

The Danger of Mass Media and Technology in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá nebezpečím technologií a masmédií v románu *451 stupňů Fahrenheita* Raye Bradburyho. Cílem teoretické části je poskytnout více informací ohledně doby a událostí, které mohly autora silně inspirovat k sepsání tohoto dystopického díla. Dále také bližší přiblížení termínu sci-fi, utopie a dystopie a poskytnutí základních informací k autorovi Rayi Bradburymu a dalším významným dystopickým spisovatelům, a krátkému představení jejich nejvýznamnějších děl.

Praktická část této bakalářské práce následně navazuje popsáním rizik spojených s technologiemi a masmédií, zároveň také přibližuje konkrétní negativní důsledky těchto jevů v knize, a zároveň pozitivně vyzdvihuje cesta hlavní postavy, Guye Montaga, který těmto negativním vlivům úspěšně odolává a vydává se na cestu hledání pravdy a moudrosti, v důsledku čeho se na konci knihy stává hledaným mužem.

Klíčová slova: technologie, masmedia, cenzura, propaganda, 451 stupňů Fahrenheita, Ray Bradbury

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis focuses on the danger of technology and mass media in Ray Bradbury's novel "*Fahrenheit 451*". The goal of the theoretical part is to provide more information about the time and events that could have strongly inspired the author to write this dystopian work. It also provides a closer insight into the terms of science fiction, utopia, and dystopia, as well as basic information about Ray Bradbury and other significant dystopian writers, along with a brief presentation of their most significant works.

The practical part of this bachelor thesis continues by describing the risks associated with technology and mass media. It also highlights the specific negative consequences of these phenomena in the book while positively emphasizing the journey of the main character, Guy Montag, who successfully resists these negative influences and sets out on a path to seek truth and wisdom, ultimately becoming a wanted man by the end of the book.

Keywords: technology, mass media, censorship, propaganda, Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury

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INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis examines the perils of technology and mass media in Ray Bradbury's novel, *Fahrenheit 451*. As a work of dystopian fiction, the author portrays issues prevalent in modern society such as censorship, technology, and ignorance. The story is set in an unknown location in America, where books are banned and firemen burn every book they come across, including the homes of their owners. The protagonist, Guy Montag, works as a fireman but eventually begins to question his life and values. He ultimately quits his job to safeguard books and seek knowledge.

The book, *Fahrenheit 451*, is comprised of three chapters: "The Hearth and the Salamander," "The Sieve and the Sand," and "Burning Bright." Chapter 1 centers around Montag's job and life, where he is faced with a decision between his curiosity for knowledge and the conformity of society. In Chapter 2, Montag experiences a revelation when he begins reading books and striving to learn from them. However, this choice has severe consequences as it opposes the beliefs of the oppressive system. Chapter 3 depicts the culmination of Montag's transformation, turning him into an intellectual who is eager to safeguard books and knowledge.

Published during the Cold War, *Fahrenheit 451* reflected the fears of many Americans during that time of potential nuclear warfare and the spread of communism. Ray Bradbury drew inspiration not only from contemporary events but also from historical ones, such as the Nazi book burnings and ideological repression in the Soviet Union. With little time having passed since World War II and the Korean War, these events had a profound impact on American society. The Cold War was not a traditional battlefield conflict; rather, it was a psychological clash of differing ideologies. During the height of the conflict in the 1950s and 1960s, people lost hope for progress and were deeply affected by the traumas, fears, and distress caused by previous conflicts.

Other significant authors of dystopian fiction include Aldous Huxley and his 1932 novel, *Brave New World*, and George Orwell and his 1949 work, *1984*. It is fascinating that some of the most well-known dystopian books were all published within a similar time period. Perhaps the authors were inspired by the prevailing attitudes of their time, or used their books about dystopian futures as a means of coping with the current events and propaganda they were surrounded by.

All three books mentioned share a common theme: they do not necessarily predict the future, but rather highlight the potential dangers of a totalitarian regime controlling the

population. One recurring motif is the use of modern technology as a tool for providing leisure and entertainment, while also promoting a certain agenda and programming. Another common aspect is the issue of loyalty or lack thereof; in *Fahrenheit 451*, for example, Mildred betrays her own husband and exposes him to the authorities. The prohibition of books or other sources of information is another danger explored in these books, often coupled with the manipulation or editing of history to ensure that citizens are ignorant and compliant. Perhaps the most effective method of control depicted in these books is the destruction of individuality, with people encouraged to think of themselves as part of a collective rather than as autonomous individuals. Hedonistic consumerism is promoted, and those who display any sign of individuality or open-mindedness are seen as outcasts.

I. THEORY

1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The aim of this chapter is to provide more information about the state of American society at the time of the publication of *Fahrenheit 451* – early 1950s and preceding years that might have heavily inspired Ray Bradbury in his writing.

1.1 The attack on Pearl Harbor

On December 7th, 1941, the Japanese airforce attacked the American fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor. The surprise attack resulted in the destruction or damage of 19 ships, 150 planes, and the loss of over 2400 American lives. The very next day, the American Congress declared war. Ray Bradbury, although not part of the US army, was among the many citizens whose lives were shaped by America's involvement in the Second World War. This unanticipated attack had far-reaching implications; it not only shaped America's worldview and foreign policy, but also had a profound impact on its citizens on a personal level. The attack galvanized the nation, uniting them as never before. Even the biggest "America first" proponents were eager to avenge their fellow citizens who fell at Pearl Harbor.¹

One of the few positives of this devastating fact was that mobilization called for pro-business policies, which were a cure for the Great Depression. National debt, military expenditures, and gross national product rapidly increased, while unemployment rapidly decreased.²

1.2 World views

With the end of World War II, the United States emerged as the most powerful global superpower. While America suffered minimal casualties compared to other countries, Americans longed for a time of peace and prosperity. However, this vision of peace and prosperity did not last long. Just two years after the end of the most destructive conflict in the history of mankind, the vision of peace evaporated with the start of the Cold War. The threat of the Soviet Union led to the creation of NATO on April 4th, 1949, by its 12 initial members: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Norway, Portugal, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Iceland. The main focus of this alliance was to prevent the spread of communism and protect its members from Soviet military intervention. However, the US also cooperated with many other countries, such as

¹ Nash, Gary B. *The American people: Creating a Nation and a Society Volume Two: since 1865*. (Third edition. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993), 860-861.

² *Ibid.*, 863.

Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Taiwan, and even their former enemies Germany and Japan. The whole world seemed split into two parts with conflicting world views.³

After World War II, America became less withdrawn from the world arrangement and wanted to share its core values of liberty, equality and democracy, to shape the world order into one, that would benefit American aims and also ensures more stability around the world. After suffering minimal life and material losses during the war, their aim was to exceed their influence overseas to destroy trade barriers and secure markets for future American export.⁴ Soviets had significant casualties and material damages compared to Americans, and their first goal was to rebuild and maintain their own country, but at the same time they were scared by the spread of capitalism to their western border. Western border was the weakpoint through which all previous invasions of Russia came, whether it were Germans in World War II or Napoleon Bonaparte long before them. The threat of western ideologies spreading near Russia seemed very possible and while mainly focussing on rebuilding its own nation, Soviets wished to surround their western border with regimes supportive of their own. Alongside with safety the Soviets did also desire new regions that would benefit them economically.⁵

1.3 Beginning of the Atomic Age

The Manhattan Project was a top-secret project aimed at producing the first atomic bomb. It was started in 1941 and the first successful atomic bomb saw the light of day on July 16th, 1945, after the end of the war in Europe. Although Germany suffered for months before the Manhattan Project was finished, Japan still represented a significant threat with millions of soldiers and thousands of kamikaze pilots who were willing to sacrifice their own lives to wreak havoc among the American fleet with bomb-filled aircraft. Invading Japan would have cost the Allies many lives. On August 6th, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan's city of Hiroshima, killing tens of thousands of people. After Japan refused to surrender, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945, and the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. These events forced the Japanese Empire to surrender, bringing an

³ Nash, Gary B. *The American people: Creating a Nation and a Society Volume Two: since 1865*. (Third edition. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993), 894.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 894.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 895.

end to World War II. This surrender also marked the beginning of the arms race and the atomic age.⁶

1.4 The Cold War

The Cold War was an event that had been brewing for a long time before it actually started. However, during World War II, both the United States and the Soviet Union put away their disagreements to join forces and fight their common enemy. After the war ended, both parties entered a spiral of conflict based on their different views about the shape of the postwar world. At the beginning, most Americans probably saw the Russians as heroes for their victory at Stalingrad, which was the first surrender of the German army, and some of them even trusted in possible cooperation with the Soviet Union in the postwar years. But not long after the war, this trust quickly disappeared among the citizens of the United States. The presence of nuclear arsenals turned the situation into a grey zone between peace and military conflict. Instead of causing physical damage to each other, the two superpowers were undermining each other's morals and mental state.⁷

1.5 Technology

According to surveys, Americans listened to the radio for an average of over 4 hours a day during the war years. The major reason for this increase was probably the desire to stay up-to-date with news regarding the war. Most radio stations saw this as an opportunity and increased their news coverage to around 30% of their broadcasting time.⁸ The war wasn't just present in radio broadcasts; it became the main theme of American social life. This conflict was also reflected in music, with songs about love, separation from home and loved ones, and hopes for a better future. Movies depicted conflicts with Japan or German forces and their spies, and a whole new genre of film gained popularity: films produced by the United States Office of War Information. Some of these were documentaries realistically

⁶ Nash, Gary B. *The American people: Creating a Nation and a Society Volume Two: since 1865*. (Third edition. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993), 884.

⁷ Chin, Warren. "Technology, war and the state: past, present and future". *International Affairs* 95, no 4 (July 2019): 782.

⁸ Nash, Gary B. *The American people: Creating a Nation and a Society Volume Two: since 1865*. (Third edition. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993), 870.

depicting the war, but most of them were propaganda materials created with the intent of indoctrinating American soldiers and civilians with reasons for fighting the war.⁹

With America entering the Second World War, its economy underwent a shift that focused on military production, which were the main beneficiaries of pro-business policies. During this time, most Americans viewed movies by going to the cinema, as owning a television was a rare occurrence in the war years. However, after the war ended, the economy shifted back to a consumer focus, and ownership of televisions in American households skyrocketed. American citizens quickly increased their consumption of entertainment provided by the media, which became much more widespread.

1.6 The Second Red Scare

The Cold War and the Second Red Scare are closely linked. The term "Second Red Scare" describes the uneasy situation in American society after the Second World War, fueled by politics, society, and culture at the start of the Cold War. The First Red Scare, which happened after the First World War, was shorter and less intense compared to the second one. The Second Red Scare is also known as "McCarthyism," named after Joseph Raymond McCarthy, a Republican senator from Wisconsin who claimed that communists had infiltrated institutions in the United States. The American Communist Party was portrayed as a major threat to the American people, and mechanisms for finding and punishing Communists or their sympathizers were introduced at national, state, and local levels. The anticommunist frenzy ended tragically for Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were charged with espionage and executed. Many Americans were subjects of congressional committee hearings and FBI investigations, which often resulted in deportation, loss of passport, or unemployment.¹⁰

There are two main perspectives regarding this period of time. One highlights the danger of the Communist Party, while the other underscores the threat to democracy posed by the repression. In the 1990s, it was confirmed that more than 300 Americans had provided information to the Soviets during the Second World War, with government employees and

⁹ Nash, Gary B. *The American people: Creating a Nation and a Society Volume Two: since 1865*. (Third edition. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993), 871.

¹⁰ Storrs, Landon R. Y. "McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare" (July 2015), 2.

Project Manhattan technicians among them. This confirms that, although McCarthyism began as a populist tactic, the threat of espionage was indeed a real problem.¹¹

¹¹ Storrs, Landon R. Y. "McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare" (July 2015), 2.

2 SCIENCE FICTION

The aim of this chapter is to define the term “science fiction” and to closely describe its utopian and dystopian subgenres. Both these subgenres deal with alternative societies, worlds or future and often focus on technological, political and social themes.

2.1 Definition of science fiction

Although science fiction is one of the most popular genres of literature and culture in general, and even though most people have a general understanding of what can be expected of this genre, its definition is not unequivocal. There are certain elements that are typical of science fiction and help with its recognition, such as futuristic societies, traveling in space and time, or encounters with creatures from other worlds. Simply put, science fiction, in some aspect or aspects, differs from the reality we live in.¹²

This general characteristic of science fiction seems obvious, but despite agreeing upon concrete distinctions of this genre or its concrete difference from other forms of fantastic and imaginative literature, experts seemingly can't reach a consensus. Critics who came up with definitions were contradicted by other critics, or their definitions were modified. However, with all definitions, it is possible to find a text that is categorized as science fiction but doesn't meet the requirements of the concrete definition. This difficulty with clearly defining science fiction led to some of their definitions being as vague as “anything published as science fiction” or “anything marketed as science fiction.” Some even suggest that the author may decide to label or not label their book as science fiction due to the effect it might have on its sales.¹³

Science fiction is instructively described by The Oxford English Dictionary as “imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel”. This interpretation clearly separates it from realist fiction, which tries to authentically create a fictional world, like our reality. The realist author must provide a truthful representation of the world we are living in, whereas the science fiction author can let their imagination loose and create things unfamiliar to our reality. The elements of “postulated scientific discoveries” and “spectacular environmental change” may be depicted by phenomena such as time and space travel, or even by phenomena not characterized by the definition, such as

¹² Roberts, Adam. *Science Fiction The New Critical Idiom*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

robots, alternate histories, or realities. Thus, science fiction is defined by substantive difference or difference to the reader's world.¹⁴

The term science fiction gained large popularity during the 1920s, but some critics claim that the first science fiction publication was published much earlier. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is regarded as the first by several experts, as the story of a creature that came to life with the help of science. Some go back even further and choose Thomas More's *Utopia* or *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* written by Rudolf Erich Raspe. But these books were not, at their time, part of any genre, type, or species of literature called science fiction. They were called Gothic tales, *contes fantastiques* ("fantastic stories"), scientific romances, and other various terms. They were part of imaginative fiction, but it took until the 1920s that a family of literature called science fiction emerged. While science fiction can be correctly placed into imaginative literature, not all imaginative literature meets the requirements of science fiction. Science fiction can be understood as characterized by things that are not available to us at the moment, such as colonies on other planets, space travel, or technology that seems way superior to ours, however, they might be available one day. Imaginative fiction, such as fairytales, surreal fictions, or magic realism, contain differences between the fictional world and the reader's world but are not categorized as science fiction.¹⁵

Even with this definition, the distinction of science fiction might be tricky. When we compare Ian Watson's novel *The Jonah Kit* to Franz Kafka's short novel *Metamorphosis*, we might say that they both deal with the same phenomenon of transformation. Only Ian Watson's novel is classified as science fiction, while *Metamorphosis* is not. These distinctions are so complex that under certain circumstances, both writings can be labeled as science fiction. Some people might argue that science should be a broader category and include works such as Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, even though it is usually not considered one. Others might emphasize the differences between the works of these two writers.¹⁶

While *The Jonah Kit* contains a technological device that transfers human consciousness onto a whale, *Metamorphosis* does not explain how the protagonist turns into a giant insect. The transformation is not described and can be seen as physically impossible. Kafka probably doesn't describe the transformation process because it is not important in his writing. He writes about the suffering and alienation of the main character after his

¹⁴ Roberts, Adam. *Science Fiction The New Critical Idiom*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

transformation, and the process itself is inconsequential. *Metamorphosis* can be seen as unrealistic, while *The Jonah Kit* offers a reason for the transformation, which is rationalized through technology, with a machine reading brainwave patterns and transcribing them to another brain. Both books describe something that is unrealistic, and science fiction can be understood as writing that provides material or physical rationalization, which makes unreal things seem plausible. This phenomenon of being rationalized by material rather than supernatural becomes one of the key distinctions of the genre.¹⁷ According to this definition, we can certainly classify Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* as science fiction, because all the things that are unreal in our world are defined as advancements in science and technology. However, as mentioned before, many critics have come up with different definitions and seem to be unable to find common ground.

One of the reasons for these disagreements might be the fact that science fiction is so popular and encompasses so many texts that coming up with a definition that characterizes all of them might be impossible. Scott McCracken, in his work published in 1998, claims that in 1998, one of four books sold in the United States and one in ten in Britain was a science fiction work. In its humble beginnings, there were only a handful of books. Even in the Golden Age of Science Fiction, the number of these novels was only a couple of hundred. We can safely assume that nowadays, there are thousands of new science fiction books released every year, including traditional publishing, self-published, or indie titles.¹⁸

This complexity in science fiction developed throughout time. During the so-called "Golden Age," which started in the 1930s and lasted until the early 1960s, the genre was much more coherent. At that time, it was primarily texts about science and exploring the possibilities of science in the future. Hugo Gernsback, the author of many influential science fiction magazines at the time, for example, required stories to be based on scientific laws or new logical deductions from what was currently known to be submitted in his magazine.¹⁹

¹⁷ Roberts, Adam. *Science Fiction The New Critical Idiom*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3-4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

2.2 Short summary of the beginnings of science fiction during the 20th century

The roots of science fiction can be traced back to ancient mythology, medieval romance, Victorian gothic, and post-Renaissance fantasies and satires, but the genre is primarily a phenomenon of the 20th century. Initially, science fiction was popularized by aspects such as philosophical speculation and pure action adventure, as well as futurology and space opera.²⁰

Following World War I in America, science fiction evolved with the introduction of cheap pulp magazines and their science fiction short stories. After being adopted in Britain, it became even more popular in the 1930s and 1940s, with an emphasis on plausibility to differentiate it from fantasy literature. The 1940s and 1950s are known as the "Golden Age of Science Fiction," with many of the genre's most famous authors publishing during this time.²¹

In the 1960s, the "New Wave" of science fiction began in Britain and then spread to the US, focusing on issues of consciousness, subjectivity, hallucination, and the influence of technology on personal life. New experimental content also appeared in the magazines. During the 1970s, science fiction was used as a means for political goals, such as being adopted by the women's movement to show a desire for a more equal society, either by presenting an idealistic polemic or by extrapolating real examples of exploitation.²²

In the 1980s, science fiction returned to hard-technology science and cyberpunk, and continued to focus on the theme of self-consciousness with reality and fiction throughout the 1990s. Some of the stories included new matters of galactic exploration, attacks by aliens, and more. Each decade added something new to the genre, making it more complex and interesting, without replacing the old elements.²³

²⁰ Stockwell, Peter. *The Poetics of Science Fiction*. (New York: Longman, 2000), 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

3 UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

The aim of this chapter is to define the concepts of utopia and dystopia, and to provide information about some of the most renowned dystopian authors and their works. Utopian and dystopian fiction are two closely linked genres, but their concrete classification can be tricky because they often overlap, and what may be considered utopia for some could be dystopia for others.²⁴

3.1 The concept of utopia

The term "utopia" was first coined in 1516 by Thomas More, who combined the Greek words "eutopia" (good place) and "outopia" (no place). This term prompts us to consider whether a perfect world can ever truly exist.²⁵

"Utopia" was not originally intended to name a new genre of literature; rather, Thomas More was simply seeking a name for the fictional island in his book. Throughout history, the term "utopia" has been used by many authors and researchers with varying interests and sometimes even conflicting aims.²⁶ Utopia can be described as an imaginary society created by an author, which is better than any existing society, past or present, in one or more aspects. However, it is important to emphasize that people may view a utopian society differently based on their personal opinions and values. Thomas More was not the first author to explore utopianism, as a desire for a better life in a better society. He simply invented the term "utopia," which was later used to describe works published long before his time, such as Plato's "*Republic*."²⁷ If we compare these two works, they both use fiction as a tool for describing the author's perfect society, but their ideal societies are different. In "*Republic*," the society is ruled by a philosopher-king at the top, chosen for their intelligence and wisdom, followed by a strong class structure made up of Guardians, Auxiliaries, and Producers.²⁸ Meanwhile, Thomas More's "*Utopia*" presents a more democratic society where all people are equal and vote for their leaders.

²⁴ Panagopoulos, Nic. "Utopian/Dystopian Visions: Plato, Huxley, Orwell". *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* 8 no. 2 (March 2019): 23.

²⁵ Stockwell, Peter. *The Poetics of Science Fiction*. (New York: Longman, 2000), 185-186.

²⁶ Vieira, Fátima. *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature: Part 1 History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

²⁷ Ibid., 4-6.

²⁸ Panagopoulos, Nic. "Utopian/Dystopian Visions: Plato, Huxley, Orwell". *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* 8 no. 2 (March 2019): 23.

3.2 The concept of dystopia

Dystopia typically depicts a fictional world that is a more dreadful version of actual society. It can also be viewed as a criticism of our current society, displaying frightening situations that could potentially follow if mankind makes the wrong decisions. Dystopia was initially a reaction to the abuse of technology, current social and political issues, and the fact that previously presented utopias were often found to be subpar to reality.²⁹

The term "dystopia" was first used in 1868 by John Stuart Mill in a speech to describe the opposite of utopia. As a literary genre, dystopia does not accept the idea of a perfect society as achievable, but rather implies that humans have, always have had, and always will have flaws. These flaws should not result in the alternate realities depicted in dystopian works; the nightmarish societies portrayed in dystopian works should be just as unattainable as the perfect societies presented in utopia. Dystopian works present potential horrifying societies created to scare the reader and make them realize that the future could be bright or gloomy, depending on the decisions we make.³⁰

Some people may confuse dystopian literature with other genres that share some features, such as apocalyptic literature, as they both seem to present a tragic end to society and humanity. However, dystopian literature is different in that it usually contains a glimmer of hope for a better future. Dystopian authors share the same desire as utopian authors for a better future, but their delivery of this desire is different. They are reconciled with the reality that we will never live in a perfect society, but believe that we should aspire to create a better and more thriving society in the future.³¹

3.3 Ray Douglas Bradbury

Ray Douglas Bradbury was an American novelist, short-story writer, essayist, playwright, screenwriter, and poet who is still considered by many to be one of the best science fiction writers of all time. He was born in Waukegan, Illinois on August 22, 1920, and was

²⁹ Atasoy, Emrah. "Oppression and Control in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction". *The Journal of Academic Social Sciences* 9, no. 115 (April 2021): 65.

³⁰ Vieira, Fátima. *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature: Part 1 History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),16-17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

passionate about writing from a young age. He began his writing career at the age of eleven in 1931.³²

After moving to Los Angeles in 1934, Bradbury's career gradually turned toward science fiction. He joined the Los Angeles Science Fiction League in 1937 and with their assistance began publishing his own science fiction magazine, *Futura Fantasia*. After graduating from Los Angeles High School in 1938, he entered the workforce while continuing to hone his writing skills.³³

His first published short-story was *Pendulum*, co-authored and published in 1941 in the magazine *Super Science Stories*. *The Lake*, published in 1942, was Bradbury's first work to exhibit his characteristic writing style. In 1943, he became a full-time writer after quitting his job as a newspaper seller, allowing him to publish numerous short stories in the following years. In 1947, Ray married Marguerite McClure and published his first short story collection, *Dark Carnival*, which included some of his best works.³⁴

Most of his early short stories were inspired by his childhood experiences. However, in 1947, after publishing *Dark Carnival*, he began to explore a new genre of literature - philosophical science fiction. *The Martian Chronicles*, published in 1950, was inspired by Bradbury's own philosophical opinions and fears, which expressed his anxieties about nuclear conflict, foreign political powers, censorship, racism, and his yearning for a simpler life. His opinions were also reflected in *Dandelion Wine*, published in 1957, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, which was published five years later, where he emphasized the importance of authors writing based on their own experiences and opinions.³⁵

Throughout his career, Ray Bradbury was very active, releasing well over one hundred books. Especially in his fictional works, we can see an interesting progression, from *Green Town* representing his hometown of Waukegan, to the exploration of Mars and other planets. He went from childhood to adulthood, starting with reflecting on the past, continuing with observing the present, and then shifting towards Ray's visions about the future of humanity.³⁶ To emphasize how prolific author Ray Bradbury was, it's worth noting that many of his books remain in print to this day. Additionally, his work has been recognized with

³² Hiner, Kristi. *CliffsNotes on Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*. (New Jersey: Cliffs Notes, 2000), 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ Johnson, Wayne L. *Ray Bradbury*. (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co, 1980), 4-5.

various awards, including the National Institute of Arts and Letters award for *The Martian Chronicles* and the Commonwealth Club of California Gold Medal for *Fahrenheit 451*.³⁷

3.4 Other dystopian authors and their works

3.4.1 Aldous Huxley – *Brave New World*

Aldous Leonard Huxley was an English writer and intellectual born in Surrey, England on July 26, 1894, mostly known for his dystopian novel *Brave New World*. Initially a poet, Huxley joined the popular English imagist movement after the First World War. By 1921, he had shifted his focus almost exclusively to creative writing.³⁸

The novel *Brave New World* is set in the year 632 A.F. (After Ford), in a world that has been ravaged by a major war, leaving it in a state of chaos. This chaos has allowed a dictatorship to take control and rule with an iron fist. Marriage is forbidden, and people are artificially born through test-tube births. Society is divided into five castes, assigned to people based on their genetics at birth. Imaginative roles are reserved for the higher castes, while the lower castes essentially serve as a slave force, with the World Controllers possessing the real power. Although society lives in peace, it is achieved through conditioning the young and medicating the old, while keeping them distracted with sports and entertainment. The story follows multiple characters and mainly deals with their struggle to find individuality. It highlights the dangers of a utopian society that prefers efficiency over human relationships, which are still present in the outcast Savage Reservation.³⁹

3.4.2 George Orwell – *1984*

Eric Arthur Blair was an English writer and journalist born in 1903 in India but brought up in England. After attending public school, he joined the Imperial Police and served in Burma, where his experiences fueled his hatred of imperialism and sparked his sympathy for the poor and working class. Upon his return to England, he traveled north, where he encountered many miners, whose labor he considered the most valuable but also the most underpaid.

³⁷ Olander, Joseph D. *Ray Bradbury: Writers of the 21st century*. (New York: Taplinger Pub. Co, 1980), 214-215.

³⁸ Warren, Paul. *Cliffs Notes on Huxley's Brave New World & Brave New World Revisited*. (New Jersey: Cliffs Notes, 1965), 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Orwell found inspiration for his writing in the experiences and situations he encountered. However, his concrete opinions are not always easy to define. For example, it appears that he did not believe in the existence of God, but he thought that belief in God was important. He did not like capitalism, but he appreciated the culture it has produced, and so on.⁴⁰

1984 is a dystopian novel that depicts a future with a totalitarian system in control. The story follows Winston Smith, a member of the Party who starts to rebel against the system. The book mainly deals with the dangers of totalitarianism and highlights the importance of freedom and individual thought.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Colls, Robert. *George Orwell: English Rebel*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-2.

⁴¹ Meyers, Valerie. *George Orwell: Modern Novelists*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 114-116.

II. ANALYSIS

4 FAHRENHEIT 451

4.1 The Heart and the Salamander

The first part introduces the main character Guy Montag, who lives in twenty-fourth century and works as a fireman. Montag lives in a dystopian society, full of technological advancements, where people indulge in consumption of entertainment and propaganda through "parlor walls" – large screens present in almost every house. His work has nothing to do with firemen of our age, in *Fahrenheit 451* houses are build of fireproof materials, making the job obsolete, but firemen were given a new task – to burn books. Montag and other firemen obeyed the system and burnt books without questions.⁴²

Everyone is supposed to blindly listen, and do as he is told and he'll be happy in return. Books and new ideas are perceived as bad because they cause disagreements and unhappiness. For some time, Montag coaxes himself with this false premise of happiness, but it all comes crashing down when he meets Clarisse McClellan. She is his new teenage neighbor, whose curiosity makes Montag wonder, if he really is as happy, as he always thought of himself to be.⁴³

After his first encounter with Clarisse, and his wife's overdose event, Montag realizes that their lives are meaningless and starts questioning his life. This change in Montag is quickly recognized by Montag's superior captain Beatty who starts suspecting, that something is not right with Montag. Some time later, Montag is forced to question his life after two significant events – 1. witnessing a woman burn to death rather than letting go of her books 2. Clarisse gets killed by a speeding car. Montag later reveals to his wife that he stole some books and entertains the idea of reading them, but the mechanical hound, robotic dog-like creature used to hunt people who disobey, is already in his track.⁴⁴

4.2 The Sieve and the Sand

Montag's wife Mildred finds books useless and prefers her fictional family in the television, but Montag is fascinated with books, and yearns to find someone, from whom he can learn.

⁴² Hiner, Kristi. *CliffsNotes on Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*. (New Jersey: Cliffs Notes, 2000), 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-21.

He remembers encounter with retired English professor Faber and decides to visit him. Montag shares his feelings of meaning less and asks Faber with learning to understand the books he reads. The thought of next encounter with Captain Beatty terrifies Montag, but Faber gives him his invention – a two-way seashell radio, which will enable them to stay in contact.⁴⁵

When he returns home, he finds out that Mildred's friends Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles are visiting. Montag can't help himself, and even though Faber tries to calm him down, confronts them and criticizes their way of living.⁴⁶

At work, the terrifying encounter with Captain Beatty takes place, Faber keeps his word and supports Montag, but before Montag can respond the fire alarm starts ringing, and the firemen leave to go to their next burning destination, Montag later finds out, that his house is the next destination.⁴⁷

4.3 Burning Bright

Montag learns that it was his wife, Mildred who has called for the firemen to burn their house. Beatty is taunting and psychologically assaulting Montag, and forces him to burn his own house. When Beatty notices the two-way radio on Montag's ear and threatens to find with whom he is communicating, Montag has no choice but to kill Beatty with his flamethrower.⁴⁸

After successfully escaping the other firemen and the mechanical hound, which manages to injure his leg, Montag officially becomes a wanted criminal. Only person who can help him is Faber. With the mechanical hound on his track, Montag is encouraged by Faber to cross the river and join the other intellectual exiles, that live outside the city. The public can't be aware of Montag's successful escape and police's failure, so an innocent man is murdered by the mechanical hound and framed as Montag. After joining the outcast group led by Granger, they all have to move further south, to escape the get away from the raging conflict. In the end, the city is destroyed, and Granger, Montag and the rest of the community go back to offer their help.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Hiner, Kristi. *CliffsNotes on Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*. (New Jersey: Cliffs Notes, 2000), 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 42-44.

5 THE DANGER OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology in itself is not particularly dangerous or malevolent, it is a tool that can be used to accomplish positive things, as well as abused to reach havoc and vile outcomes. Dystopian literature often focuses on the case of abuse of technology, and *Fahrenheit 451* is no different, depicting both the personal level – overindulgence in the technology/media consumption, and on the governing body level – used to enforce the systems agenda.

Eventhough technology itself is not evil, some experts believe that the advancements in technology will naturally bring more problems to the human race, and point out examples of our own time. These events vary from the stock market flash crash of The Dow Jones Industrial Average to the usage of nuclear weapons.⁵⁰

5.1 The danger of technology in *Fahrenheit 451*

Technology plays an important role in *Fahrenheit 451*, technological advancements are ubiquitous and the whole society became reliant on it. But it becomes so widespread, that it replaces even things like human interactions.

The characters of Mildred, her friends, and probably majority of the fictional society meet requirements of what we call behavioral addiction, being compulsively addicted to something eventhough it has negative consequences. What is fascinating is that, the term behavioral addiction started getting traction mostly during the 1960s⁵¹, but Ray Bradbury probably saw the danger in technology that was rapidly growing in popularity around him.

5.2 Isolation and a loss of connection

Even with the risk of severe consequences, not all people will obey the systems agenda. These people with unbreakable spirit are seen as outcasts and forced to live in isolation, whether in relative or literal. Even in these seemingly hopeless moments, these outcasts continue to dream about a better world order, demonstrating the systems failure to eradicate free will.⁵²

⁵⁰ Wallach, Wendell. *A Dangerous Master: How to Keep Technology from Slipping Beyond Our Control*. (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 46-47.

⁵¹ Alter, Adam. *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 5.

⁵² Atasoy, Emrah. "Impediment to Knowledge and Imagination in Ray Bradbury's Dystopian Novel, *Fahrenheit 451*". *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 55, no. 1 (2015): 405.

5.2.1 Isolation and a loss of connection of Guy Montag

Throughout the book, Guy Montag gradually realizes, that his relationship with Mildred is very superficial and meaningless. It can be observed in the instance of the overdose event, husband and wife are unable to communicate, if it was an unsuccessful suicide attempt or an accident, displaying that even though being in relationship and living in one household, Montag and Mildred are in fact very distant, almost like complete strangers.

Montag doesn't experience only the isolation in his personal relationships, but his whole regard for the society as a whole drastically shifts. He turns from a close minded fireman, amenable worker blindly listening to orders and enforcing governments interests, to free thinker, who questions his whole existence and begins seeking his own truth. These actions don't go unnoticed and he quickly turns into an outcast and a wanted man.

5.2.2 Isolation and a loss of connection of Clarisse McClellan

Clarisse McClellan is a young teenager, who describes herself as crazy, crazy not meaning mentally ill, but curious, interested in gaining knowledge, and enjoying the simple things about life.⁵³ These traits are seen as weird and even dangerous, Clarisse is mostly perceived by others as unique or weird. Clarisse doesn't face the same level of isolation as other rebelling members of the society, but to an extent her uniqueness would probably make it harder to fit in and almost impossible to find like-minded friends.

The book does not necessarily imply, that Clarisse is a loner without friends, rather the opposite as she enjoys random interactions with strangers and asking them questions. Even when they disagree on very important aspects of life, as was the case with Montag when they first encountered each other. Clarisse is probably feeling some sense of isolation, even though she tries to make the most of her life, as free-thinkers are not welcomed in the fictional society.

5.2.3 Isolation and a loss of connection of the other characters

The other outcasts, including Faber and the intellectual group lead by Granger, face more severe case of lost connection and being discharged from the society. They had to resort to living in hiding to avoid persecution by the authorities. Their isolation is further exacerbated

⁵³ Atasoy, Emrah. "Impediment to Knowledge and Imagination in Ray Bradbury's Dystopian Novel, Fahrenheit 451". *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 55, no. 1 (2015): 406.

by the technology used to enforce the censorship such as the Mechanical Hound or the Salamanders.

5.3 Apathy

Apathy is a theme present in *Fahrenheit 451* throughout the whole story, whether it is apathy for human life, more precisely it's loss, apathy to loss of knowledge, or the lack of interest in thinking, finding the truth and asking questions.

5.3.1 Indifference to death

There are many cases of death, or near-death experience in *Fahrenheit 451*, and reaction of other people to them is almost always indifferent, like it's something normal, it happens all the time. When Mildred almost overdoses on the tranquilizers, the two technicians that come to pump her stomach act very routinely. It is never directly mentioned, but we can assume that suicide is a common phenomenon in the society depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*.

Captain Beatty is a very complex character, who in conversation with Montag mentions, that death is not really mourned in their society.⁵⁴ In the case of the average brainwashed person, being negligent to death is expected, however in Beatty's stance to life and death is rather interesting. He is a rather intelligent individual, possessing knowledge about many topics and even quoting from some of the books. It might be possible, that Captain Beatty is going through internal struggle much like Montag, but his relationship to wisdom is different. After enforcing the censorship throughout his whole life, he might have decided to provoke Montag to kill him with flamethrower, as he saw it as the only way out.

5.3.2 Apathy to reality

Mildred is the perfect representation of the fictional society's average citizen. She is so distracted with meaningless things and consumption of entertainment, that she almost completely ignores the real world and relationships around her. Her days are filled mainly with consumption of entertainment and fastly driving a car to keep herself distracted. She dissociates herself from her real feelings and prefers her fictional family, where she plays a

⁵⁴ Atasoy, Emrah. "Impediment to Knowledge and Imagination in Ray Bradbury's Dystopian Novel, *Fahrenheit 451*". *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 55, no. 1 (2015): 25.

scripted role, over her family with Montag. Mildred surrounds herself with like-minded shallow and simple people such as Clara Phelps and Ann Bowles.⁵⁵

5.4 Control

Control is one of the main themes of *Fahrenheit 451*, and technology is one of the main tools, that helps the government to stay in control. Educated, informed and thinking citizens are not wanted, the ideal citizen is one that does what he is told, and doesn't question, or even dares to have his own opinion. Mindless society that has no access to books chooses to indulge in entertainment through television, seashell radio, gossip, music, sports and fast cars as a way to distract themselves.⁵⁶ Even though these people seem happy, we can assume it's only because they keep themselves so distracted, that they don't even have time to think and realise, that their lives are shallow and nonsensical. The society as a whole can be seen as evil by choice in *Fahrenheit 451*, but generalising the whole society is not an easy task. It is important to mention, that the society is not making any decisions, but rather being manipulated and indoctrinated by the government, which possesses all the power. The society is witnessing evil deeds and being indifferent to them, someone might make a statement, that being indifferent to evil is inherently being evil too. However it is important to emphasize, that the government is doing their best to manipulate the public, thus probably making them unable to distinguish between what is good and what is bad. Most of the society can in fact be good people, that would need just one small impulse, in Montag's case it was talking to Clarisse, and they might realise what is happening around them and rebel against the system.

The former English professor Faber himself mentions, that the books are plainly just the form that is used to deliver the message. The wisdom that was in the past spread through books could be shared through the parlor walls, but are deliberately not.⁵⁷ However, this control is not only present in entertainment, people are exposed to the government propaganda in all spheres of their life from a very young age. Children come into contact with technology as soon as nursery school. And it accompanies them through their whole academic career. It is not directly mentioned if children are taught by teachers or learn from

⁵⁵Hiner, Kristi. *CliffsNotes on Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*. (New Jersey: Cliffs Notes, 2000), 57.

⁵⁶ Abootalebi, Hassan. "The Omnipresence of Television and the Ascendancy of Surveillance/Sousveillance in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*". *K@ta: a biannual publication on the study of language and literature* 19, no. 1 (2017): 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

only from display, but it is clear that technology plays a big role in the educational system. And because the governments control what is studied in schools, the students are conditioned to be the mindless, shallow and submissive citizens, the government wants.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Abootalebi, Hassan. "The Omnipresence of Television and the Ascendancy of Surveillance/Sousveillance in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451". *K@ta: a biannual publication on the study of language and literature* 19, no. 1 (2017): 12.

6 THE DANGER OF MASS MEDIA

Mass media are not very dangerous by itself, according to some experts such as Joseph Klapper, mass media can't be single-handedly used to sway the opinions of people, as they tend to follow media that alligns with their ideologies. Mass media can be simply seen as one of the many phenomem that all merge together to create our views and opinions.⁵⁹

But not all experts see mass media so innocuous, Megan Hopper highlights the degree, to which we get affected by advertising, more precisely the impact it has on our perceiving of things such as a beauty.⁶⁰ Mass media can certainly have an impact on the small choices we make, but it can be questioned if they are able to change who we are, based on its contents.

What is the evillest aspect of mass media is that it thrives on human attention and thus aims to consume as much human time as possible, whether is it solely for the purpose of being successful or the purpose of monetisation. By consuming media, we become the product of their advertising in exchange for some sort of information or entertainment. But all mass media is not created equal, some might be beneficial, while others are pure distractions and a waste of time.⁶¹

6.1 The example of Russia

The use of mass media as a tool for propaganda and the spread of agenda is not only a topic in scientific literature, but is also evident in various real-world examples, such as Russia. In fact, Vladimir Putin himself views media as more of a tool than an institution.⁶²

The situation that arose after the revolution in Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014-2015 is a prime example of the use of censorship and propaganda. This event led to a deepening divide between Russia and the West. In response, Russia faced an outflow of capital and sanctions and utilized censorship and propaganda tools. Censorship was implemented to restrict the flow of information about the deteriorating macroeconomic situation, while propaganda was used to justify Russia's actions.⁶³

⁵⁹ Klapper, Joseph T. *Effects of Mass Communication*. (New York: Free Press, 1969), 4-6.

⁶⁰ Hopper, Megan K. *Ethical Problems in Mass Media*. (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2020), 3.

⁶¹ Wu, Tim. *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*. (New York: Knopf, 2016), 1-3.

⁶² Melnikov, Nikita. "Censorship, Propaganda, and Political Popularity: Evidence from "Russia" (February 2019): 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3.

In his article, Nikita Melnikov analyzed the link between the amount of propaganda in Russian media, media popularity, and the impact of propaganda on audience opinion. He concluded that an increase in censorship or propaganda led to greater popularity for Vladimir Putin and the United Russia party. However, this increase in popularity was not observed in regions with high internet penetration. This momentary increase in popularity faded away, and popularity levels returned to their original levels after 2-3 weeks if no further action was taken to manipulate the popularity levels. Furthermore, these tools of propaganda and censorship led to lower consumption of media, which returned to its original level after a week when the amount of censorship and propaganda was reduced.⁶⁴

It can be deduced that even in our modern age, propaganda and censorship can be effectively used for manipulation. However, their efficiency declines with an increase in the number of information sources available to people. These tools are particularly effective in countries such as Russia, where the government's control of media and information creates an environment in which dissenting voices are suppressed, and alternative viewpoints are censored.

6.2 The danger of mass media in *Fahrenheit 451*

The problem with mass media in *Fahrenheit 451* is that the oppressive system controls everything. By manipulating every variable, it can easily indoctrinate unsuspecting citizens. The main medium of mass communication in the book is television, which is used as a tool for propaganda and endless entertainment. Watching TV programs is one of the primary ways people spend their time in this fictional society. This media consumption distracts people from the world around them, reinforces consumerism, and enforces conformity to societal norms. Mass media is used as a tool of censorship, restricting the free flow of information and spreading the systems agenda.

⁶⁴ Melnikov, Nikita. "Censorship, Propaganda, and Political Popularity: Evidence from "Russia" (February 2019): 5.

6.3 No self-reliance

The absence of critical thinking and self-reliance is intertwined in the fictional society portrayed in *Fahrenheit 451*. Throughout the novel, Guy Montag transforms from a non-self-reliant person into a free-minded individual. He progresses from blindly following orders without questioning them to searching for his own truth and asking questions.

This loss of self-reliance is exemplified by the ban on books, which pose a threat to the system by encouraging individuality and critical thinking. The system is able to restrict access to information and ideas by banning books, which disables people's ability to form opinions and make decisions. Moreover, the loss of self-reliance is reinforced by the consumption of media. People spend their days passively consuming, taking in the information and values that are supplemented to them through media. However, this consumption leads to a loss of active engagement with the world around them and a lack of responsibility for one's life.

6.4 The decline of culture and thought

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the ban on books leads to a loss of the depth and diversity of society's culture. The replacement of literature with shallow entertainment and sports fails to fulfill the needs of a complex society. The previous acceptance and consumption of books now contrasts with their prohibition, and the transmission of messages that benefit the oppressive regime. This cultural shift towards conformity contributes significantly to the decline of critical thinking.⁶⁵

It is important to emphasize, that even with the system is pushing its agenda, people should still be able to think for themselves. Bradbury didn't want to criticize technology, but rather its misuse and a lack of thought. This can be supported by the fact, that even the intellectuals in *Fahrenheit 451*, own and use technology. Professor Faber owns a small television, and even the exiled intellectuals have access to technology, however they use it soberly and don't let the propaganda poison their mind.⁶⁶ This highlights the importance of questioning the authorities, and instead of accepting all the information that is fed to us on its face value, thinking about it.

⁶⁵ McGiveron, Rafeeq O. "What 'Carried the Trick'?: Mass Exploitation and the Decline of Thought in Ray Bradbury's 'Fahrenheit' 451". *Extrapolation* 37, no. 3 (1996): 245.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 245-246.

Eventough the exploiters themselves are guilty of the decline of thought, the general population can be seen as guilty as the exploiters, as they are willingly letting themselves be exploited.⁶⁷ But it is also important to note, that eventhough the citizens are willingly letting themselves to be exploited, that not getting exploited, or even realising than you are being exploited is not an easy task, part of the general public probably never experienced anything else than this propaganda and hedonistic values being encouraged.

⁶⁷ McGiveron, Rafeeq O. "What "Carried the Trick"?: Mass Exploitation and the Decline of Thought in Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit" 451". *Extrapolation* 37, no. 3 (1996): 246-247.

CONCLUSION

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* presents a cautionary tale about the wrong usage of technology and mass media, in a society that prefers entertainment and hedonistic pleasures over wisdom and critical thinking. The novel depicts, how limiting free speech and restraining information can lead to a society, that lacks empathy, individuality and creativity. Through the journey of the main character, Guy Montag, Ray Bradbury highlights that the pursuit of wisdom is necessary for a man to have a meaningful life.

This novel can also be seen as a reminder that responsible use of technology and media is necessary if we want to move towards a bright future. What is terrifying is that things such as social media censorship and the banning of certain books in schools and libraries are certainly bringing us closer to the fictional realities described in dystopian works, rather than moving away from them. It is necessary for us to reflect upon works such as *Fahrenheit 451* to prevent the dystopian future it warns about.

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