



Fahrenheit 451 : Transposition in our Modern Society

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***Fahrenheit 451* : Transposition in our Modern Society**

Emmanuel TARDIVEL

Mémoire de Master 2

Sous la direction de M.Alain Geoffroy
Professeur des Universités

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"Ray Bradbury's gift for storytelling reshaped our culture and expanded our world"

Barack Obama

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Emmanuel TARDIVEL

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

TV: Television

F451: Fahrenheit 451

NEA: National Endowment for the Arts

UNESCO: United Nations for Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

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INTRODUCTION

We should learn from history about the destruction of books. When I was fifteen years old, Hitler burnt books in the streets of Berlin, so I learned then how dangerous it all was, because if you didn't have books and the ability to read you couldn't be part of any civilization, you couldn't be part of a democracy. If you know how to read, you have a complete education about life [...] but if you don't know how to read, you don't know how to decide. (NEA Big Read: Meet Ray Bradbury)

Fahrenheit 451, a novel published in 1953 and Ray Bradbury's most famous book is one of the great dystopias of the twentieth century, depicting a futuristic world in which an unlettered American society is glued to their TV screens and where censorship, conformity and anti-intellectualism are the norm. As dystopias are projections of undesirable futures, exploring the extent to which Bradbury's novel projects itself into our modernity is relevant.

Ray Bradbury is one of the 20th century most influential American writers. Despite being a fantasy writer, and often having his eyes set to the sky, as he had a keen interest in space and especially Mars, Bradbury remained an extremely human-focused writer. Born in an era of social and global conflicts where a deep fear of nuclear technology existed after the end of World War II, Bradbury always valued human life and its intricacies. Most, if not all, of his works are imbued with the humanity he had, always trying to preserve what he perceived as the good sides of mankind. Bradbury's poetic vision of science and his writing proficiency undeniably left a tremendous impact on the American society. Ray Bradbury never stopped writing, even in the struggles of his last years, and had a deep passion for the imaginary and mankind's ability to believe in the fantastic and the miraculous, and was well aware that this faculty was already fading away during his time and trying to safeguard it was one of his main drives.

My motivations for this particular topic came from a class we had during our third year, where we studied Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* and discussed some of their characteristics being present in our own modern society. Some time later, I saw glimpses of HBO's 2018 *Fahrenheit 451* Television film, and was vaguely interested in its content but without any reasons to get into it. While looking for a science fiction novel to study for my master's thesis, I

stumbled upon *Fahrenheit 451* again, and this time it sparked my interest in reading it, as I was particularly interested in dystopia at the time. I was also wondering why *Fahrenheit 451* was less talked about compared to the other two dystopias I mentioned. After some research, I was hesitating between studying Plato's allegory of the cave in *Fahrenheit 451* and this topic. Ultimately, I decided that I would study the correlations between the novel's future and ours after thinking about the course again as well as having some interest in sociology. I was then captivated by the novel and its author, who happened to be a very interesting character, whom despite his influence and his largely recognized work, seemed to still be somewhat misunderstood or underrated in some regards, which gave me further ideas to work on this interconnected global world that relies a lot on technology.

Often when talking about dystopias in the present, people often say that they are now happening and that the author was right. This feeling is reinforced in times of crisis, when certain measures are taken in one way or another because governments, new concepts and actions are seen as oppressive or authoritarian, which is the focus of dystopias. In addition, many people seem to agree that Bradbury was a visionary writer. This would then justify the need to see the extent of that statement through an extensive research.

One of the definitions of the term "transpose" by Lexico is "[to] transfer to a different place or context," which means that the elements of the novel will be transferred to our own context, our modernity and compared in order to see if the dystopian future has many connections to what we live today.

Modern Day in this study refers to the Information Age, where society started to turn toward information technology like the Internet, with a particular focus on the era between the early 2000s to our immediate present in 2020-2021 where Internet, its applications, related technologies, and evolving mentalities have created a whole new set of tendencies and social changes that should in many ways be completely different from Bradbury's society in the fifties, but perhaps not too different from his dystopias. However, it will also be necessary to re-contextualize elements anterior to our modern era in order to understand what brought those changes, and the links to the novel's own context.

We will use these key notions as well as hypotheses to study Ray Bradbury's novel in our contemporary era.

This master's thesis will focus on studying the extent to which *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury is a prophetic novel in relation to our modernity on diverse

aspects while also taking in consideration the novel in its own context as a 1950s novel and its relevance almost 70 years after its first publication.

To tackle this subject and answer the questions it raised, a number of documents have been collected, especially interviews given by author Ray Bradbury, where he presents and talks about the contents as well as contextual elements around his novel. A number of newspaper articles linked to the different topics related to the novel and its context have been used as well. Due to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine and health crisis, it was difficult to procure physical books, which lead to a majority of online sources, but the situation itself brought an interesting perspective that helped explore the dystopian novel. The idea was to research the novel not only in our context, but also the context of its creation, as well as elements of the past and of the author's era that influenced the writing of the novel in order to identify the themes of the novel and apply them to the present. The objective of this study was to see if the 20th century dystopia held up in the 21st century, as well as putting into light more subdued yet important themes of *Fahrenheit 451*, compared to major ones such as censorship and screen addiction.

At first, we will see how the past, the era in which the novel was written and our own modernity are contexts that are essential to understand dystopias in general, and that their interconnection through the novel makes the transposition possible (Part I). We will also study the themes of the novel in order to pinpoint the elements that could be relevant to our modernity, notably the technological and social aspects of the novel (Part II), to finally study our present and its correlations with the Bradburian dystopia on these same aspects (Part III).

1 - THE TRIPLE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

To fully comprehend a novel and its contents, replacing it into its context is important. The contextual elements surrounding the era and the author are extremely relevant when it comes to analyzing a story and having a better understanding of some of the choices and inspirations that led to the writing of a novel. Fictions, and especially dystopian novels contain the author's reflections and predictions that they develop into a futuristic society to an extreme, which make context for these types of novels even more crucial. As this study puts in perspective a fictional future with our own present, we also have to establish the contextual elements that define our own modernity in order to be able to draw conclusions on whether *Fahrenheit 451*'s world is a prophetic novel in our time. This chapter in particular will focus on the events leading to the writing of *Fahrenheit 451*, the historical elements that have inspired the characteristics of Bradbury's dystopian future. It will also focus on contextual elements of the era in which Ray Bradbury published his novel, elements that surrounded him in his everyday life, in other words, replacing the book in its own contemporary context. Finally, it will be necessary to define the general context of our own modernity, its own specificities that will be used in later chapters to study the similarities between the dystopian society of *Fahrenheit 451* and our modernity. The authors of the great dystopias of the 20th century had a strong conviction that as time passed, the world in which they lived was already getting closer to the ideas they were discussing in their own works. In his last appearance on television, on BBC Four, Orwell warned the audience to not let his predictions happen, while Huxley made the observation that much of what he had described in *Brave New World* was getting closer to reality. *Fahrenheit 451* is a novel that successfully manages to make a bridge between the past, its present and the future thanks to its narrative that takes inspiration from past events, showcases the concerns of the time, but that also makes us think about our present, which corresponds to the future that the novel presents. Thus, *Fahrenheit 451* is inspired by past events and actual historical events that were a basis for the fire-filled dystopia. *Fahrenheit 451* is also a novel of its time, the United States of the fifties, painting the anxieties of the era. *Fahrenheit 451* is a novel that aims at the future, based on anticipation, yet the prediction of the futuristic developments as well as the extension of Bradbury's

time seeping into our own nearly 70 years from now is set in a not so distant future than it first seems.

1.1 - THE EVENTS THAT INSPIRED *FAHRENHEIT 451*

1.1.1 -Salem Witch trials & Mary Bradbury

The Salem witch trials, which took place between 1692 and 1693 were a series of hearings and prosecutions related to presumptions of witchcraft. They took place in colonial Massachusetts and were the deadliest witch hunts in the history of Colonial North America. Out of the 200 persons accused of witchcraft, Mary Bradbury born Perkins, Ray Bradbury's ancestor whom he discusses in his interview directed by Laurent Bouzereau, was declared to be a witch but managed to escape the sentence until the trials stopped completely and died of old age. Bradbury says that she is mentioned in most books related to the Salem witch trials. According to Bradbury in the same interview: "the novel was a long coming to birth, you could say it went back to my great-great-great grandmother Mary Bradbury, who was tried as a witch in Salem." Though at the time of Mary Bradbury, the sentence was death by hanging, the common method of execution during witch hunts was death by burning, which was very frequent during the Middle Ages. We can find a correlation between this fact and the novel, especially considering that fire is a central element in the story. In the first part of *Fahrenheit 451*, entitled "The Hearth and the Salamander," Montag and his firemen squad find themselves into the house of an old woman. As they proceed to burn the house down as she was found in possession of books, the elderly lady refuses to leave and dies inside the house, giving Montag a visceral reaction, and making him ill the next day. In relation to the witch hunts, the old woman in the novel could be compared to one of those women accused of witchcraft and killed for crimes they did not really commit. To expand on this idea, Montag's story is a sort of reflection of a witch hunt. Books are outlawed inside *Fahrenheit 451*, they are destined to be burnt. Fugitives are hunted down and generally killed. Montag himself was the target of a witch hunt of some sort, as he had to flee the city after killing Captain Beatty. He is tracked down by authorities and barely manages to escape by jumping into the river at the limits of town, leaving all his clothes behind and letting himself

be taken away by the currents. One cannot help but notice the similarities between Montag and Mary Bradbury's fates since they both managed to escape death sentences. This begs the question of a parallel between *Fahrenheit 451* and this particular historical event. However, there are very few sources linking *Fahrenheit 451* to the Salem witch trials and to Mary Bradbury in particular, but since the author himself referred to it in an interview, this hypothesis is not to be put aside, as it could be one of the levels of interpretation of the novel: a futuristic rewriting of the Salem witch trials.

1.1.2 - The First Half of the 20th Century: an era of turmoil

Even though mentions of texts being destroyed were found even before Christ, the concept of book-burning as we understand it is itself still recent. Matthew Fishburn, author of *Burning Books* says: "In the modern sense, it's very much a mid 20th century idea, very much a propaganda thing that happens during World War II." According to an article from Time written by Lily Rothman, senior editor in the history coverage of the magazine, 1933 was the year where the most infamous book burning took place. They are known as the Nazi book burnings, during which more than "tens of thousands of books, from the works of Sigmund Freud to those of Jack London" (Rothman) were burnt by the Nazi forces. This was done as part of an intellectual purge of books that didn't fit the ideological canon of the Nazi regime. It was during that time, when people finally realized how efficient book burning was in the repression of ideas, that book burning was then considered to be a villainous thing to do. This literary cleansing happened again in 1945, when the Nazi regime was defeated, but this time the purge was anti-Nazi, but did not detract from the fact that it was still considered to be an evil, if a necessary one, to ensure that the Nazi ideas would not be spread again. The US helped in that effort, though it was done quietly rather than publicly like the 1933 burnings.

Bradbury also heard about the Great Purge in Russia, which happened between 1936 and 1938. In an interview he gave to the National Endowment for the Arts, an independent agency of the federal government of the United States, Bradbury explained that Russia was "burning the books behind the scenes." They got rid of the book without people knowing what was being done, and they also killed authors behind the scenes, although the authors died of exhaustion from labour in concentration camps or prisons. As Bradbury always considered himself a

library person, these events became personal to him, he took them at heart.

The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings can also be taken into account when discussing the context preceding the publication of *Fahrenheit 451*. Since these bombings have been the first and only nuclear attacks to this day, it left an unquestionable impact on the world. To quote Ray Bradbury on his interview by Laurent Bouzereau:

The threat of an atomic war was very fresh in my mind when I wrote the novel, because it was just 4-5 years after Hiroshima and we would all be living in anticipation of being hurt or destroyed by this new device and the hydrogen bomb was in the process of being invented. It was a threat to all of us and I wrote the book under the cloud of this concept. (Bouzereau, *Fahrenheit 451: a discussion with author Ray Bradbury*)

The atomic war that is in the background of the plot of *Fahrenheit 451* was motivated by this real life looming threat, something that is extremely well translated in the novel, as the characters of *Fahrenheit 451* knew that a war was coming, but they did not know when it would really happen, similar to the apprehension people during Bradbury's time felt. An interesting element to point out is that even though the novel has this atomic war threat, Bradbury said that it should in fact not be the main focus, and is to be removed in any adaptation of his novel because for him it is just "an extra threat" because the real threat is "ignorance and the lack of education." The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, though they do not play a major part in the ideas developed by *Fahrenheit 451*, as Bradbury said that the bombings at the end of the novel would not be necessary to mention when he discussed the fact that they are completely absent in François Truffaut's 1966 movie adaptation, although he was not sure it was a good idea at first. It is nonetheless a contextual element that helps have a better understanding of the novel. They give us a framework for the study of the context and society depicted inside the book, which mirrors the one the author lived in despite being futuristic.

1.1.3 -The Genesis of *Fahrenheit 451*

Ray Bradbury was no stranger to writing dystopian literature before *Fahrenheit 451* was published. He had antecedents in writing such stories before. Ray Bradbury considers five short stories to be at the origin of *Fahrenheit 451*. All the short stories that were part of the genesis of *Fahrenheit 451* were compiled

inside a collection entitled *A Pleasure to Burn: Fahrenheit 451 Stories*, published in 2010, two years prior to Bradbury's death. The first short story that can be considered a predecessor to Bradbury's most famous novel is *Bonfire*, in which a man named William Peterson is having philosophical thoughts about art on the night before the end of the world. He gets on the phone with a girl named Mary and they discuss and mourn about the futility of mankind's knowledge and survival as it was all for nothing due to their impending doom. Just as she is about to tell him something important, the earth blows up and burns for millions of years. There is not much to say about *Bonfire* in itself, except for the fact that we find an idea of knowledge being destroyed and that literature keeps ideas alive which is similar to *Fahrenheit 451*.

For centuries their thoughts had gone on and on, living. For tomorrow, they would be dead. Shakespeare, Frost, Huxley, Dali, Picasso, Beethoven, Swift, really dead. Until now they had never died, even though their bodies had been with the worms. Tomorrow that would be attended to. (Bradbury, *A Pleasure to Burn*, 132)

Later on, Bradbury wrote a more imaginative story that has a similar theme called *Bright Phoenix*, which was published in 1947. This short story is set in a dystopian world in which a town's "Chief Censor" named Jonathan Barnes goes to a library to burn selected books. He is then confronted by a librarian who does not seem to worry much about the Chief Censor's presence. Jonathan Barnes is angered by the man's odd behavior. The Librarian seems to be unconcerned as Barnes sends his men to the shelves to burn the books, stating that they are doing him a favor as libraries have limited space. The Librarian takes Chief Barnes through the streets, where we learn how most people in the town have memorized books, and have code names such as "Freud" and "Mr. Shakespeare", which is without a doubt an early iteration of the Book People led by Granger in *Fahrenheit 451*. At the end of the short story, The Librarian is confident that even if the Chief Censor comes back, the citizens have enough preparation to fight against this new measure of censorship.

There was then *The Exiles*, previously entitled *The Mad Wizards of Mars* in which characters from *Oz*, *Tarzan*, *Alice in Wonderland* as well as authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe are exiled on Mars to survive a massive destruction of knowledge. When the astronauts finally reach Mars and burn the last of books, the authors and their creations die and are exterminated forever. Once again, literature, books and knowledge are at a peril in one of Bradbury's stories, following his idea, which reveals a pattern in Bradbury's themes.

Following that is *Usher II*, previously known as *Carnival of Madness* before revision and inclusion as one of the stories of Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), where the hero, named Stendhal, gathers all the book-burners of Earth who think that fantasy is bad for the mind, tricking them into a costumed ball in which they are all killed before Stendhal destroys the House of Usher and flies away in a helicopter. Here again there is the presence of book burners, alluding to censorship and conformity. Bradbury also was a great admirer of Edgar Allan Poe and *Usher II* is a direct homage to the short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* which is referenced several times in Bradbury's short story.

Later in 1951, Bradbury wrote another short story entitled *The Pedestrian*. This short story tells the tale of Leonard Mead, a man sneaking out of his house to walk down the streets every night in the year 2050. The specific night on which the short story focuses on is the night where he gets arrested by a police car. In *The Pedestrian*, walking on the sidewalks is prohibited and the reason of Mead's arrest. The protagonist is then forced to answer the police car's questions before being taken in. We then learn that the police car is empty: "there was no one in the front seat, no one in the car at all" (Bradbury, *A Pleasure to Burn*, 156) which tells us that the car is self-driven or remotely controlled, and the few remaining police officers are at their office talking through communication devices. Furthermore, we learn that there is only one police car in the city, because people do not go out at night, and so the government reduced the police force needed. In the end, Leonard Mead gets into the car and is to be taken to "the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies" (Bradbury, *A Pleasure to Burn*, 156). There are similarities between *The Pedestrian* and *Fahrenheit 451*. The citizens in both the novels are acting as a mass following orders of the government without asking questions. Walking alone in the streets can also lead to sanctions in *Fahrenheit 451*, as Clarisse McClellan's uncle was arrested for walking down the streets and taking a breath of fresh air, a striking similarity in both texts and which is most likely a reference to his previous work, which nonetheless creates a link between the two. Pedestrians walking the streets are often ran over by cars in *Fahrenheit 451*. Another similarity is how absent the police seems to be in general in both universes, and how little they work due to the population complying. They only physically appear in the novel at the end and the firemen seem to be busier than them. They do not physically appear in *The Pedestrian*, they are represented by the car and the voice that comes out of speakers, described as "a metallic voice"

(Bradbury, *A Pleasure to Burn* 153), stripping them of their humanity. The short story gives us an insight of an authoritarian regime: Leonard Mead was arrested even though he did not do anything that should logically be reprehensible by law, something that was quite common to see in dystopias at the time e.g., keeping a diary in *1984*, walking in the streets like in *The Pedestrian*, and as we know it reading books in *Fahrenheit 451*. This totalitarian aspect of *The Pedestrian* will be found later in *Fahrenheit 451*, but with a different focus.

The result of these five short stories gave birth to an early version of a novella *The Fireman*. It was published in the February 1951's issue of *Galaxy Science Fiction* magazine, and put together the book-burning censorship of *Bright Phoenix* and the Totalitarian aspect of *The Pedestrian*, and expands it in a much longer story. In *The Fireman*, we can already see familiar names appearing, such as Guy Montag, the protagonist of both *The Fireman* and *Fahrenheit 451*, Mildred who is Montag's wife, as well as Faber and Granger, both being key characters in both stories. *The Fireman* is an earlier version of *Fahrenheit 451*, with way less details but with a familiar universe. Bradbury was pushed by one of his publishers, Ballantine Books, to extend the story of *the Fireman* to make it into a novel instead of a novella to be published as a proper book. This also explains why *Fahrenheit 451* is a rather short novel. *The Fireman* has some noticeable differences with its successor, as some names have changed and some major events have been altered. The expansion of *The Fireman* allowed Bradbury to expand his dystopian vision of the futuristic America thanks to this longer format.

We can then see a consistency in Bradbury's dystopian writing. He had a coherent guideline for his stories and experimented with different angles on the same themes in the years that preceded the publication of what he considered his magnum opus, *Fahrenheit 451*. Ultimately, it's the novel that accumulates all his years of writing and conveys his unconditional love for books, knowledge and stories.

Well then, at last what you have here is the love affair of a writer with the stacks; of a sad man's, Montag's love affair not with the girl next door, but with a knapsack of books. What a romance this is! The maker of list in *Bonfire* became the librarian of *Bright Phoenix* who memorized Lincoln and Socrates, became *The Pedestrian* who walked late to become Montag, the man who smelled of kerosene, who met Clarisse, who sniffed his uniform and told him of his dreadful life function, which led Montag to show up in my typewriter one day forty years ago and beg to be born. (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 227)

Through this quotation, Bradbury makes the bridge between everything

leading up to Montag's story which mirrors his own love for knowledge but also for the imaginary. For the author, imagination and creativity are detrimental and losing them would be disastrous, which is what happens in *Fahrenheit 451*. It is the same ideas that were refined throughout his career as a writer to finally create this novel that became a major work in American literature as well as a major novel in the dystopian genre. These ideas that lived through a great number of his stories are in fact extremely relevant to Bradbury's times, simply because they were written as an answer to the immediate climate that Ray Bradbury lived through during those years but also with inspiration from past events, mixed in with Bradbury's own experience and beliefs.

1.2 - *FAHRENHEIT 451* IN ITS ERA

1.2.1 -Influences

When Bradbury wrote *Fahrenheit 451*, he didn't actively think about the names of his characters, yet some of them have names that are in fact related to the topic of the novel, something that the author himself realized only a few years after the original publication of his novel. This information came from the various interviews he gave, as well as introductions and afterwords he wrote in different editions his book, which are a valuable source of information for the context the novel was written in. The name Montag, the last name of the protagonist, is the name of a paper company named Montag Brothers Paper Company. Faber, former college professor and Montag's accomplice later in the book comes from the pen and office supplies manufacturer Faber-Castell. The Salamander, a prominent symbol that we find multiple times in the book, as it is engraved on the Firemen's uniforms, took inspiration from Francis I of France, whose symbol was the folkloric salamander, a magical creature living inside hearths and coming out of the fire.

According to Ray Bradbury, the reasons behind the name choices for his characters were mostly subconscious, but it also shows the influence of his background as a library person, as he was self-educated from libraries and never went to college. Most of the references he makes and a great part of his inspirations came from books and stories he read when he was younger.

Most of it was my romantic background in Roman, Greek and Egyptian mythology, starting at the age of three. Yes, three years old, three when Tut was raised from his tomb and appeared in the weekend news gazettes in all his gold panoply, and I wondered what he was, and asked my folks. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 221)

This quote, taken from the afterword of the 50th year anniversary edition of the novel, shows Bradbury's affinity with the imaginary, and especially fantasy, which was his main genre. As such, he did not understand why people called him a science-fiction writer as for him, his only work of science fiction was *Fahrenheit 451* while the rest is fantasy, even works such as *The Martian Chronicles* which is described as science fiction. However, Bradbury saw the misuses of technology, which undoubtedly inspired parts of his works, and the presence of technological advancements, and especially its dystopian counterpart in *Fahrenheit 451*. Bradbury's influence, however, contributed to making science fiction a more popular and more accessible genre. According to an article written by Michiko Kakutani for the newspaper The New York Times entitled *Up from the Depths of Pulp and Into the Mainstream*, Bradbury's works "informed the imagination of writers and filmmakers like Stephen King, Steven Spielberg and James Cameron, and helped transport science-fiction out of the Pulp magazine ghetto and into the mainstream." King, Spielberg and Cameron's contributions to the world of science fiction are of international renown, and their work have in a way been inspired by the one of Bradbury, who himself didn't really think of himself as neither a scientist nor a science-fiction writer can only attest to the importance of his vision of the future.

Though Bradbury's approach of science-fiction is not scientifically accurate didn't mean he didn't have a keen interest in it, notably in space travel. He didn't really have a scientific approach to his writing as he admitted as such in a symposium from 1971 not long after the launch of the space probe Mariner 9, which largely contributed to the observation of Mars. He read an unpublished poem entitled *If Only We Had Taller Been* to the audience which according to him "sums up some of my feelings on why I love space travel, why I write science fiction, why I'm intrigued with what's happening this week on Mars and part of this has my philosophy about space travel" (Bradbury). In the poem, we get the idea that Men have a wish to reach the heavens, closer to God, and that in a way, spaceships and space travel are one step to reaching that goal, and bettering humanity, possibly reaching the concept of immortality, one of mankind's oldest desire. At the same time, the speaker of the poem acknowledges that they will not reach this goal

during their lifetime: “if only we had taller been/ [...] We would not have to go with them/ Who’ve gone before”(Bradbury). This poem shows that the author had hope for the future of mankind and technology, but what he feared would be that people stopped being creative and stopped thinking for themselves, which for him was represented by libraries and books, as it was his own mean of access to knowledge and the imaginary.

Bradbury’s own educational background is essential because ultimately, most of Bradbury’s dystopian literature is closely linked to his love for knowledge, books and reading that he cultivated throughout all his life, as well as his drive to write.

Another inspiration for Bradbury’s work is the car craze of the 50s. Cars have a great presence in *Fahrenheit 451*, most people use them often in the novel, young and old alike. This was a reflection of the American car frenzy that happened at that time. In an article written by Karal Ann Marling, professor of Art History and American Studies, for the 146th issue of the magazine *Design Quarterly* entitled *America’s Love affair with the Automobile in the Television age*, she says:

If the cars were complex beyond all telling, with their Dynaflow pushbutton transmissions, their power brakes, automatic windows, vacuum ashtrays, retractable roof and wraparound windshields, the feelings they aroused in their owners were straightforward: after the privations of the Great Depression, after the hardships and shortage of the war, victorious Americans deserved nothing but the best. Within a year of the surrender of Japan, twelve million GIs had been sent home, every last one of them in search of a girl, a car, a new house, and – although they didn’t know it just then – a television set: the American dream. (Marling, *America’s Love affair with the Automobile in the Television age*)

The automobile industry took off during that era, and the car culture became an integral part of the American culture. This was encouraged by the manufacturing of the United States shifting from war products to consumer products. At the same time, the United States became the largest car manufacturer in the world, and car related activities saw their peak during that era, especially drive-in theaters, where the audience would park their car just in front of a screen to see a movie, or yet the “Hot Rod” culture becoming part of the mainstream. It was an older form of car modification done to increase speed as well as acceleration, but also for changing the appearance of cars. When it comes to *Fahrenheit 451*, cars are driven at excessive speeds all the time and are an integral part of the futuristic American culture. As we see in *The Pedestrian*, walking is seen as regressive and is based on Bradbury’s encounter with a police officer that scolded him for walking. In an interview for *Playboy* that he gave in 1996, which can be found in Bradbury’s

collection of interviews *Conversations with Ray Bradbury* compiled by Steven L. Aggelis, he explained his aversion for cars and of the car culture as he witnessed a fatal accident in his youth.

When I was sixteen, I saw six people die horribly in an accident. I walked home holding on to walls and trees. It took me months to begin to function again. So I don't drive. But whether I drive or not is irrelevant. The automobile is the most dangerous weapon in our society. (Aggelis 164)

Bradbury did not like the rising overuse of cars in his society and the fact that the roads as well as the cities were starting to be shaped for cars rather than pedestrians, which again echoes to his previous short story *The Pedestrian*. He indeed saw the car as a danger, as shown in *Fahrenheit 451*, as it was a car that killed Clarisse McClellan and almost killed Montag while he ran away, because cars are not used with care inside the novel, they are used for almost anything, including hitting animals and people alike along the way. The author was painfully aware of the importance of the car in the late 40s and early 50s: "Here a human without a car is a samurai without his sword" (Aggelis, 164). The comparison is interesting because swords were a symbol of honor and status as well as an important weapon during the Japanese medieval era. The car itself has become a symbol of status and wealth as well as an indispensable tool for everyday use in society and still is to this day. Bradbury was not against public transports, on the contrary, he preferred them to cars because they are more pedestrian-friendly than cars. He simply did not like how people were finding the most mundane excuse to use their cars.

I don't care what people do with their cars, as long as they give them up three quarters of the time – roughly the amount of time people spend every week superfluously driving places they don't want to go to visit people who don't want to see them. (Aggelis 164)

Bradbury was not completely averse to the new ways of society, but he did favor old ways to a certain extent, especially when it regarded excessive use of technology.

1.2.2 -Book Burning & Censorship during Bradbury's era

In the mid-1940s and 1950s, the idea of "literary cleanup" came back due to the Cold War context. The US government was worried about books that would not

fit. In the United States, a series of book burning occurred, though mostly on local levels. The problem was that after the events of World War II, book burning became a sort of taboo which sparked controversies within the country. People were divided on the question, and the topic of “freedom to read” was summoned several times against the burning of books. Bradbury wrote in *Burning Bright: an afterword by Ray Bradbury* that at the time, McCarthyism and the fear of communism was strong: “McCarthy had bullied the Army into removing some ‘tainted’ books from the overseas libraries. Former General now president Eisenhower, one of the few braves one that year, ordered the books put back on the shelves.”(Bradbury) For him, this was exactly in the same vein as burning books, the idea of getting rid of ideas, and it further fueled his ideas in the story he wrote. However, well before McCarthy and McCarthyism was the creation and involvement of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) whose work was to investigate private citizens, employees as well as organizations that were suspected to have ties with Communism. They were one of the reasons why Bradbury’s novella *The Fireman* which as we presented earlier became *Fahrenheit 451* had difficulties selling well. The HUAC was created 2 years after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, when the Communist Party took the power in the Russia. There was then a fear that the Communist Ideology would spread inside the United States, which is the first Red Scare. Much like McCarthyism, this lead to a culling of books that were accused of spreading the communist ideology.

Incidentally, *Fahrenheit 451* was published at the time when the book-burning debate was at its peak, and the release of the book in the year 1953, was “the culmination of the modern era of book-burning.” (Rothman, *The Real History Behind Book Burning and Fahrenheit 451*). It can be noted that the McCarthyism era was considered to be over approximatively around 1954, one year after the publication of the novel. *Fahrenheit 451* was deeply rooted in its time but also in the past, as the preceding events that defined the modern conception of book-burning, the destruction of ideas, came to life two decades before the publication of the novel, and remain to this day a very prominent representation of the modern imagery of censorship. To quote Lily Rothman, senior editor for TIME magazine: “The symbolism is baked into the world’s memory, and words on fire are still a tragically powerful image.” This shows that even though the era that inspired the writing of the novel is in the past, the ideas behind it are still very much of importance, which underlines the relevance of Bradbury’s novel 67 years later,

which is a statement that is of interest in this research as we explore the extension of Bradbury's projected society into our own.

1.2.3 -Television in the United States during Bradbury's time

Thomas Doherty, professor of American studies at Brandeis University, Massachusetts, writes in his book *Cold War, Cool Medium*:

At the halfway mark of the twentieth century, the seedling medium had not yet blossomed into a garden of color, cable, and World-Wide Web-ing. Their TV did not look like our TV. Condemned to a mere handful of channel selection, paleo-viewers adjusted rooftop antennae to receive clear reception and trudged vast distances across carpeting to rotate dials manually. Drab two-tones images in black and white, fuzzy and flippy, beamed forth from a pitifully small screen. The sets were serious pieces of furniture, mammoth in girth, encased in walnut or mahogany, molded to dominate a living room and displace the upright radio from the family hearth. (Doherty 1)

The TV as a media was very limited at the time of the novel, for the many reasons Doherty mentioned. The programming was not extremely compelling at that time. Before the second World War, television was still in a very primitive state, due to the limitations of the technology at the time. The television industry was affected by the Great Depression of the 30s, prompting their early shows to stop being broadcast, due to economic limitations of the crisis. In the 40s, television did not have much recovery either due to TV sets being expensive still, combined with a programming that was still greatly lacking. At that time, it was not possible to broadcast pre-recorded shows, so the broadcast schedule was also very problematic. WWII was also another factor that thwarted the progress of television, since the development of TV-related technologies was less important due to the scale of the conflict of the time, even though some stations kept broadcasting during the war. At the end of the conflict, yet another major conflict will affect television, namely the Cold War. Doherty says that “[d]uring the Cold War, through television, America became a more open and tolerant place” (Doherty 2) although the “common wisdom”, as Doherty calls it, says otherwise. This is due to the fact that in people's minds, television helped the heavy repression that weighted on America at that time, notably McCarthyism. While it was developing in an era of witch-hunting, television managed to adapt to the harsh climate of the country, and eventually did in fact expand “free expression.” To quote Doherty again: “within a

few short years, television had become the prized proscenium¹ in American culture, and the stage was open to an array of unsettling opinions and unruly talent” (Doherty 3). There was another reason why television was frowned upon: the concept of television much like the concept of radio conflicted with the one of literature. The new medium was a challenger for the well established medium. It was easier to access the meaning and information brought by television compared to the reading and processing of a book. It became more efficient than its predecessor, even though radio itself was already more attractive in the field of information than books. “[T]elevision radiated through the life of the present and the memory of the past with a force that dwarfed the impact of the other media. Soon print itself came to seem the hieroglyphics of a lost civilization” (Doherty 2) So even as though TV was not completely rooted into the American culture, it presented aspects that would come to threaten the prestige of the paper media, and as such, books. It was undoubtedly one of the reasons TV and screens are depicted in such a way in *Fahrenheit 451*. Ray Bradbury saw the slow take-over of television in his own society and extended it to the extreme in a dystopian fashion. However Bradbury did not hate television, as he loved movies and even wrote scripts based on his stories for a TV series which is known as *The Ray Bradbury Theater* and had its original run from 1985 to 1986 then from 1988 to 1992, at the time TV was already implemented into the daily lives of Americans and became an integral part of the mainstream. He had a two-sided opinion on TV, on one hand he knew it could tell stories that were thought-provoking, on the other hand what Bradbury thought was dangerous was that people would eventually stop reading completely to watch TV instead, which is understandable considering that at the time, most programs were variety shows, which was mostly “shallow entertainment” conflicting with the intellectual image of literature and books that are affiliated with knowledge, education as well as fine arts. In the novel, books and screens are a completely dichotomous, fundamentally opposed, which seems to mirror the collision of the two medias combined with the author’s background, making him obviously in favor of books. While television growing more popular as a mainstream media gave Bradbury matter to write about the dangers of the future, as we have seen in the previous subparts, Bradbury also wrote about the “threats to creativity and art [...] and humanity’s own waning capacity for belief in the strange and miraculous” (Kakutani) at the time television was still in its early stage of

¹ Front of a stage, here meaning that TV started becoming popular

development, showing that his intent was not purely attacking television. The slight growth of the TV popularity at the time of the publication of the novel could be a coincidence that gave the author inspiration to improve his long-running discourse that exists in most of his dystopian works. After the early 50s, the television market became more aggressive, prompting TV as necessity for most families: “As early as 1951, guilt-mongering advertisements warned parents that their children would ‘suffer in school and be shunned by their best friends’ if the family resisted buying a television set. The prospect of social ostracism was real enough.” (Doherty, 4,5). Due to the Cold War context, this argument seemed to be taken quite seriously. From this point onward, TV was no longer simply a luxury, it became important in the “American life”. Some Americans at that time even prioritized having a TV-set over a refrigerator, showing the impact of the new medium at that time, as the refrigerator itself had become a necessity in the American lifestyle. The emergence of the television is at the same time a cause and a consequence of the decline of Hollywood’s studio system, a system that ensured the total control of the movie production process by a small number of large studios. The ever-growing TV audience dealt a blow to Hollywood’s film production, especially considering that the quality of the movies during that period was declining. Additionally, the practice of block-booking, a commercial system that forced theater owners to buy multiple films from the same studio instead of buying them independently, was put under strain when Walt Disney’s blockbuster *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* became the highest grossing film at the time. The fact that an independently produced movie even more so an animation movie did better than most of the Hollywood star-studded movies was an embarrassment for the studios. Hollywood’s monopoly was hit the same year as the main studios were targeted by the United States Department of Justice for “monopoly in restraint of trade.”² This is where TV, the smaller media offering a quasi-similar experience to cinema started to shine.

Nowhere was the impact of television felt more keenly than in Hollywood, hometown of the precedent and soon-to-be subordinate moving-image medium. The arrival of television in 1946 coincided with classical Hollywood’s last great season, when a weekly audience of 90 million paying spectators flocked to ornate palaces and homey neighborhood theaters. In a few short years, what Hollywood called “free television” (the implication being that anything free could not be worth much) had metastasized to lethal levels. (Doherty 6)

Hollywood’s dismissive behavior toward television is reminiscent of the

2.Prevention of free competition in business, here by monopoly

printed world's antagonism toward TV as an information and knowledge medium, and both of which could not prevent the challenger rising to the top. The television medium's audience started to rival that of Hollywood, plummeting its box office. As Thomas Doherty puts it using the imagery of a boxing match: "Hollywood played the slow-lumbering has-been, down for the count against the scrappy new kid, swift, lean and hungry" (Doherty 6). Incidentally, this was in the same period of time when *Fahrenheit 451* was being written and published. The accumulation of events that led to the early 50s, alongside the notable social changes that ensued gave the author all the elements to be put together in his dystopian novel. The social and technological transitions that coincidentally happened made for a solid structure for the novel. It could be said that Ray Bradbury saw *Fahrenheit 451* writing itself before his own eyes before he even published it.

Go, I said to Montag, thrusting another dime into the machine, 'and live your life, changing it as you go. I'll run after.' Montag ran. I followed. Montag's novel is here. I am grateful that he wrote it for me. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 227)

Fahrenheit 451 is the result of a long thought process, from short stories to a full-fledged novel, inspired by the author's education as well as his observations of the drastic social and technological changes in a difficult period of America's history that happened to occur at a fortunate time and woven into Ray Bradbury's most famous and most influential novel.

1.3 - OUR MODERN CONTEXT

1.3.1 -The Information or "Digital" Age

Our present is intimately connected to the lightning development of technology in a relatively short time frame. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the Information Age as "the modern age regarded as a time in which information has become a commodity that is quickly and widely disseminated and easily available especially through the use of computer technology." This major shift in technology happened in the early 1980s when access to smaller and less expensive computers became possible, making access to information much easier

than ever before. “Acorn,” IBM³’s first personal computer popularized the term “PC” and was the first computer sold by outside distributors. Most, if not all personal computers before 1983, including “Acorn”, had an impractical text-based interface that made it hardly suitable for the casual user. Apple introduced the first personal computer with a Graphical User Interface (GUI) which have become the norm for all computers nowadays and facilitated the use of computers in general. Furthermore, Gavilian Computer Corporation released their own computer the same year, which was the computer introducing the recognizable flip design that all laptops use today. In fact, the Gavilian SC was the first computer marketed as a “laptop.” Between 1985, with the release of Microsoft’s famed operating system Windows, and the 21st century, computers have evolved from their almost strictly business-oriented use to real multipurpose tools, adding gaming capabilities to the machines, pushed by the graphical and sound innovations in computer technology. From there, computer technology has greatly improved, with machines the size of a hand whose performances are largely superior to any computer from the last century. This technological feat was largely due to the implementation of computer functions inside the mobile devices. Though the smartphone did in fact exist ever since the 90s and displayed some of the built-in applications that still exist today, notably a touchscreen, it had too much issues, namely a short battery life that made it unreliable compared to other types of phones. The phone market considerably changed when Apple introduced the first generation of iPhones. This smartphone device pioneered the technological leap in smartphone technology and drastically changed the relationship between the user and their device. Smartphones played a large role in making information readily available due to their portability and their access to information sources. The way the world was shifting in favor of computing technology and digitization of data is called the Digital Revolution, which consequently marked the beginning of the Information Age.

Along with the development of computer technology, an interconnected network was needed in order to communicate this new flow of information on a wider scale. ARPANET⁴, Internet’s predecessor, was launched in 1969 in order to develop a network and was barely able to send a message to another computer. A few years later, in 1972, the first email program was successfully implemented on the ARPANET system by computer programmer Ray Tomlinson. The next year sees

3. International Business Machines Corporation

4. The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network

the birth of the Global Networking, as the University College of London and a research center situated in Norway successfully simultaneously connected to ARPANET. In 1974, a commercialized version of ARPANET known as Telenet appeared. Internet technology picked up in speed during the 80s and 90s with the introduction of the World Wide Web, the system that contains the global collection of documents and resources available on the internet, easily recognizable nowadays by its nicknames “The Web” or “the Internet.” This was coupled with the development of internet browsers, software that were created in order to navigate the internet, like Google Chrome or Firefox. Social Media, important players in the way information circulates on the Internet, can be traced back to the end of the 90s, where they served mostly as a way to create connections between users through a friend system and forums on the Internet. Blogs have also been a pioneer in the development of online social networking, with users able to share photos and videos as well as talking about their interests on their own personalized page. At the time of their creation, social media did not really have the colossal impact they have on society nowadays, as they have become an uncontrollable force.

1.3.2 -A world of interconnections and fast paced information

As early as 2004, the social website Facebook went online, marking the beginning of the “era of social networking” also called the social media era. On social media, community-driven websites where people can interact with other users, share a variety of thoughts as well as creating connections, have become pivotal in the way the Internet functions and is used. Social media have become the heart of social life on the Internet, where most users go on a daily basis to access content they are familiar with, in many formats. Social media have become a place where information, news and opinions are easily and rapidly relayed. The arrival of social media has drastically altered the way news are processed around the world, due to its instantaneity and the speed at which news are spreading. Fast communications in the Digital Age (Information Age) are a key factor to its efficiency. Social media have facilitated communication between people with live-chats, live-video feed, but also with asynchronous communication via public posts, videos and image sharing on their social platforms. Changes in information and communication with the Internet have also drastically increased the way and speed at which the world is able to react. It is commonplace nowadays to have reactions

and feedback on worldwide events a few minutes after a given event has happened. Our Modern world is characterized by the speed at which information circulates and the way it does, which, as we have seen, have been helped by the development of social media in the last decades. There is little doubt in the fact that the smartphone revolution played a critical part in making social media so influential and central in our modernity. Smartphones significantly increased the use of social media in our daily lives as they became necessary tools. In the same way social media have become practically inseparable from Internet as a whole. One consequence of instantaneous communications is the slow disappearance of handwritten letters which took days if not weeks to reach their recipients when they were the mainstream mean of communication. The globalization of the cellular phone as well as the global phone coverage has contributed to the decline of handwritten letters in everyday life, though printed letters are still largely used for official communications in diverse fields.

The Information Age, however, also brought a handful of problems. The question of the reliability and veracity of information on the Internet is a complicated one. Due to any user's ability to post information as well as the difficulty to check every single information that is distributed on the internet, mainly due to the large quantity of it, false information have a tendency to spread like wildfire, especially on social media. British author and journalist Steven Poole writes in an article for the Guardian: "The Age of Post-Truth stretches as far as you care to look, there never having been a golden-age of perfect transparency" (Poole, *Before Trump: the real history of fake news*). However, the scale on which this happens nowadays is on a whole other level. Internet is to blame for the rapid spreading of fake news. According to Steven Poole, fake news are intimately related to the "confirmation bias", the tendency that people have to turn to information that confirm or strengthen their own beliefs. With social media putting same-minded people together, this tendency is reinforced when it comes to sharing information. This is further worsened by individuals purposely modeling news to serve their own discourse or reinforce their political beliefs. Poole adds: "Politicians may be apt to spread misinformation too, if they like to discuss on subjects about which they have no expertise" (Poole, *Before Trump: the real history of fake news*). This statement can be applied to most people on the internet with a certain number of followers. Internet celebrities tend to do the same thing, sharing their opinions and discussing matters they have no expertise in, spreading misinformation to their audience not

checking the veracity of the information, often taking it at face value. Quality of news and information on the Internet have been deeply affected by social media practices. This can be put into perspective with the manipulation of facts and history in dystopian literature, notably in *1984* with the Party manipulating recent news in order to push an agenda and in *Fahrenheit 451* in order to justify the censorship and the Firemen's occupation in society by changing history.

The Information Age is also characterized by the emergence of online-based content, that is to say content solely available on the Internet, and easily accessible to users. Internet has quickly become a reliable and competitive medium in the 21st century, especially for audiovisual endeavors. With Google buying Youtube in 2006, the platform has since then become the biggest video sharing website on Internet, with “over a billion hours of video” watched every day (Official Youtube Statistics) and a large range of programs with generally more diversity than what is available on Television. On video-sharing websites, most formats can be found, from self-made short films, to various tutorials and podcasts, which are similar to radio programs. The possibilities are as varied as there are creators on those platforms.

When it comes to books on the internet, e-books, their virtual counterpart and audiobooks, are a young but growing market. The main appeal of audiobooks come from the fact that, much like watching TV, they do not require the same focus as reading physical books and have the capability of being enjoyed while doing other tasks, which brings the convenience factor and explains the growth of this market. E-books and audiobooks have the advantage of taking less space, as one device nowadays can hold thousands of books. E-books have been frowned upon for a long time because they were supposedly “cannibalising” other formats in the book world. One major critic addressed to e-books being that they do not bring anything to the table apart from being digital. Screen fatigue is another argument used by e-books detractors. E-books however shine with the readiness and availability of the format. One can order an e-book on their own and have instant access to the content they purchase without having to move or wait for delivery to consume or without having to worry about books being sold out. This has proven truer in recent times, due to the Covid-19 pandemic clogging shipping chains worldwide, and plummeting printed books sales while e-book sales have risen for the first time since 2016. The digital format makes for an enormous bookshelf in a handheld device, as well as offering a customizable experience with different sizes

for texts, adding the accessibility argument. However, while some people will argue that these new mediums are threatening the book industry, others are more optimistic. Richard Lennon, publisher at Penguin Audio says “Often Audio is not competing with time spent with books” (Thorp, *Audiobooks: The rise and rise of the books you don't read*). He adds that it gives new ways to enjoy books, while doing tasks that make the traditional handling of a book more difficult, like chores, or commuting. It expands the possibilities of renewal of the book format, with audiobook publishers pushing the boundaries between books and audio content, to create completely new experiences altogether. At the same time, classic titles found popularity in audio format, because they tend to be difficult to finish in the normal paper format, and audiobook versions can be a solution to finish those classics. This also proves to be a good selling point for those who are still defiant towards audiobooks, as they find a familiarity in the classics. Audiobooks are adapting to all types of audiences from new readers to seasoned book enthusiasts. Audiobooks have also become a medium of their own, with original stories written only in the audio format rather than being pre-existing novels translated in the audio format. All in all, audiobooks have become part of the mainstream world while being still in their early stage, and bring a new form of creation within the literary world.

Legal streaming platforms, which have become ever more popular, are a direct challenger to television. They offer a constant flow of video content for customers, with even the ability to be directly projected onto the television screen for a less alienating experience. These services offer a highly customizable watching experience. Legal Streaming services for multimedia content have resulted in the rushed obsolescence of DVD and CD industries, in favor of buying and downloading digital versions of said mediums.

The Information Age has both largely contributed to globalization as well as being a result of it. The world has been connected to an extent never seen before, bringing with it what can be called a globalized fusion of cultures. Brought by the blooming of the Internet and of mobile technologies, such as phone integrated cameras, sharing cultural elements with people around the world has become accessible for about anyone with a connection. The Internet has brought cultures closer to people, as well as making them more accessible. The average internet user has then access to a multiplicity of worldwide content. Culture has influenced the Internet, but the other way around is also true. Multiculturalism on the Internet has

become common. Internet has become its own original multicultural microcosm⁵.
An official statement from UNESCO states:

In principle, the Internet is open to all languages of the world when certain technical conditions are met, and when the necessary human and financial resources are in place. [...] UNESCO is convinced that cultural diversity and multilingualism on the Internet have a key role to play in fostering pluralistic, equitable, open and inclusive knowledge societies. (UNESCO.org, *Linguistic Diversity and multilingualism on Internet*)

The Internet has given the potential for multiple voices to be heard in all languages, and it empowers unheard voices in standard societies, something that can have an impact on the world at large. Internet is a real multicultural space in which cultural exchanges as well as cultural integration is possible and happens almost naturally.

5. Internet has become a miniature globalized multicultural society of its own

1.3.3 -Ray Bradbury in the Information Age

Ray Bradbury, who died in 2012, and lived through a part of the Information Age had the opportunity to see the beginning of the Internet's rise as a whole. He never really was enthusiastic about the digitization of books as he also loved books for their feel and their smell. He loved books as objects too, which is linked to libraries, his own learning ground. He said that ebooks "smelled like burned fuel," which is relevant imagery for the author of *Fahrenheit 451*. He only accepted to have *Fahrenheit 451* published as an ebook because Michael Congdon, son of Bradbury's lifelong literary agent Don Congdon, convinced him to do so. Alison Flood, books reporter for the Guardian writes that Ray Bradbury, was "one of the last bastions against the digital age." Bradbury's opinion on the Internet was mainly opposed to its basic concept, in his own words: "It's meaningless; it's not real. It's in the air somewhere." (Flood, *Fahrenheit 451 ebook published as Ray Bradbury gives in to the digital era*). Bradbury put a great value on books, but not only their content as his own remarks demonstrate, as he valued the physical value of books. His animosity toward the Internet is also connected to the ideas contained within the novel itself, that is to say mindless entertainment, something the Internet is filled with. Bradbury saying that e-books smell like burned fuel tells us that he saw the Digital Age and e-books as being the same as metaphorically burning the paper books he cherished. Ray Bradbury had no doubt drawn a link between TV and Internet as a similar idea, but he knew at the same time that it was inevitable, in the same way television took over the American society in the later parts of the 20th century. Internet fills both the role of radio and TV with its mix of audio and video capabilities with much more flexibility than its predecessors, slowly but surely making the other mediums more obsolete as time goes. Even though Bradbury was an author writing about the future, there was something about the past that he could not let go of. For him, science fiction was not only about predicting the future. In 1982 he wrote an essay that discussed ways to make cities attractive and livable entitled *Beyond 1984: The People Machines* and published in 1991 in a collection called *Yestermorrow: Obvious Answers to Impossible Futures*.

People ask me to predict the future, when all I want to do is prevent it. Better yet, build it. Predicting the future is much too easy, anyway. You look at the people around you, the street you stand on, the visible air you breathe, and predict more of the same. To hell with more. I want better. (Bradbury, *Yestermorrow: Obvious Answers to Impossible Futures*)

This position he had taken reflects his vision of the Internet. While it provide tools and new opportunities for technology and communication, the Information Age is also filled by Information Pollution. This phenomenon, that was already talked about earlier is the contamination of information with a large quantity of low-quality or erroneous data that damages the overall quality of information, something that is especially true on the Internet. With the incredible amount of information and the diversity of content on the Internet, quality of the content provided tend to lose in quality in favor of quantity. Bradbury described Internet as “distracting”, which is a similar remark he made about the shallow entertainment on television, showing consistency in his reservations about technology in general. Still, it is difficult to ignore that Bradbury’s positions about technology also tended to change or be contradictory. He considered the computer to be a sort of typewriter, saying that he did not own a computer because he already had a typewriter. However, he green-lighted the development and release of a strategy video game based on his novel that was released in 1984. The game’s events take place 5 years after the main story of Ray Bradbury’s novel. The game has a lot of references to Bradbury’s earlier works, and is mainly a text-based game, much like an interactive novel. He also contributed to the game to some extent, and wrote a comment on the back cover of the game package.

I’m thrilled to be participating in the evolution of my *Fahrenheit 451* into a computer adventure. For anybody curious about what happens to Montag after the book ends, or about what science fiction software might be, here is an exciting place to start. (*Fahrenheit 451*, box cover-art)

This quote alone contradicts Bradbury’s statement about computers, as well as his later position about e-books, making it difficult to know what was the author’s definitive stance on the technology of the Information Age, at one point being delighted by the idea of expanding the future of his novel and at other times refusing the digitization of his own work until he was reluctantly convinced that it would for the best. Comparatively, his opinion on TV is much clearer. As discussed earlier, he saw the potential of the medium for story-telling and provocation of thought but realized that despite that, most television watchers used it to entertain themselves mindlessly. Bradbury writing the 65 episodes of his own television show, based on his previous works reinforce that idea that he embraced the potential of TV and acted on it. Bradbury’s declining health in his last years could have been a factor that prevented him from taking the time to explore the Internet

medium as he did with television, due to mobile Web being relatively young and definitely less popular during Bradbury's last life stretch. Adding to that, the Internet business started to pick up during the 2010s while the author died in 2012. In *Ray Bradbury: The Last Interview: and other conversations* edited by Sam Weller, the most extensive Bradbury scholar and his official bibliographer, he confesses.

Weller: Can I ask a difficult question?

Bradbury: Of course.

Weller: Are you afraid to die?

Bradbury: I'm not afraid of dying, I'm afraid of not living.

Weller: You still have much to do...

Bradbury: You're damned right I do. I'd like to live to one hundred.

(Bradbury, Weller, *Ray Bradbury: The Last Interview: And Other Conversations*)

This statement shows that he still had projects in mind despite his old age and illness. In fact, Bradbury was attempting to write another novel at the time, but could not finish due to his health and left the project unfinished. Bradbury did have regrets about his old age and his inability to keep writing in his last years, which leaves us to wonder if he would have changed his opinion of the Internet given enough time.

[...] *Fahrenheit 451* is you writing about libraries and books. Your two loves. I want to go to questions from the audience here, but first, is there anything else you've often dreamed of doing? You've done so much.

Bradbury: I want to write more plays, too.

Weller: Do you have any regrets in your life?

Bradbury: I regret I won't live to be one hundred.

(Bradbury, Weller, *Ray Bradbury: The Last Interview: And Other Conversations*, n.p.)

Bradbury is still regarded nowadays as one of the most influential American authors, with famous present day's figures like Barack Obama acknowledging the author's impact: "Ray Bradbury's gift for storytelling reshaped our culture and expanded our world" (Obama, official statement issued after Ray Bradbury's death). His passion for writing never faded until the end, and for Bradbury himself, passion was everything. He saw himself as a 12 year-old boy until the end. Despite his passing, his legacy remains, and with it, the chilling future in which books are

outlawed and people dehumanized.

2 - *FAHRENHEIT 451*: DYSTOPIAN TECHNOLOGY, INHUMAN SOCIETY

The overarching themes of Dystopian novels tend to be similar. The differences lie in which particular aspects of these themes the authors decide to focus on, as well as the way they approach such themes. While certain novels like *1984* by George Orwell focus more on the political and psychological sides of a dystopia, due to the pressure exerted by the government on citizens or yet again the creativity of secret services to surveil and punish every action deemed dangerous. Some other novels may focus on different aspects: in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, another major work in dystopian fiction, the author focuses on genetics and its uses to create a hierarchical society where people can only execute actions limited to the social role they are attributed before birth. It also emphasizes on the notion of marginalization of the individual and the usage of drugs to experience ecstasy as a way to compensate for their complete lack of human emotions. Often, these themes are linked to fields in which the authors seem fairly well-versed. George Orwell was politically engaged and was considered an activist. Aldous Huxley was well-versed in biology and one of his brothers, Julian Huxley, was a eugenicist, meaning he advocated beliefs and practices aiming to improve the genetic quality of the human population. It is not difficult then to understand why Aldous Huxley's major work, *Brave New World*, had such a strong focus on genetics. In Ray Bradbury's case, he was a very avid book reader. In his own words he has always "been a library person all [his] life" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 3). This observation naturally leads to understand why books are so central in the novel and why they serve as a vehicle for Bradbury's discourse. *Fahrenheit 451*'s plot is centered around censorship and book-burning, but the novel has much more things to offer. In fact, there are many underlying themes in the book that can catch the attention of the reader. It is even more impressive considering the novel was published in 1953, and that many elements in the story were far ahead of Ray Bradbury's time. The themes depicted in *Fahrenheit 451* are diverse. The first theme to be considered is technology. Technology and robotics are present in the book, and are pretty advanced considering the time period the novel was written in. One could consider that Bradbury was a pioneer in introducing robots in fiction. The three laws of robotics, major guidelines in robot science fiction, were

introduced by famous science fiction writer Isaac Asimov in his short story *Runaround* published in 1942. The second major theme in *Fahrenheit 451* is entertainment. Leisure activities are everywhere in the novel and quite literally in every corner of the room. The third main theme of the novel is society, which is, in a dystopian novel, the heart of the matter. How people react to their society, how does it function? Such questions are detrimental when dealing with dystopian literature, because society is at the core of this genre, and everything is built around it in such novels. Dystopian literature stands on the principle of the individual being crushed by the weight of society as well as the world that is a nightmare to live for the reader. Through these specific themes, we will get a general idea of why these themes were focused on in particular, and why they are essential when discussing *Fahrenheit 451* as a possibly prophetic novel.

2.1 - THE TECHNOLOGY OF *FAHRENHEIT 451*

2.1.1 -Robots

At the time *Fahrenheit 451* was released, Robotics and robots in literature were still at an early stage. While authors such as Isaac Asimov and Karel Capek did in fact write about robots before the 50s, the scientific area focusing on robots only appeared during the 50s, which falls into the time period in which Bradbury's novel was released. Considering that Ray Bradbury read a number of Asimov's work, the presence of robots in his science-fiction novel is not all that surprising. Bradbury, however, decided to work on robots that do not look or even act like humans. The robots in *Fahrenheit 451*'s universe are exclusively animalistic in nature. The first mention of robots in the novel is extremely early in the narrative.

They had this machine. They had two machines really. One of them slid down into your stomach like a black cobra down an echoing well looking for all the old water and the old time gathered here. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 23)

The first robot appearing in the novel is depicted as looking like a snake. This gives an ominous appearance to the machine. The other detail that sticks out in the passage is the fact that the snake "had an eye" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 23). This eye is used by a human operator to look inside the body of the person it is pumping. This

is a reminder of the government having an eye on their citizens. Even while this machine is beneficial to mankind in its basic concept, as it is a medical machine, the way it accomplishes its task is quite daunting and uncomfortable, for both the protagonist and the reader. The snake-like machine is a dreadful reminder that technology can be beneficial, but depends on the hand using it.

The second and most important robot we come across in the novel is the Mechanical Hound. This machine is used by the firemen to track and stop book readers and is the secondary antagonist of the story. It is an extremely advanced and performant machine able to track chemical signatures and apprehend people by stabbing them with a needle. The first thing we learn about this machine is that “The Mechanical Hound slept but did not sleep, lived but did not live in its gently humming, gently vibrating, softly illuminated kennel back in a dark corner of the firehouse.” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 35). There again, the robot is associated with an animal, here a hunting dog, which it technically is. Once again, like with the snake, there is something ominous about the Mechanical Hound, merely by the fact that it is situated in a dark corner. Another part of its description reinforces this idea of a scary machine: “its eight legs spidered under it on rubber-padded paws.” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 35). The Mechanical Hound is a looming threat in the novel, and Montag’s greatest deterrent in the first half of the story.

Yet again, the machine is compared to an animal that has negative connotations, the spider, usually linked with horror-oriented themes, supported by the fear of spiders being pretty common. Bradbury’s depiction of the Hound reveals his point of view on robots. The machine has a duality: it is alive in the sense that it acts autonomously but it does not possess life in the biological sense of the term. There is a distinction made between artificial and natural life. The Mechanical Hound remains purely a machine without sentience. During this early era of robotics which are the 50s, it is a stance that makes sense. The author insists on the artificial nature of robots several times. Beatty’s comment on the Hound reinforces this idea: “Come off it. It doesn’t like or dislike. It just functions [...] It’s only copper wire, storage battery and electricity” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 38).

Robots in Bradbury’s fiction are just tools, they still remain under human control, having no free will. Interestingly enough, the Mechanical Hound in *Fahrenheit 451* does not respect the first rule of Robotics described by Asimov in his short story, which remained a fictional device until 2011. The design of the Mechanical Hound is to hunt, inject anesthetics and ultimately kill fugitives like

Montag while Isaac Asimov's first law states that: "a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human to come to harm" (Asimov, *Runaround*).

Asimov's three laws of Robotics serve as a basis for robot-based fiction. They have been altered by other authors and even by Isaac Asimov himself. They define robotic and human relationships in order to avoid the plot where machines end up destroying their creator after obtaining sentience. Asimov's work on robotic fiction is so influential that to this day it is still being referred to in many fictions and these laws were taken into account to define the real-life ethics of artificial intelligence. The second law of robotics touches on robotic obedience to humans unless it conflicts with the first rule, which means that robots have to obey human beings as long as it does not harm their masters. The third law of robotics concerns self-preservation of the robots. They have to generally protect themselves unless it harms humans or if a human ordered them to not protect themselves. These three laws are intertwined and generally put human life on the priority line. Bradbury's robots have no sentience, which makes them drastically different from Asimov's robots. As mentioned, the Hound just functions. In this regard they are more akin to machines than living beings while robots in Asimov's work achieve a level of sentience that puts them apart as a sort of new species that has to be subservient to humanity, their creators. The Hound is merely an instrument of oppression used by the government to intimidate people or exact punishment. The Mechanical Hound has no mind of its own, it just executes the task it has been given.

In 1974, Bradbury wrote a letter addressed to writer Brian Sibley, saying the following words: "I am not afraid of robots. I am afraid of people, people, people. I want them to remain human." These lines might explain why the author of *Fahrenheit 451* created these robots whose purpose is hunting humans. The Mechanical Hound is not responsible as it is an object without a conscience. They are used by humans to further exert the censorship and control they have over society. The humans in *Fahrenheit 451* –with a few exceptions– are almost as inhuman as their robots, especially the ones at the top of the dystopian society. He shows what people in a dystopian world can make of robots: Cutting-edge killing machines that are a reflection of the terrifying people using them to further their agenda.

2.1.2 -Devices

Robots are not the only piece of technology found within the pages of the novel. In fact, there are quite a few devices used throughout the text that are worth mentioning. First of all, during Mildred's medical intervention, we are presented with a machine that "pumped all the blood from the body and replaced it with fresh blood and serum" (*Fahrenheit 451* 23).

This piece of technology implies a very advanced medical apparatus that can both suck out all the blood while replacing it instantly. This machine coupled with the snake-like robot are frequently used in everyday life as many people overdose on medication, or find themselves in situations similar to Mildred's.

Other devices that are seen quite often in the novel are the seashells and the thimble radios. These devices serve mainly for entertainment when not watching television. The seashells are a device that are put inside of the ears and deliver the sound from the thimble radios. We have a description of what this device is used for when Montag enters his bedroom and can visualize his wife in his mind: "And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 20).

These seashells are wireless earpieces that are mainly used by citizens to listen to broadcasts like a portable radio receiver. In the same fashion, Faber, one of the most important characters in the story, gives Montag his invention that bring these seashells headphones to a whole new level. Much like the Seashells, this device is put inside the ear and allows radio communication on a long range. It is slightly different as it also acts as a microphone to record what the person using it hears on their end, like a long range walkie-talkie.

'And something more! It listens! If you put it in your ear, Montag, I can sit comfortably home, warming my frightened bones, and hear and analyse the firemen's world, find its weaknesses, without danger.' (*Fahrenheit 451*, 117-118)

The technology of *Fahrenheit 451* allows for wireless long-distance communications. What is the most remarkable about these devices outside of the fact that they seem to have an unlimited range is their relatively small size: "no larger than a .22 bullet" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 117).

Considering that the headphones invented in the 1910s were fairly large and

wired to a device, it was difficult at the time to imagine small devices that were not connected by cables. Most of the communication devices that are featured in *Fahrenheit 451* are derived from radio communication devices that were invented toward the end of the 19th century.

One of the important parts of the firemen's equipment is the igniter, a device that allows the user to create a small fire. This portable fire is generally used to ignite the kerosene to burn books. It isn't unlike a lighter, and specifically the Zippo lighters which were introduced around the end of the 1930s, quite some time before the novel was published. It can be noted that lighters had some notable improvements in the 50s, such as a change of fuel as well as new way to ignite flames, which may have inspired the igniter in the novel.

Bradbury describes a few weapons in his novel which are also part of the technology. Towards the end of the book, Montag has to use a flamethrower to burn his house down alongside Beatty and the Mechanical Hound. The modern flamethrower was a relatively recent invention at the time *Fahrenheit 451* was written and it is not surprising to see it in a novel where the main imagery revolves around fire. The flamethrower is a psychological weapon, because being burned is a relatively slow and painful way to die. It also represents Montag's power in the novel, a power he eventually utilizes at the end to free himself from his chief and from society, ironically marking the end of his career as a fireman. Another weapon in the novel is the atomic bomb. It is mentioned throughout the novel repeatedly. The city in which Montag lived is bombed at the end of the story, prompting the beginning of war. The presence of the nuclear weapon in the novel is not surprising either considering the first atomic bomb was created in the 40s, a few years prior to the publication of the novel, especially after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Technology is always present in *Fahrenheit 451*. It is a tool of control and oppression of the citizen. It alienates people from each other and encourages the avoidance of human contact. Among the many inventions that Ray Bradbury developed in the novel, many of them were considered fantastical, to the point that it seemed that they would never exist. Ray Bradbury had a vision of the future that was considered to be purely science fiction in the 50s. Many of Bradbury's predictions turned out to be more realistic than what his contemporaries expected.

2.2 - ENTERTAINMENT IN *FAHRENHEIT 451*

2.2.1 -Parlor Walls & Television

The first point to be made about entertainment in the novel is that people are not allowed to read books. Books are forbidden by the government and must be burned. Most individuals do not even think about reading at all. Instead the citizens of *Fahrenheit 451* use what are called “Parlor walls.” These special walls feature screens that are as wide as the walls themselves. Through the character of Mildred, we get an insight on how these screens have become an addiction, effectively disconnecting her from reality.

He saw her leaning toward the great shimmering walls of color and motion where the family talked and talked and talked to her, where the family prattled and chatted and said her name and smiled at her and said nothing of the bomb that was an inch, half an inch, now a quarter inch from the top of the hotel. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 203)

Watching the wall-screens makes for the majority of the time spent at home for most citizens. It reached the point where Mildred’s idea of hanging out with her friends is just inviting them to her house to watch the wall-TVs. Even visiting her relatives’ house is simply about going to them to watch the screens in their parlor. The presence of these screens has completely altered the social aspect of Bradbury’s fictional society. The screens are installed all around the room to maximize the whole experience. They can either display programs or play music, which represent a virtually unlimited amount of content for the consumers. The more screens the better is a general rule, as Mildred wants Montag to install a fourth wall-screen in their home, which he reluctantly considers doing as one screen represents about one third of his yearly income.

The screens become a source of displeasure and contempt for Montag after he slowly realizes that he wasn’t really living thanks to his fateful encounter with Clarisse. He starts to understand how the screens only serve as a distraction and keep people apart as they remove their need to connect with others. The technology behind the wall-screens is pretty advanced, especially when it comes to user interaction.

The converter attachment, which had cost them one hundred dollars, automatically supplied her name whenever the announcer addressed his anonymous audience, leaving a blank where the proper syllables could be filled in. A special spot-wavex-scrambler also caused his televised image in the area immediately about his lips, to mouth the vowels and consonants beautifully. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 83)

The modules give the user a feeling of connection to the shows they are watching, luring them into false human contact and keeping them entertained. To expand this process, audience like Mildred receive scripts in their mailboxes that they need to read when watching some shows so that they feel like they are part of the television program. While in reality the role that the user is having in this shows is superficial, it is indeed what they consider as entertainment which is further proven by Mildred's comment on it.

'Isn't that fun, Guy?'

He stood in the hall looking at her.

'It's sure fun she said.'

'What's the play about?'

'I just told you. There are these people named Bob and Ruth and Helen'.

'Oh.'

'It's really fun. It'll be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed.'

(*Fahrenheit 451*, 30)

Mildred is convinced of the entertaining nature of her activity, but Montag's reaction tells otherwise: her idea of fun and entertainment is pretty shallow and uninteresting. We can even see that she is consuming so much TV shows one after another that she is not able to explain the plot of the play to her husband in any other way than giving the names of three characters. She more interested about getting a fourth screen to dive deeper into her addiction instead. This addiction is so strong in fact that she considers the characters in the wall-screens as family. She does not want to turn down the parlor's volume even as her sick husband asks her to do so, pretending to lower the volume without actually doing it, leading an annoyed Montag to move on to something else. She is never able to name the programs she is watching and is always giving vague answers to Montag.

Sensationalism is very present in the book and is deeply associated with live media coverage. Toward the end of the story, Montag is being chased by the Mechanical Hound and manages to escape by jumping into the river near the city to throw the machine off his trail. Later on, when he meets a group of marginalized intellectuals memorizing books in their head, Granger, one of their leader takes out a portable TV and shows the end of the chase to Montag. The media and the police use another man as a fake Montag and kill him with the robot. Granger explains

how they can't admit that they lost Montag at the river which is partly due to the fact that the audience's attention can be kept for so long before they become uninterested. The authorities decided to fabricate a climax to the chase. The reason why it leans toward sensationalism lies in the fact that they focus more on the drama and the action rather than the truth. They used a scapegoat to save face and pretend that they did their job right, turning the chase into yet another piece of entertainment. Most of the citizens were watching the broadcast on their screens. The media turned the event into entertainment while the authorities manipulated the reality of the situation to appear foolproof to the general population.

2.2.2 -Entertainment: Destruction of Thought

It is important to point out that entertainment in *Fahrenheit 451* does not only serve as providing pleasure. It has a deeper purpose that is highlighted by Faber when Montag visits him out of despair. While leisure generally serves as a way to think about things, it is not the case in the book. Entertainment is yet another way to control the population. Citizens have a lot of off-hours, but the activities they partake in during those off-hours can be described as mindless, leaving no place for thought.

Off-hours, yes. But time to think? If you're not driving a hundred miles an hour, at a clip where you can't think of anything else except the danger, then you're playing some game or sitting in some room where you can't argue with the four-wall televisor. Why? The televisor is "real". It is immediate [...] It tells you what to think and blasts it in. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 109)

Faber says that the entertainment in *Fahrenheit 451*'s society prevents the citizen from thinking. People are victims of entertainment rather than masters of it. People have no control over what they think because their off-hours activities are designed in a way that reflection is utterly impossible. For Faber, this creation of thought and ideas could have been present in parlor walls or radio. The mediums in themselves are not to blame, it is the use of it that has become the problem. Entertainment encourages the absence of thought by making sure citizens are not able to form any. It forces people to accept things as they are without questioning anything. Any thought process is washed away by the constant overload of mindless entertainment citizens are being fed. It is not so different from the unconscious conditioning babies go through in *Brave New World* or the constant

flow of propaganda in 1984's telescreens that cannot be turned off and much like Bradbury's wall-screens are a constant source of distraction.

Day and night the telescreens bruised your ears with statistics proving that people today had more food, more clothes, better houses, better recreations—that they lived longer, worked shorter hours, were bigger, healthier, stronger, happier, more intelligent, better educated, than the people of fifty years ago. (Orwell, 74)

At first, the telescreens used by the Party to spy on people seem to be radically different from the wall-TVs. However, the telescreens are very much like the wall-screens. They are always there, blasting some sort of program or information to the citizens. At the same time, they are always putting out propaganda about the Party. There are no possibilities for the average Party member to turn it off, so they are always submerged by the sound. As a matter of fact, both of these screens are wall-mounted devices. The biggest difference between the telescreen and the wall-TV is their relation to the common folk. The telescreens instill fear and anxiety, especially to the protagonist because he thinks differently from the rest. Telescreens are equipped with microphones that pick up everything someone says. *Fahrenheit 451*'s screens are a source of pleasure and comfort for citizens, and they spend most of their off-hours watching them. The telescreens are generally the size of a computer screen while the wall-screens are the size of a wall like their name suggest, and are all around the room when only one telescreen stands in a room. In both novels, the screens are omnipresent, and play a prominent role, always looming about the main character of the story. They are inescapable and both the telescreens and the parlor walls are tools of control, though they achieve that purpose differently. Wall-screens aren't here to spy on people contrary to their Orwellian counterpart. The fact that most people have stopped thinking for themselves in the universe of *Fahrenheit 451* makes it so the government does not even need to spy on their citizens. Citizens are so brainwashed and conformed that they automatically denounce any suspicious behaviors, as many neighbors had alerted the Firemen that Montag was behaving strangely. Beatty purposely ignored them until Mildred was the one to sound the alarm. The telescreen in a way shows that even as their control system is almost infallible and that a rebellion is unlikely, the Party is still very cautious to the point of needing to have cameras and microphones installed into a screen to keep surveilling their citizens: "Winston was listening to the telescreen. At present only music was coming out of it, but there was a possibility that at any moment there might be a special bulletin from the

Ministry of Peace.” (Orwell, 287). Like the wall-screens, the telescreen is able to broadcast music like a radio. The telescreen can be controlled by the Party to interrupt the programs in order to show an information bulletin. The wall-screens are probably much the same in Bradbury’s novel. Though it seems like there is a possibility to change channels on the wall screens, the government may be able to interrupt programming, as the whole city was watching the manhunt that occurred when Montag was being chased by the Hound. Whether people are so interested in drama that they all watch or if the broadcast is imposed on them is unclear. Both devices exert power over the population in their own way: the telescreen by being a surveillance apparatus and the wall-screens by force-feeding programs that prevent people from thinking too hard, if at all. In a way it can be said that both of these screens are the same idea interpreted differently by the two authors: the idea of control through the use of screens. Bradbury, contrary to Orwell, is way more familiar with screens because he lived through a more modern era than Orwell, where society was slowly changing to a more screen-oriented world. As the story progresses and Montag’s vision of the screen changes, he comes to despise them: “And then he came to the parlour where the great idiot monsters lay asleep with their white thoughts and their snowy dreams” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 151).

Montag antagonizes the wall-screens to the point where he gives them a life of their own by comparing them to monsters. The term “white thoughts” could refer to incomprehensible thoughts the TV is consistently throwing at the viewers to keep them from thinking too hard, but it could also refer to the term “white noise” which are sounds akin to roaring or a radio static, which still alludes to the idea of incoherence. The screens are then just distraction from thought, by parasitizing the human brain with lots of information and sounds. The expression “snowy dreams” does in the same fashion than “white thoughts,” link itself to screen-technology. A TV that does not have a signal will display a series of moving gray and black dots that resemble a sort of snow. At the same time, it may be alluding to the imagination being destroyed by the excessive screen watching to the point where when people sleep at night in the story, they don’t see anything but white static in their dreams, as their minds are empty of thoughts, referring once again to the fact that thinking is not encouraged in the universe the story takes place in.

2.2.3 -Escapism through entertainment

Entertainment is the most common form of escapism in *Fahrenheit 451*. The seashells illustrate this idea. When someone puts them on, they enter another world, away from the ugliness of reality. The case of Mildred encapsulates the idea of escapism in the novel as, in most of her appearances, she is seen fleeing from reality or trying to do so.

Every night, the waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning. There had been no night in the last two years that Mildred had not swum that sea, had not gladly gone down in it for the third time. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 20)

In this passage, we learn that Mildred has been putting seashells in her ears every night for two years. She uses the seashells as a way to escape, as a mean to drive herself away from the real world. It is seen during many scenes in the novel that Mildred is almost always accompanied by her seashells and thimble radio when not watching her screens. She also avoids heated subjects. When Montag is having a breakdown, telling her that he burned an old woman in her house along with the books, her focus switches to the rug Montag just vomited on instead. Another example is when he is asking for medicine, she fails to bring them in. He asks for it three times in a row and every time she is getting sidetracked, either lost in her own reverie or saying things that bring nothing interesting to the conversation. Even in her last scene in the novel, she is escaping from reality, her husband and her house, taking a taxi to an unknown destination. Until the end, she does not face her problems. The reason why Mildred is so prone on escaping reality and lose herself in the music and the entertainment is because deep down she is profoundly depressed and is unsuccessfully trying to avoid sadness by entertaining herself: “But that was another Mildred, that was a Mildred so deep inside this one and so bothered, really bothered, that the two women had never met” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 69). While she generally displays a very shallow and mediocre behavior, being a pure product of her society, at the same time there is a deep malaise within her that is so difficult to handle that she has no other choice than to slip away from it as often as possible, as it almost killed her. This quotation could imply that she has a sort of split personality disorder or that she refuses to acknowledge her true self.

Montag comments on Mildred’s sleeping habits several times in the story. He mentions her restlessness quite often. She takes sleeping pills every day, and

stares at the ceiling every night while listening to her seashells. Despite her medication, she barely sleeps. As a matter of fact, a sleeping pill overdose causes her to nearly die at the beginning of the story. She is stuck in a sort of hellish loop. During the day she is escaping inside her wall-screens, drowning in hours and hours of television programs or is constantly listening to her seashells. At night, she has to take pills to sleep, still listening to her thimble radio until early in the morning. Her life is stuck in this downward spiral.

In contrast, Montag's escapism is drastically different from his wife's. While she is consuming entertainment in the form of screens and radio, Montag seems to find respite in pure destruction. His first mean of escapism is through burning things. Several times he mentions how easy burning things are, and how liberating it is to him. Before Clarisse makes him realize how terrible life is in his world, Montag's way of liberating himself was by indulging in his simple joy of watching books burn and he felt great while doing it, which is stated clearly in the first few sentences of the novel.

It was a pleasure to burn. It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and **changed**. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 1)

It is safe to say that Montag considered burning as his own form of catharsis. It is a thing that will stick with him even later in the book as he has to burn his own house in his final face-off against Captain Beatty, and this despite having changed his mind about books. However, as time goes on and Montag acknowledges the emptiness of the society he lives in, he tries to find purpose outside of the usual forms of entertainment. He seeks answers in books that he reads in secret and tries to stay away from the screens. Montag, however, is not infallible, he also has his own doubts. Confronted by his peers' emotions, something that rarely ever happens in this novel, he faces his own emotions and questions his own actions: "Maybe they're right, maybe it's best not to face things, to run, have fun. I don't know, I feel guilty" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 134) By acknowledging that escapism could be the only solution to face this destructive society, he shows a realist side of himself, contrasting with the idealistic side he develops in the end. He tries to make books become his own form of escapism from society contrary to his wife who keeps sinking further into the TV-watching. He

only partially succeeds as he struggles to understand the content of books. Montag's need to read and understand books becomes rather obsessive, to the point he almost fails to hide his book-reading. Books are also what set Montag on his defiant journey against society and prompted his meeting with Faber, the cowardly old man who believes that books shouldn't disappear. Montag's newfound relationship with books is ironical considering he had been burning them for 10 years yet they set him free from the shackles of society. His obsession is what causes his eventual downfall, as he is being reported by various neighbors and even his wife.

It can be said that Guy Montag escapes the unpleasant reality in the literal sense of the term. He becomes a fugitive in the third part of the book, killing Beatty and destroying a Mechanical Hound before fleeing the city to save himself: "Beatty, he thought, you're not a problem now. You always said, don't face a problem, burn it. Well, now I've done both" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 157). In his last confrontation, Montag stops running away from his problems. He handles them his way, be it moral or not. The ambiguity of his action resides in the fact that, in a way he does escape from his problems but chose the easiest way-out: He killed his captain and left the city. In the end, he did not have much of a choice as he was to be arrested, and acted out of desperation.

Escapist societies are a common theme in dystopian literature. The government of *Fahrenheit 451* is involved in this escapism, as it encourages people to continue doing distracting activities. It does so because it allows for more control over society. Instead of bettering the situation of the individuals, it gives them access to temporary relief from their sadness and stress. The government's attitude toward their citizens is reminiscent of a concept called "bread and circuses" or "bread and games" (Juvenal, *Satire X*). The expression is attributed to Juvenal, a Roman poet, and is used to describe a political strategy consisting in calming the discontent of the masses by providing entertainment to them. This political tactic has been used by a lot of regimes throughout the ages. Common people are partially to blame for buying into this "bread and games" strategy. They get distracted and gradually accept the injustice because they get satisfaction out of the entertainment provided. It is a sort of selfishness coming from the people which ultimately boils down to neglect of the wider concerns. What happens in the book is the result of this behavior: people have come to neglect what happens on the larger scale, just focusing on their own selfish desires.

‘Is it because we’re having so much fun at home we’ve forgotten the world? Is it because we’re so rich and the rest of the world’s so poor and we just don’t care if they are? [...] Is it true, the world works so hard and we play?’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 96)

This quotation perfectly illustrates the “bread and games” concept. There was probably a time where people were unhappy with the government in the novel, however, they have been provided with endless entertainment and fun. Ultimately, the citizens came to forget their concerns and neglected the larger picture, which leads to this selfishness that is omnipresent in *Fahrenheit 451*. The situation of the world is dire and the general unhappiness is their reality, a forgotten reality masked by entertainment which serves as a placebo for everything wrong with the world.

2.3 - THE SOCIETY OF *FAHRENHEIT 451*

Society is the most important part of dystopian literature. A dystopia is a reflection on an undesirable or nightmarish society. Dystopias are created by exaggerating and focusing on specific traits of a society. The themes linked to society are undoubtedly the main point of focus in dystopian fiction. This is no different in *Fahrenheit 451*. At first glance, Bradbury’s society does not look as frightening as other societies like Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s *1984*, but there are several elements that need to be thoroughly analyzed in order to see its intricacies. Bradbury’s writing and his slightly humoristic undertones at times collide with some of the darker parts of the novel. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury is a novel about censorship, inhumanity, loss of individuality and unhappiness. A society in which absence of thought and lack of humanity is encouraged. A society in which consumerism is pushed at its extreme. The world of *Fahrenheit 451* can be as dreadful as any other dystopia when looking in the right places. It is a society of ignorance, excessive pleasure-seeking, emptiness, lack of meaning, with the threat of war at every corner and oozing with violence.

2.3.1 -The Firemen of *Fahrenheit 451*

‘Established, 1790, to burn English-influenced books in the Colonies. First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin’

RULE 1. Answer the alarm swiftly.

2. Start the fire swiftly.

3. Burn everything.

4. Report back to the firehouse immediately.

5. Stand alert for other alarms.

(*Fahrenheit 451*, 48)

The Firemen in the novel show the extent to which truth can be twisted and manipulated due to censorship. Firemen in Bradbury's future are the complete opposite of real-life firemen, burning things down instead of putting out fires. They act as the primary anti-book force and are enforcers of censorship. Their mission is to answer alarms, find books hidden in houses and burn the houses down along with the books. In *Fahrenheit 451*'s universe, the firemen are a sort of special police and can arrest people. Beatty uses a fabricated version of history to justify the firemen's task. There are instances showing that despite the censorship, the original purpose of firemen is not completely lost because Clarisse McClellan's older relative told her that firemen used to stop fires instead of starting them, something Montag doesn't believe at first. Montag's disbelief shows how powerful manipulation of history is. Whether Beatty's version of history is right or wrong does not matter in the end because something can become the truth if everyone believes it. By using an influential figure like Benjamin Franklin, Beatty cements his version of history to make his claims legitimate. Falsification of history, also called historical negationism, is a common theme in dystopia, and is particularly central in *1984*. The importance of history and remembering it is nullified in these stories. Under this kind of regimen, the people do not really have a choice but to believe the version of history the government is giving to them. This is a bit different in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. People do not think for themselves. They stopped reading books so they do not care much for History. The only information they are getting come from the radio or the TV, which are filled with programs that distract the masses, which then becomes their reality. The majority of the citizens in the city are unaware of their history and have been conditioned to be this way. This explains why history, but also facts, became irrelevant in the story. Even if some of the people know the truth about the past, like Clarisse's family or Faber, the masses are so ignorant that they will generally not believe anything that is said about history or just raise alarms for the firemen to take care of the dissidents. Dystopian literature reinforces the saying "History is written by the victors", quote attributed to former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill even if its exact origins are unknown. History has been rewritten by the authorities because they are the victors of society that get to dictate their truth. In the same fashion in *1984*, history and facts are constantly rewritten so that the Party is always right and even has a branch

called “Ministry of Truth” whose task is to make corrections to articles at all times. The name is ironical as their task is to bend the truth. By robbing people of their past, they cannot evolve, remain static, which is something that is needed for a dystopian government to be prosperous. Captain Beatty also says that after burning so many books, a fireman has a chance to become curious about the contents of the books. They can take one book and read it, but they have to give it back after a day or their house will be burnt, which is a sort of test of loyalty for the firemen. Some firemen are inexorably attracted to what they are supposed to destroy. Ironically enough, Beatty was an avid reader but changed his stance on books at some point in the past. Firemen also have enough authority to kill to some extent. They let an old lady burn with her house because she didn’t want to leave, and most of them were not fazed by the murder except for Montag. They can also send their Mechanical Hound to track and kill fugitives. Firemen duties seem to make it so they will not face justice as long as they fulfilled their missions. Most of the time, the firemen spend their time sitting in the firehouse playing cards until they get an alert.

We get an interesting insight from Clarisse: “You know, I’m not afraid of you at all.’He was surprised, ‘Why should you be?’ ‘So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean. But you’re just a man, after all...” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 14). Firefighters have generally always been seen in a positive light and respected by citizens in most cultures of the world as they do a risky profession where death is close at all times. This is quite the contrary in *Fahrenheit 451*. The firemen are something people avoid at all costs, as it is generally bad news when they are around considering they burn down houses without a qualm. In a way, normal people do not see the firemen as simple men but more as a fearsome entity that brings order and chaos at the same time. At the same time, people enjoy seeing firemen burning down buildings.

‘Remember, the firemen are necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord. You firemen provide a circus now and then at which buildings are set off and crowds gather for the pretty blaze, but it’s a small sideshow, and hardly necessary to keep things in line.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 113)

We learn from Faber that even considering how supposedly important their job seems like at first, the reality is that the masses themselves do not read anymore, and that people still reading are a minority to the point where firemen burning some buildings now and then is merely some more entertainment for the public. In reality, there are almost unnecessary. Through the character of Montag,

we also get to know how he feels about his profession. At the beginning of the story, he does enjoy burning books, and loves the smell of kerosene that never really leaves him. Montag, not unlike other firemen, took interest in books, even secretly taking some of them with him and hiding them in his house. As the story progresses and his mind opens to reality, he becomes sick of the smell of kerosene, and becomes more wary of his colleagues, especially of Beatty who reads him like a book, so to speak. His new vision alienates him from the other firemen. They all turn on him during their last mission. Firemen are a negative entity throughout the entirety of the book, from which Montag slowly dissociate himself and finally confronts in the last part of the novel.

2.3.2 -Fear of books, Burning & Hedonism

The society of *Fahrenheit 451* still needs the firemen because they want to destroy every remaining book. The fear of being burned or chased down by the Mechanical Hounds translates into an irrational fear of books. This strong fear and dislike of books is shown at different moments in the story. One of these moments occurs when Montag wants Mildred to read some hidden books with him. Mildred and her addiction to TV makes her aggressive towards books.

Mildred kicked at a book. 'Books aren't people. You read and I look around, but there isn't anybody [...]' 'Now, said Mildred, 'my "family" is people. They tell me things; I laugh, they laugh! And the colours!'*(Fahrenheit 451, 95)*

Mildred is quickly bored of books. She does not like making any mental effort that reading requires since her screens spare her the trouble. She despises books because there are not alive by her definition. For her, TV programs are alive because she sees people moving. She firmly believes that she is interacting with people when watching her programs and even calls fictional characters on TV her family. In a way she is hypocritical as she calls TV characters people while denying that book characters are people, even though their very nature is pretty similar, showing her bias toward TV. Mildred's opinion does without a doubt extend to the majority of the population, as Mildred is the average citizen. At the same time her case seems to be quite extreme. She has no respect for books, shown by the fact by she kicks them. She is throwing a tantrum over the fact that she isn't entertained by books. The things she sees on television feel real to her so she doesn't want to use

her imagination to process the information stored within the pages, mindlessly absorbing what is shown to her on the screens instead.

‘And besides, if Captain Beatty knew about those books-’ She thought about it. Her face grew amazed and then horrified. ‘He might come and burn the house and the “family”. That’s awful! Think of our investment. Why should I read? What **for**?’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 95)

The main reason people are afraid of books is directly connected to the firemen. They are afraid of them burning down their house, losing all their material possessions, getting arrested or in the worst case scenario, killed. In Mildred’s case, she is scared of having her parlor burned with her screens. Her TVs are much more important than the rest. She doesn’t see the point of reading because it will only bring her trouble which contrasts with Montag’s opinion that on the contrary, they might learn the answers as to why their world is a terrible place. Furthermore, the censorship of books leads to them being unable to understand what is written in them. Montag read some parts of the books, but he doesn’t really understand what they are saying due to the fact that they so rarely come across actual knowledge that even the simplest concepts written in books are difficult for them to grasp. Book-burning is the main method of censorship in the novel. It is done by both the firemen or the citizen themselves. Every house has a wall incinerator, which can serve for getting rid of many things, among which books. Books seem to be the only remainder of uncontrollable knowledge in society, which is why the government explicitly prohibits any intellectual activity. Book burning reflects Bradbury’s fear that books would be abandoned in the future, it is his own way of showing concern for knowledge in the future. Book burning has become the symbol of oppressive or totalitarian states, as we saw in the first part. Books are also a symbol of intelligence, and book burning would then represent the destruction of knowledge and intelligence, leaving people as empty husks, spending their lives doing non-intellectual activities until the day they die. When confronted with books, they can experience intense reactions, as seen when Montag snaps and decides to read poetry to Mildred’s friends because he had enough of the emptiness of their conversation. He reads to the three women and Mrs. Phelps starts crying as he finishes reading.

Mrs. Phelps was crying. The others in the middle of the desert watched her crying grow very loud as her face squeezed itself out of shape. They sat, now touching her, bewildered by her display. She sobbed uncontrollably. Montag himself was stunned and shaken. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 130)

The people in the novel have become so unused to think or simply feel emotions that simply hearing a poem turns them upside down. This not only shows that they became insensitive but also that facing their repressed sadness has a strong effect on them. It underlines the shallowness of their pastimes, that time spent with their “family” in the walls, and how low the intellectual and emotional level of those TV programs are. This fear and hatred of books stems from this constant censorship, repression of the self, mixed with the fear of government oppression in the form of the firemen, the police and the robots used to deter any attempt at intellectual thought. Book-burning is the only logical solution to their problems: a practice that is both liberating and destructive, freeing them from their problems but also making them sink into utter ignorance. Burning everything has become the solution for dealing with the many problems in Bradbury’s dystopian America.

You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can’t have our minorities upset and stirred. [...] Coloured people don’t like *Little Black Sambo*. Burn it. White people don’t feel good about *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; Burn it. Someone’s written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lung? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag, Peace, Montag. Take your fight outside. Better yet, to the incinerator. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 78)

In the Bradburian dystopia, problems are not confronted, they are purely eliminated. According to Captain Beatty, people do not need to face their problems, because it is much easier to burn them. As an example of an escapist society, the society of *Fahrenheit 451* is one of irresponsibility. People are not eager about facing obstacles or issues. Their behavior is based on an extreme form of hedonism, meaning that the only components of their well-being are seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. Instead of taking responsibilities, they avoid them. Fire almost becomes an obsession, and this is especially true for firemen, namely Beatty and Montag in the novel. While many people use incinerators to get rid of things, the firemen constantly work alongside fire. Beatty in particular seems to have taken a liking in talking about fire in general. Captain Beatty embraces the power to get rid of his responsibilities.

‘Its real beauty is that it destroys responsibility and consequences. A problem gets too burdensome, then into the furnace with it. Now, Montag, you’re a burden. And fire will lift you off my shoulders, clean, quick, sure; nothing to rot later. Antibiotic, aesthetic, practical.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 150)

The destructive nature of fire makes it a prime choice for removing problems. It barely leaves a trace of what it consumes. The way Beatty is acting

shows that he can get rid of his subordinates if they become a problem for him. The authorities can murder someone if they become problematic, revealing the violent nature of society in *Fahrenheit 451*.

2.3.3 -Children, Violence, Death and War

In a world where citizens tend to act as a collective mind, in which firemen and robots come and go after people that dare to read books, one would imagine the people of *Fahrenheit 451* to be very disciplined in an almost military way, much like the cold and oppressing world of George Orwell's *1984*. However, to the contrary, the United States in *Fahrenheit 451* seem to be a very chaotic society in which violence and murder is much more frequent than expected. The very orderly atmosphere that one would expect in a dystopian novel seem to be constantly disrupted one way or another. The children, especially, are extremely violent. We get an insight of children's actions and behaviors thanks to Clarisse's discussion with Montag.

‘I’m afraid of children my own age. They kill each other. [...] Six of my friends have been shot in the last year alone. Ten of them died in car wrecks. I’m afraid of them and they don’t like me because I’m afraid of them. My uncle says his grandfather remembered when children didn’t kill each other.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 42)

The children seem to have lost control of their animalistic urges. They are uncontrollable or rather they are let loose, which enable their instincts. This is a consequence of the parenting in *Fahrenheit 451*. Considering that Clarisse McClellan is seventeen years old, we understand that teenagers are especially violent. Another concerning fact is that teenagers are killing each other. Clarisse's revelations show that shootings and other gun crimes between youths are pretty common in *Fahrenheit 451*'s society. Another cause of death for teenagers is from car accidents or vehicular manslaughter. If we take into account what was said earlier about driving fast being one of the main leisure activities, it is not surprising to see young inexperienced drivers kill themselves in car crashes or die in accidents involving their parents' driving habits. Violence is rampant among children in Bradbury's futuristic society: “[...] everyone I know is either shouting and dancing around like wild or beating up one another” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 42). Clarisse is different from other children her age because she does not party like them. To her

society, she is considered a maverick due to her curious nature and tendency of doing things she is not supposed to do. She doesn't go to "fun parks" – a place where people break things and fight each other – nor does she watch the parlor walls. She isn't one to partake in the mindless entertainment that her society emphasizes to the extreme. The other part of her sentence talks about young people beating up one another and in the novel, there is rarely any mention of the police. The only moment when police authorities are mentioned is during the final chase between Montag and the Mechanical Hound. Teenagers killing each other in the streets is a frequent occurrence and it does not seem that the police is doing anything at all to prevent that from happening. When it comes to having and raising children, the adults of *Fahrenheit 451* have a very resolute opinion.

‘How’re your children, Mrs Phelps?’ he asked. ‘You know I haven’t any! No one in their right mind, the Good Lord knows, would have children!’ said Mrs. Phelps, not quite sure why she was angry with this man. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 124)

Children are unwanted in *Fahrenheit 451*. They are seen as a source of problem and an extra luggage. In the same discussion, we also learn that women in this dystopian era will almost always do a caesarean section rather than the natural delivery. This is explained by the fact that they do not see the point of going through agonizing labor pains for a baby, reinforcing this idea that children are cumbersome for them. However, they still make children to perpetuate the human species, which makes children a necessary evil in this society. Furthermore, children are too expensive for them. Mrs. Phelps uses the word “ruinous” to describe children. It means that parent-child relationships in Bradbury’s fictional society have completely fallen apart. Montag and Mildred do not have any children of their own, for the same reason as other couples. The story itself contains no children characters and almost all teenagers seen are merely a presence in the story. The only named teenager in the book is Clarisse McClellan, who disappears fairly quickly in the novel. Mrs. Bowles, Mildred’s other friend, explains that she does not hate children, and that they are easy to deal with since she only sees them scarcely. This implies that child neglect is a norm among parents, as they do not raise their children.

‘I put up with them when they come home three days a month. It’s not bad at all. You heave them into the “parlour” and turn the switch. It’s like washing clothes; stuff laundry in and slam the lid.’ Mrs Bowles tittered.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 125)

To “put up with” means to endure, to tolerate something or someone. This shows us how taking care of her children is just a task for her and she compares it to doing laundry. Simply put, there is no family bonding at all. As we mentioned before, they consider the people in the screens as a part of their family and they neglect their own children in the process. They would rather simply put their children in front of a TV so they won’t have to deal with them. It also seems that some if not all parents have a very unloving relationship with their children: “They’d just as soon kick as kiss me” Thank God, I can kick back” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 125).

While the women laugh at this statement, it reveals a society where casual violence is omnipresent, even among blood relatives. It coincides with Clarisse’s statement that people her age beat each other up. They also try to hit their parents, which is the reason why they are put in front of the TV as a way to avoid them and escape their responsibilities as parents. Human bonding is discouraged by the government, even family bonds. The society does not believe in parenthood, and TV-screens are educators and caretakers alongside schools. It is not hard to imagine why the citizens are so inclined to seeking leisure, as they are raised to do that from a young age. It is very similar to how Aldous Huxley’s society is unable to understand what parenthood means and laugh when they are confronted with the concept of a mother. Children are just a liability used to preserve the human species until they become adults and perpetuate the cycle like their parents. *Fahrenheit 451* depicts a society where the concept of family does not mean much anymore, where parents shove their children in front of entertainment so they can have peace. Education is only done by schools and screens while young people only think about partying and fighting each other.

When Montag is on the run after killing Beatty, he sees a group of young people passing him by in their car. They are aged “from twelve to sixteen” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 165). He remarks that these teenagers are generally extremely violent and makes the observation that they have no qualms about attacking people if they feel like it.

A carful of children, all ages [...] whistling, yelling, hurraing, had seen a man, a very extraordinary sight [...] and simply said, ‘Let’s get him’ [...] They would have killed me, thought Montag, swaying [...] touching his bruised cheek. For no reason at all in the world they would have killed me. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 165-66)

This quote confirms that children are extremely dangerous and unstable in

Fahrenheit 451, and can suddenly decide to kill a person. This is what happened to Clarisse, and Montag barely escaped it. It also seems like the children do not really face any consequence when they kill pedestrians because walking on the street is somewhat a criminal offense: “My uncle was arrested another time- did I tell you? for being a pedestrian” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 17). Walking the streets is generally prohibited because walking makes one think or reflect, something that is unacceptable for the government, hence why people are pushed to drive dangerously fast so their mind is only focused on danger and survival.

Death and mourning is yet another dark topic in *Fahrenheit 451*. While Montag is bedridden due to his misadventure with the old woman that was burnt alongside her house, Beatty personally comes to his house because he knows Guy is troubled. He starts talking with the protagonist, explaining how society came to burning as the solution for everything, one of the most interesting scenes of the book. It is a great exposition scene, and gives a very detailed overview of Bradbury’s dystopian America. We get to learn more about how people view death, funerals, and mourning.

Funerals are unhappy and pagan? Eliminate them, too. Five minutes after a person is dead he’s on his way to the Big Flue, the Incinerators serviced by helicopters all over the country. Ten minutes after death a man’s a speck of black dust. Let’s not quibble over individuals with memoriams. Forget them. Burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 78)

People are not honored in death in *Fahrenheit 451*. In this pleasure-seeking society, sadness has no place. Once someone dies, they disappear from the surface of the Earth forever with nothing to be remembered by. Burning has become the solution to all problems, and dealing with death is no different. Individuality in society is not a thing anymore. Remembrance doesn’t really exist anymore either. It is a society of the present, of the instant gratification where past and future do not matter. This lack of remembrance is highlighted when Montag admits to his chief that he “can’t even remember her [Clarisse’s] face” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 79) after she died. The only people that matter to them are the people that are alive. The dead are not important anymore. It is one of the reasons why people do not like books too: they were written by people that are already dead, whom they do not care about. While Montag clings to the figure of Clarisse to progress in his own journey, Mildred do not seem to want to remember her: “‘Is that what it was in the girl next door? I’ve tried so hard to figure.’ ‘She’s dead. Let’s talk about someone alive for

goodness' sake'" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 94). This behavior is likely to be similar for most of the people in the book which also explains why the government does its best to prevent people from bonding, so that they have no attachment to the dead.

It only takes ten minutes for someone to disappear from the world, showing that the society is eager to discard deceased citizens. We have seen that the society of *Fahrenheit 451* is a very violent society behind the scenes. A lot of accidents, road kills, and young people getting into fights. As death is a common occurrence, the government has learnt to deal with death in the simplest way for the fire-filled society. There is a sort of counter-balance however. Granger, one of the leaders of marginals living outside the city who memorize books to keep them alive, gives a small speech to Montag, where he is reminiscing his grandfather. Granger believes in commemoration, memory and remembrance. For him, although his grandfather died, he left something behind that allows him to be remembered. Granger also believes that actions, as small as they can be, will leave a mark on the world, as long as these actions were done.

‘I suddenly realized I wasn’t crying for him at all, but for the things he did. I cried because he would never do them again. [...] He was part of us and when he died, all the actions stopped dead and there was no one to do them just the way he did.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 199)

For Granger, people leave an impression on others through their actions, not just physical actions, but also through what they can bring to the world. This is how Granger explains why Montag does not feel sad that Mildred will probably die in the next few days. She did nothing for others, and only chased her own pleasure, like many members of the Bradburian dystopia. Granger also believes in the importance of craft and its perpetuation. He says that if someone made something personal, it will stay.

‘The difference between the man that just cuts lawns and a real gardener is in the touching, he said. The lawn-cutter might as well not have been there at all; the gardener will be there a lifetime.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 201)

What he is saying is that passion is an element of remembrance, something to be celebrated. A lawn-cutter just does a job, he cuts lawns because he has to. A gardener loves the garden, they are passionate about taking care of it. They put their heart into the garden, which results in them being remembered through what they loved. The way Granger thinks of memory and honoring of the dead is the complete

opposite of the way *Fahrenheit 451*'s society treats the dead.

War is always near in the novel. Many times throughout the whole book, the imminence of war is underlined. The authorities keep repeating that war may be declared at any given time. The jets that pass over the city many times during the story act as a reminder of the war, a sort of leitmotif in *Fahrenheit 451*. A leitmotif is "an associated melodic phrase or figure that accompanies the reappearance of an idea, person or situation"(Merriam-Webster). These jets, which are supposedly bombers, are a physical reminder of the incoming war. However, even if the threat of war is ever present, war itself is secondary and in the background for most of the story. Even if people are aware that a war is likely to break out sooner or later, they never seem to be concerned about the dire consequences it entails. Inside the city, Montag seems to be the only one worrying about the jets constantly flying over the city. Other citizens simply ignore it, or are not even bothered to care. This is undoubtedly the result of this pleasure-seeking escapist society that avoids problems. This is illustrated by Mildred's friends whose husbands are soldiers. Their comments are very telling of their emotional distancing.

When do you suppose the war will start? 'He said. 'I notice your husbands aren't here tonight?' 'Oh they come and go, come and go. [...] Quick war. Forty-eight hours they said, and everyone home. [...] 'I'm not worried', said Mrs. Phelps. 'I'll let Pete do all the worrying.' She giggled. [...] Not me. I'm not worried. [...] it's always someone else's husband dies, they say 'I've heard that too. I've never known any dead man killed in war. [...] 'Anyway, Pete and I always said, no tears, nothing like that. It's our third marriage each and we're independent. Be independent, we always said. He said, if I get killed off, you just go right head and don't cry, but get married again, and don't think of me.' (*Fahrenheit 451*, 122-23)

This passage is full of elements showing the general attitude when it comes to the matter of war. The government predicts the duration of the war, and people will take its word for granted. They have a blind faith in their leaders. The second element is how detached they are when it comes to what happens during the war. It is their husbands' concern, not theirs. Only soldiers have to worry about war. For them, it is no different from any normal day in their lives and war is a trivial topic. This is highlighted by the fact that they laugh about it. War is a disturbingly lighthearted topic for them. At the same time, it shows how delusional they are. They are sure that their husbands won't die just because it has never happened before. And even if they were to die, for the women, it would not really change their disinterest in war. The bonding between couples is so superficial that they

would simply remarry and move on, as death has no meaning in *Fahrenheit 451*'s society. The reality is that they are more bothered about Montag turning off the wall-screens than the prospect of a nuclear war breaking out. Ultimately, war does start toward the end of the novel, supposedly killing everybody in the city in an explosion, only sparing the book people as well as Montag. War generally has negative connotations, yet it is not completely a bad thing in this novel. War has broken the status quo of this dystopian America. The war gives an opportunity for the world to change. In a peace context, the story could have taken a different turn, but war gives an opportunity to the few that are still able to think for themselves. There is a chance that the embers of revolution, that started with Montag, Granger's people and Faber can revert the world to what it once was.

‘Right now, we have a horrible job: we’re waiting for the war to begin, and, as quickly, end. It’s not pleasant, but then, we’re not in control, we’re the odd minority crying in the wilderness. When the war’s over, perhaps we can be of some use in the world.’
(*Fahrenheit 451*, 196)

Granger believes that this war is a necessary evil. He knows that it will result in a lot of casualties, but at the same time, it is needed to even hope for a change. It would be a matter of years for the government to get rid of all the “oddballs” as Beatty called them. Granger hopes that at the end of the war, people will realize that this world was wrong and that knowledge and books are still important as well as useful to mankind. Contrary to other novels of the same genre, *Fahrenheit 451* ends on a hopeful note: the protagonist managed to rise against society and can even contemplate the possibility that the world will change in the near future.

2.3.4 -Loss of Individuality, Unhappiness and Shallowness

Conformity is an important theme in *Fahrenheit 451*. From the moment children are put into schools, they are formatted to act the same way as everyone else. Any child that is thinking slightly differently than their peers is generally corrected at an early age to conform to the norm. To avoid the children's formatting to be undone by their family, like Clarisse's with her family, the authorities lowered the age of kindergarten so that the children are shaped by the system as early as possible. According to Captain Beatty: “we’re almost snatching them from the

cradle” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 79). This shows that the government is very keen on eliminating every possible trace of dissidence. People will almost never disagree with each other when discussing matters, transforming arguments into vapid conversations. They have pretty similar positions about the few subjects that come up during their discussions. This same-mindedness is displayed during the political discussion between the three women when Montag turned off the wall-screens to get their attention:

‘Sounds fine, said Mrs Bowles.’I voted last election, same as everyone, and I laid it on the line for President Noble. I think he’s one of the nicest-looking men who ever became president.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 125)

We learn that every citizen votes for the same person. They do not make a choice based on their own political convictions but instead because everyone is voting for the same person. In Mrs Bowles’ case, the physical appearance of the president seems to be her prime concern. Even if people can have slightly different opinions on certain subjects, they agree on general topics. This absence of contradictions and diverging opinions can be attributed in parts to the destruction of books and the avoidance of conflicting matters. Books are full of diverging opinions on many subjects. However, as people do not read books, it is most unlikely that they would be able to have a different opinion than the one that is considered the good opinion. The screens are the other major factor contributing to this conformity. Most people just watch the same programs on their wall-TV that tells them what to think. This helps the government keeping the population in check by making them like-minded. There will be no need for rebellion nor any risk of people rising up against the government because they have the same opinion that everything is fine. Individuality is not encouraged, as seen in the fact that each citizen acts and thinks almost identically because they have been educated to do so. Another example where this conformity is shown in the book happens towards the end of the story, when Montag is running away.

‘Police suggest entire population of Elm Terrace area do as follows: Everyone is every house in every street open a front or rear door or look from the window [...] Everyone up, everyone out! He couldn’t be missed! The only man running alone in the night city, the only man proving his legs.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 178)

The entire city is watching TV, following the chase. When told to do so, they all stand up and reach for their door without asking questions. They are a mass

obeying to an order disguised as a game by the television. This scene illustrates the crushing force of the conformist society against the powerless individual. This shows how the citizens in the city act like a hive-mind, that is to say that they act as a collective sharing the same opinions and knowledge while acting as one entity. Captain Beatty happens to be the spokesperson of the mass many times during the story, and Faber illustrates this argument:

But remember that the Captain belongs to the most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom, the solid unmoving cattle of the majority. Oh God, the terrible tyranny of the majority. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 140)

Faber refers to the majority as a “cattle.” This may be a reference to the French phrase “mouton de Panurge” which literally translates in English as “Panurge’s sheep” and describes an individual that will blindly follow the mass and disregard the consequences. In the original story *Pentagruel*, one of the five books written by Rabelais of the *Gargantua and Pentagruel* series, Panurge, one of Pentagruel’s companions wants to buy a sheep. However, the merchant, Dindenault, purposefully overprices his sheep. After buying the overpriced sheep, Panurge exacts his revenge by throwing the animal off a cliff and into the ocean, resulting in the whole herd following the first sheep to its demise. This expression and its connotations illustrate the majority’s behavior in Montag’s society. They do not think for themselves anymore, they just follow what is popular and recommended by the government instead, hence the use of the term “cattle.” Faber also qualifies the majority as a “terrible tyranny” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 140), showing that being an individual in this society is to suffer the oppression of the majority. The “terrible tyranny of the majority” does not tolerate individuality and aims to crush any remnant of individual thought. Beatty is indeed a spokesperson for the majority: he always speaks about the needs of the majority, and how his job is to serve the will of the masses while ironically being an educated individual. Any person that shows signs of individuality, and starts questioning the life they are living becomes a problem. Going against the social conformity is not without risks, and they must do so in hiding. For example, Montag was nearly killed at the end, Faber is always in hiding, Granger and his fellow book people have to live outside the city to avoid the authorities as much as possible. Clarisse was the only character whose individuality was displayed in broad daylight. She symbolizes individuality and freedom of thought in the book. She does not partake in the mindless fun like her peers. She is

always open-minded and questions the nature of things. In the words of Captain Beatty: “She didn’t want to know *how* a thing was done, but *why*” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 79). While most people in *Fahrenheit 451* are just interested in making things without knowing why, Clarisse questions the meaning of things, which is considered odd in this society. Her death represents the fate of dissidents in the Bradburian society. Although she wasn’t killed by the firemen, they had a file on her and her family, meaning that they have been following what she was doing and would remove her out of the equation should she get any idea, as it would be a good excuse to do so. Beatty was thinking of eliminating her, but her unfortunate encounter with a carful of teenagers led to her death, which made the situation easier for Beatty. The book people, while being a group, are individuals that think for themselves. They are former scholars or intellectuals that left the city to avoid persecution. Each of them has both a civil identity and a book identity. Granger, the leader of this group, much like Clarisse, is completely at odds with the conformity of the society. He has his own beliefs, remembers the dead, values the importance of books and knowledge and even leads what could be called a passive resistance. Unlike other characters such as Mildred or her friends, he strikes the reader with his personality and humanity. He isn’t a shallow person, he has individual thoughts which makes him a social outcast much like his whole group. His belonging to the group of book people gives us an indication that he isn’t an example of conformity. They memorize books in their heads so the government does not bother with them, which makes them relatively safe. This ability they have to remember books is different from this society where people forget things minutes after they have happened. Memories and experiences are proofs of individuality so Granger and his people are the few of the remaining real individuals of the conformist dystopian America imagined by Ray Bradbury.

Taking into account the fact that *Fahrenheit 451*’s society is one of constant mindless thrill and instant gratification, it doesn’t immediately come to mind that the members of this society would be unhappy or depressed. The truth is much more disheartening than at first glance. The people of *Fahrenheit 451* are actually extremely unhappy and while they might not realize it themselves or hide the fact from others, there are very telling elements that appear here and there showing us what happens behind the curtains of the happy facade that society is displaying. We get a very disturbing statement coming from one of Mildred’s friend during their conversation.

‘I’ve heard that too. I’ve never known any dead man killed in war. Killed jumping off buildings, yes, like Gloria’s husband last week, but from wars? No.’(*Fahrenheit 451*, 123)

This statement gives us details about deaths in the context of the story. She knows more men that have killed themselves than men that died in war. If we take this into the larger context of the story, we know wars are quite frequent in *Fahrenheit 451*, which is concerning. Suicides seem to happen quite frequently considering she says her friend’s husband killed himself the week before. Suicide is generally attributed to mental disorders like personality disorders or to substance abuse but also it is commonly associated with depression. Thus, unhappiness is also a cause of suicide. This observation can lead to the hypothesis that even if the society is claiming to be happy, the frequent suicides show that people are not as happy as they pretend to be. At first, Montag is being delusional about his happiness. This quickly changes after his encounter with Clarisse McClellan and one question that will turn his whole perspective upside down.

‘Are you happy? She said. ‘Am I *what*? He cried. But she was gone – running in the moonlight. Her front door shut gently. ‘Happy! Of all nonsense.’ He stopped laughing. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 17)

While he denies the truth about his unhappiness, slowly his mask starts to crumble. As he walks into the darkness of his house, dread starts to build within him. The darkness of his home reflects the darkness inside him, the truth he kept hidden and buried. When he finally reaches his bedroom, his facade breaks.

He was not happy. He was not happy. He said the words to himself. He recognized this as the true state of affairs. He wore his happiness like a mask and the girl had run off across the lawn with the mask and there was no way of going to knock on her door and ask for it back. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 20)

Montag wore a social mask, one that kept his unhappiness away from the others, but more importantly from himself. Montag’s situation is not just an isolated case. In fact, it is not difficult to imagine that many people are in the same situation as him, however, their mask of pretense will not fall because they have almost no way to realize that themselves, nor do they have a Clarisse of their own. Montag’s realization will then push him throughout the story, and will be his prime motive. This state of awareness of his unhappiness is what moves the gears of the story. Unhappiness leads the protagonist to turn to books because he thinks that they may

contain the answers to his sorrow.

‘We have everything to be happy, but we aren’t happy. Something’s missing. I looked around. The only thing I positively *knew* was gone was the books I’d burned in ten or twelve years. So I thought books might help.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 107)

This quote shows that *Fahrenheit 451*’s society can provide artificial satisfaction to its citizens, but it is ultimately unfulfilling. They have everything, but at the same time they feel extremely empty. If we consider happiness as the journey and not as the destination, then the society of the book skips the journey to provide fabricated happiness to people, which results in this deeply unhappy society that seeks pleasure to compensate for the void they feel. They are confusing enjoyment that is light-hearted pleasure like the activities they are pursuing in the novel, and happiness, which is closely related to life satisfaction and subjective well-being. When one sees how empty and unfulfilling the lives of the people in *Fahrenheit 451* are and how suicides are definitively commonplace, we can deduce that in fact, the government makes it so people are formatted to believe in their fake happiness. They told themselves as much, but deep down there is a gnawing unhappiness in most of them. However, like war, unhappiness has a positive effect in the book. Its revelation to the protagonist leads to a brutal but necessary change, which affects Montag in a positive way.

‘I want to hold on to this funny thing. God, it’s gotten big on me. I don’t know what it is [...] ‘I’m going to do something,’ said Montag. ‘I don’t know what yet, but I’m going to do something big.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 84-85)

Unhappiness negatively affects the other characters. Mildred is a perfect example of the average citizen. Many times in the novel, she brushes away topics that make people unhappy and focuses on her wall-TVs and her seashells. She always seeks mindless fun, but the truth about Montag’s wife is that she is extremely unhappy and depressed. Right from her first appearance in the novel, she is dying from an overdose and only survives thanks to Montag’s intervention. Furthermore, we learn from an engineer that her case is far from being isolated: “We get these cases nine or ten a night. Got so many, starting a few years ago, we had the special machines built” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 24). Many people fall victim to an overdose each night, probably unconsciously attempting to commit suicide, like the people jumping off the roofs. After the operation, Mildred has no recollection of her

overdose. She even claims to be happy later in the novel.

‘Fun is everything. And yet I kept sitting there saying to myself, I’m not happy. I’m not happy.’ ‘I am.’ Mildred’s mouth beamed. ‘And proud of it.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 85)

It is difficult to know if Mildred did try to kill herself and is pretending to have forgotten in order to convince herself and others that she is fine, or if she became forgetful due to her conditioning and the brainwashing she has undergone due to her screens. Whatever the reason may be, Mildred is still extremely unhappy especially when we know her unhealthy lifestyle, her need for sleeping pills and her behavior which are described by Montag throughout the novel.

When dealing with the topic of unhappiness, Beatty’s case is one of the most interesting ones. Beatty is the main antagonist of the story, as he is against Montag’s ideas and is also the one to force the climax of the story through his opposition to the protagonist. He is the chief of the firemen, with a genuine dislike for books. However, contrary to a lot of citizens, he is not ignorant. It is shown many times that he did read books prior to the story. He is even more knowledgeable about them than Montag, as was able to quote a variety of them during his speeches and dialogues with the protagonist. He voluntarily chose to be against books and decided to embrace his society’s beliefs. He is one of the few characters in the novel who could make a choice, including Montag, Faber and Granger. Beatty came to the conclusion that the things that were said about books were true and that they indeed created discord and unhappiness for everyone by being conflictual. He seems to fit well into society, yet there is one event in the story that makes us question whether he was really fine and accepted the world as is. The scene being referred to here happens toward the end of the book, when Montag is forced to burn his own house. The protagonist is beaten by his own former colleagues, but especially by Beatty. He orders Montag to burn the house himself with a flamethrower, giving him a weapon. Furthermore, he starts provoking Montag and mocking him for his foolishness. When the fireman starts to lose his temper, and aims his weapon at his former chief, Beatty keeps provoking him but does nothing to stop Montag from pulling the trigger, finally killing him. After Montag manages to get rid of the first Hound, he drags himself on the street, and finally comes to a realization: “Beatty wanted to die” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 158). This becomes an important plot point due to Beatty being very careful and calculating, there is no way that he did not give Montag an opportunity to rebel

against him on purpose. While nothing in the story can point this out as the absolute truth about Beatty, it is the truth Montag chose to believe. Beatty made fun of Montag until he got angry enough to kill him, and the fact that he did not do anything to prevent it reinforces Montag's suspicions about Captain Beatty.

How strange, strange, to want to die so much that you let a man walk around armed and then instead of shutting up and staying alive, you go on yelling at people and making fun of them until you get them mad, and then... (*Fahrenheit 451*, 158)

Beatty's case then shows that unhappiness is in fact almost omnipresent and that even a strong minded individual like him could not escape it. Beatty's reasons to be unhappy remain undisclosed, but it is safe to assume that they are similar to those of other characters in the book: the state of society in *Fahrenheit 451*. He sought answers in books much like Montag, yet he was not satisfied with the answers he found in them. He may have not totally believed his own words either, and was profoundly dissatisfied with the United States but kept it to himself because that would go against society's rules. One may even hypothesize that Beatty was planning his own death the very second Montag got interested in books, or that he may have seen the opportunity when Montag turned against him in his last moments. Pretending to be happy is then a normal thing in this society, and to compensate for the unhappiness, people fill the void in themselves with an almost constant stream of entertainment, until they lose the will to live and decide to end it all.

This constant and smothering unhappiness in the book is the result of the rampant shallowness of the society the characters live in. Shallowness is at the core of the unhappiness in the novel. Everything in the society of *Fahrenheit 451* has a profound lack of depth. Most of the knowledge of the citizens is limited to the very basic things, and do not go deeper. Like we demonstrated earlier while talking about the character of Clarisse McClellan, in school, children are taught how things are done, not why they are done. They never question the meaning of things, they stay at the process of the production, always scraping at the surface. Shallowness starts very early in the formation of the citizen. The same can be said about human relationships. People very rarely end up developing relationships deeper than being acquaintances. Even couples are basically strangers to one another.

‘Anyway, Pete and I always said, no tears, nothing like that. It’s our third marriage and we’re independent. Be independent we always said. He said, if I get killed off, you just

go right ahead and don't cry, but get married again, and don't think of me.' (*Fahrenheit 451*, 123)

Couples are simply married as a social norm, they don't even have feelings for their lovers. They change partners like they change clothes. Mrs. Phelps married three times and so did her husband, indicating that changing partners when they die is pretty common, if not the norm. They do not express any grief over the death of other humans, be it friends or lovers. They have come to accept it as a trivial event. The same can be said about Montag and Mildred. Their relationship is based on indifference toward each other, although Montag at least tried to care. He grows ever so distant of Mildred when he realizes the void that fills him, barely listening to what his wife says about her TV shows. The truth about Montag's loss of worry about Mildred is largely due to the fact that he realizes that he does not really love her and is too afraid to accept this idea, but he has shown to pity her in many ways, not as a lover but rather as another victim of society. Mildred on her side is barely concerned by the fact that her husband is starting to act desperate in the face of unhappiness. One important thing to take into account is how Mildred is so obsessed with her screens that she will even make them a priority over Montag's health.

'Will you turn the parlour off?' he asked. 'That's my family.' 'Will you turn it [the screens] off for a sick man?' 'I'll turn it down.' She went out of the room and did nothing to the parlour and came back 'is that better?' 'Thanks.' (*Fahrenheit 451*, 65)

Montag is so thoroughly annoyed and fatigued that he does not bother even bringing up the issue again, aware in a way that Mildred is long gone. She carries on with her life, doing the same things as usual and only worried when Montag drags her into his book reading. She fears that the Firemen will come and burn her possessions and the screens. Everything about her dialogues with her husband are completely devoid of any feeling of love or care. She asks questions, but does not listen to the answers, almost as though she is monologuing.

She does not seem really willing to make sacrifices for her husband, and is the one sounding the alarm in her house, her last heard sentence being: "Poor family, poor family, oh everything gone, everything gone now..." (*Fahrenheit 451*, 148). At first, we could think that Mildred is talking about her couple life with Montag, as if she regrets that she had to do this to him. In reality, it was already established earlier in the novel that the "family" that Mildred is referring to are the

people she sees in the screens of her wall-TVs, showing that even the notion of family in *Fahrenheit 451* is shallow. She feels sad that she lost the screens in her parlor and not her husband. She does not even look back at Montag one last time, if anything she seems to put the all the blame on him.

To further analyze the character of Mildred, she is the representation of shallowness itself in the novel. Most of the things she has done within the novel give us a clear picture of the general shallowness of the story. She shows how the average citizen behaves in their everyday life. She serves as a frame of reference in that regard. She's addicted to screens and only says things that have no depth to them. She has the same opinions as everyone else, she drives fast to forget her troubles. She allows us to have a glimpse of what the middle class woman in the dystopian America of *Fahrenheit 451* looks like. She also suffers from this shallowness, something that we can see only at the beginning of the book during her introduction. She may know deep down inside that what she is and does is insignificant which is the potential source of her depression but she has no power or will to change. She is just one among the many who suffer every day and among the number of people who will try to commit suicide because of the emptiness of their life. This links shallowness to the notion we saw earlier, namely the loss of individuality. It is possible everyone is in the same situation as her, drowned into the shallowness of the life they are living in this society.

To continue on the topic of shallowness, TV-programs, the main source of entertainment in the world of *Fahrenheit 451* are also very lackluster. They mostly consist of programs that last a few minutes so that the attention span of the audience does not wane: “‘That reminds me’, said Mildred. ‘Did you see that Clara Dove five-minute romance last night in your wall? It was all about this woman who-’” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 123). Everything that happens on the screens is fast-paced, ending as abruptly as it begins. Nothing becomes a meaningful story or character, everything resolves in a short time so that nothing has time to get any deeper. This is true for most of the programs that are broadcast in the book.

In the other walls, an x-ray of the same woman revealed the contracting journey of the refreshing beverage on its way to her delightful stomach! Abruptly, the room took off on a rocket flight into the clouds, it plunged into a lime-green sea where blue fish ate red and yellow fish. A minute later, three White Cartoon clowns chopped each other's limbs to the accompaniment of immense incoming tides of laughter. Two minutes more and the room whipped out of town to the jet cars wildly circling an arena, bashing and backing up and bashing each other again. Montag saw a number of bodies fly in the air. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 121-122)

There is nothing meaningful to take away from the TV programs. They are fleeting bits of entertainment that last a very short time without making much sense or having any continuity. It is an endless and mindless flow of visual stimuli aiming at staving off citizens' boredom, feeding their violence. There is almost no catharsis inside the society of the novel. People have very few ways to let out their frustration instead of having them bottled up inside. This is further demonstrated by the fact that one of the ways to forget their state of mind is to drive their cars for hours at extremely dangerous speeds, risking their life so that they can feel something.

‘The keys to the beetle are on the night table. I always like to drive fast when I feel that way. You get it up around ninety-five and you feel wonderful. Sometimes I drive all night and come back and you don’t know it. It’s fun out in the country. You hit rabbits, sometimes you hit dogs. Go take the beetle.’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 84)

The citizens have a repressed need for violence, and they satisfy this bloodlust caused by the shallowness of their lives by watching or doing things that are violent. This links shallowness to the concept of the violent society that we saw earlier. Some programs display very violent imagery, such as clowns chopping each other's limbs or cars bumping repeatedly into one another. This is to counter-balance the lack of thrill these citizens experience on a daily basis. Mildred thinks that running over rabbits and dogs is amusing, which is, considering the lack of action or excitement in her life, not that surprising. As we demonstrated earlier, violence is omnipresent and so is shallowness.

The lack of depth is a considerable topic in *Fahrenheit 451*, it takes multiples shapes and forms and is at the very heart of many social problems in the story. It is the cause of the unhappiness, as people are not able or authorized to enjoy things on a very deep level. The education is shallow, and the citizens are formatted to keep their relationships with other humans as superficial as possible so that they are unable to develop as individuals and can only follow conventions without asking questions. This lack of depth and thought is accentuated by the TV-programs constantly broadcasting fast and forgettable shows to their audience to compensate for the lack of meaningful entertainment. The lack of excitement, both mental and physical, pushes people to seek thrills by putting their lives in danger and satisfy their repressed feelings and their violence.

3 - *FAHRENHEIT 451* IN OUR MODERN ERA

For an author like Ray Bradbury, considered by many as a visionary, the question of whether the dystopian future presented in the novel can be said to have become a reality in our modernity, the future in the context of the novel, makes sense. Indeed, one part of writing dystopias has been dedicated to try to prevent such futures from happening, which then begs to question: how far are we from such a future? We have seen that *Fahrenheit 451* is a novel of its time, deeply rooted in the difficult times that were the first half of the 20th century, but it is also a novel looking toward the future, and from the novel's perspective, the era in which we live can be considered to chronologically be the one we see in *Fahrenheit 451*. The future we live in has been transformed by a large array of technological discoveries and inventions that drastically changed the way society functions, one of its most notable aspect being the surge of the Internet as a widely available service allowing the extension of interconnected human activities on a worldwide scale as well as computers and phones becoming indispensable rather than being simply convenient. The progressive development of online based services and entertainment has started to deeply influence the way human interactions are carried out in society, both in the professional world as well as family circles, in both positive and negative ways. The Hedonistic society of *Fahrenheit 451* focuses on many themes which as demonstrated previously are censorship and technology but also shallowness, the loss of human individuality, imagination and thought. It is a violent totalitarian world in which citizens have given up most of their humanity for quick and constant satisfaction and where conflict of ideas, represented by books, have almost completely vanished in favor of mindless entertainment mainly provided by wall-sized screens. By researching the differences and similarities between the world of *Fahrenheit 451* and ours, we attempt to explore the extent but also the limits of the novel's development of the future, while at the same time reflecting on the characteristics of our own modern world in parallel with a dystopia and the importance of such literature when looking at our own future and its possible developments.

3.1 - TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS: VISIONARY PREDICTIONS

The theme of technology permeates *Fahrenheit 451* as Bradbury's self-proclaimed sole science-fiction novel. A large amount of technological advancements used in the narrative that seemed purely fictional at the time of the novel's publication, are in fact easily imaginable by today's standards, as some of them have already entered our daily lives. The seashells, Mildred's favored device to listen to in bed, and especially the "green-bullet," given to Montag by Faber to listen and guide him, are nowadays common and very much in use. Earbuds and especially the wireless ones using the Bluetooth technology, made a breakthrough in the everyday life. Though the first pair of headphones existed since 1910, the modern design we see nowadays only appeared in the 80s with Sony's Walkman, while wireless headphones appeared as early as 2004, but didn't prove effective until 2016 with Apple's AirPods among others which were the first to work exactly as intended and finally proved themselves a worthy alternative to wired headphones that still dominate the market. People nowadays use their earbuds to listen to a variety of things, plugged into their phones that can be considered to be like the "thimble radio" present inside the novel. Hand-sized radios also exist in our days, although they are not as popular as simply using a smartphone. Even as though Bradbury did not invent the headphones, he did predict their design and uses way before they got popular.

Another prediction from the novel that became reality in our society are the flat TVs and flat computer screens. The Aiken Tube was the first flat-screen display TV released in the early fifties, and was relatively small. The first large flat-screen TVs were introduced to the market in 1997 by Sharp and Sony and started dominating the market ever since, slowly replacing the square-shaped TVs that most homes were using before. The plasma screen technology that dominated from the sixties was slowly replaced by the LCD⁶ technology. By 2009, LCD screens made for the major part of flat screens in households. Both television screens and computer monitors now use the flat design brought by the LCD technology. The transformation of previous TV screens into flat screens notably permitted the increase of screen sizes, as they took less space in the room and could be fitted on walls, contrasting with the small screens of the fifties with a comparatively big wooden frame. TV screens nowadays can effectively be as large as a wall and,

6.Liquid Crystal Display, a light emitting method for screens

coupled with audio devices, became part of everyday life. This is reminiscent of the parlor walls fitted with screens that Bradbury described in *Fahrenheit 451* and can be considered yet another technological advancement that the author predicted in his novel. Another piece of technology that deserves to be taken into account while talking about predictions are the Mechanical Hounds, the robots that chase and apprehend fugitive book readers. With the evolution of computer technology, Robotics started to develop, with machines designed to ease the human workload, especially in manufacturing. Robots also contributed in diverse areas of human activities. Isaac Asimov and Bradbury had both written about robots in the modern definition of the term, which was largely different from Karel Capek's, the Czech writer who coined the term "Robot." These machines were a sort of pipe dream at the time. The first robot, by its modern definition, was conceptualized in the early 1950s by American inventor George C. Devol, who patented his invention in 1954, one year after Bradbury's publication of *Fahrenheit 451*. He met his future business partner, Joseph Engelberger, who was fascinated by robots as a result of reading Asimov's stories. Mindful of Asimov's first law stating that a robot may not injure, or allow a human to come to harm, Engelberger decided that this first machine would then replace humans on dangerous tasks. Together, they managed to create a prototype that was installed on an assembly line. The prototype successfully carried out an automated task that was dangerous for workers at the time. "Unimate" became the first industrial robot employed in die casting plants. The invention was presented outside of the US, and production consequentially started in Finland and later Japan. Although earlier "robots" were created before Unimate, computer technology and programming was best suited for the automation of machines. Nowadays, Devol is known as the grandfather of Robotics while Engelberger is seen as the Father of Robotics. Since Unimate, robotics made giant leaps, and is continuously expanding, covering more and more aspects and areas of human life. Many robotics companies have seen the light of day ever since, with Japan being the leader of robotics in the world. Boston Dynamics, an American engineering and robotics design company is particularly relevant when it comes to the robots seen in *Fahrenheit 451*. Boston Dynamics' robots have an impressive degree of autonomy for performing their tasks. Over the course of the 2000s and to this day, Boston Dynamics has been designing, developing and fabricating quadruped robots designed for multiple purposes, among which the LS3 model released in 2010, designed to follow soldiers and carry their gear in rough terrains or the WildCat

model that could run at a top speed of 32 km/h on a flat terrain. This line of robots led to the Spot line of robots, with unprecedented terrain navigation among the Boston Dynamics robots and an impressive array of features and specializations for autonomous routine inspections. The Spot robot design is reminiscent of a dog, can carry 14 kilos, is able to navigate in rainy weather and can right itself when falling. If we compare this robot to Bradbury's eight-legged, sedative needle-equipped robot with the ability to track down fugitives using scent, Boston Dynamics' Spot is far from being the nightmarish machine representing governmental control in the novel. However, it does show that robotics and technology in general is evolving rapidly in our era. Military robots already exist, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, which are drones piloted from ground-control stations, armed with weapons like missiles and used for certain situations. This shows that killer machines like the Hound already exist but are not a daily occurrence unlike the Hounds in the novel but leaves to the imagination the possibilities of the future and what such machines could entail in society. Robots in *Fahrenheit 451* represent both oppression and the dehumanization of human society in the future, as they use the Hounds to patrol neighborhoods and discourage potential book readers. Boston Dynamics, on the contrary, works toward a positive image of their robots, using familiar designs, showcasing amusing and entertaining advertisements, humanizing their robots, which collides with *Fahrenheit 451*'s extremely dehumanized robots serving as tools to achieve a purpose.

The use of the snakelike robot in the novel evokes robot-assisted medical procedures, and robots in medicine were first used in the 80s when an industrial robot was used to perform a surgery-related task. The procedure involved a surgeon controlling a camera and mechanical arms using a computer console to perform surgery on a patient. This is very similar to the operation Mildred went through during the first part of the novel.

The impersonal operator of the machine could, by wearing a special optical helmet, gaze into the soul of the person whom he was pumping out. [...] The other machine was operated by an equally impersonal fellow in non-stainable reddish-brown overalls. This machine pumped all of the blood from the body and replaced it with fresh blood and serum. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 23)

Robot-assisted surgery did not exist at the time the novel was written and only started approximately 30 years after its publication. Nowadays, medical robots

are vastly used and trusted for performing various tasks, taking some burden off medical personnel's shoulders. The da Vinci Surgical System made by Intuitive Surgical is a robotic surgical machine designed to perform a certain number of medical procedures. It has arms that mimic the human hand and wrist, and is designed to translate the surgeons movements. The robot has been used for over 3 million procedures around the world. Medical robots are being developed to help in various areas of medicine, but those machines are still expensive today which limits their numbers and costs a lot of healthcare money without real proof of return on investment for medical facilities. As of today, medical robot technology has been stuck, without proving much more efficient from operations done directly by surgeons. The medical robot industry is facing a need to further push the technology to answer to surgeons' demands. Nonetheless, Bradbury predicted such advancements in medical technology way ahead of his own time.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, people can be arrested for being pedestrians, in the same way the police car arrested Leonard Mead in *The Pedestrian* for walking at night. The police car is remotely controlled by the police, with no humans inside it. Driverless cars have been a vastly discussed topic, mainly because it is met with skepticism by most people. The technology behind self-driving cars already exists, but needs more testing for the time being. There are different levels of automation, from no automation at all to fully automated vehicles. While the existence of self-driven cars is concrete, completely autonomous cars are not available to the public yet, but it is mostly a matter of time. The main issue remains the implementation of such a technology into the mainstream. Reasons against such technology range from a lack of trust into the security of a fully automated vehicle to some people enjoying the freedom of driving so much they do not want to relinquish the task to a machine. The technology behind these cars has to prove itself to be safe enough for mass production by passing a number of tests. Nevertheless, driverless cars were already a part of Bradburian dystopias way before they were even thought to be a feasible technological advancement.

Furthermore, at some point in the novel, Montag goes to a bank: "...he had visited the bank, which was open all night every night with robot tellers in attendance..." (*Fahrenheit 451*, 119). At the time Bradbury wrote the novel, all banks had closing hours, and it was impossible to do any transaction outside of those hours. The Automatic Teller Machine, ATM for short, allows customers to do monetary transactions at all times in specific places. While ATMs are not

considered to be robots, they are machines that serve the same function as the robot tellers in *Fahrenheit 451*. Bradbury did not only predict that there would be machines replacing bank employees but also anticipated that banks would provide this new service to their customers ahead of his own time. ATMs were only born in 1967, more than a decade after the publication of *Fahrenheit 451*, making it yet another technological prediction in Bradbury's novel.

The Hound's ability to track people with scent gives us an interesting but rather unexpected prediction: the Global Positioning System, widely known as the G.P.S. Contrary to the detection of individuals using their individual scent, the satellite-based technology we have today is a somewhat similar idea. The GPS was released in the early 80s by the US government, making anyone able to equip themselves with a GPS receiver. This technology brought a new perspective for travels, as it serves as a more efficient replacement for the traditional maps, but more interestingly in tracking. GPS and Geopositioning technology have become the norm in most devices today, and most if not all modern cars are equipped with GPS, leaving a signal, a "scent" that can be traced to the source, an information that can be vital in police investigations. Although it can be disabled easily, a great number of people and applications use geopositioning services today, which makes following people and surveilling their location easier than before. The same can be said about the Internet Protocol, commonly referred to as IP, which can be compared to an online identity for a computer, an information that can be used to track the activity of a certain computer on the Internet for a couple of reasons but sometimes used for malicious endeavors. It can be said that Bradbury also predicted the creation and use of the tracking technologies, even as he did not really intend to in the first place.

Most of the technology present in the novel have come to exist one way or another. The amount of technological advancements that were predicted by a person who considered themselves a fantasy writer is impressive, making *Fahrenheit 451* a technologically prophetic novel. This can be considered to be positive because technology in itself is not good or bad, but depends on who uses it. Technology is misused in the novel, a tool of control that transformed people into mindless pleasure seekers, stripping citizens of their humanity. As the technology of the novel is close to ours, it then begs the question: How close is our society from the one in *Fahrenheit 451*?

3.2 - SOCIAL TRANSPOSITION

As previously established, the society of *Fahrenheit 451* is one that stopped reading and instead drowned in mindless entertainment. People spend countless hours behind their TV screens, unable to form serious thoughts as their minds are swarmed by the constant flow of programs, noises and images that come and go inside their parlors. According to researches, adult reading of any work of literature in America has drastically dropped between 1982 and 2015, from 57% to 43% of adults, described as a “three-decade low” (Ingraham, *The long, steady decline of literary reading*). These numbers, collected by NEA’s surveys and published in 2015, specifically focused on literature as a leisure and not in the context of work or school, showing that literature as a form of entertainment is not as popular as it used to be. This coincides with the growing popularity of television as a medium in American society in the 80s but also the expansion of the Internet in recent decades. Nowadays, the large variety of entertainment media competes and overshadows literature. Video games and TV series armed with their compelling qualities tend to bring a similar satisfaction to reading literature with less efforts, which can be said to be a distinct reminder of *Fahrenheit 451*’s world. One major difference, however, would be that many writers attempt to provide qualitative storytelling on different mediums, rather than being completely mindless like TV programs in *Fahrenheit 451*. Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that Bradbury did see that reading would become less and less popular as time goes. Television had undeniably become more popular after the end of McCarthyism and, during the Cold War era, had a hand in making reading less relevant. Television became the main medium in American society from the 60s and for many decades with an ever growing number of programs and channels for different types of audiences, although it became less popular among younger adults in recent years. It is nevertheless important to point out that these types of surveys only encompass literature such as novels, short stories, poems and plays and do not account for online reading, or any other forms of literature such as comics or graphic novels, which are fairly popular nowadays. Bradbury did see that screens would become central and slowly replace books as a medium, although not completely yet in the context of this study.

In the 2010s and going forward, especially among younger generations, screen time has increased, notably with smartphone devices, computers and video

game consoles. Ray Bradbury may not have predicted the creation or the rise of Internet, but the virtually unlimited amount of entertainment that the mass medium is able to provide is the closest thing to *Fahrenheit 451*'s screens and parlors in today's society. Internet cemented its place in society when it started to provide a viable alternative to television broadcasts but with more convenience and versatility than its predecessor could achieve. With the rise of news and streaming platforms readily available on internet, need and interest for cable TV has steadily decreased. While younger children still spend hours in front of the TV, the focus is shifting to other devices for older age groups and the screen time keeps increasing. According to statistics from the CDC⁷ published in 2018, children between 8 and 18 spent around 7.5 hours behind a screen for entertainment, and 4.5 of these seven hours are spent watching TV. As computers and phones have become an integral part of the work and house environment, they also became an integral part of entertainment in our modern world. Despite this, cinema theaters still remain one of the main forms of cultural and social engagement. Spending a large amount of time in front of screens means that *Fahrenheit 451* did predict this social tendency. It is further amplified by the fact that a lot of time spent in front of screens for entertainment tend to be for relaxation after work and such activities, and as such the programs consumed are generally not intellectually challenging or particularly thought-provoking. A great amount of casual entertainment could then be considered to be mindless. Yet, there are still a lot of programs and shows that make efforts to be instructive or to arouse viewers' minds with an array of philosophical, scientific or social questions. The novel is prophetic regarding screens to some extent because Bradbury saw that they would become the norm and overtake other forms of intellectual entertainment. The reality is a bit more complex than that, as people have not completely stopped reading and that intelligent and complex programs still exist. Screens have certainly taken an increasingly important place in our daily lives, have caused a number of problems, but they did not destroy our humanity or transformed people into mindless puppets.

With the Digital Revolution and Internet becoming an integral part of our societies' characteristics, sensationalism as described and lamented by Bradbury in the novel has become comparable to ours. The large amount of information and articles the internet provides, as discussed earlier, leads to a loss of quality. Additionally, an Internet practice called "clickbait" has surfaced. The concept of

7.The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

clickbait is to attract the attention of internet users to make them click on links by using images or information that are generally deceptive, misleading and more often than not sensationalized. This technique is often used to inflate the number of views on online content to obtain more revenue and visibility. Furthermore, Internet allows for worldwide live broadcasts or for recording and publishing of events, sometimes used to inform but also used to gain following or attract sympathy by using unfortunate events as a base. It is similar to *Fahrenheit 451*'s sensationalism because Internet is a platform where news providers compete to get attention and clicks from internet users and some of them will use underhand methods, much like how the authorities used a citizen as a scapegoat in the place of Montag to preserve their credibility and dealing with the audience's short attention span. Interestingly, in our modern society, the collective attention span has changed due to the Information Age and the amount of information presented to the public. Philip Lorenz-Spreen, researcher at Max Planck Institute for Human Development says that "Content is increasing in volume, which exhausts our attention and our urge for 'newness' causes us to collectively switch between topics more regularly" (McClinton). The collective attention on individual topics tends to dissipate faster than before, and social media are partly to blame for this tendency, with the constant flow of information and posts. Quality journalism on the Internet is struggling to get attention on these platforms because of the "accelerated news cycle" (McClinton). This acceleration of the news cycle is enhanced by Internet users' habit to read only the title, click on the link and not read the full article. Social media news are extremely volatile, with some news lasting for longer than average and some quickly losing the collective interest of users.

Omnipresent advertising and consumerism are also a part of the novel that transposes in our society. On his way to meet Faber, Montag is sitting in a subway trying to remember a part of the Bible, but has difficulties doing so because of a loud and lengthy advertisement, preventing him from thinking.

He clenched the book in his fists. Trumpets blared. 'Denham's Dentifrice.' Shut up, thought Montag. Consider the lilies of the field. 'Denham's Dentifrice.' They toil not- 'Denham's-' Consider the lilies of the field, shut up, shut up. 'Dentifrice!' He tore the book open and flicked the pages and felt them as if he were blind, he picked at the shape of the individual letters, not blinking. 'Denham's. Spelled: D-E-N-' They toil not, neither do they... A fierce whisper of hot sand through empty sieve. '*Denham's does it!*' Consider the lilies, the lilies, the lilies... 'Denham's dental detergent.' 'Shut up, shut up, shut up! It was a plea, a cry so terrible that Montag found himself on his feet, the shocked inhabitants of the loud car staring, moving back from this man with the insane, gorged face, the gibbering, dry mouth,

the flapping book in his fist. The people who had been sitting a moment before, tapping their feet to the rhythm of Denham's Dentifrice. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 103)

Aggressive advertising is a common practice in *Fahrenheit 451*. Repetitive and catchy slogans, melodies that stay in the head and occupy the thoughts of those who hear it, convincing people to open their wallet. Consumerism is also part of this society, where people want more and more, much like how Mildred wants more screens in her parlor. Consumerism is not new at the time the novel was written, however, with the increased use of televisions, radios and means of communication brought by the Information Age, advertisement is even more visible than it was before. Giant billboards, television and radio advertisements as well as sponsors are part of everyday life. Advertisements are everywhere, in every form. Internet has also increased advertising at home, with personalized advertisements due to tech-corporations gathering data on Internet users. Every television channel has advertisements in between programs and even in the middle of those programs. Companies have been using catchy tunes and recognizable slogans for a long time, and still do. Social media, entertainment platforms, and the internet in general have become a prime target for advertising and marketing campaigns that try to catch the user's attention in a very disruptive way. Companies personally contact users that get a lot of attention to advertise their products or simply hire online content creators for sponsorship, in which they add sales presentations to their content, something that has become common place on YouTube, and is either well-received or extremely criticized depending on the person, the genuineness of the product and the frequency of such sponsored content. To use certain services, users have to subscribe to newsletters that clutter message inboxes with advertisements of the company's products, leaving the average internet user in a sea of promotional emails. These companies can pay platforms for their advertisements to be shown more prominently to the users. This shows that the way advertising is today has not changed much since the time the novel was published and is even closer to how it is described in the dystopian story. The same advertisements are repeated over and over every day at the same hour on televisions. Today's society is drowning in advertising, to the point where some of these advertisements can last from a few seconds to minutes depending on the company and products. These advertisements are distracting and encourage consumerism at the expense of intellectual content that gets disrupted by the very aggressive advertising the world is subjected to.

Fahrenheit 451's programs generally last a few minutes at best, which is

almost the same length as the average YouTube video. This fast-paced TV programming is drowning citizens in information so much so that they cannot remember most of them. Similarly, extremely short video formats are popular on the Internet, first with the now discontinued Vine application that allowed for six seconds videos that were popular for their humoristic value, and more recently applications like TikTok that take on the same concept of short videos and allows for interactions between users through videos. This social media has gathered a large user base, and has become especially popular among younger generations of teenagers. These videos are particularly similar to Bradbury's express TV programs. On this front, *Fahrenheit 451* can be considered to be quite prophetic, as it predicted screen-based entertainment with short lengths to keep up with the public's loss of attention span.

On a similar topic, the ascent of screen media in society have impacted relationships between parents and children. Our era of technology has created an important gap between generations before and after the beginning of the information age. This means that older generations have a harder time keeping up with the online trends unlike younger generations. The gap is not only technological but also emotional, as older people will have troubles understanding modern children's problems that can be described as different due to considerable changes in society. The generational gap of the information age also affects language and humor, especially ever since since new expressions and words have appeared on Internet as well as a new type of jokes. The gap between parents and children is getting wider, as kids are more easily exposed to screens, be it TV screens or other devices. This has created a new type of parenting where adults will leave their young children in front of screens so they can have free time and not be bothered by them. Ultimately, this early exposure to screens and lack of parental presence will undoubtedly create an emotional distance between parents and children. There is a chilling similarity with family relationships in *Fahrenheit 451*.

‘I plunk the children in school nine days out of ten. I put up with them when they come home three days a month; it's not bad at all. You heave them into the “parlour” and turn the switch. It's like washing clothes; stuff laundry in and slam the lid’ Mrs Bowles tittered. ‘They'd just as soon kick as kiss me. Thank God I can kick back!’ (*Fahrenheit 451*, 125)

The parallels between the novel and this form of parenting that rose up with

the spreading of smartphones and social media in the mainstream shows that once again, Bradbury was able to see how technology could slowly estrange parents and children. Two-thirds of American parents find parenting harder nowadays than 20 years ago and technology is reported among the main reasons (Auxier, Pew Research Center). A lot of parents tend to point out the impact of technology, the rise of social media, and technology's tendency to expose children to things at a younger age than before. There is a smaller percentage of answers that concern the cost associated with raising a child. In *Fahrenheit 451*, as mentioned previously, one of the main reasons a good amount of couples do not wish to have children is because they are "ruinous" (*Fahrenheit 451*, 125) which echoes with a small part of our own reality. Furthermore, concern is growing when it comes to screen times, but not only limited to children. As a matter of fact, half of the parents that participated in the survey also think that they spend too much time in front of their screens and smartphones (Auxier, Pew Research Center). The existence of digital grounding – educational practice consisting in taking away devices and Internet as a punishment – or the fact that parents are aware that they should monitor their children's screen time or interactions shows that not everything is leading to a dystopia either.

Teenagers in *Fahrenheit 451* are less interested in screens than their parents, as Clarisse clearly states that they are outside being violent and killing each other. There is a rising concern over the fact that smartphones could cause issues in interpersonal relationships between children, and between adults. Nowadays it is not rare to see younger adults spend time with their friends or relatives while using their smartphones, having less interactions than before or simply staying on their smartphones and not spending time with their relatives. It once again echoes with one of the points Bradbury made in his novel, mostly illustrated through Mildred and her interpersonal skills. In the second part, it was established that Mildred considered the persons on her screens to be her family members, and she interacts with the programs using an advanced technology that makes it look like the programs are talking to her. Additionally, she wants to go her true family's house only to watch the screens with them, as well as inviting her friends over to have vapid conversations while watching the wall TVs. This lack of interpersonal relationships is also present in parent-child relationships, as Ms Bowles does not want to go through labor pains for her children, and considers taking care of them – which amounts to putting them in front of screens – not unlike a chore. Furthermore

her children do not talk to or love her as “they’d just as soon kick as kiss” her, showing that families do not really have anything except being blood relatives. This is not a one-sided estrangement, as Mrs Bowles says she “can kick back.” Loss of interpersonal relationships in the novel is quite an important theme, which leads to emotional dissociation toward others and lack of care for their fate. Several experts have been in agreement that technology has been hurting interpersonal relationships as well as emotional bonds, showing how many aspects of *Fahrenheit 451*’s society hit close to home and offering a sharp contrast to all the progress that the information age has brought to human society.

In addition, another element of our own reality can be tied to Bradbury’s dystopian world: the COVID-19 pandemic that struck the world since December 2019 has generated special behaviors as well as governmental decisions that, in the context of the pandemic, but also the future of society, are very uncomfortably reminiscent of Bradbury’s dystopian worlds. The highly contagious disease prompted an array of regulations and temporary laws that are supposed to fight the contagion rate by reducing physical contact between individuals. Notably, mandatory face masks, curfews, social distancing and quarantines. While these are exceptional measures, some resemblances with *Fahrenheit 451* need to be pointed out. A video from CNBC⁸’s YouTube channel shows an exclusively new use for Boston Dynamics’ Spot robot. In the video, we see that the machine, remotely controlled by a human, is patrolling a park in Singapore and playing a pre-recorded message, encouraging civilians to exercise social distancing to diminish spreading of the virus. The robot is fitted with a camera that can estimate the number of people in the image. Marc Raibert, founder and chairman of Boston Dynamics says that the operator at the station can see some of the imagery from the robot. The whole operation was part of a two-week trial to evaluate the efficiency of the robot and eventually implement it for the whole duration of the pandemic in heavily crowded areas during peak hours. Despite the government claiming that Spot cannot track individuals or record personal data, some concerns have risen from the whole situation. A great number of comments for the video have said that the display was scary or uncomfortable and that it would be a matter of time before these robots were armed. This situation is undoubtedly very similar to the Mechanical Hounds patrolling neighborhoods to dissuade book readers in *Fahrenheit 451* or even the remote controlled police car from *The Pedestrian*

8.Consumer News and Business Channel, an American news channel

arresting the protagonist. The Bradburian dog-shaped robot bears an uncanny resemblance to Boston Dynamics' Spot, especially in this scenario, as both robots are doglike machines executing tasks for the government. Marc Raibert stated that these robots are still under human control and as such are harmless, an approach that Boston Dynamics have used for a long time. Nonetheless, this situation raises questions about the future uses of these robots in daily life after the end of the sanitary crisis. Adding to that, all around the world, but especially in China, cities are starting to equip themselves with surveillance and facial recognition systems that can pick up faces in the crowd. It is not a stretch of the mind to imagine Spot robots equipped with such features in the near-future, even as it would violate individual rights for privacy, further emphasizing the dystopian aspect of these technologies, as legislation surrounding these topics are still not well developed. The major concern is that these technologies will end up benefiting "city authorities and the big tech companies who sell the solutions, rather than the actual people they purporting to help" (Keegan).

Furthermore, the pandemic brought additional dystopian scenarios to the light, especially due to countries' previous inability to effectively fight the disease, leading to rises in number of cases. The trust in experts and intellectuals has faltered during the sanitary crisis, because of their contradicting views on the resolution and the outcomes of the pandemic. In 2020, the Trump administration pulled the United States out of the World Health Organization (WHO) at the end of his mandate, "discredit[ing] public health officials" (Lowenstein). The WHO has also been targeted by many governments claiming the organization had failed to execute its mission, while the WHO claimed that many Member States "ignored the warnings" (Buranyi) when it came to handling the crisis. "At the same time, the international order on which the WHO relies is fraying" (Buranyi), as countries started acting out of their own interest or refused to cooperate with the WHO to fight the pandemic. It relates to *Fahrenheit 451*, as intellectuals have been marginalized in the Dystopian America and most of them live outside the cities as itinerants who do not take part in society, or very rarely do so. Intellectuals are hated in *Fahrenheit 451* because most people do not think and only believe in what is shown on the screens, leading to intellectuals like Granger or Faber being distrusted by the average citizen. It echoes with the current loss of faith in intellectuals and experts due to the exceptional circumstances of the sanitary crisis. In relation to this theme, but not exclusively linked to the virus, the recent

unfortunate events that lead to the assassination of a middle-school teacher in France in October 2020 sparked a series of actions and controversies with the government openly attacking universities and academies and especially social science research branches, pointing at them as the hearth of a religious and political extremism known as “Islamism-leftism.” The French government has even gone as far as launching an investigation into academic research, claiming that “it feeds ‘Islamism-leftist’ tendencies that corrupt society” (Onishi, Méheut, *Heating Up Culture Wars, France to Scour Universities for Ideas That ‘Corrupt Society’*). This caused great indignation among scholars around the country, claiming that the government was using a “pseudo-notion” that heavily threatened academic freedom and that it “delegitimized different fields of research, like post-colonial studies, intersectional studies and research on race” (Onishi, Méheut). Once again this is very close to *Fahrenheit 451*’s authorities destroying books and ideas that would displease certain groups.

Coloured people don’t like *Little Black Sambo*. Burn it. White people don’t feel good about *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Burn it. Someone’s written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag. Take your fights outside. Better yet, to the incinerator. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 78)

As social studies tend to scrutinize subjects and thematics that are generally controversial, such as slavery, gender studies, religion or cultural assimilation of minorities, they tend to create new perspectives on subjects, which generally go against beliefs that have been established by religious or social institutions for a long time. Therefore, these research areas have a tendency to rouse religious or social extremism, leading at times to events such as terrorist attacks. The government is then taking measures to root out extremism, accusing universities and “left-leaning intellectuals” of justifying such extremism and advancing “radical and activist” ideas by “always looking at everything through the prism of their will to divide, to fracture, to pinpoint the enemy” (Onishi, Méheut). By enforcing against what they consider the heart of the problem, the government is then accused of threatening both academic and religious freedom. It echoes *Fahrenheit 451* in the sense that France is trying to maintain its status as “a secular state devoted to the ideal that all of its citizens are the same under the same law” (Onishi, Méheut) while at the same time being “a nation that has often been averse to reflect on its history or on subjects like race and racism” (Onishi, Méheut), something scholars of social studies have been trying to do in recent years. This leads to the

government targeting universities and academies based on the idea that scholars and researchers are purposely fueling social and religious extremism. Sara Mazouz, sociologist at the French National Centre for Scientific Research says that governmental attacks on social theories and use of the term “Islamism” was “aimed at ‘delegitimizing’ these new studies on race, gender and other subjects, ‘so that the debate does not take place.’” (Onishi, Méheut). The French government is then exercising a form of censorship by targeting academic freedom because it upsets a certain portion of society, much like in *Fahrenheit 451* where intellectual fights are taken “to the incinerator” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 78).

It can be said that many aspects of the dystopian society depicted into Bradbury’s novel turned out, as a matter-of-fact to be pretty close to a number of facets of our own modernity, although with slight or major differences that fit the evolution of our society. Our world, on certain aspects, has evolved in a similar fashion to *Fahrenheit 451*’s society but, as it stands, not to the dystopian extent of the novel. At the same time, many elements in the story seem to be out of date, while the ideas themselves are still relevant to us. This then raises the question of imagery and the contrast with the ideas of *Fahrenheit 451*.

3.3 - *FAHRENHEIT 451*: RELEVANT IDEAS, AGING IMAGERY

Ideas in a fictional work are different from its imagery. As defined by the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus*, Imagery is “the use of words or pictures in books, films, paintings, etc. to describe ideas or situations.” In the *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, Imagery is defined as “the use of pictures or words to create images, especially to create to create an impression or mood.” The term imagery here would refer to the visual language of the novel, and the mental image it creates for the reader. In simpler terms, it refers to how the reader visualizes what the world in the novel looks like based on how the author describes it. Ideas, however, refer to the topics, the concepts, the themes that are described in the novel. It is then the discourse of the author that the reader can interpret in their own terms, their own reality. This means that ideas from a book can easily transcend time because they are not completely tied to a specific era, which also means that they can be adapted in all eras without much of an issue. Imagery, however, tends to age because the aesthetics of the world are constantly evolving. Imagery will generally be stuck in a certain time period which limits its

relevance as time goes on. This proves even truer for science fiction works, whether in books or movies. These works tend to age somewhat poorly when it comes to visuals as they are generally influenced by the era in which they were created. As such, *Fahrenheit 451*, as a work of science fiction, does not seem to escape this tendency. The novel may have seemed unbelievable on many aspects during its time, but most of the technology that looked impossible in its own era became common technology, became outdated, or on the verge of being so. This can be explained by the fact that mental images of what is described is generally an extension of the writer's experience and knowledge. *F451* was written in a period where more technology was starting to appear but was still in a very experimental state, which translates in the imagery of the novel. The description of the Mechanical Hound illustrates this idea.

The Hound half rose in its kennel and looked at him with green-blue neon light flickering in its suddenly activated eye-bulbs. It growled again, a strange rasping combination of electrical sizzle, a frying sound, a scraping of metal, a turning of cogs that seemed rusty and ancient with suspicion. (*Fahrenheit 451*, 37)

A lot of the descriptions of technology in the novel seem familiar in our modernity, but with an archaic feel to them. The Hound, although quite technological for the time, feels like an old machine from our perspective, especially with the use of the terms “electrical sizzle”, “frying sound” and “turning of cogs.” As the novel was written before the modern definition of a robot became a reality, the depiction of the Hound is pretty limited, reflecting the non-substantial knowledge of robots of the time, resulting in a mostly speculative description: “It’s only copper wire, storage batteries and electricity” (*Fahrenheit 451*, 38). Similarly, the beetles, the cars used in *Fahrenheit 451*, are most likely based on the Volkswagen Beetle, a popular car used during the era the book was written in, which shows that even as a futuristic novel, a great number of things it depicts are based on elements that were contemporary to Bradbury and very grounded in the reality of the time. Thimble radios and seashells are also one of those items in the book that, although they are now common place in our daily lives, are described with terms such as “seashell” or “thimble,” likely due to the fact that these were the only real life objects at the time that were similar enough to describe those technological devices, adding to the aging and perhaps vivid imagery of the novel. Bradbury himself was much more of a poet than a scientist. Although he showed a keen interest in science, he wrote most of his novels that had science themes with

the same type of poetry found in *Fahrenheit 451*, like in *The Martian Chronicles* or most short stories present in the collection *A Pleasure to Burn: Fahrenheit 451 stories*. The use of gasoline and igniters, and especially the flamethrower, was very contemporary to the author's time, as the flamethrower as we know it was introduced during WWI as Germany's newest weapon. This exhibits once again that despite its futuristic setting, the novel was, despite being looked at by many contemporaries as fanciful, reasonably close to the reality of the time. The parlor walls are very different from the TVs of the time, but television was relatively new when the novel was written, just starting to rise in popularity. Television started losing popularity in recent times in favor of other screens and means of entertainment, but the idea remained relevant. As such, with the rise of modern technology, the imagery of *Fahrenheit 451* aged considerably. The futuristic features of *Fahrenheit 451* correspond to depiction of the future of its own time. *Fahrenheit 451*'s aesthetics seem to mirror the designs of the Atomic Age which itself is based on atomic science. This type of aesthetic stemmed from the concerns of a nuclear war after WWII's infamous bombings. François Truffaut's 1966 movie adaptation of the novel supports the idea that imagery and visuals tend to age quickly due to technological limitations and lack of special effects of the time, making the movie far from futuristic by our modern standards of science fiction. The movie was not well received and was Truffaut's most difficult movie to produce. The visuals of the movie may influence the way the novel is perceived by the reader who have seen the movie. The wall-screens are way smaller than their book counterpart, looking more like a small screen by today's standards rather than a wall-sized TV. A lot, if not all, of the technological aspects of the novel were left out in Truffaut's movie. The scenario is mostly identical to the book, and covers the same themes as the source material. Truffaut's movie could not rely on a lot of special effects, thus abandoning much of the technology, and focused on reproducing aspects of the society the best it could by sticking closely to Bradbury's plot. The 1966's movie illustrates the aging imagery of *Fahrenheit 451*. What is seen in the novel – and by extension in the movie – is nowadays part of the Retrofuturism movement, visions of the future by artists and authors in the pre-1960s and how they tried to predict it, although Bradbury did not seem to have an optimistic view of a such a future. Another difference is that Bradbury's intention was not to predict far-fetched technological progress. He most likely simply took things he knew and pushed them to a futuristic extent as a way to illustrate his

concerns. The technology and the imagery of the novel are then more of a vehicle supporting Bradbury's ideas. The author himself said in essays that predicting the future was easy, and that his intent was to help build a better future. His focus was not particularly on technology itself, although he managed to predict the evolution of some of it, as well as predicting a number of inventions before they even saw the light of day. *Fahrenheit 451* is prophetic in many aspects, because Bradbury's ideas and his discourse were aiming at something beyond technology and its misuses. Society always was the true focus of his novel, and science-fiction was the vessel to address his concerns. Bradbury's ideas managed to transcend his own time and be relevant in our modernity with his social themes. Ray Bradbury's writing, compared to the imagery, is not outdated either as his book is still read by both children and adults, and is easily understandable thanks to Bradbury's writing style.

In the scope of this study, however, it has to be understood that despite still being relevant, time and evolution of society are taking a toll on the novel's imagery and appeal, which felt new and futuristic back when it was released. However, the fact that the novel doesn't feel futuristic nowadays but rather ordinary on many aspects reinforce the idea that it was prophetic of our era to some extent. At the same time, one could say that the novel is somewhat stuck in the 50s – which corresponds to the time it was written and published – even though the themes and ideas manage to stay relevant nowadays. In the light of *Fahrenheit 451* being first and foremost a dystopian novel, thus making society its main concern, the futuristic imagery aged faster with the arrival of the Information Age.

However, modern adaptations can rightfully give a breath of fresh air to literary works such as *Fahrenheit 451*, released almost 70 years ago. In 2018, an adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*, written and co-directed by Ramin Bahrani, was released. It is based on Bradbury's novel, but gives updated visuals to the dystopia. Bahrani's *Fahrenheit 451* includes the Internet which, nowadays, speaks to us more than the television programs of the original. In the movie, most books are located on the Internet. Most of them are banned and the ones that still exist are heavily modified. The themes are mostly similar to the novel, yet not treated in the same fashion. In fact, the movie successfully modernized some concepts of the novel. Not only does this adaptation gives *Fahrenheit 451* a new futuristic look, it shows that Bradbury's ideas are transposable to a new context, further emphasizing the relevance of the original work in our modernity. The movie however, takes on a more mainstream approach of the story, sacrificing crucial elements in the novel to

focus a lot more on ambience, action and drama, which contributes to the dystopian atmosphere but completely eclipses the more subtle themes of the novel, such as the rise of violence in children, parent-child relationships and loss of the humane. The 2018 movie mostly focuses on censorship and is more loosely based on the novel compared to Truffaut's movie. A lot of the movie completely misses the thought-provoking qualities of the novel to mostly make it a drama movie that has the spirit but not the impact of the original. Even if the movie does not have the same influence as the source material and is met with mixed reviews, it still contributes in its own way to the transposability of Bradbury's ideas to our modernity and shows that actualization is possible. Bradbury himself actualized his own work through his TV show, a computer game and his *Fahrenheit 451* play, expanding on his own novel. If we compare both movies, they both have aspects close to the original, and other aspects on which they do not do justice to the source material. Nevertheless, both movies defend the idea that wrestling with thoughts is necessary for a fulfilled humanity. Thanks to both movies being released in two different eras, and mostly addressing the same themes as Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, it gives us an idea of how relevant the novel still is nowadays. The two movies stand 52 years apart, adapting an even older novel. Scott Tobias, former editor of The Dissolve⁹ says:

Bradbury's book remains relevant because its themes can always be applied to one disturbance in the culture or another – just this month, in fact, a North Carolina school board made the inexplicable decision to ban Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. *Fahrenheit 451* appears on book lists as a constant reminder of tyrannies that are persistent and timeless, and Truffaut's film was conceived around that idea. (Tobias, Scott, *The enduring oddness of François Truffaut's Fahrenheit 451*)

Scott Tobias made the observation that the movie director was not really “interested in science fiction”, as seen by the obvious lack of technology in the movie we saw previously, but rather in the idea that “the not-quite contemporary setting suggests ever-present problems with censorship, conformity and anti-intellectualism, and television's tendency to creep toward banal omnipresence” (Tobias). Accurately enough, television and screens became banally omnipresent, while censorship, conformity as well as anti-intellectualism became as, if not more, easily transposed, that is to say, applicable into our modernity. *Fahrenheit 451* still finds a way in our reality and on our bookshelves several decades later after it was

9.The Dissolve was a film review, news and commentary website launched in 2013 and terminated in 2015

released because these particular themes, that we saw in the previous parts of this study, are universal and timeless. The applicability of these themes nowadays speaks volume about our own modern context, with the Internet culture as well as diverse crises contributing to the exacerbation of these issues.

CONCLUSION

This master's thesis aimed at studying the novel from American author Ray Bradbury in the light of the 21st century and its characteristics to see if the dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* turned out to be a prophetic and relevant text in our modernity.

Firstly, we studied the contexts surrounding the novel, respectively the elements that inspired its creation, the era in which it was published and finally the main elements of our modernity, which has been greatly influenced by the Information Age, characterized by the computer technology revolving around information.

Through video and textual interviews as well as essays from the author and a short story collection, it was established that *Fahrenheit 451* was a novel that put together a number of historical references and personal experiences from the author's background both as a passionate library person coupled with a keen interest for science-fiction. The novel itself is the culmination of a number of short stories with similar themes turned into a fully-fledged novel taking those concepts to their full extent.

Fahrenheit 451 was written in a difficult era of conflict and social turmoil: the fear of nuclear wars, Communist Witch hunts that threatened freedom of speech, as well as a very conservative American Society showing hostility towards television, a new form of media that challenged both the literary world and the cinema industry by providing an attractive alternative to its two predecessors. Television was also determinant in the evolution of the American society during the Cold War, and an important focus in Bradbury's novel, as he perceived the changes of his own country years before the television took over the American culture.

In a similar fashion, our modernity is deeply linked to the evolution of computers, mobile devices and the Internet; evolutions that became central in the way our society functions, challenging older media in the same fashion television challenged literature and cinema during Bradbury's time. Internet provides a number of services that are inherited from television, and as such can be considered as a replacement for television in our world.

Fahrenheit 451 is a novel that deals with technology, mindless

entertainment and the effects of anti-intellectualism on humanity and its moral standards. Censorship is a central theme in the novel, and takes many forms. Technology plays a large role in suppressing and discouraging personal thoughts. Similarly, entertainment has been pushed to an extreme, serving as a mean to prevent citizens from having their own time to think. Television is then used as a dictatorship of thought and a surrogate family for dehumanized citizens acting as a hive mind rather than individuals. *Fahrenheit 451* presents a violent society in which individuality, human relationships and family bonds are almost inexistent. It is a society in which adults do not wish to have or care for children, whose education is only done by TVs and schools where they are formatted. Children fight among themselves and even frequently kill each other through shootings or car accidents. It is also a society in which death and remembrance has no place anymore, replaced by a hedonistic need to seek cheap thrills, leaving citizens unfulfilled, unhappy, shallow and even suicidal. Intellectuals are marginalized and persecuted, sometimes even killed, forced to constantly hide or stay away from cities while roaming the land and keep books alive in their head.

In our modernity, quite a number of technological advancements that were described inside the novel have become commonplace, notably large and flat television screens, wireless headphones the size of a small bullet, the use of robots for various tasks especially in medicine, an automated banking system as well as tracking technology, some of which only appeared decades after the novel was published.

On the social side of our modernity, it turns out that quite a number of social practices and behaviors from the novel have become reality. Reading has declined, gradually replaced by other activities like television, games or series. Screens have become central in our society, and the Internet provides an almost unlimited amount of content, much like the parlors of the novel. Younger generations are particularly exposed to longer screen times, although such entertainment has not become mindless to the extent of the novel. Internet has also given rise to new forms of sensationalism, which coincided with a surge of information and a lower collective attention span on social media. This contributed to a qualitative decrease of journalistic standards on the Internet, with some journalists often more interested in getting users to click articles than delivering accurate information. Advertising has a great presence in our modernity, much like the constant advertising in *Fahrenheit 451*. Both appear in a very disruptive way, often interrupting programs. Internet

also plays a role in the proliferation of advertising, with companies' newsletters and aggressive marketing. The Information Age, especially in more recent years, has accelerated the generational gap even among younger generations, and has made parenting harder in general, with parents of older generations having a hard time connecting with their children or understanding their modern problems. It has partly resulted in bad parenting habits, such as leaving a child in front of a screen for long periods of time in order to be free to do something else. It echoes with *Fahrenheit 451*'s parent-child relationships which have become minimal even to the point of non-existence and conflict, although they are not that extreme nowadays. Online networking has also somewhat affected interpersonal relationships, with less real life interactions needed or desired.

The context of the Covid 19 pandemic has created exceptional conditions, which made some aspects of our society lean toward totalitarianism. Test runs of robots used to monitor citizens, mandatory curfews and other governmental measures aiming for the containment of the infection rate while at the same time, raising concerns for the future post health crisis, as city authorities are thinking about reinforcing surveillance measures, notably with more cameras, some of which can pinpoint individuals in a crowd, enhancing collective security at the cost of individual privacy.

The recent unexpected development of the pandemic as well as other social crises sparked a rising distrust of specialists and intellectuals, as the pandemic's handling was not as smooth as expected, with specialists contradicting one another due to a lack of information. The World Health Organization found itself under political fire, and especially from the Trump administration for supposedly failing to handle the health crisis, when in reality, the WHO's powers are extremely limited compared to its responsibilities.

Culture wars have exploded in France, with the government targeting universities and scholars, especially Social Studies, accusing them of spreading ideas that corrupt society. According to some experts, this stemmed from France's difficulty at looking back to its past and dealing with topics such as race. France's academic freedom is then threatened in an attempt to discredit social studies so that the debate does not take place, similar to *Fahrenheit 451*'s society being averse to intellectual conflicts, burning problems instead of facing them.

The imagery of the novel and much of its presentation is very noticeably marked by its own period, and as a science-fiction novel of the 1950s, *Fahrenheit*

451 looks barely futuristic by our modern standards and the 1966's movie contributes to *Fahrenheit 451*'s aging visuals. In contrast, a 2018 movie adaptation of the book shows that the novel manages to survive time. Bradbury's ideas are universally relevant many decades after its first publication. Modern adaptations, if done correctly, can help actualizing the novel and successfully deliver the message of the original.

This study, on many levels, showed that many aspects of *Fahrenheit 451* proved to be prophetic in our modernity. They correspond to an extent to what I expected from my research, although I also discovered aspects that I did not expect at first. From my own first personal analysis of the novel, I was expecting a decent number of elements to correspond to our reality, but after further readings, notably newspaper articles related to our modernity as well as re-reading some parts of the novel itself, I was able to see even more elements that added to what I wanted to demonstrate. *Fahrenheit 451*'s themes and ideas are universal and atemporal in many ways despite being stuck in the fifties to some extent, which made it relevant despite that. It showed me that *Fahrenheit 451* was slightly underrated compared to the two other 20th century dystopias *Brave New World* and especially *1984*, which always seem to be the go-to dystopia for most people, probably for its more political themes, and perhaps because Bradbury's novel is more hopeful than the other two. This study also brought the more subdued themes of the novel to light, such as the parent-child relationships, the loss of death and mourning, children violence, the omnipresent advertising and the loss of individuality, that often are less scrutinized in comparison to censorship, television addiction or anti-intellectualism. With these themes put into light, there is hope that they will not be forgotten and even studied to a greater extent. Overall, I managed to reach my objectives through the diversity of sources I found online, and exceeded my expectations on certain points that I expected to be less developed.

While working on specific parts of the thesis, I realized that there was an increasing number of elements that could have been added, which lead me to cut out some of them in order to develop my points as much as possible without cutting corners. Similarly, I had to only focus on aspects that Bradbury had seen inside his novel, without going on tangents about other elements that could add to Bradbury's vision, such as developing in details the diversity of services available on Internet or other developments that could come out of each point as it would have been too convoluted in the number of pages attributed for the master's thesis. As this study

was trying to stay relatively close to the realm of literature, some historical aspects were kept relatively simple to illustrate the author's ideas, and make comparisons with some past and present elements. However it was impossible to make certain points without some interdisciplinary research notably with civilization. Due to the pandemic, I could not easily access some books about Ray Bradbury that could potentially have helped develop some aspects of the present, like some interviews put together by Bradbury's official biographer so I had to compensate with other resources.

This study could be integrated in a larger comparative research work between *Fahrenheit 451* and another dystopia of the 20th century in a modern context, or, as this study dealt with a connected world, a separate study focusing on a specific country could also be plausible. It could also be interesting to study whether *Fahrenheit 451* would be as relevant in a strictly Eastern context as the novel is mostly Western centered.

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RÉSUMÉ - ABSTRACT

Résumé

Fahrenheit 451, le roman phare de Ray Bradbury, auteur influent de son temps, présente un futur dystopique où la population américaine a arrêté de lire et passe son temps à regarder la télévision ou à se divertir, abandonnant leur humanité et tout conflit d'idée. Est-il possible que ce roman du milieu du 20ème siècle soit prophétique du présent que nous vivons au 21ème siècle ? Nous étudierons l'œuvre dans son contexte, sa création, analyserons son contenu et son message, puis nous observerons ces caractéristiques en les transposant dans notre époque, afin de voir sur quels aspects ce roman s'avère être prophétique et pertinent plus 65 ans après sa publication.

Mots-clés : Fahrenheit 451; Bradbury; Ray Bradbury ; dystopie; transposition; totalitarisme ; 21ème siècle ; Internet ; technologie ; société ; censure ; autodafé ; Anti-intellectualisme ; divertissement ; modernisation.

Abstract

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* presents a dystopian future in which the American society has forsaken literature for screens, giving up humanity, individuality, preaching anti-intellectualism and mindless entertainment. To what extent is Bradbury's future prophetic similar to our own modernity in the 21st century? We will study the contexts surrounding the novel and its creation, analyze the ideas presented in the novel and its main message, before turning to the transposition of those ideas to see how well they fare in our modern context, by exploring which aspects of the novel are prophetic and relevant almost 70 years after its publication in 1953.

Keywords : Fahrenheit 451; Bradbury: Ray Bradbury; dystopia; transposition; totalitarianism; 21st century; Internet; technology; society; censorship; book burning; Anti-intellectualism; entertainment; modernization.