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## **“The Machine Stops”:** Divinely Human or Mechanical?

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### **Abstract**

Written in a dystopian fashion, E.M. Forster’s only science fiction story, “The Machine Stops” (1909), features a networked society that functions at the touch of a button for the provision of human needs to the point of despising and avoiding any human contact. Living in an underworld honeycomb gadgeted by the eponymous machine and far removed from the surface of the earth, each individual is assigned a cell and separated from parents at birth. Unlike other dystopian stories which more commonly highlight class or political issues, “The Machine Stops” does not involve any of them but concerns another division, that of the society into individuals who, despite the benefits of technology, do not want to lose touch with nature and the world out there and those who want to live in a world commodified by technology, the first represented by Kuno and the latter by Vashti, his mother. Stepping out of the cell and reaching the surface of the earth brings about perishment or death. Revered as a god, the Machine (capitalized in the story) provides spiritual nourishment for these individuals who are oblivious of the fact that they created it. In this paper I discuss how technology links with religion and humanity by examining the dichotomous relationship between Kuno and his mother in a context when this futuristic society, which prefigures in many ways our own, sees to technology for its salvation and commodification. Read in this way, the story is very actual and a metaphor of our techno-cultural reality in which every individual and his human relationships are projected in a virtual space. The point (which Forster makes in the story) is how far should we allow technology take over our existence?

**Keywords:** *dystopian, science fiction, Forster, technology*