

Love-Triangles and the Structure of *Fahrenheit 451*:  
Creating Contrast to Foreground the Elements of Dystopia

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Spring 2017

## **Abstract**

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) is one of the best-known science fiction dystopias, presenting a strictly controlled state maintained by book-burning 'firemen'. People of the society have been turned into non-thinking masses, as books are banned, and technology and media are used to control their thought. The protagonist, Guy Montag, is a fireman, who goes through a transformation leading him to question the society and internalize humane values.

In this thesis, I will examine the relationships between Montag and two female characters contributing to his transformation, namely Clarisse and Montag's wife, Mildred, and compare these relationships and the two female characters. Love-triangle construction between the three characters is used to demonstrate the contrast between Clarisse and Mildred and their relationships to Montag, revealing the contrasts of life and death, meaningful and shallow relationship, and nature and technology. These contrasts foreground common dystopian elements in *Fahrenheit 451*: the fears of deindividuation and dehumanization, as well as critique towards consumer culture. Thus, Mildred and Clarisse are not only affecting Montag's transformation, but have a function of representing the dystopian society of the novel.

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## 1. Introduction – *Fahrenheit 451* in Context

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dystopias have been popular among writers, and they are also prominent today, especially within young adult fiction. Based on Darko Suvin's definition, dystopia refers to a construction of author's community, in which social and political features are "organized according to a *radically less perfect* principle" than in the actual community (384). Dystopia is sometimes used interchangeably with 'anti-utopia' but, in fact, the latter refers to texts warning "against existing utopia" (407). Dystopia, on the other hand, warns against the possible negative consequences of practices characteristic to the present reality (Booker and Thomas 65).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "suspicions of Utopian solutions to political and social problems became increasingly strong as those problems grew more and more complicated" (Booker and Thomas 65), which contributed to the rise of dystopias. Before the second World War, it was typical in Anglo American science fiction (SF) to believe that technological advances would solve any problem, but after the atomic bombs were dropped, this faith soon ended, leading to "the anti-scientific fictions of the 1950s" (Fitting 61). Utopias were replaced by dystopias warning against technological advances, and thus, "Western science fiction during the Cold War tended to have a dystopian inclination" (Booker 173). One of the best-known SF dystopias written during this era is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). It is not only "considered one of Bradbury's best works" (Reid 53), but also one of "the most celebrated dystopias" along with the works such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949) (Domingo 726). When published, *Fahrenheit 451* was praised by "mainstream critics", which was unusual for SF in 1950s, in addition to which it "has received a great deal of critical attention from academics" (Reid 53).

As it is common to dystopias, *Fahrenheit 451* "presents not so much an observation, but a current form of feeling, related primarily to contemporary society" (Williams 358). This is supported by Jack Zipes, who suggests that Bradbury "was obviously reacting to the political and intellectual climate of his times" (183). The war and the rise of both socialism and fascism preceding it had affected the overall themes of dystopias, but what most influenced Bradbury himself was the America of 1950s, especially McCarthyism. This practice – named after Joseph McCarthy, who was elected Senator in 1946 and 1952 and who in 1950 publicly claimed that the State Department was infiltrated by communists ("Joseph McCarthy") – dominated American Politics through the 1950s (Schrecker 10), aiming to eliminate domestic communism – a "threat to the American way of life" (2). This led to many accusations, sometimes anonymous and without proper evidence (38), costing

many people their jobs as they were stigmatized by communism. Thus, it was a form of political repression. David Seed points out that “Bradbury was completing *Fahrenheit 451* against the background of the 1952 presidential election, when his own favored candidate Adlai Stevenson lost to Eisenhower. Bradbury attributed this in part to Stevenson ‘s failure to speak out against McCarthyism” (87). In the interview in 1976, Bradbury told that he got angry as nobody was brave enough to oppose McCarthy, and that he said to himself “I didn’t approve a book burning; I didn’t approve of it when Hitler did it, so why should I be threatened about it by McCarthy?” (qtd. in Seed 87).

Book burning was one of Bradbury’s main themes not only in *Fahrenheit 451*, but also in short stories published during the years 1947-1948, namely “The Library”, “Bright Phoenix” and “Pillar of Fire”. Finally, in 1951 “The Fireman” was published in H.L. Gold’s *Galaxy* magazine (Seed 86). It was the first version of the novel *Fahrenheit 451* (85), which presents a strictly controlled state maintained by ‘firemen’. They control citizens by burning books – “a manifestation reinforced by omnipresent radio and television” (Baker 489). In other words, ‘high culture’ is oppressed, and the mass culture thrives. The popular culture in the novel is “designed partly to purvey the official ideology of the society, but mostly to stupefy the populace by saturating their minds with useless information” (Booker and Thomas 69), as well as to make people ‘equals’. Thus, *Fahrenheit 451* criticizes “both conformism and mass culture” (Booker 175), but also the extensive reliance on technology, all common themes in the dystopias of the era.

In a usual manner for dystopias, also *Fahrenheit 451* “begins directly in the terrible new world” (Baccolini and Moylan 5). The protagonist of the novel is Guy Montag, a fireman, who along the narrative goes through a process of transformation leading to questioning the society and its norms, and internalizing more humane values. This change includes also the transformation from burning books to reading them – and finally becoming one – as Montag wants to find a way to fill the emptiness inside him and his wife. Montag’s transformation is affected by two female characters: his wife Mildred and an eccentric young girl, Clarisse. From these two, Clarisse is a catalyst, or a supporter, contributing to Montag’s change, and Mildred an antagonist opposing it, and also representing “larger antagonist in the novel, American society” (Reid 57-8).

Dystopian fiction is often discussed in terms of the protagonist who goes through the transformation to notice the faults of the society – at least in cases of classical dystopias such as *Fahrenheit 451* – for “The element of textual estrangement remains in effect since the focus is frequently on a character who questions the dystopian society” (Baccolini and Moylan 5). The other characters, as

well as their relationships with the protagonist, are usually noted only in terms of this transformation, as in the case of Clarisse the catalyst and Mildred the antagonist.

However, Clarisse and Mildred have also a function besides contributing to or opposing Montag's transformation, namely bringing to attention dystopian elements of the novel. In this thesis, I examine the relationships between Montag and Mildred, as well as Montag and Clarisse, and compare these relationships and the two female characters. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the traditional love-triangle construction is not used in its conventional function to create tension between characters or keep readers hooked with the narrative, as in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* -series, which presents perhaps the best-known example of love-triangles today. Instead, Bradbury uses the love-triangle to demonstrate the contrast between Clarisse and Mildred and their relationships to Montag, which I argue is the key element in representation of the dystopian society of *Fahrenheit 451*.

## 2. Contrast between Clarisse and Mildred – Representations of Life and Death

According to M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas, women are often peripheral in the early science fiction texts (86). This is also the case in *Fahrenheit 451*, but even though peripheral in the narrative, Mildred and Clarisse, and more specifically the contrast between them, foregrounds the dystopian elements of their society. Bradbury has intentionally constructed these characters as opposites of each other (Seed 114), which implies this is an important element to their function.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Clarisse McClellan – Young, Active and Close to Nature

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Clarisse represents life. One manifestation of this is that she is presented as part of nature, which is often thought as a source of life. The ability to create life is probably one of the reasons why throughout the western culture women have been associated with nature. For instance, in Greek mythology many goddesses, such as Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility, “celebrated the feminine divine in nature” (Clark), and also today terms like ‘mother Earth’ are often used. Furthermore, in literature, especially young girls are portrayed as having a deep connection with nature, where they can find freedom from all the expectations they are to fulfil as a woman, and by being one with nature, they feel alive and finally come to terms with themselves and the world (Beauvoir 386-7). Similarly, by being close to nature, sixteen-year-old Clarisse is free – or as free as possible – from the pacifying practices of the state in *Fahrenheit 451*, and thus, is alive.

In the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, where nature is not appreciated, Clarisse is one of the few still valuing it. Already from the beginning Clarisse’s eccentric connection to nature is made clear as the young girl is described to let “the motion of the wind and the leaves carry her forward” when Montag first meets her (Bradbury 3). Also, Clarisse herself brings to attention the fact that many people do not see nature the same way as she does. When talking to Montag about jet cars racing around with high speed, she says “I sometimes think drivers don’t know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly”, and instead would only recognize “a green blur” as grass and “a pink blur” as a rose garden (6). Unlike the speeding drivers, in other words, most people in the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, Clarisse views nature and surroundings with interest and consideration. In addition, Montag associates her with nature and naturality: he thinks about time with her together with weather (25) and juxtaposes her with candle light instead of “the hysterical light of electricity”

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<sup>1</sup> In François Truffaut’s film version of *Fahrenheit 451*, the same actress played both Clarisse and Mildred, which was criticized by Bradbury as he thought that the characters were now too similar (Seed 115).

(5). Also, similarly to nature, which is often thought to provide shelter, Clarisse is Montag's haven he finally reaches in the end – when escaping from the city, he “crosses the river which divides the city from the country, the mechanical from natural” (Baker 489).

Clarisse's connection to nature manifests itself in her activities as well, and this physical activity is also a feature contributing to the representation of life. Whenever Montag sees her, Clarisse is outside. One day she is “shaking a walnut tree”, and another “sitting on the lawn knitting a blue sweater” (Bradbury 25). Clarisse also likes to walk around, which is considered odd in their society. Furthermore, walking is suggested to be a sign of “the key dystopian theme of the protagonist's growing estrangement from his culture” (Baker 494). In Clarisse's case, walking indicates alienation from the society that has already happened, and it is one of the elements making her “the figure of the feminine alien Other, who threatens male dominance”, which is a conventional character in dystopias (Booker and Thomas 86).

In addition to physical activities, Clarisse is mentally active. Most people in the society of *Fahrenheit 451* have been turned into non-thinking masses by the media and kept “ideologically anaesthetized” (Baker 493). However, Clarisse rarely watches the ‘parlor walls’, wall-sized television screens, or goes to “races or Fun Parks” as others (Bradbury 7), so she has time – and willingness – to think. She notes the problems in their society that others do not, for instance, how in schools nobody asks questions and the teachers “just run the answers at you” and children are violent and killing each other or themselves (27). Clarisse is curious, and as her school record reveals, “She didn't want to know *how* a thing was done, but *why*” (58). In their society, asking “why”, and being different from the masses is considered a threat to the society. As José Ortega y Gasset suggests, “The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different [...]. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated” (18).<sup>2</sup> Montag's boss, Captain Beatty, reveals that they have a record on Clarisse and her family, and tells that asking why things were done “can be embarrassing. You ask Why to a lot of things and you wind up very unhappy indeed, if you keep at it. The poor girl's better off dead” (Bradbury 57-8). In other words, those being different cannot be happy, and already for their own sake would be ‘better off dead’, although, as Beatty the Fire Chief is saying this, the state's authorities probably agree.

To sum up, Clarisse is a young girl, who represents life as she is associated with nature and is active. She cares about nature and spends time outside with different activities, which also makes

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<sup>2</sup> Ortega y Gasset also points out that “everybody” in this case refers to the masses, not to “the complex unity of the mass and the divergent, specialised minorities” it used to (18).



her physically active. In addition, Clarisse is mentally active: unlike most people in their society, she thinks for herself and sees the faults of the society.

## **2.2 Mildred – Like a Dead body, Passive and Unfitted for Nature**

Whereas Clarisse represents life by having a connection to nature and being active both physically and mentally, Mildred, an opposite of her in every way, represents death. The most obvious contrast between these women can be seen in their eyes: Clarisse is described to have “clear dark eyes” (25) that are “shining and alive” (4). Mildred, on the other hand, has “eyes all glass” (11) that, in the first description, are “fixed to the ceiling by invisible threads of steel, immovable” (10). Considered in terms of a common proverb, ‘eyes are the window to the soul’, these descriptions imply that Clarisse is, as already discussed, alive and active, whereas Mildred seems like an empty shell without a soul inside her.

Mildred is described for the first time right after Montag has met lively Clarisse, making the contrast between these two characters clear from the beginning. When stepping into his and Mildred’s bedroom, Montag juxtaposes the room with a tomb and his wife with a dead body: “Without turning on the light he imagined how this room would look. His wife stretched on the bed, uncovered and cold, like a body displayed on the lid of a tomb [...]” (10). This clear connection between Mildred and death is made even more apparent as Montag realizes that she is nearly dead from overdosing sleeping pills. In another description of Mildred, given by Montag, she has “hair burnt by chemicals to a brittle straw” (45), “the body as thin as a praying mantis from dieting, and her flesh like white bacon” (46). In other words, nothing in this woman seems to be alive to Montag – her hair is burned, her skin associated with dead meat, and her body in general withered. This description also brings forth Mildred’s artificiality, as her looks are due to beauty products and dieting. Furthermore, Mildred’s blood has been changed in the process of reviving her after the suicide attempt, and she was given a pill to forget that she tried to kill herself. Thus, Mildred is, in a way, only artificially alive, and this is an example of how “technology is being used even in the field of medicine to deaden the senses while keeping people alive as machines” (Zipes 186).

Mildred’s artificiality creates a contrast with Clarisse’s naturalness. As a contrary to Clarisse whom Montag constantly associates with nature, Mildred is described as unfitted for nature. When thinking about his wife, Montag notes that “The most significant memory he had of Mildred, really, was of a little girl in a forest without trees” (Bradbury 41). Also, after Montag has escaped from the city to the countryside, he thinks about his wife: “All this country here. Listen to it! Nothing and

nothing. So much silence, Millie, I wonder how you'd take it?" (135). Thus, Montag seems to think that Mildred could not cope outside the city, away from the loud TV-shows, and he also cannot picture her there, placing her somewhere without trees instead. As discussed earlier in the chapter, nature is often a symbol of life, and in this sense, Mildred's inability to be part of it reflects her connection to death.

Besides that Mildred is described as a dead body, artificial and unfitted for nature, also her own activities juxtapose her with death. Whereas Clarisse is physically and mentally active, Mildred is passive and anaesthetized by the media and technology. Clarisse is always outside, doing different things, but Mildred does not leave the house during the whole narrative before turning her husband in for having books. Mildred is practically always either watching the parlor walls or lying in bed listening to 'Seashell', "the electronic waves which broadcast music and programs to prevent her from thinking" (Zipes 188). Furthermore, as Montag tries to think about his wife after he has escaped the city, he does not remember her doing anything, only seeing her hands just hanging at her sides or lying on her lap or holding a cigarette, "but that's all" (Bradbury 149). In comparison to Clarisse, who uses all the senses, as she both feels and tastes the rain (19), thinks that old leaves smell like cinnamon (26), and listens to Montag carefully and sees faults in the society, Mildred seems sort of anaesthetized. She is seemingly using her senses, but does not actually hear her husband for the Seashell is always plugged in or the parlor walls are too loud, and she cannot see anything wrong with the society even though Montag tries his best to show it to her.

Mildred's lack of using senses is closely related to her mental passivity. Not being able to see the faults of the society is due to media and technology, as they are used to stupefy and pacify the people in *Fahrenheit 451*. Mildred is conditioned by the media to believe what she is told via the parlor walls or the Seashell, and thus, she is not able to think for herself, and has been turned into part of the non-living masses as most in their society. She cannot respond to situations herself without being told what to do, as it is apparent when Captain Beatty comes to talk with her husband. Mildred awkwardly tries to do something as the men talk, walking restlessly around, trying to tidy up the room, and at times repeating some words Beatty has just said. She only leaves the room to turn down the volume of the television when Beatty tells her to, and finally leaves the men alone as Montag tells her to sit down (52-4). Thus, Mildred does not know how to act in spontaneous situations, when she is not told what to do.<sup>3</sup> She also does not try to take part in the

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<sup>3</sup> Although, after Montag has revealed the books and Mildred's 'happy' lifestyle is in danger, she spontaneously comes up with an explanation for Montag reading to her and her friends (95), and later watches Montag hide the books into the garden so that she can bring them back in and turn in her husband (109).

conversation, but only repeats what is said, and to be exact, repeats what Beatty has said, as he represents the authority as a Fire Chief.

All in all, Mildred is the opposite of Clarisse and represents death. She is described as a dead body and artificial, and thought by Montag as unfitted for nature, in addition to which she tries to kill herself with sleeping pills. Mildred is also passive, both mentally and physically, as she is addicted to technology and media, which are used to control people and make them unable to think for themselves.

### **2.3 Surroundings and Relation to Life**

In addition to the features already mentioned – namely, Clarisse’s activity both mentally and physically and her association with nature, and Mildred’s passivity and the way she is described as a dead body and unfitted for nature – the way in which the surroundings are described around these characters contribute to their representations of life and death. When first meeting Clarisse, Montag notices not only her extraordinariness, but also the change in the surroundings with her: “there was the faintest breath of fresh apricots and strawberries in the air, and he looked around and realized this was quite impossible, so late in the year” (4). Montag also feels Clarisse’s presence a few nights before their first meeting, around the corner, where he will finally meet her (2-3). Thus, Clarisse makes the world around her magical and alive. After meeting her, Montag returns home, and the magic is gone. The wondrous surroundings change into Montag and Mildred’s bedroom: “It was almost like coming into the cold marbled room of mausoleum after the moon has set. Complete darkness, [...], the chamber a tomb-world where no sound from the great city could penetrate” (9).

The way in which surroundings are described is connected to the ‘relations to life’ these women have. Clarisse brings her surroundings to life, if not physically, at least in Montag’s mind. The name Clarisse, as Zipes points out, “suggests light, clarity, and illumination” (185), and as light, Clarisse brings everything around her alive: besides the apricots and strawberries mentioned above, her “dress whispers” and “the motion of her hands can be heard” (Bradbury 3), as though these were separate living entities. The way Clarisse radiates life around her, like sun, also strengthens her connection to nature, as she is one of the few still caring about nature, and thus, she is perhaps an essential ray of light for it. It can also be argued that Clarisse brings Montag back to life. Before meeting her, Montag is “part of a deadening process” in which his life was about to become “a permanent fixture in a system of degradation” (Zipes 186). However, after meeting Clarisse, the

Man, Montag's waking consciousness, starts taking control, and he starts questioning the society as well as himself as fireman.<sup>4</sup>

Mildred, on the other hand, attempts to kill everything around her, which is present as Montag contrasts their bedroom with the tomb as his wife is lying there, and in Mildred's suicide attempts. In addition, Mildred speeds around the countryside with her jet car, killing animals if they happen to be on the road. Brian Baker suggests that these jet cars are "symbols of a society towards ruin. The society of *Fahrenheit 451*, like the car on the highway, is accelerating towards destruction" (495). By speeding around, not minding anything living on her way, Mildred is part of this process leading to destruction of the society. She also tries to keep Montag as part of the deadening process by persuading him to destroy the books and finally turning him in. Thus, she is trying to 'kill' Montag, and Montag feels this too, as he feels like he is suffocating in their bedroom (Bradbury 10), and compares Mildred to a praying mantis, an insect species whose females eat the head of the male after mating (46). In addition, burning books in *Fahrenheit 451* is juxtaposed with killing, for they "are literally humanized in the novel, to the extent that they actually take human form at the end" (Baker 490). Bradbury himself thought books inseparable from their authors, and has commented: "when Hitler burned a book I felt it as keenly, [...], as his killing a human, for in the long sum of history they are one and the same flesh" (qtd. in Baker 489). Thus, by burning books, Mildred is portrayed as someone killing people.

## **2.4 Fear of turning into non-living masses**

The contrast of life and death between Clarisse and Mildred foregrounds a common feature of dystopias, namely the use of media to control people and turn them into non-thinking, and non-living masses by pacifying them.<sup>5</sup> Mildred's representation of death is due to her artificiality, inability to be part of nature, and her passivity both physically and mentally. She is also suicidal and does not care about others' lives. All these aspects of Mildred are due to use of technology and constant presence of media. Constant watching of parlor walls has conditioned and addicted Mildred to TV-shows, making her stay inside in front of the screens all day, also preventing her from thinking, for all the time she is provided with rapidly changing scenes and useless information. If not watching television, she has Seashell in her ear leaving her no time to think. Thus, Mildred

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<sup>4</sup> Montag had hidden books already before meeting Clarisse, thus, the Man was already waking up, but Clarisse gives him the final push needed to begin the transformation process.

<sup>5</sup> Besides *Fahrenheit 451*, this is manifested, for instance, in Huxley's *Brave New World*, in which media require no thinking and hypnopedia is used to brainwash children (Stableford 60).

uses the never-ending stimulation of media to keep herself anaesthetized and to fill the emptiness inside her, even though the constant use of technology is the source of this emptiness, driving her to attempt suicide time after time.

Mildred exemplifies an average person in the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, which consists of passive, non-living masses. Both passivity and turning into masses are due to the use of technology, as it “is used to promote a mass culture and to suppress individualism” (Reid 59). However, thought control, which is “necessary for the supposed benefit of the entire society” in dystopias (Patai 42), probably led to the formation of these masses. The mechanisms of thought control in *Fahrenheit 451* seem to be used as ‘the regulatory technology of life’ introduced in Michel Foucault’s theory of biopower, or biopolitics. It aims to “control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass”, to achieve “an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers” (249). In *Fahrenheit 451*, these regulatory mechanisms consist of the use of technology and mass media, and destruction of books as well, to control people by keeping them mentally passive. People cannot think for themselves, and the propaganda they are shown by the authoritarian state government introduce them “a sanitized version of happiness palatable to all” (Atkinson 5). As people think they are happy, the society – or the ones controlling it – are safe from the ‘internal danger’.

The technology and media are the mechanisms used to turn people into masses and stop them from thinking. The media and its effect in *Fahrenheit 451* is very similar to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s idea of culture industry. They argue that culture industry provides material that does not require any thought from the viewer, and “Its prime service to the customer is to do his schematizing for him” (124). As culture industry is supposed to provide the viewer with ‘pleasure,’ “it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from the audience” (137). To understand the films “quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed [...]; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination” (126-7). All the products of culture industry are practically the same, thus, it is known what to expect. As in the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, where anything different is considered a threat, also in the Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry “Every detail is so firmly stamped with sameness that nothing can appear which is not marked at birth, or does not meet with approval at first sight” (128). They also suggest that the paradise offered by culture industry works as an everyday drudgery (142). All the needs of a consumer should be shown as capable of fulfilment, but they “should be so predetermined that he feels himself to be the eternal consumer, the object of the culture industry”,

which makes “him believe that the deception it practices is satisfaction” (142). This is apparent in Mildred’s case, as she is addicted to television shows, believing that they will fill the emptiness inside her.

In both Foucault’s theory of biopower and Adorno and Horkheimer’s ideas about culture industry, it is discussed in terms of masses. Ortega y Gasset defines the mass as “the common social quality, man as undifferentiated from other men, but as repeating in himself a generic type” (13-4). He suggests that the individuals have many ideas of their own, and it is typical for the ‘mass-man’ “to content himself with them and to consider himself intellectually complete. As he feels the lack of nothing outside himself, he settles down definitely amid his mental furniture” (69). This is what Ortega y Gasset calls “the mechanism of self-obliteration” (69). In *Fahrenheit 451* there is a similar phenomenon, but instead of own ideas, people are content with the propaganda of the authorities and stop thinking for themselves. The contentment to the society, and themselves, is apparent in the masses of *Fahrenheit 451*. As Christopher Atkinson points out, “most in this society have internalized its norms” and “are comfortable with the loss of freedom they have experienced” (5). Getting people to support the thought control – burning of books and using media and technology – by providing ‘happiness’ to all, is an important strategy, and thus, the citizens “believe that happiness and harmony are what best characterize their society” (Patai 43). However, as we have seen, the happiness provided by the technology and media is not enough to fill the emptiness inside people of *Fahrenheit 451*, and suicide attempts are common.

All in all, the technology in *Fahrenheit 451* is used as a regulatory mechanism to pacify the citizens. The media provided requires no thinking at all, and is full of propaganda, making people content with their situation, even though they are deindividualized – turned into passive, non-thinking and non-living masses that consists of individuals that are copies of one another. TV-shows have a promise of happiness and fulfilment, but never fulfil this promise, leaving people empty. These features of the masses manifest themselves in Mildred, but they are brought to attention by the contrast created by Clarisse. She does not use technology and is not affected by the media, thus allowing her to think for herself and be close to nature. She radiates light around her, bringing anything near her to life. Unlike Mildred, Clarisse is not empty, but full of life.

### **3. Contrast Between Relationships with Montag – Meaningful and Shallow Relationships**

Baker suggests that “Montag’s trajectory from fireman to book-man is negotiated through key encounters with three male figures of authority”, which refer to Captain Beatty, a former professor Faber, from who Montag seeks help to understand books, and finally Granger, the head of the ‘book-people’ Montag joins in the end of the novel (495). However, Baker also points out that “it is Montag’s relationships to two women – Clarisse and his wife, Mildred – that indicate his personal transformation” (495). Nonetheless, these relationships are not only a sign of Montag’s transformation, but they also affect the change, as the meaningful relationship Montag has with Clarisse makes him realize the shallowness of his relationship with his wife. Also, Montag’s relationship with Clarisse emphasizes the common dystopian elements in his and Mildred’s relationship, where technology has replaced the interaction and led to dehumanization.

#### **3.1 Clarisse and Montag – Comfortable and Meaningful Friendship**

Montag and Clarisse know each other for a week before Clarisse is killed in an accident. During this time, their relationship develops from Montag being suspicious and confused into a mutual friendship.

Already at the first sight Montag finds Clarisse eccentric and fascinating. However, even though Clarisse’s youthful appearance seems to appeal to Montag, her ideas and questions make him suspicious and even irritated. During their first conversation, Clarisse asks Montag many questions, and tells him he never stops to think what she has asked him, to which Montag replies “You *are* an odd one [...] Haven’t you any respect?” (Bradbury 6). After this, Clarisse starts asking and telling Montag things she thought he would not know, such as “There’s dew on the grass in the morning” (7). Probably not used to conversations like this, Montag “suddenly couldn’t remember if he had known this or not, and it made him quite irritable” (7). Clarisse also upsets Montag when rubbing a dandelion to his chin. She tells that if the colour rubs off, the person is in love, and as it does not, Clarisse says “What a shame [...] You’re not in love with anyone”, which makes Montag exclaim “Yes, I am!”, and he tries to convince Clarisse – and himself – that he truly is very much in love (19-20).

The reason why Montag gets upset, however, is probably due to his waking subconscious, as he starts to notice the things he has not realized before Clarisse. Thus, being upset in these cases is

more about being confused, and Montag himself seems to realize this, too, as he always forgives Clarisse quickly and feels comfortable around her. When Clarisse has once again upset him with something she has said, and asks him if he has forgiven her, Montag replies: “Yes, I have. God knows why. You’re peculiar, you’re aggravating, yet you’re easy to forgive” (21). It is also straightforwardly stated that “He felt at ease and comfortable” (26) as he was talking with Clarisse, and the day Clarisse does not show up as usual, “there were vague stirrings of dis-ease in [Montag]” (29). Thus, Clarisse’s sudden disappearance makes him uncomfortable, and when it turns out she is dead, Montag feels need to act and change the society.

Montag’s confusion with Clarisse is not surprising, for their conversations are not the usual kind in their society. This is brought to attention by Clarisse’s notions: “People don’t talk about anything. [...] They name a lot of cars or clothes or swimming pools mostly and say how swell! But they all say the same things and nobody says anything different from anyone else” (28). Even though this is an exaggeration, as it is demonstrated in the conversations between Montag and Mildred, looked at later in this chapter, the main idea that the conversations have no meaningful content is apparent. Clarisse, on the other hand, talks about nature and the faults of the society, and she actually discusses with Montag – they ask questions and the things they say are connected to what the other has said.

Besides the overall difference to ‘usual’ conversations and interaction between people in the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, there is two straightforward references to the difference between Montag’s conversations with Clarisse and with Mildred. The first one appears during Montag and Clarisse’s second conversation, as Montag wonders how Clarisse is only seventeen: “How odd. How strange. And my wife thirty and yet you seem so much older at times. I can’t get over it” (21).<sup>6</sup> By this, Montag refers to the manner and content of her speech, for the conversation takes place soon after Montag has talked with Mildred, implying that Clarisse talks in a more mature way than his wife twice as old as her. The second occasion takes place during the last conversation between Montag and Clarisse, as she asks him why he has no children, and Montag explains that his wife “just never wanted any children at all” (26). This implies that Montag and Mildred have not discussed the matter much, or that there was not much to discuss as Mildred had decided already. Also, the topic seems important, and not very easy to discuss for Montag, as he first tries to avoid talking about it by saying he does not know, but as Clarisse does not believe him, he pushes himself to tell her the reason. However, after telling Clarisse, who now feels bad about the question, Montag says “It was a good question. It’s been a long time since anyone cared enough to ask. A good question” (26), and

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<sup>6</sup> Clarisse is actually still sixteen for a month (21), but has introduced herself as seventeen and crazy (5).



he seems relieved and comfortable. This implies that Montag has not been able to talk about the subject with Mildred, but can talk about it with Clarisse he has known for a week. Even though Montag discusses the subject reluctantly, the difference between Clarisse and Mildred in this case is that Clarisse ‘cares enough to ask’.

Montag and Clarisse become friends, who talk about the world and feel at ease around each other. During their last day together, Montag wonders why he feels like he has known her “for so many years”, to which Clarisse replies “Because I like you [...] And I don’t want anything from you. And because we know each other” (26). Previously, Montag had thought about all the people there are around, but still “Nobody knows anyone” (14). Thus, it seems common in their society that people do not know each other well, and Montag starts to realize that even his wife is a stranger. However, he and Clarisse know each other, which makes their relationship extraordinary for Montag. After Clarisse’s death, as Montag starts reading books, he thinks about her and tells Mildred that “She was the first person in a good many years I’ve really liked. She was the first person I can remember who looked straight at me as if I counted” (68). Their relationship is extraordinary also for Clarisse, for she tells Montag: “When I talk, you look at me. When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. [...] No one has time any more for anyone else. You’re one of the few who put up with me” (21).

### **3.2 Montag and Mildred – Relationship Made Shallow by A Wall of Technology and Inability to Respond**

As already discussed in the previous chapter, Mildred is bound to technology reducing her to a passive piece of the masses. However, the extent of Mildred’s addiction manifests itself best in her relationship with Montag, as we see what Montag means to her in comparison to technology, and how Montag feels the effect of technology in their relationship.

Montag acknowledges that technology is one of the major obstacles between Mildred and himself: “wasn’t there a wall between him and Mildred [...]. Literally not just one wall but, so far, three! [...] And the uncles, the aunts, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that lived in those walls” (41). Walls mean the parlor walls that have replaced the walls in their living room, and by relatives Montag refers to characters of different TV-shows, for Mildred calls them ‘family’, already which reveals how important they are to her; even more important than her real husband. As Montag tries to talk with Mildred about her suicide attempt, Mildred pauses “long enough from reading her script [of the TV-show] to glance up”, and Montag notes that “She was quite obviously waiting for him to

go” (17). After denying that she would do something like that, Mildred turns back to the script, not bothering to look at Montag again as he continues to talk (17). Also, after Montag reveals to Mildred the books he has hidden in their house, she turns him in. As Montag comes to the house with his boss and co-firemen to burn it down, Mildred comes outside with bags, and Montag exclaims “Mildred, you *didn't* put in the alarm!” (108). Mildred, for her part, ignores her husband: “She shoved the valise in the waiting beetle, climbed in, and sat mumbling, “Poor family, poor family, oh everything gone, everything, everything gone now...”” (108). Even though Mildred probably knew that Montag will either be prisoned or killed, she does not say anything to her husband, or even look at him, but only worries about her parlor walls and unreal family.

Montag also feels estranged from his wife because of the Seashell Mildred has constantly in her ear. As Montag walks into their bedroom and describes it as a tomb, he also recognises his wife lying on the bed, but after hearing the sound coming from the Seashell in her ear, he thinks “the room was indeed empty” (10). Later, Montag thinks more about his relationship with Mildred and how the Seashell separates him from her:

Wasn't there an old joke about the wife who talked so much on the telephone that her desperate husband ran out to the nearest store and telephoned her to ask what was for dinner? Well, then, why didn't he buy himself an audio-Seashell broadcasting station and talk to his wife late at night, murmur, whisper, shout, scream, yell. But what would he whisper, what would he yell? What could he say? And suddenly she was so strange he couldn't believe he knew her at all. (39)

During the ten years they have been married, Mildred has been listening to the Seashell, and finally Montag realizes that he really does not know his wife, who now seems like a stranger, for she has never truly listened to nor payed attention to him. The description of Montag burning down their house summarizes effectively the relationship between him and Mildred:

He stepped into the bedroom and fired twice and the twin beds went up in a great simmering whisper, with more heat and passion and light than he would have supposed them to contain. He burnt the bedroom walls and the cosmetics chest because he wanted to change everything, [...] everything that showed that he had lived here in this empty house with a strange woman who would forget him tomorrow, who had gone and quite forgotten him already, listening to her Seashell Radio pour in on her and in on her as she rode across town, alone. (110)

Thus, technology, especially the Seashell, has made their relationship empty. For Mildred, the Seashell has replaced interaction with Montag, which has made them strangers to each other, and she does not care about him; as any other average person in this dystopian society, she forgets her partner in a blink after ten years together, for technology is there to replace him – and in fact, already has replaced him.

Even though Mildred's addiction to technology is a major reason for her disregard for Montag, also her lack of empathy and understanding of feelings makes her unable to respond to him. When coming home after the firemen burned a woman along with her books, Montag is quietly crying. As he falls into bed "his wife cried out, startled" (39), but instead of asking him the reason for his strange behaviour, she talks to him "about this and that and it was only words" (39). As Mildred finally realizes he is crying, she does not say anything anymore. It seems that Mildred does not know how to deal with sorrow, for in their society everyone is supposed to be happy all the time. Later, as Mildred's friend starts crying after Montag has read them poetry, Mildred and her another friend "sat, not touching her, bewildered with her display" (97). Mildred tries to make her stop by saying "You're all right" and "snap out of it!", and nearly panicking tells her "Let's laugh and be happy, now, stop crying, we'll have a party!" (97). She is not trying to comfort or understand her friend, but just wants her to stop crying to get away from the awkward situation.

Besides not understanding sadness, Mildred does not seem to understand her husband, or care about his feelings. The same night as Montag is crying after burning a woman, he asks Mildred, if she has seen Clarisse, whom he has not seen in four days. Mildred does not remember the girl at first, but finally realizes that she had forgotten to tell Montag that she is dead. Montag cannot believe this, but Mildred says in her hasty way: "[...] McClellan. McClellan. Run over by a car. Four days ago. I'm not sure. But I think she's dead. The family moved out anyway. I don't know. But I think she's dead" (44). Even though Mildred sees that Montag is upset, after telling him that she "forgot all about it", she says "Good night" and puts the Seashell Montag had taken off back in her ear (45). Next morning, Mildred says to Montag he "acted funny last night" and asks if something had happened, and as Montag replies "A fire, is all", Mildred starts talking about the nice evening she had (46). Finally, Montag says that they "burned an old woman with her books" (46). Mildred ignores this, telling that she visited a friend last night, and as Montag says again that they burned a woman, insisting on a reaction from her, she replies: "Well?" (46). Mildred cannot understand her husband's upset after letting this woman die. Both this incident and Clarisse's death demonstrate Mildred's lack of empathy. She had just forgotten the death of Clarisse, who was their neighbour, and sees nothing wrong with killing the woman for having books. Instead of feeling sorry, she tells

Montag that she hates that woman, for Montag is acting strange and soon all will be gone because of this (48).

Moreover, Mildred values herself, and everything that makes her “happy”, over her husband. This is demonstrated as Mildred worries about what would happen to their “investment” – the house and the “family” – if Beatty learned about the books (69), and she finally turns Montag in. Furthermore, as Montag directly tells Mildred that he is not happy, after listening to Beatty telling how important it is to be happy and that is why books were banned, Mildred states “I am. [...] And proud of it” (62). As Montag goes on talking about how he will do something, Mildred says she is “tired of listening to this junk”, and turns back to the TV-show (62). Thus, she is not interested in her husband’s unhappiness; only her happiness matters. However, she still requires him to take her into consideration – by buying her the fourth parlor wall (18).

Mildred’s constant disregard for Montag has estranged him from her, which he realizes after meeting Clarisse. As soon as Montag walks into their bedroom in the beginning of the narrative and sees Mildred listening to the Seashell, “He felt his smile slide away [...]. He was not happy” (9). But still, for the whole narrative, Montag tries to figure out his life with Mildred and balances between the real emotions and the duty. After finding Mildred nearly dead, Montag is worried about her, but later “he remembered thinking that [...] if she died, he was certain he wouldn’t cry. For it would be the dying of an unknown, [...] and it was suddenly so very wrong that he had begun to cry, not at death but at the thought of *not* crying at death” (41). Montag knows that he should be feeling something towards Mildred, but as he does not, he gets upset. This happens also during the dandelion incident, as Clarisse saying he is not in love upsets him: he insists on being “very much in love”, and tries to “conjure up a face to fit the words, but there was no face” (20). Also, after Mildred has turned Montag in, and Montag has begun his escape from the city, he tells Faber “there’s Millie gone, I thought she was my wife, but now I don’t know” (125). The estrangement from Mildred proceeds as the Man inside Montag starts taking control, but still, in the end of the narrative, even though Montag has just told Granger how strange it is that he does not miss his wife, or feel anything at all, he shouts to Mildred “*Get out, run!*”, as the bombs fall to the city (152). However, this can also be due to his transformation, for part of it is humanization.

### 3.3 Split Subjectivity and Relation to Books

As already discussed briefly, Montag's subjectivity is divided into the Fireman and the Man. From these the latter is connected to Clarisse, for as Montag thinks about her after their meeting, he asks "What?" from "that other self, the subconscious idiot that ran babbling at times, quite independent of will, habit, and conscience" (Bradbury 8). This 'subconscious idiot' is also the one who hides books, as Montag describes how his hand moved on his own when grabbing a book while burning old woman's house (35). According to Baker, "this somatic rebellion indicates a split in Montag between mind and body, between ideological imperatives and the need to fill the emptiness within" (497). The reason for Montag's split subjectivity is due to contradiction of burning the books, even though they "represent all that is missing from his and Millie's life", and they "are empty within, because of the cultural emptiness without" (496).

When struggling between the two subjectivities – as Montag has already started hiding books before the actual story begins – he runs into Clarisse. As suggested by Baker, "All the things that Montag has lost, and must rediscover, find their embodiment in Clarisse McClellan", referring most of all to the culture (497), and more specifically, to the 'high culture,' the books. Even though Clarisse mentions books only once, she is clearly connected to them in Montag's mind. As he starts reading the books, he lifts two of them, and says "These men have been dead a long time, but I know their words point, one way or another, to Clarisse" (Bradbury 68). Thus, for Montag, Clarisse and books represent the same ideals, which he needs to internalize to fill the emptiness in his life.

Mildred, on the contrary, is unable to respond to the books. As Montag shows them to her, she is scared and tries to burn one of them, not listening to Montag's idea of trying to find something to help them. While Montag looks at the books with excitement, Mildred stays away from them, being angry with Montag and worrying about their house and her 'family'. Finally, Mildred betrays her husband, for she is "deeply imbued [...] with the belief that books represent deep threats" (Patai 42). Thus, Mildred's inability to respond to books is the final element making Montag choose Clarisse. Even though already dead, to Montag she becomes more alive than his wife. As Montag starts to notice the faults of the society, he realizes that his wife is dying, stating this explicitly to Faber when asking him for help with the books. However, Mildred is beyond help, and part of Montag's previous life. By trying to act as a 'homemaker,' Mildred's "association with performance indicates the kind of subjectivity that Montag inhabits at the beginning of the narrative, and must reject" (Baker 496), referring to the Fireman in Montag. Montag needs to leave Mildred behind in order to become the Man. Clarisse, on the contrary, represents the new Montag, who has internalized her ideals and escaped to the countryside, leaving behind the city and Mildred

with it. Thus, Mildred truly dies in the end when the city is destroyed, and she “has already receded into the past of a consumer culture that Montag has abandoned” (Seed 104), whereas Clarisse lives on in the reborn Montag.

Language is usually considered “a key weapon for the reigning dystopian power structure”, for to control social order, the authorities must use the discursive power, namely, “the reproduction of meaning and the interpellation of subjects”, to control thought processes (Baccolini and Moylan 5-6). In *Fahrenheit 451*, this is manifested by the destruction of books. Thus, “the “high culture” of the literary canon is the means by which mass culture, television, and state control can be opposed” (Baker 491). Representing the same ideals as books, Clarisse can be thought as a danger to the dystopian state – as it is typical for the ‘alien Other’ – and her accidental death leaves room for suspicion. In the same manner as high culture poses a threat to mass culture, so is Clarisse a threat to Mildred through Montag. As the Man in Montag is affected by Clarisse, his ideals and actions begin to change, which threatens Mildred’s ‘happy’ lifestyle. Thus, by choosing Clarisse and the books, Montag chooses to be a rebel.

The choice Montag must make between Mildred and Clarisse, the high culture and the mass culture, is also “a representation of ethical in material terms” (Baker 497). Bradbury reckoned books “central to human experience and human culture. When books are lost, so is humanity” (490). In *Fahrenheit 451*, books are “transmitters of the ethical knowledge”, but as they are destroyed, the society does not have the “source of moral direction” nor “the ethical base” it would provide, and which Montag needs to “reconstitute his moral and authentic self” (490). However, ‘the source of moral direction’ Montag needs, finds its materialization in Clarisse, who represent the same ideals as books, and therefore Montag can begin the process of alienation from the state. Montag chooses Clarisse over Mildred, when it comes to values, and thus makes the ethical choice needed.

### **3.4 Fear of Dehumanization and Critique Towards Consumer Culture**

The “concern with technological advances that are clearly intended to bring about a utopian existence but lead instead to the opposite” is a typical feature in dystopian science fiction, present, for instance, in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* (1952) (Booker and Thomas 69), as well as in *Fahrenheit 451*. The deindividualization due to control of media discussed in the previous chapter is one of these kinds of phenomena in the novel. The other is dehumanization, which is also due to use of technology and consumption of mass culture. This phenomenon is foregrounded by Montag and Mildred’s relationship, as it manifests itself in Mildred’s lack of empathy and understanding of

feelings, and in her way to consider her husband only as a provider of her 'happy' lifestyle. In this case, consuming mass culture is closely related to the process of dehumanization, hence the novel can be thought to criticize consumer culture.

Baker points out that in the world of *Fahrenheit 451* "consumption occurs apparently without production, and consumption is largely based not on commodities but on spectacle" (493). In *Fahrenheit 451*, this spectacle consists of rapidly changing scenes, loud voices and bright lights transmitted through the wall-size television screens. Mildred spends most of her time watching these spectacles, and to people like her "an eternally circulating and spectacle-based present completely masks the systematic erasure of "culture"" (493). As the spectacle lacks content, it "both replicates and masks a void at the core of official discourse" (493), but still it has replaced real "family and social structures" (Atkinson 5). Spectacle are often violent or hostile, and they are affecting values of the society: death and killing are considered natural and random. As people are shown violence constantly from the same source as most of the information they get, it is no wonder they see nothing wrong with this brutality. Only feelings presented in these shows are anger and happiness, and feelings cannot be shown in public either (Zipes 186), which is probably behind Mildred's inability to respond to other feelings such as sorrow. Together with the "spectacle of death [...] that keeps the citizens pacified" (Baker 493) and normalization of violence, the absence of variety of emotions from the spectacles are the source of Mildred's lack of empathy, thus, dehumanizing her.

The spectacle is a common feature in the dystopias written in 1950s, and it "is usually linked to a fabricated reality and false ideology disseminated by the mass media" (Baker 493), as it is also in *Fahrenheit 451*, in which the spectacle is used to make the citizens ignore the war that is about to begin. The constant consumption of spectacle in *Fahrenheit 451*, and its effect on people, can be interpreted as critique towards consumer culture. Mildred, who "is constructed as a consumer of the TV parlor's representation of the world" (Reid 58), and also represents the average consumer of their society, sees her husband only as someone able to provide her with more spectacle, the fourth television screen. As Montag does not function as Mildred would like him to, she implies he is inconsiderate of her, and loses interest in the conversation they are having. This aspect of Mildred reminds of Ortega y Gasset's 'mass-man', as she thinks that she has the right to "the free expansion of [her] vital desires" (58), thinking Montag is inconsiderate for not buying the fourth wall, even though they are still paying for the third one. Also, "the radical ingratitude towards all that has made possible the ease of his existence", a trait of the mass-man (58), is apparent in Mildred, as she is provided for by Montag, but still mostly ignores him. In this matter, Clarisse creates again a

contrast with Mildred, as she wants nothing from Montag, and it is one of the features making Montag feel at ease around her. In the end, Mildred realizes that Montag is a threat to her consuming of spectacle, and turns him in and forgets his existence. Thus, consumerist culture, together with use of technology, is portrayed as leading to dehumanization.

Besides the connection of Montag and Mildred's relationship to the fear of dehumanization and critique towards consumer culture, both typical elements of dystopian texts, also the nature of relationship between Montag and Clarisse is common to dystopias. Whereas Booker and Thomas used the concept of "alien Other" (86), which was associated with Clarisse in the previous chapter, Kathryn M. Grossman brings forth the idea of woman as temptress, who leads the protagonist to otherhood in science fiction dystopias. Temptress, "instead of merely seducing the male protagonist out of his earthly paradise, [...] charms him into seeing it in the new manner" (Grossman 135). Clarisse is quite clearly this temptress in *Fahrenheit 451*, and by her "uncommon vitality [she] disrupts the dreary codes of conformity governing not only the hero's behavior, but even his very view of the world and of himself" (138). However, temptress usually has a romantic relationship with the protagonist, but Montag and Clarisse are only friends.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, the omission of romance from Montag and Clarisse's meaningful relationship emphasizes the dystopian elements in Montag and Mildred's marriage, which is supposed to be a romantic relationship. The hold of technology and media over Mildred, her tendency to ignore her husband and think him as means to provide her happy life, as well as her lack of empathy, create a clear contrast to the Montag and Clarisse's conversations, comfortable atmosphere, and the way they enjoy each other's company. Thus, the meaningful friendship Clarisse and Montag have makes Mildred and Montag's marriage seem like a shallow relationship between two strangers, creating a contrast foregrounding dehumanization and criticizing consumer culture.

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<sup>7</sup> Montag seems to be attracted to Clarisse at first, but later says how she made him feel like a father (26).



#### 4. Conclusion

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the characters Clarisse and Mildred are constructed as opposites. Whereas Clarisse represents something extraordinary and unusual, even suspicious, in the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, Mildred represents the norm of this dystopian society. The construction of love-triangle contrasts the female characters, as well as their relationships to Montag, with each other, revealing contrasts of life and death, meaningful and shallow relationships, as well as nature and technology related to these. The contrast created by Clarisse and her friendship with Montag foregrounds the dystopian elements of turning people into ‘non-living’ masses by thought control, and dehumanization by suppressing feelings, both of which are effects of using technology and consuming media. In relation to relentless consuming of spectacle and its dehumanizing effect, *Fahrenheit 451* also critiques consumer culture, which is a common theme in dystopias.

All the elements of dystopia mentioned above are apparent in Mildred and her relationship to Montag. However, the contrast of Clarisse contributes to ‘cognitive estrangement’, which is vital for dystopias, and utopias and science fiction in general. As mentioned in the introduction, usually the protagonist going through a transformation, internalizing humane values missing from the dystopian society, creates the effect of estrangement. The balancing between the norms of the dystopian society and the humane values works as “a return or feedback into the reader’s normality”, and without it “there would be no function for utopias or other estranged genres” (Suvin 35). According to Ernst Bloch, “the real function of estrangement is [...] the provision of a shocking and distancing mirror above the all too familiar reality” (qtd. in Suvin 35). Even though Montag functions in this sense, the contrast between Clarisse and Mildred is what contributes to this cognitive estrangement more effectively. Clarisse is a character that seems familiar to the reader; a young girl that likes to spend time outside and talk with people, thinking there is something wrong as children kill each other or themselves. With Mildred, on the other hand, it is soon realized that she is a character of dystopian society, talking in a hasty manner, always listening to Seashell, and being more considerate of TV-shows than her husband. Also Montag realizes this difference, and it is what finally begins the transformation, as Clarisse makes him see the faults of the society, and most of all, what is lacking from his and Mildred’s relationship.

At this point, I briefly discuss the nature of love-triangle in *Fahrenheit 451*. As it is demonstrated in this thesis, Montag and Mildred’s relationship is not actually romantic or loving. Also, Montag and Clarisse are friends – even though Montag seems attracted to her at first – who know each other

only for a week. Therefore, to use the term ‘love-triangle’ may not seem valid. However, love in the society of *Fahrenheit 451* is embedded in the relationships like Montag and Mildred’s, as also Montag himself has thought to be in love with his wife before meeting Clarisse. The friendship with Clarisse, on the other hand, is that meaningful and special for Montag that it can be juxtaposed with love. Furthermore, Montag balances between these two female characters, even though in terms of his transformation, and finally makes the choice between the values and ideas represented by these women, choosing Clarisse over Mildred.

The themes of dystopia, namely the fear of turning into masses, dehumanization, critique towards consumer culture, and the danger of technological advances, together with other dystopian elements, such as the nuclear war and natural disasters caused by human action, are still current themes today – maybe more current than ever. Therefore, it seems that dystopias will remain a popular genre also in the future. As the genre remains prominent, also the studies on dystopia will probably keep being conducted, considering both the classics as well as the newer works of the canon. Thus, new viewpoints are needed as well. As I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis, the focus on peripheral characters and relationships they have with the protagonist – aspects that are often given little notion in studies on classical dystopias – may reveal a broader view on the dystopian society of the narrative. Despite their peripheral status in the narrative, these aspects are essential to the representation of the dystopia in *Fahrenheit 451*. Thus, the function of relationships could be an example of worthy aspects for future studies on dystopias.

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