GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE
THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION

By

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Abstract

This work analyzes the use and portrayal of gender in Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908), George Orwell’s *1984* (1949), Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), and Stephanie Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008), four dystopian works written over a period of 100 years. It questions the reasoning behind the use of gender within each of the texts and looks at the changes in the use and presentation of gendered characters in each of the novels, considering the purpose of each text and the possible reasoning behind gendered portrayals of the characters in each story. Though a chronological analysis of these texts reveals a change from the portrayal of femininity as a singular good to a mindless weakness to a necessary balancing force, feminine characters remain subordinate to and weaker than masculine characters, even as a female protagonist takes the stage in the final novel. Finally, the work questions whether the conventions of the dystopian genre preclude the existence of a feminine dystopian hero or if the reason she has not yet been written is based on a cultural bias towards strong masculinity in main characters of any gender rather than the norms of the dystopian genre.
Introduction

Popular media has influenced and created human culture for centuries. Children’s stories like *Aesop’s Fables* are laced with moral lessons, novels like Harriet Beecher-Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* have helped to fuel social movements, and popular shows like *Star Trek* have stretched cultural boundaries and created new roles for marginalized groups. Media is both a powerful force of socialization and a battlefield for representation. The media which we consume throughout our lives educates us, creates social change, and, importantly, allows us to see into worlds we cannot be a part of and imagine different realities. Additionally, popular media allows us to imagine *ourselves* as something different. Marie Wilson’s famous statement that “you can’t be what you can’t see” illustrates the importance of strong female characters to young girls, because these characters harken to possible futures which might have been unimaginable beforehand. This, then, is the importance of gender performance and representation in media.

Today, dystopia is arguably among the most popular genres for young adult readers (Ford), and numerous recently released young adult novels have followed a hero on their journey to take down the dystopian system in which they live. Because dystopia has become such a popular genre among young readers, it is important to understand the messages which the genre engenders not only in its broader plots but also in the subtle treatments of and interactions between its characters. I have loved dystopia since childhood, but found myself more and more troubled with the genre’s representation of women as I became better acquainted with the genre. Because of the social importance of gender in our society, authors who write about the future must, whether they realize it or not, grapple with and make predictions or prescriptions about gender’s operation within their societies. In the future, do authors imagine that women are still socially subjugated in the ways that we see within their novels, and that gender relations have not
changed, and that femininity is powerless or evil? Is this seemingly inherent devaluation of the feminine a necessary facet of the dystopian story, or is it a symptom of a culture which devalues traditional femininity? Is it possible to have a feminine dystopian heroine, or do genre conventions preclude her existence? If dystopian conventions do inherently devalue femininity, then should we continue to embrace it, or should we seek to let go of stories which reinforce harmful stereotypes? Here, I take on four texts which are representative of different moments in the history of the dystopia: Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908), George Orwell’s *1984* (1949), Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), and Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008). In looking at these novels, I endeavor to answer the question of how dystopia treats its characters based on gender, the consequences of this treatment, and the possibility of a future with a feminine dystopian heroine.
Introduction

Hailed by Erich Fromm as “the earliest modern Dystopia,” Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908) follows the rise of a tyrannical oligarchy in the United States through the eyes of a young woman named Avis, who falls in love with socialist revolutionary leader Ernest Everhard. Unusual for its time in that its narrator is a woman, London’s novel earns its place as a notable dystopian work because it both marks the beginning of the modern dystopian and uses gender to send complex messages about the effect of a dystopian society on tradition and culture. In this analysis of *The Iron Heel*, I will look at the presentation of the feminine in the novel, why London chooses a female narrator for his pro-socialist dystopian work, and the complexities of Avis as well as her role in the novel.

Often, women in literature are given roles in which they have two-dimensional personalities and are unable to influence their own fate. This characterization of women as plot-devices without multi-dimensional personalities and without apparent desire or ability to take their life into their own hands produces a harmful perception of women as passive plot-devices for their more active male counterparts which seeps from literature into culture. To give a character the capacity to choose and the complex emotions of a real person is to grant them status as a subject rather than an object. While Avis is an active agent and a round character, she operates chiefly as a reflection of Ernest and speaks to his power as a revolutionary. She is a product of his life, his work, and his determination, not of her own. Avis’ activity is through Ernest and for him, ultimately her life belongs to him because she becomes the mirror through which we see him as a revolutionary hero. Avis perpetually offers her life to Ernest and merges it with his in order to fulfill her purpose as the woman in love. Whatever agency Avis has is
obtained through Ernest is recycled back into furthering his cause. She acts not truly of her own volition, but out of her love for her “hero husband” (ii), who she admires so much as to be blind to his relative insignificance in the grand scheme of the revolution (i).

The Male Agent

London presents the active male agent as, in the Avis’ words, “bold” (4), “thrilling” (5), “enthusiastic” (18), and having a “blood for adventure” (129). Both Avis’ father and Ernest fill this role, and Bishop Morehouse acts as a foil to it in his tenderness (136). This presentation of the man as innately active echoes traditional gender roles which define the female as a passive object and the male as an active subject and which assume sexual differences to be a natural rather than social construct (Beauvoir 25). Because we see active male agents as well as active female agents in London’s novel, we must question in what context the traditionally passive woman is allowed to be active, and by what means the passive woman that London presents becomes an active agent.

Ernest waltzes into the story with boldness which Avis initially finds “almost unforgivable” (4). He is a swashbuckling, eloquent, and “merciless” (13) in his condemnation of the oligarchy, and represents a type of man that Avis claims never to have met before, though we can see clearly that he is a doppelganger to her father. Earnest tells Avis that at their first meeting “you pleased me; why should I not fill my eyes with that which pleases me” asserting his dominance through his blasé attitude (4). He is presented as suave, sexy, and persuasive. He teaches Avis about the transgressions of the oligarchy not through words, but actions (50), and whisks her away into an exciting world of adventure. He saves her life when she is stranded in the midst of the riots in Chicago, proving that though she has come far as a revolutionary he
must still rescue her (249), and in doing so enacts the traditional story of relations between man and woman by “bravely taking on the weight of woman” for her (Beauvoir 263). Ernest represents an old-time James Bond sort of character, full of action and adventure and always ready to save the day. This is the classical image of the active male protagonist: an agent that is capable of doing.

Notably, Ernest is not the only image of the revolutionary, active male in the novel; Avis’ father, John Cunningham, also has within him “the blood of adventure” (129). It is undoubtedly Avis’ relationship to these two active male agents that pulls her into the revolution. We see that she is almost exchanged between them in the novel; first in the care of her father, she becomes more and more tied to Ernest as the story goes on. This “exchange of women between men” is touched on by Rubin (171) and expanded on by Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, in which she notes that “the woman’s first guardian is her father… when the woman marries, she passes “into the hands” of her husband” (99). This exchange of the woman keeps her under the care of one man or another throughout her life, and, Beauvoir argues, oppresses her by keeping her dependent on men. The exchange of Avis between her father and Ernest ensures that she is never allowed to be truly independent, to work of her own volition, but must instead follow the actions of a man, be it her father or her husband, while remaining under their protection.

Bishop Morehouse is perhaps the most interesting character in the novel in a gendered analysis, because he does not embody the traditional active element that Ernest and Mr. Cunningham do. A gentle-hearted man, Bishop Morehouse represents everything that Ernest and Mr. Cunningham are not. He too is a revolutionary, but he lacks the vitality and fire of the other revolutionary men and is therefore rendered ineffective as an agent of change in society. As Avis notes, “his spirit was too gentle” to be a good agent of change (136). He acts as an example of
what not to do, a useless rebel whose weak cries of injustice are completely ineffectual. It is clear that the Bishop’s heart is in the right place, but we see the futility of his gentler, more feminine actions and opt instead to put our faith in the active, aggressive, masculine Ernest.

By comparing models of the revolutionary and oligarchical men and women in the novel, we see that the successful revolutionaries are more active than their passive counterparts in both genders, though men are much more active than their female counterparts in both cases. This promotes masculine activeness as a force of good in the revolution and traditional feminine passiveness as a force of evil, delving into the complicated gender divide in which men actively strive while women sit with whatever hand they have been dealt, and painting the masculine as virtuous and the feminine as sinful (Beauvoir 28). Notably, women, also seem to react actively or passively to the oppression of the oligarchy, though their reactions are driven largely by class.

**The Effect of Dystopia on Traditional Feminine Roles**

Throughout London’s work, we see examples of women affected by the oligarchical, capitalist dystopia in which they live. Traditional feminine roles are twisted into representations of women that we find unsettling or wrong in order to define the oligarchy as evil. Marxist theory asserts that women define capitalism through housework and the reproduction of labor (Rubin 160); this use of women in capitalism makes their presentation in London’s dystopia even more relevant as they are forced from roles of motherhood and homemaking into becoming helpless, maniacal, or revolutionaries. In *The Iron Heel*, we see two classes of binary women, and, notably, it is the presence of these women rather than any aspect of their individual personality that gives them importance in the story (Beauvoir 263). Typically, it seems, living under the Iron Heel of the oligarchy affects the binary woman in one of four ways, depending on
her status; the poor woman becomes helpless or fanatical, and the rich woman becomes passively evil or actively sacrifices the blessings of womanhood in order to help the revolution.

First, we have the helpless woman, the passive poor woman affected by the oligarchy’s oppression of the lower classes. She relies on the support of her husband or lover and is tied to his success or failure. While we do not physically encounter this woman often in the novel, traces of her are evident throughout. Jackson, the man who lost his arm in the mills, speaks of his wife and children, telling Avis that “there’s not a soul in the world except myself that cares whether they starve or not” (37). Through this assertion we see that Jackson’s case is not made pathetic by his inability to work to support himself, but rather his inability to support his family. The bishop is found helping a woman who has no man to care for her, telling Avis “it is a sad case. It is terrible. She is an old woman,” drawing on her femininity and her age as sources of her weakness and as reasons that she needs his care (138). Later, when Avis is acting as an agent provocateur, she meets a girl whose partner is in the mercenaries; she immediately thinks to herself “poor girl. Her lover was in one of the three disloyal regiments” (226). The women in these situations are defined by their relationship, or lack thereof, to men, and are treated as property which cannot be cared for as a result of the depraved state of society (Beauvoir 90). This presentation of the innocent woman affected by the tyrannical oligarchy is a part of London’s painting the Iron Heel as a negative force in the lives of its citizens. He uses the oppression of innocents and the breakdown of a traditional family structure in which men support women to argue the evils of capitalism, showing that it destroys the moral tenets to which we cling by breaking or disabling the traditional operation of the virtuous nuclear family.

The second fate of the poor woman, unlike the helpless woman, challenges not only traditional family structures but also robs these women of their passive femininity. This woman
has been made mad by the revolution and has, in becoming fanatical, lost her rationality and humanity. She is a part of the revolution, but acts only as a savage animal. In her account of the horde, Avis notes “a woman in fantastic rags, with cheeks cavernously hollow and with narrow black eyes like burning gimlets… let out a shrill shriek and bore in upon us” (235), and later “a woman bore down on the wounded man, brandishing a butcher’s cleaver” (243). These women have been so oppressed as to be robbed of their femininity and their humanity, reduced to rabid animals with a thirst for blood. It is notably only women who we see madly brandishing knives at anyone who appears to be of the oligarchy. This twisting of the feminine by the tyranny speaks to its inherent evil because of its ability to transform what once represented goodness and purity into animalistic insanity.

Another example of feminine passivity is embodied by the passively evil rich woman, who does not show the proper feminine care for the less fortunate and thereby represents the greed and depravity of the oligarchy. Avis remembers two rich women after she meets them and tells them about the deplorable state of the poor, and describes their reaction to her plea for help, saying “they were sincere… they were drunk with conviction of the superiority of their class and of themselves” (52). These women offer a direct foil to Avis, who, though she also belongs to the wealthy class, does not see herself as superior to the poor and seeks to help them. It is interesting that, out of all of his examples of greed and the confidence in capitalism, London chooses this instant as the turning point at which Avis realizes the folly of the upper class. The passively evil woman sits opposite from the actively good woman, who sacrifices the blessings of femininity in order to help the cause of revolution; both of whom, notably, come from the upper class.
The good women of the upper class take on an unnatural state of activity as they rise to fight against the evil oligarchy, mirroring the active male agent and sacrificing the blessings of motherhood by becoming, instead, mothers of the revolution.

**The Active Woman: Woman’s Sacrifice as Representative of Dystopia**

One of the most resounding messages sent by London’s description of the women actively involved in the revolution is their feminine perfection and the travesty that they are unable to fulfill their destiny as producers of the next generation. The dystopia in *The Iron Heel* destroys the traditional structures in society and makes it impossible for the truly noble women in the novel to realize their proper roles as wife and mother; and it is the theft of these women’s potential as mothers that solidifies the evil of the oligarchy, rather than the sad state of the poor. Notably, these women are only allowed to transcend the world of the traditionally feminine because of the depravity of the oligarchy; this transcendence and access to the active life of man is painted as unnatural and therefore wrong. The active woman in *The Iron Heel* is no longer guarded by a man, but escapes this fate only because she is a part of the revolution, thereby becoming something other than the traditional woman (Beauvoir 99). The resounding message that the oligarchy violates the laws of nature and the destiny of the good woman by robbing her of her chance at motherhood marks it as truly perverted and evil by pitting it against the sacred institution of the family, and sends a starkly traditionalist message about gender roles.

The revolutionary actions taken by the women in *The Iron Heel* are, however, still defined by their femininity; we are first presented with the generic masses of working women, who “proved to be the strongest promoters of the strike” because “they did not want their men to go forth and die” (153). Later on, Avis makes her escape from the city disguised as “Felice Van
Verdighan, accompanied by two maids and a lap-dog,” and is led by a number of men to a secluded area to create a hideaway for Ernest (192). Perhaps the most notable example of the revolutionary woman defined by her femininity is Anna Roylston, called the “Red Virgin” for her ability to seduce and capture enemy soldiers (205). In looking at these examples we see that the chief operating platform of women involved in the revolution is based on their relationship to men, a relationship which is also the platform for their systematic oppression (Mussett). The generalized woman supports the strike because she opposes a war which would take her husband away, not because she feels that it is the right thing to do. Avis is smuggled away as a rich woman, not hidden in sub-par conditions, and her duty when she is whisked to safety is to create a safe haven for her husband the revolutionary. Even Anna Roylston, who does not operate for any one man, must work in relation to them; she uses her femininity in a way that reinforces her womanhood; it is perhaps this bolstering of her femininity which allows her to be in “a class by herself and not amenable to the ordinary standards of the revolutionists” (205). In order to be able to “play with the boys” so to speak, Roylston must prove herself as ultimately feminine so that she does not break the gendered rules that London imposes on the characters in his novel.

The defining feature of the woman involved in the revolution, save her inherent femininity, is the sacrifice of her purpose as a woman. Once again Roylston emerges as the most compelling example of a woman who sacrifices her feminine potential for the revolution. Avis notes that Anna “steadfastly refused to marry. She dearly loved children, but she held that a child of her own would claim her from the Cause, and that it was the Cause to which her life was devoted” (205). Based on this description, we see Anna as a beautiful, caring, passionate woman who would be the perfect mother in a better world. By robbing Anna of “blessed motherhood” (218) and marrying her to the cause, London makes a statement about the feminine potential that
is lost to the tyranny of the Iron Heel. This sentiment is most blatantly expressed when Avis and Hartman encounter a woman in a pool of her own blood, who had “clasped in the hollow of her arm, as a child might be clasped… a bundle of printed matter… we found that it consisted of large printed sheets, the proclamations of the revolutionists” (232). This image of the woman shot down for the revolution, clutching the propaganda of the revolutionists like a child in her arms, sends a clear message that the oligarchy is so inherently evil that it interrupts the most natural parts of human life. It is the perversion of these traditions that underlies and defines the wrongness of London’s dystopia. Avis, also robbed of her chance at motherhood, is the character with whose activity we become most intimately acquainted, because we see her evolution from a passive bystander into an active agent.

Avis as Active

For all that might be said about the presentation of the average woman in *The Iron Heel*, one cannot deny that Avis is a dynamic character, and shows a multifaceted roundness that most other women in the novel lack. She grows throughout the story from a daughter of the wealthy class to a revolutionary with her own agency and ability to contribute to the revolution. Like Forster’s round character, she “waxes and wanes and has facets like a human being,” a trait which inherently separates her from many female characters in science fiction, such as Millie and Clarisse in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, who are “constructed around a single idea or quality” (Forster 50). In light of the dynamic nature of Avis’ character, the important questions to ask about her role are, one, what gives her the ability to be an active agent and two, how she changes as a character through the course of the novel.
When we are first introduced to her, Avis does not strike the reader as particularly impressive; she is reminiscent of any Victorian heroine. We see that she has some fire, some spark of the boldness that she sees in Ernest, when she tells us that “in that moment I hated him” after he compares the savagery of the rich class to the “wild Indian” (29), and when she is willing to search out both Jackson and the society women herself in order to find the truth to which Ernest will lead her (33, 52). It is these traits in Avis that allow her to be molded into an active revolutionary by the end of the novel, though she is notably prodded along by Ernest, who encourages her by telling her who she ought to talk to in order to better “dig truth for herself” and tells her that though she has failed to shake the masters, “I’ll shake them for you” (50, 54). Avis is drawn into her activity through her relationship to Ernest. As she becomes more and more involved in the revolution, she notes that “I… found myself and my personal affairs drawn into the vortex of the great world affairs. Whether it was my love for Ernest, or the clear sight he had given me of the society in which I lived, that made me a revolutionist, I know not; but a revolutionist I became” (117). Her love for Ernest, then, translates directly into a love for the revolution, though we can be sure that it is his love for the Cause that influences hers. Regardless, it is clear that she in fact relinquishes herself in order to become part of Ernest, gives up her individuality to merge herself with the active man, and in doing so becomes active herself (Mussett). It is this relinquishing of the self that marks Avis’ transition from a curious girl in love into a true revolutionary, even if her love for the revolution is wedded to her love for Ernest.

After her marriage to Ernest, Avis becomes a much more active and independent individual, though she is still defined by her love for him. She is entrusted with the responsibility of preparing a safe-house, and when Ernest fears that they might be found out, she is able to transform herself into another person so entirely that even he does not recognize her when they
meet again (208). She spends months doing work for the revolution, and tells us that she
“marveled at her own metamorphosis” (201). She is assigned missions as important as acting as
an agent provocateur along with Ernest (220), and alludes to her future work as an international
spy (210). During the siege of Chicago, she notes that “a transformation came over me. The fear
of death, for myself and others, left me… Had it not done this, I know that I should have died.”
(235). Her mental and spiritual transcendence of her dire situation embodies Avis’ realization
that what she is fighting for is so much larger than she, her comrades, and even Ernest; this
epiphany, which keeps her alive, is the culmination of her growth as a character. She is now
acting for something larger than herself, her class, or the ones she loves, and is an unburdened
agent of the revolution, much in the way that Ernest is from the start. However, it is still her love
for something outside of herself, be it Ernest or the revolution, which defines her character
entirely.

**Avis as the Woman in Love**

Though dynamic and powerful, Avis is ultimately a representation of Beauvoir’s “woman
in love,” who gives her lover “total devotion, with soul and body, without any consideration or
reserve… her love is a faith” (Beauvoir 263). Avis derives her agency and will to act from her
relationship with Ernest, and dedicates her life completely to the cause that he has chosen. Her
dramatic transformation into a revolutionary is by and for her lover, and her ultimate purpose is
to serve him, which she does by committing herself the revolution that he gives his life for.

In Beauvoir’s description of the woman in love, she references Byron’s assertion that
“love is merely the occupation of a man, while it is life itself for a woman” (683). In this kind of
relationship, the woman seeks to find “meaning and identification” through her lover, first by
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serving him, and then by becoming a part of him (691-3). Avis follows this trajectory almost exactly; as she becomes more entranced with both Ernest, she becomes a part of him and in so doing becomes a revolutionary, transforming herself in order to fit better into his life. Not only is she a prime example of the woman in love, but the kind of love that Avis seems to have for Ernest is nothing short of romantic hero-worship. She calls him her “oracle” (53), and remembers him as her “Eagle… so noble a character” (2). She marvels at the fact that “I, mere I, had filled that mind of his to the exclusion of all his multitudinous and kingly thoughts” (56). She constantly works to please him, and receives gratification by knowing that she can serve him. She reminisces that “and this out of all remains: I made Ernest happy… what greater joy could have blessed me than that?” (130). Ernest also seems to be aware that Avis’ purpose is to be used by him; as he begins to doubt the possibilities of success, he asks her to “sing me to sleep… for I have had a visioning and wish to forget” (164). Like Beauvoir’s woman in love, Avis’ life is a perpetual offering to her lover, and her sole purpose is to make him happy, which she does through joining his revolution and uprooting her entire life for his cause (Beauvoir 707).

Another facet of the woman in love is that she is unable to be truly self-sufficient. We see this in Avis as she blunders through the battle in Chicago, needing rescued from Garthwaite (236, 244) and falling back on her femininity and her status as the woman in love to ensure her safety when she says “Oh, I’m going to be married. Then I’ll be out of it all” (239), reinforcing the idea that the married woman is a passive creature who would not take part in a revolution. When all hope seems lost to her, she is “awakened out of a sound sleep by a man… It came to me as a matter of course that this was Ernest” (249-250), who rescues her from the terror of the city and comforts her by telling her that “for this time is lost, dear heart, but not forever” (252). Like Beauvoir’s woman in love, Avis is under “the curse that weighs on woman trapped in the
feminine universe… incapable of being self-sufficient” and relies on her lover to rescue her from the revolution and assuage her fears (Beauvoir 708).

Perhaps Avis’ most important purpose as an ideal female character in London’s novel and as the woman in love is to be a mirror through which we can see Ernest’s life and accomplishments, as well as the narrative device that makes it possible for us to revere Ernest. She reminds readers of her transformation and merging with Ernest throughout the novel, saying that “I became a part of him” (3), and, remembers that “he found time to love me and make me happy. But this was accomplished only through my merging my life completely into his” (133). It is through her embodiment of Ernest that Avis operates as a platform for sharing his story. Because she has so completely become a part of him, Avis telling her story allows us to more clearly see his, and relate to him as an idealized hero in a way which would be impossible were he to be the narrator, a role in which he might point out his flaws or seem too egotistical. Avis, however, is allowed to see Ernest as perfect and praise him as such without calling negative attention to him. If the ideal woman is “she who embodies most exactly” the man in order to “reveal him to himself” (Beauvoir 264), then Avis is not only the ideal woman who fulfills this purpose, also a mirror of Ernest that provides a better view of him than any story narrated by him could, because she first sees what he is and then becomes it.

Conclusion

At first glance, London’s The Iron Heel appears surprisingly progressive because it chooses a female narrator with her own agency, roundness, and ability to act of her own accord. However, upon delving deeper into the novel, we see that, though Avis is a strong character in her own right, she is defined through her relationship with her father and Ernest and is never
allowed to escape the patriarchal shadow under which she operates. Despite his use of a female narrator, London’s novel is deeply entrenched in gendered ideas of activity and passivity, and it paints deviation from the traditional gendered structures as a mark of a degenerative society. In setting up examples of broken families and women who have been forced to sacrifice their right to motherhood by the war, London actually works to further perpetuate traditional ideas of gender. By choosing Avis as his narrator, London ascribes her some activity and humanity, but more importantly he ensures that his readership will see both his hero and the socialist revolution through the gaze of the woman in love. The perversion of the traditional feminine in London’s novel, then, reinforces traditional gender roles by using their violation to illustrate the depravity of his capitalist dystopia and uses women as plot devices rather than people.
Part II: Mind versus Body in Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four

Introduction

Perhaps the best-known dystopian novel ever written, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is an essential component of any analysis of the history of dystopia. It has become an undisputed classic and has influenced modern thought through its introduction of the concepts of *Big Brother*, *doublethink*, *thoughtcrime*, and *newspeak* into our societal vocabulary. The chilling and ever-relevant story follows Winston, a party member whose job it is to revise history to make it fit the party’s propaganda, as he decides to act out against Big Brother. Along the way, he meets and falls in love with Julia, a young woman whose ultimate goal is to thumb her nose at the party by tricking them into believing her to be a loyal member of the machine while secretly breaking party rules.

Winston’s initial reaction to all women of the party is a mix of lust and hatred; he is bothered by the urge to rape and kill Julia when he sees her at the two-minute’s hate (15) and sees party women as “the most bigoted adherents” to the party’s rule (10). It is only later, when he falls in love with Julia, that he is impressed with her ability to plan and evade the party. However, as Julia reveals more about herself, it becomes obvious that her rebellion is without cause and that she wants only to live life as she pleases, while Winston wishes to fight the party and save the future from its clutches. This divergence in interests paints Julia as a character who values body over mind, pleasure over action, and separates her from Winston’s determination to help to overthrow Big Brother. Though Julia at first appears to be a sort of revolutionary teacher or partner for Winston, it becomes clear as the story progresses that she is nothing more than a love interest, a stupid girl following her own predilections and a slave to her smallness of mind. Though Julia acts as Winston’s physical love interest, in the end, it is O’Brien and by extension
Big Brother who steals his heart and mind. In this analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I will look at the effect of Orwell’s dystopia on women, Winston’s relationship with the feminine, the character of Julia, and Orwell’s presentation of O’Brien as the true love.

**Women, Children, and Family in Orwell’s Dystopia**

Orwell’s work is rife with examples of the deterioration and deformation of family and gender roles in the world of Big Brother. Traditional feminine roles such as mother and caregiver are made fearful and women morph from the sweet, meek mother into the terrible, shrewish party official, who orders men around from the telescreen, and is sexually appealing but out of reach. In this way Orwell’s dystopia plays heavily on the idea of the “eternal feminine” and the binary woman by taking traditionally “good” women and making them helpless and taking traditionally “evil” women and putting them in power, mirroring London’s use of the feminine as a perverted good in order to demonstrate the evil of the ruling class (Musset). It also goes one step further in its categorization of these roles by painting the active woman as evil and the passive, helpless woman as good (Beauvoir 28-29). It is not only the change of feminine gender roles that characterizes the dystopian nature of Oceania, but also the deterioration of the family unit. Sex is prohibited except for the purpose of creating children, and couples are matched with the intention that they have as little attraction to one another as possible (Orwell 65). Children begotten by these loveless marriages are trained to spy on their own parents and look out for behaviors that the party deems unfit. This dissection of the family into individual unsympathetic components isolates people from one another and creates a society in which there is no love and no one to confide in, which creates a space for Big Brother as the ultimate object of love.
The helpless good woman, a returning star from London’s novel, was once free to act as mother and make the home, but is now terrorized by her own children and unloved by her husband. She is epitomized by Mrs. Parsons, a “colorless, crushed looking woman” who lives in the same apartment complex as Winston (20). She is still utterly reliant upon her husband to fix things around the house, and asks Winston to help her “only because Tom isn’t home.” Trapped with her children but robbed of the task of teaching them right from wrong, Mrs. Parsons is purposeless and pathetic, completely at the mercy of her demonic spawn. She is a foil to the prole woman that Winston watches from his window in the safe-house, “a monstrous woman, solid as a Norman pillar” who sings as she hangs up clothes outside, free to raise her own children and happy with her lot in life as a mother (137-138). Unaffected by the rules of the party, the prole woman is everything that Mrs. Parsons cannot be, and she represents the freedom that has been lost by the good woman under the tyrannical rule of the Party and Big Brother.

The empowered evil woman exemplifies the more vital of the effects of the party on women. This woman comes from either youth or motherhood and devoted herself utterly to the party. She is characterized by a number of different women who Winston encounters, including the sandy-haired woman who lets out a “squeak of mangled disgust” at the two minute’s hate (11) and the “shrewish” woman on the telescreen who encourages the men to stretch by telling them that she can do it despite being 39 and a mother of four (36-37). This woman is capable, generally attractive, and married or celibate. She represents the traditional Lilith, the empowered whore, but also refuses to allow men to derive pleasure from her evilness, and in doing so puts herself on a new level of the devil woman. Like a siren seducing a sailor, the party women tease Winston by being attractive but are so utterly attainable that he is driven to fantasize about raping
and murdering them. In this case, it is the tease rather than the whore that represents the utmost evil to Orwell and Winston.

Among the most disturbing cultural changes that the dystopia inflicts is the indoctrination of children into the Party mentality and their recruitment of them as spies against their parents which utterly destroys the traditional structure of the family. The Parson children exemplify this transformation of children from innocent and playful to cunning, evil, and unburdened by any love for their parents. Winston’s description of the Parson children as “tiger cubs which will grow up into man-eaters” highlights his relationship to them. They do not have his humanity, but are instead characterized as baby monsters, menacing even now, with the potential to grow into powerful and dangerous enemies (23). Their mother beholds them with “a look of helpless fright” (24), and when in prison, Winston discovers that Mr. Parsons has been turned in by his own daughter, who “listened at the keyhole. Heard what I was saying, and nipped off to the patrols the very next day” (233). However, it is not the children’s utter disregard for their parents that underlines the skewed and despicable family dynamic that has arisen from the party’s influence, but Mr. Parson’s pride at having been turned in by his own children. He tells Winston “I don’t bear her any grudge for it. In fact I’m proud of her. It shows I brought her up in the right spirit, anyway” (233). It is his father’s pride, so out of place in the universe of Nineteen Eighty-Four, that makes the situation ridiculous. Subconsciously disloyal to the party, Mr. Parsons is condemned by his own children and likely subjected to torture in spite of his best efforts to be a loyal party member and his success in raising dangerous spies. His ultimate prize for his twisted and exemplary fatherhood is the satisfaction of knowing that his children loved him so little that they were willing to give him up to Big Brother. This disfiguration of the family unit is what separates the party from the proles. Winston’s description of his mother’s disappearance
underlines the change in the family dynamic that has taken place in his lifetime when he says that his mother’s death “had been tragic and sorrowful in a way that was no longer possible” (30).

**Winston and Women: Mother, Party Women, and Prostitutes**

It becomes immediately obvious through Winston’s descriptions of his mother, his wife, prostitutes, and the party women who he works with that Winston has a complicated relationship with women and the feminine element, and carries a deep-seated prejudice against women of the party. His unwillingness and inability to create space for his mother and sister before their disappearance demonstrates his feelings of entitlement and his sexual desire explains his utter frustration with women and the desperation that leads him to sleep with the old prostitute. Winston’s relationship to women is perhaps driven by the morphing of good women into evil members of the party, but it is evident that he still feels a softness for the feminine, whether it be an object or a person, and that he still has a desire to possess it, which contributes to his violent fantasies about the women of the party. Winston’s desire to possess the feminine and his inability to do so leads to his aggressive and lusty frustration, and his projection of this frustration on to the women of the party causes him to hate them with vitriol. His propensity to collect fragile objects which he codes as feminine underlines this desire and presents itself as a coping mechanism to counteract his inability to possess what he truly desires: the female body. However, it also has to be noted that Winston’s relationship to women evolves over the course of the novel, likely because of his relationship with Julia.

Winston shares some of his earliest memories about women when he describes his relationship to his sister and mother, who he remembers as a “rather silent woman… sitting
below him with his sister in her arms” (29). His mother’s existence after his father’s disappearance is characterized by her giving all of herself for Winston, in effect sacrificing herself in order to save her children (Beauvoir 43). Winston gladly takes this sacrifice, noting that “She took it for granted that he, “the boy,” should have the biggest portion…he knew that he was starving the other two, but he could not help it; he even felt that he had a right to it” (162). This entitlement to the things which his mother and sister have bleeds over into his relationship to other women, but also causes him feelings of guilt because he, the man of the house after his father disappears, is unable to take the weight for his mother and sister (Beauvoir 261-265), and feels as though he killed them himself (Orwell 160).

Winston’s utter hatred for party women is evident in the assumptions that he makes about them. When he is worried about being caught for writing, he imagines that “some nosing zealot… (a woman, probably)” will wonder why he has ink on his fingers and turn him in (28). He is jarred by the “silly feminine voice” of the woman on the telescreen (53) and claims that “the women of the party are all alike” (67). It becomes apparent later on that this disdain for all women of the party stems largely from Winston’s loathing of his wife, Katharine, who had a had a “stupid, vulgar, empty mind,” and to whom he is likely still married despite their long separation. However, it is not her mind that truly disturbs him, but her perfect adherence to the party, especially concerning their private life. He remembers that when they would attempt to procreate, “as soon as he touched her she seemed to wince and stiffen” (66), and that when he suggested that they be celibate “she refused this” because she felt it was her duty to the party to have children (67). It is her utter lack of desire for him and repulsion by him which leads him to hate her and seek release somewhere else. When he speaks of the prostitute who he visits during his marriage to Katharine, he is melancholy. At first, she appeals to him because “she had a
young face, painted very thick” (63). However, later on, when he discovers that she is “quite an old woman, fifty years old at least” (69), he has sex with her anyway, more out of desperation than desire.

This need to possess the feminine manifests itself in his propensity for feminine objects. The journal that he writes with, with its “beautiful creamy paper” that deserves a real fountain pen rather than a pencil (6), and his decision to “buy further scraps of beautiful rubbish” after he purchases the coral paperweight from Charrington (100) not only mirrors his desire to have a woman but also summarizes his view of them. We see this desire in his fantasies about Julia before she approaches him, in which he imagines “he would ravish her and cut her throat” (15) or in his dream, in which he recalls “she tore off her clothes and flung them…” (31). After she gives him the note proclaiming her love for him, he first imagines her to be a member of the thought police, but is then seized with fear at the thought that “he might lose her, the white, youthful body might slip away from him” (110). It is Winston’s obsessive need for the female body that guides his thoughts and actions concerning women and his neurosis around their meeting. His ultimate fear is the fear that he might lose what he desires most, the “white, youthful” female body.

Winston’s development as a character from hateful towards all women and judgmental of the female form is also in relation to Julia, though it is arguably her presence as a willing sexual partner rather than her personality that constitutes her importance (Beauvoir 261-265). It is during a blissful escape with her that he sees the prole woman, whom he first describes as “monstrous” (137), singing and hanging clothes, that he has the realization “it struck him for the first time that she was beautiful” (219). When he shares this revelation with Julia and she disagrees, he simply tells her “that is her style of beauty” (219). He imagines her as a younger
woman, who had “a year perhaps, of wildrose beauty, and then she had suddenly swollen like a fertilized fruit and grown hard and red and coarse” (220). This idea of the beauty of motherhood, of the “normal” cycle of life and family as beautiful, shows Winston’s growth from seeing women only as old and ugly or beautiful and evil to seeing the motherly feminine beauty that has been lost because of the actions of the party. This placement of the motherhood as a virtuous thing which has been lost in the dystopia mirrors London’s use of the feminine. It is the moment that Winston is able to see women as something other than the evil party woman which shows his salvation through the sexual act. Because Julia makes him happy, he is able to evolve and see what is truly wrong with the society under the rule of Big Brother; the loss of the family and traditional motherhood.

**Julia: the Angel, the Devil, and a Rebel for all the Wrong Reasons**

As a character, Julia appears to straddle the binary of the good, pure woman versus the evil tease or whore (Musset). She becomes Winston’s savior when she tells him she loves him, and is obviously an active agent who takes control over her own life. She is the angel woman in Winston’s eyes, at least at first, who rescues him from his own melancholy. She is the devil woman from the perspective of the party because she appears to be the perfect, loyal party member but instead chooses to follow her own fancy and break the rules that Big Brother has set in place. If nothing else, Julia is rebellious. Her major motive is to act against the party and Big Brother. Though this rebelliousness appears at first to be a sign of independence and strength of character, it later becomes evident that her need to rebel is born not out of a wish for a better world but a physical need for closeness and sexuality. Because of this, Julia cannot even be qualified as a round character that changes over time; she is nothing but a flat, static rebel
without a cause (Forester 50). While it is tempting to paint Julia as an empowered heroine fighting against the party in partnership with Winston, in the end, Julia is not in the rebellion because she cares about the atrocities committed by the party, but because she is angry about being denied the satisfaction of her bodily urges and wants revenge.

Julia’s first actions make her a tempting heroine to follow. She shows courage when she dares to make contact with Winston by slipping him a note that says “I love you” (105-108) and she takes charge and makes intricate and precise plans for when and where she and Winston will meet, impressing him with her “military precision” (113-115). She is perceptive in her selection of Winston as a partner and is delighted by the effectiveness of her disguise in fooling him (120-122). All of these qualities suggest that Julia is on the same plane, or perhaps a plane above Winston. She is an experienced rebel who has mastered her ability to act. She is first presented as the ideal dissenter, an angel to Winston and a devil to the party, and presumably because of this she is also involved in the revolution. Our initial reaction to Julia is as a woman with agency, so much so, in fact, that she does not even need to be rescued. She proclaims herself that she hates both purity and goodness (125), but it is precisely because she is a reflection of the evil woman that Winston loves her. He notes that her tendency to swear whenever she mentions the party “was merely one symptom of her revolt against the Party and all its ways, and somehow it seemed natural and healthy, like the sneeze of a horse that smells bad hay” (122). He sees her as an equal in her hatred of Big Brother and her need to rebel. In the reality in which Winston lives, the devil woman has become the angel woman and vice-versa because of the switching of societal standards. As a result, Julia is held up as a pedestal of goodness, a relief from the complacent and compliant masses to which Winston has become accustomed.
It is not until later the true motives behind Julia’s actions become clear. She says that “you wanted a good time, “they” meaning the party, wanted you to stop having it… she hated the party, but she made no criticism of it” (121). Here the difference between Winston’s rebellion and Julia’s begins to become clear. Julia is similar to a child who is angry that her parents will not allow her to do something and disobeys only to spite them. Winston, on the other hand, recognizes the true injustices that the Party perpetrates and wishes to bring an end to them to benefit future generations. He notes that she does not feel disturbed by the historical revisionism that she performs at the Ministry of Truth and did not “feel the abyss opening beneath her feet at the thought of lies becoming truths” (154). When Winston begins to talk of the rebellion, of what they can do that will make a lasting impact, it is evident that Julia is not the rebel he wanted. Her words, “I’m not interested in the next generation, dear. I’m interested in us” mark the death knell of any hopes Winston had for her to actively affect change in their corrupt society. Julia becomes a pivot point, an example of what not to do, and Winston replies with the all-too-accurate retort “you’re only a rebel from the waist downwards” (156). All of his further interactions with Julia are tainted by her disinterest in true rebellion, and our final assessment of her can be summed up in his words:

“In a way, the world-view of the Party imposed itself most successfully on people incapable of understanding it. They could be made to accept the most flagrant violations of reality, because they never fully grasped the enormity of what was demanded of them, and were not sufficiently interested in public events to notice what was happening. By lack of understanding they remained sane. They simply swallowed everything, and what they swallowed did them no harm, because it left no residue behind, just as a grain of corn will pass undigested through the body of a bird.” (156)

From this moment on, Julia’s actions are unsurprising. She is characterized as having an active body but a passive female mind, incapable of complicated thought or criticism of the Party (Beauvoir 28-29). There is a certain understanding that she is not a true rebel in the way that
Winston wants to be, but an empty shell. This assumption is confirmed both by O’Brien’s lack of acknowledgement of her and her refusal to be separated from Winston even if it is for the benefit of the revolution (172-173), which not only codes her as selfish but also hints at the idea that she needs Winston in order to define herself as a rebel and for her own identification, and in fact mirrors the trope of the woman in love (Beauvoir 681). She falls asleep as Winston reads the revolutionary manifesto to her (217), but by the time she does it is not a jarring event but simply another disappointment in a long line of misfortunes relating to Julia, the rebel without a cause.

**O’Brien and Big Brother as Winston’s True Love**

O’Brien’s stoic nature and magnetic presence set him up as a direct foil to Julia. She is introduced as a woman, inherently bad because of her youth and attractiveness, who Winston feels is dangerous and cannot be trusted (10). In nearly the same breath, O’Brien is introduced as a noble, urbane man who Winston imagines as trustworthy and intelligent and to whom he feels “deeply drawn” (11). Though after this first encounter Winston initially falls for Julia, it becomes clear as he seeks further rebellion and after his capture that he feels a much deeper connection to O’Brien. Throughout the course of the novel, Julia develops into a physical love interest, and comes to represent bodily release for Winston. However, he still finds himself drawn to O’Brien, and even in the midst of his physical bliss with Julia, he knows that “sooner or later he would obey O’Brien’s summons” (159). If Julia represents the woman as body, then O’Brien answers by being the man as mind. To Winston, though Julia is his physical lover, it is O’Brien to whom he remains loyal throughout the novel and who, in the end, emerges as Winston’s true love through their intellectual and spiritual connection.
In Winston’s mind, O’Brien is a constant companion and a brother in thought. At the two minute’s hate, “Winston knew- yes, he knew! - that O’Brien was thinking the same thing as himself” (17). This blind trust in O’Brien’s motives led a number of Winston’s actions and peppered his thoughts about the things which happened to him. He recalls a voice in the night that he remembers, and is convinced that “it was O’Brien who had spoken to him out of the dark” (25). As he is writing in his journal, he realizes that “he was writing the diary for O’Brien” (80). Winston’s innate attraction to O’Brien is left unexplained by Orwell, but it is perhaps the fact that O’Brien stands out so much as a man, quiet, intelligent, and ideal in a similar manner to the “ruggedly handsome” image of Big Brother (1) that creates him as Winston’s perfect savior. He is contrasted from the “lean, Jewish face” of Goldstein with its “senile silliness” (12) and from the “small, dark, and ill-favored” men of the Party (60). He is defined not only by what women lack (Musset), but also what the other men that surround Winston lack, a “large, burly man with a thick neck and a coarse, brutal face” (10). He represents not only the party ideal but also Winston’s ideal man, not stupid like the rest of them but “curiously civilized” and “intelligent,” and therefore, in Winston’s assessment, a possible rebel (11). While this constitutes a queer reading of Orwell’s text, the fact that Winston’s connection to O’Brien is presented as inherently superior to his relationship with Julia speaks to the ubiquity of the assumption of woman as body and man as mind regardless of any imagined or true homoeroticism.

When O’Brien meets Winston and invites him to his house to go over the newest edition of newspeak, Winston interprets it as a sign. “All his life, it seemed to him, he had been waiting for this to happen” (156). After his blissful vacation from the mind with Julia and his realization that she can never rebel in the way that he wants to, he is drawn even more strongly to O’Brien. He takes Julia to meet him, but it is obvious that it is a meeting between men as O’Brien “almost
ignored Julia, taking it for granted that Winston could speak for her” (172). When Julia tells O’Brien that she refuses to be separated from Winston, it takes him longer to respond, and “until he said it, he did not know” whether he would say yes or no (173). In this moment, Winston’s vacillation between his love for Julia and his love for O’Brien is almost palpable, and in the end, he takes the easy way out by agreeing with Julia. However, it seems clear that Winston knows that O’Brien will win him over. “When you looked at O’Brien’s powerful shoulders… it was impossible to believe that he could be defeated. There was not stratagem that he was not equal to, no danger that he could not foresee” (175). When he hands Winston “the heavy black volume” of the rebels, he hands over a mirror of himself; a work of power, rich with content and strength, and as Winston becomes enthralled with the book even in the presence of Julia, it is evident that she has taken a back seat to the rebellion (217).

Winston’s time in the Ministry of Love is the most telling about the feelings he has developed for O’Brien. During the time he is held and before his torture, he notes that “he thought little of Julia…he loved her, but that was only a fact…he felt no love for her…He thought oftener of O’Brien, with a flickering hope” (228-229). Even after O’Brien begins to torture Winston and confesses to him that “they got me a long time ago” with a “mild, almost regretful irony” (238), Winston continues to put his trust in him and imagines that O’Brien is directing his torture, even hallucinating him saying “don’t worry, Winston, you are in my keeping” (243-244). During his torture, Winston “looked up gratefully at O’Brien… his heart seemed to turn over” (252). He is unreservedly and unconditionally devoted to O’Brien even as the man strips him of his outer shell. He bears O’Brien no grudge when he says that Julia has not only betrayed him but did so almost immediately (259). His feelings toward O’Brien are, unlike his feelings to Julia, powerful and inexplicable. He loves Julia because she was his partner, but his
attraction to O’Brien is magnetic, automatic, and unbreakable. However, his love for O’Brien and consequently for the Big Brother figure that O’Brien represents is still interrupted by his love for Julia during his torture. At this point, O’Brien tells him that he “must love Big Brother. It is not enough to obey him; you must love him” (282).

In the end, Winston is no longer able to resist O’Brien’s call or his devotion to him. He betrays Julia. He wins the victory over himself. At the close of the novel, Julia is reduced to a thicker, stiffer waist and “a momentary glance, full of contempt and dislike” (291) and, following Winston’s devotion to O’Brien and Big Brother as the true, intellectual lover, “he loved Big Brother” (298).

Conclusion

While Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four at first appears to introduce a truly capable heroine in Julia, it becomes evident that though Julia offers Winston insights into his own mission and wish to rebel against the Party, she is nothing more than a static, unchanging plot device, a pivot point for Winston and an example of what not to do. She is a rebel without a cause and even a body without mind, concerned primarily with her own pleasure, a quality which, though it satisfies Winston at first, eventually drives him from her in search of an intellectual equal. By destroying the typical family and overturning social norms, Orwell creates an environment in which Julia can be perceived as both angel and devil, but fails to portray her as a character with human roundness or capacity for growth. In setting her up as a foil to the seemingly noble O’Brien, Orwell confounds the ideas of good and evil by characterizing both Julia and O’Brien as having qualities relating to both. However, it is not the divide between good and evil, but rather the divide between mind and body, that most importantly separates O’Brien from Julia.
Though she is a rebel and therefore aligned with Winston, she rebels only in a physical sense.

O’Brien, on the other hand, first acts as an intellectual rebel and then uses the mind to coerce Winston into loving Big Brother. It is his intelligence that sets him apart from Julia and the other people of the Party and causes Winston to love him. In Orwell’s world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is not brain over brawn but mind over body that determines the lasting desirability of a person, and it is through masculine intellect that Big Brother asserts his dominance.
Part III: Do Androids Dream of Feminine Empathy?

Introduction

Written in the middle of The New Wave of science fiction, Philip K. Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep (1968) presents an entirely new kind of dystopia. Unlike the political dystopias of London and Orwell, the universe of Dick’s novel is filled with a post-nuclear apocalyptic earth, new technologies which control and disperse emotions, and humanoid androids which are nearly indistinguishable from “real” people. Additionally, the work introduces the concept of a “new bad future” in which consumer capitalism has devastated earth, and presents a decayed technological wasteland haunted by rapidly blurring lines between humanity and technology (Glass 11). Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter who kills androids, as he struggles with feelings of empathy for them, and tackles ideas about humanity through an exploration of both human and android characters. While the remnants of The Golden Age in which men are manly and women wear bikinis are evident in Dick’s narrative, his novel not only looks at the complicated nature of human emotion, but also introduces multifaceted female characters in order to demonstrate his ideas about what makes us truly human.

Though Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep doesn’t necessarily break the mold of traditional gender performance in science fiction, it does present its female characters as complicated and surprising rather than as static objects present only for plot purposes. While Dick’s novel is primarily explores human compassion and relationships, by including a female character as his epitome of empathy, he paves the way for female characters with substance and personality despite his failure to present us with dynamic and believable women.
Reproduction and Humanity

_Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep_ presents a post-apocalyptic dystopian world governed by new rules and full of new possibilities when compared with the relatively traditional political dystopias of _The Iron Heel_ (1908) and _1984_ (1949). Dick’s novel introduces the nova of the android and commercial space-travel, and his writing opens up a number of avenues on which to explore human nature by defining what is and is not “human.” His work separates outward android femininity, defined by traits which women have, such as sexual appeal and a humanlike form, from true human femininity, which is defined by the ability to feel compassion and empathy, and holds up reproductive ability as highly valuable in a society in which reproductive abnormalities have become a problem. Unlike London’s and Orwell’s works before, Dick’s novel does not look at human femininity from the inside, but instead defines it from without by stripping it into component parts and picking out what he thinks are its most important facets; the ability to feel empathy and the capacity to effectively reproduce.

The concentration on reproduction in Dick’s dystopia is directly related to the nuclear fallout from World War Terminus, a war which rendered the world largely uninhabitable and killed most organisms on the planet. In the wake of the war, the ability to reproduce has become closely monitored due to radiation from “the dust,” and the ownership of animals, particularly females, is a sign of status because of their increasing rarity. This preoccupation with reproduction is hinted at from the outset when Deckard thinks about the monthly tests which confirm him as “a regular… a man who could reproduce” (Dick 8) and his concerns over his earth-bound job, because “loitering on earth potentially meant finding oneself abruptly classed as biologically unacceptable” (16). As if to answer this neurosis and provide a foil to Rick Deckard, the strong, masculine action-hero, we are immediately introduced to John Isidore, a “special” and
a “chickenhead” (19) who ekes out a pathetic existence as a delivery man for an electric-pet vet. The stark difference between these two men sends a clear message about those who are reproductively viable and those who are not; though Deckard struggles with himself and the women around him, he has hope for salvation and at least some agency in the situation. Isidore, on the other hand, is utterly stripped of his manhood and falls prey to Pris and her gang of androids when they invade his apartment complex (152); he is easily influenced and completely reliant on others for his livelihood (19), on the empathy box for his emotional well-being (22), and on his television to tell him the time of day (18). He represents that which Deckard is afraid to become; passive, inept, and inert.

However, while male reproductive ability seems to determine the manliness of a character, feminine reproduction holds a different set of implications. When Deckard buys his animal, the salesman tells him that “the goat- especially the female- offers unbeatable advantages to the serious animal owner” (169) because of its ability to produce more animals. This commodification of the feminine ability to incubate life is a most literal example of women defining capitalism (Rubin 165), as is Iran’s desire to own a real animal (Dick 9). While Iran reproduces the capitalist system through her unpaid labor as a housewife, she also influences the capitalist consumption of the goat by her husband (Rubin 160). Iran’s desire to own an animal prompts Deckard to buy one, and when he does, he purchases a female for the possibility of producing more animals and therefore more wealth, thus perpetuating the capitalist system in which he operates (165). While it is never explicitly stated that Iran is able to reproduce, we assume that she can because she has not been classified as a special. Rachel, on the other hand, like all androids, cannot bear children (Dick 193). This, then, begs a different question; is a female who can never be a mother truly be a woman? Dick’s characterization of his female
characters suggests that traits in line with motherhood, namely reproduction and empathy, are what define a woman’s humanity by devaluing the trappings of femininity attributed to the androids.

**Women as Androids (or Androids as Women): Pris, Irmgard, and Luba Luft**

The female androids in Dick’s novel present an interesting problem in that, while they are representations of feminine objects, they lack the empathy that defines a human woman. Forced to fit into human society, these androids take on the role of the human female. At their best, the female androids manage to represent the superficial facets of “the eternal feminine,” defined by Gilbert and Gubar as demonstrating the virtues of “modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, [and] politeness” (23). They are, however, completely unable to fulfill the most meaningful role the myth of the eternal feminine prescribes them as women— the ability to reproduce (Beauvoir 261-262). In this way, the female androids are condemned to a status of semi-women, women in name but not ability, in image but not action. It is this state of semi-femininity that causes Deckard to mistakenly imagine that androids have humanity and leads to his downfall.

Pris, Irmgard, and Luba demonstrate that Dick’s female androids are not naturally inclined to be particularly feminine. When Isidore first meets Pris, her difficulty in acting human is evident— she is unable to process the meaning of his offer of margarine, she gives away that she does not know Buster Friendly (63), she does not accept his offer for help moving in, shows no fear of the empty apartments which Isidore instinctively avoids (64), and near the end of their interaction, Isidore thinks to himself that “something else had begun to emerge from her. Something more strange… and… deplorable. A coldness… it was not in what she did or said but
what she did *not* do and say*” (67). Pris, unlike Rachel, is not practiced in fitting in as a human female; she is still raw, more android in her actions than her softer and sneakier counterparts. In this way, Pris reveals the true colors of the androids, who are “oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence,” and occupy a space similar to Donna Haraway’s cyborgs (Haraway 68). While Pris’ non-recognition of social norms confuses Isidore, it is her a-femininity that troubles him. She does not embody the feminine warmth which he expects, and does not welcome his presence in the way that he feels a woman should. Irmgard, though she is better at showing compassion for Isidore, also proves her android nature and lack of empathy when she and Pris mutilate the spider that Isidore finds. As she and Pris examine it, Irmgard says “eight? Why couldn’t it get by on four? Cut off four [legs] and see” (206). Even Luba Luft gives off a disturbing coldness, “which he [Deckard] had encountered in so many androids. Always the same: great intellect, ability to accomplish much, but also this” (100). Pris, Irmgard, and Luba, then, demonstrate in the android women a heightened level of activity and an inability to see and process feelings when compared to human women. Despite this a-feminine activity, Pris and Irmgard are still subordinate to Baty, stating that he is their leader (158), though this relationship seems tenuous when Pris comments that he is “a man… of action. Too bad he’s so bad with his hands” (159). These interactions with androids as their natural selves codes the android women as, by nature, utterly oppositional to the eternal feminine. They are active, brusque, scientific and unsympathetic, embody none of the empathy which Dick sets up as essential to femininity, and are only reluctantly subordinate to male-coded characters.

In spite of their oppositional nature, it is also the androids which are presented as the most outwardly feminine characters in the story, at least on the more shallow levels. While Iran is described as “gray” and “unmerry” (3), Rachel is “black haired and slender… [with] long
black eyelashes” (39-40), and Buster Friendly’s android partners are described as “beautiful, elegant, conically breasted foreign ladies” (73). Rachel, “like a human woman,” has “every class of object conceivable filched and hidden away in her purse” (192). After speaking with his wife, “sodden with the six-hour self-accusatory depression” (93), Deckard compares her to Luba Luft, noting that “most androids… have more vitality and desire to live than my wife” (94), and comments on the androids’ feminine attractiveness (95). In this moment, Deckard’s comparison between his human wife and the androids he has encountered is based largely on the myth of the eternal feminine and the superficial ways in which his wife does not fulfill it. Even the other nameless human encountered women in the novel are painted as less than appealing. The woman who speaks about androids on television is described as “a tired, dry, middle-aged female voice” (18). The inspector’s secretary is “an ancient monster from the Jurassic swamp, frozen and sly, like some archaic apparition fixated in the tomb world” (34). The androids, on the other hand, are all thin, beautiful, young, and attractive.

The superficial femininity possessed by the androids causes both Deckard and Isidore to anthropomorphize them, though Isidore does this without realizing that they are androids at all. Deckard notes that “he had found himself physically attracted by several [androids], and it was an odd sensation, knowing intellectually that they were machines, but emotionally reacting anyhow” (95). This inability to distinguish feminine characteristics of androids from human femininity leads Deckard to imagine that Rachel has human qualities which allow her to love that she, as a non-human and non-empathetic entity, lacks (Caporael 215).

This anthropomorphization causes particular problems for Deckard as he seeks out and retires the escaped androids. As he interacts with Rachel and Luba, he finds that he has difficulty killing them, and even confesses to Resch that he is “capable of feeling empathy for at least
specific, certain androids…” (142). Resch’s following comment sums up the source of Deckard’s difficulties when he tells him that the empathy he is feeling is about “sex… because she -it- was physically attractive” (143). It isn’t the android’s humanity that makes it difficult for Deckard to kill them, but what he perceives as their femininity. Here, Deckard mistakes his lust or love for Rachel and Luba as empathy, a problem to which Resch responds with “[go to bed with her first…] and then kill her” (143-144). Deckard’s willingness to associate humanity with android femininity and attractiveness is the driving force of his struggle with Rachel. His belief that he loves her (and that she loves him back) causes not only the death of his goat (227), but also his inability to continue his job as a bounty hunter (202, 235). It is his (and Isidore’s) inability to distinguish the superficial feminine traits of the androids from the human femininity defined by empathy and reproduction that causes their respective predicaments in the first place, and the contrast created between android and human women which paints the androids as wholly other while lifting up Iran as an example of human empathy.

**Iran: The Bitter Wife and the Ultimate Human**

“Now, in her bed, his wife Iran opened her gray, unmerry eyes, blinked, then groaned and shut her eyes again” (Dick 3). Our first introduction to Deckard’s wife is an unflattering. It sets up her up as a soul-sucking old hag, demonstrates a marital relationship similar to that seen between Mildred and Montag in *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and paints Iran as a bitter woman who the innocent and lively Deckard is reluctantly tied to, similar in nature to Tuttle’s “frustrated spinster scientist” (Tuttle 1343). However, unlike Bradbury’s Mildred, Iran ends up earning herself a much more important role in the novel than “the bitter wife” not through her own character arc, but by demonstrating different sides of herself in relation to her husband. Though
it is a stretch to identify Iran as a truly round character by Forster’s definition (50), she plays the important role of communicating to readers the value of empathy and compassion in relationships and, in the end, defines herself as the most empathetic of all of the characters by showing tenderness to Deckard, acting as the novel’s baseline for what a human woman should be. Though Dick does not give us a round female protagonist in Iran, he does at least give us a female-coded object that is multifaceted, aligned with goodness, and demonstrates the importance of the empathy which the androids lack.

Despite her seeming inability to put her needs aside in order to serve her husband in the beginning of the novel (Dick 3), Iran is coded as heavily feminine from her introduction. She exists in her own domestic sphere, alienated from society (Beauvoir 90), and is so passive that she cannot even bring herself to want to dial to be awake (Dick 3). As a housewife, she is completely reliant on Deckard to take care of her (Beauvoir 261-65) and, because the couple lacks children, has nothing to do during the day aside from mope around and partake in “a six-hour self-accusatory depression” (Dick 4). She defines Deckard’s capitalistic desires through her wish for a real animal, and her need to maintain a certain social status is what keeps him taking care of their electric sheep (9) (Rubin 160). In addition to this traditionally feminine coding, we see that Iran is also a highly emotional and even introspective being, a quality which breaks out of the traditional man-as-mind and woman-as-body dichotomy, though stays true to the idea of men-as-logic and women-as-emotion. She notes about the mood organ that she “realized how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence in life… and not reacting” (5) and says that “wanting to dial is the most alien drive” (6). This sense of absence echoes “the problem” of housewives which Friedan explores in The Feminine Mystique, an issue characterized by feelings of emptiness and desperation despite the intellectual awareness that nothing is wrong, and which
Friedan argues is caused by a desire to have the choice to be something more than a housewife (14, 24). Interestingly, it is the male-coded intellectual analysis of the mood organ and the emptiness that she feels which leads Deckard to complain that she has little “vitality and desire to live” compared even to most androids that he meets.

Despite the vitriolic dislike for Iran that Deckard demonstrates when he tells us “I wish I had gotten rid of her two years ago when we were considering splitting up… She has nothing to give me” (94), he still relies on and cares about her as a partner, even if he does not love her in that moment. He tells the officer who detains him that he will phone his wife rather than a lawyer after attempting to retire Luba for the first time (114), and buys the goat with the confidence that Iran will be able to take care of it (170-72). He acknowledges that she is right when she tells him that they need to use the empathy box (173) and she cleans up the blood on his ear after he has been hit by a rock while fusing with Mercer (179). Even as Deckard is leaving his apartment to rendezvous with Rachel, it is clear that Iran is offering herself to him, taking care of his needs, and acting as a his support (Beauvoir 707-8). She later calls because she is “terribly, terribly worried” about him (Dick 233), and before Deckard comes home we find her sitting before the mood organ unable to dial anything, utterly purposeless, and thinking about how Rick would help her find something meaningful to dial if he were there (239). Iran’s reliance on Deckard to help her with even the simplest of things is another way of coding her as feminine in comparison to her relatively independent android peers.

It is at the end of the novel that Iran proves her worth as Deckard’s wife and her superior and more authentic femininity when compared to the androids. When Deckard comes home with a toad Iran discovers is electrical, she feels guilty because he is crestfallen after this revelation (241). In this moment, we see Iran gain a sense of purpose that she lacked before. In Deckard’s
time of need, Iran is there to take care of him and make him feel better. She kisses him, which seems “to please him; his face lit up, almost as much as before” (242), and asks if he will go to bed if she sets the mood organ to the setting that confers “long deserved peace” (243). After Deckard has gone to sleep, Iran goes above and beyond in her expression of empathy and finds the peace and purpose that she has lacked throughout the entire novel. She sits and watches him at first, making sure that he doesn’t wake up with a nightmare (243), and then goes to the kitchen to order artificial flies for the toad. After the saleswoman suggests a few products in addition, Iran says; “‘I want it to work perfectly. My husband is devoted to it.’ And, feeling better, fixed herself at last a cup of black, hot coffee” (244). This immutable urge to please her downtrodden husband exposes Iran’s nature as in line with Tuttle’s “good wife” (1343) and Beauvoir’s “woman in love” (683). Not only is her love for Deckard “life itself” for Iran in that she has no purpose without him, but it is through making herself a perpetual offering to him that she finds her own meaning (Beauvoir 690-94).

Rachel Rosen: Manic Pixie Revising the Woman in Love

If Iran is first presented as the bitter wife, then Rachel initially steps in as a representation of the manic pixie dream girl similar to Bradbury’s Clarisse in Fahrenheit 451, a character whose only plot-purpose is to help the (male) main character reach self-actualization. Rachel, however, is not the pure pixie or an uninterrupted version of Tuttle’s “timorous virgin,” as she first appears (Tuttle 1343). After she sleeps with Deckard, Rachel reveals her true motives and gloats to him that not only has she incapacitated him as a bounty hunter, but that she has done it many times to many men (Dick 199). Because she does not simply exist to actualize Deckard, Rachel’s presence transcends man’s activity; her motives are her own, and her personality, not
just her presence as a woman, is integral to the progression of the story (Beauvoir). While Rachel, as an android, is technically property, she exists as a binary breaker, an active agent, and differs from previous portrayals of women in science fiction. Unlike Orwell’s Julia, a rebel without a cause, Rachel is motivated by a desire to rid the earth of effective bounty-hunters and is clever enough to do so using her feminine wiles, though it is not completely clear whether she acts for herself, her fellow androids, or for the Rosen corporation. At the end of the novel, while Iran emerges as the face of human empathy, it is clear that Rachel, though she has lost her friends, has won the battle against Rick Deckard.

When Rachel is first introduced to us, she isn’t happy to see Deckard, but she strikes us as innocent and naive, particularly just after Deckard realizes that she is an android. When he asks Eldon Rosen if she knows, Rachel reacts as if she had no idea, feigning a sort of naive and horrified surprise when Eldon asked her if she guessed when Deckard asked for a second try (59). Every reference that Deckard makes to her in his first encounter is as a “girl” rather than a woman or an android, further solidifying her identity as childlike. While Eldon seems to be the main actor in this scene and innocent Rachel appears to Deckard as simply a pawn in his game, we learn later that she is playing him at least as much as Eldon is, if not more. Significantly, Deckard thinks that they have fooled him when Rachel first fails the Voight-Kampff test and Eldon tells him that he might retire authentic humans “such as my innocent niece here” (54), while Rachel gloats over their win like a child who has fooled an adversary. From the way Rachel says later in the novel that she has slept with bounty hunters nine times (199), it is clear that Deckard’s situation with Rachel has played out before with other men, though she feigns surprise enough for Deckard to believe that she truly didn’t know her status as an android.
Despite her anti-utopian status as a man-made machine, early Rachel maintains a childlike innocence and insolence that primes Deckard to choose her as his experimental plaything.

Her innocence established, Rachel begins to infiltrate Deckard’s hunt. Her first call to him seems innocuous and placating. She tells him “I really think you need me” (90), but doesn’t show desperation. This plants the seed for Deckard to call her back, with the intention to sleep with her. Though we can assume she knows this based on her later comments, she still plays the fool, telling Deckard that he is “asking too much” (189) and pondering her state as a machine, telling him “I never felt this way before. We are machines, stamped out like bottle caps. It’s an illusion that I- I personally- really exist; I’m just a representative of a type.’ She shuddered” (189). But in her comments she also gives him a sort of confession about why she is following him- to find out how to produce androids that cannot be distinguished from humans, supposedly (190). She tells him that she loves him (194), and finally she gets the point at which she says that she is willing to retire Pris Stratton in order to sleep with him (195). In Deckard’s eyes, this is evidence that Rachel is really in love with him, and is giving herself up to him as the woman in love (Beauvoir 692). After they sleep together, he tells her that if she wasn’t an android, “if I could legally marry you, I would” (197). At this point, Deckard has fallen for the trap that Rachel has set by mis-perceiving her feminine actions as human.

Directly after they wake up from their night together, Deckard thinks to himself “This is my end… as a bounty hunter” (198), a sentiment which is almost immediately echoed by Rachel; her confession drains him, and when he asks her how many times she has “done this”, she tells him “Seven, eight. No, I believe it’s nine… Yes, nine times” (199). Immediately, Deckard’s language around her changes, shifting from “she” to “it” (199). In this way, Rachel has taken her role intended by Deckard as his actualizing force and twisted it so that it is not her death or
disappearance that impacts him so harshly as her intentional confession that she has duped him. The manic pixie refers to “that bubbly, shallow cinematic creature that exists solely... to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures” (Rabin).

In Fahrenheit 451, Clarisse is a true manic pixie, because she exists just long enough to make Montag question and change his worldview and is then abruptly wiped from his story by a greater force (Bradbury). Rachel, however, is a twisted pixie. She is not some innocent ephemeral being, but a talented actress bent on changing Deckard into something that cannot bring her or any android harm. Instead of allowing Deckard to reach self-actualization, she manipulates him into a position of powerlessness and in effect steals from him his agency as a bounty hunter, and is because of this able to reclaim both her own agency and her status as a character who is able to act for herself. In his final moments with her in the car, Deckard realizes this, seeing her lit cigarette as “a steady, unwavering index of Rachel Rosen’s achievement. Her victory over him” (202).

However, the question of for whom Rachel acts and why is not completely answered by this analysis. Though during her confession she tells Deckard that the Rosen association wants to create an android that can pass the Voight-Kampff test as a human (198), and she tells him that she and Luba were close friends and that she knew the androids that he wanted to retire (198-199), we don’t have a complete sense of whether Rachel acts for herself or has feelings which might be comparable to those of a human. When she comments to Deckard about his goat, telling him “‘you love that goat more than me. More than you love your wife, probably. First the goat, then your wife, then last of all-’ she laughed merrily ‘what can you do but laugh?’” (202), we see a side of Rachel that expresses a sort of painful lamentation that she cannot have the same love from a human that a living thing is given simply because it is “natural”. While she does win the
game she plays with Deckard by making him incapable of bounty hunting, she is unable to maintain his love for her. In the end, he sees her as a machine. Perhaps, then, Rachel’s actions are out of a desire for revenge, revenge for the unfairness of the dichotomy between humans and androids. The fact that Rachel expresses feelings of regret and longing and takes such vengeful action begs the question of whether androids could ever be considered human and gives Rachel an unexpected roundness of which makes her more human than the cardboard cut-outs of women seen in works like Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*.

**Android Femininity v. Human Female Empathy: Are Any of these Women “Human”?**

Perhaps the most intriguing question begged by Dick’s novel is whether any of his female characters, human or android, are presented as realistic, dynamic beings. Despite the fact that it technically passes the Bechdel test and its bustling cast includes five different named, speaking female characters, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* is still set in a man’s world in which women and female androids exist primarily for Deckard’s growth and eventual self-actualization. However, a major change has taken place in the presentation and perception of women between *The Iron Heel* and *1984* and Dick’s work. Instead of coding feminine passivity or physicality as negative and almost causal of the dystopia, Dick’s novel feminizes and then exalts human compassion and empathy in his presentation of Deckard’s wife Iran, and holds up the feminine body as special and valuable because of its ability to incubate life. Instead of showing the effects of a dystopia on human women and exalting the traditional family structure or demonizing feminine traits, Dick shows the importance of humanity and empathy by exploring female-coded android characters which lack the important traits that would make them into caring partners and
good “women in love,” and places Iran at the pinnacle of humanity through her demonstration of empathy.

Dick makes it clear through Iran’s final actions that his novel’s idea of “woman” coincides directly with his idea of “empathy,” and sets up a world in which emotional responses quite literally define humans from androids. The question of empathy, then, is not only central to Dick’s work, but also synonymous with the question of one’s humanity. This much is evident from the way that Deckard identifies androids using his Voight-Kampff Empathy Test, which no android can pass, but which humans pass reflexively (Dick 29) and his note that “empathy, evidently, exists only within the human community” (30). Humanity, then, is defined by what androids lack, a relationship which seems directly correlated with Beauvoir’s assertion that men are defined by what women lack (5). The binary between human and android also creates and reinforces the assumption of woman as a natural being by setting up androids as unnatural and oppositional. Interestingly, while empathy is set up as the ultimate test of humanity by the Voight-Kampff Test, outward empathy is expected only in female characters. Deckard, on the other hand, struggles to squelch any empathy which he feels for the androids, and does not appear to feel much empathy for Iran. Our realization that Deckard does not seem to feel empathy, but Isidore does, then, is interesting. Though Dick sets up empathy as a test of humanity, it seems that the only characters allowed to feel or show it are women and weak and impotent men.

The androids know that they are differentiated from humans based on their empathetic inability, and even attempt to act empathetic in order to avoid detection by humans. Irmgard seems to understand this when she tells Pris not to call Isidore a chickenhead and gives him “a look of compassion” (159), but proves that she is lacks emotional intelligence when she asks
whether the spider really needs eight legs and tells Pris to “cut off four and see” (206). Luba tells Deckard after he buys her a print of the picture that she likes that “there’s something strange and touching about humans” (133) and that an android would never have done such a thing. These observations seem to back up the idea that androids are emotionless, purely logical beings. However, Rachel’s lamentation over Luba’s death and her desire to protect the other androids seems to stem out of some kind of identification with her fellow androids, and when she tells Deckard about her friendship with his quarry she does so in a moment that does not require her to show empathy (198-199). One must wonder why Rachel, a being supposedly incapable of feeling empathy for others, chooses to protect her fellows. Is it purely out of a sense of duty to the company, or is it because of a friendship, even an emotional identification, that she has with the other androids? Rachel’s empathetic behavior complicates the binary of androids as unemotional and humans as empathetic.

Another complicating factor is Deckard’s own empathy, or rather his lack thereof. Deckard’s way of relating to Iran is in no way empathetic; he disregards her thoughts and feelings when she describes to him her problems with dialing, and characterizes her as a consumer and the reason he must work so hard to buy a real animal (9). He compares her to androids, even placing her below them, and wishes that they were divorced (94). When their goat is killed, he is not concerned with Iran’s feelings but with the fact that Rachel has beaten him once again (227). His inability to see Iran as another person with complex thoughts and needs and his refusal to even attempt to sympathize with her code him as a disinterested husband and anything but empathetic. Even his so-called empathy for the androids is based on lust rather than true concern for their feelings. Resch calls this as it is when he describes our hero’s attraction to Luba (143), but it is Deckard’s reaction to Rachel that solidifies his lack of feeling. As Rachel
laments her lot as an android, noting that she cannot bear children and that she isn’t alive,
Deckard simply continues to undress her, exposing “her pale, cold loins” (193) and “taking off
his shirt and tie” (194) without acknowledging her existential crisis. While Rachel at least seems
to play for a team, Deckard’s behavior verges on the psychopathic. He cares only for himself.
When compared to Rachel and Deckard, Iran emerges as a saintly figure. She worries about
Deckard’s safety and emotional well-being when he comes home with the electric frog (241),
and finds her purpose only through serving her husband, fitting into the mold of Beauvoir’s
woman in love (707-8). Though Iran’s placement paints her as the most empathetic and therefore
the most human character so far as the constraints of Dick’s world suggest, her position as
completely selfless flattens her character and places her in a box, essentially taking a once-
complex person and dehumanizing her through her relationship to the main character, who gives
her purpose by needing her.

Interestingly, if Deckard is a non-empathetic psychopath, and Iran is the women in love,
Rachel emerges as the most human character. Though coded as villain, Rachel spends the
entirety of the novel attempting to thwart Deckard’s plans to murder her companions and is still
independent at the conclusion of the novel. While killing Deckard’s goat may speak to some
level of immaturity, it can also be read as a poetic revenge. Had Dick chosen to write the story
from Rachel’s perspective, we might have been presented with a main character who shares
more of our human qualities than the novel’s swashbuckling protagonist.
Conclusion

Though not a complete departure from gendered presentations of good and evil or agency and passivity, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* complicates and questions the binaries that run throughout the novel. Dick uses different types of feminine traits to create a conflict for male characters and in doing so separates superficial femininity from the idea of good, natural, human femininity, and then places Iran’s initially unappealing person at the top of his moral pyramid, subverting the idea of the binary woman who can be either good or evil. While Dick’s novel does give us another set of rules for what a woman ought to be, it takes a step forward from using femininity as a force of evil and defining women as passive and intellectually unavailable. Though Dick’s female characters are not as agent as Deckard, both Rachel and Iran are able to think and act for themselves and are given traits which are culturally valued. Dick sets up Rachel and Iran as oppositional forces with a potential for dynamic humanity, and in doing so (perhaps unintentionally) brings up questions of whose side we ought to be on.
Part IV: Still Hungry for Change: Katniss as the New Male Protagonist

Introduction

The face of the popular dystopian novel has changed drastically since the publication of London’s *The Iron Heel* in 1908, and perhaps nowhere is this change so outwardly evident as in *Katniss Everdeen*, the protagonist of Suzanne Collins’ wildly popular *The Hunger Games* (2008), which follows Katniss after she is thrust into a barbaric ceremonial slaughter put on by a consumerist upper class. Though not aimed at a comparable audience to older dystopian works, Collins’ book epitomizes the contemporary dystopian and is easily the most popular work of dystopian science-fiction to hit the shelves in recent years. Here, I will compare *The Hunger Games* to its predecessors and question how much the presentation and use of gender has changed in the 100 years since the publication of London’s work, questioning particularly whether Collins’ novel represents a new era of gender representation or subtly recycles the same mechanisms seen in the novels by London, Orwell, and Dick.

While Katniss is an undeniably strong character, Collins’ dystopia is little more than an echo of older works. The characterization of Panem through the fractured lower-class family and the feminized consumer reads as a direct throwback to London, and the presence of multiple strong male mentors and an excess of women coded “weak,” “evil,” or “untrustworthy” does not break the mold. Even as she lifts up agency within femininity, Collins reinforces ideas of feminine dependence and innocence, which are supremely embodied within the male-gendered but female-coded character Peeta. Katniss, while a female character, is little more than our traditionally logical, active, and unemotional male hero given a girl’s body. Though *The Hunger Games* is commendable in that it bends the genders of the traditional dystopian characters, it fails
to subvert the gendered norms which have become entrenched in the dystopian narrative perpetuates the seemingly systemic devaluation traditional feminine roles.

The Fractured Family, Focus on Survival, and Capitol Consumerism

Much like London and Orwell’s works, *The Hunger Games* characterizes its dystopia as problematic through its effect on the traditional family structure. However, while the destruction of the family is somewhat peripheral in *The Iron Heel* and *1984*, here it takes center stage, defining Katniss’ life and her battle against the Capitol. The themes of survival and family are emphasized by the consumerist nature of Panem, which is run by a frivolous capitalist aristocracy that uses the citizens of the outer districts to keep their high standard of living. While Collins’ dystopia can serve as an allegory for the nature of the United States’ role in the global economy, the novel’s main goal is not to vilify capitalism as London did. The novel instead uses a villainous capitalist system as a plot-point in order to set up the story’s real issues of family, survival, and security.

*The Hunger Games* takes place in Panem, a country which, according to legend, rose up after a great war (Collins 21). Panem is broken up into twelve districts, which each produce a special resource, and the Capitol, which houses the country’s government. The Capitol’s consumerist lifestyle is supported through oppressive capitalism and inequality between the districts; Panem is a system in which the more central districts benefit from the sweatshop-like labor of the outer districts. Additionally, each year the Capitol puts on an event called “The Hunger Games,” in which 24 children, two from each district, are sent to the Capitol to fight to the death in a romanticized and televised competition of survival. While one might point to the games themselves as the problem in Panem, it is clear that the games are simply an outgrowth of
an upper class which is fascinated with the ultimate form of the survivor-based reality TV show and doesn’t understand or care about the plight of those who suffer to give them their high standard of living. Interestingly, the image of evil in Panem is, as in London’s work, the ignorant, feminized consumer. Characterized by their frivolous and vain focus on the outer self, the citizens of the Capitol, are, like Friedan’s housewife, forced to find meaning in becoming beautiful or buying things (Friedan 173). This vanity and mindless frivolity is exemplified by Effie Trinket, who is first described by “her scary white grin, pinkish hair, and spring-green suit,” and who “gushes” and “trills” in her “bright and bubbly” voice as she picks children from district 12 for the games (Collins 21, 28, 23), and Katniss’ prep team, who don orange curls, purple lipstick, and pea-green skin (75-76). By vilifying a feminized consumer Capitol, Collins plays on an age-old trope which calls out the supposed frivolity and thoughtlessness of the feminine.

Instead of giving us a character like Avis or Winston, protagonists on the upper crust or at least in some sort of cultural favor, Collins presents readers with a character who comes from the lowest of the low, one of Orwell’s proles or an unnamed child in the scheme of London’s work. From District 12, the coal-mining district, the Everdeens are among the poorest of their already destitute community and live in what is colloquially referred to as “the Seam.” Unlike other characters, who must explain the condition of the poor, Katniss sticks the reader’s nose in the problems with Panem simply by speaking her story. Collins’ decision to present us with a character from the underbelly of society is likely due to both the great increase in literacy since the early 1900s and our cultural obsession with the underdog. Katniss is, undeniably, the unlikely hero and the under-doggiest of all people in Panem. She casually mentions her father’s death in a mining accident when talking about her own ability to hunt for her family (Collins 6) and bitterly
recounts her mother’s inability to cope without a patriarch. Katniss explicitly tells us “at eleven years old… I took over as the head of the family” (32), and demonstrates that she feels obligated to care for her mother and sister when she tells us that “the community home would have crushed her [Prim] like a bug, so I kept our predicament a secret” (33). In an ideal or even reasonable situation, Katniss would not be expected become the head of her family. However, her major argument against having children of her own is not fueled by her own situation, but the terrifying reality of the games.

While Katniss is driven by a feeling of responsibility for her family, she is also governed by the lack of security which families experience in the cultural system of the games. Her decision to avoid having children (9) is based upon the fact that everyone is subject to the games and that children can be taken from parents and placed in a situation in which they will almost certainly be killed. The Capitol’s insatiable desire for entertainment, which literally kills innocent children and prevents a secure future in which Katniss can have a family and fulfill an idealized role as a mother, is the true evil of the Capitol and of Collins’ dystopia. Though presented differently from London’s and Orwell’s stories, Collins carries on a tradition of characterizing her dystopia as evil through its dissolution of the nuclear family.

The Good, Strong, Masculine and the Weak or Evil Feminine

While Katniss is a positively-coded and highly agent female character, not so much can be said of her female would-be mentors. In fact, there seems to be a divide between the men and women in Katniss’ life who influence her actions and should act as adults in the context of her story. While Collins’ novel at first appears to subvert traditional gender roles, the adults we encounter in Katniss’ life exist in highly gendered binaries which do little or nothing to break
down traditional representations of men and women, in science fiction or any other genre. Katniss’ parents are two halves of a traditionally gendered nuclear family in which the father is the breadwinner and the mother is a housewife. Haymitch and Effie are a depressed drunk and a socialite who is overly concerned with status and consumerism, and Peeta’s parents fulfill the archetype of the evil, overbearing wife and the kindly but oppressed husband. However, the importance of the gendering of these characters is not in their initial pairings but in the way that they are coded as good and bad. Katniss’ father is her first-best mentor, whereas her mother is a burden. Peeta’s mother represents an evil upper-class which will not help the unfortunate, while his father is a philanthropist. Effie, while she means well, is completely ineffective, whereas Haymitch, who at first does not seem to care about Peeta and Katniss, ends up being the mastermind behind keeping her and Peeta alive near the end of the games (Collins 368). Cinna and Gale, Katniss’ other notable companions, are also male; Cinna teaches Katniss to believe in herself, and Gale is presented as Katniss’ more conventionally gendered equal. The way in which these gendered pairs are separated is reminiscent of Orwell’s presentation of the nobility of men and the thoughtlessness of women, and exposes a prejudice against strong femininity.

The Everdeen family was happy before the mine accident that killed Mr. Everdeen, or at least functional, according to Katniss. After her father died, however, her mother “didn’t do anything but sit… eyes fixed on some point in the distance” (32). Despite the fact that she has two children who need her, Katniss’ mother is so overcome by grief that she is not only unable to care for her children, but also herself. This sort of helpless femininity as attached to man is described by Beauvoir as the “woman in love” who finds her own meaning and identity through serving a man and is not able to be self-sufficient; without man to take on the weight for her and be her identity, the woman in love becomes nothing more than an ineffectual shadow (Beauvoir
Katniss’ assessment of her parents demonstrates that she received all of her positive traits, such as her ability to survive and provide for her family, from her father, and that her mother is only a burden in the wake of her father’s death. The death of Katniss’ father forces her to grow up by essentially orphining her because her mother’s inability to parent forces her to take over as the primary support for her broken family.

Both Effie and Haymitch seem equally useless at the beginning of Katniss’ journey, but as she moves through the games, it becomes clear that Haymitch is the brains of the operation. While Effie and Katniss’ prep team mean well and have a certain fondness for her and Peeta, they also have affected speech that “you can’t help but make fun of” (Collins 74), and an overwhelming preoccupation with beauty and consumption. Cinna, on the other hand, is presented as an oasis of reason and simplicity in a desert of consumerism, though he is also from the Capitol. When he tells Katniss “I asked for district 12” (78), he demonstrates that he is above the fight for status that seems to permeate the games and is concerned with something deeper. Even Caesar Flickerman, the man who interviews the tributes, “really does his best to make the tributes shine” (151). We consistently see the characters from the Capitol put into the box of the careless but well-meaning feminine and the somewhat enlightened and perhaps humanitarian masculine. This micro-categorization of the characters based on gender splits even the culture of the Capitol into a superior masculine and an inferior feminine. In the end, it is Cinna’s encouragement as well as Haymitch’s strategic communication during the games (368) that keeps Katniss alive long enough for her to come up with a plan to save herself and Peeta.

Peeta’s parents present the other end of the gendered binary. While Katniss’ parents and the people of the Capitol show us good, strong masculinity versus weak or thoughtless femininity, Peeta’s parents show a strong evil woman and a good but weak man. Katniss recalls
Peeta’s mother screaming at him to “feed it [bread] to the pig, you stupid creature!” (36) while she stood outside their home starving, but when she and Peeta are leaving for the Capitol, Peeta’s father tells her that he’ll “keep an eye on the little girl [Prim], make sure she’s eating” (46). Because Peeta’s mother is the only outspoken woman we encounter in the novel aside from Katniss and the female career tributes, the only presentation of women as both strong and feminine is of them as either bloodthirsty (like the tributes) or selfish. Peeta’s family also acts as a foil to Katniss’ family, and perhaps explains Peeta’s feminine qualities through their similarity to his father’s comparative passivity.

Finally, Katniss herself is a battleground between masculine and feminine traits. Katniss is not only strong, hardworking, and responsible, traits which she codes masculine by crediting her father for giving them to her, but she also completely rejects any femininity that she is ascribed, seeing it as frivolous, silly, and inauthentic. When her sister tells her she looks beautiful when she puts on a dress before the reaping, Katniss replies “and nothing like myself” (18), outwardly rejecting beauty because it is feminine. When Peeta says to Katniss “I’ve got you to protect me now” (380), he further codes her as the active, masculine protector. Katniss works throughout the entire novel to push away any semblance of femininity, from allowing herself to feel beautiful to showing emotion, and embraces instead her father’s agency, activity, and ability to protect his family.

**“Good” Femininity, Agency, and Helplessness**

To argue that Collins only portrays femininity as negative would be wrong. There are many female characters or feminine-coded characters with admirable traits who teach Katniss empathy and compassion throughout the course of the novel. Prim and Katniss’ mother are both
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capable of healing and basic medicine. Rue is smart and clever, able to hide, listen, and plan sneak attacks on other tributes. Foxface survives most of the games by using her wits and stealing food from others, and Peeta can disguise himself as a tree by using body paint. To say that these characters have no agency and no control over their own future would be incorrect. However, though all of these feminine-coded characters have positive traits which help them to survive either inside or outside of the games, they are undeniably dependent upon those around them, and fit into Beauvoir’s analysis of the ways in which male and female have traditionally interacted with one another. All positively coded feminine characters in Collins’ novel are passive (Beauvoir 28), directly or indirectly cared for by a more masculine character (261), and are weaker than and subordinate to the masculine character(s) they rely on (43). While the feminine is not always evil in The Hunger Games, the “good” feminine is always dependent on the masculine, and always has a softer touch.

Prim is the first example we see of a completely positively coded female character. She is “out of place” (Collins 9) in the dirty world of the seam because of her fair hair and blue eyes, and she brings out Katniss’ tenderness when she tells Prim to “tuck your tail in, little duck” (18). Katniss would do anything to protect her, including take her place in the games, as she demonstrates when she volunteers to go in Prim’s place. While Katniss knows that Prim is able to collect herbs, collect milk for her goat, and help her mother heal the sick, she doesn’t trust her to be able to take care of herself, noting that she doesn’t suggest that Prim attempt to hunt, remembering that “the woods terrified her, and whenever I shot something, she’d get teary and talk about how we might be able to heal it if we got home soon enough” (42). Instead, she relies on Gale to feed her family, because Prim’s hyperfemininity makes her so soft and compassionate that it renders her useless in the taking of life, even when it is for own survival. Prim is the
driving force behind Katniss’ need to be responsible and protective because she is so feminine, so helpless, and so good. The little agency she has is used only in helping others and never to harm.

Rue is a step up the ladder from Prim when it comes to self-sufficiency, though she is still reliant upon Katniss during the games and a direct doppelganger to Katniss’ little duck. She comes up with the plan to attack the careers with tracker-jackers (222), keeps out of sight of the others by leaping from tree to tree (229), and helps Katniss heal her stings after she escapes the career tributes (242). In spite of this agency, however, she still needs Katniss to provide her with food and protection. She trusts Katniss wholeheartedly after their initial partnership, and “snuggles against [her] and falls asleep” (251) after they find one another. Katniss is aware of Rue’s reliance on her when she remembers that “Prim has my mother and Gale and a baker who has promised she won’t go hungry. Rue has only me” (258). Fittingly, it is when Rue and Katniss split up that Rue meets her end. By the time Rue dies, Katniss is carrying not only her own will to survive, but also the promise that she makes to both Prim and Rue to win the games; the weight that she takes on for these characters, while symbolic, is essentially what gives her the strength to go on. By committing to them that she will do her best to win, Katniss acts as the man taking on the weight of the women in her life (Beauvoir 261).

However, while Prim and Rue both offer themselves as purely feminine objects which Katniss must protect from harm, Peeta presents a more complex look at femininity within the arena of the games and a more interesting look at the ways in which masculinity and femininity are enacted within *The Hunger Games*. 
Peeta, Teacher of Kindness and “The Woman in Love”

Perhaps the most interesting character when it comes to gender and gender roles, Peeta plays the role of Katniss’ “movie girlfriend” who constantly needs to be saved, but also acts as a vessel through which Collins demonstrates that not all men are masculine and not all femininity is bad. Katniss’ relationship with Peeta forces her to look more deeply at herself and the motivation behind her actions, but Peeta’s primary purpose is as her foil. He is kind, emotional, passive, and most concerned with his love for her, while she is willing to be actively ruthless if it means that she will survive and ignores her feelings for both him and Gale throughout the novel. By setting Peeta as Katniss’ opposite, Collins draws attention to the things that our heroine lacks and the ways in which she is weak because of her inability to acknowledge her emotional self.

From the start, Peeta is characterized as kind. He gives Katniss a “reassuring squeeze” (Collins 39) when he is chosen as the male tribute and throws her bread when she and Prim are starving in spite of his mother’s instructions and the punishment he likely received (38). Even as she interacts with him, suspecting that he has an ulterior motive for acting the way he does, she realizes that he is just a kind person (59). Throughout the novel, Katniss struggles with Peeta’s kindness as well as his willingness to show his emotions and be in touch with himself. She finds herself feeling guilty when he tells her about his “struggling with how to maintain his identity, his purity of self” while she thinks of strategies to kill the other tributes and with the games (171). Later, it becomes clear that Peeta’s major purpose is to teach Katniss that she needs not only to save her physical self, but also to remain human and not succumb to the will of the game-makers. After Rue’s death, Katniss remembers their conversation before the games and, understanding what he meant, buries Rue in flowers to honor her and show the Capitol that she is still human (286-290). She wishes that she “could tell Peeta about the flowers… that I now
understand what he was trying to say on the roof” (293). Here, it is evident that Katniss has learned the lesson that will save both her and Peeta later, though it lands them in bigger trouble with the Capitol. She has learned that it isn’t just victory in the games that matters, but victory against the system that put them in the arena in the first place. Without Peeta, Katniss would simply be another victor. With Peeta, Katniss becomes a revolutionary, prompted to fight against the Capitol and awakened to a responsibility to take the Capitol down and preserve her humanity.

In spite of her larger realization that she must preserve her “self” and fight against the Capitol, Katniss does not seem to realize the importance or even the reality of Peeta’s feelings for her. At first, she assumes that he is acting in order to increase his chances of survival in the games, as when he tells Caesar Flickerman that he likes a girl and “she came here with me” (158), creating the drama of the star-crossed lovers within the minds of the Capitol citizens. She is surprised when she wakes up at him screaming for her to run after she sees him with the careers (234) and immediately dismisses Rue’s suggestion that his feelings for her are genuine and not simply an act for the Capitol (249). When they meet in the woods after the rule change that would purportedly allow two tributes from the same district to win together, she thinks to herself that he’s “great at this stuff” (317), acting like he loves her, without assuming that he could actually feel anything for her. She sees him as a “perplexing, good-natured boy who can spin out lies so convincingly” (379). Katniss doesn’t seem to realize the Peeta was never acting, that it was not strategy on his part, until after the two of them are returned to the Capitol and make their appearance as victors. It is only then that she sees that while he was in love with her, she acted in order to preserve her chances of survival rather than out of love for him. She articulates this to herself after he reacts with anger at her using him to escape the games, thinking to herself “I want to tell him that he’s not being fair. That we were strangers. That I did what I
had to stay alive, to keep us both alive in the arena” (453). In the end, Peeta’s greatest strength is also his greatest weakness. While he had to teach Katniss the meaning of compassion, he is also unable to accept that she could act like she loved him in order to survive, and seems to flip from being a woman in love to being the “nice guy” who feels slighted by a woman’s rejection.

While Peeta is essential to the trajectory of Katniss’ journey and his personality is important, he also constitutes, indisputably, another rendition of Beauvoir’s “woman in love.” He constantly values Katniss’ life above his own, telling her “don’t die for me” (Collins 361) when she has to retrieve the medicine he needs for his infection. He is able to act so convincingly because his love for Katniss is the most important part of his identity, because he has forgotten himself in his love for her (Beauvoir 683). Peeta’s role is to embody a part of Katniss that she did not realize existed in order to reveal her to herself, (261-265) and it is because of the way he wraps his identity in her that he is so lost when he finally realizes that she does not love him. When Katniss notes that “his voice isn’t angry. It’s hollow” (454) she hits the important point that without Katniss, Peeta is only a shell. Because Peeta only exists as an offering to Katniss, he is unable to accept her rejection and see the logical reason behind her actions.

**Katniss as the Masculine Heroine and the Consequences of Gender-Flipping**

At a glance, Katniss seems to break the norms of the traditional dystopian hero simply because she is a young woman. She is, unlike previous female characters, driven by her own goals, unattached to a man, and has agency in her own right. Unlike the “image of a woman” in science fiction, she feels relatable, authentic, and much more human than the perfectly feminine heroines of the ages. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that Katniss isn’t particularly feminine. Instead, she sits in a category without gender, in which she could be
comfortably gendered as male, female, or neither, though she arguably embodies more masculine traits. Her explosions of fury, which are compared to the career tribute Cato, her inability to process her emotions and the emotions of others, and her strict adherence to the logical confuse her gendered identity further. While Katniss’ preferred pronouns break the norms of the genre, her actions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings are all well within the bounds of what is to be expected from the traditional dystopian hero.

Katniss as an intellectual entity is not traditionally feminine by any stretch of the imagination. While she has a feminine appearance, she makes it obvious to us that she is still the hardened victim of a society that wants to keep her down. She talks about the way that she used to speak against the government, until she realized that it would cause trouble and she learned to “hold her tongue and turn [her] features into an indifferent mask” (Collins 7). Here, she essentially tells us that she had to learn to control her active, aggressive temper, and was therefore feminized through the oppression of the state. Perhaps the closest Katniss comes to being traditionally feminine is during her softer moments with Prim, but even her relationship with her sister feels gendered in a masculine way because she feels the need to protect Prim from all harm.

Katniss’ masculine traits are not all “good.” Throughout the games, she brings up the boiling rage that she feels around the injustice of the system, a rage which, though sometimes productive, also has the potential to turn her into a monster. When she shoots an arrow at her evaluators during their assessment of her out of sudden fury, she risks her life (124), though they end up rating her well because of her audacity (132). This loss of control to anger is mirrored in the career tribute Cato, who, furious at being fooled by Katniss, tells his cronies that “when we find her, I [will] kill her my own way, and no one interferes” (262), suggesting that he has a sort
of torturous cruelty in mind that goes beyond simple murder. She later notes that “his rage is so extreme that it might be comical… if I didn’t know that it was aimed at me” (270). When she thinks of how she scored better than him in training, she compares his hot temper to Peeta’s mild nature, imagining that, unlike Peeta, Cato would feel bitter at her outscoring him (393), but then realizes that her reaction to the game makers’ ignoring her led her to lose her judgement in fury the same way that he does, and she concedes that “maybe I understand Cato better than I think” (395). If Peeta is Katniss’ teacher of compassion, then Cato is her warning against what straying into the extremes of masculinity looks like. While Katniss does learn to preserve her humanity while winning the games, she constantly reminds us that she could be capable of atrocities not unlike Cato’s if she allows her fury to consume her.

Katniss’ inability to realize and process her own emotions is also a traditionally masculine trait that seems to be a staple of the dystopian hero’s personality. When she is acting as though she is in love with Peeta to please the Capitol, her thought process is still utterly logical. “One kiss equals one pot of broth” (316), she thinks when Haymitch sends her the gift after she and Peeta are reunited. She has to remember “the whole romance thing” when she is around Peeta, and only plays in order to keep her donors happy. When she talks about romance, she thinks of the girls in the Seam who are able to easily act romantic, but tells us that she’s “never had much time or use for it” (364-365), once again pushing her own behavior away from that of other women within the narrative. Even her decision not to have children is purely logical. They would not be safe from the reaping, so she will never have them (378). The dichotomy created between her logical thought process and Peeta’s emotionality is similar to that between Rick Deckard and Iran in Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep. In fact, the relationship between the characters in each novel is essentially the same; the protagonist has a hard heart, has
been beaten down by the world and is ready to do whatever it takes to survive, and the love interest is the one who demonstrates the importance of empathy and compassion, which the hero lacks.

Katniss is the traditional dystopian hero reborn with the mind of a man and the body of a woman. While her youth and gender break the norms of the dystopian hero, she is little more than a version of Rick Deckard that an attractive actress can be hired to play and who is still utterly disconnected from traditionally devalued and feminized traits. While Katniss represents a breakthrough in that she gives girls a strong woman to look up to, she does not present traditional femininity as valuable, but instead continues to tell the myth that in order to be a hero, one must be masculine, unfeeling, and strong. Notably, Winston, Deckard, and Katniss all show some ambiguity around their “goodness” as characters. While Ernest is undeniably good, the protagonists in more recent works present readers with more relatable protagonists who have potential for both good and bad, and are not ideal, but human. While Katniss might be a step in the right direction when it comes to gender equality in dystopia, she begs the question of whether it is possible to have a traditionally feminine heroine as the central protagonist in a traditionally dystopian narrative.

**Conclusion**

While *The Hunger Games* takes the traditional dystopian narrative in a slightly different direction by placing Katniss at the helm of the story, it fails to subvert gender norms or the presentation of masculine versus feminine traits which has played out in older dystopian works. This revelation leads to the question of whether the traditional presentation of the feminine as weak and subordinate and the hero as masculine, strong, and unemotional are cultural norms that
seep into the story, or if they have become so entrenched in the creation of the dystopian protagonist that they are nearly impossible to break. If the masculine protagonist is a part of a tried and true formula for dystopia, do the norms present in a dystopian story inherently act to devalue traditional feminine roles, and if they do, is the devaluation of the traditional feminine essential to dystopian works? While Collins’ characters confound norms, the story she tells is based on the same formula with a few identity changes, and represents not a revolutionary leap in the genre but instead a strict adherence to traditional guidelines disguised as a presentation of change and equality.
Conclusion

Dystopian literature has changed significantly during its life. Though still characterized by the protagonist’s struggle against a society marked by degradation, poverty, and a terrible force greater than the protagonist themselves, the dystopian story has moved from the sphere of the political to that of the popular, and the use and presentation of gender within it has changed significantly due to social changes and the ways in which the stories are told.

In the earlier texts, gender is used as a tool to demonstrate the author’s point. Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* uses the myth of the eternal feminine to appeal to his audience about the evil of the oligarchy. The fact that good women are not allowed to become mothers and fulfill their feminine destiny is a testament to the unnatural and oppositional nature of the government, and its ability to corrupt what might be good femininity into the terrible knife-wielding insanity of the poor woman further impresses upon us its truly evil nature.

In Orwell’s *1984*, femininity is used not as a corrupted good but as a point of comparison, an example of weakness when compared to O’Brien’s strong masculinity. Julia is seductive, but as we come to know her we see that she simply does what feels good to her body without thinking through the consequences or the importance of her actions. O’Brien, though he is on the side of Big Brother, is intellectually appealing, and, in the end, Winston chooses him over Julia. Ironically, Winston’s choice to follow O’Brien is the wrong one, but the interplay between Winston, O’Brien, and Julia shows that while Winston wants to possess the feminine, it is too shallow to satisfy him. Instead, he needs the deeper actualization offered by the love of an intellectual (and male) equal, even if that equal plays for the wrong team.

Philip K. Dick gives us perhaps the most interesting presentation of femininity. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, he writes two bi-dimensional female characters and sets
empathy as a defining token of both humanity and “true” femininity. While it makes sense for him to equate femininity with caring for others, his decision to define humanity through a traditionally feminine trait as well as his presentation of Deckard as bordering on psychopathic leads us to question whether true humanity is in fact more in line with traditionally feminine attributes than culture might want to admit.

Collins’ presentation of gender, then, is only inching forward from Dick’s. *The Hunger Games* gives us a female protagonist with masculine traits who works tirelessly to push away any femininity ascribed to her. It once again presents a feminine character who demonstrates traits like empathy and caring to the protagonist, but ultimately codes femininity as good and weak or strong and evil. It offers us no example in which a character coded as feminine is able to be both self-sufficient and good, and all examples of good femininity are characterized by their need to be taken care of by other more masculine characters. While Collins offers girls the choice to be like boys, she does not open doors for them to be both traditionally feminine and strong.

It is also important to consider the goals of these dystopian texts. While *The Iron Heel* and *1984* are both political in nature, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* was written for a small niche of science-fiction fans, and *The Hunger Games* was written for a large, young adult audience. Taking this into account, It makes sense the two older novels use commonly accepted ideas of gender to structure their works and make their political points. Dick has more freedom to play with ideas of gender if he has no underlying message to send and little motivation to appeal to a wide audience. Collins’ had to make her novel marketable to not only all genders, but also people from many political backgrounds. By writing a masculine female hero, she managed to appeal to any gender while still using a tried and true plotline which can be interpreted as a
story about class struggle or a tea-party call to action. Collins’ novel is tailored to the market of young-adult literature, and reads as such. The authors’ different goals give them different motivations for their use of gender and different levels of freedom in their depiction of it. Interestingly, Dick’s work makes the greatest leap in its presentation of gender. Because he is not using it to help prove a point or appeal to popular culture, Dick makes the most interesting assertions in his use of the traditional gender structure.

But what does this mean for the future of dystopian protagonists? Can a dystopian story present gender in a way that values traditional femininity and allows it to be strong? Is it possible to have a traditionally feminine dystopian heroine, or does the dystopian genre inherently prohibit a character who relies on communication rather than confrontation? Femininity in dystopia has gone from a singular good which can be corrupted by evil to a definition of mindless weakness to a necessary and balancing force of good and understanding which is still subordinate to and weaker than the masculine. While the presentation of the feminine has changed, and though these changes do represent increased equality in gender presentation, we have yet to see a dystopian hero or heroine that embodies feminine traits and powerfully inhabits their own story. Though we have not seen her yet, I do not believe that the genre conventions of dystopia completely preclude the existence of a feminine dystopian heroine or hero. I think that we as a culture are just not ready to accept such a hero into the mainstream of mass media to which the dystopian story has fallen.
Works Cited


