



---

# Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS  
DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA  
Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

*The Lost Ones:*  
Samuel Beckett's Tale of Dystopia

David Gutiérrez Cordero

Tutor: María José Carrera de la Red

2014-2015



## ABSTRACT

Samuel Beckett's short prose is difficult to categorize and admits of numberless interpretations. I start this BA Thesis with the working hypothesis that *The Lost Ones*, a piece of short fiction published in 1970, fits into the genre of the dystopian novel. The method I have chosen to prove this begins with the analysis of four canonical dystopian novels that allows me to determine the main features of the dystopian genre. Subsequently, I bring these features into comparison with the ones existing in Beckett's tale and conclude that this piece's interpretation as a dystopian tale is indeed accurate.

Keywords: Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, Dystopia, Short Prose, Comparison, Fiction.

La prosa breve de Samuel Beckett es difícil de clasificar y susceptible de recibir muchas interpretaciones. Este Trabajo Fin de Grado parte de la hipótesis de que *The Lost Ones*, pieza de prosa corta del irlandés publicada en 1970, se ajusta a las características de un tipo de ficción muy concreto: la novela distópica. Para demostrarlo, comienzo con un análisis de cuatro novelas cumbre del género que me ayudará a extraer las principales características del género distópico. Posteriormente, contrastaré estas características con las presentes en el cuento de Beckett para determinar de esta forma que efectivamente su interpretación como cuento distópico es apropiada.

Palabras clave: Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, Distopía, Prosa Breve, Comparación, Ficción.



## Index

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>1. Dystopian literature</b> .....	9
a. E.M. Forster, <i>The Machine Stops</i> (1909) .....	11
b. Yevgeny Zamyatin, <i>We</i> (1924) .....	13
c. Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> (1932) .....	15
d. George Orwell, <i>1984</i> (1949) .....	17
<b>2. Dystopian traits in <i>The Lost Ones</i></b> .....	21
a. The world of ‘the lost ones’ .....	21
b. ‘Inside a flattened cylinder’: Life in a closed environment .....	25
c. ‘Seen from a certain angle’: A superior controlling power .....	27
d. ‘The ideal preying on one and all’: Humanity at stake .....	29
e. ‘The need to climb is too widespread’: Purposeless occupations .....	31
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	35
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	37



## Introduction

A renowned figure of universal literature, Samuel Beckett (Dublin 1906 – Paris 1989) is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential and original writers of the 20th century. He cultivated every genre: drama, fiction, poetry, criticism and screenwriting but he is essentially known as a dramatist. Nobel Prize Winner in 1969, his works explore major themes like the futility of human existence, sprinkled with his particular style: a characteristic distillation of black comedy and gallows humor. The Irish writer, settled in Paris most of his creative life, wrote mainly in French despite his being a native speaker of English because he claimed that it was easier for him to “write without style” in his adoptive language (Knowlson 324). Part of his motivation to break with his own language may have been his desire to break all associations of his work with James Joyce’s, by whom young Beckett was highly influenced. John Pilling, one of Beckett’s most noted scholars, affirms, “With Joyce he shared a liking for arcane facts and figures, a love-hate relationship with Ireland, an interest in experimental literary forms, and a strong affection for alcohol” (Pilling 3). However, he adds that after a short visit to Dublin in 1945, he had a moment of revelation at his mother’s house: Joyce’s writing was based on the principle ‘knowing more is creative’; Beckett’s writing, on the contrary, was going to focus on poverty, failure and disturbing reality: the man as ‘a non-knower’ in a world where only the essential is necessary. While Joyce was mainly concerned with himself, Beckett was troubled by the world in general (cf. Pilling 8).

What is called ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ is not easily understood without Samuel Beckett. His play *Waiting for Godot*, first performed in 1953, is probably his best-known work and one of the crucial works of the genre. In the same decade he also wrote the postmodernist trilogy made up by *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. These novels were first written in French and translated in English years later by Beckett himself. What I have mentioned so far is, roughly speaking, what is taught about Beckett in a Literature class. The mentioned literary productions, along with some other works such as *Watt* or *Endgame* have been the matter of study of multiple scholars during the past and the current century.

However, it would be a severe disregard to his literary *oeuvre* to approach this literary genius as basically a dramatist who wrote some narratives. The depth in the

research regarding his poetry and prose fiction, especially his short prose, is too little when brought into comparison with the study of his drama. What literary critic Frederick R. Karl says about this is illustrative:

Even though Samuel Beckett as a dramatist has frequently taken critical precedence over Beckett as a novelist, it is in his six novels that his originality is demonstrated; the plays merely add a footnote to what the novels indicate with greater range and force. The plays themselves—*Waiting For Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Act Without Words*, for example—are fragments of the novels, episodes submerged in the larger context. The real Beckett—if one presumes to define him—is the novelist who almost arbitrarily broke off segments of his fiction and labeled them tragicomedies, monologues, mimes, et al... (19)

Samuel Beckett wrote short fiction during the entirety of his creative life. In fact, his first published full-length book, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), was a short-story collection. Bearing Karl's observations in mind, and taking into account that Beckett himself considered his prose fiction as the most important part of his writing, the fact that few anthologists of short fiction incorporate Beckett's work is surprising. S.E. Gontarski, specialized in Samuel Beckett and Modernism, argues that this fact may be due to a tendency to consider Beckett's stories as anomalous or aberrant (cf. Gontarski xi). The truth is that critics are still aiming to figure out what they mean and even what they are: novels, stories, rejected fragments, incomplete tales...

As a consequence of the few studies available on Beckett's short prose and the controversy that his stories have originated, I find them a fascinating object of study. As I said, Beckett wrote short prose during his whole creative life, so it would be beyond the bounds of possibility to do a close analysis of every composition. After his novel *How It Is* (1961) and throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Beckett's works reflect a tendency to compactness. Consequently, a large number of critics consider this period as minimalist. He continued writing short fiction during this late period and it would be an interesting purpose to analyze the short stories that he wrote throughout this creative stage. Even reducing the boundaries of the analysis to only his late short prose would be too ambitious for this paper. Therefore, my purpose is to focus on one of the most enigmatic and controversial pieces of short fiction of the Irish writer: *The Lost Ones*.

## State of the Art

Among the different interpretations that different readers have made about the text—Platonic, Dantean etc.—we find a few that hint at some type of dystopian trait in *The Lost Ones*. In “De/Composing the Machine in Samuel Beckett’s *The Lost Ones* and *Ping*” (2004), Katherine Weiss discusses the role of Beckett’s narrative voice in the dismantling of what otherwise could have been a pure technotopia. In her unpublished 2006 Ph.D. Dissertation—*Textualizing the Future: Godard, Rochefort, Beckett and Dystopian Discourse*—Julie Anne Monty puts *Le Dépeupleur* (the French version of Beckett’s short story) in the context of other French literary pieces of the 1960s and analyses their dystopic nature, establishing links with the work of cultural critics like Foucault, Adorno and Barthes. More recently, “No Way Out: The Effect of Surveillance in *The Lost Ones*” by Mary F. Catanzaro (2013) studies the dehumanization of Beckett’s ‘lost ones’ through the constant and relentless vigilance to which they are subjected.

## Objectives and Methodology

Taking into account the existence of these prior studies, the main objective of my BA Thesis is to provide a dystopian reading of *The Lost Ones* by measuring it with four unquestionably dystopian works.

These works are E.M. Forster’s *The Machine Stops*, Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and George Orwell *1984*. They were published in different decades of the 20th century but prior to Beckett’s tale, thence they could have influenced the Irish author to write his dystopia.

After explaining the plot and characteristics of these works, I will do the same with *The Lost Ones* to later proceed to explain the main points the five works have in common. These points are: the location in a closed environment, the existence of a superior controlling power, the lack of humanity in the inhabitants, and the purposeless occupations to which they devote their lives.

In a final stage, I will expose the conclusions that I have reached.



## Dystopian literature

A quick search in the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definition:

dystopia, *n.* An imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible;  
opp. utopia *n.*

Therefore, dystopia is generally understood as an inverse utopia: a society whose characteristics make it dreadful or displeasing. While utopia is too good to be real, dystopia is assumed to be too bad to be real. This definition may lead us to understand dystopias strictly as anti-utopias. However, English professor Chad Walsh makes a distinction between anti-utopias and dystopias: anti-utopias are reactions to specific utopias, while dystopias are reactions to popular utopian ideals of the average person. The utopian is primary, like the artist; the dystopian is secondary, like the art critic (cf. Walsh 177).

The undesirable dystopian societies appear in plenty of works within different artistic fields such as literature, films, television programs, music, etc. Numerous authors use dystopias to criticize some aspects of our own troubled world, as a kind of warning to their current society to avoid progressing towards disaster. It is a recurrent technique among the authors to locate the plot in a remote future. This fact justifies that some kind of technological innovation not present in the current society is present. As a consequence, this kind of fiction is often classified as science fiction and many works overlap between both categories. Nevertheless, dystopian fiction “differs from science fiction in the specificity of its attention to social and political critique” (Booker 1994b, 19). By means of giving the worst future scenarios possible, they warn society about the need to avoid them.

It is necessary to clarify that “whereas utopias describe an escape *from* history, these anti-utopias describe an escape, or attempted escape, *to* history, which is to say, to the world of contingency, conflict, and uncertainty” (Booker 1994b, 4). Thus, while the utopian thought dreams and stimulates the human imagination, the dystopian one examines those dreams looking for everything that could go wrong. The dystopian role

may seem destructive rather than creative, but it is necessary to approach dreams carefully. After all, reality is not ideal.

One of the most relevant figures concerning dystopian criticism, M. Keith Booker, defines dystopian literature, our focus of interest, as follows:

Briefly, dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (1994a, 10-11)

Besides emblematic works with some dystopian features, like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, dystopian fiction is mainly a product of the 20th century. The evolution of science and the technological advances brought crucial changes that turned utopias into modern dystopias, reflecting the hasty transformation of society. Although there have been rare cases of resurgence in utopian fiction, in the last century utopia has been considered as either impossible or undesirable. Scientific developments made possible an industrial revolution in Western Europe, establishing this way a worldwide imperialism that bound exploited masses of European workers to machines in the service of industry; the same advances that humanity reached to control nature were dominating and controlling people as well. In addition, two world wars, nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and totalitarian regimes in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia condensed in the first half of the century, powered the cocktail of distress required to prompt the birth of dystopian fiction.

The number of examples within any field is large: films (*Metropolis*, *Blade Runner...*), videogames (*Fallout*, *Bioshock...*), and there are even sub-genres like cyberpunk or post-apocalyptic fiction. However, dystopian literature is the basis of every other type of dystopian fiction; the list is endless and, for obvious reasons, dystopian literary works are the most closely related to Beckett's *The Lost Ones*. Therefore, I will limit my focus to them.

Just to mention a few essential names, H.G. Wells' entire production is significantly influential in what today are considered canonical dystopian texts. Kurt

Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, a satire about an extremely automated society that despises all that makes us human, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel dealing with the burning of banned books and the abolition of free speech, are other notable examples of dystopian discourse. Both were published in the 1950s, prior to Beckett's text, so they perfectly could have been an influence. They all have a certain weight in dystopian fiction but it is necessary to narrow down the number of works suitable to be compared with *The Lost Ones*, which is what I will do in this paper in order to prove whether Beckett's tale deserves to be labeled as a dystopia or not.

Consequently, I will reduce the number of literary touchstones to four emblematic examples: E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909), Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). Most critics agree that they are "the great defining texts of the genre of dystopian fiction, both in the vividness of their engagement with real-world social and political issues, and in the scope of their critique of the societies on which they focus" (Booker 1994b, 20-21). Reason enough to examine carefully each one of them and compare their main dystopian features with the corresponding ones in Beckett's tale.

### *The Machine Stops*

Published in 1909, literary critics acknowledge Forster's futuristic short story as "the first work of the emergent genre of dystopian fiction, and a precursor of its canonical texts" (Monty 23). Forster said that he wrote this story as a reaction to some of H.G. Wells' optimistic views of the future: he was troubled by the increase of human dependence on technology. One critic adds, "*The Machine Stops* is not a mere indulging in fantasy, but a serious intellectual engagement: by proposing a perverted and paradoxical version of future reality, his imaginative exaggerations and deformations provide us with an interpretative key that helps us to read our present more correctly" (Caporaletti 43). Thus, these assertions demonstrate the weight of Forster's story in subsequent canonical texts of the genre that are relevant to this paper: *We*, *Brave New World* and *1984*. Nevertheless, the main reason why it is essential to be cognizant of the story is its certain influence in Beckett's dystopian tale, as we will see.

The story is narrated by an impersonal voice external to the plot. It presents a setting where human beings are not able to live on the surface of the Earth anymore; they live in an artificial, underground world where there is no difference between day and night. It is geometrically perfect and divided in zones where people live isolated from the rest. They live in individual hexagonal cells where the space is limited and there are almost no objects. An omnipotent Machine artificially controls every type of human need, physical or mental; the rooms have fresh air and omnipresent light despite of the fact that there is neither window nor lamp. This Machine produces a constant humming noise that the dwellers have always in their ears; they do not know life without this murmur. People rarely venture outside their cells since they communicate through a system of instant messaging and videoconference: the 'speaking apparatus', that is also a part of the Machine. It is a peaceful clockwork environment, but peace is also artificial: there are no true feelings of fraternity. The life of all the inhabitants is occupied by only one meaningless task: the exchange of knowledge and ideas through the speaking apparatus. However, these are never original; they are always second-hand ideas since imagination is seen as dangerous. *The User's Manual for the Machine* is the only book in their society and it functions as a sort of Bible. Sexual intercourse is done only for perpetuating the species, and parenting ends at birth. Children are separated to a different zone as far as possible from the parents to discourage possible visits.

Vashti, the main character, is presented as an unattractive white-faced woman. She is satisfied discussing ideas inside her cell and does not question the aim of the uninterrupted, global exchange of information. However, her son Kuno, who has a nonconformist nature, reveals to her mother his displeasure with humans that act automatically, repeating motions and unimaginative thought processes. He confesses to her mother that this search for a way out of the inhuman conditions has led him to escape to the surface through a ladder. There, he saw other humans living outside the world of the Machine. His transgression is punished and the access to the surface is forbidden from that moment. A view of the Machine as a deity is imposed; those who do not worship it are accused for being 'unmechanical' and threatened with 'Homelessness': they forget that humans created the Machine and not the opposite. Eventually, the Mending Apparatus, whose function is to repair possible defects of the Machine, starts to fail. Kuno realizes these defects and says in a secret tone to his

mother: ‘The Machine stops’. Vashti does not understand his words because language has also become a mechanical act, and those words that do not fit into pre-established ideas are difficult to grasp. Eventually, the malfunctions end in an apocalyptic collapse of the Machine with its whole civilization, since the human knowledge to repair it is lost: they have been so busy performing their single task that they have forgotten the mechanism of the Machine. The cessation of the humming noise causes the death of many inhabitants; the technological habitat they created is the tomb of the entire population. Mother and son die in each other’s arms but differing about the fate of humanity: while Vashti is pessimistic, Kuno is hopeful and believes that the humans on the surface will build a new civilization avoiding their mistakes.

Briefly put, the story presents a hypothetically futuristic society living in an underground geometric world, governed by the norms of only one single book. It is a world where physical contact is avoided, fraternity is untrue and the connection with Nature is completely non-existent. People rarely venture outside the identical hexagonal cells where they perform a single meaningless task: the communication of unimaginative second-hand ideas. The exception is Kuno, who represents the figure of the rebel that hopes to change the world of the Machine. These features settled the ground for the upcoming dystopian fictions of the century, included the canonical works presented in this paper and Beckett’s tale.

### *We*

Written in the middle of the Revolutionary Russia, *We* warns about how the socialist state, ruled theoretically by the proletariat, may turn into totalitarianism. It is regarded as “one of the important founding texts of the dystopian genre. It deals with a wide range of issues that have come to be central to the genre, including science and technology, sexuality, culture, religion, language, and history” (Booker 1994a, 295). Although the early Soviet period was prosperous in dystopian fiction, Zamyatin’s dystopia is a rare example considering that most works were in favor of the regime. In fact, the novel was first published in New York in an English translation in 1924 and it was not published in the Soviet Union until 1988. Although the text is commonly

considered as the first genuine dystopia, it shows unequivocal aspects reminiscent of *The Machine Stops* like “a fear of the dehumanizing potential of technology and of an excessive insistence on rational solutions to all human problems. The book depicts a sterile and stagnant society of the distant future ruled so thoroughly by scientific and rational principles that its citizens have been stripped of any real humanity” (Booker 1994a, 292). Thus, similarities in dystopian devices already adopted in Forster’s story are to be expected in this canonical dystopian novel. Additionally, the writing style is remarkable, alternating emotional passages with rational ones. For this reason, it is catalogued within the same literary movement as Beckett’s early works: Modernism.

The inhabitants of the novel live in the ‘One State’, a city entirely built in ultra-resistant glass, governed by the ‘Benefactor’, where all activities are rigorously regimented. A glass ‘Green Wall’ surrounds the city and completely isolates the environment from Nature. This way, the secret police of the state is able to supervise every public detail of the entire population. Nobody has a name; people are labeled with a character and a number, like D-503, thus enforcing the suppression of individualism. The state tries to avoid human emotions through an exhaustive control of any aspect that may lead to them. Nevertheless, sexual intercourse is encouraged but never involving feelings, only as a physical process. The basis of society is rationality; every hour of everyone is scheduled for efficiency in a ‘Table of Hours’. Even poetry and music are composed under mathematical principles and exclusively for didactic objectives.

The novel is written as the diary of D-503, an engineer enrolled in the construction of a spacecraft whose purpose is to colonize outer space. At this stage, he is convinced of the power of rationalism and shows blind obedience to the One State. Eventually, he is captivated by the sexual charms of I-330, a rebellious woman that belongs to ‘Mephis’, an organization that seeks the destruction of the One State regime. Their union infringes the rules of regulation and encourages D-503 to question the imposed rationality. Eventually, Mephis members manage to provoke an explosion that breaches the Green Wall. Irrationalism invades the city but the One State reacts by demanding all the citizens to undergo a lobotomy process that removes imagination. D-503 is submitted to lobotomy while I-330 is captured and executed in front of the masses. D-503 is present in the execution but shows no feelings about it. At the end, he

declares in his diary his conviction about the supremacy of reason, clearly biased due to the surgery, but the revolution is still taking place and its denouement is a mystery.

To sum up, *We* displays a futuristic advanced society ruled by the ‘Table of the Hours’ that controls every detail of life with mathematic precision: music, poetry, the tasks to perform... A superior power, the State, is able to inspect even the most private aspect of life. Sexuality is encouraged but as a merely physical process. The city is isolated from Nature by means of a glass wall that also prevents the invasion of irrationality. The disturbing element is Mephis, a group of rebels that defend the power of emotions and try to change the established order. Undoubtedly, there are similarities with Forster’s story but Zamyatin’s novel develops dystopian features in a deeper way. Thus, most critics confer more weight to *We* in the development of dystopian tradition.

### *Brave New World*

Huxley’s masterpiece was first published in 1932, a controversial time for Europe and specifically for England where the Industrial Revolution had prompted a new bourgeoisie and cities like London were expanding at a great rate. Although some critics claim that *We* was a central inspiration for this production, Huxley declared years later that he wrote *Brave New World* long before he was aware of Zamyatin’s dystopian work. The novel depicts “a hedonistic future society in which individuals spend most of their time in the pursuit of instant happiness through sex, drugs, and mind-numbing multisensory entertainments” (Booker 1994a, 171). According to this description, it may be difficult to find similarities with Beckett’s dystopia or other dystopian writings mentioned in this paper, but there are key features in this novel that justify its inclusion in it.

The plot takes place in the future London where significant advances like sleep-learning or reproductive technology have taken place. In fact, natural birth is considered an atrocity so human beings are produced through the Bokanovsky Process, a mass production system. Before birth, embryos are modified to belong to one of five classes: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta or Epsilon. The Alphas are conditioned to be the future

intellectual leaders and the Epsilon to perform menial tasks. Children are taught through sleep-teaching the morals of the World State; sexual play and games are also present in their life since childhood. Despite this open sexuality, the complete removal of strong feelings, desires and relationships is considered as a major success. Materialism is highly encouraged by the World State to the point that repairing a broken item rather than buying a new one is considered antisocial: this is capitalism taken to its extreme. Nobody presents signs of aging and if they feel disgusted they are encouraged to take 'soma', a universal drug that stupefies the senses and produces happy hallucinations. The government of Mustapha Mond, the Dictator, controls the citizens through alterations since birth until death that modify what they are; their needs are artificially satisfied so they do not ask questions about their loss of humanity. People giving natural birth, aging normally and performing religious acts are considered as savages and isolated in a Savage Reservation.

Bernard, an Alpha male, invites Lenina, a vaccination worker, to accompany him to the Savage Reservation. There they are astounded by the savage customs and take one of the individuals, John, to introduce him in their 'Brave New World'. John is soon disgusted with the new society; he becomes a phenomenon. He feels attracted by Lenina and she is disposed to have sex with him but for John it is more than simple lust, and her incomprehension saddens him. He is mocked when he reads some passages of Shakespeare about love and marriage. At some point, he tries to convince a group of Delta workers to revolt and he is arrested for the riot caused. He is sent to the office of Mustapha Mond, where they debate the values of the World State. John maintains that it is dehumanizing whilst Mond argues that social stability and artificial happiness is more necessary than humanity. After that, John retires to a lighthouse where he plans to purify his soul through self-flagellation. However, his whipping himself becomes a spectacle to the population and they break in the lighthouse, including Lenina. The powerful moment triggers an orgy in which John participates. The morning after, he feels ashamed by what the World State has done to him and commits suicide.

Huxley's dystopia is atypical considering that where other works present a strict superior power constantly surveying its citizens and punishing any hint of rebellion, the World State in *Brave New World* controls the population artificially fulfilling all their needs to maintain happiness and prompting an extreme capitalism. However, John the

Savage represents how this superficial search for instant pleasure would alienate us and erase all that makes us human. It is probably the less feasible dystopia to compare with *The Lost Ones* but major issues like the system of classes and the lack of freedom, as well as its weight in subsequent dystopias are sufficient grounds for its presence here.

### *1984*

Orwell's most acclaimed novel was first published in 1949 and had a prominent impact on the genre. In fact, it is widely considered as "one of the central defining texts of the genre of dystopian fiction, dealing in important ways with almost all of the central motifs associated with the genre" (Booker 1994a, 208). It is the best example of a dystopian regime, since the governing Party does not try to improve human life through pleasure or technology; it only strives for the perpetuation of its immense power and the total control of the population. Orwell had witnessed totalitarian governments through the first half of the century—Russia, Spain, Germany—and he wanted to warn about their dangers in a not so remote future; this also explains the title of the novel. He wanted to criticize every kind of totalitarian oppression, either fascist or communist. The described totalitarianism evokes the repression of Stalin's regime that is also present in *We*. However, *1984* enjoys more popularity in our culture. Booker explains this in the following argumentation:

If Zamyatin's *We* gains a special poignancy from the striking fulfillment of its dystopian warnings under Stalin, George Orwell's *1984* takes its energy from the ability to look back on the worst horrors of the Stalin years—with a side glance at Hitler as well. It may be because of this close contact with reality that Orwell's book has probably become more a part of the vocabulary and imagination of modern Western culture than has any other dystopian fiction. (1994b, 69)

The Party ruling Oceania, Orwell's dystopian state, represents the supreme totalitarian government. Technology and science have only a political role; they have advanced electronic cameras but they are exclusively used to spy every move of the population. There are screens in every corner and inside every home but they only broadcast

brainwashing propaganda of the Party. Religion has been forbidden but the Party's ideology is a religion itself. Strong human feelings like love are prevented by means of a strict regulation of sexuality, only allowed for procreation. A 'thought police' supervises thoughts and punishes anyone with ideas opposed to the Party's doctrine. In fact, thoughts defying the Party are considered the worst possible crime and the punishment is incarceration and psychological and physical torture until those thoughts are eradicated. These facts demonstrate that Orwell's dystopia depicts one of the cruelest, strictest controls over the population, but the two most striking motifs in *1984* are the revisionist manipulation of history in order to provide support for the programs of the ruling Party and the attempt to institute a new language, 'Newspeak', that will allow for the expression only of ideas that are consistent with the Party's policies (cf. Booker 1994a, 208). They translate classic writers like Shakespeare into Newspeak, adapting them to the Party ideology. Thus, language is the most powerful force to control the masses. The leader of the Party is the Big Brother, known even by those who have never read the novel.

Winston Smith, a worker for the party of little importance (and the main character of the novel) feels drowned by the omniscient control of the Big Brother. Winston's job is to alter historical records to adjust them to the Party's interests but he hates the Party and starts a secret diary where he expresses his displeasure. He falls in love with Julia, a co-worker whose optimistic nature contrasts with his pessimistic one. Eventually, they start an illegal affair and they join the Brotherhood, an organization led by Emmanuel Goldstein that pursues the destruction of the Party. As Winston expected, they are caught and he is imprisoned and tortured for months as he struggles to resist brainwashing. Ultimately, his will breaks and he begs them to stop his punishment and to apply it to Julia. That is what the Party intended since the beginning so he is released; he meets Julia outside but does no longer feel anything for her; he only loves the Big Brother.

Thus, Orwell's dismal creation presents a large number of motifs that define dystopian fiction. A superior power controlling every move of the population, manipulation of language and history, the punishment if they transgress the Big Brother's doctrine, and the fatalistic view of the main character along with the hopeless ending make *1984* a central work to take into account to bring into comparison with any

other dystopian text. For this reason, as well as for its similarities with Beckett's dystopia, it is the last canonical work I decided to incorporate in this paper.

The four fictions by renowned authors here analyzed are a reliable basis to demonstrate that *The Lost Ones* deserves to be categorized as a dystopia.



### **Dystopian traits in *The Lost Ones***

With these four dystopias already in the market, in 1966 Beckett began to write his own in French but he did not finish the work that year; he failed at bringing to an end the world that he had created. This world grew more intricate and complicated than he initially intended it to be, so he abandoned it “because of its intractable complexities” (Gontarski xv). However, he managed to bring the story to a close in 1970 when he added a final paragraph. Initially, the text was named *Chacun son dépeupleur* but it was finally published under the shorter title of *Le Dépeupleur*. The French title is a neologism that Beckett took from a poem by the Romantic poet Lamartine. Later, he found it impossible to translate the term into English and for this reason the final title of the English version is *The Lost Ones*. Eventually, the story was published in French in 1970 and translated into English by Beckett in 1971.

#### **The world of ‘the lost ones’**

The world depicted is a flattened cylinder made of a substance similar to rubber which emits light and heat, and produces no sound when hit. It is fifty meters round and sixteen meters high. This geometric space is the abode of two hundred and five naked bodies that are in a sterile pursuance. Each body is moved by the need of “searching for its lost one” (Beckett 202), but they have only enough room to stand: their abode is crowded. Therefore, to create some kind of order for motion to be possible, the floor is divided in three areas. The central one is called the arena and it is the largest by far. Here the naked bodies circulate clockwise until the necessity to search impulses them to the second area: a thin band where they progress counterclockwise around the arena. From this second area, the bodies have the possibility to achieve the third one, “a belt about one meter wide” (210), which is limited by the cylinder wall. This zone contains fifteen ladders of different length and some missing rungs. What is the purpose of these ladders? Around all the upper half of the wall there are twenty niches distributed in four

irregular quincunxes. Tunnels link some of the niches but some of them are blind; their origin and aim remain a mystery even at the end of the story. Near each ladder, queues of bodies wait for their turn to ascend. When they are at the head of the line, they have the right to transport the ladder—only in one direction—along the zone and plant it where they guess there could be a niche. For all we know, they plant the ladders randomly.

One peculiarity that attracts the attention of the reader is the narratorial voice. As in many of Beckett's writings, "the narrator of *The Lost Ones* gives birth to the story as he writes, clarifying the rules of the climbers' code for himself as he articulates them for the readers" (Brienza 146). He is not one more 'lost one' wandering but a presence observing and presenting the conditions inside the cylinder to the readers. To some extent, "the reader is put in the same position as the searcher: just as the searcher must follow intricate, exact rules for climbing the ladders with little hope for a way out to the stars, so the reader must follow intricate, exact sentences with little hope of a way to critical meaning" (Brienza 148). Thus, the narrator acts as an outside superior entity. However, as Knowlson and Pilling clarify, his tone varies from remote voice to a more personal one:

As the work proceeds the oscillation between dispassionate description and passionate involvement increases to the point where one is no longer certain quite which is which, and one begins to ask oneself whether the former is not in fact a more genuine commitment to the 'lost ones' situation than the latter. But the personal note is kept to an absolute minimum in order that the times where it does intrude may strike with maximum force. (159-160)

Thus, it is essential to separate the narrator from Beckett since "author and tale-teller should never be simply equated. The narrator of *Le Dépeupleur* shares its author's taste for numbers and logic, but he is a rare example of one who is innocent of irony" (Cohn 309).

Although the narrator hides certain relevant details for the convenience of the narration, he describes with completeness and accuracy other facts like the different demeanor of the inhabitants: not all of them are roaming endlessly. These bodies are two hundred and five naked men and women of all ages divided into four groups

according to the role they perform in the cylinder. The first two categories are those “perpetually in motion” (Beckett 204) and “those who sometimes pause” (204). The third are “sedentary searchers sitting or standing against the wall” (205). How these sedentary bodies still continue their barren quest only with their eyes is described with dispassionate tone. Paradoxically, despite their immobility, these are the most troubling dwellers since they act violently when stepped on. The last group, denominated “the vanquished” (205), are those who have lost their will to seek and therefore crouch unmoving with their heads bowed; their eyes search no more. Far from being a physical handicap, the blindness of this group is the consequence of a complete nullity where nothing disturbs their minds. Towards the end of the tale, one of these bodies is particularized: a woman with long red hair that curtains her face and body. This woman is the North, the only point of orientation inside the cylinder.

The total surface of the cylinder is “roughly twelve hundred square metres of which eight hundred mural. Not counting the niches and tunnels” (205) so privacy is unthinkable. The number of bodies in each group is in constant change, although at the time of the narration the amounts are proportional: the first group has 120 members; the second, 60; the third, 20; and the vanquished are 5. This illustrates Beckett’s concern about mathematical precision and detail.

The conditions in the cylinder are extreme and contribute to the distress of the inhabitants. Light and temperature are in continuous fluctuation. Light increases and decreases four times per second from brightness to darkness and temperature oscillates between five and twenty five degrees centigrade in eight seconds. Occasionally, both of them stop shifting for a few moments and the bodies freeze in place provoking that “all go dead still” (202), but after seconds it all begins again. Silence dominates the cylinder except for a permanent murmur whose origin is unknown but which seems “as of insects” (214).

We know that the bodies are in a permanent search, but what do they seek? It is certain that they experience a powerful necessity to do it since this need determines all their actions. However, throughout the fifteen paragraphs, the narrator disproves every attempt of the reader to answer the question. There are two beliefs among the dwellers about the existence of a way out:

One school swears by a secret passage branching from one of the tunnels and leading in the words of the poet to nature's sanctuaries. The other dreams of a trapdoor hidden in the hub of the ceiling giving access to a flue at the end of which the sun and other stars would still be shining. (206)

For this reason, the possibility that they are in search of a way out may be argued. Nevertheless, none of the bodies seem to take this into consideration: nobody tries to reach the hub or the ceiling nor using the tunnels for anything else than rest. Parallel to other works by Beckett, the only way to be at peace in the cylinder is when all expectations have died. Although the vanquished are liable to seek again, they are lucky enough to have reached this state of resignation. "Roam each searching for its lost one" (202), but this search is not for another dweller since it is depicted how husband and wife may exchange a look without recognizing each other and going separate ways. Sex and even kisses are unlikely to happen since "a kiss makes an indescribable sound. Those with stomach still to copulate strive in vain" (202). Furthermore, Beckett states clearly "Whatever it is they are searching for it is not that" (213). The search for inner self is also discarded by the statement "None looks within himself where none can be" (211).

Therefore, the purpose of the search is no other than its own continuation. For this reason, Beckett did not manage to give an end to the story in 1966: the inhabitants would have continued roaming endlessly. From sections one to fourteen, the reader gets no sense of chronological progression since he is trapped in the present as much as the bodies. However, he reached a conclusion for the story in 1970 with the appendage of the last section, separated in time from the rest, where Beckett describes the last instants of life in the abode. At this point, a weak last body starts his search again; the rest of the dwellers are still and their eyes vacant. This last man approaches the vanquished woman known as the North and examines her blind eyes. Then his eyes close, the light is "extinguished as purposeless" (205) and all life in the cylinder ends. The problem of an endless tale is solved. This last paragraph also proves that the narrator is not one of the 'lost ones' but an outside observer that presents us their end.

Now that we are familiar with *The Lost Ones*, it is not difficult to immediately point out some obvious similarities with the dystopian canonical works described before, like the relevance of language and communication, the odd treatment of

sexuality, and the harsh demeanor of the dwellers with their fellow creatures. Nevertheless, in this paper, I am going to focus on four features that deserve a separated, detailed examination for their unquestionable significance both in Beckett's text and in the canon of dystopian fiction. These four features are: the location of the plot in a closed environment, the presence of a superior power, the humanity (or lack of it) of the population, and the purpose (or lack of it) of the tasks they perform depending on their class hierarchy.

### **'Inside a flattened cylinder': Life in a closed environment**

In *The Machine Stops*, the citizens live in a geometric, underground world where there is no difference between day and night and personal space is limited to a hexagonal cell where the Machine artificially controls light and temperature; Nature is out of the question. The Machine produces a constant noise that only stops when their world is ended. This world is divided into socially constructed zones to regularize behavior and create a false feeling of security. Similarly, the inhabitants of *We* live in a city built in glass and surrounded by a wall that isolates them from Nature. This enables the State to survey every public action; privacy is unthinkable. Nobody has a name to suppress individuality and every hour is programmed beforehand based on rationality in a 'Table of Hours'. Additionally, Huxley depicts how people living in a natural environment outside the artificial 'Brave New World' are considered savages. In his dystopia, class division takes effect even before birth. Alongside, *1984* is located in a hypothetical future England where nothing escapes the eyes of The Party ruling it. Again, privacy is inconceivable and people are encouraged to be harsh with those who do not stick to the imposed regime. Hence, technology is only employed to brainwash the inhabitants with propaganda and watch their actions and even their thoughts: one more time, Nature is not present.

Likewise, *The Lost Ones* is set in a rubber, closed cylinder where the existence of an exit is mere speculation, and where light "appears to emanate from all sides and to permeate the entire space as though this were uniformly luminous down to its least particle of ambient air" (Beckett 215). Thus, in parallel to the mentioned dystopias and

especially to Forster's story, the world is closed and geometrically perfect and the space for each inhabitant is limited, with different zones being assigned to different groups of individuals. Moreover, the omnipresent light and temperature oscillate harmfully, the moments of total darkness being the coldest and quietest ones. This is more of a torture for the inhabitants than a way of fulfilling their necessities, as the narrator describes in the first paragraph:

The light. Its dimness. Its yellowness. Its omnipresence as though every separate square centimeter were agleam of the some twelve million of total surface. Its restlessness at long intervals suddenly stilled like panting at the last. Then all go dead still. It is perhaps the end of their abode. A few seconds and all begins again. Consequences of this light for the searching eye. Consequences for the eye which having ceased to search is fastened to the ground or raised to the distant ceiling where none can be. The temperature. It oscillates with more measured beat between hot and cold. It passes from one extreme to the other in about four seconds. It too has its moments of stillness more or less hot or cold. They coincide with those of the light. (202)

As we can imagine, this also implies that there is no distinction between day and night and, as in the other dystopias, any form of Nature (like vegetation) is non-existent. Nature is only mentioned outside the cylinder where "the sun and other stars would still be shining" (206). In fact, along with the bodies in the cylinder there is nothing but "the ladders. These are the only objects. They are single without exception and vary greatly in size" (203).

Furthermore, the constant, buzzing noise of the Machine is also a characteristic of Beckett's cylinder. This murmur results "from the manipulation of the ladders or the thud of bodies striking against one another or of one against itself as when in sudden fury it beats its breast" (203). Parallel to the hum in *The Machine Stops*: when everything goes quiet, it means the end of it all. Besides, the proportions of the cylinder and the round number of bodies, as well as the mathematical language used by the narrator lead the reader to think that rationality is the basis of this setting. Similarly, in *We*, everything is founded upon rational principles; the 'Table of Hours' is the best example to illustrate it.

For all these reasons, we can assert that the closed, rational setting isolated from Nature and with harsh conditions in *The Lost Ones*, as well as its class system, resemble those of the four canonical dystopias under consideration.

### **‘Seen from a certain angle’: A superior controlling power**

A salient feature of all these dystopias is the presence of a superior entity that sometimes is worshipped by the population, whether they like it or not. In the case of Forster’s story, the object of adoration is the Machine: it fulfills every human need and its *User’s Manual*, which is the only book allowed, works as a kind of Bible. Thus, the Machine works as a god for the humans, although they created it; ironically, they are proud of having eradicated religion. The ending of this power implies the ending of their society. Additionally, Zamyatin’s ‘One State’ function as the perfect totalitarian state that knows everything about its citizens. Here the leader is the ‘Benefactor’ who pursues the absolute establishment of reason and the removal of all humanity. Following this line of totalitarianism, Huxley’s ‘World State’ has Mustapha Mond as a leader. He controls the population modifying their humanity since birth until death and artificially fulfilling every need since he believes this pseudo-happiness is more valuable than humanity. The cruelest example of these superior powers is found in Orwell’s novel. The Benefactor wants the establishment of rationality while Mond seeks social stability, but the Big Brother only pursues sheer power; even science and technology are only employed to perpetuate its doctrine. It is a totally omniscient power since it controls the thoughts and the language of the population, and punishes them if a little hint of rebellion emerges.

In a similar way, Beckett’s narrator depicts the cylinder and its dwellers from an outsider, superior point of view. Like the mentioned leaders, he is not one more inhabitant of the dystopian world: he is not another ‘lost one’. Except for a few moments of personal involvement, he adopts a dry, dispassionate tone through the whole narration. Even when all comes to an end he shows detachment from the bodies:

He himself after a pause impossible to time finds at last his place and pose whereupon dark descends and at the same instant the temperature comes to rest not far from

freezing point. [...] So much roughly speaking for the last state of the cylinder and of this little people of searchers one first of whom if a man in some unthinkable past for the first time bowed his head if this notion is maintained. (223)

Not only that, it is certain that he knows the denouement of life in the cylinder and he proves it asserting at the beginning of the tale: “here all should die but with so gradual and to put it plainly so fluctuant a death as to escape the notice even of a visitor” (206).

As I mentioned before in this paper, he is unfolding the cylinder’s features on the go and this fact explains some self-corrections and the use of the expression ‘if this notion is maintained’, as in the previous passage, and the adverb ‘approximately’ in passages like the following:

Temperature agitated by a like oscillation but thirty or forty times slower in virtue of which it falls rapidly from a maximum of twenty-five degrees approximately to a minimum of approximately five whence a regular variation of five degrees per second. That is not quite accurate. For it is clear that at both extremes of the shuttle the difference can fall to as little as one degree only. (206)

Thus, the narrator shows a certain taste for numbers and logic that resembles the obsession with rationality of other dystopian leaders, like the Benefactor in *We*, or the knowledge of every aspect of the dwellers, like the Big Brother. However, it is a flawed omniscience since we can see him doubting about the exact numbers. Furthermore, he explains that the use of the ladders “is regulated by conventions of obscure origin which in their precision and the submission they exact from the climbers resemble laws” (207), yet we never learn if he imposed these conventions or the inhabitants themselves did. Certainly, the ladders’ rules could be compared to the *User’s Manual* of the Machine since both are the only, unquestionable principles in their respective worlds. Nevertheless, their origin is irrelevant: only their enforcement matters.

The citizens of all these dystopian worlds remain lost because they follow ridiculous codes and submit to superior entities or authoritarian leaders, instead of thinking creatively and originally. These supreme authorities have diverse natures and some of them, like the Big Brother, are more oppressing than others like Mustapha Mond, but regardless of their differences, they have clear similarities with Beckett’s

narrator and they are a remarkable characteristic of all the dystopias here discussed, including Beckett's tale.

### **'The ideal preying on one and all': Humanity at stake**

Every dystopia reveals certain conditions that provoke an alienated population, usually reducing their humanity. Thus, in *The Machine Stops* the sons are separated from their parents at birth and sent to the other part of the world to avoid fraternal feelings. Citizens live in an individual cell that isolates them from the rest for the same purpose; they communicate only to exchange unoriginal ideas. Similarly, in *We* nobody has a name but a label with a number in order to suppress individuality. Sexual intercourse is only allowed to mere reproduction but never involving feelings. Additionally, Huxley depicts a society where natural birth, poetry and marriage are considered abominable. Extreme consumerism is encouraged and every human necessity is artificially fulfilled with drugs, lessening this way the humanity. Orwell also presents a society where citizens are encouraged to betray friends and family in favor of the state; again fraternity is bogus. Love is considered a crime and punished with torture and brainwashing and even thoughts are supervised.

Beckett begins his tale speaking of 'bodies' making the reader wonder if they are even human bodies. However, as the narration proceeds, he uses the terms 'man' and 'woman' to confirm they are indeed human bodies, yet their humanity is questionable. The narrator explains that "whether relatives near and far or friends in varying degree many in theory are acquainted" (Beckett 204); this fact is not surprising taking into account that the number of bodies is relatively small. Nonetheless, this does not assure fraternal feelings but on the contrary, "relatives and friends are well represented not to speak of mere acquaintances" (213). As in the described dystopias, the concept of family is blurry or nonexistent; what the narrator says about husbands and wives is illustrative enough:

Man and wife are strangers two paces apart to mention only this most intimate of all bonds. Let them move on till they are close enough to touch and then without pausing

on their way exchange a look. If they recognize each other it does not appear. Whatever it is they are searching for is not that. (213)

There are no newborns in the cylinder since for all we know the number of bodies remains constant. The harsh conditions of the cylinder make the work of love a rare event but when it occurs “the spectacle then is one to be remembered of frenzies prolonged in pain and hopelessness” (220).

Although as in *1984* love is painful, violence is much more common. They react violently against the dwellers who do not stick to the climbers’ code: “Certain infractions unleash against the culprit a collective fury surprising in creatures so peaceable on the whole” (207). This happens because their only motivation is the need to climb, and consequently, the only objects of desire are the ladders; they wait in the queues for their turn to use it although their use is purposeless. This is reminiscent of the absurd consumerism of Huxley’s dystopia. Moreover, as explained before, there are two possible beliefs of a way out: a secret passage or a trapdoor in the hub of the ceiling. If they combined forces, they might be able to reach the ceiling, we are told:

All that is needed is a score of determined volunteers joining forces to keep it upright with the help if necessary of other ladders acting as stays or struts. An instant of fraternity. But outside their explosions of violence this sentiment is as foreign to them as to butterflies. And this owing not so much to want of heart or intelligence as to the ideal preying on one and all. (207)

This illustrates how in Beckett’s world as in the four canonical dystopias, feelings of fraternity are bogus or very rare. Furthermore, “the effect of this climate on the soul is not to be underestimated. But it suffers certainly less than the skin whose entire defensive system from sweat to goose bumps is under constant stress” (219). Therefore, the harsh conditions in the cylinder are the reason behind the lack of humanity.

All the bodies are alienated but, similarly to Winston in *1984* or Kuno in *The Machine Stops*, one is particularized in the narration: the vanquished woman considered to be the North:

She squats against the wall with her head between her knees and her legs in her arms. The left hand clasps the right shinbone and the right the left forearm. The red hair

tarnished by the light hangs to the ground. It hides the face and whole front of the body down to the crutch. The left foot is crossed on the right. She is the north. She rather than some other among the vanquished because of her greater fixity. (221)

This woman, like the other vanquished, attracts the admiration of searchers and climbers: they inspect her head and hair, and look into her vanishing eyes. Then, they put carefully everything back in place; there is some kind of agreement of not inspecting other than the vanquished, thereby demonstrating some minimum respect for the others.

In view of all these similarities, we can assert that in Beckett's tale, as in the other dystopias, the humanity of the citizens is on the verge of disappearing due to the dystopian conditions of the world that surrounds them.

### **'The need to climb is too widespread': Purposeless occupations**

In all these dystopias, a common device adopted by the controlling power is to assign the citizens a single (and usually meaningless) duty. This way, every inhabitant invests all their efforts in these duties thereby not asking questions about their environment, lack of freedom, or their role in society. Thus, in *The Machine Stops* their only concern is the exchange of secondhand, unoriginal ideas through the Speaking Apparatus while other activities, like travelling, are understood as a waste of time. They are afraid of misused time but they spend their lives performing a worthless task. However, they do not ask themselves about their situation since they are absorbed by their only occupation. Likewise, in *We*, every duty of each citizen is thoroughly controlled in the mentioned Table of the Hours. Although the main character is an engineer (and has, therefore, a significant job), the suppression of the arts in favor of total rationality provokes a lack of opposition to the totalitarian State. In *Brave New World*, the division of classes through artificial alterations before birth presets the task that the citizens are going to perform unquestionably for the rest of their lives. Only an outsider, a more human individual, John the Savage, is able to challenge the status quo. Finally, in Orwell's dystopia the uninterrupted, brainwashing propaganda drives the population to

accomplish their roles and never confront the Party doctrine thereby assuring its perpetual power.

In Beckett's dystopia, the dwellers feel the constant need to search—although we never learn what for—and this need impels them to wait in queues to use the ladders to climb to the niches, “For the need to climb is too widespread. To feel it no longer is a rare deliverance” (Beckett 203). However, a few have achieved peace by no longer feeling this necessity; they are a superior class in the cylinder since the loss of hope is a victory, a very often repeated motif in Beckett's prose. Consequently, the surveying narrator divides the bodies into different classes, according to the task they are performing at the moment:

Seen from a certain angle these bodies are of four kinds. Firstly those perpetually in motion. Secondly those who sometimes pause. Thirdly those who short of being driven off never stir from the coign they have won and when driven off pounce on the first free one that offers and freeze again. That is not quite accurate. For if among these sedentary the need to climb is dead it is none the less subject to strange resurrections. The quidam then quits his post in search of a free ladder or to join the nearest or shortest queue. The truth is that no searcher can readily forgo the ladder. Paradoxically the sedentary are those whose acts of violence most disrupt the cylinder's quiet. Fourthly those who do not search or non-searchers sitting for the most part against the wall. (204-205)

This division depending on the task unequivocally resembles the division of classes of *Brave New World* that works in favor of the infinite preservation of their society. Although in Huxley's dystopia class is irrevocably determined before birth and until death, in Beckett's tale, albeit appallingly slowly, the dwellers of the first three groups change roles in the cylinder. However, they all search for something, so “what better name be given them than the fair name of searchers?” (212). The fourth group, the vanquished, “never again will they ceaselessly come and go” (212) thereby being the only group of non-searchers, although it is explained that “in the beginning then unthinkable as the end all roamed without respite” (213). Hence, they are high-regarded by the searchers since they have reached the best possible state of being (if it is being at all) in the cylinder. Though their sitting propped against the wall and therefore interfering in the movement of the ladders is “a source of annoyance for both climbers and carriers they are nevertheless tolerated. The fact is that these sort of semi-sages

among whom all ages are to be admired from old age to infancy inspire in those still fitfully fevering if not a cult at least a certain deference” (210).

Eventually all the inhabitants will reach the state of total stillness although Beckett explains with an ingenious metaphor the slowness of the process: “Even so a great heap of sand sheltered from the wind lessened by three grains every second year and every following increased by two if this notion is maintained” (212). Consequently, the fate of every searcher is to become one of the vanquished, which would also mean the end of their abode. In short, if all the bodies belonged to the ‘elite’ class of their society, i.e. to the vanquished, society would disappear.

For all these reasons, it is undeniable that to keep the population focused on a single task is one of the grounds of Beckett’s dystopian world as well as of every dystopia.



## Conclusions

Beckett's writings, especially his short prose, are puzzling and frequently hard to classify into a particular genre, and *The Lost Ones* is not an exception. This prose piece has been traditionally interpreted as an allegory: the cylinder as the human mind, the cylinder as a modern Plato's *Cave*, the cylinder as Dante's Hell... However, after comparing *The Lost Ones* with canonical dystopian fictions, I can assert that this text resembles them in its tone and subject matter.

To demonstrate this affirmation, I started defining dystopia, the reasons for its rise, and the evolution of dystopian works throughout the 20th century. At this point in my thesis, it was clear that dystopian fiction is a broad genre and is closely related with science fiction. Therefore, to make *The Lost Ones* fit into such a wide range of features would contribute little or nothing to the more accurate categorization that this paper pursues. For this reason, I opted for a direct comparison with major dystopian texts by renowned authors, works which were published in different decades of the twentieth century and which, with others, have set the grounds of the genre.

Thus, *The Machine Stops*, *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984* work as representative examples to extract common features of the genre. Subsequently, I brought these features into comparison with the subject of study, *The Lost Ones*, to conclude that similarities in at least four points with the mentioned canonical dystopias can be discerned.

To begin with, in the four dystopian fictions, as well as in many others, the tale takes place in a closed environment isolated from Nature: the rubber cylinder of *The Lost Ones*. Secondly, a superior controlling power, like the Machine or the Big Brother, is represented in Beckett's tale by the narrator, who describes the demeanor of 'the bodies' and the conditions in the cylinder. Moreover, in all these dystopias the fraternity between the inhabitants is vague or non-existent; strong feelings like love are strongly discouraged or punished. This is also found in *The Lost Ones* where the harsh conditions transform lovemaking into 'unmakeable love' and the obsession for the search transforms the inhabitants into frenzied creatures. The obsession with a single task that in the end is empty of purpose, the search in the case of Beckett's dystopia, is the last feature which is also present in the major dystopian works.

Consequently, while this tale is susceptible of multiple interpretations, due to all these similarities with major dystopian fictions at different levels, it can be certainly categorized as a dystopia. Nevertheless, Samuel Beckett is a unique figure and no work of his entire literary legacy has a single, fixed interpretation.

## Works Cited

- Baldwin, Hélène L., "The Way Out of the Cylinder: The Quest for the Lost Ones". *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 1991. 125-135.
- Beckett, Samuel. "The Lost Ones." *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*. New York: Grove Press, 1995. 202-223.
- Booker, M. Keith. *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994a.
- . *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994b.
- Brienza, Susan D., "The Lost Ones: The Reader as Searcher". *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. 139-159.
- Caporaletti, Silvana. "Science as Nightmare: 'The Machine Stops' by E.M. Forster." *Utopian Studies: Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies* 8.2, 1997. 32-47.
- Catanzaro, Mary F. "No Way Out: The Effect of Surveillance in *The Lost Ones*". *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 25. [*Beckett in the Cultural Field / Beckett dans le champ culturel*] Ed. Jürgen Siess, Matthijs Engelberts & Angela Moorjani. (January 2013). 183-196.
- Cohn, Ruby. "All at once or by degrees." *A Beckett Canon*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001. 308-314.
- Forster, E. M. *The Machine Stops and Other Stories*. Ed. Rod Mengham. London: André Deutsch, 1997.
- Gontarski, S. E. "From Unabandoned Works: Samuel Beckett's Short Prose." *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*. New York: Grove Press, 1995. 11-22.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: HarperCollins, 1932.
- Karl, Frederick R. "Waiting for Beckett: Quest and Request." *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1962. 19-39.
- Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.
- Knowlson, James and John Pilling. "The Lost Ones". *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*. London: John Calder, 1979. 156-167.
- Libera, Antoni. "The Lost Ones: A Myth of Human History and Destiny." *Samuel Beckett Humanistic Perspectives*. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1983. 145-156.
- Monty, Julie Anne. *Textualizing the Future: Godard, Rochefort, Beckett and Dystopian Discourse*. Unpublished Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin, 2006. Accessed at <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/2832>

Orwell, George. *1984*. New York: New American Library, 1961.

Pilling, John. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Routledge, 1976.

Walsh, Chad. *From Utopia to Nightmare*. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962.

Weiss, Katherine. "De/Composing the Machine in Samuel Beckett's *The Lost Ones* and *Ping*". *Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature* 1:1 (Fall 2004). 4-24

Zamyatin, Yevgeny. *We*. Trans. Clarence Brown. New York: Penguin, 1993.