

***Fahrenheit 451* and rising: post-modernist reverberations in the work of Ray Bradbury**

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ABSTRACT : This paper involves examination of the novel *Fahrenheit 451*, a well-known dystopia from the perspective of highlighting some features of that text which may be regarded as post-modernist in nature. A two-pronged approach is adopted in that a post-modernist reading is applied in conjunction with a discussion on the nature and purpose (i.e. the philosophy) of literature. Relevant examples will be given as the appropriate junctures in the text.

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship that persists between literature and philosophy is old and complex. It involves different strands of thought and interwoven layers of ideas involving interpretation, style and emphasis. This paper seeks to explore the relationship between these two disciplines and the role they play in the development of critical self-awareness and cultural evolution through a dialogue with post-modernist discourse with reference to a number of key thinkers in the areas of literary and cultural theory. Complimenting this approach, cross-reference will be made to relevant works of philosophical musings and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Such reflections will involve an exploration of the nature and purposes of literature before bringing these ideas into communion with the above references areas of inquiry.

Bradbury's novel provides a powerful focal point from which to engage in necessary interrogations of the role of literature in questioning existing cultural practice and simultaneously to reject existing practices that have formed an integral part of the culture up to a certain point, but which now have been called into serious question. Thus, post-modernist tendencies take on a particular relevance in this respect.

The relationship persisting between literature and philosophy

Texts are written for a variety of purposes, for different desired effects in different styles depending on the author's intentions and nature of the motivation for the writing in question. The formation of ideas to question and express contesting identities and contexts and their interpretations are reliant upon the media which give them form and the underlying principles that provide the theoretical ballast to sustain their existence. Finding a suitable mode of expressive form adequate for the task of genuine engagement with artistic endeavour and its role in mapping understandings of the cultural terrain involves a variety of devices. This paper is concerned with asserting that a productive approach to pursuing these concerns is to be found by engaging with the intricate and refined instruments of analysis found in philosophical readings of literature and the culture in which literary works can and are conceived.

A task of this nature, i.e. attempting to map certain philosophical approaches to the role and purpose of literary works and the relationship between interpretation and cultural conditions, can be sustained by reference to the fact that as Christopher New has noted in his *Philosophy of Literature*:

...whenever we write or speak, whenever we produce a linguistic composition, however slight, we utter sequences of written remarks (inscriptions) or sounds...These inscriptions or sounds have, as well as other features, certain grammatical and semantic ones that are determined by the rules of language which we speak or write. These rules determine how the sequences or sounds or inscriptions constitute words and sentences, and what the sentences mean...The rules also determine (together with certain intentions of the utterer) what statements, questions, orders, etc. we issue when we utter the sentences that are constituted by those sentences that are constituted by those sequences of sounds or inscriptions that we speak or write.

(New 1999, 8-9)

In referencing such 'linguistic compositions' are governed by what he calls 'the rules of the language', New acknowledges that obvious influence that grammar and culture exert over the composition and interpretation of language. Further reflection on these remarks suggests exploring the nature of public discourse would be a fruitful avenue of inquiry/analysis. There is little doubt that any such analysis reveals the multifaceted nature of this form of expression, a feature also recognised by New who acknowledges that: ...All discourses have implicit or secondary meaning, but some have more than others. The higher the ratio of implicit to explicit meaning in a discourse, according to the theory, the more literary the discourse. The norm is thus not a fixed amount, but a **blurry-edged band in a spectrum**. Some discourses are high in explicit meaning, and they are literary (in the extended sense). Others are low, and they are not. There are still others about which we may be unsure. (...)

(New 1999, 29)

A degree of uncertainty is sometimes present in perceptions on the nature of text, but there is little disagreement over the principle that art (construed in this paper as the medium of the literary work) has long since been recognised as powerful medium in which philosophical ideas can be exposed and debated mainly due to its capacity to address complex and important issues and the manner in which deliberates the contours of their meaning and relevance (Vidmar 2015, 2). Much of the potency of literary representation and its expression of content is marked by a distinct departure from the more exacting procedures and quantitative characteristics of descriptions commonly found in the area of political economy and other scientific endeavours. Moreover, this manner of thinking found in the contours of sentiments in 'The Literary Imagination in Public Life' (1991) by Martha Nussbaum who praises the novel which she notes as being a:

...morally controversial form, expressing in its very shape and style, in its modes of interaction with its readers, a normative sense of life. It tells its readers to notice this and not this, to be active in these and not these ways; it leads them into certain postures of the mind and heart and not others.

(Nussbaum 1991, 878-9)

Given the complexities and intricate nuances of human experience and the varying perceptions of the interpretations brought to bear on such experience, New's notion of a 'blurry-edged band in a spectrum' gains further traction. Arguably, accounts of human affairs from the perspective of political economy and scientific quantities reduces human experience and emotion to definite numerical values and these accounts are devoid of what Nussbaum has described as '...complexities of the inner moral life of each human being, its strivings and perplexities, its complicated emotions, its perplexity and terror'. Adopting this approach permits the reader to benefit from the insights gleaned from the writer's artistic work that recognises the need to view people as living beings that necessitate tender treatment (Nussbaum 1991, 886).

Other scholars have also highlighted the strident role played by literature in representing the human experience. In this respect, Olsen in his *The Structure of literary understanding* (2008) is acutely aware of the importance of literary works in how they 'convey insights into the human condition and human nature by presenting the reader with descriptions of sequences of events or characters which display certain features characteristics' of these elements. Literary works depict conditions that are often fictional, but they consistently display certain features that readers realise have come to establish a pattern of situations in which particular kinds of occurrences and personae are a recurrent feature (Olsen 2008, 72). Olsen's approach closely emulates the principle adopted by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographica Literaria* in which he asserts that:

...poetry is essentially ideal, that it avoids and excludes all accident; that its apparent individualities of rank, character or occupation must be representative of class; and the *persons* of poetry must be clothed with generic attributes, with the *common* attributes of class: not with such as one gifted individual might *possibly* possess, but such as from his situation it is most probably before-hand that he *would* possess.

(Coleridge 1907, 33-4)

Coleridge's remarks reinforce the belief that a certain credibility is attached to plausibility and that it is not uncommon for literary works to imitate 'life' in order to reach this point of credibility with its readership. One could assert that finding a suitable artistic mechanism to account for and give form to the human condition inevitably involves a degree of philosophical rendering. Some scholars give credence to such a view including Philip Kitcher who concurs with those who believe that the barrier between literature and philosophy to be relatively porous. He has noted that this barrier has been traversed on a multitude of occasions within recent Western cultural history. This is exemplified in the form of philosophical thinkers such as Thomas Mann and Fredrich Nietzsche having produced literary text. Other examples include Montaigne, Voltaire, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, and Coleridge and extend further to a profoundly philosophical character of renowned literary and

musical works such as the Shakespeare's drama, certain features of songs found in Schubert's work and the symphonies of Mahler and Wagner as well as Joyce's work – *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* among the prime examples (Kitcher 2013, 13).

Noting these examples and considering that philosophy facilitates the questioning of concepts and the idioms that serve as a vehicle for their cultural transmissions it become evident that the imagination can be highly stimulated through interaction with literature or music which in turn catalyse the materialization of perspectives and approaches that would otherwise remain ensconced within the subconscious or entirely ignored (Kitcher 2013, 16-17).

Imaginings of any kind inevitably involve the creation and/or penetration of consciousness. Such a term is nebulous in meaning and is still contested. In his *Experience and Nature*, John Dewey asserted that the notion of consciousness inspired ambiguous interpretation. From one perspective, it can refer to existence of the qualities of being sentiency, which may be interpreted as feelings, which come to exercise form where concrete meanings do not exist. From an alternative standpoint it can also be construed as indicating actual awareness of objects and being fully cognisant of meaningfulness of the existence of affairs external to the self (Dewey 1929, 298). These external realities are vitally important since language cannot exist without at least two interlocutors who act as the necessary agents to bring meaning through shared abilities to employ language and the process of using that medium to attach and contest meaning (*Ibid*, 299). It is thus Dewey's contention that each individual continuously engages in what he refers to as 'immediate organic selections, rejections, welcomings, expulsions, appropriations, withdrawals, shrinkings, expansions, elations and dejections, attacks, wardings off, of the most minute, vibrantly delicate nature'. Such practices permit each individual to appropriate, select and reject certain meanings and values that inform what we believe to be 'right' or 'wrong'. Qualities of this nature constitute the greater part of our "institutions" and thus the individual who has the most acutely refined ability to direct their communications articulately are said to be a "reasoning" person who is quite capable of employing carefully discerned choices of 'initial premises, jointures, and conclusions' (*Ibid*, 299-300).

One could thus justly claim that a fortuitous cooperation between reasoned thinking and intuitive abilities is required to activate latent awareness within the subconscious so that such influences and thoughts are permitted to exercise greater supervision over sentiment to reach clearer sense. This is in evidence in Bradbury's dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* to which our attention shall turn to later. Dewey contends that the deification of the subconscious offers a means to counter-act the effects of what he refers to as 'evil communications' (perhaps better thought of as *corrupting attitudes*) on the formation of the subconscious. In his view, this is important as the subconscious of a 'civilised adult' should be regarded as the aggregate of the sum total of a whole set of habits the person has acquired up to that moment. Thus, recognition can be given to the purported causal relationship between the character of language and its significant influence upon feelings, which is a direct reflection of the perceived nature of things and the existential point of departure for the treatment of immediate qualities of things (*Ibid*, 300-301).

It is at this point that the interpretation of the *qualities of things* passes from idea to practice, or more precisely, artistic practice. Such processes depend heavily on the artistic capacity of each writer or thinker to affect a rendering of a particular perspective or set thereof. As Harold Bloom once remarked: 'Weaker talents idealize; figures capable of imagination appropriate for themselves' (Bloom 1997, 5). If we then adopt a position that is based on Bloom's remarks here we could logically assume that such an exercise would inevitably involve reflective judgment in which we seek to account for and give form to those elements that remain elusive and contingent in nature. Brockelman (2001) defends that as part of this process the imagination conjures upon suitable concepts which facilitate the formation of "purposive" cognition which itself capable of realising a more profound penetration of the sense of subjective experience. Thus, it is argued that all judgment is either partially or wholly imbued by an aesthetic element. Brockelman instantiates the Kantian view that a strong degree of familiarity of our perceived facts about the natural world has led to a situation where there has been a diminution in the degree of satisfaction derived from our ability to comprehend nature since, he asserts, "We have gradually come to mix it in with mere cognition and no longer take any special notice of it" (Brockelman 2001, 102).

Artistic endeavour and the empowerment of the imagination

As things become more banal, or the perception of nature becomes more prosaic, the need for artistic intervention steadily grows. Many different approaches to this situation persist and it would be foolhardy to favour one over another, however, due to limitations of time and persuasiveness of rhetoric I shall invoke some remarks from Albert Camus' *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* in which he invokes the power of the artistic spirit to question and propel imaginative reflection on human existence and our place in the world. In the chapter titled: 'Rebellion and Art', Camus defends the idea that:

(...) Art is the activity that exalts and denies simultaneously. "No artist tolerates reality," says Nietzsche. That is true, but no artist can get along without reality. Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is. (...)

(Camus 1992, 253).

This complex interplay in the artistic imagination involves mediating competing values and their contours driven by a particular element within the artist's own conscience to construct a meaningful account of the human condition. He espoused that artists:

...express on the aesthetic level the struggle, already described, of revolution and rebellion. In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it, and the construction of a substitute universe. Rebellion, from this point of view, is a fabricator of universes. This also defines art. The demands of rebellion are really, in part, aesthetic demands. All rebel though, as we have seen, is expressed either in rhetoric or in a closed universe

(Camus 1992, 255).

With these remarks in mind one could credibly assert that the artistic endeavour provides the form, the tangible shape of feeling and sentiment from which sense can be made of a disjointed and fragmented world. The act of artistic interpretation through writing thus renders a system of understanding possible which empowers consciousness through the careful sculpting and placement of words in which, quote: 'man can reign and have knowledge at last.' Art is thus always meaningful and is a positive source of signification where reality is disputed, but not denied (Camus 1992, 255; 258).

Thus, for Camus this notion of artistic endeavour has a definite and potent role in rendering the contours of the reality that comes to be perceived by the artist. He notes that it is the novel that is the form given to this aesthetic encapsulation:

...What, in fact, is a novel but a universe in which action is endowed with form, where final words are pronounced, where people possess one another completely, and where life assumes the aspect of destiny. The world of the novel is only a rectification of the world we live in, in pursuance of man's deepest wishes. For the world is undoubtedly the same one we know. The suffering, the illusion, the love are the same. The heroes speak our language, have our weaknesses and our strength. Their universe is neither more beautiful nor more enlightening than ours. But they, at least, pursue their destinies to the bitter end and there are no more fascinating heroes than those who indulge their passions to the fullest...

(Camus 1992, 262-263)

Camus' thus surmises that the imaginary world that persists within a novel is a product of the reification of the tangible world in whose reality suffering can continue indefinitely until the mortal end, passions continue unabated without diversion in the presence of people who never depart active company. In such a world relief from the limitations of finite indulgences that are inescapable in everyday life are granted so as to achieve any desired outcome. Death itself can be transcended altogether as creation itself can be bargained with and manipulated. The sole agenda for the character of these alternate outcomes and objectives is the satisfaction of artist's own sensibilities governed by the intelligence directed toward nostalgic or rebellious sympathies. Ultimately this form of activity serves to express a metaphysical need and satisfy its formation (Camus 1992, 264).

One of the major areas that has garnered the attention of artistic renderings is that of abuses associated with the growth of the modern state conceived in light of accumulated technical achievement and philosophical desires. These latter factors have naturally tended to frustrate the advancement of libertarian ambitions that gained renewed vigour as the human spirit has attempted to grapple with the implications of modernity and its consequences. Ironically, this renewed vigour has been provoked by the foundation and maintenance of the rational (and from some perspectives, also irrational) state sustained by a philosophy removed from the notion of God and based on terror (Camus 1992, 178). Once more, we can find a sense of vigour found in *Fahrenheit 451* as it seeks to highlight the dangers of technical achievement allied with a state-sponsored consumerist philosophy that mollifies ambition by converting it to consumption. The manner in which the artist can draw attention to such matters is where attention is now directed.

Rational constructs of the artist – a search for meaning

Rational reflection is sometimes subject to challenge either by the passage of time or through the deliberate labours of those who wish to subvert in the service of their own corrupt and corrupting agenda. This arguable deforms the tenets of imagination and by doing so endangers freedom of thinking that in turn facilitates hegemonic accumulation of power to the detriment of individual well-being both from a cultural and individual standpoint. In a chapter titled 'Oracular Philosophy and the Revolt Against Reason' in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Karl Popper alerts his readership to the fact that reason and language are both born of social interactions. The implication here is obvious: if people become isolated and atomised from others the formation of meaning is restricted. He gives the example of Robinson Crusoe who was marooned on a desert island at a very early stage in his life and credits him with the capacity to pragmatically acquire problem-solving skills on

his own, but notes there are limitations experienced by individuals in this kind of situation and those comparable to it. This is because a character like him could not originally invent language or discover the art of argument in the absence of extended dialogue with others. It is thus that reason is, just like language, dependant on communication with other people (Popper 2002, 431).

Problem-solving, whether through practical task or reflective thinking, is thus in need of rationalist basis for its successful conclusion. However, this cannot happen in the absence of the application of prior knowledge and lucid thinking as opposed to sentimental desire. Through the adoption of certain attitudes and behaviours it becomes possible to enter a state of being whereby critical argumentation is a valid strategy to learn and develop. Such an approach recognises the necessity to commit to a culture of observation and reasoning so that it becomes possible to secure agreement or compromise between competing interests of different parties. Employing an equitable approach of this nature thus makes it more likely to secure a mutually acceptable position or conclusion. What he terms 'an attitude of reasonableness' provides meaningful perspective which can be instrumental in its own right in a quest to reach an objective position where reason and rational thinking are central objectives (Popper 2002, 431). It can thus be asserted that the intellectual culture and philosophical condition encouraged by works of literature can act as strong instrument of persuasion in bringing about psychological conditions under which rationalism can be introduced and perpetuated.

Language remains at the heart of the process of rational reflective imagination and the judgements they are frequently employed to materialise. Jürgen Habermas has postulated that:

Every complete thought has a specific propositional content that can be expressed by an assertoric sentence. But beyond the propositional content, every thought calls for a further determination: it demands an answer to whether it is true or false. Thinking and speaking subjects can take a position on each thought is complemented by an act of judgment. Only the affirmed thought or the true sentence expressed a fact. The affirmation of a thought or the assertoric sense of a statement brings into play a further moment of ideality, one connected with the validity of the judgment or sentence.

(Habermas 2012, 12).

It is the power of semantic reasoning that underpins Habermas's claim and one which again reflects the necessity of the role of language in formulating a rational position through idealisation of concepts and ideas through the selection and application of suitably functional lexical terms. Increasingly it has become more evident to some theorists, particular Habermas, that language is very powerful actor in the nature and functioning of society and indeed, the nature of the culture associated with it. In that respect he observes that:

As long as language is used only as medium for transmitting information, action coordination proceeds through the mutual influence that actors exert on each other in a purposive-rational manner. On the other hand, as soon as the illocutionary forces of speech acts take on an action-coordinating role, language itself supplies the primary source of society.

(Habermas 2012, 18)

Extruding further meaning from this assertion reveals the irreducible and inescapably potent role played by language in constructing systems of meaning that form the primary basis of our understanding of the world. By implication, devices which supply segments of meaning that come to form part of the constellation of systems of meaning must also receive due recognition. An undeniable instrument of these devices is the role literary works which in turn supply a structure that aids stratification and edification of the fragmentary nature of post-modern culture. Literary works, particularly those of a fictional nature, are a central part of this process. Works of fiction serve an important role in promoting rational reflection which can guard against the development of extremist positions and a false consciousness.

Fiction itself also fulfils another important role in positing and perpetuating an agreed system of meaning in what that has 'conferred identical meanings on the expressions employed' (Habermas 2012, 19). The presence and use of these meanings is intricately dependent on language itself that is in turn sustained by 'communicative action' that essentially envelops our whole cultural environment and on which we are dependent for awareness through knowledge. There are, however, some deficient qualities in this cultural structure as this knowledge is applied almost instinctively and thus does not generally have recourse to reflective thinking in respect of our own awareness that such a practice is prevalent. An obvious implication is that these assumed certainties could be false since all knowledge is susceptible to fallibility particularly where it remains uncontested (as is the case of the false consciousness prevalent in the character of Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*). Where such knowledge forms a fundamental part of the underlying basis of our assumptions in respect of the true character of our cultural context, it is more discrete in character and by inference less likely to be questioned. It follows then that background knowledge is rarely elevated to active discourse in which it can be subjected to active debate. The obvious remedy or response to such a latent position is to engage these values as resources of debate as a process that transduce their presence into active topics of discussion (Habermas 2012, 22-23).

Thus, if we follow Habermas's notion whereby 'the generality of concepts and thoughts is interwoven with an idealization' (Habermas 2012, 12) it becomes evident to the aesthetic eye that these idealizations are delivered through the vehicle of assertoric prepositions that can then be brought into the public consciousness and thus be subjected to scrutiny.

Stuart Middleton (2014) notes that given the nature of such activities, situations and contents in which values and practices are subject to critique are left to the artistic figures of a society. Art is thus seen as evoking imagery and devices that attest to the 'ordinary experiences' which comprise a fundamental part of the object of the artistic enterprise. In his *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), Richards holds that 'the arts are our storehouse of recorded values'. He further asserted that 'they spring from and perpetuate hours in the lives of exceptional people, when their control and command of experience is at its highest.' Thus, the central role of the artistic enterprise is recognised to such an extent that it is bestowed with the power that 'exceptional people' merit whose enlightened principles in the exercise of self-government is shared and benefits the whole of society (Richards 1924, 30-34).

Middleton (2014) explicitly concurs with Eliot's vision of the role of the poet which he said was to unify 'the disparate experience' and in a sense, retrieve it for the ordinary man to whom the experience was akin to something 'chaotic, irregular, fragmentary'. This also involved the artist being part of the effort to 'construct experience' in a cohesive way that supported a 'public moralism' that originated in Victorian cultural mores where the poet is entrusted with the task of being the arbiter of a unified 'experience' through the work they produce infused with the knowledge of the character persisting in a historical literary corpus (Middleton 2014, 424).

But what of 'experience'? Can it be rendered sufficiently well within a literary context. This paper argues that it can, but the quality of that exercise is reliant on the strength and variety of the writer's imagination. Closely intertwined with the representation and rendering of experience is the notion of meaning and value. Experience is subject to interpretation, as previously noted, however, certain elements of it will receive greater attention that others and which elements received this treatment can be determined by engaging in analysis of meaning of things. For one persuasive approach on how this could be done attention can now be turned to the work of Robert Nozick. In his *Philosophical Explanations* (1981), Nozick speculates on the purpose of meaning and value. Recognising the broad and complex nature of this issue, he posits that:

We were driven to speak of the unlimited by the nature of meaning as transcending of limits, a connecting with something external. For how could a mere connection with something, no matter how trivial, establish the requisite meaning? That other thing, surely, must itself have meaning, if meaning is to accrue to anything in virtue of being connected with it. Inexorably, we are led to iterate the question "and what is the meaning of that?", asking it of each wider context. Barring an infinite chain, we are led either to something itself without meaning, which seems to undercut the meaning of all the rest based upon it, or to something that somehow can constitute its own meaning (...)

(Nozick 1981, 610)

Resisting the temptation to indulge in existential speculation, Nozick recognises the need to impose some recognisable form on this exercise of rendering meaning in that he acknowledges that:

Meaning involves transcending limits; yet although merely connecting with anything at all beyond the limits, no matter how trivial, does not suffice to establish meaning, it does not follow the requisite connection must be made with something itself has *meaning*. What bestows meaning by connection itself be nontrivial, but there are ways of being nontrivial, also, if it has value. The chain that grounds meaning cannot terminate in something worthless, but it need not end with something that somehow is intrinsically meaningful; it can rest upon something valuable. (...) Meaning is a connection with an external value, but this meaning need not involve any connection with an infinite value; we may well aspire to that, but to fall short is not to be bereft of meaning. There are many numbers between zero and infinity. (...)

(Nozick 1981, 610-611)

It is arguable that a reasoned analysis of these observations would arrive at a conclusion that would, at the bare minimum, recognise values are relative in nature and generally only materialise once ideas are conceived and compared to other values in a wider context. Nozick believed that this was the case to the extent that any meaning derived from such an exercise will be inextricably drawn to examining the nature of the connections between values in respect of their proximity, intensity and strength and how these interact to create conditions of unity that produce meaning. He holds that meaning in human life is to be found by looking at the broader context of value in what is being examined (Nozick 1981, 611). Fiction thus supplies a powerful medium

through which values can be examined and debated. Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel does just this as he seeks to re-adjust the protagonist understanding of society and his own role within it, the analysis of which shall be dealt with in a later section.

The contours of the values arrived at are thus determined by the nature of the interpretation applied. Berel Lang (1990) recognises the important contribution made by Spinoza in understanding the nature of interpretation. He notes the rationalist tendencies that guided Spinoza in appropriating reflexive versions of interpretation which places strong emphasis on "the natural light of reason" as the basis of all knowledge. In turn, this is held to be a central tenet in the process of interpretation and the conclusions it yields (Lang 1990, 217). Furthermore, he also refers to the Spinozian process of interpretation that holds the truth meaning to be reliant upon the recovery on meaning itself as opposed to the truth of the content unearthed by the process itself whether or not that meaning is consistent with doctrine. The implication in that respect is that interpretation does not need to and indeed must not be accountability to authority (Lang 1990, 221). Such a stance is thus in accordance with the view that it falls to the writer to reveal meaningful insights through the course of the production of their literary creations. Meaning, of varying degrees and forms, is thus given the impetus to take shape in the mind of readers. The latter is complex and contested process which Hilary Putnam (1997) has interpreted as being intrinsically linked with what he terms *intension* and *extension* which are ambiguous in nature. Putnam alludes to the fact that the majority of traditional philosophers take the view that concepts should be seen as a *mental* construct. Exposing this idea further reveals that what is implied in this respect is that meanings can be seen as mental entities. However, he recognises that gaining a real appreciation of the meanings in such situations involve the recognition of abstract entities rather than mental ones. Once this stage has been reached it then becomes possible for readers to 'grasp' what these entities are as individuals. A key part of this process of understanding, Putnam observes, involves the reader being in a particular psychological state (Putnam 1997, 218).

Putnam is not alone in this line of reasoning as postulations on the role of the reader proffered by Paul Ricoeur who presciently recognised that the most relevant site of the narrative process is significantly heightened by a competent strategy designed to 'simulate real presence through writing.' This strategy is clearly evident in *Fahrenheit 451* where characters are presented in their everyday lives going about their normal business as ignorance turns to awareness. This facet will be explored in greater depth later in this paper. Within this line of reasoning, Ricoeur is given to the view that highly refined rhetorical techniques skilfully employed by the writer is ideally part of an attempt to render a faithful reflection of life while discretely applying writing techniques that are designed to ensure the 'intensity of the illusion' (Ricoeur 1991, 392). Maintaining this process intact also involves recognising the wisdom of old through the work of respected thinkers such Aristotle who was of the view that a well-told story offers pedagogical value. Ricoeur is in concordance with Aristotle's contention that stories expose universal characteristics of the human condition and it is the art of poetry that is endowed with greater power than philosophy to expose the contours and nuances of the character of human experience (Ricoeur 1991, 427). For Ricoeur there is little ambiguity to be encountered when examining the power of texts to transform insight, on this says:

Whatever this relation of art and historiography may be, it is certain that the tragedy, the epic, and the comedy – to mention only the genres known through Aristotle – develop a kind of intelligence we could call narrative intelligence, and which is much closer to practical wisdom and moral judgment than it is to science and, more generally to the theoretical use of reason. (...)

(Ricoeur

1991, 427)

As artistic expression in narrative form has developed and evolved it has also reflected the qualities of post-modernist culture. However, innovation is real but still owes much to tradition and is still subject and reflects certain rules since imagination must have some basis and cannot be conjured from nothing. New models of have expression arisen to reflect the need for innovation and these forms are said to 'range through every degree of regulated deformation.' Traditional stories remain an important form and deviance has come to dominate over other forms and this has meant that contemporary novels give form to experimental writing to such an extent that some have been deemed 'anti-novels' (Ricoeur 1991, 430). There is little doubt that this is a symptom of post-modernism which established patterns and defined relationships are torn asunder, question and reassembled in new ways.

On this phenomenon Ricoeur also pronounced a view in which he said:

A text is not an entity closed in upon itself; it is the projection of a new universe, different from the one in which we live. Appropriating a work through reading it is to unfold the implicit horizon of the world which embraces the action, the personages, the events of the story told. The result is that the reader belongs to both the experiential horizon of the work imaginatively, and the horizon of his action concretely. The awaited horizon and the horizon meet and fuse without ceasing. (...)

(Ricoeur 1991, 431).

Hence ideas and characters coalesce within a narrative structure to give form to the writer's imaginative projects to create a fictive world that empowers different strands of the human experience. The malleable world of fiction creates ideal conditions for a communion of ideas where the possible and the real coalesce to create conditions that permit a greater understanding of the self which is a fundamental function of a narrative as Ricoeur also recognised in his remarks when he observed '...a life *examined*, in the sense from Socrates, is a life *narrated*.' (Ricoeur 1991, 435).

II. Postmodernist cultural practices

With the onset of modernity and later post-modern cultural conditions, the forms in which this narrative takes has become more diverse and complex. In his book *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983), Hal Foster demonstrates how a resistant postmodernism is preoccupied with a critical deconstruction of tradition which critiques origins and an exploitation of cultural codes that exposes rather than occults social and political identities (Foster 1983, xii). In a chapter in Foster's above cited work, Frederic Jameson acknowledges the contested nature of concept of the postmodern. He identifies postmodernisms as being engaged in the effacement of some key boundaries and separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture (Foster 1983, 112). Moreover, Slavoj Žižek (2012) also recognises the breakdown of traditional boundaries within the postmodernist paradigm. For him a key feature of this phenomenon is that old forms are repurposed and deployed in the form of pastiche that have been stripped of their substantial content (Žižek 2012, 603-604). Such disjunctive practices are symptomatic of the flexibility that is a key feature of postmodernist texts is that they, according to Stanley Aronowitz (1988) are narratives about the world that are openly partial and which are bound to discourse and represent an intimate link between knowledge and interest from which to gain a foothold to interpret 'reality' (Aronowitz 1988, 103).

The reality of an unforgiving separation and disjunction under cultural conditions which witness a specialization and rationalization of labour practices are irrefutable features identified by Frederic Jameson in his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). In this text Jameson defends his thesis that:

...the force, which was responsible for this new moment, does not stop there either: in another stage, heightened, a kind of reversal of quantity in quality, reification penetrates the sign itself and disjoins the signifier from the signified. Now reference and reality disappear altogether, and even meaning – the signified – is problematized. We are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism, which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage: metabooks which cannibalize other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts...

(Jameson 1991, 96)

It becomes clear from Jameson's interpretation that there is an ongoing cacophony of relative chaos that relies on certain nodes of reception to punctuate different points of resistance to free-flowing narratives. In certain contexts it is the form on interpretation that defines form itself and experimental play can produce a wide variety of forms that interact unpredictably with other elements.

Paul Crowther (2013) has theorized on the effects of globalization on what he refers to as the 'historical paradox of civilisation' in the context of postmodern society. He believes that macro-social element of the civilising process can be used to achieve a much higher level of assimilation in the absence of the application of coercive force. He refers to the utility offer by innovative devices conceived within the medical and information technology industries. In respect of the latter in particular, he recognises the power of satellite television and the internet to ensure the transmission of values and interactions on a global scale. This technology thus has a central part to play in providing orientation on a scale and depth that would previously have been unimaginable (Crowther 2013, 31). Crowther further claims that this most extensive feature of this phenomenon is consumerism which has been a major feature society – particularly in the United States – since at least the 1950s. Instant gratification rather than practical utility is the driving force within such a system where packaging is more important than principle. The values system that encourages and reinforces these attitudes is sustained by a culture in which information and ideas materialise in a recognisable form by means of television which takes precedence over printed text. While text is still preferred by a diminishing body of people, its role has changed considerably as print has become a largely inferior feature of modern culture as it is ever more eclipsed by computer informational technology that also models newspapers and magazines to emulate the format of television screens (Crowther 2013, 32).

Bradbury's highly instructive novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) thus stands as an important critique of television and consumer culture and the subversion of human needs to consumerist desires. The central role played by

consumerist culture in Bradbury's dystopian novel clearly stands an early example of the dangers identified in Neil Postman's thought-provoking book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Publication Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (1987). Postman recognises the reality of how commercial imagery has superseded text-based claims:

...The move away from the use of propositions in commercial advertising began at the end of the nineteenth century. But it was not until the 1950s that the television commercial made linguistic discourse obsolete as the basis for product decisions. By substitution images for claims, the pictorial commercial made emotional appeals, not tests of truth, the basis of consumer decisions. The distance between rationality and advertising is now so wide that it is difficult to remember that there once existed a connection between them...

(Postman

1987, 131)

Fahrenheit 451 has been described as dystopia that reflects the enormous attack of 'consumer civilisation' against what were understood as traditional moral values of society. An increasingly authoritarian regime suppresses literature so as to guard against independent thinking. This novel is an example of the science fiction genre that portrays a highly centralised, totalitarian state that abolishes freedom of expression in favour of efficiency and overall social harmony. The plot is centrally concerned with the main character, Guy Montag, who works as a firefighter who comes to realise his life of mindlessly burning books by setting fires instead of putting them out is a futile existence. He attempts to re-assert his own autonomous personality and is aided in this quest by his neighbours a young woman, Clarisse McClellan and professor Faber who encourage him to think and to read. His boss Captain Beatty represents the power of the state. His wife Mildred and her friends are consumerist prisoners of a society which Montag comes to revolt (Gorlach 2020, 97-98).

In writing *Fahrenheit 451* (among other works) Bradbury is highlighting the estrangement that Montag is experiencing from his own community and society in a community at some point in the future. In this way he is following an agenda that some authors pursue through science fiction by means of fabulation, which plays an important role in how, as Robert Scholes has observed:

...fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns us to confront that known world in some cognitive way...Speculative fabulation (i.e. science fiction)...is defined by the presence of at least one clear representational discontinuity with life as we know it.

(Scholes

1975, 29)

Bradbury's novel offers a critique of this commercially centred living. Mildred and her friends are virtually addicted to the "parlour walls" which are large television screens found in a prominent position and on permanent display in every home in that dystopian world. These devices are mentioned during the course of Montag's own self-reflection as he converses with Clarisse on his way home:

'...I sometimes think drivers don't know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly,' she said. 'If you showed a driver a green blur, Oh yes! He'd say that's grass! A pink blur? That's a rose-garden. While blurs are houses. Brown blurs are cows. My uncle drove slowly on a highway once. He drove forty miles an hour and they jailed him for two days. Isn't that funny, and sad too?'

'You think too many things,' said Montag uneasily...

'I rarely watch the "parlour walls" or go to the races or Fun Parks. So I've lots of time for crazy thoughts, I guess. (F 16)

A quick succession of images is what governs the conscience and thus drives a consumerist culture rather than nurturing reflective citizens who could potentially challenge the established order of things. Censorship is employed to maintain this state of affairs and this is mentioned by Captain Beatty as he chastises Montag's desire to question how existing practice in their society:

Speed up the film, Montag, quick. Click? Pic? Look, Eye, Now, Flick, Here, Three, Swift, Pace, Up, Down, In Out, Why, How, Who, What, Where, Eh? Uh? Bang! Smack! Wallop, Bing, Bong, Boom! Digest-digests, digest-digests-digests. Politics. One column, two sentences, a headline! Then, mid-air, all vanishes. Whirl man's mind around so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcasters, that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!' (F 73)

This segment of dialogue reveals a great deal of Bradbury's concern about the state of society and the greater dangers to come if no remedial action is taken. An even reducing incidence of content is the preferred form of things so as to reinforce free-wheeling, care-free commercial advertising and the consumption it commands. Printed text becomes ever more simplified and superfluous to meet the ultimate objective: to avoid '...all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!'

A quick succession of images governed by a centrifugal force of constant consumption discourages reflection as much as it encourages instant gratification. Homogenisation encourages and supports universalism which in turn enables mass consumption under a liberal-capitalist paradigm, therefore, tastes must be equal so that people are equal in their outlook and desires. Under these circumstances rational thought is unwelcome and denied. Therefore, sustaining this kind of system requires a single, accepted image of the ideal citizen which Beatty outlines in his rebuttal of Montag's doubts. Any impediment to this goal must be eliminated without further hesitation:

We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make the cover, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it! Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man? Me? I won't stomach them for a minute... (F 77)

The dominant cultural values thus foreground simplicity and compliance and discourse wonder. Preventive measures are taken to ensure continuity, and little is left to chance.

Critics have noted Bradbury conscientious intentions when he wrote *Fahrenheit 451*. For example, Zack Zipes (2008) remarks that the author was inspired to write the work and was influenced by the intellectual and political climate of the time in which it was written and was quite deliberate and fully cognisant of his intention of engaging in a science-fiction exercise of extrapolating possible worlds with his readers in 1953. These intentions necessarily involve making universal statements about humanity and its relationship with the world of art and the future direction of the world (Zipes, 2008: 3). The interpretation offered is that engaging with the fictional world will bestow the insight that the imagined events that occur in the novel could possibly and may even happen in the distant future. Thus, *Fahrenheit 451* does not actually require readers to suspend belief in reality, but rather admit the possibility of the version of events portrayed in the text. The book reflects the author's genuine concern about the state of his society and he is thus attempting to penetrate the reader's conscience with a view to altering the behaviour of people in society at large (Zipes, 2008: 3). McGiveron (2008) echoes Zipes reading in how he also believes that Bradbury is attempting to influence individuals' behaviour. For him, the novel creates a metaphorical mirror that offers the means to engage in self-examination that makes it possible for people's shortcomings to gain form in their minds (McGiveron 2008, 63). Clarisse acts as mirror because she reflects words back as she informs Montag of her thoughts when she mentions how odd she finds the world. She also mentions the noisy and boisterous way people conduct themselves, but in so doing she does not impart an ideological agenda. What she does succeed in doing is to draw Montag's attention to realities that he should be able to detect and recognise for himself, but has not done so up to that point. Clarisse, McGiveron remarks: 'reflects truth into Montag's eyes.' (McGiveron 2008, 65).

Montag's confusion about his predicament is characteristic of the postmodernist novel which David Harvey (1991) believes expose questions of how radically different realities – in this case the wildly different views of the society held by Montag and Clarisse – may simultaneously reside in the same space, strike one another and also permeate one another. Harvey notes that in such a context the boundaries between fiction and science-fiction (clearly evident in *Fahrenheit 451*) break down and postmodernist characters display confusion in respect of the kind world they reside in and the role they are supposed to assume in it (Harvey 1991, 41). Montag clearly demonstrates this kind of confusion at the beginning of the novel, while Bradbury is clearly focused on sketching out the social consequences of unchecked technological innovation within a totalitarian framework (if not the specific nature of the technology itself). McHale affirms that such concerns are typical considerations to be found in the work of postmodernist writers (McHale 2004, 66).

III. CONCLUSION

In *Fahrenheit 451* Bradbury is preoccupied with the declining level of self-awareness and increasing level of technological distraction in his imaginary society. By projecting his fictive world into the future, it offers a timely insight into what may come to pass if remedial action is not taken. His interpretation offers a means by which to unify haphazard patterns of behaviour and varying visions of the world into a single, comprehensible unit of a unified narrative form. While it does not offer definitive answers to complex questions, it raises awareness and forces the reader to take stock of what is portrayed as a disturbing set of circumstances. This awareness offers an opportunity to affect change and change offers the means to avoid an extreme scenario, one which motivated the author to write the novel in the first instance.

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