



Analysis of Dystopian World in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

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Abstract

This academic paper intends to examine the methods that the dystopian state in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* employs to manipulate its citizens. To investigate the ways the government uses in this story, the totalitarianism is studied and analyzed how it is applied in this novel's government. From the exploration, there are seven means: destroying books, brainwashing its citizens to be loyal to their duty and the government, using media as the means to distract its citizens from learning new things, exploiting its citizens to monitor on the rebellious people, brainwashing its citizens to have the emotional detachment, employing the scientific invention to inspect on the rebellious people, and preventing its citizens from communication. According to the theory of totalitarianism, the methods of setting the standard ideology, having only one party of a small group of people to control over the state, using the system of the police control are shown in *Fahrenheit 451*, whereas the ways of employing its power over weapons and economy are not clearly seen. Yet, their totalitarian means cannot control all of its citizens. There are the intellects groups who rebel against the state. Although their rebellious actions are not seen clearly, it is apparent that not everyone agrees with the state's totalitarianism. Consequently, the state does not completely succeed in using totalitarian methods to manipulate its people.

Keywords: Dystopian World, Book Burning, *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury, Totalitarianism

Introduction

Dystopia has been the interesting issues that appear in literary works for many years. Dystopia is the opposite world from utopia. Both of them are the futuristic world. Utopia is the ideal perfect world where the inhabitants live happily. On the contrary,

dystopia is the future world that creates the opposite atmosphere from utopia. It is the terrible and undesirable place where everyone's freedom is limited and in total control of the government (as cited in Akman, 2015, p.75). Dystopian world uses totalitarian ways to control over their citizens to have the absolute power. As a result, the future world of dystopia is the unpleasant place to be. There are many dystopian fictions that present how horrible the dystopia can be. One of the famous novels that discuss about this topic in quite distinguish way is *Fahrenheit 451*. In this story, the government does not obviously present itself as the center of the state. It manipulates its citizens via the subtle controls by exploiting different intelligent ways to distract its citizens from thinking that the state is cruel so that they will not try to rebel against the government.

Fahrenheit 451 was written by Ray Bradbury in 1953. It is about the fireman named Guy Montag, whose job is to destroy books and he is very proud of it at first. But then his life starts to change when he meets some certain characters such as Clarisse, Faber and the intellect groups. He begins to think differently and does not follow the government's rules anymore. Moreover, he sees book burning as the wrongdoing so he escapes to the forest after being chased by the state for collecting the books in his house.

Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* depicts the abominable situations in the dystopian world: the world with "the destructive side of technology and dictatorship, which can deprive people of a normal life and basic freedom". This novel arose after World War II along with the American fear of Communism. Bradbury presents the theme of "censorship and forced conformity where books are forbidden and burned". This story demonstrates how the authority has the total control over its citizens by suppressing their "free thinking and individuality" (Anwar, 2016, p.246). According to Pendery (2017, p.50), he claims that Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* "has long been included in a canon of innovative science fiction writers from the 1940s through the 1960s". Anwar states further that many people think that Bradbury's writing style, however, does not completely belong to this genre since his writing includes some other genres such as horror and fantasy. Yet, Pendery (2017, p.50) argues that science fictions give "great freedom, flexibility, contingency and multidimensionality in their speculation". They also concern about social issues and "public consciousness" which presents the "reinforcing expectations of personal and social change and development in the present and



future”. To scrutinize the totalitarianism in this story, the totalitarian ways will be clarified below.

Theoretical Framework

Dystopia world is usually engaged with the enforcement and the most well-known method is totalitarianism. The concept of totalitarianism, thus, will be briefly described before analyzing *Fahrenheit451*. Totalitarianism is the absolute power that only belongs to the government which means it has the total authority to control over its citizens in every aspect of their lives (Borowski, 2017, p.81; “Totalitarianism”, 2012). Its aims are not only manipulated “all economic and political matters but the attitudes, values, and beliefs of its population, erasing the distinction between state and society”. It also wants to eradicate the different classes in the society. People’s main concern is about the state’s well-being not the private matters anymore. Moreover, the objective of the government is “the replacement of existing society with a perfect society” (“Totalitarianism”, 2012). To enable the term of totalitarianism, the characteristics of totalitarianism will be demonstrated below.

According to Carl Joachim Friedrich (as cited in Borowski, 2017,p.83), he classifies five significant features employed in the totalitarian methods: firstly, the set of standard ideology used throughout the state; secondly, there is only one “mass party led by the small groups of people (oligarchy); thirdly, the state has total power over weapons owning; fourthly, the state has the absolute power over the mass communication and fifthly, “a system of terroristic police control and the last condition is controlling over the state’s economy. The state aims to manipulate the entire community focusing on “human minds, communication, and memory” so that the individuals will only receive the information that the state wants them to know. And they will not enable to express their own opinions and rebel against the government.

This academic paper intends to examine the methods of totalitarianism that the government in *Fahrenheit 451* employs to gain their authority and whether it succeeds in employing those means. Yet, formalism critical approach or textual analysis is the main ways to investigate dystopian world in this novel by concentrating on the concept of totalitarianism. To examine this, the totalitarian means used in this story will be categorized into seven types: destroying books, brainwashing its citizens to be loyal to



their duty and the government, using media as the means to distract its citizens from learning new things, exploiting its citizens to monitor on the rebellious people, brainwashing its citizens to have the emotional detachment, employing the scientific invention to inspect on the rebellious people, and prevent its citizens from communication.

Destroying Books

The state controls over the knowledge and information by burning books. Destroying books leads to the destruction of history and knowledge. Books are the place where all the precious and rebel thoughts contain. Books consist of history, philosophy, politics, people's lifestyle and culture. Burning books, therefore, prevents people from having different ideas and thoughts from the state. When people are ignorant, it is easy for the government to brainwash them. All the past was written in the book so that people will know what happened in each period of time: the different types of authority and manipulation, democracy and communism; the events and situations in each era. In this story, the government intends to take the complete control of its state. To achieve its intention, the government has to destroy history and create its own story: the invented story that does no harm to the state. The information is, thus, distorted from what the history was written. The state can build its own story in whatever ways it wants to prevent the rebellious thoughts and fill its citizens with their new contents and brainwash them.

Firemen's duty is distorted from the past. In the past, firemen's responsibility is to extinguish the fire. In the present, firemen's main job is to light up the fire. What is amazing here is that the firemen in the time of this government have no clue at all that the firemen's duty used to be totally different in the past. For example, when Clarisse asks Montag if he knows the firemen's duty in past is to stop the fire: "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires *out* instead of going to start them?" (Bradbury,2012, p.6), Montag insists that the firemen's job has never been changed. It has been like this since the old time: "No, Houses have always been fireproof, take my word for it" (Bradbury,2012, p.6). The government in this story does not want its people to be smart at all because if they are clever it means they know a lot of knowledge that might lead them to resist the power of the state. If they know that firemen's duty is completely changed, they will be



skeptic why it has to be changed: if the firemen extinguish the fire in the past, why they have to start the fire now. Moreover, people will have a doubt about ruining books. They will be curious to know the true reason of burning books and what is exactly inside the books that make them very dangerous for the stability of state. And if they know that the history is totally different from what they perceive at the present, they would think they are deceived and might be angry later on. As a result, the state establishes its law to make books reading and possessing illegal. Naturally, most people tend to avoid doing the illegal things or activities so that they will not be punished by the government. Additionally, they will likely dare not to be curious or ask for the reasons for burning books since the state brainwashes them to think that books are dangerous. People, therefore, do not want to be near the threatening items because they do not want to be in troubles. Books are full of knowledge and it also opens the new perspectives of the world to the readers. Not only about the history of firemen that has been deleted from people's knowledge, has the state also done different ways to ruin history.

Brainwashing its Citizens to Be Loyal to their Duty and the Government

The government in this story is very good at making people loyal to it without the obvious force. Most people do not realize that their freedom is limited. The government does not manipulate its people obviously. It knows to make use of the firemen. In this text, firemen have the important role in the state since they act like the state police who suspect and monitor those who tend to violate the government's rules. It makes them proud of their duties and being loyal to the government. For example, Montag is very proud of being a fireman. This situation is seen at the beginning of the story when he is doing his duty:

It was a pleasure to burn.

It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head,... (Bradbury, 2012,p.1)

As seen from the above, Montag enjoys his job as burning books from people's house. The metaphor is used to evoke the picture of how powerful the brass nozzle he is. The author compares the fireman's brass nozzles to the great python which implies

that the writer wants to give the respect to the firemen and describe this job as the important and frightening task that everyone should be afraid of. The comparison of the brass nozzles to the great python signifies the power of the fire which is like the venom of the great python which is very poisonous. It is seen in the story that people are afraid of firemen from what Clarisse says: “So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean...” (Bradbury, 2012, p. 5). The firemen, therefore, has the great and honored duty to check on people for the state. The reason that the state chooses the firemen to do this job because it wants to destroy history with can be found in various kinds of books. As a result, burning is the best way to destroy books. Montag is described to love and enjoy burning so much that the author compares his action to conducting the symphonies. Montag’s action seems to be delicate like the movement of the conductor who is conducting the symphony. Consequently, the state makes the firemen themselves and its citizens perceive that the firemen are like the representatives of the state who look over the nation for it. It gives the sense of high respect.

Captain Beatty and Millie are the good examples of the loyal members of the state. As seen in the story, both of them are referred to “waxed doll” which illustrates the models that the government shapes to be in the exact directions that it wants them to be or believe. Despite their loyalty to the state, there is some dissimilarity between these two characters. As the leader of the firemen, Captain Beatty has done his duty quite well. He is strictly following the government’s rules. He, is, however, torn between his loyalty to the government and morality. He knows since the beginning that there is something wrong with his colleague, Montag and that strange habits must be related to books since Montag talks about books and turns cleverer. He attempts to ignore his co-worker’s illegal actions by warning him about books, sending the Mechanical Hound to his house, ignoring Millie’s friend sending him the alarm to burn Montag’s house. On the contrary, Millie does not aware of anyone or anything surrounded her at all. She is a representative of the coward people who does not want to get in troubles and be punished by the government. She, thus, lives her life with the lifestyle that the state wants its people to have.



Using Media as the Means to Distract its Citizens from Learning New Things

The government completely controls the mass media in order to establish all the knowledge and information they want its citizens to know. It can make the limitation of their broadcast in every kind of medium. “Parlor wall” and Seashell are the popular equipments employed by the citizens. Its aims are to give them the happiness so that they will realize that there are no other kinds of emotions nor unhappy situations exist besides contentment. When people are contented with their life, they will not strive for independence nor hunger for any other kind of information. They would focus on the entertainment they watch and listen all day long that it becomes their lifestyle. They also used these implements to distract people from paying attention to other more important things or situations around them. Some people are even addicted to those two gadgets. As a result, Parlor wall or television is like the family to people. For example, Millie enjoys watching parlor walls so much that they call them “her family”. There are more than one television in her house but she still wants more. She calls them “parlor aunt or parlor uncle”. It is good for the state when people connect themselves with those machines because they will not feel lonely. People find “parlor walls” their good company at home. Apart from “parlor walls”, seashell is another device that most people are addicted to. It is the device that makes a person isolate oneself from the crowd and be in his/her own world. It allows its citizens to listen only what it broadcasts on the radio. As seen in the story, Mille has the Seashell attached to her ears very often even when she goes to sleep. Notably, these two devices are only one-way communication. It does not allow people to talk back and forth since having two ways communication will lead them to express their ideas and creativity and share their opinions which is not good for the state’s stability. Information and entertaining programs fed to the citizens’ brains do not give them any thought provoking at all. This entertainment, hence, makes people become shallow and do not think much. Actually, people are not truly happy but they just do not become aware of it. For example, Mille takes so many sleeping pills one night that Montag has to call in the emergency. Millie is also empty. She has troubles going to sleep. The Seashells radio she listens to every night cannot make her sleep. Deep down inside her mind, Mille is empty and has the meaningless life. She also does not really know the actual meaning of family. She calls



the television as her family but she does not even take a good care of her husband, Montag who is considered her real family.

The government tries to make people think only the happy and positive things in lives so that they will not question or strive for the better place. People in this story do not seem to know what is really going on outside their society. They do not realize that there are problems and chaos outside their community. Mildred's friend has never known that a lot of soldier dies in the war. She thinks that every soldier will alive after the war. As seen, people are kept ignorant for the sake of state's stability. The more ignorant people are the more stable the state is. The state, therefore, keeps their citizens' eyes shut by offering them as much entertainment as they can to lure them in the illusion of the perfect world it attempts to create.

Exploiting Its Citizens to Monitor on the Rebellious People

In this story, the government does not use any head figure to make the citizens worship nor makes the government's force outstanding. It uses its people to monitor people who likely to rebel against the state. *Fahrenheit 451* does not give the important role to the police to check on the security of the society since the most harmful crime for the government seems to be about reading books. Burning books is, thus, considered, the honorable job to protect the stability of the state. Firemen is, hence, act as the watchdog agents to inspect if people do the illegal actions against the state's laws. In addition, its citizens are exploited to observe those who try to violate the government's rules. For example, they will inform the firemen if they know that someone possess the books in his/her house. Furthermore, the state will announce to people to help catching those people who attempt to break the laws.

Brainwashing its Citizens to have the Emotional Detachment

The state controls human minds by preventing them from having the emotional attachment to anything as much as possible. People in *Fahrenheit 451* are deceived by the government to believe that the world they live in contains only the contentment. It is very crucial for the state to make its people think that they are joyful so that they will not want to do anything against the state. It also prevents people from being sensational. If their emotions are easily aroused, they would be discontent or angry with

the state's actions which will stir its stability. As seen in the story, its citizens do not seem to have emotional involvements in any situations. People do not have the emotional attachment to their couples and family members. Moreover, they do not really care about the things surrounded them. Emotional detachment, therefore, makes the government at ease since it does not have to be afraid that there would be any curiosity in anything it has done that will lead to the rebellion later on. In this story, Mildred and her friends, Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles are the good examples of the obedient and passive people who are well qualified citizens. Mildred does not seem to have emotional involvement in anything. She does not seem to care much about her husband, Montag. This is obviously seen when Montag pretends to be sick one day and does not want to go to work. He asks Mildred to call Captain Betty to inform him about his sickness. Instead of doing so, she is very upset and worried that he will lose his job and they will have no money and that their lives would be terrible. She tries to urge him to go to work. She does not concern about his illness at all. Montag asks her to bring him the aspirin. It takes her several times to be able to get it for him. There is one feeling that most people in the state has in common but they are not aware of it is the feeling of emptiness. Montag and his wife, Mildred are the notable examples of people who are empty. Although they are both empty, their actions towards the emptiness are different. Montag realizes his emptiness and wants to eliminate this feeling whereas Mildred is not aware of this feeling. Yet, her emptiness is seen when she takes so many sleeping pills that Montag has to call the Emergency.

Employing the Scientific Invention to Inspect on the Rebellious People

The government uses the Mechanical Hound, the machine that is programmed to enable to detect people who own books. The government use of technology is very smart because they do not have to worry about its disloyalty. The machine does not have its own feelings. It does what it is functioned to: "It doesn't think anything we don't want it to think" (Bradbury, 2012, p.25). As a result, this machine only does its job which is "hunting, finding and killing" (Bradbury, 2012, p.25). It does not have a heart to sympathize anyone. On the contrary, using humans to investigate the rebels may have the emotional involvement. Sometimes humans may be torn between their duty and the morality. In the story, Captain Beatty is the leader of the firemen. He has to examine



who violates the state's rules. Yet, he does not want to punish his colleague, Montag. Even though Beatty has been suspicious of Montag reading books, he tries to giving him a hint that owning books is not good at all. He, also, delays the time to burn his house until Montag's wife, Mildred, calls by herself that he cannot avoid not arresting him anymore. As a result, the mechanical hound is the most honest fellows to the government.

Preventing its Citizens from Communication

The government prevents people from having conversations with one another so that they will not share their ideas nor create any radical thoughts that might threaten the government's security. Obviously, the state hinders their citizens from having two ways communication. Only one-way communication is accepted. It invents the one-way communication devices for their citizens and lures them to spend as much of their time with them until they become addicted to them. In this story, the state distracts people from the real communication which allows them to express their ideas and share opinions and experiences with others since they were young. The school system is not designed to permit the students to convey their thoughts or discuss in any certain issues. The school will only teach the students about what they want them to know and let them watch some lessons from television. The students, thus, will get used to this way of communication. They do not have a chance to practice their critical thinking. They probably do not know to think differently at all. However, it does not seem to give them any troubles because they are happy with the one-way communication the state offers. Those teenagers focus on spending their leisure time on fun parks or racing which also distract them from thinking. Besides, the "parlor wall" or the television is very popular among the citizens. They seem to spend most of their time watching the "parlor wall" instead of paying attention to the things around them. The state is keen on making its people believe in one-way communication so much that they conceive the "parlor wall" as their "family". Moreover, the seashell is another people's attachment. This device alienates one from the others. It only distracts oneself into his/her own world. But this own world does not allow them to think or criticize anything because they listen to what the state broadcast through the seashell. In addition, the porch is eliminated from every house to avoid people of gathering together since it gives them the



opportunity to talk, listen, express and share opinions with one another: “No front porches. My uncle says there used to be front porches. And people sat there sometimes at night, talking when they wanted to talk,...Sometimes they just sat there and thought about thing, turned things over...” (Bradbury, 2012, p.60). Such actions might stir the state’s stability.

Conclusion

The government in *Fahrenheit 451* controls its citizens into seven ways: destroying books, brainwashing its citizens to be loyal to their duty and the government, using media as the means to distract its citizens from learning new things, exploiting its citizens to monitor on the rebellious people, brainwashing its citizens to have the emotional detachment, employing the scientific invention to inspect on the rebellious people, and preventing its citizens from communication. According to the theory of totalitarianism, the methods of setting the standard ideology, having only one party of a small group of people to control over the state, using the system of the police control are shown in *Fahrenheit 451*, whereas the ways of employing its power over weapons and economy are not clearly seen. Yet, the state does not seem to completely succeed in its dictatorship since they cannot control some groups of people who think differently from the state and realize that their freedom is restricted and the world, they live in is not the perfect world like the government try to present to its inhabitants.

Recommendations

Fahrenheit 451 can be examined in other interesting topics related to dystopia. For instance, exploring the protagonist’s transformation in the dystopian world where the freedom is limited: how he has changed from the obedient citizen to the rebellious one; how the protagonist escapes from his dystopia society. Besides dystopian issues in this works, dystopia is also popular and found in many contemporary and young adult literary works. Those intriguing fictions such as Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One* (2011), Veronica Roth’s *The Divergent Trilogy* (2011-2013), Tahereh Mafi’s *Shatter Me Series* (2011-2014) should be analyzed how dystopia is revealed, how the protagonists react to the state absolute power, how they struggle and solve the problems. Most importantly, the



scrutiny of whether they achieve their liberty or still have to succumb to the authority is the challenging issue to discover. Notably, most citizens in this genre would strictly obey their government and it seems like they do not realize that their human rights and freedom are restricted. Yet, there will be a few characters who mostly appear to be the protagonists and his/her friends who are aware of this unhappiness and start to plan their mission against the authority. Dystopia is compulsive and outstanding because what happens in its society can be associated to the world nowadays. Even though dystopia is claimed to describe or predict the near future. Some of the predictions are surprisingly similar to some current situations and some circumstances narrated in the dystopian works truly happen in our real world. Studying dystopia, hence, makes us aware of what will happen to us in the future so that we can prepare for those upcoming horrible events.

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