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BACHELOR'S THESIS

Post-WWII USA reflected in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

Odraz USA po druhé světové válce v díle *451 stupňů Fahrenheita* od Raye Bradburyho

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I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, “Post-WWII USA reflected in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*”, is the result of my own work, written under supervision of Mgr. Jakub Ženíšek, Ph.D., and that I have used only the cited sources. I also declare that this thesis was not used to obtain any other academic title.

Prague, 15. 4. 2024

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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této práce je zanalyzovat dystopický román Raye Bradburyho *451 stupňů Fahrenheita* (1953) vzhledem k jeho historickému kontextu Spojených států amerických po druhé světové válce. V teoretické části je popsáno toto období a jeho rapidní sociální a technologický rozvoj, společně se začátky studené války, která vedla k protikomunistické mánii nazývané Rudá panika, během níž strach z vlivu Sovětského svazu zapříčinil rozsáhlou propagandu a cenzuru v politice, médiích i umění. Bradburyho dílo je často interpretováno jako kritika tohoto období a jako varování před jeho důsledky, takže v praktické části bude zkoumáno, jak se mnohé historické skutečnosti odrazily ve *451 stupních Fahrenheita.* Některé z těchto reflexí byly zřejmě zamýšlené autorem, neboť k nim poskytl rozsáhlý komentář v mnohých rozhovorech či jiných médiích. Další se stále dají vypozorovat z Bradburyho románu, ať už ty více očividné, často zkoumané mnohými odborníky, nebo ty méně nápadné, ale neméně relevantní. Analýzou těchto odrazů společně s historickými skutečnostmi poválečných Spojených států je možné rozšířit kanonicky zavedené interpretace, vytvořit nové a tím nahlédnout hlouběji do světa *Fahrenheita* a jeho koncepce.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

451 stupňů Fahrenheita; Ray Bradbury; poválečné USA; boom; studená válka; rudá panika; McCarthy

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the dystopian novel of Ray Bradbury *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) in relation to its historical context of post-World War II USA. In the theoretical part, this period of American history and its many rapid social and technological developments will be described, as well as the beginnings of the Cold War that subsequently led to an anti-Communist mania known as the Red Scare during which the fear of Soviet influence caused a great deal of propaganda and censorship in politics, media, and art. Bradbury's work is often interpreted as a criticism of this era and a warning of its consequences, and so in the practical part the many historical reflections present in *Fahrenheit 451* will be inspected. Some of these reflections were clearly intended by the author, as he has provided extensive commentary on them in numerous interviews and other media. More reflections can be seen in Bradbury's novel, both the obvious ones, often examined by scholars, and the less apparent interpretations that are also relevant. By analyzing all of these together the historical realities of post-war United States, one can expand upon the already established canonical interpretations, construct new ones, and thus provide deeper insight into the world of *Fahrenheit* and its conception.

KEYWORDS

Fahrenheit 451; Ray Bradbury; post-war USA; boom; Cold War; Red Scare; McCarthy

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Introduction

Fahrenheit 451 (1953) by Ray Bradbury is regarded as classic novel of the dystopian sci-fi genre. However, the world of *Fahrenheit* has many distinguished features that set it apart from other novels of the genre. Perhaps the most canonical dystopian authors like George Orwell or Aldous Huxley primarily deal with the dangers of authoritarian regimes that force their populace into submission through a combination of violence and surveillance. These are largely inspired by the 20th century Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union which were both threatening global expansion of their ideologies and regimes, committing inhumane transgressions against any opposition.

Though Bradbury depicts a similarly oppressive governing force in his book, this force is not responsible for the inception of his dystopia, but the byproduct of the natural development of society and technology. He primarily does not base his imaginative projections on the contemporary authoritarian regimes, but rather on the realities of post-WWII USA to construct a plausible futuristic vision, through which he not only criticizes the many American issues of the 1940's and 1950's but also issues a warning against the rapid development of technology and how it is utilized, primarily through media, to neglect thought and meaning in favor of short-term entertainment and convenience. What makes Bradbury's world engaging as well as threatening is that many of its concepts turned out to be accurate predictions. The emphasis on the constant influence of media, entertainment, advertising, and other trends is arguably even more relevant in the 21st century's era of mass consumerism and easily accessible social media than they were seventy years ago. The continuing relevance of many of the book's notions, together with personal passion for dystopian fiction, was my primary source of interest in *Fahrenheit 451* and inspired me to construct this thesis as a deep analysis of the work and how its conception was influenced by the historical context of post-war America.

Therefore, the focus of the theoretical part will be to present the US of the late 1940's and early 1950's. During this period, America was undergoing massive changes – the ending of the Second World War established a general sense of optimistic expectations, and rapidly accelerated technological and economic growth, which contributed to many social and political developments. However, this optimism was partially undermined by the rising

tensions between the Western nations and the Soviet Union. This dispute known as the Cold War not only threatened the emergence of yet another world-wide armed conflict and the disruption of hard-earned peace and prosperity, but also rose questions and fears of Communist influence on the American public that led to many questionable policies, sparking an era of investigations, propaganda, and censorship. These were often unjustified and abused as means for personal gains, arguably making them even more threatening than the Communist influence itself, especially for public figures like politicians and artists.

These policies were one of the primary sources of inspiration for Bradbury to write *Fahrenheit 451,* but he also used other aspects of his contemporary world to construct his dystopia, and nearly all of them are to varying degrees present in the book. Therefore, the practical part of the thesis will attempt to examine how the realities established in the theoretical part are reflected in Bradbury's vision through various historical interpretations. Some of these interpretations were offered by the author himself in numerous interviews, other are generally regarded by scholars as canonical because of their evident presence. My aim will be to present an overview of the already established interpretations, as well as provide some of my own, exemplify them within the text of *Fahrenheit,* and through their combination with the historical context potentially expand upon them, offering new insights into the work as well as the notions of Ray Bradbury.

1 Theoretical Part

1.1 Domestic situation in the USA after the Second World War

1.1.1 Setting the stage – the end of the War

"At 7:00 P.M. EWT (Eastern War Time) on August 14, 1945, President Harry Truman announced to a packed press conference that World War II had ended" (Patterson 3). This followed the Japanese surrender, after the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki days earlier. Joyous celebrations erupted all over the United States. Dragons marched through New York's Chinatown, grand bonfires were lit in San Francisco and automobiles dragged cans through the streets of Saint Louis. People had high hopes for the upcoming years. The time of shortages, gasoline rationing, and the disruption of automobile production was soon to be over, and a period of peace and prosperity was on the horizon (Teaford 97).

However, this post-war optimism was also offset by many uncertainties about the future and issues caused by the war and its aftermath, as well as those already rooted in the United States for a long time, merely obscured by the greater crisis of wartime (Ragsdale and Rusk 169-171).

1.1.2 Atomic bombs

The first and most apparent of these uncertainties immediately after the war was the fear of the atomic bombs, and the effect they would have on the world going forward. "Could the world survive with atomic weapons?" (Patterson 5). Many people were reflecting on the destruction of the Japanese cities and the horror caused by the bombs (Yavenditti 224).

President Truman expressed his anxieties on July 16, 1945, in his diary after the first test of the atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico, writing that "we are only termites on a planet and maybe when we bore too deeply into the planet, there'll be a reckoning – who knows?" (Truman). Despite this, in his letter to Professor James L. Cate on January 12, 1953, he claims that him authorizing the attack "ended the war, saved lives".

Most Americans agreed with Truman, thinking the attack warranted against the Japanese, who were generally portrayed as a "sneaky, fanatical, sadistic enemy" (Yavenditti 228)

given their suicidal combat tactics, abysmal treatment of American hostages, and more. Most importantly for the Americans, the bombs helped to end the war swiftly and prevented further fighting and deaths of more of their soldiers (Yavenditti 224-228). However, this issue continues to be a topic for critics, contemplating whether the use was really justified, and whether it was necessary to target cities, which resulted in enormous civilian casualties. The short time period between the two bombings also gave the Japanese little option to react to the first one and possibly surrender before the second one happened.

Possessing the atomic bombs, as well as Europe and Soviet Union having been ravaged by the war, the United States became the leading world power. It became apparent that they would need to get more involved in foreign affairs unlike they did in the past, because their secluded continent no longer guaranteed them security due to rapid technological and military advancements such as the atomic bombs. Rising tensions between them and the Soviet Union, which would soon escalate into the Cold War, was the main catalyst for this, as well as the need of America's western allies for recovery aid after the war. (Patterson 82, 83) This is not to say that America was untouched by the war. There were massive shifts happening at home and many problems to be solved.

1.1.3 Ethnic issues

The 1945's American population of nearly 140 million was very racially diverse. 25 percent was either foreign-born or of foreign descent, mostly European (Patterson 15). There were also around 10 percent of African Americans and less than 1 percent of people of Mexican, Native American, and Asian origin, with varying concentration throughout the States. (Gibson and Jung) Most of these minorities lived in poverty, and suffered discrimination, although the war had some positive influence on the ethnic relations and "accelerated acculturation" (Patterson 16).

Before the war, "blacks almost always worked at menial, unskilled, low-paying jobs" (Polenberg 24), and they had little prospect of improving this situation due to segregation laws and discrimination, issues largely ignored by the government (Polenberg 31). During the war, however, the need for labor emerged, partly because of a new booming war industry, and partly because of the lack of manpower caused by the drafts. With most production

located in the North, this caused great migrations of blacks in search of better-paid jobs as well as an escape from the harsh discrimination dominant in the South (Polenberg 72-75).

Additionally, military service of African Americans also had an impact on their overall situation. Although there was a lot of segregation and racial conflicts in the army (Polenberg 76, 77), the war bolstered the patriotism of blacks and other minorities. This resulted in a great deal of activism and protests for equality both during and after the war (Rolland-Diamond 96, 97), often led by war veterans who refused to, as explained by a black corporal in 1945, "let the Alabama version of the Germans kick me around when I get home" (Patterson 23).

Their living conditions in the North were not ideal in the slightest. Even though there was enough work, the same cannot be said about housing. Cities like Chicago were not prepared for the massive immigration waves happening both during and after the war, so blacks had to resort to living in slums, often having limited access to basic necessities such as heating, toilets, or cooking stoves (Hirsch 17-19). Even when there was vacant housing, realtors would often not allow them to buy houses in some areas, arguing that it would reduce the interest of potential white residents in those neighborhoods and reduce the value of their properties (Patterson 26, 27). This was not a baseless stance, as white people were reluctant to buy houses near black communities, often selling their properties and moving to more white-dominated areas when the immigration waves were happening (Hirsch 31). This led to a rapid growth of crowded black ghettos and white-dominated suburban areas, further increasing the racial division. In areas with mixed race, conflicts and violence were a frequent occurrence (Hirsch 40).

Despite not avoiding discrimination on many fronts, compared to the working and living conditions in the South, the North was a land of opportunity for African Americans, "there were plenty of jobs for people who knew how to work hard, which all the migrants did" (Lemann 79). Black art, most notably music, was also on the rise during this period, despite still being misinterpreted and misrepresented in mass media (Patterson 30, 31).

1.1.4 The position of women

Another social shift that was happening during and after the war was the changing position of women. Before 1940, "married women held jobs only if their husbands received an

income below the poverty lines" (Chafe 169), which were usually women belonging to ethnic minorities. It was a general belief that women should be taking care of the household and children instead of having a job. However, since many men were drafted and abandoned their jobs during the war, together with high demands on the production of wartime necessities, many opportunities for women opened which were previously not widely available to them. This resulted in many women either entering the workforce or leaving their former jobs as maids and waitresses for the better-paying jobs in manufacturing, previously locked behind sex segregation barriers (Anderson 3-6). The main incentive for this was to secure financial stability during the difficult times, but there was also a "desire for self-expression" (Chafe 168).

However, with the war ending, many of these jobs either disappeared due to demobilization or were given back to veterans returning from home. "Many women, in turn, initially welcomed the chance to go home and resume a more normal existence, especially given the propaganda that described such a life as Nirvana" (Chafe 171). For some, however, working well-paid jobs felt empowering, and giving them up was uneasy. Some wanted equality in the work field and fought for the approval of the gender-blind Equal Rights Amendment. But most female political leaders rejected this, proclaiming that women are in some ways a 'weaker' sex that needs protection under the law. This protection was laws that for example set maximum working hours, or disallowed night work and work involving hard physical labor. Because of this, the Amendment did not get much attention in the government until the approval of its new, highly reduced, version in 1950 (Patterson 36, 37).

Still, the employment of women, especially middle-aged with children old enough to attend school, increased significantly after the war. Some wanted to keep their wartime independence, some out of necessity to accommodate decent living with their husbands and boyfriends returning from war, and some because of the spread of consumerism accompanied by inflation, new job opportunities, and incentives to spend more money (Chafe 166-170).

1.1.5 Education boom

Post-war America experienced many booms, one such boom being in the sphere of education. In 1940, only one-third of Americans above the age of 25 had finished eighth

grade, one-fourth finished high school and only 5 percent graduated from college or university. Education was an accurate indicator of social class, same as income, housing, and health. While a college education would secure a well-paid middle-class career in areas such as business, medicine, or law for those who could afford it (Polenberg 20), there were cries of inequality, especially on the level of public schools. Education funding depended on local property taxes, which led to quality differences based on the social class of the school area's residents, and so the less fortunate, most notably the children of black and other minorities, "struggled to learn in segregated and poorly financed institutions" (Patterson 67). The quality of education on all levels plummeted during the war with many teachers leaving, either for military service or for a better-paid job. This was understandable, as they "earned less on the average than truck drivers, garbage collectors, or bartenders" (Patterson 68).

With the war's ending, the situation improved, especially on the college and university levels. A significant factor for this was F. D. Roosevelt signing the Servicemen's Readjustment Act in 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill of Rights. It was passed to aid veterans returning from service in purchasing housing, taking loans for starting businesses, or providing stipends for those wanting to study. Even though the stipends were not very substantial, they still gave the veterans incentive to participate in the program (Goulden 57-60). Because of this, "total enrolment jumped by more than 50%, from the prewar [1939] level of 1.3 million to over 2 million in 1946, with further increases through 1949" (Bound and Turner 785).

There was some criticism of the Bill. One major complaint was that many science faculties were dependent on military funding, which aroused fears that scientific results would primarily be utilized for military purposes (Goulden 265). Other critics complained about the quality of education, claiming that schools "were abandoning rigorous academic standards and "dumbing down" the curricula" (Patterson 69). Despite this criticism, the Bill is generally seen as a catalyst for the education boom, not only increasing the quality of education and the amount of college and university graduates but also improving the public outlook on education in general (Patterson 70).

1.1.6 Economic boom and consumerism

Arguably the most dominant boom, shaping the optimistic attitudes and expectations of the era, was the economic boom. ‘With 7 percent of the world's population in the late 1940’s, America possessed 42 percent of the world's income and accounted for half of the world's manufacturing output’ (Patterson 61). The Second World War was one of its primary catalysts, as government spending on wartime necessities rapidly accelerated industrial and technological development and lifted the USA from the pre-war Depression (Goulden 92). This growth did not, however, translate into everybody’s prosperity. Around 30 percent of the population were poor by the era’s standards, especially minorities such as African Americans and people of Native American or Mexican descent, and people who worked as farmers were often losing their jobs due to mechanization. ‘In 1947 one-third of American homes had no running water, two-fifths had no flush toilets, three-fifths lacked central heat, and four-fifths were heated by coal or wood’ (Patterson 62). Still, this period is remembered as prosperous. Most Americans lived in better conditions than their parents, earned more, and spent more (Patterson 65). The already widespread radio and the rising of television greatly increased the power of advertisers, convincing Americans that they needed all the newly accessible products previously locked behind a luxury barrier, reserved for the upper class (Higgs 73, 74).

All the aforementioned factors led to an era of mass consumerism that prevailed in the following years. One’s pursuit of constant acquisition of goods was believed beneficial to the good of society, as it would further feed the already booming economy and many industries (Cohen 237, 238), and so people were happily buying refrigerators, washing machines, and other home appliances, plastic goods, clothing, frozen food, liquor, and more (Patterson 70).

Automobile boom

One of the most notable growths was in the automobile industry. Car sales between 1945 and 1950 increased almost tenfold, and from thereon grew annually. Most of those cars were American made, which was quite expensive, but affirmed by the rapid economic boom, people would spend large sums of their money, or even take loans, rather than cease their spending. The era would be known as the automobile age, and greatly affected other

industries. Some negatively, like the railroad industry, but it had a greatly positive effect on the oil and gasoline industries, roadside hotels and restaurants, and the spread of suburban shopping centers (Patterson 71).

Housing boom

Another booming industry was the housing one. The government authorized increased spending for home loans, incentivizing people to get long-term mortgages, especially war veterans, who could do so with almost no down payment with the help of the G.I. Bill (Goulden 135, 136).

William J. Levitt used this increased demand for homeownership to revolutionize the market. He bought a sizable amount of land on Long Island and began building from pre-manufactured parts, which meant fast and cheap construction of large numbers of houses, a technique soon adopted by other developers. They were subject to criticism, as their overwhelming focus on efficiency often sacrificed individuality and space – the variation of design was limited, and additional bedrooms could come at the cost of omitting garages or front porches. These 'Levitton' neighborhoods would also neglect community interests and many lacked parks, stores, or schools (Goulden 138-141).

Despite this, their sheer affordability would easily overshadow any criticism and led to a massive development of new suburban areas, which were only now easily accessible thanks to the automobile age. The increase in home ownership and overall prosperity also sparked the desires of starting a family in many, which subsequently caused the post-war baby boom (Patterson 76, 77).

1.2 Early Cold War years

1.2.1 The question of Eastern Europe and Germany

Hitler's defeat and the ending of World War II in Europe on the horizon gave rise to a new conflict, that being between the communist Soviet Union against the nations of Western Europe and the United States. Although the origins of this largely ideological conflict can be traced back to 1917's October Revolution in Russia (Engerman 20) and a great deal of mistrust that followed (Chafe 32), its principal catalyst after the Second World War was the question of Eastern Europe and Germany. The West wanted to connect eastern regions by

trade, “they wanted, in short, East Europe to continue to serve as an economic colony of the West, contributing raw materials which the West would convert into finished products to be sold at high profits in the East” (Ambrose 104). Some scholars have argued, however, that for the Soviet Union, the interest in Eastern Europe was not only economical but also defensive. Twice in the early 20th century was Poland used as a gateway to Russia for invading German forces (Ambrose 108).

The future of Poland as well as other nations of Eastern Europe was the bone of contention at the Yalta conference in early 1945 (Chafe 45-47), a meeting of the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and the General Secretary of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin. By this time, “the Red Army occupied Poland, leaving Roosevelt little room to maneuver” (Chafe 46), as Stalin had already established a puppet government in Poland prior to the conference. Even though the American President was able to secure Stalin’s promise of holding free elections in Eastern Europe, it was soon broken when Stalin “refused to reorganize the Polish government in any significant way, suppressed freedom of speech, assembly, religion, and the press in Poland, and made no move to hold free elections” (Ambrose 109). Another agreement reached at the Yalta conference was that Russia would join the war in the Pacific against Japan within three months of Germany’s surrender, and in return Roosevelt promised them concessions in Asia (Leffler 69).

1.2.2 The diplomacy of President Truman

Strict attitude

However, the dynamics of the diplomatic relationship between the US and the Soviet Union changed with the sudden passing of the American president in April 1945, and Harry S. Truman taking his position. Truman was inexperienced with foreign politics (Chafe 55), and “knew little about his predecessor’s diplomacy and strategy” (Leffler 67). While “Roosevelt was willing to overlook much, or … to adopt a realistic attitude towards developments in Poland” (Ambrose 111), Truman assumed a stricter position, reinforced by many of his advisors, as well as his personal misjudgment of his predecessor’s intentions which he had hoped to uphold (Chafe 55-56). This attitude would become apparent during his meeting with Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet foreign minister, directly and bluntly accusing him of breaking the Yalta agreements.

> When Molotov arrived, the President shouted at him in the language of a Missouri mule-driver. The interpreter said, "he had never heard a top official get such a scolding". At the end, Truman told Molotov that "there was only one thing to do". Stalin had to reorganize the Polish government by bringing in elements from the London Poles [the Polish government in exile] and hold elections. Molotov finally remarked, "I have never been talked to like that in my life." Truman replied, "Carry out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that.'' (Ambrose 114)

This attitude, however, proved not very effective when dealing with the Russians, as they put even more pressure on the Polish government and imprisoned most of its anti-communist leaders (Patterson 106-107).

Atomic bomb as a diplomatic tool

Another factor that influenced Truman and his further negotiations was the possession of the atomic bomb. "The bomb, coupled with the financial position the United States enjoyed, gave Truman and his chief advisers an awesome feeling of power" (Ambrose 127). They intended to use it as a "leverage to shape the peace according to American desires" (Leffler 70). He received news of the first successful test of the bomb during a conference with Stalin and Churchill at Potsdam, where they were primarily discussing the questions of Eastern Europe, Germany, and the Soviet involvement against the Japanese (Chafe 59-60).

At Potsdam, Truman wrote in his diary that he was resolved to use the bomb against Japan soon (Truman). Doing so before the Red Army could join the war in the Pacific would cut the Soviet Union off that area and give America complete control over the occupation of Japan (Ambrose 126). However, the bargaining power of the bombs was greatly overestimated by Truman and his advisers. "The Russians dealt effectively with the atomic bombs by simply appearing to ignore it" (Gaddis 17), and Stalin later said that they were an instrument of fear that would not work on the Russian people, and so for the most part, the weapon merely increased the degree of mistrust and suspicion between these world superpowers (Chafe 60).

The bombs were indeed not as decisively threatening during the 1940's as they are today. They were not powerful nor numerous enough to maintain peace through the threat of retaliation, and the Soviet Union had a massive advantage in terms of army numbers present

in Europe, and potentially had the ability to overrun Germany, and subsequently the whole of Western Europe (Ambrose 128). The US could do little to prevent this, as they were pressured to "demobilize the American armies in Europe . . . and to convert the war economy to peacetime purposes" (Schwarz 141), and any potential destruction of Russian cities through utilizing the bomb could just as well be unleashed by the Red Army on western cities. They were also not flexible enough to punish aggressions which were not deemed severe enough by the US, for example, the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia (Ambrose 129).

Economic means as a diplomatic tool

Other means intended to force Stalin into cooperation were economic ones, such as loans and reparation shipments, and their potential denial. However, those too were largely unsuccessful. One reason for this was that the Soviets, unlike Western Europe, were not dependent on economic aid, even though they suffered great damage and casualties during the war, and would only need it to hasten their reconstruction by several months (Gaddis 17). So, when Truman abruptly canceled some shipments after his meeting with Molotov, it only further worsened Soviet-American relations without having any serious repercussions for the Russians (Chafe 60).

1.2.3 Containment policy

The following American policy of dealing with the Soviet Union is generally called 'containment'. Its main aim was to prevent their territorial expansion (Gaddis 4), as well as the ideological worldwide spread of communism. The government agreed that the ideology "thrived on chaos and poverty" (Ambrose 141), and so the US strategy revolved around providing political, economic, and military support to threatened nations. This was achieved through the Truman Doctrine, which came into effect after his speech on March 12, 1947, asking Congress for the support of Greece and Turkey, arguing that America must protect 'free peoples' – a term which could well be exchanged with 'anti-communist' from the context of his speech. (Ambrose 150). The doctrine was followed by the Marshall Plan which provided economic assistance to rebuild postwar Europe. (Gaddis 54-55)

1.3 Red Scare

The fear of Communist expansion and control, known as the Red Scare, was not limited to foreign territories, and rising tensions between the US and the USSR were accompanied by suspicions of Soviet espionage within the government and Communist influence on the American public.

1.3.1 FBI investigations

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) led by J. Edgar Hoover started investigating Communist subversion in late 1945 (Hamby 379), and numerous state officials were arrested in the following years, some even executed. Several of these were involved in the FBI itself, or the Manhattan Project responsible for the development of atomic bombs and disclosed its secrets to the Soviets (Haynes 50-63). The patterns of these cases were not uniform, however. Although some accused confessed to their cooperation with the USSR, others were just committed members of the Communist Party of the United States or merely supported unpopular opinions, and, in terms of their accusations, it was often unclear "where verifiably fact merged into improvisation and innuendo" (Hamby 381) as anti-Communism became not only a countermeasure against espionage, but also a powerful political tool (Hamby 382).

1.3.2 HCUA and the Hollywood trials

Another participant in these Red Scare investigations was the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA). Founded in the 1930's, it originally combated American Fascism and Nazism (Haynes 64). This changed alongside the development of the international conflict, shifting its focus against the Communists. Unlike the FBI, which primarily dealt with espionage and subversion within the ranks of government officials (Haynes 50), the HCUA concerned itself more with the public, "compiling lists of citizens suspected of subversive affiliations" (Carleton 94).

In 1947, it began holding Congress hearings about "alleged Communist infiltration of the motion picture industry" (Dick 1). Much of the Hollywood community had its political preferences leaning towards the liberal and the left, with several screenwriters being members of the American Communist Party. These were responsible for the creation of the Screen Writers Guild (SWG) (Haynes 70). This unionization of writers was seen by the right

as a steppingstone toward the left's control of the movie industry and led to "the notion that the SWG was communist-infested" (Dick 1). Although writers and actors had little success promoting Communist ideology in their movies, their political affiliations were sufficient enough to raise suspicion and charges against them before Congress (Haynes 71). Ten of them were sentenced to prison after refusing to answer questions under the First Amendment of freedom of speech. These would be known as the 'Hollywood Ten' (Dick 8-9). Although not imprisoned, many other actors and screenwriters were blacklisted from the industry, as these Congress hearings generated an enormous amount of publicity, and their future involvement in movies would be controversial and damaging to the box office (Haynes 74).

These Hollywood trials were the spark for future cases and accusations of similar nature. One of the major ones was the publishing of Red Channels in 1950, shortly before the beginning of the Korean War (Haynes 75). The main figures behind the publication were three ex-FBI agents "who had worked mainly in their so-called Communist Squad, a group that pressed the envelope of legality in order to obtain information" (Hill 7). Red Channels were a series of lists containing the names of 151 artists and entertainers, 130 organizations, and 17 publications that were suspected of subversive activities, supporting Communism. However, none of the Channels' publishers could verify these accusations with tangible proof, and the lists were usually built on assumptions and implications about the accused (Hill 5). The Channels became a catalyst for a new 'screening' business – investigators would examine and interview artists, and then for a fee clear their names, a process which could sometimes amount to plain extortion (Haynes 75).

1.3.3 Profiling in education

Education was another sector greatly affected by the Red Scare. "Taxpayers long had demanded that schools and colleges promote national values" (Patterson 185), which was further reinforced by the Communist paranoia. Teachers were being investigated, and often required to take loyalty oaths, which were adopted by several other professional organizations. Had the educators refused to answer questions or sign the oaths, regarding it as "an invasion of their private convictions, or a violation of their constitutional rights [primarily the Fifth Amendment]" (Haynes 176), they were often dismissed and struggled to find another academic job (Patterson 186, 187).

1.3.4 McCarthyism

Perhaps the most notorious figure of this Red Scare was the Republican Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, hence this time period is often named after him as the era of 'McCarthyism'. In the initial phase of his career, he did not much advocate anti-Communism compared to other Republicans like Richard Nixon who used the trial of Alger Hiss "to make himself into a national figure" (Haynes 144). This, however, changed drastically in February 1950 with his speech at a meeting of the Republican Women's Club. In his speech, he attacked Truman and his Democratic administration, with the high point being when the senator started waving a stack of papers and proclaiming "I have here in my hand a list of 205 … a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department" (Haynes 144). Although McCarthy has not provided any specific names or evidence to support his claim, it still skyrocketed his popularity into the center stage of American controversy (Griffith 50, 51).

After this rise, McCarthy continued his wild and exaggerated attacks, accusing numerous state officials of Communist affection and treason, despite himself being highly uneducated on these issues. These charges were, however, popular with the Republican audiences and continuously earned him substantial publicity. Even those who did not believe McCarthy's claims often did not dispute them. One reason was the Red Scare and uncertainty caused by the previous shocking revelations about Soviet espionage within the government, later reinforced by the Communist takeover of China and the beginning of the Korean War (Haynes 147). Another reason was the threat of themselves becoming a target of the unpredictable and ruthless force that was Joseph McCarthy.

This force was utilized by the Republicans as a useful weapon against the Democrats, shifting the press rhetoric in their favor. Once they gained control of Congress with Dwight D. Eisenhower as president in 1953, they expected McCarthy to "tone down his rhetoric" (Haynes 152). However, they soon came to realize that the senator had become uncontrollable, as he lavished on the publicity his attacks had brought him. He was constantly seeking new targets and shifting the public focus away from his losing cases.

One such target was the International Information Agency, an overseas library program. He accused its officials of spreading Soviet propaganda, as some books were allegedly written by pro-Communist authors. He concluded investigations of its European libraries, and many books were "removed or replaced, in some cases even burned" (Griffith 216). This gained great publicity, although mostly negative, as European press often ridiculed the venture which was labelled as an embarrassment for American foreign policy (Haynes 156). By the end of 1953, McCarthy was gradually losing popularity and "the frenetic and desperate quality of his activities was becoming more apparent" (Griffith 217). His final act of desperation was his futile attack on the US Army's Defense Department. The army was still held in high regard by most Americans after the Second World War, so his case received no support from the public or press, and he was ultimately discredited. He died a few years later, in 1957, of liver disease due to his known alcoholism (Haynes 161).

1.3.5 Red Scare subsiding

With the decline of Joseph McCarthy and the death of Stalin in 1953 also came the decline of the Red Scare. McCarthyism highlights how the vulnerabilities and insecurities of society can be abused to cause harm and chaos while maintaining a popular image, even by an individual outside of his area of expertise. In 1954, still, more than 50 percent of Americans supported McCarthy. The press could partially be blamed for this, though it is important to note that in the 1950's journalists did not have the resources to delve deeper into the topic and challenge official sources as they did later during the Vietnam War, and so McCarthy was able to efficiently manipulate them (Patterson 200). Although his investigations did not directly affect more than several hundred people, their mere threat scared thousands, and his success inspired many other smaller political figures to abuse anti-Communism in a similar manner during the early 1950's (Haynes 161).

2 Practical Part

2.1 Authorial intentions

Fahrenheit 451 is a science fiction novel written by Ray Bradbury in 1953. It is set in a dystopian future where books are burned by firemen, and their reading and possession prohibited. The readers follow the story of Guy Montag, and his character development from being a book-burning fireman to questioning the realities of his world and his subsequent rebellion against the system. Unlike other popular dystopias, such as George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which depict societies strictly repressed by a powerful totalitarian regime, Bradbury's world came into being not by the means of governmental oppression, but rather was self-imposed by the public through their ignorance, with thought and intellect being suppressed by the redundancy, simplicity, and comfort of mass media, consumerism, and entertainment. This dystopian vision can be analyzed as a reflection of Bradbury's contemporary realities, and a plethora of analogies can be found between his fictional world and the state of the early 1940's and 1950's America and its society.

The first source that can be used to examine the many references and reflections is the author himself. With the book's popularity, as well as the general rising popularity of science fiction during the time of its publishing, Ray Bradbury commented on the themes and intentions of *Fahrenheit* many times in interviews, articles, and forewords.

2.1.1 Red Scare and McCarthyism

Perhaps the most overarching theme in the novel is the act of burning books. The title itself, *Fahrenheit 451,* refers to the temperature at which paper burns. In his 1967 article *At What Temperature Do Books Burn?* in *The Writer*, he states that his primary inspiration was his love of books and libraries, together with the historical book burnings of Nazi Germany: "when Hitler burned a book I felt it as keenly, please forgive me, as his killing a human" (19). Later he confirmed he also had in mind the book burnings in Soviet Russia (Seed 237). This act is a frequent occurrence throughout *Fahrenheit.* The very first line of the novel, "It was a pleasure to burn" (*Fahrenheit* 9), together with a line from the following paragraph, "He wanted above all, like the old joke, to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace,

while the flapping pigeon-winged books died …" (*Fahrenheit* 9-10), introduces the protagonist Guy Montag, depicting him as someone indoctrinated and fanaticized by a totalitarian, book-censoring government.

These historical book burnings were an inspiration for *Fahrenheit*'s theme; however, they were not the primary topic that the book was supposed to address. That would be the Red Scare of the post-WWII period in the U.S. and the era of McCarthyism. In a 1964 interview the author states that the book was "a direct attack on the kind of thought-destroying force [Senator Joseph McCarthy] represented in the world" (Bradbury, "A Portrait of Genius"). Later, in 1993, he reinforced this idea by saying that he was angry at the Senator and others, like the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and their prosecutions, such as the blacklisting of artists and imprisonment of the Hollywood 10 (Bradbury, "A Few Words With…"). Although the situation in America has never gotten as far as to experience any actual book burnings, there was a great deal of censorship during this time. Several analogies can be found between the era during which the book was written and the world and events of *Fahrenheit.*

The first is the similarity of the book-burning firemen and the investigative forces of the FBI, HCUA, Joseph McCarthy, and others, responsible for the 'witch hunts' of people deemed dangerous to the American nation and society by spreading the Communist ideology. Similarly to these real-world inquisitors, the firemen in the book were responsible for locating potentially subversive individuals – those in possession of books, and their subsequent elimination. As the fireman captain Beatty explains to our protagonist, the firemen were the "official censors, judges, and executors" (*Fahrenheit* 77). All three of these roles are accurate in their description, as they represent a force seemingly independent of any other institution. Although there is an existing government in the world of *Fahrenheit 451,* the firemen have apparent autonomy on both the restriction of books and the degree of punishment for their possession, further reinforcing how much of a powerful and dangerous instrument these real-world prosecutions were, often disregarding the Constitutional rights of their victims, as can be seen in the case of the Hollywood 10.

2.1.2 Paranoia

The early 1950's were a period of paranoia, especially for public figures like artists and politicians, as Bradbury explained in a radio interview in 1956 when talking about *Fahrenheit:* "I wrote this book at a time when I was worried about the way things were going in this country four years ago [in 1952], too many people were afraid of their shadows, there was a threat of book burning, many of the books were taken out of the shelves at that time" (Bradbury, "Ticket to the Moon"). He refers to the threat of being labelled or suspected a Communist, an individual dangerous to American society, and the fear of the many investigative forces searching for any mildly suspicious activity. The firemen are the primary source of this fear in the novel, which is expressed multiple times. Clarisse McClellan, a girl who first sparked curiosity in our protagonist to question the realities of his world, says: "So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean" (*Fahrenheit* 14). Faber, a retired English professor who later becomes Montag's accomplice and mentor is suspicious of him at first, reluctant to disclose any information. Montag himself is experiencing paranoia, and as his interest in the state of society and the meaning of books grows, so does his fear of the firemen, most notably Captain Beatty and the Mechanical Hound they use to locate suspicious activity.

With this analogy between the prosecuting forces in respective worlds established, one can easily deduce a similar analogy between the prosecuted – the book-owners in *Fahrenheit,* labelled as 'intellectuals', and the suspects of Soviet affiliation in the US. Much like the inquisitors, they too are a source of paranoia, this time for the general public. When Montag showed his wife Mildred a stash of books he had been hiding in their house, she "backed aways as if she were suddenly confronted by a pack of mice that had come up out of the floor. He could hear her breathing rapidly and her face was paled out and her eyes were fastened wide" (*Fahrenheit* 86) and later "her foot touched one [book] and she saw this and pulled her foot away" (*Fahrenheit* 87). Later, when travelling in the subway, reading and citing a book, other passengers are visibly shocked and frightened by him (*Fahrenheit* 103, 104). These fears of negative Communist influence were the reason why the prosecutions of public figures in America happened and received attention in the first place.

2.1.3 Mass culture and the degradation of media

The remaining actors in Bradbury's dystopia other than the firemen and the 'intellectuals' are the masses, mindlessly consuming substance-lacking entertainment and media, not questioning the repetitiveness and irrelevance of their daily lives. What is unique here compared to other dystopian visions like those of Orwell or Huxley is that this life is not a result of an oppressive totalitarian regime, but it emanated from the gradual development of technology, mass media, advertisement, and entertainment: "It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God" (*Fahrenheit* 76). Bradbury frequently criticizes the state of mass media in America, how the depth of their content is reduced, prioritizing attracting attention and short-term amusement instead:

> We are so enamored of effects, of surfaces, of gimmicks, as you well know in Hollywood if you have a gimmick film, or careers are built on gimmicks, or automobiles each year are sold on gimmicks, our whole society is rampant with the jazzing up, the overdoing of surfaces and I think the real business of all the artforms is to go beneath the surfaces and find out what makes them tick. I think a great example of this is my book *Fahrenheit 451.* (Bradbury, "Ticket to the Moon")

In later interviews he further criticizes magazines, saying they are simplified, littered with advertisements and unnecessary headlines, "beginning to look … moronic at the lowest level" (Bradbury, *Gauntlet* interview). This effect of 'dumbing down' is taken to an extreme in the book and thoroughly explained by Captain Beatty. The catalyst for it, he says, was the development of motion pictures, radios, and television in the early 20th century.

> Things began to have *mass* ... And because they had mass, they became simpler ... Films and radios, magazines, books levelled down to a sort of paste pudding norm … Books cut shorter. Condensations. Digests. Tabloids. Everything boils down to the gag, the snap ending … Classics cut to fifteen-minute radio shows, then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, winding up at last as a ten- or twelve-line dictionary resumé … Politics? One column, two sentences, a headline! (*Bradbury* 71-73)

Another notable example of this loss of substance can be seen with the television 'relatives' that Montag's wife Mildred watches every day – it is a frequent source of entertainment, but she is unable to comment on any meaning of their actions. "What was it all about? Mildred couldn't say" (*Fahrenheit* 60). Even though at the time of the novel's conception, TV has not yet been as widespread, it was quickly rising in popularity, and it is another form of media Bradbury often criticizes. It is present on several occasions in the novel, as it seems to be constantly turned on in Montag's living room, playing on the three television walls for his wife's entertainment. Montag himself does not seem to be much interested in the TV, expressing a rather negative disposition against it. Such can be seen on page 59 of *Fahrenheit*: "Well, wasn't there a wall between him and Mildred, when you came down to it? Literally not just on wall but, so far, three!" or when he is reluctant to purchase an additional expensive fourth wall (*Fahrenheit* 30-31). He expressed his concerns in a letter to fantasy and sci-fi author Richard Matheson as early as 1951 after Matheson reacted to Bradbury's early short story "The Fireman", which was later used as a template for writing *Fahrenheit.* In this letter, Bradbury explains how it is increasingly more difficult to enjoy starting new novels when other media are much easier to get into. This extends from television to movies, and radio (Bradbury, *Remembrance* 107-109).

Unlike TV, radio had already been quite established in the USA in 1953. It too is imagined by Bradbury as a form of media declining in the quality of its content. Mildred's character is generally utilized to offer the reader an intimate look at an individual's reality in the world of *Fahrenheit* and how they exist on a daily basis. The critique of radio is no exception, as it is again Mildred whom we see wearing 'Seashells', headphones that are constantly transmitting words and music: "And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind" (*Fahrenheit* 20).

2.1.4 Minorities

One factor which contributed to this gradual development of mass media, as stated by Beatty, was minority pressure. "You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred … Coloured people don't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about Uncle Tom's Cabin. Burn it. Someone's written a book

on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book" (*Fahrenheit* 78). Post-war America saw a lot of social changes, and many civil rights movements emerged or started gaining more traction, most notably those fighting for equal rights of African Americans or women (see 1.1.3 and 1.1.4). Although at the time of the novel's conception, these were not nearly as popular as they became in later years, Bradbury still included them as a potential element that could limit the freedom of expression in the future. He commented on this much later, in 1996, when political correctness concerning minorities was significantly more relevant than it was in the 1950's. "… whereas back then I wrote about the tyranny of the majority, today I'd combine that with the tyranny of the minorities. These days, you have to be careful of both. They both want to control you" (Bradbury, *Playboy* interview). Here he also notes that the fire chief's description of minority pressure was an accurate prediction of the 1990's.

2.1.5 Education

The last major thing Bradbury often criticizes is the decline of education and the lack of motivation for young students to read because, as mentioned previously, other forms of media, such as comics or television, are much easier for one to get attracted to (Bradbury, "The Bradbury Chronicles"). In a 1991 interview, when asked if he saw the book burning and censorship in *Fahrenheit* become a reality, he answered "No, but I see the other danger that I pointed out—how the totalitarian concept came about. If people can't read, if your educational system fails and people can't read or write, then they're at the beck and call of everyone with a flimsy idea" (Bradbury, *Gauntlet* interview). A failed education system is precisely what can be seen in the novel. Clarisse McClellan stopped going to school, she was labelled 'anti-social' and is not missed there. She gives Montag an overview of *Fahrenheit's* schools:

> An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don't; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film-teacher. That's not social to me at all. 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. They run us so ragged by the end of the day

> we can't do anything but go to bed or head for a Fun Park to bully people around, break windowpanes in the Window Smasher place or wreck cars in the Car Wrecker place with the big steel ball. (*Fahrenheit* 41-42)

Captain Beatty later explains that this type of education is only natural and practical, as its aims are to teach a person how to do their job and anything else is meaningless. “School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?” (*Fahrenheit* 73).

From several of his comments one can also link how schools are utilized by *Fahrenheit’s* totalitarian regime to impose its ideologies on the young generations; an effective strategy used by real-world authoritarian governments, as children are most susceptible to influence and can easily be molded into subservient citizens. “Surely you remember the boy in your own school class who was exceptionally ‘bright,’ … And wasn’t it this bright boy you selected for beatings and tortures after hours? Of course it was. We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal” (*Fahrenheit* 76, 77). Limiting the amount of time the children spend at home, potentially exposed to ‘unwanted’ influence, is one step to increasing the effectiveness of this type of indoctrination: “The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That’s why we’ve lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now we’re almost snatching them from the cradle.” (*Fahrenheit* 79). Suffice it to say that the majority of children in *Fahrenheit* would not be exposed to any rebellious influence at home regardless, as their parents are already well-indoctrinated and behaved citizens who do not care much for their children, as can be seen with Mildred’s friend, Mrs. Bowles: “I plunk the children in school nine days out of ten. I put up with them when they come home three days a month; it's not bad at all. You heave them into the 'parlour' and turn the switch. It's like washing clothes; stuff laundry in and slam the lid.” Mrs. Bowles tittered. “They'd just as soon kick as kiss me. Thank God, I can kick back!” (*Fahrenheit* 125).

2.1.6 Conclusion of author's intentions

To conclude Ray Bradbury's personal interpretations, it is important to note that throughout the years during which he has commented on *Fahrenheit 451* many times in articles and interviews, he has not always been consistent in his explanations of what his intentions and motivations for writing the book were and what it is about. Many times has he said that it was inspired by real-world book burnings of totalitarian regimes: "It's about Hitler and Stalin and China, where they burned God knows how many books, killed God knows how many teachers." (Bradbury, "A Few Words With…") He used this historical context as an analogy between these oppressive governments and the state of America in the late 1940's and early 1950's, saying the book was 'a direct attack' on the prosecutions and censorship of artists and books during the Red Scare mania and McCarthyism (Bradbury, "A Portrait of Genius"). However, in a 2007 interview, he firmly says that "Fahrenheit 451 is not … a story about government censorship. Nor was it a response to Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose investigations had already instilled fear and stifled the creativity of thousands" (Bradbury, "Misinterpreted"). This is not only a direct contradiction to what *Fahrenheit* is generally regarded to be about by many scholars and critics, including Sam Weller, who wrote Bradbury's authorized biography *The Bradbury Chronicles* (Bradbury, "Misinterpreted"), but also a contradiction to the author's many previous commentaries. It is unclear why he said this, perhaps his personal opinion and interpretation of the book changed. One possible explanation would be that he wanted to put more emphasis on the other intention of the book that he and others have examined thoroughly, that being a warning against the dangers of declining education, mass media, and entertainment, as well as political correctness, as those were significantly more relevant in 2007 than book burning and censorship.

Nonetheless, despite this minor inconsistency in his interpretations, it is evident Ray Bradbury used the era of post-war America and its political and social issues as building blocks to craft the dystopian world of *Fahrenheit 451,* which in many ways reflects this historical period. And although he said his stories are "warnings, they're not predictions" (Bradbury, "The Romance of Places"), by utilizing his present realities as the basis for his work, he reached many accurate assessments about the future development of society and technology.

2.2 Other plausible interpretations and reflections

Even though the author often deliberated on his intentions regarding *Fahrenheit* in numerous interviews and articles, his commentaries did not depart from the most obvious notions that set the book as a reaction to Red Scare censorship, development in technology and media, mass culture, minority pressure, and failing education system, all topics which Bradbury was deeply passionate about.

The following chapters are focused on other significant realities of post-WWII America, and how these realities are used to construct the novel's dystopia – some likely intentionally by the author, as they are inherently connected to the ideas which he expressed on many occasions, such as the Cold War being directly responsible for the period of Red Scare and McCarthyism. These apparent reflections were examined by numerous scholars, and critics to varying degrees, offering a wide range of interpretations of Bradbury's work. However, some reflections are less apparent, perhaps not even intentionally included by Bradbury, and their deeper analysis could potentially offer insight into the author's subconsciousness and hint at his attitudes and experiences. Therefore, the aim of these next chapters is not only to introduce these interpretations and exemplify them through the text of *Fahrenheit,* but also to expand upon them, thus surveying not just the widely acknowledged interpretations, but also the less evident undertones. By reading these against the historical context of the late 1940's and early 1950's, one can reach new interpretive conclusions that have not been overtly acknowledged by Bradbury himself.

2.2.1 Cold War and the global position of USA

America in the 1950's was involved in a major conflict against Soviet Russia, which had the two nations striving for both military and ideological supremacy – the Cold War. This conflict was the inherent catalyst for the resurgence of the Red Scare after the Second World War and was a looming threat in the background of American life. Not only was this a threat of secret Communist influence that would taint the capitalist paradise of the US, but also a threat of yet another bloody conflict which could easily engulf the entire world again, its damage even more severe, potentially irreparable this time with the usage of atomic bombs. That the novel refers to this conflict is apparent and considered by many critics and authors, such as Robin Anne Reid, Kevin Hoskinson, Jack Zipes, and others. "Throughout the novel,

war lurks in the background until it finally erupts. The obvious reference here is to the Cold War …" (Zipes 187). Multiple times are the events of the book suddenly interrupted by jet-bombers flying overhead with rumbling sounds:

> As he stood there the sky over the house screamed. There was a tremendous ripping sound as if two giant hands had torn ten thousand miles of black linen down the seam … The jet-bombs going over, going over, going over, one two, one two, one two, six of them, nine of them, twelve of them, one and one and one and another and another and another, did all the screaming for him. (*Fahrenheit* 22)

After one of these flyovers, when Montag is already set on his path to enlightenment, resolved to study books and decipher their meaning, he expresses his anger at the planes and society's indifference to them as well as any other world events: "Every hour so many damn things in the sky! How in hell did those bombers get up there every single second of our lives! Why doesn't someone want to talk about it?" (*Fahrenheit* 96). This could hint back to how the public behaved both during the Second World War and the early Cold War, usually not questioning the purpose or morality of the conflicts, such as can be seen for example with the usage of atomic bombs against Japan, which the majority of public deemed appropriate and necessary (see 1.1.2). This is not to justify or condemn the actions of either side of these conflicts, nor to generalize the public as brainwashed masses, but to highlight the argument that people are more often influenced by their patriotism, the involvement of themselves and their families in the war, and government propaganda and censorship rather than conducting their own deeper research of the topic. Perhaps this is why so many Germans supported the Nazi expansion during WWII, or why the Red Scare was so menacing for Americans during the Cold War. This phenomenon is taken to an extreme and adjusted to serve the needs of the government in *Fahrenheit 451.* Rather than rallying the masses under a war cause, it wants to keep its citizens in their obedient state of mental oblivion. Instead of telling them which side is 'good' and which side is 'bad', there are no sides at all, removing any possibility of questioning whether theirs is indeed the 'good' one. The war is generally treated as a mundane part of everyday life and getting drafted as no different from going to work, as can be seen when one of Mildred's friends, Mrs. Phelp, says: "The army called Pete yesterday. He'll be back next week" (*Fahrenheit* 122). She also seems oblivious to any

dangers her husband might face in the war, “It’s always someone else’s husband dies, they say” (*Fahrenheit* 123). Not providing any information about the war, its dangers, or the enemy makes the conflict seemingly irrelevant to the citizens, and most likely intentional by the government to shift the public focus to different matters.

The concept of rallying the masses against a common enemy is still utilized by *Fahrenheit’*s government, only not connected to the war. The real enemy here are the books and their readers; thus, their burning and prosecution is the rallying cause, accompanied by spectacle to grab the attention of the populace. “Always at night the alarm comes. Never by day! Is it because the fire is prettier by night? More spectacle, a better show?” (*Fahrenheit* 53). Later, Montag’s escape from the Mechanical Hound is even broadcast as a popular TV program (*Fahrenheit* 171-174). An interpretation of these spectacles in relation to the ongoing war provides an allegory on how the Red Scare investigations and trials, often accompanied by great publicity, might have potentially been used to divert the populace’s attention from other US policies, of which the Korean War offers itself as the most apparent one during this period.

In conclusion, the portrayed irrelevance of the war in *Fahrenheit 451* and the lack of interest of the general populace in it reinforces the basic premise of this dystopian world – the elimination of thought and meaning. However, in relation to the extravaganza of burning books, it is arguably also allegorical of real-world events and presents yet another potential reflection of the 1950’s America.

America as the world’s enemy – an alternative reality

After exclaiming society’s indifference to world affairs, Montag continues questioning why the world is the way it is.

> We've started and won two atomic wars since 1960. Is it because we're having so much fun at home we've forgotten the world? Is it because we're so rich and the rest of the world's so poor and we just don't care if they are? I've heard rumours; the world is starving, but we're well-fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we're hated so much? (*Fahrenheit 96*)

This is practically the only piece of information about the world outside the American borders that *Fahrenheit* provides to its readers, even though it is mostly Montag's speculation based on his experience and rumors. However, his assessment is in many regards matching the global position of America after the Second World War or could in theory be argued to be a plausible historical development, had the political tensions between the US and the USSR escalated to the levels of atomic warfare.

During the post-war period, the American economy experienced a massive boom, mostly due to the many technological advancements and social changes, and the quality of life of its citizens as well as their incomes and purchasing power increased significantly. This gave rise to a society lavishing on the consumption of goods and entertainment, which further accelerated economic growth. Europe on the other hand was devastated by the war and dependent on American aid, while its eastern nations were swiftly losing their autonomy to the oppressive Soviet Russia. Even several famines occurred during this time, so the line "the world is starving, but we're well-fed" exemplifies the incomparable difference in the living conditions of the average American versus the average European. Despite this, the US was a valuable ally to the Western block, so there is no real basis for the hatred Montag talks about, except for perhaps some superficial envy. However, by using some historical data which were analyzed in the theoretical part of this thesis, one could construct a plausible hypothesis of alternative historical development.

It has been established how ineffective the atomic bomb was as a diplomatic tool against the Russians in the early Cold War years, as its use was highly impractical, and its destructive potential easily matched by the Red Army (see 1.2.2). Although, in the real-world, America has not utilized atomic bombs against the Soviets, in the world of *Fahrenheit 451,* Montag tells us that "we've started and won two atomic wars since 1960" (*Fahrenheit* 96). So, assuming American diplomacy fails, they use the bombs against Russia, and the Red Army ravages Western Europe in retaliation, it is not impossible to imagine how America would be, at least partially, blamed and hated for this destruction. In this case, Bradbury follows a classic dystopian trajectory, as he uses possible and dreadful outcome (atomic conflict) of an existing situation (the Cold War) to create his world, the plausibility of which is reinforced through the exploration of American status and diplomacy after the Second World War.

2.2.2 The intellectuals and their utopian vision

The war in the book culminates by the ending of the story. Shortly after Montag escapes from the city where he once lived, it is bombed and completely annihilated. The intellectuals who until then were hiding in the countryside now begin to march forward, resolved to guide humanity in this new world. Here Bradbury can be subject to criticism when analyzing some implications of his final pages. Weapons of mass destruction, capable of levelling cities to the ground are regarded as instruments only to be utilized in the direst situations, as the consequence of their use is an unprecedented number of casualties, most of which being innocent civilians. However, in *Fahrenheit 451,* the vision of this destruction is almost cathartic, ending the era of oppression and oblivion, and cleansing the world of the evil government, its firemen, publishers, and broadcasters, but also of their flocks of mindless citizens and consumers. The sinners have been flooded away and a new utopian world is about to be born anew. The symbol of Phoenix is used throughout the book to indicate this rebirth – first, it is a crest of the book-burning firemen, and at the end of the book Granger, one of the rogue intellectuals, approximates this mythical bird to humanity and the repetition of history: "every few hundred years he built a pyre and burned himself up. He must have been first cousin to Man. But every time he burnt himself up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again. And it looks like we're doing the same thing, over and over" (*Fahrenheit* 208, 209).

The first issue with this is that although symbolic, the process of establishing utopia through this rebirth suggests the necessity of eliminating the majority of society which is merely subject to oppression resulting from its natural development. Even though this oppression and subsequent destruction is very much self-imposed, the 'scorched earth' seems too drastic of a solution, and history teaches us that partial eradication of the populace hardly leads to a utopian world. Granger continues:

> We've got one damn thing the Phoenix never had. We know the damn silly thing we just did. We know all the damn silly things we've done for a thousand years, and as long as we know that and always have it around where we can see it, some day we'll stop making the goddam funeral pyres and jumping into the middle of them. We pick up a few more people that remember, every generation (*Fahrenheit* 209).

This refers to the idea that history repeats itself and humanity should use it to learn from its past mistakes, but it also clearly links the 'people that remember' to the book-reading intellectuals, which arguably subverts the original reference with a notion that these intellectuals have higher claim to life than the people who perished in the bombing. This interpretation, especially given the previously established links between *Fahrenheit 451* and post-war America, could paint the book's ending message as elitist, rejecting equality in favor of educated individuals. Furthermore, although these intellectuals are portrayed as 'saviors' by the novel, preserving humanity's knowledge against a force seeking to eliminate it, an argument could be made that they are less humane than they seem to be on the surface. One indicator of this is that they seem to be anticipating the destruction that ensues in the book's finale and are indifferent to it, or even rather looking forward to it. Faber says to "wait on the war to break the pattern … A few bombs and the 'families' in the walls of all the houses, like harlequin rats, will shut up!" (*Fahrenheit* 116). In addition, it could also be argued that they regard books higher than human lives, and themselves are more defined by the books they memorized rather than their names and personalities, as can be seen when Granger introduces them to Montag first by the name of authors and the books they memorized, and only then by their real names. "I want you to meet Jonathan Swift, the author of that evil political book, Gulliver's Travels! And this other fellow is Charles Darwin, and this one is Schopenhauer, and this one is Einstein, and this one here at my elbow is Mr. Albert Schweitzer, a very kind philosopher indeed. Here we all are, Montag" (*Fahrenheit* 194). After the destruction, Granger also reminds them to "hold on to one thought: You're not important. You're not anything" (*Fahrenheit* 209). One could further employ this interpretation of these individuals, as well as their own belief that history repeats itself, to compose a possible unwritten future for the world of *Fahrenheit,* with the intellectuals as its leading force stressing the importance of books and knowledge. Although not repressing reading and critical thinking, they might strive to filter out and censor any simplistic content similar to the one propagated by the previous regime which was, after all, self-imposed. This would result in a system that is the reverse of the government portrayed by the novel*,* but also similar in many aspects and oppressive in its own right.

To sum up, although one of the principal intentions of Ray Bradbury with *Fahrenheit 451* was to issue a warning against the rapid expansion and degradation of media in America in

the 1950's, it could be argued that his final utopian vision is somewhat biased, affected by the author's often-expressed personal passion for books. Using the constructed hypothesis of the potential future for his fictional world, one could also issue a different warning – one against the disruption of the natural development of media, society, and technology. After all, the Red Scare of the 1950's gradually subsided, books are still widely distributed, and 'minority pressure' above else improved the position and secured equal rights of previously oppressed or neglected groups.

2.2.3 Captain Beatty

A deep analysis of one other prominent character in the novel can further reinforce the theory of false utopian vision in 2.2.2. Captain Beatty, although being the leader of the book-burning firemen and primarily acting as Montag's adversary, interestingly shares many traits of the rebellious intellectuals. Faber even admits the possibility of him being "one of [them]" (*Fahrenheit* 118). He seems to be acquainted with literature, not only from the perspective of a fireman but also from that of a reader. He displays extensive knowledge of books by frequently citing various quotes and admits that he "had to read a few in my time, to know what [he] was about" (*Fahrenheit* 81). It is not confirmed on what occasion this was, whether he used to be on a similar path of questioning his realities like Montag, or whether it was part of his fireman training, or something else entirely. His potentially rebellious past would explain how he swiftly becomes suspicious when Montag is sick, and Beatty's visit and conversation with the protagonist are made threatening by his accurate deduction that the sickness is a result of subversive thoughts and curiosity about the forbidden texts and messages hidden in books, something the Captain might have recognized from personal experience. He explains: "At least once in his career, every fireman gets an itch. What do the books *say,* he wonders" (*Fahrenheit* 81), which indicates that he had this 'itch' himself in the past. Although he then dismisses books as containing "nothing you can teach or believe" (*Fahrenheit* 81), the sincerity of this final statement could be debatable, and perhaps he is hiding more than others, including the reader, are led to believe.

Furthermore, Beatty is educating Montag on the history of their society and the fireman profession. And he is not just reciting the firemen rulebook which likely contains government propaganda, but he refutes some of its claims and offers his personal hypothesis

on the historical development of their profession. This potentially marks him as one of the 'people that remember', who were defined by Granger at the end of the novel, and consequently to the intellectuals, as the link between these groups has already been established (see 2.2.2). It could further be argued that he shares their belief in history's repetition and the Phoenix-like cycles of rebirth. In the moment of his death, when Montag burns him alive, he seems indifferent to his destruction, just as Faber and the other intellectuals were indifferent to the impending doom of society. 'He just stood there, not really trying to save himself' (*Fahrenheit* 158). Perhaps he foresaw the current cycle of history ending, and himself as one of the leading figures of its regime not having a place in the next one. We know from Montag that there have been two atomic wars before, each of which might have caused a similar reset to the one described in the novel's finale. Using the analysis of Beatty's character, one could potentially view him as a rebellious intellectual after the first reset, who then helped to shape society after the second one, resulting in the world we see in *Fahrenheit 451*.

In conclusion, by deeply analyzing the character of Captain Beatty and his many similarities to the group of intellectuals, we could establish him as one from an older time. Given the notion that these groups are to be overseeing and guiding the 'rebirths' of civilization, together with their belief of history repeating itself, after experiencing the world potentially established by Beatty and his contemporaries, the aforementioned claim that Montag's future would hardly be utopian is further reinforced.

Beatty's approximation to real-world figures and practices

The analysis of Beatty's character also offers an analogy between him and some public figures of the 1950's. Both being the leading prosecuting figures in their respective worlds, the most striking analogy would be between him and Joseph McCarthy. The Senator did not shy away from publicly presenting his brutish nature and vulgarity, and although it is highly unlikely that he was faking such personality, it would be incorrect to merely assume him a mindless brute. Despite being insufficiently educated in the areas of his function; he was able to gain enormous publicity and skillfully manipulate the press to shape his exaggerations into a believable narrative for the general public. Similarly, the senseless brutality of the firemen towards books and their readers would hardly have one believe that

the fire Captain would display extensive knowledge of the books' contents and share many traits of the prosecuted individuals.

This highlights how public figures can use publicity, both positive and negative, to reach their desired goals while intentionally hiding some aspects of their character and actions. In the context of the Red Scare period in post-war USA, this hints not only at the policies of Senator Joseph McCarthy but also at other politicians who abused the pretext of anti-Communism to further their personal agendas.

2.2.4 Reflections of post-war booms

Technology

The many booms of the post-war period are reflected in the world of *Fahrenheit 451.* Similarly to his contemporary writers of the British Angry Young Men and the American Beat Generation, Ray Bradbury criticizes the rapid technological innovation and mass consumerism, and Montag's disillusions could be well approximated to the authors of these groups and their works. However, rather than criticizing technology in general, some argue that Bradbury focuses on how it is utilized by society to produce television programs and goods like automobiles which overshadow its other uses (Zipes 186). Television and the mass consumption of media have already been widely explored in authorial interpretations (see 2.1.3). A more symbolic representation of technology and its threat to intellect is the Mechanical Hound the firemen use to locate subversive individuals. Alongside Montag's path to rebellion and reading books also gradually rises the Hound's suspicion of him, culminating in a violent attack and pursuit once Montag openly revolts against the government. The firemen also use the hound for fun when they are bored: "At night when things got dull … [they] let loose rats in the firehouse area-way, and sometimes chickens, and sometimes cats that would have to be drowned anyway, and there would be betting to see which the Hound would seize first" (*Fahrenheit* 36). The vivid cruelty here further supports the claim that Bradbury disdains the use of technology for entertainment, reinforces *Fahrenheit'*s position as a critique of rapid technological advancement, and through the Hound highlights how dangerous it can potentially be.

Automobiles

The booming automobile age is not omitted from the novel. High-speed driving is considered one of the fun activities people of *Fahrenheit* do outside of watching TV. Much like the Hound, cars are often connected to the general indifference of people towards other living beings, both animals, as can be seen when Mildred says "It's fun out in the country. You hit rabbits, sometimes you hit dogs" (*Fahrenheit* 84), as well as humans - Clarisse tells Montag that last year "Ten of [her friends] died in car wrecks" (*Fahrenheit* 42) which nobody seems to care about, and later during Montag's escape from the city a group of teenagers are seemingly trying to run him over for fun (*Fahrenheit* 164-167).

The book's depiction of automobiles is not only reflective of the booming automobile industry of the 1950's but also yet another reflection of the misuse of technology. No longer primarily utilized for its original purpose of transportation, driving cars is, much like technology in general, merely a source of entertainment accompanied by cruelty.

Housing

The suburban housing boom is also partially depicted in the book. Montag lives in suburbs that reinforce the monotony of the lives of its residents (Seed 231). The only diversion from this seems to be the house of Clarisse and her family which stands in opposition to the other uniform buildings, "brightly lit … while all the other houses were kept to themselves in darkness" (*Fahrenheit* 26). Clarisse further talks about the removal of front porches and gardens. These provided unnecessary comfort and therefore a place for people to relax and think, behavior unwanted by the government. This directly correlates to the criticism of the early suburban development sparked by William J. Levitt in America, which often similarly omitted these spaces, as well as individuality and other community interests in favor of practicality and efficiency.

2.2.5 Women

The book's women, notably Montag's wife Mildred and her friends, arguably reflect the position of American women in the 1940's and 1950's. Much like was the widely popular norm at that time, the women in *Fahrenheit 451* do not have any jobs, or at least it is never hinted at them having one. So apart from occasionally visiting an amusement park or going for a drive to entertain themselves, they do not seem to do anything besides watching their

television walls or visiting each other to watch together. This is a somewhat twisted portrayal of housewives who lost all purpose, as they barely need to dedicate time to their children if they have any, and the work at home seems minimal thanks to automation. This lack of purpose and meaningful interests is arguably a reason for their deep depression which they do not admit, not even to themselves, choosing to drown it beneath a constant intake of entertainment. This can be seen when Mildred overdoses on sleeping pills and forgets it the next day, or when Mrs. Phelps bursts into tears when listening to poetry which stresses deeper meaning and introspection rather than surface effects like TV.

Consuming television or radio most of the time also means they are easily subjected to the broadcasted propaganda, such as when they all voted for the same president purely based on his presentation rather than his politics, a trend that became more prevalent in the real world with the rise of visual media, notably television. Furthermore, their exposure to propaganda also partially correlates to how the propaganda of the Second World War and the following years was often centered around women. During the War, more women were needed in the workforce to increase industrial production, but afterwards, these positions had to be given back to the returning veterans, so the propagated narrative of what was expected of women changed to suit the needs of its time.

These shifts in women's position sparked various feminist movements, slight hints of which can be seen when Mrs. Phelps talks about her independence from her husband, or through the character of Clarisse McClellan, who has the traits of an independent woman, although her struggle is against the general ideologies of *Fahrenheit's* society rather than the conformity of its women. Feminism movements could also be categorized under Bradbury's notions of minority pressure (see 2.1.4).

To conclude, Bradbury once again uses the notions of his contemporary society, this time the position of women, to construct a futuristic vision of how this group might evolve under the influence of the book's dystopian reality.

Conclusion

Bradbury's futuristic vision in *Fahrenheit 451* serves as a warning against the rapid development of media and technology and how these may be utilized by a governing force to establish a dystopian reality. Bradbury's world, however, is unique compared to other dystopian works, as its oppressive government is a result of the gradual degradation of society and thought rather than its catalyst.

Bradbury constructs his vision based on the many realities of post-WWII America which are recounted in the theoretical part. This period was an uncertain time of both optimism and fear. The ending of the Second World War kickstarted the positivity – American veterans were coming back home from Europe and the Pacific to enjoy their well-earned peace. The rapid industrial development during the War also led to great economic expansion, and together with the comfortable global position of the USA, they further strengthened these optimistic attitudes and secured an era of great prosperity. The position of minorities improved however slightly, and many booms were occurring, notably in education, the economy, housing, the automobile industry, consumerism, and media. But these were subverted by a new global conflict rising in the background, that being the Cold War. This feud with the Soviet Union, accompanied by the threat of the new and deadly atomic bombs, caused fears of another armed conflict on the horizon. Additionally, after the discovery of Soviet spies in high government positions, a period of paranoia known as the Red Scare ensued, and rigorous investigations of any potential Communist influence were being conducted. These were often unjustified, and many abused the Red Scare to damage others for their personal gains, the most notorious of these being Senator Joseph McCarthy, hence this behavior is also known as McCarthyism.

These investigations led to the censorship of media, artists, and producers, which angered Ray Bradbury, and inspired him to write *Fahrenheit 451.* In this novel, he uses the book-burning firemen as an obvious allegory to the many investigative forces of this period and warns against the dangers of their influence. These are, however, only partially responsible for the creation of his dystopian world. He further blames the degradation of mass media and the use of technology, how its increasing simplicity sacrifices deeper thought and meaning in favor of short-term entertainment. He points out the principal danger being how

very much self-imposed by society, its ignorance, minority pressure, and failing education system this is, rather than forced by the government. All the aforementioned reflections are easily identifiable in the novel and sanctioned by Bradbury's personal interpretations, which he expressed in detail in numerous interviews and commentaries, which is shown in the first half of the practical part of this thesis. The Cold War and the looming threat of atomic bombs, although not extensively explored by the authorial interpretations, are other aspects of post-war America which are evidently present in the novel, thus their reflection is generally accepted by critics and scholars. A potential interpretation of this reflection, explored in more detail in 2.2.1, can be utilized to construct a plausible alternative historical development similar to the futuristic vision of *Fahrenheit*. Bradbury's use of nuclear annihilation by the end of the novel also allows for an interpretation which offers a potential critique of some of the author's notions and warnings, subverting some of his originally noble intentions (see 2.2.2). Many other aspects of the late 1940's and early 1950's America are further present in the story, such as the economic and technological booms, or the general position of American women during this period.

As a result of the many similarities between the world presented by Ray Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451* and his contemporary America, it is credible to state that this futuristic vision accurately reflects many aspects of society during the Cold War era and that its warning message was very relevant not only in the context of the 1950's, but due to the continuous prevalence of many of its themes, retains its relevance even in the 21st century.

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