalence, individuals tend to relate the technological progress with the human one. Indeed, the amenities and automated products are seen as a measure by which happiness and well being is attainable. According to these people, wellbeing might be achieved through the materialistic development. Forster’s criticism of man’s belief that the advance in technology and the automated products is the source of human progress, health, wealth and well being is well described in this passage: “ But Humanity, in its desire for comfort, had overreached itself. It had exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean the progress of the Machine.”¹⁹ This, however, does not prevent Forster from being optimistic that in the future man could prevail. The best illustration might be seen in the very end of the story. As the Machine stops, the whole world collapses, but not the human sense of humanity. In this regard, Kuno tells his mother: “I am dying– but we touch, not through the Machine.”²⁰

B-The Enslavement of Man by the Machine in *Player Piano*

Akin to Forster’s *The Machine Stops*, Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* also deals with the aspect of the degradation of the individual by the Machine. In this sense, Neil Postman

asserts that : “ It is important to remember what can be done without computers, and it is also important to remind ourselves of what maybe lost when we do use them.”²¹ A clear statement, declares Postman, of what might be the result of the misuse of machinery and what this very misuse could engender in the short and long run. Vonnegut sees that this dependence on automation renders the individual a mere prisoner in the jail of machinery. In his work, the writer pictures this through the giant EPICAC; a computer that manages practically all aspects of life. Individuals are reduced to needless creatures who are no longer appreciated for being humans. They are only needed for what they have and the skills they possess. Consequently, with the machine replacement of the main-d’œuvre, work has become more efficient and more rapid. But still the question that must be asked here is: what will the people that were made redundant do? In other words, what need is there for them as human beings anymore?

Vonnegut’s portrayal of the technological advances in the modern era and their impact on the social and cultural fabric espouses Neil Postman’s belief that man is duped. Postman refers to this process as technopoly. He contends that man has surrendered to the control of technology: “it (Technopoly) consists in the deification of technology, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes its orders from technology.”²² By the mounting disqualification of the individual and his replacement by the machine, man accelerates the pace toward his own dehumanization. The individual is no more considered as a human being according to Vonnegut but a means to obtain an end.

Vonnegut finds that it is not technology or science that is the problem. The real issue lies according to him, in the misuse of technology and science. The writer exemplifies this in *Player Piano* by showing the machines as being beneficial to a certain extent. Paradoxically, it is man who misapplies science. Regarding Vonnegut’s *Player Piano*, Françoise Grelett

writes : “ Everyday physical and material problems have often been mastered by technology, but men can still be hurt : the machines that rule their lives stop working or exceed the functions they were created for ; and the old feelings of love and suffering persist.”²³ The managers and engineers in the book misuse the machines. This results in dehumanizing the individual and getting controlled by their own creations. For instance, in a discussion about scientists, Lasher says to Paul Proteus : “ It isn’t knowledge that’s making trouble, but the uses it’s put to.”²⁴ Vonnegut observes that technology has remodeled not only the field of economy, but it went further to interfere in the cultural and social spheres. Thus, automation can not be excluded from the fact that it has created negative effects upon the human, as it reshapes the social tissue and the cultural orientations towards a one sided thought; a thought guided by technology. All aspects of life are perceived and pictured in concordance with what automation dictates. Even mental faculties are greatly influenced by technology. As Vonnegut’s character Doctor Halyard puts it: “By eliminating human error through machinery, and needless competition through organization, we’ve raised the standard of living of the average man immensely.”²⁵

It is worth mentioning that Paul Proteus, the protagonist of Vonnegut’s *Player Piano*, exposes how the machine is perceived and received by the population. People see the machine as synonymous to progress. It is the genuinity and accuracy of the machine that helped the Americans during World War Three. As the narrator expresses it: “During the war, in hundreds of Illiums over America, managers and engineers learned to get along without their men and women, who went to fight. It was the miracle that won the war—production with almost no manpower.”²⁶ However, when the war is over and the fighters come back home, they notice an enormous change. While men and women are confronted by the merciless conditions of war away from home, their jobs have been taken by “the miracle that won the war--production with almost no man-power.” Their main-d’oeuvre has been replaced by

another one; the machines. As a result, chaos and havoc spread rapidly leading to riots and violence. Thousands of men and women are arrested and imprisoned under the anti-sabotage law. In this regard Ruzbeh Babaeen, Wan Roselezam and Shivani Sivagurunathan write,

Postwar American society of *Player Piano* believes that the individuals are free to enjoy the goods offered by machine production, then they can fulfill their utopian desires of happiness and prosperity. But in reality, people are dissatisfied, disappointed, and displaced with feelings of obsolescence. People have forgotten the dynamic function of their bodies and lost their capacities, because they become quite passive minds that are significant for the consumer culture and automated society that needs them for more consumption.²⁷

Hence, the American society described in *Player Piano*, seems to be a sinking one. Neil Postman sees that the fact of being introduced to the world of automation or technology while embracing it wholly is a way of surrender and acceptance of being controlled.²⁸ The industrial development overwhelms the social order. As a result, machines triumph over humans. Society is shown in a position of loss of control. Vonnegut believes that the same thing is applicable on the American society. If Americans still consider the technological advances as equivalent to human progress, man's regression will undoubtedly prevail.

Vonnegut pictures Illium, New York, as a place in which the economy is governed by computers. The EPICAC runs almost everything. The ones who have real jobs are actually the engineers and managers. Their work consists of maintaining the functioning of the computers and ensuring the sustainability of the companies. In Illium, society is divided geographically into three distinctive areas. The first is reserved for the managers and engineers, the second for the machines, while the third is for the common people. By this division, Vonnegut makes reference to the social division and the hierarchical social system adopted in America. The hierarchy places the managers and engineers at the top of the pyramid together with the machines, while the common people are left at the bottom of the pyramid. The Northern parts that stand for the top, are kept by the elite and the machines, while the Southern parts which are below the northern ones, symbolize the bottom to which the rest of the people belong.

The narrator's description of Illium in *Player Piano* may stand for a right illustration as he states at the opening of the novel: " Illium, New York is divided into three parts. In the northwest are the managers and engineers and civil servants and a few professional people, in the northeast are the machines, and in the south, across the Iroquois River, is the area known locally as Homestead, where almost all of the people live."²⁹

It is clear that Vonnegut's classification of Americans in his novel is a reflection of what he sees in the American society. Even in his classification, the writer proceeds in a logical order. He mentions the managers, then the engineers and civil servants together with the professionals. Then he moves to the machines since the latter are operated by the previously mentioned (engineers mainly) while he keeps the ordinary populace at the end. By the same token, Spengler states,

[...] individuals' worlds as lived and experienced by men of the one culture or spiritual community are interrelated, and on the greater or less degree of this interrelation depends the greater or less communicability of intuitions, sensations and thoughts from one to another—that is, the possibility of making intelligible what one has created in the style of one's own being, through expression-media such as language or art or religion, by means of word-sounds or formulae or signs that are themselves also symbols.³⁰

Spengler stresses that members of the same culture are bound by a shared relationship. The durability and strength of this relationship is related to that of the individuals of the very same community or culture. In *Player Piano* the social tissue is torn up into several little entities, each separately living according to its own 'laws' and adopting its own thought. Furthermore, the place the machine is accorded in society degrades the large masses of population. By placing the machine above the common people, social alienation grows and the thread that links individuals of the same culture can no longer resist.

In Vonnegut's novel, the minority that has the choice to be selected for jobs must undergo an intelligence and aptitude test that will determine their legibility for that work. The

common people have no alternative except being recruited in the army knowing that there are no more wars to fight or to serve in the R&R (Reconstruction and Reclamation) corps as an 'accessoire' worker. Here again Vonnegut stresses the needlessness of the so-called jobs that are given to the 'homesteaders'. The personal data of every worker are recorded, each time an occupation is no longer needed or replaced by machines, the individuals performing that job are made redundant. In other words, the fired workers are reduced to needless beings and their contribution is of no use to society. Vonnegut exposes the issue of mechanization as a means of both deprivation and degradation of man; deprivation due to the replacement of men's jobs by machines and degradation because individuals feel themselves worthless since their contribution in the construction of the future is no more needed. In reality, even the people who have got jobs are not really working. Vonnegut writes,

The bridge was blocked again Reeks and Wrecks [the Reclamation and Reclamation corps] who were painting yellow lines to mark traffic lanes....Like most of the R&R projects, it was, to Paul at least, ironic. The four-lane bridge has, before the war, been jammed with the cars of workers going to and from the Illium works.... Now, at any time of the day, a driver could swerve from one side of the bridge to the other with perhaps one chance in ten thousand of hitting another vehicle. Paul came to a stop. Three men were painting, twelve were directing traffic, and another twelve were resting.³¹

Vonnegut indicates how these so-called jobs are not in reality jobs. In the above scene, he shows this through Paul Proteus who witnesses a scene in which only three out of practically thirty workers are really functional. As a result, the disillusioned Proteus becomes skeptic about technology and questions the limits of automation. He realizes that the once simple life is better than the present one ruled by machines. As a result, he participates in the anti-machine revolt as a spokesman as he states : " I deny that there is any natural or divine law requiring that machines, efficiency, and organization should forever increase in scope, power, and complexity..."³²

Regardless of the technological advances and the development they engender, Vonnegut warns the American society of the wrong turn it takes. He maintains that the belief that

science is equivalent to progress is wrong. He indicates that Americans are misunderstanding the real meaning of science as they relate it to happiness and progress. For instance the Young Engineer measures the progress of American society through the scientifically manufactured products. He goes beyond that to associate it to happiness and well-being as he states:

We've become rich beyond the wildest dreams of the past! Civilization has reached the dizziest heights of all time! Thirty one point seven times as many televisions sets as all the rest of the world put together! Ninety-three per cent of all the world's electrostatic dust precipitators! Seventy-seven per cent of the world's automobiles! Ninety-eight per cent of its helicopters...! ³³

Vonnegut sees that it would be better to encourage the technology which is beneficial for humanity taking into account the individual as a human being living in a social and cultural environment. He also worries about the technological progress in the economic field that dehumanizes the individual. The writer is pessimistic about the American society and its relationship with automation. Mass-production, consumerism, the prevalence of materialism, the uselessness of humans and the appearance of the human automaton seem to be Vonnegut's great concern in *Player Piano*. In this novel, the American society is characterized by the unconditional embracement of the machine. Individuals are shown to welcome gadgets without any questioning whether they (gadgets) are beneficial or potentially destructive. The results of this shift of control seem to be devastating to the human being.

Endnotes

¹ Lionel Trilling, *E.M.Forster by Lionel Trilling* (New York : New directions publishing corporation, 80 Eight avenue, New York10011), 24.

² Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 94.

³ E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 92.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 72.

⁸ E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 96-97.

⁹ Ibid, 94.

¹⁰ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 90-91.

¹¹ Ibid, 70.

¹² E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 91.

¹³ Ibid, 104.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 71.

¹⁶ Dirk Lindbaum, Frank den Hon, and MikkoVesa, '*Insights From " The Machine Stops" to Better Understand Rational Assumptions in Algorithmic Decision Making and Its Implications for Organizations*', *The Academy of Management Review*(2020), Vol.45, No.1, 247-263 : Accessed on March 11, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0181>.

¹⁷ E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 92.

¹⁸ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 63.

¹⁹ E.M. Forster, *The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 116.

²⁰ Ibid, 123.

- ²¹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 120.
- ²² Ibid, 71.
- ²³ Fraçoise Grelett, *An Introduction to American Literature “ Time Present and Time Past”* (Paris : Hachette Livre, 43, Quai de Grenelle, 75905 Paris Cedex 15, 2009), 361.
- ²⁴ Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York: Rosetta Books LLC, 2000), 89.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 24.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 9.
- ²⁷ Ruzbeh Babae, Wan Roselezam, and Shivani Sivagurunathan, ‘ *The Tyranny of Cybernetics in Kurt Vonnegut’s Player Piano*, International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature (January 2014), Vol. 3, No.1, 195-201 : Accessed on November 11, 2021. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.lp.195>.
- ²⁸ Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 94.
- ²⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York: Rosetta Books LLC, 2000), 9.
- ³⁰ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929) ,165.
- ³¹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York: Rosetta Books LLC, 2000), 162.
- ³² Ibid, 278.
- ³³ Ibid, 201.

Chapter Three : The Inhuman Treatment of Man to Man in *The Machine Stops* and *Player Piano*.

A. The Inhuman Treatment of Man to Man in *The Machine Stops*

This research has so far analyzed the irrationality of man as well as his enslavement by the Machine in the two works. The present chapter's concern is to highlight the inhuman treatment caused by man to his fellow men in the two works starting with Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909).

As stated above, Forster's *The Machine Stops* tackles one of the results of the automated society which is the inhumanity of man toward man. The irrational society portrayed by Forster tends to believe that all its needs are satisfied by the Machine. Individuals are split into two: the unconscious hypnotized ones and the conscious ones. The first category, which represents the majority, is exemplified by Vashti. While the second, which is a handful members, is represented by Kuno. In such a society, individuals seem to be selfish and greedy. Their main concern is to satisfy their own needs without realizing that they are spreading danger. It is worth saying that despite the fact that all aspects of life and all man's needs are dealt with by the Machine, man is unconsciously halting others' as well as his own prosperity.

The misapplication of science by man results in the process of dehumanizing others. In reality, it is man who created the Machine. Due to his own creation, man is no longer needed. In *The Machine Stops*, man's initial purpose is to create the Machine in order to ensure the survival of the human race underground. The result turns out to be a total fiasco. The Machine, despite the services it offers, confiscates man's humanity. As an illustration from the story Kuno says: "It (the Machine) has robbed us of the sense of space and the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralyzed our bodies and our wills, and now it employs us to worship it. The Machine

develops— but not on our lines. The Machine proceeds—but not to our goal.”¹ Indeed, the machine takes away from individuals more than main-d’oeuvre during the process of replacing the labor force. What is striking is that it is man himself, the one behind manufacturing the Machine, who contributes in the process of degrading other individuals. It is through man that man is denigrated. It is true that the Machine is not really taking away all jobs from individuals, as they work virtually, but it takes from them the sense of humanity. For example Vashti delivers lectures via video conferencing and has thousands of virtual friends, but none in real life. Forster is worried more about the virtuality of the individuals’ lives. This might be easily noticed today as the demand on social media platforms and the virtual world is growing.

Forster warns about the results the misuse of science may engender. Indeed, humans use it (technology) the wrong way because of their total dependence on the Machine. Man’s greed and selfishness leads him to ignore others. As a result, he becomes at first place a slave to the Machine, but a master to other men. The case of Vashti who venerates the Machine to the point of ignoring her own son is the best example. This idea is well expressed in Postman’s affirmation that : “We are a culture consuming itself with information, and many of us do not even wonder how to control this process.”² Neil Postman remarks how the modern culture is heading toward its decline. To him, the control of automation is flagrant since individuals are not even able to understand this.

The initial purpose from inventing machinery is to help man solve his problems. With individuals exaggerating its use, what once has been helpful to them has become a source of worries. The Machine triumphs doubly over man. On the one hand, it prevails because it defies the one who created it by taking power from him. On the other hand, man’s use of technology to reign over man is nothing but another sign of the machine’s control. In *The Machine Stops*, though man’s control over man is not clearly seen, the fact that the former

harms others because of the Machine he invented is sufficient to understand his intention. Because of the Machine, humans become worthless and needless. Their main functions are done by the Machine. All that distinguishes humans from other creatures is confiscated by the Machine. The only way to meet and see each other is the virtual world that man himself has created. In a way, in the story the inhumanity of man to man is clear in that some characters such as Vashti find in the veneration of the Machine all their needs. This furthers the gap and makes of these individuals human-like figures or even worse; human automata.

Unlike Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, the war in Forster's *The Machine Stops* is not a physical one. In *Player Piano*, Vonnegut deals with the inhumanity of man to man by the promotion of war, while in *The Machine Stops*, the war tends to be psychological.

In essence, the promotion of war finds its way when individuals' interest in materialism grows. As a result of the irrationality of the individual's behavior, dehumanization takes place under the Machine's enslavement of man. The irrational behavior of man and his dehumanization by the machine lead to inhumanity. In this sense, Spengler thinks that one of the final signs of a decaying civilization is the promotion of war. Clearly, the irrationality of the human behavior shows his idiocy. It seems that the psychological war in *The Machine Stops* is fought between the mother and her son. It shows how Vashti and Kuno reflect the real individuals in real life. Vashti, the individual who idealizes the Machine embodies the irrationality and dehumanization of the human being. Kuno the boy who lives in a world governed by the Machine, but his rationality pushes him to seek the life his ancestors used to live when earth was a safe place to live in. As mentioned in the story, the boy states : " It was naked, humanity seemed naked, and all these tubes and buttons and machineries neither came into the world with us, nor will they follow us out, nor do they matter supremely while we are here."³ Forster warns humans about the results of the blind pursuit of automation.

Man's inhumanity to man manifests itself through many forms. War is one of these forms. The psychological war pictured through the two main characters, the mother and son might stand for a warning of an actual war. In a world of atomic, biological and chemical weaponry, war means devastation. Even by the end of the Story, Forster stresses that the Machine is only a machine, a man-made thing. As he puts it through his character Kuno when talking about the Machine : "Men made it, do not forget that. Great men, but man."⁴ Thus, its right use is beneficial, while the over-exaggeration of its capacities might be destructive. This is clearly seen at the end of the story. The Machine collapses and humanity collapses with it. It is man's idiocy that brings him to his decline. The reason behind this is man's incapability to differentiate what is rational from what is not. In the story, individuals embrace the Machine and accept it to run all their needs after they created it. They miss the basic law that this very creation is theirs and it might stop working at any time. Not only this, they go further to justify the supremacy of the Machine. In the end, when they associate their existence to that of the once made Machine, it becomes logical that their end is tied to that of the Machine. Despite the fact that the end of the story is apocalyptic, it appears that Forster is somehow optimist. The remarkable sentence of Kuno to his mother when dying might be the best illustration : " I am dying— but we touch, we talk, not through the Machine."⁵

B. The Inhuman Treatment of Man to Man in *Player Piano*

Like Forster's *The Machine Stops*, Vonnegut's *Player Piano* deals with the prevailing inhumanity of man. In the American society, Vonnegut believes that individuals are greedy and unreasonable as a result of the blind trust of automation. Scientists are shown as selfish and satisfying their own benefits. Indeed, he shows that misusing science has confiscated man's labor force by the introduction of mechanization that turns thousands if not millions of

workers into unworthy, useless and needless individuals. In short, man's adulation of technological success and materialistic orientations leads to his own dehumanization.

Humans misuse science and misapply it. Vonnegut finds it necessary to stress the effects of so doing. The misuse of technology seems to translate into man's zealous use of automation for personal profitability and his use of science to promote war. These two aspects are well expressed in Spengler's theory. The former is reflected through man's limitless will to fulfill his physical and materialistic needs. This idea is well expressed in Spengler's affirmation that the individual: "[...] is subjected to so consistent a pressure of natural-law notions that, when scientific and philosophical prejudice (it is no more than that) dictates the proposition that this condition of the soul is the soul and the mechanical world-picture is the world."⁶ While the second idea, which is promotion of war, finds its supporters among humans as a result of the growing materialism, man's greed as well as his own irrationality and dehumanization. This idea also, is embodied in the theory of Spengler and it is shown as a sign of a civilization undergoing decadence. The German historian states that the final phase of a degenerating civilization is characterized by the prevalence of wars. For Vonnegut, the idiocy of the human being leads him to lose his sense of humanity. The writer illustrates this through the Barber Homer Bigley who affirms: "Doctor doesn't use his head and education to figure out what's the matter with you. Machines go over you—measure this, measure that. Then he picks out the right miracle stuff, and the only reason he does this in on account of the machines tell him what to do."⁷ As a result, the irrationality and dehumanization of man merge into a more complex aspect: man's inhumanity to man.

Vonnegut also deals with war and its catastrophic aftermath. He thinks that war is a result of man's inhumanity toward man. He indicates that the age of classical wars has ended. He shows his concern about the great risks that a war may engender in the era of atomic and chemical weaponry. Vonnegut assumes that man is irrational where he should be rational and

rational where he has not to. The ample example is man's incapability to realize how he has imprisoned himself in the gilded prison of automation and his justification of war through rationalizing it while it spreads destruction. Vonnegut is pessimist because he had witnessed its atrocities. Being a prisoner of war, he survived the Dresden bombing during the Second World War after the Germans' defeat. According to him, war brings to the surface the worst in men; it breeds violence and tyranny; it transforms losers into fierce beasts and winners into absolute tyrants.

The terror of war seems to affirm that life is meaningless. People who undergo it, find difficulty to cope with real life. They usually create their own remote worlds within the one they are living in. They find the justification and the rationalization of war in these alternative worlds. In essence, war cannot be associated with something that inspires happiness, beauty or goodness. To Vonnegut, war is the illustration of man's cruelty, bestiality and enslavement by other men. Hence, justifying and rationalizing war is a way of showing the irrationality of the human, his denigration and after all his inhuman treatment of other men. In this regard, in a passage from *Player Piano*, Homer Bigley, the barber, shows his admiration of war,

There's something about war that brings out greatness. I hate to say that, but it's true. Of course, maybe that's because you can get great so quick in a war. Just one damn fool thing for a couple of seconds, and you're great. I could be the greatest barber in the world, and maybe I am, but I'd have to prove it with a lifetime of great haircutting, and then nobody'd notice. That's just the way peacetime things are, you know? [...] Up there, fighting and all, you couldn't be righter. You could've been a heller at home and made a lot of people unhappy and all, and been a dumb, mean bastard, but you're king over there--king to everybody, and especially to yourself. This above all, be true to yourself, and you can't be false to anybody else, and that's it--in a hole, being shot at and shooting back.⁸

Vonnegut's use of satire is a way of drawing attention to the cruelty with which man faces his fellow men in war. It is a recurrent technique that shows the author shifts from the serious to the humorous, the cruel to the laugthy. He depicts some aspects of war as being funny and humorous regardless of the horrific and cruel reality of warfare

and its psychological and moral denigration on the individual and the community. For instance his portrayal of the barber Homer Bigley combines the laugthy with the serious. The barber's answer when discussing war is : "There's something about war that brings out greatness."⁹, then he adds : "You could of been a heller at home and made a lot of people unhappy and all, and been a dumb, mean bastard, but you are king over there"¹⁰ This stands for his use of humor in a scene that inspires horror and terror. Vonnegut combines the horrific with the humorous to draw attention not only to the fact that war is furious, but also to show that it is man himself who spreads war. Another reason, may be seen in the impact these scenes have on the reader as they awaken his rationality and open his eyes widely to the reality that man has created war. Vonnegut's hope and desire to see a better world appears to be not attainable. Thus, he uses humor as a way of comforting. To Vonnegut, it would be more profitable to see man developing automation or technology to sustain peaceful and humanitarian purposes rather than developing it to serve personal objectives and selfish destructive ends.

Vonnegut shows how people perceive war as a way of reaching greatness, which is paradoxical and irrational. The Barber, for instance, affirms that greatness is easily attainable during wartime. He (the barber), confirms that he himself is fascinated by war and wishes to a certain extent to get profit from it. According to him, no one could notice the greatness of others in peace time. At the end, the barber states that regardless of what one might be at home, when he colonizes another, he appears as " king over there—king to everybody" no matter what it takes, be it making others unhappy and "being shot at and shooting back." The writer sees war as abominable since it spreads violence, killing, destruction and cruelty.

Besides, Vonnegut satirizes the army and sees no need for the wars they are fighting. He illustrates this idea in *Player Piano* through Homer Bigley, the barber when he says: "These kids in the Army now, that's just a place to keep 'em off the street and out of trouble, because

there isn't anything else to do with them. And the only chance they'll ever to be anybody is if there's a war"¹¹ Vonnegut remarks how hard and difficult it is to change the Army's orientations and views even though there are no more armed wars to fight. Satire reaches its apogee as the Shah of Bratpuhr declares: "Americans have changed almost everything on earth, but it would be easier to move the Himalayas than to change the Army."¹²

Like Oswald Spengler, Kurt Vonnegut is pessimistic about Western Civilization. He sees that man has forgotten science's real objectives. Science has become undetachable from attaining self profit, promoting war and destruction as well as ignoring the truth about the human nature in order to reach scientific goals. The writer believes that true science, the one that takes into account the social and cultural aspects as well as the sense of curiosity, should be promoted and maintained. However, the science that overlooks all these aspects should be controlled.

Endnotes

¹ E.M.Forster, *Selected Stories : The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 110.

² Neil Postman, *Technopoly : The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York : Knopf, 1992), 70.

³ E.M.Forster, *Selected Stories : The Machine Stops* (London : Penguin Books, 2001), 107.

⁴ Ibid, 92.

⁵ Ibid, 123.

⁶ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Tran Charles Francis Atkins (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 99.

⁷ Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York : Rosetta Books LLC, 2000), 190.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 67.

Conclusion

The comparison of E.M Forster's *The Machine Stops* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* has allowed me to reach certain conclusions regarding the two authors and their works. To commence, the two works are vivid examples of the already starting automation by the outbreak of the twentieth century. However, Vonnegut's *Player Piano* is written in the mid twentieth century ; a period of technological boom in the United States of America. In this paper, I have demonstrated that the two works are similar in their treatment of automation as both authors see the over-exaggerated automation as destructive.

My analysis showed that both authors, associate the triumph of the machine over man with the irrationality of the latter's behavior due to his blind belief in automation. The authors adhere to the idea that the mounting interest in automation leads the individual to be the slave of his own creation. Furthermore, the machine's control over man as well as man's greed, selfishness made of him a human-like creature that is ready to treat his counterpart inhumanly. Forster and Vonnegut also share the points related to the right use of automation and the draw-backs of its misapplication. Their tenets about the power of the machine in society and man's denigration are shaped by the collapse of the machine in both works.

In the light of their representation of the relationship between man and the machine, the two authors show how the social and cultural tissue is infected. Due to man's irrational behavior, his addiction to automation and his misuse of technology, he loses his humanity. Almost all these aspects are signs of a decaying society. By adhering to these idea, the two authors adhere to Oswald Spengler's and Neil Postman's signs of a decaying society and culture.

As a result, my study demonstrates the inter-related connection between the irrationality of the human behavior, the abnegation caused by the Machine as well as man's inhumanity to man in *The Machine Stops* and *Player Piano*. As it is shown in the paper, Forster and Vonnegut tend to relate irrationality, dehumanization, and inhumanity when talking about man's blind use and addiction to technology. This maintains the idea that when analyzing automation's prevalence over man, the trinity of: irrationality of the human behavior, the machine's abnegation of man and man's inhumanity to man count. It would be, however, interesting to enlarge the scope of the analysis to englobe writers who encourage automation in a way to investigate the differences.

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