

RAY BRADBURY'S *FAHRENHEIT 451*: AUTHENTIC FUTURE DYSTOPIA

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Abstract:

Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 (1953) is science fiction novel which discuss the effect of technological advancement on a people living in future society. In such future society written literature is banned and burned by a fireman because it is considered as threat to social conformity. This future government considers book as a dead thought by dead people and this government make people to think only about present not future. Guy Montag is protagonist and fireman in the novel represents future modern man who is burning this book without knowing its meaning. Novel also visualizes the picture of dystopian future in which people are like machines, without emotions. The novel also highlights such important aspect which creates the authentic picture of this dystopian future.

Keywords: *Dystopia, Censorship, Consumerism, Morality, Cultural anxiety, Book-burning.*

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) is most popular work of fiction. It discusses the impact of censorship on a group of living in a future society where books are forbidden and burned. It is considered as the future dystopia in which 'Fireman' is employed to start fires rather than extinguish them. It is in one sense social commentary on the contemporary government. It also shows the important of books and literature. Novel attacks against McCarthyism and on the domination of mass culture.

Dystopian novels usually explain the negative picture of future and negative effects of technology on human being and alert its reader from the bad future. Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* visualizes the future society in which fireman's duty is to burn the book and literature. The government in that future society mandate to seek out and burn all the books. Guy Montag is the hero of the novel and 'fireman', enjoying his duty of burning the book. He is burning a book without knowing the importance of a book but his encounter with Clarisse McClellan, a teenage girl makes him to read book and to know the meaning of it. This future government encourages people to think between only four-wall televisions but Clarisse whose curiosity and love of nature makes Montag to think. He also begins to read books and rebel against the government and regret to burn books. He turns against the authorities in a rash and unpremeditated act of murder. At the end, he joins a group of self-exiled book-lovers who hope to preserve the great works of the world despite the opposition of the masses and a nuclear war against an unspecified enemy.

The relationship between Montag and his wife Mildred is the good example of technological dystopia. Technological dystopia often focuses on the negative effects of technology that harm our interpersonal communication relationship. Technology like smart-phones decreases communication within family members and friends group because people engrossed in their excessive use of technology and smart-phones. Montag and his wife are the best example of it. She is brittle and sickly looking wife. She is obsessed with watching television and refuses to engage in frank conversation with her husband about their marriage and relationship. Her suicide attempt in novel indicates her great deal of pain. She does not understand her husband. Montag also could not make good relationship with his wife and biggest

regret in life is not having a better relationship with his wife. This lost relationship visualizes the future dystopia.

Other important feature of dystopian literature that it describes tyrannical government or dehumanization in contemporary society. *Fahrenheit 451* also visualizes the frightening vision of future society where fireman don't put out fires but start them in order to burn books. In such future society funerals are eliminated because they are the source of unhappiness. Death is forgotten as soon as it occurs and bodies are unceremoniously incinerated. Books are forbidden because according to contemporary government books contain dead thoughts by dead authors.

Dystopian literature also usually throws light on the eradicated family and keeps it from re-establishing itself as a social institution. People in that society do not read books, enjoy nature, spend time by themselves, think independently or have meaningful conversations. Instead of it they drive fast cars, watch excessive amount of television and wall-size sets or listen to the radio on 'Seashell Radio' sets attached to their cars. Mildred is good representative of such society. Her obsession with television is a means to avoid confronting her life. Not only Mildred but her friend Mrs. Phelps also presents alienation in dystopian future. She is emotionally disconnected from her life and appearing disconnected when her third husband is sent off to war. When Montag reads out a poem, she breaks down and this reveals her suppressed feelings and sensibilities. Other Mrs. Bowles also Mildred's one of friends, has also such kind of a misery. She also does not seem to care deeply about her own miserable life, which includes one divorce, one husband killed in an accident, one commits suicide and two children, who hate her. Both Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles represent as typical specimen of their society. Mildred and her friends face inner pain which also affects much of the population of present day also. Most of the people are alienated from their family relation and engrossed in work. They have lost their emotional attachment and *Fahrenheit 451* represents this real dystopia through it.

The domination of television, consumerism and suburban lifestyles, domination of technology visualizes future dystopia. In novel, to read books means to assert individuality and individual moral action. In such a society, books transmit ethical knowledge that produces stable and liberal communities. The society is without moral direction and without ethical base. Loss of the books and individual morality in society brought the lack of community in society. The emptiness in such future society is described by the deserted city's cape, a zone of isolation, control and death. The world of *Fahrenheit 451* is empty one and Montag at the end run across the highest transformed into a killing zone, their no pedestrians on the road. The motor-car, television screen are technological changes which heading us towards destruction. Bradbury also explores that how the government is able to use mass media to influence society and suppress individualism through book-burning. Book-burning in such society became a form of entertainment to the general public. Bradbury also warns us that book-burning will be inevitable part of our future because of technology. People believe in online information than to engross in books. Nowadays 'Google' is essential part of our life and knowledge. We don't need to search more and more books for information. But this may destroy all the written literature and in future book will be no more. Bradbury warns us about the dystopia and also fears about possible future society of non-reader and non-thinker, who have no sense of their history. Books in such society are perceived as threats to social conformity.

This future country's political situation irritates the reader because it is unimaginable but Bradbury presents its possibilities with ease. In such future, United States this denominator of culture has imposed its idea of happiness on people in that society and has become an extrapolation of sitting in front of television with six packs of beer, free of hard work, also of complex human relationships like Mildred and Montag. It also consists of the disturbing stimulations of the ideas and image of the great artists and thinkers. Bradbury visualizes or alerts reader that in future the television screens can be all four walls of the room. The viewer participates in the families by subscribing it and then acting out a viewer script. Bradbury

represents his complex ideas with the future society and vivid images of human possibility.

Future society only makes to think people in present. With burning of book, they try to erase the past and prevent people from imaging the future. People's mind in such society is locked for only present but nothing. The emptiness of this future dystopian society is brought out by Bradbury with literary references. Quote from Mathew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' expresses the emptiness in contemporary society:

Ah, Love, let us be true to one another! For the world, which seems to lie before us like a land of dreams, So various, so beautiful, so new, Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, Not Certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain; And we are here as on a darkling plain; swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies Clash by night. (96-97)

Novel is set at the time of war, jet planes cultural anxiety and ends with the destruction of the city by an atomic or nuclear device. This mysterious ending of novel can be a warning to readers about dystopian future which may harm human being. The culture presented by author is based on war, economic power and prosperity. As Montag explains:

We've started and won two atomic wars since 2022! It is because we're having so much fun at home. we've forgotten the world? It is because we're so rich and rest of the world is so poor and we just don't care if they are. I've heard rumours; the world is starving, but we're well fed. It is true, the world works hard and we play? (69-70).

Bradbury makes use of fantasy to horrify the reader, or to place man in future as the master of the universe or the destroyer of the world. In modern world changes occur suddenly that nobody would deny that any idea presented by Bradbury is incapable of realization. He mysteriously comments on the issue of documentation and raise questions that what will happen to the written record? Will people still read books and what roll will libraries play? Bradbury broods over the important issues like what would be life on earth if books were lost or destroyed?

Novel visualizes the future in the sense that it describes the empty lives of people, excessive use of electric media and drugs, fast cars and big television screens. It can be commentary on the mass media like television and popular magazines, which are reducing our society to very low-quality tastes. It can be a picture of a future turning towards technology and destruction.

Novel also traces the Montag's flight from the dangerous mechanical world of the city to the traditional haven of the country. Montag at first feels comfortable with the machine and job of burning and that is why when he first meets Clarisse, he views the scene in mechanical terms as thus:

The Autumn leaves blew over the moonlight pavement in such a way as to make the girl who was moving there seem fixed to sliding walk, letting the motion of the wind and the leaves carry her forward.(3)

But many mechanical things are repellent to Montag especially the equipment of the medical technicians use on his wife after she has attempts to suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. Anti machine and anti-war elements in novel are there for the background for Montag's spiritual development. Though Montag leaves society, he is not happy with his new -bookish society. Murder of Beatty is the Montag's rebel against the freedom in society and to maintain this freedom and integrity of his vision, he leaves this society.

Beatty's explanation of reason behind book-burning is perfectly visualizes the state of literature and art in dystopian future. Beatty considers books as a dangerous and worthless because they do not give definite answers, that they contradict themselves and one another. Beatty is frustrated because he doesn't find stable meaning in book and it made complex to Betty. Nobody has mastered over book and it can be interpreted in many ways as Beatty explains it:

The books say nothing! Nothing you can teach or believe. They're about nonexistent people, figments of imagination, if they're fiction. And if they're non-fiction, its worse, one

professor calling another an idiot, one philosopher screaming down another's gullet. All of them running about, putting out the stars and extinguishing the sun. You come away lost. (59)

Character of Clarisse is important in novel in the sense that she is only one to aware of this dystopian future society or world she lives in. She represents the key in novel that unlocks the Montag. Before Montag Meets Clarisse, he is like a machine or book burning robot, only doing his job and have a lack of family relationship. But Clarisse shakes him and forces him to examine the world around him. She indirectly makes him to take drastic and violent steps. She shows Montag the way she observes society and she shares her insight into people, shares metaphors, comparing the rain to wine and the fallen leaves to cinnamon. She displays curiosity about other people's motivation and lives. Clarisse turns Montag from automation into a thinking, feeling, and analysing being.

Bradbury exaggerates and extends scientific, technological and social conditions from a current real situation and it convince the reader that everything occurs in the fantasy world is feasible in the distant future and that is the dystopia of future.

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