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“WIRES AND LIGHTS IN A BOX”: *FAHRENHEIT 451* AS A PRODUCT OF
POSTWAR ANXIETY ABOUT TELEVISION

by

Christine V. Shell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

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2014

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ABSTRACT

“Wires and Lights in a Box”: *Fahrenheit 451* as a Product of
Postwar Anxiety about Television

by

Christine V. Shell, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2014

Major Professor: Dr. Melody Graulich
Department: English

In his 1953 novel *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury describes a dumbed-down, pleasure-seeking civilization on the verge of collapse. Books are banned, and various forms of mass media—most notably television—have replaced the written word as primary sources of culture and information. Bradbury’s dystopian vision of a media-dependent society seems remarkably prophetic, but when considered in the context of postwar ideologies and technological developments *Fahrenheit 451* emerges more as a product of its own time than a forecast of a future one. This thesis focuses on three major themes in Bradbury’s work—television as an enforcing agent of amusement over critical thinking, television and femininity in the domestic sphere, and television as a fusing agent of news and entertainment—and the ways in which postwar ideologies of and anxieties about media, gender, and pleasure informed these themes.

(55 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

“Wires and Lights in a Box”: *Fahrenheit 451* as a Product of
Postwar Anxiety about Television

Christine V. Shell

This project discusses the ways in which Ray Bradbury’s novel *Fahrenheit 451* functions as an indictment of media culture. While many analyses of the novel focus on the text’s sweeping themes of literary censorship, this study instead centers on Bradbury’s depiction of media—particularly television—culture and the ways in which Bradbury feared it could be harmful. Although Bradbury wrote about a future society a century beyond his own, his novel serves as a remarkable reflection of his contemporaneous culture’s media consumption and gendered divisions; this thesis discusses Bradbury’s novel alongside such forces, considering the effects such influences may have had on his work.

DEDICATION

For my grandparents,
George and Anna Mae Shell

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a thesis is special beast, one I could not have tamed without assistance and encouragement from some wonderful people. Many thanks to my thesis chair, the incomparable Dr. Melody Graulich, and committee members Dr. Ryan Moeller and Dr. David Wall for their insight, patience, and support. Also, I extend a hearty and sincere “thank you” to my remarkable family and friends, especially my parents and grandparents. Without their love and faith, who knows where this project or my own sanity would be.

Christine Shell

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INTRODUCTION

FAHRENHEIT 451 AND THE PROBLEM OF TELEVISION

John Crosby, critic, 1973: "In the 1950s everyone was interested in TV—the educated and the featherbrains alike. It was new and we were very innocent." (qtd in Boddy 89)

"We must all be like. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal. Each man the image of every other, then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against" (Bradbury 56).

This is the world of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, a society of bottom dwellers who devote the entirety of their lives to avoiding pain. To do so, these individuals rely on a system of soulless mass media and other vapid entertainment to distract themselves from the harsh realities of their war-torn world. Those who engage in activities involving enlightened thought are considered subversives. Those who own or read works of literature—considered contraband in their society—are punished by fire; their books and home are burned by the firemen, an agency dedicated to the destruction of books, and the book owners themselves are thrown into prison. Captain Beatty, a fire chief, justifies this censorship when he tells Montag, one of his subordinates, about the dangerous tradition of books and their ability to make men miserable. "A book is a loaded gun," he says. "Who knows who might be the target of a well-read man" (56). Books, a symbol of critical engagement throughout Bradbury's text, have the power to make people think, a power which also brings the potential for unhappiness. But this won't do, for *Fahrenheit's* society views happiness as the absence of discomfort or pain; such discomfort or pain, in the collective reasoning, is only possible when people think

critically about their world. They view “fun” or “pleasure” as any activity which provides careless amusement and easy distraction from the heavier problems of life. Hence, the materials which prompt vivid imagination and careful examination —chief among them books—are outlawed, and those who strive for a life of intellectual enlightenment are considered social pariahs and are carefully monitored by the Fire Department.

A small yet vital cast of characters populate this drama, set in a large, unspecified United States city: Montag, a disaffected Fireman who senses there’s more to life than what he’s been conditioned to accept; Millie, his brain-addled wife who watches television incessantly; Clarisse, their bright teenage neighbor who strives for a life beyond pain-avoidance and pleasure-seeking; Faber, a former college professor who guides Montag’s quest for fulfillment; Captain Beatty, the menacing and devastatingly intelligent Fire Chief who vigorously enforces the status quo; the Mechanical Hound, a personified machine utilized by Beatty and the State to punish those who challenge the status quo; the Book People, a group of exiled intellectuals who keep literary culture alive in the wilderness outside the city. Through these characters, Bradbury personifies the varied themes of his work—censorship, the dangers of media saturation, the importance of critical thought, the danger of apathy—and presents a terrifying portrait of what society might someday become if its members don’t make personal commitments to living on what Bradbury views as a higher plane of existence.

Many readers and critics respond enthusiastically to the novel’s themes of censorship, but fewer focus on the chief agent of this censorship—not the Firemen, but the system of mass media (particularly television) which opiates the people, and the ways in which it contributes to a larger system of pleasure-seeking. This thesis will focus

primarily on the portrayal of and effects of television and radio in the novel, relying on the historical context of postwar America to explore why Bradbury feared that such a dystopian world could constitute his country's future, and will examine how postwar discourses on entertainment, gender roles, and current affairs may have shaped Bradbury's characterizations of *Fahrenheit's* individuals and collective society. Granted, Bradbury's fears have deeper, more historical roots than the 1950s—as Patrick Brantlinger writes in *Bread and Circuses*, anxieties over new technology, scorn for societies built around pleasure seeking, and disdain for mass culture in favor of high (elite) culture date back to the days of the Roman Empire. Bradbury and many of his contemporary writers and thinkers continued this tradition in their criticisms of postwar television, which they clearly viewed as a lower form of culture. Television writer Paddy Chayefsky (who would later write the film *Network*, itself a prime and influential condemnation of mass media) wrote in 1955 that “lyrical writing, impressionistic writing and abstract and expressionistic writing are appalling in television whereas they might be gauged exciting in the theatre” (qtd in Boddy 83). Similarly, TV writer Manny Rubin in 1954 viewed the television landscape as a place with “no profession of idea[s]” and lamented, “There will be no F. Scott Fitzgeralds in TV, no Faulkners, no Hemingways. For TV writing has become a hack job” (qtd in Boddy 192). Such voices were part of a movement of “culture elitists” in the 1950s who produced work which demonized popular media, arguing that it “corrupted and vulgarized High Culture” (Cassidy 14). These critics overlooked the potential everyman value of so-called “hack job” entertainment; instead, to them television was, as Newton Minnow would famously remark in his 1961 speech “Television and the Public Interest,” a “vast wasteland,” a

landscape utterly devoid of creativity, intellectual depth, and true art—the supposed hallmarks of high culture, and the kind of culture Bradbury craved, at least if *Fahrenheit* serves as any evidence.

Bradbury often said he was more interested in preventing the future than predicting it (Moore), but perhaps what he didn't realize was that in his effort to prevent a dastardly future he was also reflecting his own perfidious present. For the purpose of this thesis, Bradbury's then-present will be revealed through the examination of postwar television offerings and the writings of critics, intellectuals, and television industry insiders. Some postwar influences I cite are still well known today, such as television programs like *I Love Lucy* and *The Today Show*, while others have faded into relative obscurity, such as the misery shows of the 1950s (like *Strike it Rich* and *Queen for a Day*) and some of the popular writers and philosophers of his time, like Phillip Wylie. A particularly ascorbic critic, Wylie wrote his best-known work, *Generation of Vipers*, in 1944, a bitter critique of contemporaneous American culture with tirades against those who eschewed critical thought. Bradbury himself read the book in the mid-1940s (Eller 107) and hints of its influence on Bradbury surface throughout *Fahrenheit's* text. Although Wylie's views are extreme and often offensive, his commentary on American life—both in the 1944 and updated 1955 edition—function as useful references for the kinds of societal conditions present in the time of *Fahrenheit's* conception. In citing these and other sources, I do not intend to state with absolute certainty that Bradbury was most definitely influenced in some concrete way by each and every one of them; rather, I offer them as evidence of the general atmosphere of the time, and one through which to better interpret the world of *Fahrenheit 451* than the trappings of our familiar and thoroughly digital world.

The postwar era was an age of uncertainty, with the long years and losses of World War II still fresh in memory, and the threat of a new nuclear war looming heavy. As Elaine Tyler May writes in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, as Americans struggled to return to some sense of certainty about their world and their place in it they increasingly rejected the progressive ideas of the 1920s and 30s and attempted to return to a sensibility reminiscent of the Victorian era, with its traditional gender roles and firmly established patriarchy. They also turned to consumerism, filling their homes with sleek modern appliances to reduce labor time and increase leisure potential.

In this environment, “television was typically welcomed as a catalyst for renewed domestic values” (Spigel 2). Its basic principles had been known for some time, and were predicted as “just around the corner” since the late 1920s (Boddy 24). Limited television broadcasts commenced in the mid-thirties, but further development of the media was stalled by the arrival of World War II. After the war, the industry picked up again, with Americans purchasing the devices more rapidly than they had any previous home entertainment device; between 1948 and 1955 televisions appeared in over two thirds of American homes (Spigel 1). Such a rate of infiltration may have alarmed Bradbury, enough so to center his first full-length novel on the problem of television.

The novel itself developed through several incarnations—first as an unpublished short story, then as the short published work *The Fireman* in 1949, and finally in its expanded form as *Fahrenheit 451* in October 1953. Bradbury feverishly worked on the manuscript in short creative bursts, producing much of the novel over a nine-day period in July, using a rented typewriter in the cool quiet basement of the UCLA library, a place

away from the distractions of home and family. The analyses in this thesis will concern itself strictly with the final version of the novel, which the irrepensible Bradbury resisted altering over the years and instead left in its 1953 form (although he did adapt the novel for the stage in the 1970s, at which point he couldn't resist adding some material).

Throughout this thesis, terms such as or similar to “pleasure-seeking” are used to indicate mindsets and activities which stifle critical thought—which, in Bradbury's world, leads to pain—and which instead provide simple, mind-numbing amusements which do not promote intellectual or emotional stimulation or growth. The term “critical thought,” as applied throughout this text, refers to the careful and rational examination of personal and cultural philosophies, conditions, entertainments, and rhetoric. Critical thinking here indicates a willingness to be open to new ideas and engage in careful and sustained discourse with one's self and others, regardless of the discomfort or pain that may follow, in a greater search for truth and profundity.

The first chapter will focus on the prominent portrayal throughout *Fahrenheit 451* of societies built around mass culture as cheap, pleasure-seeking collectives. Like the critics in Brantlinger's book and multitudes of 1950s thinkers, Bradbury appears to associate high culture with intelligence and progressive thought, and low, or mass, culture with mediums like television and radio as well as an overall cultural environment of idiocy, undeveloped thinking skills, pleasure-seeking tendencies. The chapter will especially discuss the concepts represented in the depiction of the novel's Mechanical Hound and the ways in which it functions both as a symbol of media devices and their users.

The second chapter will consider the role of the domestic sphere in *Fahrenheit 451*, first examining Bradbury's rendering of the domestic space and family life in his media-saturated society, and the resulting implications. It will pay close attention to Bradbury's construction of femininity—particularly, femininity as a product of motherhood and housewifery—as it relates to both novel and postwar gender narratives. Finally, it will explore the ways in which women interact with and are affected by media in the novel and the effects these habits have on the fulfillment of their gender-dictated duties. Throughout, the chapter will discuss these postwar notions through the lens of popular entertainment, magazines, and social critics such as Wylie and Betty Friedan.

Finally, the third chapter will examine the friction between and ultimate marriage of popular news and entertainment. Such conflicts would be warned against in future works such as the 1976 film *Network* (penned by Chayefsky, who actually wrote for television during the postwar era) and in Neil Postman's 1986 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Both Chayefsky and Postman viewed the melding of news and entertainment as a catastrophic event, a tactic which pandered to the lowest common denominator of society and encouraged stupidity and base thinking. Both also had a longer history of television news coverage to draw from than Bradbury, yet even in the early days of television, patterns of entertainment news and even reality shows were already emerging in the broadcasting landscape. This chapter will consider some of these early examples, and the ways in which they could have spoken danger to Bradbury's sensibilities. It will also consider the ways in which Bradbury connects wartime culture with television culture, and how these connections inform his critiques of news entertainment and television programming in general.

As his biographer Jonathan Eller writes, “[Bradbury] recognized at any early age that a culture can slip away from its ethical anchor by destroying, or even by ignoring, its art and literature” (92). As the following pages will demonstrate, in *Fahrenheit 451* such fears are manifest.

CHAPTER I
“FUN IS EVERYTHING”: TELEVISION AS AN
INSTRUMENT OF PLEASURE-SEEKING

“This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box.” (Morrow)

Second only, perhaps, to Captain Beatty, one of the most sinister and frightening figures in *Fahrenheit 451* is the Mechanical Hound. As its name suggests, the Hound’s form mimics that of a large dog, but with distinct differences—rather than fur, flesh, and bone, the Hound is constructed of brass, copper, and steel; rather than four legs, this Hound has eight, spidery in structure and with “rubber-padded paws” (Bradbury 22). When not in use, it “[sleeps] but [does] not sleep, [lives] but [does] not live” in a corner of the firehouse (21); when activated, its “multifaceted” eyes flicker with a green-blue neon light, and it growls—“a strange combination of electrical sizzle, a frying sound, a scraping of metal, a turning of cogs that seemed rusty and ancient with suspicion” (23). The Hound, on a literal level, functions as an enforcer and assassin for the Fire Department. With a four-inch hollow needle extending from its nose, the Hound is always at the ready to inject morphine or procaine into its helpless victim. Within seconds of being dispatched, the Hound can run down, pounce upon, and kill its target with terrifying, silent precision, then return to its kennel and “die as if a switch had been turned” (23).

Montag is both fascinated by and terrified of the Hound. Convinced that the Hound doesn't like him (he touches its nose while it sleeps, and it growls at him and starts to stir), he quickly escapes and talks to his boss, Beatty, about the situation. Beatty replies, "Come off it. It doesn't like or dislike. It just 'functions.' It's like a lesson in ballistics. It has a trajectory we decide on for it. It follows through. It targets itself, homes itself, and cuts off. It's only copper wire, storage batteries, and electricity" (24). Indeed, the Hound can be programmed to pursue a specific person by entering the chemical values of the person's scent into the Hound's electronic brain, rendering it a personalized killing machine.

Beatty's characterization of the hound could also be used to describe a television set. Like the Hound, television sets—as physical objects—have no life on their own. They have no emotions, no preferences, no motives. They are, as Edward Murrow would famously say in 1958, "lights and wires in a box." Television, as a technology and a medium, is as helpful or as malicious as the people producing programming and the people consuming that programming wish it to be. And in *Fahrenheit*, people "gave up reading of their own according" decades previous—no one forced them to do so. The state of their culture is portrayed as a direct result of their choice of fast and easy entertainment over thoughtful, sustained discourse and critical thought.

Along these lines, later, when Montag wonders aloud what "the Hound think[s] about . . . at night," the Captain replies, "It doesn't think anything we don't want it to think." "That's sad," Montag answers, "because all we put into it is hunting and finding and killing. What a shame if that's all it can ever know" (25).

Montag's lament for the Hound's lost potential echoes those of television critics in the 1950s. Many critics bemoaned the slough of what was, in their opinions, poor-quality programming. The earliest days of broadcast television, from the mid to late forties and early fifties, were filled with variety programs, comedy hours, and the so-called "misery" shows (treated in Chapter 3)—all created in the name of entertainment. While some of the shows were praised for their ingenuity, many were panned as uncreative, stifled, dull, and/or violent. Sitcoms and variety shows were extremely popular. In April 1952, a ratings service determined that 42.7 percent of all network programming was comedy-based, with 24.8 percent of that total comprised of comedy-variety shows (Macdonald). Many of these shows fell in the category of "vaudeo" entertainment (the term an amalgamation of "vaudeville" and "video") and featured "dancing, popular songs, dog acts, pony acts, circus-style stunts, and big-name guest stars and/or series regulars, all sandwiched between generous portions of funny skits and monologues" (Macdonald). Although many, such as *Your Show of Shows* and Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre*, were well received, others fared poorly. *New York Times* critic Val Abrams labeled Gary Moore, who hosted an eponymous vaudeo show on which he was known to pull stunts such as boxing a bear or bouncing on a trampoline, a "perpetual juvenile" (qtd in Cassidy 80). *Times* critic Jack Gould, perhaps one of the most respected television critics of the era, wrote that Fred Allen, on *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, "did not seem to be trying very hard, which is not the trouper's way of showing loyalty to an audience that wants and expects to be entertained" (qtd in Murray 46). Gould also panned Milton Berle and his *Texaco Star Theater* for a time, disdaining his "parading around in women's clothes and pushing into everybody else's act" ("A

Reversal of Form” 15). Even the very format of these shows—somewhat schizophrenic in their large variety of often-silly acts—might have rubbed someone like Bradbury the wrong way. The way Berle, for example, ventured in and out of character might have been endearing to audiences, but Bradbury and similar critics could very conceivably have viewed such performance as evidence of an inability to maintain a fluid and intelligent performance.

Others were disturbed by the violence they found on television. In 1949 the Southern California Association for Better Radio and Television tallied all the violence they found during one week of television broadcasts in Los Angeles and found “ninety-one murders, seven stagecoach holdups, three kidnappings, ten thefts, four burglaries, two cases of arson, two suicides, one instance of blackmail, and cases of assault and battery ‘too numerous to tabulate’” (Macdonald). Five years later, a Gallup poll found that seventy-five percent of Americans believed that “the constant parade of violence on the home screen was a major contributor to the growth of violent behavior, juvenile delinquency, and outright criminal behavior among the nation’s young people” (Burns 262). Early crime anthology dramas such as *Lights Out*, *Danger*, and *Suspense* and detective shows like *Man Against Crime* (also known as *Follow That Man*) and *Martin Kane*, *Private Eye* may have contributed to this perception. J. Fred Macdonald writes that although such shows “preached the moral that crimes did not pay, . . . powerful individuals and social groups assailed them because of their fundamental violence,” claiming “causal links between crime programming on TV and juvenile delinquency, social violence, and a general undermining of moral conduct in the United States”

(Macdonald). Bradbury reflects such anxieties in his novel, writing of teenagers who run over pedestrians or kill each other for fun.

Ironically, the consumption of such programming from this version of a Mechanical Hound in some ways renders its consumers as Mechanical Hounds themselves. In Bradbury's dystopian world, when citizens allow their lives to be overrun with media, particularly television, they turn into mirror Hounds—fulfilling the form of a human being, as the Hound fulfills the form of a dog, but inside empty and soulless. Like the Hound, they only think what they are told to think—in their case, by the media—or are the sad sum of the mindless programming they consume, and they function accordingly. They have little value for human life, seeing each other as dispensable (“this is the age of the disposable tissue,” one character says. “Blow your nose on a person, wad them, flush them away, reach for another, blow, wad, flush. Everyone using everyone else's coattails,” [Bradbury 15]), and will turn in even neighbors, family members, and friends for owning books (and, therefore, subjecting the new criminal to prison or death) without a second thought—because it is what they are programmed to do. Human beings, like the Hound and television, are controlled by and in service of the dominant social narrative—“to run, have fun” (100)—and without the intellect or a desire to do anything else. These pleasure-seekers believe, as does Millie, that “[h]appiness is important. Fun is everything” (62).

Television and other forms of media aren't the sole supporters of this pleasure-seeking society, although they're certainly the mediums Bradbury focuses on the most; rather, Bradbury casts these devices as part of a larger system of amusement. Other parts of the whole include sporting events, theaters filled with clowns rather than high drama,

comic books, trade journals, three-dimensional sex magazines, high-speed street racing, clubs and parties, jet cars, motorcycle helicopters, sex, heroin, acrobats, magicians, and Fun Parks filled with attractions such as Window smashers and Car Wreckers, in which their participants can wreak havoc to their heart's content. All these diversions keep their participants so busy that they are left without the time, inclination, or capacity for critical thought about their fragile world, their place in it, and the hollowness of their beings and souls. Millie claims that she is happy "and proud of it" (62), and as she functions as representative of the media culture at large, the scores of other television watchers (presumably, the entire country) would claim the same thing. But it's clear they're not happy. Millie and countless others continue to overdose on tranquilizers, which they take to numb even a flicker of psychological pain, and so many are overdosing that the medical profession builds special machines to pump the junkies' stomachs, drain their blood, and replace it with fresh blood, untainted by tranquilizing chemicals (12).

Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* noted the frequent use of chemical tranquilizers in women of the 1950s, stating that "[m]any suburban housewives were taking tranquilizers like cough drops." One user told her, "'You wake up in the morning, and you feel as if there's no point in going on another day like this. So you take a tranquilizer because it makes you not care so much that it's pointless'" (31). Clearly, all is not well on the home front. People aren't happy and so they turn to the media, to their pills, to forget.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Frankfurt School theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno explain such avoidance of pain, this masking of misery. "Pleasure," they write,

always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance. The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and from negation. (144)

The problem is clear then. The cause of *Fahrenheit's* ailing society isn't media itself—it's a population filled with people who are either unable or unwilling to think seriously and bravely face difficulties. While Bradbury allows that television can be a force for good if used properly (this becomes evident in a conversation between Faber and Montag about midway through the novel), he seems pessimistic that it will actually be used to that end. Instead, he believes it dumbs down its viewership with banal chatter and spectacle. The TV parlor walls are "always talking to Mildred," its actors spouting off meaningless dialogue such as:

"Something must be done!"
 "Yes, something must be *done!*"
 "Well, let's not stand and talk!"
 "Let's *do* it!" (42)

But Bradbury never portrays the characters actually *doing* anything. We're only privy to their mindless chatter:

"Now, don't get angry!"
 "Who's angry?"
 "*You* are!"
 "*I* am?"
 "You're mad!"
 "Why would I be mad!"
 "Because!" (43)

Montag is understandably baffled by the lack of coherency, development, and sense in the television show and asks his wife in frustration, "[W]hat are they mad about? Who *are* these people?" Millie, who has probably been watching the series for some time,

can't satisfactorily answer his simple questions. She barely knows the plot, can't remember if the fighting characters are married, and is bewildered that Montag is even asking questions about it—not because she's unaccustomed to him asking questions about television (although he doesn't seem to have done so before, much less participated with the medium in any way), but because she herself isn't accustomed to examining, in any degree, what the show she mindlessly watches is actually trying to achieve.

Television has not trained her to think or ask questions. Television has trained her to consume and be entertained, rather than absorb and be enlightened. It offers nothing worth absorbing, anyway—rather, this entertainment, this pleasure-seeking society, is a system of “flowers . . . trying to live on flowers,” an institution insistent on only seeking after agreeable things and not willing to put in the hard work, to grow their characters with metaphorical “good rain and black loam” (79).

The opposite of this stupefied state, shrouded in misery, is another kind of misery, but a far more enlightening one. To become alive to the world again and lift the culture from the mess it's in, Montag's mentor Faber outlines three essential ingredients.

1. Quality of Information

Faber favors books because, he believes, “they have quality,” a term he defines as having “texture,” “*pores*,” and “features,” something that “can go under the microscope” and give its reader a glimpse of the cosmos. That's why books “are hated and feared,” Faber says—because they “show the pores in the face of life” (Bradbury 79). They chip away at the insulation their society has built around itself, their aversion to anything which makes them feel uncomfortable or unpleasant, anything that challenges the

accepted and established cultural narrative. Certainly, he claims, television and radio could have the same rejuvenating effect if the public desired them to, but the public doesn't, and Faber believes they never will without serious change. *Fahrenheit's* media consumers aren't interested in finding or producing the "infinite detail and awareness" (78) that Faber believes comes from the best cultural sources, such as old phonograph records, old motion pictures, old friends, and of course books. However, no "magic" lies within these entities, Faber claims—it's what they *say*, the ways in which they "[stitch] the patterns of the universe together in one garment for us" (79) that make the difference.

Some postwar figures would have agreed with Faber. NBC President Pat Weaver insisted in 1955 that "we [at NBC] have been against the know-nothings, the primitives, because we do not believe that television should be run to give the people what they want. We believe that every NBC show should serve a purpose beyond diversion" (Cassidy 181). But others, particularly advertisers, disagreed. A 1950s General Foods executive declared a program "must be light, it must be pleasant" to support the advertising aims of its sponsors (qtd in Boddy 199). But the success of light programs proved deeply troubling to some. Fred Allen wrote of his fellow, more popular television personality Arthur Godfrey:

[Godfrey's] sweeping the country, and, Lord knows, it needs to be swept. But I think Arthur must be doing it with a short-handled broom—he's nearer to the dirt than most people. Millions of people think he's the funniest guy alive, but their standards are open to question. This is an age of mediocrity. Anything mediocre is bound to be a success. As we get more regimented, there are few Tiffany's and more Woolworth's. (qtd in Murray 127)

Ultimately, what this boils down to is the age-old battle referenced in the introduction, the distrust intellectuals exhibited of the common man, a classist duel

between high and mass culture, “Tiffany’s versus Woolworth’s,” the yearning for the supposedly-purer times past against the supposedly-crass and degraded present. In the 1950s, mass culture often took the form of vaudeville/variety shows, half-hour sitcoms, and pleasant, inoffensive dramas. While *Variety* quoted CBS President William Paley as saying “a network is as good as its comedy line-up” (qtd in Murray 63), others like Paddy Chayefsky disagreed. Chayefsky wrote several teleplays for some of the short-lived high-art programs of the late forties and early fifties (a genre which included shows such as *Goodyear Playhouse* and *Playhouse 90*), and would go on to write the film *Network*, itself an extreme indictment of media culture. In 1955, he lamented:

The advertising agencies are interested only in selling their client’s products, and they do not want dramas that will disturb potential customers. This limits the choice of material markedly. You cannot write about adultery, abortion, the social values of our times, or almost anything that relates to adult reality . . . Downbeat-type drama is almost as taboo as politically controversial stories. (qtd in Murray 100)

Faber, too, doesn’t find evidence of elevated thought (high culture) in such crowd-pleasing media (mass culture) of the present, and indeed in *Fahrenheit* the mass culture—designed for amusement and an easy laugh—is as debased and low as one could imagine. But Bradbury seems to have a grudge against common man, evidenced when Faber asserts that “the most dangerous enemy to truth and freedom” is “the solid unmoving cattle of the majority” (Bradbury 104). Ironically, Bradbury—who made his early living selling short stories to pulp magazines like *Weird Tales* and consumer publications like *Collier’s* (Eller 20), both organizations firmly rooted in mass culture—uses Faber’s declaration to scorn the aspects of culture embraced by everyday people, siding himself with the culturally elite in the process.

2. Critical Thought

The second ingredient in Faber's recipe for a nutritious culture is what he refers to as "leisure," a concept which goes beyond having time away from a dedicated occupation. For Faber, leisure is the "time to think," a space separate from the distractions provided by the endless litany of cheap and/or dangerous thrills ubiquitously provided by the culture—most specifically, a space away from television.

Of course in *Fahrenheit*, the copious amounts of leisure time people like Millie enjoy are devoted to other ends. Jay B. Nash voiced a similar fear in 1932 when he wrote:

This machine age has ... already supplied an unexampled wealth of leisure and what happens? The average man who has time on his hands turns out to be a spectator, a watcher of somebody else, merely because that is the easiest thing. He becomes a victim of spectatoritis—a blanket description to cover all kinds of passive amusement, an entering into the handiest activity merely to escape boredom. (qtd in Spigel 114)

Raymond Chandler offered a complimentary view on home media:

Television's perfect," he said. "You turn on a few knobs ... and lean back and drain your mind of all thought. And there you are watching the bubbles in primeval ooze. You don't have to concentrate. You don't have to react. You don't have to remember. You don't miss your brain because you don't need it. (qtd in Burns 18)

The media saturation described in these two passages demonstrates how television is perhaps the most threatening of all the pleasure-providing forces because it doesn't allow its viewers to, as Faber says, "argue with the four-wall televisor." He believes that, for its viewers, "[t]he televisor is 'real.' It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It *must* be right. It *seems* so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn't time to protest, 'What nonsense!'" (Bradbury 80).

The immediate physicality of television is thus more authoritative when compared to the process of nebulous, abstract contemplation. Thoughts do not have physical form or dimension and are therefore more difficult to hold on to. Television, on the other hand, is a solid corporeal structure projecting realistic images. These images, by virtue of the fact that they can be witnessed with the physical eye, adopt an illusion of tangible weight and form—something much more difficult for images and ideas, nurtured with a mental, emotional, or spiritual eye, to achieve. Therefore, when this physical television forcefully “tells [viewers] what to think,” those viewers adopt such thoughts without hesitation. It’s certainly an easier process than duking out an opinion or processing a difficult piece of knowledge by themselves, but one which Faber and Montag unitedly believe they must resist.

What Faber longs for is what Edward R. Murrow, in his 1958 speech to the Radio-Television News Directors Association, referred to as “itching pills,” a force to break the cycle of “decadence, escapism and insulation from the realities of the world in which we live.” Murrow was speaking then of the need for better programming, but what both he and Faber really want is for people to think carefully and critically about the dangerous world around them. In the midst of World War II, Wylie wrote in *Generation of Vipers* that “any man, these days, who does not live every hour in a condition of alarm—however detached or icy—is either a traitor or an idiot” (14); in the middle of a Cold War, Bradbury’s novel echoes the same sentiment.

3. Freedom to Act

For any positive change to be made possible, the final ingredient is what Faber terms as “the right to carry out actions based on what we learn from the interaction” between “quality of information” and the “leisure to digest it” (Bradbury 81). The television experience of *Fahrenheit 451* doesn’t provide such respite; it is instead a jarring, cacophonous affair, as Montag experiences while observing one of Millie’s programs:

A great thunderstorm of sound gushed from the walls. Music bombarded him at such an immense volume that his bones were almost shaken from their tendons; he felt his jaw vibrate, his eyes wobble in his head. He was a victim of concussion. When it was all over he felt like a man who had been thrown from a cliff, whirled in a centrifuge and spat out over a waterfall that fell and fell into emptiness and emptiness and never—quite—touched—bottom—never—never—quite—no not quite—touched—bottom ... and you fell so fast you didn’t touch the sides either ... never ... quite ... touched ... anything ... (42)

This encounter with television leaves Montag “sweating and on the point of collapse” (42). It’s far from the culturally enriching experience that many early television critics hoped for. Instead television, as rendered by Bradbury, is a complete assault on the senses, beating its viewers within an inch of their psychological lives, and leaving them utterly disconnected from the physical and emotional world, and instead suspended in a state of endless and rushing madness.

Faber believes that, while a large-scale departure from such spectacle is necessary, he and Montag are powerless to change the system by virtue of Faber’s age, Montag’s defection from his occupation, and their sheer lack of numbers. But what he doesn’t seem to initially realize—and what, in the end, is the most important—is that the freedom he craves requires freedom from his own personal demons of cowardice and

years of inaction. It also requires the ability to be alive to the world and its possibilities, to as one of the Book People remarks at the novel's end, "[s]tuff your eyes with wonder" and "live as if you'd drop dead in ten seconds" (150).

Unfortunately, it's an ability the people of *Fahrenheit's* society no longer have. They're instead ruled by the metaphorical Mechanical Hounds which reside in their homes and inject them daily with sedative media, making them blind.

CHAPTER II

“A SPIDERY HAND BUTTERED THE TOAST”:

TELEVISION IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

“The women showed their tongues, laughing.” (Bradbury 93)

In *Make Room for TV*, a study of postwar television and American families, Lynn Spigel writes:

Culture critics have often expressed their disdain for mass media in language that evokes contempt for those qualities that patriarchal societies ascribe to femininity. Thus, mass amusements are typically thought to encourage passivity, and they have frequently been represented in terms of penetration, consumption, and escape ... Mass culture, [as Andreas] Huyssen, claims, “is somehow associated with women while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men.” (61)

Bradbury anticipates these associations in *Fahrenheit 451*. Incredibly, he never shows men actively engaging with the medium, even though he implies that nearly *all* members of his pleasure-seeking society are addicted to media. Instead, the only figures he *ever* depicts interacting with the medium are women—and they are always made the worse for it. He depicts both women and their domestic sphere as television-tainted realms and in the process relegates these characters as tragically misguided figures at best, self-absorbed villains at worst.

The Montag residence is more a house than a home. Although we’re not treated to an in-depth description of the house, we can form a general conception of the house’s configuration from revealing pieces of information sprinkled throughout the text. This house of the future, like the other houses surrounding it, has a flat front with no porch

(60). Similarly, a 1953 issue of *Harper's* magazine predicted a future filled with “‘monotonous’ tract houses, ‘where nothing rises above two stories, and the horizon is an endless picket fence of telephone poles and *television aerals*’” (Spigel 101, italics added).

The home's front door slides open automatically to the Montags' touch; when visitors arrive, the door calls Millie (“Mrs. Montag, Mrs. Montag, someone here, someone here,”) to answer. Futuristic features continue in the kitchen, with a built-in incinerator, accessible through a slot in the wall and an automated toaster which seizes the finished toast with a “spidery metal hand,” then slathers it with butter (16). Bradbury seems to indicate with these details that the Montags' home is at least partially, if not fully, automated, a set-up which he likely mistrusted. (His 1950 short story “The Veldt” describes two spoiled children who use their automated house to murder their parents. It's hardly a rosy picture.) At the very least, the Montag home appears to be one bestowed with a decent number of modern conveniences, similar in character to the type of labor-saving machines (washing machines, dishwashers, etc.) which made their initial appearances in many homes during the postwar era, and which Wylie argued “deprived” a woman of her “social usefulness” (199). These conveniences likely leave Millie an ample amount of time to spend engaging with the most imposing feature of the home: the TV parlor, a room with three of its four walls functioning as giant television screens (18), expensive to purchase and dubbed by Bradbury as “phono-color walls” (44).

But beyond this pleasure palace, perhaps the most telling area of the house is the Montags' bedroom. Bradbury renders Guy and Millie's shared room as a sterile and icy place, devoid of marital intimacy and comfort. When Montag returns home from a late

night of fire-starting in the first portion of the novel, he enters the room as Millie sleeps with Seashells (a tiny radio device, similar to our modern ear-bud headphones) in her ears. Walking into the space is “like coming into the cold marbled room of a mausoleum after the moon has set.” It’s completely dark, the “silver world outside” excised by “the windows tightly shut” (9). Sealed off from nature and shrouded in blackness (the moon is absent after all, having set) the room embalms its inhabitants with lifelessness and morbidity—hardly a picture of marital wellbeing, and certainly a grim implication for the state of Montag’s marriage.

Bradbury continues this death motif when he further describes the room as “a tomb-world where no sound from the great city could penetrate” (9). Granted, for most people, keeping the noisy world outside at bay would be seen as beneficial, but here Bradbury employs these details to underscore the Montags’ disconnection and isolation from their larger community. In their fully-automated and media-saturated house, the Montags—particularly Millie—live a life fully sterilized against interference from the city outside. They can even put Seashells in their ears and use radio to block reality when the television is off. But it’s not just the noisy city that stays out. We might also read the sealed windows as a comment on Millie’s mental and emotional state. Her mind and soul, like her bedroom windows, are “tightly shut,” soundproofed against the noise of critical thought, the strain of critical discourse, the pain and pleasure of human emotion. She will not—cannot—let any outer influences inside.

All this starkly contrasts the physical and emotional environment of one neighbor’s home. The houses in *Fahrenheit 451* aren’t warm and inviting spaces, yet the McClellan Family’s home is vibrant, brightly lit and bordered outside by bright flowers.

Remarkably different from the cold, dark, and sterile environment of Montag's (and others') automated and media-ruled houses, Clarisse's home is "blazing" with light; its members spend their evenings doing the unthinkable: "sitting around, talking" (13).

Montag observes the strange spectacle:

Laughter blew across the moon-colored lawn from the house of Clarisse and her father and mother and the uncle who smiled so quietly and so earnestly. Above all, their laughter was relaxed and hearty and not forced in any way, coming from the house that was so brightly lit this late at night while all the other houses were kept to themselves in darkness. Montag heard the voices talking, talking, talking, giving, talking, weaving, reweaving their hypnotic web. (20)

The use of natural elements ("the moon-colored lawn"), paired with instances of genuine connection and communication (the earnestly smiling uncle, the "hypnotic web" of talking), suggest a happy, constructive home, an environment only made possible by its distance from television, media, and other pleasure-seeking activities.

The Montag home enjoys no such intimacy. Montag and Millie can't even remember where they first met, only ten years previous. They sleep in separate beds and never engage in any kind of substantial or nourishing conversation. At one point Montag, realizing that he and Millie don't share a fulfilling bond, muses that there is "a wall between him and Mildred . . . not just one wall but, so far, three!" Television, here, is the explicit cause of the breakdown of his relationship with Millie, a constant barrier that prevents meaningful discourse as well as sexual and emotional intimacy. Guy and Millie Montag are, in his reasoning, only "a silly empty man near a silly empty woman" (41)—no closeness, no shared understanding, only distance. Mildred, for her part, appears to esteem Montag chiefly for his ability to provide material goods, and by the novel's end, when Montag's subversive activity with books threatens to destroy her ability to watch

her television programs uninterrupted, she notifies the authorities of his behavior, leaves him, and promptly forgets about him.

In Bradbury's view, television strips its participants and their living spaces of any sort of emotional maturity, allowing them to feel nothing beyond the thrill of the latest televised spectacle. They care little for their fellow human beings, as people are now seen as disposable objects (15); all that exists, for television viewers, is their own selves and their immediate gratification; anyone or anything which doesn't affect either of those two categories doesn't matter. And the home—a space traditionally associated with family values and emotional sincerity—is little more than a giant hollow box.

Bradbury places the blame for this situation squarely on the shoulders of Millie, but in so doing draws on notions from past decades. In *Make Room for TV*, Spigel writes how Victorian cultural forces and ideology worked to “elevate women by making them the moral authority in the home” (14), the “Angel of the Home” and protector of familial virtue. Considering the postwar generation's return to this traditional morality, it's not much of a stretch to imagine that Bradbury would fear that if women were corrupted by media forces, their entire families might fall with them.

Accordingly, in the pleasure-seeking society of Fahrenheit 451, the only people Bradbury depicts actively engaging with the mass media, particularly television, are women. Although he certainly implies that the entire general population essentially are idiots, the only characters he spends more than a sentence or two describing as said idiots are women. Even Clarisse, the catalyst of change in Montag's life (Eller 215), comes across at times as an airhead, a wild child. Bradbury only writes of one other female character that doesn't appear to engage with television, an unnamed woman whose house and books Montag burns in the first portion of the novel. She prefers to die with her books, a

symbol of her intellect and creative thought, rather than live in ignorance and apathy (36). But although her presence in the narrative is encouraging, Bradbury provides few details about her and in the end focuses far more on the two women most central to his tale: Mildred and Clarisse.

A self-proclaimed housewife, Millie spends the majority of her time watching television or listening to her seashell radio. Whether or not she actually completes any kind of household tasks—cooking, cleaning, or laundry, for example—is unclear but seems unlikely; as mentioned, the Montags appear to live in a relatively automated house, and apart from a single scene in the kitchen (when the toaster cooks and butters Millie's toast for her), the only instance we see Millie engage in any kind of housework is when she tidies up her bedroom when Beatty comes to visit the sick Montag. In this scene, most of her action consists of "picking things up and putting them down again" (52), a series of repetitive and unproductive motions reminiscent of an assembly line machine.

Millie personifies—externally and internally—both the hollow nature of the media she thoughtlessly consumes and the television culture as a whole. She is extremely dull-witted, personifying Wylie's misogynistic 1944 description of the modern woman as "the child wife, the infantile personality, the woman who cannot reason logically" (53), whose "soul" consists of little more than a radio (in his annotated 1955 edition, Wylie replaces "radio" with "television," 213). She certainly loves television—the insulation of its bright colors, its noise, its spectacle, its distraction— but above all she loves "The Family"—the characters which appear on her favorite programs. Her perceived relationship with these banal fictional images supersedes her real, physical relationship with her own husband.

A 1951 article in *House Beautiful* echoed similar themes when it cheerfully proclaimed that “television has become a member of the family;” a separate article in *American Home* “explained ways to ‘welcome’ television ‘into the family circle.’” In a more general sense, “the magazines described television as a ‘newborn baby,’ a ‘family friend,’ a ‘nurse,’ a ‘teacher,’ and a ‘family pet’” (qtd in Spigel 50). Within the variety program format, at least one popular radio and television personality, Milton Berle, was often referred to as *Uncle Miltie*, a label which rebranded Berle from an inaccessible Hollywood star to a familiar member of the television viewer’s family. Other media personalities, if not quite family, at least came across as friendly neighbors. Joe McCarthy (a 1950s journalist, not the senator), remarking on the popularity of Arthur Godfrey’s program, quoted an unnamed industry observer as saying that “[t]he real secret of Godfrey’s success is that while he talks about so many things and does so many things he still remains like a guy who lives across the street. There is nothing theatrical about him” (Murray 127). Beyond vaudeville-format shows, half-hour television programs like *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Burns and Allen*, and *I Love Lucy*—centered around fictional portrayals of real life couples and families—“produced a sense of intimacy and authenticity by encouraging viewers to believe that the characters were real families who just happened to live their lives on television.” Because TV viewers were often familiar with these TV couples and their outside lives, on-screen families became “an ambiguous blend of fiction and reality,” on sitcoms which “collapsed distinctions between real life and television” (Spigel 158).

Fewer incidents in the history of early television showcase the merging of “real life and television” than the birth of Little Ricky on *I Love Lucy* in January 1953. Timed

to match up with the real-life birth of Lucille Ball's second child, the broadcast aired on January 19, 1953 (at the same time as Eisenhower's inauguration) and attracted an astounding 44 million viewers (Murray 172). *Newsweek's* cover story that week proclaimed, "All this may come under the heading of how duplicated in life and television *can* you get" (qtd in Spigel 158).

Many early television shows—talk, quiz, misery, and vaudeo shows most particularly—were often filmed live. The prevalence of live television in the early fifties may have contributed to Bradbury's conception of television and intimacy. As prominent cultural critic Gilbert Seldes wrote, "The essence of television techniques is their contribution to the sense of immediacy . . . Audiences . . . feel that what they see and hear is happening in the present and therefore more real than anything . . . which has the feel of the past" (qtd in Boddy 80-81).

This immediacy, combined with the notion of television hosts and characters being close friends or family, manifested itself in commercially beneficial ways as well. In a letter to the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1956, an ardent Godfrey fan wrote that because she and her husband had "the deepest respect and admiration for Mr. Godfrey" they had purchased over a thousand dollars' worth of Frigidaire appliances in the previous year. This, she said, they did this to prove beyond doubt that "we believe in Arthur's sincerity where 'his' products are concerned; to us when Arthur says 'I know it's good' it's the seal of approval and if we need it we'll give it preference over ANY other brand" (qtd in Murray 118).

The fabricated sense of intimacy between television star and watcher also produced fierce loyalty in the watchers, who lashed out against those who might be

critical of their beloved stars. When journalist John Crosby accused Godfrey of being a narcissist in a *Collier's* article, Godfrey fans retaliated in print. *Collier's* reader and Godfrey devotee Joyce Lieberman of Pittsburgh waged that “John Crosby is a fat, dissipated old critic who probably never accomplished anything truly worthwhile in his life,” and defending Godfrey as “virile, strong, competent, resourceful and . . . always doing something for the country he loves.” She believed that Crosby was “burningly jealous of Arthur, who is a REAL man.” In a complimentary vein Arline Koogler of Hawthorne, California declared that she knew “thousands of women who would be more than happy to beat John Crosby to death with tea bags. Arthur Godfrey is an ever-lovin’ doll, sirs” (qtd in Murray 133-34).

These women’s devotion to (and rather creepy lusting after) Godfrey illustrates the larger system of perceived intimacy with television characters and provides the groundwork for Millie’s own construction of her television family. She watches them on three giant screens installed on the walls of what she calls “the parlor” and pesters her husband to spend the extra money for a fourth wall to be installed. “If we had a fourth wall,” she insists, “why it’d be just like this room wasn’t ours at all, but all kinds of exotic people’s rooms” (18). Here, the dimensions and possibilities expand beyond family ties, as television provides for Millie the illusion of a different, more exciting life, filled with a surrogate family in places more thrilling to her than her own comfortable home. It’s a complete supplanting of both her real-life family and real-life living space.

Postwar notions of and goals for television complimented this concept. Spigel writes that “popular wisdom” of the time conveyed that “television was able to reproduce reality in a way no previous medium could” (139). Susan Murray writes that television

expanded on the intimacy factor previously available through radio, arguing that “television’s visuality made it an even more tangible and powerful presence in home life. Popular rhetoric of the period described the experience of television as one that *brought the world into the home* and was often termed by the popular press as ‘home theater’ or ‘family theater’” (Murray 50, emphasis added). Indeed, to preserve this effect, television studios preferred for live shows to be shot in front of smaller audiences, fearing that a larger crowd would disrupt the sense of the performer’s intimacy with his audience (53).

Some people tried to enhance such intimacy and reproduction of reality beyond the television screen. *Time* magazine in 1951 shared news of recently-patented (and unfortunately named) invention called the “smellies,” a device which would “‘automatically release’ various scents from containers built into TV sets” (Spiegel 109). These odors, according to *Time*, were “intended to be appropriate to the type of program—e.g. peach blossom for romance” (qtd in Spiegel 109).

Such methods perpetuated the culture of distraction that Bradbury describes in *Fahrenheit* and through Millie. By surrendering herself to television for most of the day and downing sleeping pills to deal with the rest, she enables herself to ignore the brutal nature of the world surrounding her, a life in which her marriage is all but dead and her society is on the brink of nuclear holocaust. Her ghastly exterior appearance brutally reflects all of this and functions as one of Bradbury’s most potent condemnations of media culture: she is a vain and sickly woman, with “hair burnt by chemicals to a brittle straw,” vacant eyes, a “body as thin as a praying mantis from dieting,” and “flesh like white bacon” (52). Just as “[m]etaphors of disease were continuously used to discuss the

medium's unwelcome presence in the household" by critics (Spigel 113), so Bradbury paints the image of an empty and diseased woman to represent television.

Bradbury's vision of media in human form could conceivably have been inspired by a cartoon from a 1950 issue of the *Ladies Home Journal*. It depicts a sickly, bug-eyed child with wiry hair—an appearance which resembles Millie's. The cartoon's caption labels the child, who watches television constantly and rarely goes outside, as "pale," "weak," and "stupid-looking." This degenerate mental and physical state, in the cartoonist's as well as Bradbury's estimation, is the inevitable consequence of excessive television consumption. Together, they mirror a portrait found in Calder Willingham's 1952 essay "Television: Giant in the Living Room." He relates the following anecdote:

A friend said to me the other day that no matter how good any given television show is, to look at that tube of lights and shadows almost invariably brings to mind such things as death, tuberculosis, cats howling on the back fence, incest, dishes in the sink, etc. . . . A hair-in-the-mouth, screaming-nerve sensation comes from viewing television in solitude . . . Furthermore, he declares, to look at it for any length of time, even in the company of others, causes sexual impotence, shortens the life span, makes the hair and teeth fall out, and encourages early psychosis in otherwise normal people. (115)

While such a description, replete with ominous howling cats and psychosis, is obviously an exaggeration, it nonetheless suggests how dramatic and rhetorically charged the spreading anxiety about new technology was in an unsteady postwar America. For both Willingham's friend—as well as for Bradbury and the *Ladies' Home Journal* artist—television posed a grave threat to both physical and mental capacities, promising not only to sap its participants of life and vitality but instill madness and despair in its wake as well.

Millie's representation of cultural decay and immaturity through television is meant to stand in stark contrast to Clarisse's, whom Bradbury depicts as an admirable heroine who eschews television and empty pleasure-seeking and who, in many ways, fulfills the 1950s image of an ideal woman. Properly disciplined when she was younger ("I was spanked when I needed it, years ago"), she has subsequently developed into a rather industrious young adult, in spite of her Flower Child proclivities. She gathers flowers, knits sweaters, and, as she proudly tells Montag, completes her family's shopping and housekeeping tasks "by hand" (28). These details provide more than a pretty picture of her creative proclivities and work ethic; rather, their inclusion proclaims that women who live in media-free domains properly fulfill their postwar-sanctioned gender roles. Notably, Clarisse doesn't just shop and keep house—she does these things *by hand*. (No automated toasters with spider hands for her!) By fulfilling her domestic duties without the aid of new-fangled technology, Clarisse establishes herself as a true woman, existing in a "pure" feminine state and adhering to the 1950s-approved model of womanhood.

In postwar ideology, "[t]he domestic woman needed to save her energy for housekeeping, childrearing, and an active (monogamous) sex life with her husband," and this message was repeatedly frequently throughout 1950s media (Spigel 42). Betty Friedan contended that, for women, "The end of the road is togetherness, where the woman has no independent self to hide even in guilt; she exists only for and through her husband and children" (47). She quotes a 1956 Christmas edition of *Life*, which declares that housewives are "feminine women, with truly feminine attitudes, admired by men for their miraculous, God-given, sensationally unique ability to wear skirts, with all the

implications of that fact,” and the magazine *Look*, which glowingly proclaimed the modern housewife a “wondrous creature” who “marries younger than ever, bears more babies and looks and acts far more feminine than the ‘emancipated’ girl of the 1920’s or even ‘30’s . . . Today if she makes an old-fashioned choice and lovingly tends a garden and a bumper crop of children, she rates louder hosannas than ever before” (qtd in Friedan 59).

But television threatened to disrupt this model, as networks actively worked to alter its viewers’ schedules to fit television, rather than alter their own broadcast schedules to serve its viewership. As Spigel relates, NBC President Pat Weaver boasted in the 1950s that the *Today* show was altering the daily routines of its viewers. She writes,

According to Weaver, one woman claimed, “My husband said I should put casters on the TV set so I can roll it around and see it from the kitchen.” Another admitted, “I used to get all the dishes washed by 8:30—now I don’t do a thing until 10 o’clock.” Still another confessed, “My husband now dresses in the living room.” Weaver boastfully promised, “*We will change the habits of millions.*” (85, italics added)

This purpose was betrayed within the programs themselves. A radio-TV simulcast of *Arthur Godfrey Time* attempted to convince women to drop their chores in favor of Godfrey. Right before the televised segment of the program aired, women listening to the show on the radio as the completed household tasks were instructed, “All right, ladies, out of the kitchen, into the living room. Turn the TV set on now!” (qtd in Cassidy 10). And as *The Garry Moore Show* geared up for its 1953-54 season, the *Women’s Home Companion* declared that Moore had convinced “millions of women to drop their work in

the middle of a busy day, sit down in front of a TV set, and watch a variety show” (qtd in Cassidy 83).

In these ways, as Spigel writes, “popular media often completely rejected the idea that television could be compatible with women’s work and showed instead how it would threaten the efficient functioning of the household. The TV-addict housewife became a stock character during the period” (87), something Bradbury clearly models through Millie. This shirking of housewifery—both in popular culture and in Bradbury’s novel—continued a theme developed by Wylie, when he claimed that modern women demanded to be treated like warped versions of Cinderella—not in the sense of being hard workers, but in escaping their chores by finding a man to pay for everything and subsidize their laziness (48).

Beyond housewifery, however, one of the most important tasks of the postwar woman was to bear and raise children. In perhaps Bradbury’s greatest condemnation of the media-saturated woman, he writes Millie as a woman who never wanted to have children (26). Her friend Mrs. Phelps declares that “children are ruinous” and that their friend Mrs. Bowles, who has two children, is “out of [her] mind” for having them. Even though Mrs. Bowles has children, however, she seemingly despises them; she has sent them to a boarding school and only has them at home three days every month. “[I]t’s not bad at all,” she declares to her friends. “You heave them into the [television] ‘parlor’ and turn the switch. It’s like washing clothes; stuff laundry in and slam the lid ... They’d just as soon kick as kiss me. Thank God, I can kick back!” (92). By employing television as a baby sitter, Mrs. Bowles is relegating her sacrosanct (in postwar culture’s estimation) role as mother to a technological device.

Popular media also highlighted television's potential to tame children. *Variety* declared *Puppet Television Theater* (later *Howdy Doody*) as the kind of show "that will keep the small fry intently absorbed, and out of possible mischief, for an hour. This program . . . can almost be guaranteed to pin down the squirmiest of the brood" (qtd in Burns 45). Like Bradbury's television parlors, these shows entertain children and provide (depending on who's interpreting) respite or indolence for mothers.

By the harsher set of standards, these would be the worst of women. By consciously remaining childless, Millie and Mrs. Phelps shun motherhood—the defining characteristic, next to being a wife, of 1950s womanhood. By carelessly tending to her children and allowing outside forces—a poor education system, technology, and mass media—to mold them, Mrs. Bowles similarly rejects motherhood and all its associations, therefore faring no better than Millie and Mrs. Phelps in Bradbury's estimation.

Clarisse, on the other hand, doesn't watch television or engage in the other destructive behaviors of her culture; instead she spends her time engaging in a variety of nature-inspired activities: "shaking a walnut tree" (25), tilting her head back to drink the rain (20), rubbing dandelions on her chin as a test to see if she's in love (19), roaming the forests (20), and leaving gifts from nature such as flowers, autumn leaves, and chestnuts on Montag's porch (25). She flits about from topic to topic in her conversations with Montag, and although she's able to converse with him in a far more intelligible manner than Millie, she still seems less a true sage of wisdom and either a precursor to *Lolita* or a "Manic Pixie Dream Girl," a term film critic Nathan Rubin coined to signify the type of female characters which "[exist] solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries

and adventures" (qtd in Penny). Her youthful activities and conversations shouldn't be too problematic—Clarisse is, after all, just shy of seventeen years old (Bradbury 21)—except that Montag believes she seems older than she actually is, expressing surprise at how “much older at times” she seems than his thirty-year-old wife (21) and again telling her that she “sound[s] so very old” when she describes the way her classmates’ spend their time. So what is she? A youthful nature’s child? A wise old sage? Lolita? She certainly isn’t shown to be as philosophically or intellectually advanced as Faber or the Book People, nor does she seem to possess any kind of calm maturity—and this makes sense enough, as she is a child, after all. Yet her age and experience is rendered more problematic because she is the only substantial example of a woman who doesn’t watch television.

Clarisse’s affinity with nature, examined alongside her establishment as of a model of true womanhood, draws on Victorian-era themes about the connection between true women and the natural world. Spigel writes that, in Victorian culture, “[t]he natural world was associated with the ‘True Woman’ who was to make her home a kind of nature retreat that would counteract the signs of modernity . . . [b]y the early decades of the twentieth century, the nature ideal still would have been understood in terms of its association with femininity” in addition to newer interpretations (Spigel 103-104). Clarisse, therefore—frustratingly childlike yet grounded, connected to nature, and a strongly domestic young woman—is a 1950s continuation of the pure Victorian woman, one who will ultimately be sacrificed by Bradbury to the destructive whims of her culture. Bradbury would rather submit her to the grave (as he does, interestingly enough, with his only other positively rendered female—a minor character who burns to death

with her books early in the novel) rather than allow her to remain living in an ignorant and media-tarnished world.

By contrasting Millie and her friends against the “true woman,” media-free Clarisse, Bradbury contends that women who watch television are housewives who sinfully ignore their husbands and shamefully don’t engage in housework. He suggests their behavior is driven by her perceived relationships with the characters on their television shows (“the family”), which displace their emotional and physical relationship with her husbands and children. In this sense, Bradbury renders television even more sinister by suggesting its characters (and as an extension, television itself) hold the power to emotionally replace real people.

Notably, Bradbury places the majority of responsibility for family well-being—and, therefore, the blame for its disintegration—on women. Millie, not Montag, is addicted to television; the lazy housewife, shirking her household duties, accordingly bears the brunt of blame for family disintegration, not the father. Bradbury’s idea of female devotion to television grows more troubling when considered with another widely-proliferated concept in postwar America. As Spigel writes, the notion of “technology out of control” was widespread in the postwar cultural landscape. “The television set was often likened to a monster that threatened to wreak havoc on the family . . . a kind of supernatural child who might turn against his master at any moment” (47). Such menacing personification speaks to postwar fears of powerlessness in the face of change and casts television as an agent of the march towards a dismal future at the cost of nuclear families—and, in Bradbury’s mind, the deliverers of this evil technological agent are women.

Of course, in the next decade Betty Friedan would publish her groundbreaking work *The Feminine Mystique*, providing readers an alternative view of postwar housewives and the hopelessness they felt in the midst of society ruled by traditional gender roles. Viewed through Friedan's lens, Millie and her friends are indeed tragic characters, victims of a larger system of rigid patriarchy and limited life choices, with Millie in particular one who gives herself over to television, looking to it "as if all the hunger of looking would find the secret of her sleepless unease there" (Bradbury 152). Rather than treat this "sleepless unease" sympathetically, Bradbury instead uses it as yet another device to scapegoat women for a large and complex sociological problem, but if *Fahrenheit* were to be written today perhaps a more modern (and hopefully enlightened) Bradbury might more compassionately indicate that Millie's lethargy and resulting stupidity are actually reactions to, or even psychological defenses against, her domestic confinement, rather than a selfish and senseless choice to shirk her "duties."

CHAPTER III

“HE HAD SEEN IT A THOUSAND TIMES”: MIXING NEWS AND
ENTERTAINMENT ON TELEVISION

“Twenty million Montags running, running like an ancient flicker Keystone Comedy, cops, robbers, chasers and the chased, hunters and hunted, he had seen it a thousand times.” (Bradbury 131)

A manhunt is underway. Montag has just murdered Chief Beatty, and he’s on the run. He runs, street by street, across the city, the “great whirling whisper” of police helicopters rushing through the sky as they search for him. The only person left in the world that matters to him is Faber, whose house is a place where Montag “might refuel his fast draining belief in his own ability to survive” (118). So he runs towards that house, eager to see his only friend one last time before he runs for safety and asylum, in the hills outside the city.

On his way, he listens to the radio through a Seashell in his ear. That’s when he hears a police alert broadcast his name, proclaiming him a murderer and criminal against the State. He continues his flight. As he pauses for a brief rest at a gas station along the way, he hears the station radio announce that war—an event which has, until now, been just beyond the horizon—has been declared. Montag wants to experience some kind of emotional reaction to the statement, but at present he can only think of saving his own life. And so he runs again.

When he finally reaches Faber's home, they plan the next leg of Montag's escape and say their farewells. Just before Montag leaves, however, Faber suggests they check the television to see what progress Montag's pursuers are making.

He's on the news, all right. The news station is covering the chase breathlessly, and soon announces that a new Mechanical Hound has been brought in to search for Montag: "[The] Mechanical Hound *never* fails. Never since its first use in tracking quarry has this incredible invention made a mistake. Tonight, this network is proud to have the opportunity to follow the Hound by camera helicopter as it starts on its way to the target" (126)

As the cameras and announcer breathlessly follow the progress of the Hound—landing at the murder site, sniffing for clues, following Montag's scent—it becomes clear that what's being broadcast isn't news. This is entertainment. Even for Montag, the man at the middle of the event, the televised proceedings "[seem] so remote and no part of him," a "play apart and separate, wondrous to watch, not without its strange pleasure" (127). In a sense, what Bradbury has constructed with Montag's televised manhunt is an early conception of a reality television show—far before *Cops* or *America's Most Wanted* or *Survivor*, here are real-life events being molded into a format that the masses can enjoy with guilty pleasure. Only moments after a large-scale war has been declared—by far, the heaviest and most pressing event in the nation's life—Montag's city is more interested in watching a game of cat, or in this case Hound, and mouse. In the end, the authorities never catch him, but because the public must have a "snap ending," they capture a hapless man on the street, claim that it's Montag, and kill him instead. Immediately

afterwards, the nation returns to (what we now call) its regularly scheduled programming (141).

This spectacle may seem prescient on Bradbury's part, but the roots of it exist in the popular culture and discourses of the postwar era. Existing entertainment formats, masquerading as news or informational outlets, already existed by 1953, when Bradbury completed *Fahrenheit*.

The so-called "misery" shows of the postwar era served as an early example of the melding of real-life and popular entertainment. Beginning in the early 1950s, programs such as *Strike it Rich*, *Glamour Girl*, and *Queen for a Day* invited down-on-their-luck men and women to tell their real-life stories of misery and woe on the air for some form of compensation. *New York Times* critic Jack Gould famously scorned the genre, arguing that "[t]he crises that occur in the lives of individuals must not be grist for the morbid mill of TV" (qtd in Cassidy 105).

Initially a radio show but adapted for television and broadcast on CBS from 1951 to 1958, *Strike it Rich* featured impoverished contestants who appeared on-air with grand hopes of winning cash and prizes to help raise them out of difficult circumstances (Cassidy 106). Each show opened with announcer Ralph Paul's voiceover: "It's the original show with a heart, *Strike it Rich* . . . Where every day, Monday through Friday, people tell their own true stories and where, with our cash, you build your own fortune" (qtd in Cassidy 107). The show's contestants were featured on a stage, where each of them took turns communicating their tales of trouble and woe to host Warren Hull. Although contestants were instructed to relay their stories in their own words, as Cassidy argues, Hull nevertheless found ways to guide their narratives, asking specific questions

designed to manufacture a more pitiable narrative for each contestant (109), and thereby increase the theatricality of the program. Hull further increased the drama of these moments by reacting emotionally to the stories, tearing up and even, in one instance, praying on air for a contestant (107). After the interviews completed, contestants moved to the quiz area; there, Hull asked them increasingly difficult trivia questions, and with each correct answer, their cash prizes grew. Finally, during the “Heartline” portion of the program, home viewers could call in and donate cash or material goods to their favorite contestants (106).

This mixture of real human plight and quiz show suspense proved a hit with viewers but gave critics plenty to gripe about. Gould called it “a blatant capitalization of raw human emotions” (qtd in Cassidy 112), and the Catholic publication *America* claimed the show gave off a “noxious odor” (qtd in Cassidy 115). In many ways, these programs can be considered both an early form of later reality shows (if ghastly modern day programming like *The Real Housewives of* or *Bachelor/Bachelorette* franchises aren’t “blatant capitalizations” of overwrought emotions I don’t know what is) and a cousin to Bradbury’s predicted world of entertainment news. Combining misery (news) with theatrics and suspense (entertainment), *Strike it Rich* provided an opportunity for viewers to feel informed or knowledgeable about the plight of their fellow man from the comfort of their own spacious living room.

Other shows, which either explicitly resembled or functioned as news programs in the 1950s, also followed patterns of casting hard news as entertainment. *Meet the Press*, which premiered during primetime in the late 1940s, featured an array of politicians and other public figures alongside print journalists. The original format of the show displayed

the guests seated across from each other, which made it “look like the competitive G.E. College Bowl” (Stark 21). Despite its classification as a news program, *New Republic* critic David Ebbitt wrote in 1956,

As far as I’ve been able to make out, it doesn’t even pretend to take an interest in the significant ideas or activities of the people it examines ... *Meet the Press*, more than most such programs, has always rejected the notion that it is anything more than news programming. Still, it is a TV ‘show’—meaning, inevitably, that it is sometimes hard to tell where the news stops and the entertainment begins. (qtd in Stark 21)

This indistinguishable melding of news and entertainment was also found in NBC’s “self-proclaimed ‘television newspaper,’” the *Today* show (Spigel 81). Debuting in January 1952, the program featured everything from news coverage to fashion tips. This, writes Steven D. Stark,

was the show famous for presenting an interview with a senator, next to a scene from *Caesar and Cleopatra*, next to a kidney-transplant operation, next to the filmed sinking of the *Andrea Doria*, next to the recitation of 100-year-olds’ birthdays, next to consumer and health news, next to the once-ubiquitous ads for Alpo and other products that often were presented by *Today* personalities such as Willard Scott—a former Bozo clown. (48)

Such blunt juxtapositioning of hard news alongside human interest stories and outright entertainment downplays the importance of significant current events and relegates them to the role of amusement fodder. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno contend, “the culture industry remains the entertainment business” (136), and news—as part of the culture industry—is accordingly an instrument used to manufacture entertainment.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the producers of the *Today* show, in an effort to increase viewership, added a new cast member in 1953 to keep host Dave Garroway company: a chimpanzee named J. Fred Muggs. The chimp was a hit and was soon receiving more fan

mail than his Garroway, some of the letters from women asking for Muggs to marry them. (Garroway, jealous of his new coworker's success, was rumored to have spiked Muggs's orange juice with Benzedrine to negatively affect his behavior [Burns 111].) The inclusion of an animal only heightens the potentially farcical nature of the program and suggests how an author like Bradbury might despair for the future of the medium.

Opinions of the actual news departments on television didn't always fare better. In an era which Daniel Hallin labeled the "heyday of straight journalism," critics and journalists regarded objectivity seriously (qtd in Bernhard 67). However, in spite of this standard—a standard Bradbury likely championed—deviations occurred. Television news struggled to gain legitimacy in the eyes of its critics, particularly radio journalists unconvinced of the new medium's potential. Ironically, radio had once been considered inferior to print journalism—as "journalists insisted that accurate, true news must be printed on paper"—and had only risen in that industry's estimation thanks to the coverage some radio reporters provided during World War II (Conway 4). Now, with television news arriving on the scene, radio reporters considered their medium superior to it, with some like Murrow's team of reporters—known as the Murrow Boys—regarding their own audible reporting as an extension of the written word (Cloud and Olson 286). Murrow himself called television "mindless" (qtd in Conway 4) and made, as Barbara Matusow writes, "sneer[ing] at the evening news and the industry" a stylish practice (qtd in Conway 169); "To Murrow and others," related Don Hewitt, a long-time news producer who worked with Murrow on *See It Now*, "radio was for adults and television was for children . . . I sort of think they may have been right" (qtd in Cloud and Olson 287). This distinction could only serve to lessen the reputation of a medium many

journalists were already doubtful of, rendering it as an immature and less-sophisticated source of information. In addition, Howard K. Smith, one of Murrow's radio reporters, remarked, "We felt it was kind of unmanly to go on TV and perform, just as it was in an earlier era somehow unmanly for newspaper men to go on radio" (qtd in Cloud and Olson 287). Television, in this sense—already regarded as a childish device by Murrow—threatened not only the sanctity and respectability of news but of its newsmen as well.

But visual news wasn't strictly a new thing, nor was its conflation with entertainment. Newsreels had aired for years in theaters prior to films. Such reels often presented serious world events alongside lighter fare, as in a 1952 Movietone reel which shared footage of a Japanese peace treaty, Korean War bombings, and that year's Miss America pageant. To top it off, these reels aired immediately previous to theatrical films. In this sense, news and entertainment were already dangerously close to merging.

However, television threatened to bring entertainment-like news to an entirely new level. As Murrow remarked in the late 1940s, "What seemed to concern television isn't the horror of the atom bomb, but the unique picture it makes" (qtd in Conway 167). Murrow recognized that television possessed the power to contort tragedy into spectacle, trivializing the seriousness of current events and rendering them little more than interesting or pretty pictures broadcast into living rooms across the United States.

Early news efforts may have been crude and under-financed, but operations became more sophisticated as the medium caught on, and the two largest networks—CBS and NBC—each developed their own style of presenting their (at the time) fifteen-minute news shows. Television insider and producer Robert Bendick noted that CBS was dedicated to the "content of the news," while NBC preferred to "make [news] more

entertaining or visually exciting.” The latter network even attached weekly fashion reports to their newscast. John Hammerslough, who worked on the CBS newsdesk in the 1950s, recalled that “[NBC was] much more entertainment-oriented than we were. We were news-oriented” (qtd in Conway 295). Gerald Green, a NBC news writer who eventually moved to *Today* show, agreed, wryly commenting that “[p]eople getting beat up on the street was great . . . It was a more interesting show to watch, and it steadily outdrew CBS, but in telling the news it just didn’t get the job done” (qtd in Conway 296).

Such tactics would eventually be explicitly legitimized. When NBC placed journalist Reuven Frank in charge of its new thirty minute newscasts in 1963, he wrote a thirty-two page memo to his staff about what he felt “constituted effective television news” (Conway 302). In the memo, Frank insisted that “[e]very news story should . . . *display attributes of fiction, of drama . . . We are in the business of narrative because we are in the business of communication*” (qtd in Conway 302, italics added).

This emphasis on spectacle, dramatics, and violence courses through the televised coverage of Montag’s highly dramatized (and ultimately fictionalized) chase in *Fahrenheit*. These early examples of the union of news and fiction—a world in which truth is too often trumped by entertainment—are manifest in *Fahrenheit*, a novel in which a snappy and thrilling ending to a manhunt (for which the establishment knowingly kills an innocent man) is more important than catching the actual murderer at large.

CONCLUSION

“SHOT THROUGH”: LESSONS FROM *FAHRENHEIT 451*

Television critic Jack Gould, writing in 1946: “If we want it to be, television can be a blessing such as rarely comes to mankind. If we are uninterested or indifferent to it—as we are now—it can be a veritable menace of frightening proportions.” (“Television: Boon or Bane” 320)

Ed Murrow, in a 1949 interview, referred to television as a potentially dangerous medium, and his interviewer labeled it a weapon (Bryson and Murrow 181); in a *Saturday Evening Post* article a year earlier, a reader wrote about the effect television was having on her children, declaring “this situation to be as serious as an invasion of the enemy in war time, with as far-reaching consequences as the atom bomb” (qtd in Spigel 53). As Spigel writes, “Words such as ‘invasion’ and ‘battle’ were often employed in criticisms of the new medium, and a popular assumption was that television would cause cancer by transmitting waves of radiation” (48). Bradbury’s similar decision to pair media culture and entertainment news with nuclear threats speaks volumes to the danger which he likewise saw this kind of television to be. Here, television and its multitude of programs serve as a catalyst for destruction. They insulate viewers from the harsh realities of the outer world by distracting them in multiple ways, whether it be through mind-numbing entertainment (as discussed in chapters one and two) or through news and entertainment blends (as discussed in chapter three) All this is, to borrow Neil Postman’s phrasing, a system capable of “amusing” viewers “to death” by providing programming

which either allows them to claim ignorance of the current state of the world, or which does to some degree depict current events, but does so in a way which misrepresents their true nature and distorts their value into little more than cheap thrills.

Wylie asserted in *Generation of Vipers* that “[t]he act of going to war is an admission that reason has failed; hence war is a demonstration of infantilism in man” (269), and so it makes sense, in this context, that Bradbury would send his fictional future society—in which the power of human reason is practically extinct—to a war which lasts for even less time than one of Millie’s “Clara Dove” romances. For Bradbury, television as a reasoning device has failed. Bring on the bombs.

At the end of *Fahrenheit*, little is left. Montag makes it to safety, finding a haven in the wilderness among a collective of exiled intellectuals. From a distance, they watch as nuclear war decimates the city in a matter of seconds. But, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, perhaps a new order of reason and enlightenment can now begin. Montag and the Book People trudge toward the leveled city to look for survivors and train them in the ways of intellectual rigor.

By ending the novel in such a way, it appears Bradbury believes that the cure for a media-ill society is to completely begin anew. Changing people stubbornly stuck in their ways is, in his estimation, impossible; rather, a complete rehauling of the system is the only answer. It’s a terribly grim solution, and one which most sane readers wouldn’t advocate. Perhaps Bradbury, in proposing it, believes that his own postwar society still has a chance at being redeemed. As discussed in the introduction, Bradbury (possibly unwittingly) drew on the nature of his present society to prevent a dreadful future. But perhaps the question now is, did he accomplish his goal of prevention?

Depends on who you ask, or what channel you're watching. In recent years the ever-growing number of broadcast stations, both public and commercial, has produced thought-provoking and intelligent programming (at least in this writer's opinion) such as *Arrested Development*, *30 Rock*, *Mad Men*, *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *The Daily Show*, *the Jim Lehrer Hour*, and countless others. Conversely, such programs often share networks with what many critics label as absolute drivel, including an endless parade of reality television programs (*The Real Housewives*, *The Bachelor*, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*), uninventive procedurals (*NCIS*, *CSI*, *Criminal Minds*), and flat comedies (*Two and a Half Men*, *Whitney*, *According to Jim*, the how-in-the-world-did-this-ever-get-green-lighted *Cavemen*). Bradbury himself in 2000 described quiz shows such as *Jeopardy* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* as "the stupidest shows in history," citing their focus on trivia facts rather than intellectual exploration (Moore). Some programs are quickly cancelled due to low ratings, but many of the derided presentations survive thanks to devoted audiences who await each new development and scour entertainment websites like *TVLine.com* for spoilers of upcoming episodes. Just as many so-called "good" shows get axed for low ratings and continued for high ratings as well. It's hard to say who's winning the battle, or what the battle even is.

Over sixty years have now passed since Ray Bradbury wrote the final chapters of *Fahrenheit 451* in the quiet basement of the UCLA library, but our circumstances really aren't that much different than they were then. National security threats hang above our heads, social conditions for women, while drastically improved, still have room for advancement, the distinction between news and entertainment is often indistinguishable., and, if our insatiable appetite for viral *YouTube* videos is any indication, our society's

propensity to lose itself in entertainment has only deepened. I don't think it's a terrible thing to take a break from the harsh realities of life to enjoy an episode of Jimmy Fallon's *Tonight Show* or watch a compilation of kitten videos. But when temporary stress relief turns into a full-time occupation, perhaps it is time to start worrying. If Bradbury can teach us anything today, it's to keep fighting the good fight against ignorance and isolationism lest our society make true the words of Faber: "The whole culture's shot through . . . Our civilization is flinging itself to pieces" (84).

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