



Universidad
Zaragoza

Trabajo Fin de Grado

Resisting the Digital Embers: Literature against
Alienation in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

Autor/es

Sara Galeano Ramírez

Director/es

María Esther Muñoz González

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
2023

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyse how the suppression of thought and the mental alienation in Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*, highlight literature as an element of resistance to the current digital age and government mind control over citizens. The analysis has been done by selecting direct quotes from the book that exemplify each of the themes through the most distinctive characters of the novel, such as the protagonist, Montag, or her wife, Mildred, among others. The conclusions drawn from the analysis show the important role of the habit of reading as it is capable of opening the mind and helping to develop logical and critical thinking. It gets us away from ignorance, mind control, and the replacement of our intellectual capacities by the overwhelming use of technological devices.

Key words: Ray Bradbury, fire, dystopia, censorship, totalitarianism, books, alienation, Montag, Clarisse, Mildred.

Resumen: El objetivo de este trabajo de fin de grado es analizar cómo la supresión de pensamiento y la alienación mental en la novela de Ray Bradbury *Fahrenheit 451*, resaltan a la literatura como un elemento de resistencia frente a la era digital actual y el control mental de los gobiernos sobre los ciudadanos. El análisis se ha hecho seleccionando citas directas del libro que ejemplifican cada uno de los temas a través de los personajes más característicos de la novela, como el protagonista, Montag, o su esposa, Mildred, entre otros. Las conclusiones extraídas gracias al análisis muestran el importante papel que tiene el hábito de lectura ya que es capaz de abrir la mente y ayudar a desarrollar un pensamiento lógico y crítico. Este nos aleja de la ignorancia, del control mental, y de la sustitución de nuestras capacidades intelectuales por el uso abrumador de aparatos tecnológicos.

Palabras clave: Ray Bradbury, fuego, distopía, censura, totalitarismo, libros, alienación, Montag, Clarisse, Mildred.

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Life and works	7
3. Brief historical context	8
4. Theoretical framework	10
5. Analysis	12
5.1 Repression of thought through censorship.....	12
5.2 Mental alienation.....	16
5.3 The Resistance of Literature against the Prohibition of Culture and the Overuse of Technology	21
6. Conclusion	25
7. Works Cited	28

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), written by Ray Bradbury, which presents a terrifying vision of a society in the future in which the press is systematically eliminated, and the love of screens suffocates critical thinking. In the society depicted in the book, the firemen in charge of burning books play a contradictory role, as they simultaneously ignite the flames and extinguish the sparks of knowledge. Nevertheless, in this dark atmosphere, a subversive current emerges: the opposition of literature to the incendiary impulses of conformity and alienation. After embarking on a journey through the pages of the novel, the aim of this dissertation is to explore the various ways in which literature resists the digital embers that threaten to swallow not only our minds but also our souls. Literature in the very dystopian society of the book as well as in today's society, acts in some way as a source of resistance and redemption against digital media.

The enduring power of literature to captivate, challenge, and connect with people and the world remains a beacon of hope in an age totally dominated by screens, algorithms, and instant gratification. The dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* serves as both a cautionary tale and a reminder of how resilient human thought and the written word can be in the face of technology hegemony. Nowadays, the study of this work takes on renewed importance as we find ourselves in a time when technology and everything related to it controls the vast majority of individuals who make up society. In one way or another, we are absorbed by technology, and this consumes all our attention and fragments our identity, distancing us more and more from the very essence of our humanity.

Fahrenheit 451 may reflect the author's concerns about thought control and conformism at a time when freedom of thought could result in both social and economic marginalization. This novel develops the idea of a short tale by Ray Bradbury, *Bright Phoenix*, first published in 1947. It was later published in a revised form in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1963. An expanded version of the premise was published under the title of *The Fireman* in 1951 (Gale, 2017, p. 1).

The novel is divided into three different parts: "The Hearth and The Salamander", "The Sieve and The Sand" and "Burning Bright". Thus, in order to get a deeper understanding of the book's thematic elements, it is best to discuss about the plot of each of these individually. "The Hearth and The Salamander" is the opening part of the work and is therefore in charge of gradually introducing the readers to the plot and also presenting the characters that are going to make up the story. In this first part, we meet Guy Montag, the main character, who dedicates his life to the fire department and to burning books. As mentioned above, in the society depicted in this novel the firemen are not in charge of extinguishing fires but they themselves provoke them by burning books. Any activity related to books and reading is totally forbidden and hence considered a crime. This is the case because the State has established it as the obliged norm. Montag is a fireman who does his job to the letter without even stopping to think for a second whether what he is doing is right or not. He follows orders and that is all. In this part, we discover how Mildred, the protagonist's wife, is about to die after taking a huge amount of sleeping pills. This is presented to readers as an apparent suicide attempt, or perhaps it is simply that Mildred's obvious mental alienation did not allow her to remember that she had already taken a pill resulting in her repeatedly taking additional doses. Also worth mentioning is the appearance of Clarisse McClellan in Montag's life, a teenage girl completely different from anyone he had met before

(Bloom, 2007, p. 16-39). This girl seems to think and question the world, but this topic will be addressed in subsequent sections of this TFG.

In “The Sieve and The Sand”, Montag saves some books from being fired and decides to start reading them aloud at home in front of his wife. Nevertheless, she is reluctant to collaborate with him as she is fully aware of the dangers of such activities and prefers to remain in her comfort and apparent “happiness”. Mildred only cares about the programming on the walls, as television; and the characters that appear on the different programs, as her relatives. The “relatives” are just characters in the programmes that Mildred watches, but they are not her family at all, even if she calls them that. Televisions in this society have the option of setting your name so that the characters address you directly. That is why Mildred feels she has a real family relationship with these fictional characters. Montag remembers meeting a former professor named Faber and believes that he is the one who can help him understand books and logical thinking. Captain Beatty is the chief of the fire brigade and hence the one who commands our protagonist. He is the one who makes sure that all the books are burned and destroyed, but ironically, he is the one who knows the most about them and spends most of the novel quoting from different books. Beatty tries to influence Montag throughout the novel by trying to make it clear to him that books only bring about unhappiness and trouble. At the end of this passage, the alarm sounds but Montag’s surprise when they arrive at the place where they are to burn books is that it is his own house.

“Burning Bright” is the last part, and as stated by Bloom, its name is “a reference to a famous if not strictly relevant poem, *The Tyger*, by William Blake” (2007, p. 39-40).

Beatty and Montag end up in front of Montag's house and see how Mildred flees, as she is the one who has denounced her husband. The protagonist is forced to burn his own house and ultimately turns Beatty to ashes. He then escapes thanks to Faber's help and joins a group of bookish people, led by Granger, who burn books after reading them in order to avoid getting into trouble. Finally, the city is bombed by enemy Jets, leaving only Montag and the forest intellectuals as the only survivors.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine how the suppression of thought and the resultant mental alienation enhance the capacity of literature to resist the challenges posed by today's digital age and government control. The analysis will be done by close reading and analysis of some specific passages from the novel where the different characters are shown to represent each of the themes. The themes of repression of thought through censorship, mental alienation, and literature's struggle against the current digital age and government control over people will be explored. These themes are central to conveying the meaning of the novel and creating the dystopian atmosphere of a society in which citizens are surrounded by restricted and controlled information, where reading activities are prohibited, and individuality is suppressed in favor of uniformity. In this society, the ban on reading condemns the inhabitants who blindly follow the rules to a state of ignorance and lack of culture. This is a serious matter as it makes them very easy to manipulate and control at the whim of the state. A society where critical thinking is forbidden and reading is illegal is destined to obey any order, no matter how absurd, without questioning it.

2. Life and works

Ray Douglas Bradbury (born August 22, 1920, Waukegan, Illinois, U.S.- died June 5, 2012, Los Angeles California) was an American writer known chiefly for his imaginative short tales and fantastical books, characterized because he blended a poetic language with feelings of nostalgia for his childhood, societal critique, and knowledge of the perils of unrestrained technology (Gregersen, 2023, n.p).

Although his father worked for a telephone company, there was already a family history of people related to reading and the world of letters. Both his great-grandfather and grandfather dedicated their lives to working for the press which may have influenced Bradbury to develop his interest in libraries and especially in writing (Bloom, 2007, p. 9).

Bradbury has traditionally been regarded as a science fiction author, the fact that his works have been translated into nearly all languages and have appeared on stage, screen, or in graphic media like comics suggests that the narrative power of Bradbury's works has sufficient height to have endured over time in the face of fads and trends and to still connect with readers of all ages and cultures, especially with young people of spirit, like him. From a very early age, he was drawn to the world of reading and as a result of this, he developed an incredible imagination that provoked eerie daytime fantasies and terrifying nightmares that he would later capture in his work. Bradbury claimed during his lifetime that libraries "raised him" since he spent a large part of his whole life reading tirelessly in them. These places were like a refuge for him and there he found everything and more of what he needed (Cruzado, 2012, p. 189).

Fahrenheit 451 (1953) is undoubtedly one of Ray Bradbury's masterpieces, but it is by no means the only one. This author is also recognized for works such as *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) a collection of stories that recounts the colonization of Mars by mankind with the goal of establishing a comfortable civilization on the Red Planet but faces difficulties with the Martians due to disease and lack of respect for their culture. *The Illustrated Man* (1951) alludes to another of his best-known works and the plot revolves around the character that gives the work its name and an unidentified narrator. The Illustrated Man's body is full of tattoos, but they are not normal ones, they come to life and tell stories. Among his outstanding writings, *Pillar of Fire and Other Plays* (1975) also deserves to be included, as it tells the story of an individual who ends up being destroyed by his own obsession, which reminds us of the protagonist of *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag (Reuters, 2012, n.p).

3. Brief historical context

To better understand this and any literary work it is important to look at the context in which any literary artifact was written and what the author's situation was. Although *Fahrenheit 452* places its actions in an undetermined future, this may have been Ray Bradbury's vision of how the world was going to be at a later time due to the different conditions that were going on around him. It was not only the economic issues, but also the political and social factors that led Bradbury to have such a pessimistic viewpoint regarding the future outlook of society and the world.

The Cold War, which lasted from 1947 to 1991 and was further exacerbated by the Korean War (1950-1953), provided the backdrop for the creation of *Fahrenheit 451*. Between 1950 and 1952, Senator Joseph McCarthy used these military disputes as an excuse to attack communists and promote a harsh system of denunciations that may have echoes in Ray Bradbury's writings. For example, the society he describes in

Fahrenheit 451 is threatened by a totalitarian government ruled by censorship and oppression. People are not even masters of their own will, let alone their own lives, they just obey. At first, McCarthyism obviously referred to the “witch hunt” that began with Senator McCarthy. However, the term ceased to refer only to him since that would be limiting and began to be seen “as the movement to eliminate communism from American life during the late 1940s and 1950s, [...] a phenomenon that dominated American politics for nearly a decade and one that, despite its importance, is only beginning to be explored” (Schrecker, 1988, p. 197). Furthermore, it is important to note that television was incorporated into U.S. households in the 1950s and became more of a component of the family, as it can be seen in *Fahrenheit 451* mainly through the character of Montag’s wife, Mildred (Cruzado, 2012, p. 197).

In addition to television, there are several references to other technological devices, such as ATMs. This is surprising because it was not until 1967 that the first ATM was installed (Kuvasz, 2023, n.p) and *Fahrenheit 451* was published years earlier, in 1953. That is why, with this novel, Ray Bradbury acted as a kind of visionary and at the same time tried to warn future generations. It seems that he saw the emergence of technology as a threat to the world, at least intellectually and socially. Bradbury invites us to question ourselves about freedom, censorship, control and the excessive use and power of technology in our societies.

There is a reader’s guide to *Fahrenheit 451* written by David Kipen, Campbell Irving, and Erika Koss of the National Endowment for the Arts. This reader’s guide includes an interview with Ray Bradbury by Dana Gioia in which he reveals some of the thematic inspirations for writing the novel. The idea of book burning did not appear in Ray Bradbury’s head out of nowhere. His great influence for it was the burning of

books in the streets of Berlin at the hands of the Führer, i.e., Hitler. This happened when the author was only 15 years old, so he grew up with such events. He was also aware of what happened in Alexandria and believed that if it could have happened in both Berlin and Alexandria, it could happen somewhere in the future, as he himself admitted in the interview (2006, p. 8).

4. Theoretical framework

According to Maribel Cruzado, the word “dystopia”, which is based on the term “utopia” coined by Thomas More, is credited to philosopher John Stuart Mill. He was a thinker belonging to the Classical School of the late 18th century. While utopia, which means “a place that does not exist” or “no-place”, alludes to an ideal society, dystopia denotes a negative society. The term “negative society” could describe a society ruled by a totalitarian leader whose rules are characterized by tyranny and rigidity, as well as the restriction of citizen’s freedoms. It is true that respecting the viewpoint of the person expressing it is important in order to establish this criterion, as history has provided examples of societies that were once regarded as utopian but over time have become dystopian because their social model was incompatible with current ethics and morals (2012, p. 240). In other words, the concept “dystopia” comes from the word “utopia”. A utopia represents paradise or an idyllic society where everyone lives in peace and harmony. A dystopia could be defined as the loss of that perfect society of utopia and the emergence of discord between inhabitants and government.

Initially, it seems that the terms utopia and dystopia are synchronized. However, if “dystopia” is the opposite of utopia, portraying a society that the author finds inferior or problematic, consequently “utopia” should be the portrayal of an idealized society that

the author regards as superior to their existing society. But when we consider that there are many different meanings of the word utopia and that the concept is not only restricted to literature, things, then become complicated (Claeys, 2013, p. 14).

Moreover, in the words of Harold Bloom in his *Guide of Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*:

“Dystopia” is an imaginary state or civilization in which true happiness is impossible. Dystopias are usually caricatures of the writer's own society, set in a near future in which the negative qualities the writer perceives in the present are permitted to run amok, so that the representation he creates exemplifies the consequences of a current set of circumstances out to their logical conclusion. (2007, p. 16)

Focusing on the particular case of *Fahrenheit 451*, it is the image Bradbury projected in his mind of what the world, and therefore society, was to become.

The society depicted in *Fahrenheit 451* is under the rule of a totalitarian government. According to Hannah Arendt, totalitarianism is a form of social indoctrination that draws both the elite and the general public due to the very nature of totalitarianism. Propaganda portrays the regime as a type of government that wants to see change and the freedom of people in order to better the nation, but behind these claims lies nothing but terror (1998, p. 554). In other words, totalitarianism is a political system that slowly creeps into people's mind and sells an image of change and promises of happiness, when all it wants is to have the total control over its people and their lives.

5. Analysis

5.1 Repression of thought through censorship

The novel opens with a sentence that from the very beginning gives a glimpse of what Montag is like before his great change: “It was a pleasure to burn. It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed” (Bradbury, p. 4). Montag represents the fireman of his society, i.e., the people who are in charge of persecuting those who read and burn their books. The protagonist feels power and satisfaction in his work, at least in an apparent way. Fire is all-consuming and he is part of the fire that burns everything and everyone who violates the ban on reading. This quotation shows that the world in which this character lives is cold, empty, and lacks depth when it comes to thoughts and feelings. Thinking is considered a bad activity and the vast majority follow absurd orders without knowledge. Burning books is a job but also a hobby that replaces “normal” entertainment such as reading.

In contrast to Montag’s conformism, Clarisse is a character very different from the others that does not fit in *Fahrenheit’s* society, she is a young girl full of life and concerns that make her question the prohibitions and norms she is forced to abide. She loves nature since she can observe as well as feel it, and she also likes to think a lot about life. Her individuality sets her apart from her homogenized society, but the other obedient citizens mistakenly label her as mentally ill and that is why she has to go to a psychiatrist: “I’ve got to go see my psychiatrist now. They make me go...The psychiatrist says I’m a regular onion. I keep him busy peeling away the layers...they want to know what I do with all my time. I tell them that I just sit and think. But I won’t tell them what” (Bradbury, p. 20). “They” force her to go to see the psychiatrist. “They”

seems to refer to the people who form the totalitarian government in her dystopian world. These persons want to mentally control Clarisse for not following the pattern of the society they want to create; the government want to silence and subjugate her to make her the same as everyone else. This type of government seeks to have a uniform society in order to manipulate it. Sending Clarisse to a psychiatrist is a way of censoring her and uncovering everything she and her family, who are being targeted, do.

Clarisse is a character who appears at the beginning of the novel and quickly disappears. From one moment to the next, Montag never sees Clarisse again. It is as if she has been swallowed up by the earth. Her sudden absence is a mystery and as the story progresses, Montag finds out that Clarisse has been killed by a car accident. It is quite a coincidence that the very character who least fit in with society and most questioned its norms disappears without a trace and with this rumour unconfirmed. Perhaps the hit-and-run affair is simply a cover to hide the fact that it was the government that made her disappear because of her disobedience. That is the price paid by those like Clarisse who refuse to “join the masses”.

In *Fahrenheit*'s society, schools teach their students a lot of trivial and meaningless things to divert their attention from the really important aspects of life. They are made to believe that books and any activity related to thinking are unimportant issues that should be eliminated altogether. Clarisse uses a metaphor in order to describe how they teach: “It’s a lot of funnels and a lot of water poured down the spout and out the bottom, and them telling us it’s wine when it’s not” (Bradbury, p. 27). Students are taught irrelevant content and made to think that they are learning when they are not. Through this kind of education, the government is able to create the uneducated and

ignorant society it so desires, to order things upon them without being questioned. However, Clarisse seems to be the only one to realize the truth.

Reading and knowledge make citizens more educated and informed about what is going on around them. Reading helps to open the mind and transport it to the places where the diverse stories take place, thus developing the imagination. There are books for all kinds of tastes and individuals, each book could be a person and they are all different from each other. In the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, diversity of any type is frightening. What the State seek is for everyone to be the same, as it is clearly expressed by Captain Beatty: “We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal” (Bradbury, p. 55). If no one thinks and no one asks questions, everyone is happy, according to the government. Sometimes having a lot of information about certain issues makes us a bit unhappy or worries us, but at least we are aware of the world we live in and what we want or do not want to do. The world in which the novel takes place is quite different from this, people do not know anything and do not want to know anything either, at least not the vast majority. All this is thanks to the censorship to which they are subjected by the ones who conform to the government, which only wants to turn its subjects into sheep that bleat only when they order them to do so. That is why they prohibit any kind of activity that activates the brain and the mind.

Knowledge and intellectual pursuits such as thinking are seen as activities that lead to feelings of unhappiness and unrest in *Fahrenheit 451*. Captain Beatty is a faithful supporter and enforcer of government rules and believes as well as blindly preaches their convictions. This character has so internalized censorship and control that

he tries to convey this conviction to other weak-minded characters without knowing why he is doing so. Captain Beatty wants people to believe that he is on the good side of things, the side that ban books since they want everyone to be equal and happy: “We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought” (Bradbury, p. 59). Nevertheless, the reality is quite different from that. Behind this desire for everyone to be equal and happy lies a society subjected to censorship and fear. With these words, Captain Beatty highlights the important role of firefighters in this “mission”.

Although Montag’s country has won two atomic wars, the danger of a new one is undeniable. That country seems to be the United States of America, as the author is from there and the historical and especially political context of the book takes place there. Ray Bradbury wrote the book at a time characterized by war, insecurity, and censorship. The Cold War and the Korean War, as well as the oppression of Senator McCarthy, are very present in the story as the atmosphere is one of conflict and censorship. In *Fahrenheit*’s country, therefore in its society, people have a lot of money and enjoy themselves at home most of the time. This can be a source of envy for other countries in the world. In these other places, it seems that people work hard and lack material goods: “Is it true, the world works hard, and we play? Is that why we’re hated so much?” (Bradbury, p. 70). As the books are forbidden, the citizens of the protagonist’s country are wholly closed-minded and do not know how to think or what to think about. They are not able to correct the mistakes they have already made and to see the diverse points of view that exist outside the society they know, and think is the only correct one. This whole situation would change if the society in which Montag lives were not subjugated by the government and the ban on books did not exist,

because then they could open and broaden their minds and see things from a different perspective.

Professor Faber's way of thinking make it clear where Captain Beatty stands in the System. Beatty belongs to the great majority, to those who blindly follow the rules and also to those who enforce them, since he is the chief of the Fire Brigade: "But remember that the Captain belongs to the most dangerous enemy to truth and freedom, the solid unmoving cattle of the majority. Oh God , the terrible tyranny of the majority" (Bradbury, p. 104). Captain Beatty is one of those who preaches lies and forbids any intellectual activity. He is one of the people who enforces the rules to the letter and anyone who dares to question him ends up in a really bad way. This society is not free at all, and the information passed on to them is either false or very restricted, as Professor Faber rightly expresses when he talks about Beatty. The compliant people who play by the rules and follow the government without realizing how much they are being cheated, make up the vast majority and that is why it is so difficult to find people who want to change the situation and achieve absolute freedom through the truth. Faber denounces the uniformity that Beatty advocates. Instead, Professor Faber takes the side of individuality and makes it clear that a lack of critical thinking and self-opinion is a danger to society and the world. The less diversity of thought there is, the easier it is for governments to win over the masses without even trying to do so. Humans would cease to be rational animals and become mere animals.

5.2 Mental alienation

Jerome Braun argues that alienation implies isolation. To the extent that it depends on social circumstances, this disconnection and lack of cohesion strains a person's

relationship both with his or her own self-image and with the social system of which he or she is part (1976, p. 9). In other words, mental alienation is the total disengagement of mental links with oneself and the surrounding reality.

The first meeting between the 17-year-old Clarisse and Montag, was peculiar as they are like chalk and cheese, and Montag is not at all used to having such conversations with so many questions. It is at that precise moment that Montag realizes that this teenager is unlike anyone he knows. There is something special about her, and at the same time she is disturbing and intriguing. Clarisse tells Montag what she once heard that firemen used to put out fires instead of starting them. This question makes Montag laugh and Clarisse does not understand why: “You laugh when I haven’t been funny and you answer right off. You never stop to think what I’ve asked you” (Bradbury, p. 7). What it expresses is the clear mental alienation Montag suffers because of his way of life and his uncritical loyalty to the System. Clarisse is able to question everything and come up with a thousand different ideas in just a few seconds, but even with all the time in the world Montag would not be able to develop a thought of his own since he is like a machine that simply follows commands.

Montag recalls the moment when he discovers that his wife is suffering from an overdose on sleeping pills. He remembers feeling just as silly and empty as Mildred during her stomach pumping: “a silly empty man near a silly empty woman, while the hungry snake made her still more empty” (Bradbury, p. 41). The hungry snake refers to the technological device used to pump Mildred’s stomach. In the quote we can see how Montag sees himself and how he sees his wife. After meeting Clarisse everything changed, Montag started to rethink his thoughts and to open his mind a bit more. At this point of the book, Montag is still a beginner in the act of thinking and may never reach

maturity in terms of thinking, but he is already questioning issues that once made up his undisputed reality. Before he met Clarisse, Montag was sure he was in love with his wife and very happy with their life together. Everything changed from that moment on, and Montag realized that he and Mildred did not really even know each other and could not even remember how and when they met. They just lived and follow the rules together. Their minds and hearts are empty as it is stated in the quotation, and after realizing this, Montag sees that nothing in his life makes sense anymore. The mental alienation of these characters is evident, but at least Montag seems to be realizing this and that is already a breakthrough.

The memory of Mildred's overdose keeps filling Montag's mind with confused thoughts and creating different possible scenarios in the aftermath of that event: "And he remembered thinking then that if she died, he was certain he wouldn't cry" (Bradbury, p. 41). Mildred was unconscious when her husband found her, and this leads to thoughts of what Montag would have done and felt if Mildred had died as a result of her overdose. Tying in with the idea that they do not really know each other, Montag is saddened by the notion that he would feel absolutely nothing if she were to die. It makes him want to cry more to realize that than to think of Mildred's death. All this time they have been living a lie and to come to that awareness after a lifetime together is painful for the protagonist. His mind and his thinking were so numb that he was unaware that he was unhappy and that he did not love his wife. Moreover, the same happens to Mildred, but the great difference is that she is not conscious of her miserable life and lives in her ignorance with a false happiness.

Montag and Mildred have three TV screens at home, which they refer to as walls. These walls are in the middle of the relationship of the protagonist and his wife, as she lives by and for these televisions: “Wasn’t there a wall between him and Mildred...literally not just one wall but, so far, three! and expensive, too!” (Bradbury, p. 41). So far, they have three walls with three TV screens, that is why he says they were expensive. The quote expresses that these walls separate him from Mildred, who is addicted to the televisions in their house. These “walls” are a metaphor for the physical barrier that exist between the characters. Her obsession has reached such a point that the people on the TV screens have become her “family” and she refers to them as “relatives”.

Mildred is a slave to technology and even asks Montag to put a fourth television on the missing living room wall. Adding a fourth television, or wall, would imply Mildred’s total disconnection from the outside world and especially from Montag. She pays little attention to him with three screens, so a fourth would mean the rupture of the little that still blinds them. The protagonist’s wife spends all her time with her “family” and knows everything about the programmes, which lack depth and only deal with banal topics. Technology has completely absorbed Mildred’s mind and she is no longer able to differentiate between the real world and the fictional one of the walls of her house, the two overlap in her head. Montag is aware that the only thing that matters to Mildred is what goes on the TV screens, and this is proven in the various passages in which Montag tries to talk her about serious matters and she ignores him and talks to him about television programming. Unlike Montag who hates TV screens, Mildred’s mind seems to have no salvation as she suffers total alienation and does not see beyond the walls. The TV screens act as a barrier between Mildred and Montag, but also between Mildred and the truth, or Mildred and the real happiness.

Beatty tries to explain to Montag that books and books related matters are no longer important. What is important now in the society present in the novel, is to be clever with technology in order to make good use of it so that it consumes all the time of its inhabitants to keep them busy and entertained: "Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?" (Bradbury, p. 53). Schools no longer teach how to read or write, they now teach students how to press buttons, for instance. It is in schools that people and thus societies are created. Children at an early age are like sponges and are also very manipulable, which is a danger in societies like the one in this dystopian novel. If people are brainwashed from a very young age, there will be no problem with them as adults because they will be made in the image and likeness of the State. Censorship and irrationality will be the norm for them and that is what the government wants to achieve, the mental alienation of its entire population.

In the 1950s in the United States, television was introduced into homes and became a more common member of the family. This means that dependence on technology is a long-standing and global reality in our society. Television keeps people distracted and conveys a range of information that is often manipulated. And dependency is not just about television, but about almost everything around us. Nowadays, we cannot tear ourselves away from the phone at all, we feel empty. We prefer texting to communicating and relegate many of our important activities to technological devices. The more disconnected we are from the real world because of technology, the more manageable we become and the more we open the gates of oppression, just like in *Fahrenheit 451*.

In Mildred's head it seems that saying that TV characters are her family is a super normal and rational idea, but if Montag talks about the books being like people, she sees it as a completely crazy and nonsensical idea: "Books aren't people. You read and I look around, but there isn't anybody!" (Bradbury, p. 69). Mildred is far removed from a normal life as she has no links to the real world. For the protagonist's wife, the most important things are the trivial and insignificant issues. Her words reflect the loneliness around her, a consequence of government's ban on reading and Mildred's obsession with technology. Both of these aspects push her further and further away from reality and distance her from her more human side that lies behind her mental alienation.

5.3 The Resistance of Literature against the Prohibition of Culture and the Overuse of Technology

I'm seventeen and I'm crazy...I like to smell things and look at things, and sometimes stay up all night, walking and watch the sun rise...You know, I'm not afraid of you...so many people are afraid of fireman...How long've you worked as a fireman?...Do you ever read any of the books you burn? (Bradbury, p. 5)

Clarisse is one of the most iconic characters in the novel and one of those who best represents the theme of the resistance of literature against the prohibition of culture. Although neither in the play nor in the quotation it is explicitly stated that Clarisse reads, her manner shows it. As the quotation makes clear, Clarisse is a young girl full of curiosity. She bombards Montag with a thousand questions and information in just one second and he is perhaps still processing her age. Montag lacks the mental skill and agility that Clarisse has. While she does not say that she reads, she asks Montag a

question related to books. Despite the fact that books and reading are forbidden, Clarisse asks the protagonist if he has ever read any of the books he burns. This suggests that she and her family own books and are avid readers. In her house there is always light and noise, as the members of her family communicate and have conversations, even laugh, and seem to be happy, but really happy. It seems that thanks to reading, Clarisse and her family keep their emotions and above all their humanity. They remain connected to the real world and do not allow themselves to be manipulated by the government.

From the very first meeting between the 17-year-old girl and Montag, he was dazzled and intrigued by her personality. For him, she is unique, as he has never met anyone like her before. In Montag's perception of the world, fire is just an element that destroys and devastates everything. However, when he meets Clarisse, he sees for the first time that fire can have other meanings: "Her face, turned to him now, was fragile milk crystal with a soft and constant light in it. It was not the hysterical light of electricity but-what? But the strangely comfortable and rare and gently flattering light of the candle" (Bradbury, p. 6). Clarisse is a warm person with an overwhelming personality that is complemented by her passion for nature, and that can be also represented by fire. Despite all the chaos and prohibitions around society, Clarisse resists even the fire of censorship, and it is all thanks to literature. It opens the mind and keeps it strong against attempts at manipulation and mental control.

Ms. Blake is a woman who has a lot of books and evidently sets off the alarm that alerts the fire brigade. The interesting point about this woman is that she puts her books above everything else, even her own life. She is prepared to die and turn to ashes

along with them and her house. This is sobering as the old woman sacrifices her life for books. Ms. Blake would rather die with them than live with the knowledge that the firemen will get hold of his books and burn them: “You can’t ever have my books” (Bradbury, p. 35). The character of Ms. Blake can be understood as the personification of literature and its resistance to the events in this peculiar society. Books are the most important thing for this woman, and she has a special connection with them, her life and books are intertwined and that is why when the books burn, the woman dies with them. The fact that the woman gives her life for literature suggests that what is written in books is really valuable and important to people, even if the government in the novel is trying to make the citizens believe the opposite. Ms. Blake’s death is a crucial and determining moment in Montag’s life. After that he never ceases to wonder how written texts are capable of provoking such reaction in a person.

In Ms. Blake’s house there are many books and that means there are many temptations for Montag. Clarisse awakened in Montag a part of him that he did not know himself. The curiosity and the desire to read that he puts into the books, spreads through Montag’s body and that leads him to steal one of the books and hide it so that neither Captain Beatty nor any of his companions discover it. The protagonist is a fireman, and his side is to burn books and get rid of them, but there is a great change within him that will prevent him from continuing with his life and his work as it was. The power of literature captivates him, and he is capable of risking his life and future for books, although he still does not quite know why he does it and he feels like a criminal: “His hand had done it all, his hand, with a brain of its own, with a conscience and a curiosity in each trembling finger, had turned thief” (Bradbury, p. 35). Literature opens his eyes in the midst of the hard mission at Ms. Blake’s house. Thanks to that he

sees that what he is doing with his life is not right as he thought before. Montag no longer wants to belong to that side of the history and that drives him to pick up the book. This is the beginning of his great transformation. The quote makes it very clear that for the first time, Montag is being conscious of his actions and is carrying them out for himself, without following anyone's orders. For the first time he is using his own will. Literature is beginning to take the blindfold off its eyes.

At this point of the novel, readers can see that something is blossoming inside Montag. His change has begun, he has already picked up a book and there is no turning back to his old lifestyle: "His hands had been infected...and his eyes were beginning to feel hunger, as if they must look at something, anything, everything" (Bradbury, p. 38). It is said that his hands "had been infected", infected with the desire to read and discover the truth hidden beneath the books. It is as if a flame of fire is rising within the protagonist, but not fire as something destructive as at the beginning of the book, but as something hopeful and creative. Montag is worried since he knows that he wants to read books and the worry is due to the fact that this feeling is something totally unfamiliar to him. A new world is opening up before his eyes. Literature is bringing him back to life, like a phoenix rising from the ashes. So far, he seems to have been dead and trapped in a world full of lies. Nevertheless, he is finally opening his mind and slowly becoming aware of how deceived he has been. Montag is throwing off the shackles of his old life. Once again, books show their liberating power in the face of censorship.

Despite what the government and its blind supporters say, it seems that, before censorship appeared, porches were used to hang out and talk to people, but also to think and connect with oneself, at least it is what Clarisse thinks: "My uncle says the

architects got rid of front porches because they didn't look well...that was merely rationalizing it; the real reason, hidden underneath might be they didn't want people sitting like that, doing nothing, rocking, talking; that was the wrong kind of social life. People talked too much. And they had time to think" (Bradbury, p. 60). When culture and books were not banned, people had normal conversations, socialized, and even stopped to think about the various aspects of life. This shows that reading brings only good things and acts as a resistance to censorship and manipulation. It helps humans to form an opinion and to reason. In this particular example readers notice how Clarisse sees beyond the lies that are told about porches and that is because she is able to use her own thinking and draw her own conclusions. Literature has served as a weapon for Clarisse to protect herself from ignorance and misinformation.

6. Conclusion

In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, we enter a parallel and rather negative reality that gives a glimpse of the author's idea of what the future would be like from the moment he was writing the novel. The author took his inspiration from what was happening around him. Not only the Cold War but also the Korean War may be reflected in the novel in one way or another, as the country where *Fahrenheit 451* occurs have won two atomic wars and seem to be on the verge of a third one. All along the novel, there is a continuous atmosphere of tension due to the constant threat of a possible new war.

Moreover, McCarthyism was an event or movement that shook the United States of America and its citizens. Senator McCarthy railed against culture and freedom by imposing unbelievable censorship on the country. It was like a witch-hunt, that is how people referred to what was happening, and this event seems to have influenced the appearance of censorship throughout the novel. The book revolves around the burning

of books and the author picked up the idea from what he saw as a teenager with Hitler's book burnings in Berlin. This idea also seems to be related to the fire at the Library of Alexandria. Both book burnings served as inspiration for the author and he himself admitted it in the interview with Dana Gioia.

The arrival of technology meant that people began to rely more on these devices, and it was from the 1950s onwards that televisions became a staple in American homes, then this spread globally. Technology has a strong presence throughout the novel and there are many references to it. Bradbury's presentation of the subject reveals his opinion of it. Beyond seeing it as a great advance for society, he saw it as a great threat. For the rulers of the novel's society, the only thing that seems to be important is that its inhabitants are proficient with technology and forget about reading and everything related to it. Reading is forbidden in the novel because according to the government, books are dangerous and reading prevents happiness as it only brings about discord and suffering. By reading, the mind starts to think, and this leads to analyze and question life and reality as well. So, for someone who wants to control your mind and your life, reading is the worst activity you can do since your mind will be not only strong but also impenetrable thanks to the power of literature.

To sum up, the analysis of this paper has been done on the basis of three central themes: repression of thought through censorship, mental alienation, and resistance of literature against the prohibition of culture and the overuse of technology. This analysis has attempted to demonstrate the important role of literature, especially considering how dependent the characters in the novel are on technology, and so are we nowadays. Reading is like a breath of fresh air in the face of the overwhelming abuse of

technological devices. In addition, literature more than anything else serves to open our minds and develop our own critical thinking that allows us to act with awareness and avoid being manipulated by others.

7. Works Cited

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Taurus, 1998.

Bloom, Harold. *Bloom's Guides Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*. Chelsea House Publishers, 2007.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. Edición escolar. Traducción de Alfredo Crespo. Debolsillo, 2012.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Braun, Jerome. *ALIENATION AS SOCIAL PSYCHIATRIC CONCEPT*. International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 1976.

Cengage Learning Gale. *A Study Guide for Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*. Gale, Study Guides, 2017.

Claeys, Gregory. "Three Variants on the Concept of Dystopia". *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, edited by Fátima Vieira. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Cruzado, Maribel. "Guía didáctica de Fahrenheit 451". *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury. Debolsillo, 2012.

Gregersen, Erik. "Ray Bradbury, Biography, Books, Fahrenheit 451, & Facts". Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ray-Bradbury>

Reuters. "Cinco obras maestras de Ray Bradbury". ABC Cultura, 2012. https://www.abc.es/cultura/libros/abci-bradbury-novelas-201206060000_noticia.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

Schrecker, Ellen W. "Archival Sources for the Study of McCarthyism." *The Journal of American History*. Oxford University Press, 1988.

Kipen, David, Campbell Irving, y Erika Koss. *Guía del lector: Fahrenheit 451*. National Endowment for the Arts, 2006.

Kuvasz. "Historia de los Cajeros Automáticos". Kuvasz Solutions, 2023. <https://www.kvz.cl/historia-de-los-cajeros-automaticos/#:~:text=El%20primer%20cajero%20automático%20se,británico%20llamado%20John%20Shepherd%20DBarron>