

RAY BRADBURY'S MACHINES: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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By

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CHAPTER I

INDIVIDUALITY AND MEANING

If one were forced to use only one word that best describes Ray Bradbury as a person and as a writer, that one word could certainly be passionate. Bradbury articulates his passion for life and writing in Zen in the Art of Writing, a compilation of personal essays that were published between 1939 and 1990. In the preface of the collection, Bradbury's passion is evident: "Every morning I jump out of bed and step on a landmine. The landmine is me. After the explosion, I spend the rest of the day putting the pieces together. Now, it's your turn. Jump!" (XV). Bradbury's numerous and extensive publications, as well as his eclectic and curious blend of genres and styles, reflects his excitement for life and writing; his list of credentials include poetry, novels, short stories, and screenplays. To say that Bradbury is a prolific writer is an understatement, both because he has published an extensive volume of work and because he dedicates himself so completely to his profession. According to David Mogen, in Ray Bradbury, Bradbury strives at completing a story every week (8). In the preface for Zen in the Art of Writing, Bradbury states that writing is a daily requirement and a necessary component in his life:

I have learned, on my journeys, that if I let a day go by without writing, I grow uneasy. Two days and I am in tremor. Three and I suspect lunacy. Four and I might as well be a hog, suffering the flux in a wallow. An hour's writing is tonic. (XIII)

In an interview with David Mogen, appearing in Ray Bradbury, Bradbury's excitement and wonder for life and writing is evident:

I hope. . .to be remembered as a lover of the whole life experience of life. And I think it's all in my writing, but you've got to read it all to get that. And if you could write that on my tombstone, you know: Here's a teller of tales who wrote about everything with a great sense of expectancy and joy, who wanted to celebrate things. . . even the dark things because they have meaning. Then I would be content with that. But no specific things beyond that—just the joy of being alive for another day, and being able to celebrate a particular sense of that day that you didn't celebrate the day before. (13)

According to Bradbury, passion and excitement for life are vital components of great writing; in "The Joy of Writing," from Zen in the Art of Writing, he also emphasizes the importance of individuality, claiming that one cannot be a great writer if "you are not being yourself" (4). Finding and retaining one's individuality is vital for Bradbury; in both his fiction and nonfiction, there is no greater joy or victory than elevating the individual. Bradbury's eclectic blend of stories range in setting and mood, from real to imaginative; his stories are sometimes set in the reality of his home town, Waukegan, Illinois, sometimes set

in the speculative world, such as the planet Mars or Venus, and sometimes set in the purely imaginative world, such as the tattooed skin of a carnival performer. He is known as a science fiction writer to most audiences, but his work solicits criticism from other science fiction writers; specifically, his lack of hard or accurate science regarding alien worlds and space rockets seems inconsistent with the requirements of the science fiction genre. His lack of specific and detailed scientific facts—especially regarding how humans travel through space and breath in an alien atmosphere--appear to frustrate other writers and followers of the genre, and Bradbury's popularity and success seemingly intensifies this animosity. David Mogen, in Ray Bradbury, discusses how Bradbury crossed over from "the pulp magazines to capture a mainstream audience" (14). Mogen articulates that Bradbury is indeed a popular science fiction writer, but other devout followers of the science fiction genre do not believe Bradbury to be a true science fiction writer. Mogen quotes the editors of A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction:

Ray Bradbury is a bit of a problem, the editors observe [. . .]. While to many people outside the field of science fiction, his is one of the first names that comes to mind when science fiction is mentioned, many aficionados will argue as to whether he is a science fiction writer at all. (14-15)

Bradbury's attitude toward writing is one of personal joy and pleasure, and he does not appear overly concerned with fulfilling the requirements for a preconceived literary genre.

Before attaining his paradoxical position in the science-fiction community, Bradbury also had difficulty gaining acceptance in his high school fiction class. David Mogen, in Ray Bradbury, cites a 1961 interview with Craig Cunningham in which Bradbury remembers “with a more bitter sense of irony that he was the only student in the fiction class who did *not* get a story printed in the high school short story anthologies” (6). Bradbury states that he was excluded from the anthology simply because his subject matter was unacceptable: “The only person in the class who went on and became a writer, myself, was excluded because of the science fiction subject matter. The space age was still a long way off in some never-never land of tomorrow” (6).

Although his works are not all exclusively science fiction, he is a well-known figure in the genre, and Bradbury credits his love for science fiction to Buck Rogers. In “Drunk, and in Charge of a Bicycle,” appearing in Zen in the Art of Writing, Bradbury reminisces on how he loved to collect Buck Rogers comic strips as a child, but his love for collecting the comic strips was criticized by his friends. Pressured by his friends, he finally tore up the comic strips, denounced his passion for the Buck Rogers’ comics, and tried to placate his fellow classmates. However, this action was devastating for Bradbury, and he describes walking around lost and empty, hurt and confused, without having his cherished comic strips. Realizing the absent strips were the cause of his unhappiness and misery, he quickly went back to reading and collecting the comic strips and made a profound discovery, particularly for a nine-year old child; one must pursue his or her own personal passions and interest regardless of

what others might say or think—personal meaning cannot be dictated or decided by others. Bradbury concludes the essay, emphasizing the importance of personal meaning: “Since then, I have never listened to anyone who criticized my taste in space travel, sideshows or gorillas. When this occurs, I pack up my dinosaurs and leave the room” (52).

For the purpose of this study, I propose that personal meaning is important to Bradbury because personal meaning creates individuality. Attempting to establish a criterion or a guideline for defining individuality raises many valid questions: What is an individual? How does one define individuality? What is it about a person that makes him or her special or unique? One viable answer to the above questions is personal meaning. The subjectivity of life, art, and nature creates individuality, because no two people think exactly alike, see the exact same thing, or make the same interpretation. Though people can come to a general consensus on some topics and issues, and though indeed a general agreement is sometimes reached, an exact interpretation of any aspect of life is virtually impossible. Bradbury illustrates this connection between personal meaning and individuality in “Zen in the Art of Writing”:

What do you think of the world? You, the prism, measure the light of the world; it burns through your mind to throw a different spectroscopic reading onto white paper than anyone else can throw. Let the world burn through you. Throw the prism light, white hot, on paper. Make your own individual spectroscopic reading. (148-149).

According to Bradbury, personal meaning defines individuality, and this study will examine what prevents one from seeking personal meaning in life. The intention of this study is to focus on repetition; specifically, this study will focus on what creates repetition and what effect repetition has on individuality. Bradbury's passion toward individuality is evident in "Zen in the Art of Writing," appearing in his compilation under the same title:

What are we trying to uncover in this flow? The one person irreplaceable to the world, of which there is no duplicate. *You*. As there was only one Shakespeare [. . .], so you are that precious commodity, the individual man, the man we all democratically proclaim, but who, so often, gets lost, or loses himself, in the shuffle. (148)

Bradbury's praise for the individual is obvious, referring to "the individual man" as "that precious commodity" (148), and—just as Bradbury praises individuality in his non-fiction—his fiction also contains a similar theme with a protagonist struggling to become "the individual man" (148). Specifically, Fahrenheit 451 best exemplifies Bradbury's theme of individuality, illustrating how the machines have an adverse effect on the human mind. "There Will Come Soft Rains," from The Martian Chronicles, and "The Veldt," from The Illustrated Man, are both set in an environment containing machines; both stories illustrate how the machines do not create an environment conducive toward seeking personal meaning in life.

Analyzing and examining Bradbury's fiction, some critics also address Bradbury's struggle for individuality; for example, Donald Watt and Willis E.

McNelley discuss Bradbury's theme of individuality. By referring to Bradbury's nonfiction in this study, Donald Watt's and Willis E. McNelley's arguments—which do not include any of Bradbury's nonfiction—take on greater significance. Donald Watt, in “Burning Bright: Fahrenheit 451 as Symbolic Dystopia,” articulates one of the novel's major themes—the struggle for the individual:

The deeper meaning of Bradbury's fire and water seems to be that the firemen's fire, in its negativity, is meant to put out any flame of inspiration or disagreement or creativity on the part of the individual. (205)

Donald Watt's observation emphasizes the importance of the individual. According to Watt, it is the individual's “inspiration,” “disagreement,” and “creativity” that is suppressed in Fahrenheit 451 (205). On a broader scale, the attributes that Watt names, “inspiration,” “disagreement,” and “creativity,” compose the essence of personal meaning (205).

Willis E. McNelly also addresses Bradbury's theme of individuality in Fahrenheit 451 in “I. Ray Bradbury—Past, Present, and Future”: “Yet even Fahrenheit 451 illustrates his major themes: the freedom of the mind; the evocation of the past; the desire for Eden; the integrity of the individual; the allurements and traps of the future” (22). Similar to Donald Watt, McNelly addresses “the integrity of the individual” and “the freedom of the mind” (22). McNelly also argues that “Bradbury seized upon the hatreds abroad in 1953 when the book was written, and shows that hatred, war, desecration of the individual are all self-destructive” (23).

“There Will Come Soft Rains,” “The Veldt,” and Fahrenheit 451 are significant sources for this study because all three works deal with one potential threat to individuality. “There Will Come Soft Rains,” “The Veldt,” and Fahrenheit 451 all contain a strong emphasis on technology and how technology has been over-abused. This study will illustrate that Bradbury’s machines aid in creating and maintaining repetitive routines that help strengthen a meaningless community and weaken the individual. David Seed also recognizes the adverse effect that the machines have on the individual in “The Flight from the Good Life: Fahrenheit 451 in the Context of Postwar American Dystopias”: “the individual is put into a posture of maximum passivity as subjected to machines” (230).

Marvin E. Mengeling articulates Bradbury’s attitude toward the machines in “The Machineries of Joy and Despair: Bradbury’s Attitudes toward Science and Technology”: “Bradbury is hostile to any machine or form of technology that is used to deny individual freedom” (86). Mengeling also cites part of an interview with Bradbury: “‘Some machines humanize us and some machines dehumanize us,’ Bradbury once said” (87). Examining Bradbury’s machines raises several valid questions: What exactly is so threatening about the machines? What do the machines do to the human mind? Why do “some machines dehumanize us” (87)?

I propose that the machines have an adverse effect on individuality simply because the machines lock individuals into meaningless repetitive routines and prevent people from living vital and passionate lives. Though the machines are intended to improve lives, and though indeed the machines do serve as

laborsaving devices, the environment created by the machines does not stimulate individuals, intellectually or emotionally, and instead appears to break down the human mind to the point of destruction. I further propose that nature contains several attributes that are beneficial to the human mind. Nature is antithetical to the machines because the machines' repetitive routines embody stagnation; nature embodies change and growth. Nature is also antithetical to the machines because the machines cannot provide any real sustenance for the mind; the environment the machines create is empty and does not encourage any intellectual, mental, or spiritual growth. This hedonistic, empty, and machine dependent existence appears to have an adverse effect on the very foundation of the human psyche. In chapter three of this study, I will examine Mildred, Montag's wife in Fahrenheit 451, as an excellent case study of how the machines appear to starve the mind and eventually create an unbalanced psyche. Using various works by Sigmund Freud, I will analyze how and why the machines cannot provide real sustenance for the human mind. Since the mind is trapped in a stagnant existence created by the machines, a dire imbalance forms between the conscious and the unconscious, the ego and the id. This imbalance strengthens the "death instinct" and weakens "Eros" or the life instinct.

Bradbury often associates nature with salvation or growth. For example, when Montag escapes in Fahrenheit 451, he joins the book people in the wilderness. Aside from being a sanctuary for his characters, nature also provides answers for Bradbury. In "Run Fast, Stand Still, or, The Thing at the Top of the Stairs, or, New Ghosts from Old Minds" in Zen in the Art of Writing,

Bradbury describes how he searched for “something that was really me” among the “summer noons and October midnights” (15). For Bradbury, nature appears to be a place for self-discovery, salvation, and mental rejuvenation.

CHAPTER II

REPETITION IN ROUTINE: WORSHIP OF THE MACHINES

This chapter will examine repetition in routine. The intention of this chapter is to examine certain factors that create a meaningless community and may consequently threaten individuality in Bradbury's works. I will also explore Bradbury's use of technology and how an over-dependence on the machines has an adverse effect on individuality. In his fiction, Bradbury shows machines aid in creating and maintaining repetitive routines that strengthen a meaningless community and weaken the individual.

B. Hannah Rockwell examines the social roles between doctors and patients in her article, "Image and Idea: Repetition and Dialogic Reproduction of Medical Authority in Popular Media Forms." In her article, Rockwell examines the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian semiotician: "For Bakhtin, there is always a we or a community which precedes an individual's ability to say I" (131). An interesting question is, what exactly creates a community and what is Bradbury's reaction to a community? In many of his works, Bradbury idealizes individuality, expressing resentment and distrust toward a community. In "Drunk, and in Charge of a Bicycle" from Zen in the Art of Writing, Bradbury acknowledges the powerful and negative influence that a community can have over an individual:

"But it is easy to doubt yourself, because you look around at a community of notions held by other writers, other intellectuals" (50). Bradbury's struggle for his own individuality is also apparent: "I learned that I was right and everyone else wrong when I was nine" (52).

An interesting relationship exists between humans and machines in many of Ray Bradbury's works, and the machines in Bradbury's stories and novels do not typically reflect the concept of artificial intelligence. Unlike Arthur C. Clarke's computer, HAL, in 2001, the machines in "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950), "The Veldt" (1950), and Fahrenheit 451 (1953) never excel or progress beyond their programmed tasks. A pattern exists between machines and humans that Bradbury illustrates in "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950), "The Veldt" (1950), and Fahrenheit 451 (1953); Bradbury's machines aid in creating and maintaining a routine. Since Bradbury's machines do not deviate from their programmed tasks, the routines that the machines help create are repetitive and devoid of any meaning. Although there is a strong correlation between machines and the repetitive routines that the machines create, it should be clarified that Bradbury does not distrust or despise machines or technology per se. In an interview with Ray Bradbury, quoted in Marvin Mengeling's article titled "The Machineries of Joy and Despair," Bradbury explains that he harbors no distrust or hatred toward machines: "I don't distrust machinery. I distrust people" (85).

In "There Will Come Soft Rains," "The Veldt," and Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury's human characters become too dependent on the machines, creating a strange or absurd copy of life that is devoid of any meaning or fulfillment. In

essence, the repetitious routine created by an over-dependence on the machines reflects what Greg Urban calls “form without meaning” in his essay, “Repetition and Cultural Replication: Three Examples from Shokleng” (153). Urban examines various components of the belief system of “the Shokleng Indians of southern Brazil,” including “song, ceremonial dialogue, and myth telling” (146), and discusses how each plays a part in the Shokleng culture. After examining the form and meaning behind many songs and dialogues, Urban concludes that the form or structure is more important than the meaning and—in some instances—no meaning exists behind what is being said. Thus, the community favors “form without meaning” in many songs and dialogues (153). Urban concludes that both songs and dialogue “are based on the repetition of form” in order to establish “social coordination” (156-157). However, meaning does not create a socially coordinated environment:

In contrast, meaning, whether semantic or pragmatic, can provide no basis for social coordination. Meaning can be held constant, as in paraphrase or glossing, while allowing the form to vary, but the conservation of meaning without the conservation of form provides nothing external that the participants can pick up on and use as the basis for mutually oriented action. (156)

For Bradbury, the machines often create or reinforce a socially coordinated environment that reflects “form without meaning” (Urban 153). Unlike Urban’s discussion on how the Shokleng culture preserves meaning “in paraphrase or glossing” (156), Bradbury often creates communities and sterile

environments that are not conducive to seeking personal meaning. In some of his works, Bradbury's characters are not living vital lives; they are merely stuck in a routine that is created by the machines.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950) is an interesting study of repetition in routine created by the machines, because the human characters are absent from the story; the audience learns that the occupants were killed in a nuclear blast. Still dutifully performing its programmed tasks, including washing dishes, making breakfast, and cleaning the floors, the house also announces when it is time to eat, time to play, time to relax, time to sleep, and time to awaken. As an anonymous voice narrates the story, the audience witnesses the pervasive nature of technology and how the automated house essentially dictates the daily agenda. Although there is no coercion from the automated house, the audience is given the impression that the house's routine was usually followed. The house is intended to be a laborsaving achievement, but an oppressive element exists in Bradbury's house that appears to usurp an individual's privilege to decide his or her own daily agenda. In "The Frontier Myth in Ray Bradbury," Gary K. Wolfe discusses the negative implications in the story and argues that "There Will Come Soft Rains" demonstrates "how technology has oppressed and degraded life on Earth" (52). His explanation also invests the technology with a dictatorial connotation: "the gadgets lock family life into a mechanical parody of the suburban lifestyle" (52 emphasis mine). The family that once occupied the house was stuck in a meaningless, repetitive, machine dictated routine, creating an empty structure or form that was merely a parody of vital living. By surrendering

the privilege to control their own lives, the family members lost some of their freedom. Wolfe articulates this lost freedom, explaining how the machines oppress “the imagination and the freedom which that imagination represents” (52). Essentially, the family’s willingness to relinquish a considerable amount of control to the machines creates a loss of meaning and purpose in their own lives. This over-dependence on the machines and the loss of meaning that the dependence creates is analogous to Urban’s argument concerning “form without meaning” (153). The family that once occupied the house came to idealize form over individuality, structure over independence, an easy routine over thoughtful work.

The machines in “There Will Come Soft Rains” apparently contribute to creating and maintaining repetitive routines. Unlike the machines that can only create repetitive meaningless routines, nature exemplifies growth, change, and progress. Although nature may appear cyclical in the phases of the moon and the changing of the seasons, the complex ballet of nature moves to the never-ending overture of time. Nature is antithetical to the machines, because nature is not a routine; there is progress and spontaneity in nature. This spontaneous and unpredictable attribute of nature is described by Bradbury in “Run Fast, Stand Still, or, The Thing at the Top of the Stairs, or, New Ghosts from Old Minds” in his compilation of personal essays, Zen in the Art of Writing:

Run fast, stand still. This, the lesson from lizards. For all writers. Observe almost any survival creature, you see the same. Jump, run, freeze. In the ability to flick like an eyelash, crack like a whip, vanish like steam, here this instant, gone the next—life teems the earth. (13)

This statement invests nature with a spontaneous and unpredictable quality; there is no routine or structure in nature. Nature is freedom and quickness. Unlike the machines, nature does not follow a repetitive routine; nature is always moving forward—growing, dying, seeding, changing—and progressing forward in time.

Bradbury symbolizes this drastic difference between nature and the machines at the conclusion of “There Will Come Soft Rains.” After the house catches fire and collapses, one automated voice remains, rising above the rubble, repeating the date over and over again: “Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is . . .” (211).¹ The machines’ meaningless routine transpires just as “dawn showed faintly in the east” (211). The machines’ last meaningless routine juxtaposed to a new morning symbolizes the inherent repetitious nature of the machines and illustrates nature’s forward quality. Edward J. Gallagher comments on the relationship between nature and the machines in “The Thematic Structure of The Martian Chronicles”:

This story about a last machine ends with a meaningless ritual. As the new day dawns, a 'last voice,' needle stuck, destined to become further and further out of sync with nature, repeats the date over and over again, endlessly. There can be no hope of life here. Mechanical time stands still while the eternal rhythm of nature moves on. If there is to be regeneration, it must be through the eternal-life principle of nature, a force technology has not been able to maim. (80)

The progressive and spontaneous attribute of nature appears antithetical to the repetitive nature of the machines. Bradbury also states that life itself should contain a certain level of spontaneity and unpredictability in "Drunk, and in Charge of a Bicycle" from Zen in the Art of Writing:

That is the kind of life I've had. Drunk, and in charge of a bicycle, as an Irish police report once put it. Drunk with life, that is, and not knowing where off to next. But you're on your way before dawn. And the trip? Exactly one half terror, exactly one half exhilaration. (50)

Technology cannot achieve this level of spontaneity; Bradbury's machines in "There Will Come Soft Rains" do not appear to function or operate beyond the perimeters of their programming. Because the machines in "There Will Come Soft Rains" do not create an environment of spontaneity, then life can have no passion or meaning. Life becomes stagnant. Life becomes a meaningless, repetitive routine.

Similar to “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950), “The Veldt” (1950), from The Illustrated Man, is also about an automated house; specifically, the story focuses on the house’s futuristic nursery. Increasingly concerned about the violent images on the nursery room walls, the story’s protagonist, George Hadley, decides to turn off every labor saving machine in the automated house. His reasons for turning off the house reflect Wolfe’s article asserting “how technology has oppressed and degraded life on Earth” (52). George Hadley’s explanation reflects the lifeless existence that the machines create: “‘now we’re going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we’re going to *live*’” (Bradbury 17).² Peter, George Hadley’s son, protests his father’s decision:

That sounds dreadful! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the shoe tier do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath? [. . .] I don’t want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else *is* there to do? (14)

Peter’s protests reflects a similar theme seen in “There Will Come Soft Rains”; there is an obvious over-dependence on technology, resulting in an indifferent attitude toward life. The machines in “The Veldt” cannot create a healthy, spontaneous environment, which is conducive toward seeking emotional and intellectual growth.

Bradbury’s machines in “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950) and “The Veldt” (1950) never appear to act outside of instructions and programming. Unlike “There Will Come Soft Rains,” human characters are present in “The

Veldt,” allowing the reader to witness the negative impact the machines have on the human psyche. The story also contains a significant example of how the machines create and maintain repetitive routines. The repeating images of lions on the nursery room walls is a significant example of how the machines create and maintain repetitive routines, illustrating the machines’ ability to imprint or instill repetitious routines in the human mind. Although the walls can project any image or setting that the children think, Lydia Hadley grows increasingly concerned about the nursery’s constant images of lions and Africa. She states her concerns to her husband, arguing that the room is stuck in a perpetual state of killing, “the children have thought about Africa and lions and killing so many days that the room’s in a rut” (Bradbury 11). The children in “The Veldt” are not necessarily aggressive; the machines create their hedonistic existence, and the machines cannot provide a fulfilling existence based on spontaneity. The machines can only provide a routine, becoming repetitive to the point of absurdity, and ultimately destroying the human mind. An over-dependence on the machines seems to inevitably lead to an adverse and abnormal existence. Edward J. Gallagher states in “The Thematic Structure of The Martian Chronicle” that “regeneration” can only be done “through the eternal-life principle of nature” (80). The machines cannot duplicate this “eternal-life principle” or “regeneration” (80); in essence, the machines appear to have the opposite effect of degenerating the human mind.

After investigating the suspicious nursery, George Hadley meditates on the nursery's abilities to create the children's thoughts. The language of George

Hadley's thoughts reflect a repetitive pattern, "The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun-sun. Giraffes-giraffes. Death and death" (10). George Hadley's thoughts provide significant evidence that the machines instill an impression of repetition. Since George Hadley lives in an automated house surrounded by machines, there can never be any spontaneity or unpredictability in his existence. He is inundated with the influence of the machines. Aside from the language, George Hadley also shows a concern for the repeating images of lions and Africa, "But this—the long, hot African veldt—the awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and again" (10). Lions, killing, and Africa are not the only source of anxiety and concern in the story; the repetition of the same images also concerns George and Lydia Hadley. George continues to meditate on the repeating images, "It was all right to exercise one's mind with gymnastic fantasies, but when the lively child mind settled on one pattern...?" (11). This statement is disturbing because the children's routine lacks any spontaneity or unpredictability.

Marvin Mengeling's article, "The Machineries of Joy and Despair," argues that Bradbury is concerned about the application of technology and machines. According to Mengeling, the parents in "The Veldt" (1950) are guilty of allowing the nursery to "be used as baby sitters, to the exclusion of parental love" (93). Consequently, according to Mengeling, the parents become obsolete to the nursery. Although Mengeling has a valid point concerning the parent's neglect of their children and how that neglect created the hostile feelings the children harbor against their parents, his article does not address why the children

habitually create the images of lions and the African veldt. Mengeling argues that neglect created the hostile and murderous thoughts, but there is no explanation of why it is always the same fantasy murder that eventually becomes real with the lions leaping off the walls and killing George and Lydia. Bradbury does not appear to be insinuating that people are inherently aggressive and murderous by nature, but rather to be illustrating the dangers of allowing the repetitive nature of the machines to degenerate the human mind to the point of destruction. The family in "The Veldt" (1950) is surrounded by labor-saving machines, and the psychological impact of an over-dependence on the machines is evident in both the repetitious images of lions on the nursery room walls and in George Hadley's thoughts. Because the machines in the automated house never deviate from their programmed tasks, the machines instill an impression of repetition; this psychological impact is mirrored on the nursery room walls with the repeating images of lions.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Veldt" illustrate how the machines aid in creating and maintaining repetitive routines. "The Veldt" demonstrates the negative impact that an over-dependence on the machines creates. In essence, Bradbury's machines in "There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Veldt" create a structure or a form of living that is devoid of meaning. This lack of meaning is best illustrated in Peter's protest in "The Veldt": "I don't want to do anything but look and listen and smell" (Bradbury 14). Peter's protest reflects that the machines can only create a hedonistic existence that lacks the spontaneity and unpredictability that Bradbury praises in nature; the machines cannot duplicate

the actions of lizards to “flick like an eyelash, crack like a whip, vanish like steam, here this instant, gone the next” (“Run Fast” 13).

Similar to “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950) and “The Veldt” (1950), Fahrenheit 451 (1953), also illustrates that Bradbury’s machines aid in creating and maintaining repetitive routines. Fahrenheit 451 illustrates that the repetitive and meaningless routines, created by the machines, strengthen a community and weaken the individual. Before continuing this argument, a distinction must be made between the individual and a community. In Bradbury’s works, a community is often more concerned with form or how; an individual is often more concerned with meaning or why. This distinction between how and why, a community and an individual, is identical to a similar discussion in Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451. Bradbury’s influential novel provides a powerful examination of a community and an individual, between the we and the I.

The novel’s protagonist, Guy Montag, is greatly influenced and profoundly moved by the stark observations of a seventeen-year old girl named Clarisse McClellan. Bradbury meticulously describes Clarisse’s thinking as antithetical to the community, projecting her as Montag’s friend and teacher. Montag’s antagonist and chief book-burner, Captain Beatty, explains why Clarisse’s thinking is antithetical to the community: “she didn’t want to know *how* a thing was done, but *why*” (60).³ Having made one important distinction between the community and the individual, it is important to keep Rockwell’s discussion on Bakhtin in perspective. Rockwell states that “for Bakhtin, there is always a we, or a community” (131 emphasis mine). Although Bradbury is constantly striving for

individuality, this struggle for individuality does not mean that one must or even can sever oneself from a community.

Fahrenheit 451 provides a relevant example of how one can strive to be an individual among a community. After escaping from the city and the soon to be destroyed community that Montag has come to despise, Montag joins a different community of literary fugitives who memorize books to preserve them. Although he has escaped one community only to be a part of another community, the latter represents hope and—most importantly—meaning. For Bradbury, one can still be an individual in a community as long as each member of a community seeks meaning in life. This element of meaning is often lost to technology or to the machines in many of Bradbury's works.

Urban discusses the usefulness of “form without meaning” in order to create a socially coordinated environment (153), and Fahrenheit 451 contains a similar theme with the machines creating a meaningless routine. However, unlike the Shokleng Indians, who hold meaning constant through paraphrasing, an over-dependence on the machines creates an indifferent attitude toward life and meaning is lost entirely. This indifferent attitude toward life is exemplified in one of Clarisse's statements to Montag: “I'm afraid of children my own age. They kill each other” (Bradbury 30). Edward J. Gallagher states that nature is capable of “regeneration” in “The Thematic Structure of The Martian Chronicles” (80). The machines' repetitive routines appear to deteriorate the human mind and create an adverse environment that is antithetical to “the eternal-life principle of

nature" (80). In a society where books are banned, Fahrenheit 451 is essentially about the search for meaning and consequently a struggle for individuality.

In order to understand the negative effect that the machines have on individuals, it is important to examine the powerful connotations that Bradbury invests in the novel's most influential machine, the wall-TV. Bradbury implies that one cannot find meaning in the presence of the machines; this statement is better understood after examining the text. Part One of the novel ends with the novel's protagonist, Guy Montag, revealing to his wife, Mildred, that he has been secretly hiding books in their house (65). Part Two begins with Montag and Mildred reading the illegal books and trying to find the meaning that Montag suspects books contain. As Montag examines the books, Bradbury narrates that they are sitting in the hall and away from the powerful influence of the wall-TV:

They sat in the hall because the parlor was so empty and gray-looking without its wall lit with orange and yellow confetti and skyrockets and women in gold-mesh dresses and men in black velvet pulling one-hundred pound rabbits from silver hats. (71)

Even though the television walls are off in the above passage, the machines still appear antithetical to meaning. In order to search for meaning, Montag retreats away from the parlor and into the hall.

As Montag struggles to understand the meaning of the books, he remembers a meeting he once had in the park with a man named Faber, a former English professor. Bradbury illustrates that one of Faber's most influential qualities to Montag is that Faber is the way to meaning: "I don't talk *things*, sir,"

said Faber. ‘I talk the *meaning* of things’” (75). It is interesting that Faber, who speaks only of “the *meaning* of things” (75), hides a very small television behind a framed picture (132). Faber also acknowledges the powerful influence of the machine to Montag: “I always wanted something very small, something I could walk to, something I could blot out with the palm of my hand, if necessary, nothing that could shout me down, nothing monstrous big” (132-133).

Bradbury also describes the TV-walls as a powerful vacuum that draws people into it, takes vital lives away, and keeps people from thinking. After Mildred reports Montag to the firemen, Montag is forced to destroy his own house. As Montag burns the TV-walls, Bradbury’s narration is thick with powerful, negative descriptions of the TV-walls:

And then he came to the parlor where the great idiot monsters lay asleep with their white thoughts and their snowy dreams. And he shot a bolt at each of the three blank walls and the vacuum hissed out at him. The emptiness made an even emptier whistle, a senseless scream. He tried to think about the vacuum upon which the nothingness had performed, but he could not. He held his breath so the vacuum could not get into his lungs. (117)

Wolfe’s article on “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950) argues that “the gadgets lock family life into a mechanical parody of the suburban lifestyle” (52). The TV-walls in Fahrenheit 451 (1953) also have a similar effect on Mildred. Bradbury narrates that Mildred not only watches the TV-walls, but she also obeys the machines. With special equipment, the TV-walls can be adjusted to

personally address an individual. This personal address only intensifies the machine's influence:

Montag turned and looked at his wife, who sat in the middle of the parlor talking to an announcer, who in turn was talking to her. Mrs. Montag, he was saying. This, that, and the other. [. . .] He was a friend, no doubt of it, a good friend. Mrs. Montag—now look right here. Her head turned. (63-64)

Watching her three TV-walls, Mildred dreams of completing her artificial family with a fourth TV-wall (20). The machines create repetitive routines, and David Mogen, in his book titled Ray Bradbury, refers to Mildred's routine as a "hypnotic ritual activity" (108).

Another powerful gadget or machine that appears in the text is an audio radio that fits in an individual's ear called a "Seashell." Comparable to Mildred's "hypnotic ritual activity" in watching the TV-walls (Mogen 108), the machines' ability to create repetitive routines is also illustrated with the "Seashells." Montag comes home one night to find his wife in bed, listening to the "Seashells," and staring blankly at the ceiling. Montag also meditates that Mildred always went to bed with the "Seashells" stuffed in her ears: "Every night the waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning" (12).

Bradbury continues to emphasize the meaningless nature of Mildred's "hypnotic ritual activity" (Mogen 108). Montag questions his wife about the meaning on a TV-wall program:

That's all very well, cried Montag, but what are they mad about?

Who *are* these people? Who's that man and who's that woman?

Are they husband and wife, are they divorced, engaged, what?

Good God, *nothing's* connected up. (46)

The intention of the TV-wall is to serve as a mental distraction for society, resembling "form without meaning" (Urban 153). Urban also explains that form is essential in establishing "social coordination" (157). The TV-walls serve a similar function, creating a homogenized, meaningless community; this socially coordinated environment created by the meaningless programs on the TV-walls is evident among Mildred and her friends, Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles.

In the novel, Bradbury describes Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles walking into Mildred's TV-wall parlor. As they pass the parlor door, Bradbury describes how they "vanished into the volcano's mouth" (93). Donald Watt's article, "Burning Bright: Fahrenheit 451 as Symbolic Dystopia," emphasizes the imagery of Bradbury's description: "Bradbury's figure conveys a sense of the ladies immersion in a wash of lava; they are already buried alive, like the citizens of Pompeii, under the ashes of the volcano that contains them" (204). The image of the women buried under ash invokes a featureless connotation; there is no substance or meaning to their existence. Thus, they become featureless, ash-covered members of a meaningless community.

Guy Montag's antagonist, Captain Beatty, is an enigmatic character in the novel. Beatty supposedly belongs to the same community that Mildred, Mrs. Phelps, and Mrs. Bowles belong to; Faber comments that Captain Beatty

belongs to “the solid unmoving cattle of the majority” (108). Although he represents the majority, his character is very different than Mildred’s. Captain Beatty is eloquent, powerful, and poetic. He is a leader who does not just follow the meaningless routine or mindlessly participate in a socially coordinated environment created by the TV-walls’ “form without meaning” (Urban 153). Captain Beatty invests his profession with meaning, justifying the work of the firemen with eloquent organized arguments that they help maintain happiness:

We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. (Bradbury 58)

Although both Mildred and Beatty represent the same side in society, Captain Beatty is a very different character who hardly invokes the cold, dead images that Mildred does as she lays on the bed “like a body displayed on the lid of a tomb” (12). The essential difference between Beatty and Mildred is that Beatty is not inundated with technology. Beatty is not surrounded by the machines as Mildred is; he is a leader who loves power. This difference between Beatty and Mildred is illustrated when Beatty visits Montag’s home. Disturbed by the suicide of a woman, who burned herself with her books, Montag feigns illness to avoid going to work. Anticipating Montag’s condition, Beatty visits Montag’s home to assert the firemen’s place in society. Before his powerful lecture, Beatty tells Mildred to turn off the TV-walls—the “family”: ““Shut the ‘relatives’ up”” (53).

Similar to Faber and Montag, retreating from the machines to find meaning, Captain Beatty also silences the machines to illustrate the meaning of the firemen.

Donald Watt comments on the male and female characters in “Burning Bright: Fahrenheit 451 as Symbolic Dystopia”:

The men are the intellectual and didactic forces at work on Montag, while the women are the intuitive and experiential forces. Beatty articulates the system’s point of view, but Mildred lives it. Faber articulates the opposition’s point of view, but Clarisse lives it. (197)

Despite Beatty’s best efforts, Montag is obviously swayed by the female characters in his life.

An important distinction must be made between Montag and Mildred. Like Captain Beatty, Montag also appears detached from the influence of the machines. Although he is not inundated with the powerful influence of the machines, it is important to note that Montag is initially stuck in a meaningless routine. Montag reflects that he never thought about being a fireman; he simply followed the same career path of his father and his grandfather (51). Although Montag initially follows his routine, apparently the absence of the machines in his routine has a profound impact. Without the constant presence of the machines, Montag becomes much more aware of reality; the female characters, Clarisse and Mildred, appear to symbolize two very different extremes and Montag is deeply affected by both women. Montag explains to Faber that his dying wife and his recently killed friend, Clarisse, are the reasons why he is searching for

meaning: "My wife's dying. A friend of mine's already dead" (81). Watt continues to explain that "Clarisse is, of course, catalytic; she is dominant in Montag's growth to awareness" (197). Clarisse also embodies the spontaneous and unpredictable attribute of nature that Bradbury praises in lizards: "flick lick an eyelash, crack like a whip, vanish like steam, here this instant, gone the next" ("Run Fast" 13). Clarisse tells Montag how "rain even tastes good" (21) and "there's a man in the moon"(9); amazed by her observations, Montag questions her spontaneous nature: "What do you do, go around trying everything once?" (21). The machines cannot achieve the level of spontaneity that Clarisse exemplifies.

Unlike Beatty, who tries to invest the firemen's profession with meaning through lectures and threats, Clarisse merely makes Montag more observant of his environment. She symbolizes a central truth regarding the human experience; meaning cannot be told—meaning must be discovered through observation and meditation. Donald Watt explains that Clarisse connects with Montag "with the smells and objects of nature" (199). Bradbury makes several references to Clarisse and nature. Each time Montag sees Clarisse, she is associated with nature and the outdoor seasons:

Once he saw her shaking a walnut tree, [. . .], three or four times he found a bouquet of late flowers on his porch, or a handful of chestnuts in a little sack, or some autumn leaves neatly pinned to a sheet of white paper and thumbtacked to his door. (28)

Bradbury meticulously describes her close proximity with nature and the seasons; at times, she even seems animated by the wind and the leaves:

The autumn leaves blew over the moonlit pavement in such a way as to make the girl who was moving there seem fixed to a sliding walk, letting the motion of the wind and the leaves carry her forward. (5)

Clarisse also rubs a dandelion on Montag's chin (22), she likes to "hike around in the forest and watch the birds and collect butterflies" (23), and she tells Montag "there's a man in the moon" (9). Clarisse, with her constant association with nature, is central to Montag's conversion. Her closeness with nature is her identification in the text; she embodies nature, personifies it, and projects it in the mysterious perfume of "fresh apricots and strawberries" that lingers in her presence (7). Captain Beatty even knows that it was Clarisse's proximity with nature that changed Montag: "Flowers, butterflies, leaves, sunsets, oh, hell! It's all in her file. [. . .] A few grass blades and the quarters of the moon. What trash" (113-114).

Bradbury believes that nature is pivotal to discovering the self and shaping individuality, describing how nature both refracts and reflects the self back to an observer. Metaphorically, nature is a crystal prism; the reflection makes one aware of his or her individuality, and the refraction is the obscured and bent image of meaning that feeds the mind. This metaphor of how nature has the ability to reflect and refract the self is apparent in Bradbury's essay "Run Fast,

Stand Still, or, the Thing at the Top of the Stairs, or, New Ghosts from Old Minds” in his book on writing Zen in the Art of Writing:

All during my twentieth and twenty-first years, I circled around summer noons and October midnights, sensing that there somewhere in the bright and dark seasons must be something that was really me. (15)

In Fahrenheit 451, Clarisse reflects Montag’s image back to him intensifying Bradbury’s personification of her as nature: “He saw himself in her eyes, suspended in two shining drops of bright water” (7). After meeting with Clarisse, Montag meditates about how the girl was very much like a mirror. Not only does Montag compare Clarisse to a mirror, he also comments on how she does more than just reflect his own image back at him—she refracts Montag’s image: “how like a mirror, too, her face. Impossible; for how many people did you know who refracted your own light to you” (11). Just as Bradbury searched nature and the seasons to explore his own mind and discover his identity, Bradbury invests this ability of nature to reflect and refract the mind in Clarisse. Montag continues to meditate on the girl’s ability to reflect and refract his own troubled subconscious: “how rarely did other people’s faces take of you and throw back to you your own expression, your own innermost trembling thought?” (11).

Nature is antithetical to the repetitive routines created by the machines. Although nature may appear cyclical with the phases of the moon or the changing of the season, nature is always moving forward to the never-ending overture of time. This drastic difference between nature and the machines is

exemplified at the end of Fahrenheit 451. After Montag flees the city, he floats away from the city in a river. As he meditates on the stars and the river, he makes a connection between nature, time, and burning:

And the sun goes on, day after day, burning and burning. The sun and time. The sun and time and burning. Burning. The river bobbed him along gently. Burning. The sun and every clock on the earth. It all came together and became a single thing in his mind. (140)

Montag's reflection illustrates how nature coincides with time. Unlike the stagnant existence created by the machines, nature embodies growth and change. Montag also yields to the power of nature, accepting that the sun will never stop burning, so he must never burn again (141). By yielding to the sun and to nature, Montag acknowledges that humanity cannot compete with nature, cannot conquer nature; Montag develops a newfound respect for the wilderness around him. He even appears intimidated by the incredible power of the wilderness: "He saw a great juggernaut of stars form in the sky and threaten to roll over and crush him" (140). After spending a lifetime surrounded by an empty environment created by the machines, Montag eventually finds strength in his new surroundings—a strength that the machines could never have given him.

Bradbury seems to suggest that one must learn to connect very closely with nature in order to develop individuality. In giving advice on how to be a better writer, Bradbury tells his audience to become a part of nature, connect with

nature, mimic nature in “Run Fast, Stand Still, or, The Thing at the Top of the Stairs, or, New Ghosts from Old Minds” from Zen in the Art of Writing:

Be a chameleon, ink-blend, chromosome change with the
landscape. Be a pet rock, lie with the dust, rest in the rainwater in
the filled barrel by the drainspout outside your grandparents’
window long ago. (13)

Bradbury suggests that nature is a source of strength; nature also appears to have a mystical ability to help one discover his or her own uniqueness. In nature lies awareness and awakening. Bradbury argues that one must connect very closely with nature; one must even attempt becoming part of nature to gain awareness of his or her own existence and individuality. Strength and peace exist in nature; Montag illustrates a close connection with nature that compares with Bradbury’s non-fiction. Just as Bradbury proclaims that one should “be a chameleon” and also “be a pet rock” (“Run Fast” 13), Montag also becomes a part of nature:

How long he stood he did not know, but there was a foolish and yet
delicious sense of knowing himself as an animal come from the
forest, drawn by the fire. He was a thing of brush and liquid eye, of
fur and muzzle and hoof, he was a thing of horn and blood that
would smell like autumn if you bled it out on the ground. (Bradbury
146)

Montag’s connection with nature occurs after he has fled the city and retreated to the safety of the wilderness. Rafeeq O. McGiveron articulates the importance of

connecting with nature in “Do You Know the Legend of Hercules and Antaeus?”

The Wilderness in Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451:

Certainly Bradbury shows nature to be preferable to the artificial sterility of the novel’s compulsively hedonistic urban consumer society, yet he also wisely suggests that to be truly human we must know our place in the natural world not only by appreciating the beauties of the wilderness but by respecting its awesome power as well. The thoughtful and moral characters of the novel draw strength from the wilderness. (102)

McGiveron articulates Bradbury’s belief that nature is a source of strength and self-discovery.

Nature appears to be a source of strength simply because nature has substance; nature is sustenance for the mind. Unlike Mildred’s hedonistic and empty environment created by the machines, nature has the ability to fill the mind. Nature’s ability to feed and fill the mind is illustrated at the conclusion of Fahrenheit 451:

He [Montag] stood breathing, and the more he breathed the land in, the more he was filled up with all the details of the land. He was not empty. There was more than enough here to fill him. There would always be more than enough. (144)

Montag’s meditation of how nature can fill his mind is antithetical to the hedonistic world created by the machines. As Montag retreats from the city on the river’s current, he concludes that the world he left behind cannot provide

sustenance and he floats “away from the people who ate shadows for breakfast and steam for lunch and vapors for supper” (140). Bradbury strengthens his belief that nature is sustenance for the mind by comparing Montag’s new nature surroundings to food:

And the other smells! There was a smell like a cut potato from all the land, raw and cold and white from having the moon on it most of the night. There was a smell like pickles from a bottle and a smell like parsley on the table at home. There was a faint yellow odor like mustard from a jar. (144)

The machines negative and powerful ability to break down the human mind is exemplified in Fahrenheit 451. After Montag reveals to Millie that he has been secretly hiding books in their home, Montag seeks the assistance of an out of work English professor named Faber. While on route to Faber’s home, Montag sits on board a subway train trying to read from the Bible. As he reads, he is forced to listen to a toothpaste commercial. The scene embodies several aspects of this study: the commercial is very repetitive, symbolizing the machines tendency to create and maintain repetitive routines; the passage that Montag tries to read is about nature and flowers, and the repetitive commercial has an adverse effect on individuality because it coerces the masses to listen passively. The scene is a struggle between the machines and nature. As Montag desperately concentrates on “the lilies of the field,” he is bombarded by the message of “Denham’s Dentifrice” over the train radio. The diction of the passage is interesting because it is described as a fight between Montag and the

commercial. As Montag struggles to focus on “the lilies of the field” and block out the message of “Denham’s dental detergent,” Bradbury narrates how the radio retaliated: “The train radio vomited upon Montag, in retaliation, a great tonload of music made of tin, copper, silver, chromium, and brass” (79). Aside from being a struggle between nature and the machines, the commercial exemplifies the machines’ repetitive nature and powerful influence over the masses:

The people who had been sitting a moment before, tapping their feet to the rhythm of Denham’s Dentifrice, Denham’s Dandy Dental Detergent, Denham’s Dentifrice Dentifrice Dentifrice, one two, one two three, one two, one two three. The people whose mouths had been faintly twitching the words Dentifrice Dentifrice Dentifrice. (79)

The other inhabitants on the train are overpowered by the repetitive jingle: “The people were pounded into submission; they did not run, there was no place to run; the great air train fell down its shaft in the earth” (79).

The images of fruit, trees, leaves, the outdoors and nature eventually climax at the conclusion of the novel. After becoming a fugitive for murdering Captain Beatty, Montag retreats into the wilderness and joins a community of wondering literary fugitives who memorize books to preserve them. Shortly after joining the group, Montag’s city is destroyed in an atomic war; the machines of destruction, the bombs, ruin the machines of distraction, the TV-walls. With the machines destroyed and the routine broken, Montag begins to meditate on the Bible he had stolen and given to Faber. Donald Watt also discusses how the nature images associated with Clarisse return at the end of the novel as Montag

begins to slowly remember part of the Bible he had stolen and given to Faber. Walking in silence, he remembers Revelations 22:2: *"And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations"* (165). The above passage reflects hope for mankind. The passage exemplifies the progressive attribute of nature. The reference to a tree and the fruit that it yields "every month" (165) accentuates Edward J. Gallagher's statement on "There Will Come Soft Rain": "If there is to be regeneration, it must be through the eternal-life principle of nature, a force technology has not been able to maim" (80). Essentially, nature is the giver of life and the machines can only create a mock copy of life through meaningless repetitive routines.

The machines can never duplicate the raw power of nature. Bradbury even concludes that the atom bomb only contains a fraction of nature's power. At the conclusion of Fahrenheit 451, Granger, one of the book preservers, tells Montag that the power of the bomb is insignificant compared to the nature's power:

My grandfather showed me some V-2 rocket films once, fifty years ago. Have you ever seen the atom-bomb mushroom from two hundred miles up? It's a pinprick, it's nothing. With the wilderness all around it. (157)

Granger's statement to Montag illustrates that the machines will never be a threat to nature, concluding that nature will always be superior to the machines of man. Even with all the bombs of destruction, Granger tells Montag that only nature can

truly destroy humanity; therefore, humanity should respect nature in order “to remind people that we’re allotted a little space on earth and that we survive in that wilderness that can take back what it has given” (157).

In essence, the machines cannot create a healthy environment for existence. The human mind needs to be challenged, stimulated, excited, and surprised; the machines cannot provide a challenging and stimulating environment for the mind to thrive and grow in. Since the machines only create an empty hedonistic existence, society is broken down to a meaningless, repetitive routine; the individual is consequentially lost in the malaise of boredom. Bradbury concludes that nature is the only place to find salvation and mental rejuvenation.

CHAPTER III

BREAKING DOWN THE MIND

Bradbury's machines aid in creating and maintaining repetitive routines that help strengthen a meaningless community and weaken the individual. Although the machines are the cause, the effect has not been thoroughly explored. To say that the machines have an adverse effect on individuality and also deter the search for deeper personal meaning in life is an accusation that requires a more in-depth psychoanalytical approach. Mildred in Fahrenheit 451 provides an interesting case study for a more in-depth analysis of the effects that the machines' repetitive routines create. In order to appreciate the sheer severity of her disturbed psyche, Sigmund Freud's various works provide an excellent formula to analyze her actions, thoughts, and behavior.

One major area of Freud's work is the study of the ego and the id, the conscious and the subconscious; Freud examines how both the ego and the id work together, yet also work in drastic contrast to one another. According to Freud's The Ego and the Id, the id is "unknown and unconscious"; the id contains the passions, instincts, and desires (14-15). The id is also the place of the mind where "the pleasure principle [. . .] reigns unrestrictedly" (The Ego and the Id 15).

Terry Eagleton also summarizes Freud's "pleasure principle" and "reality principle" in Literary Theory. Eagleton explains that the "pleasure principle" is repressed:

Every human being has to undergo this repression of what Freud named the 'pleasure principle' by the 'reality principle', but for some of us, and arguably for whole societies, the repression may become excessive and make us ill. (131)

The statement emphasizes that a repression of the "pleasure principle" can have a negative effect; however, Fahrenheit 451 provides an interesting study in an opposite repression. In Fahrenheit 451, the lack of repressing the "pleasure principle" appears to also have a dire effect. Faber, an out-of-work English professor aiding Montag, articulates the ill effects of allowing the "pleasure principle" unrestricted control: "Yet somehow we think we can grow, feeding on flowers and fireworks, without completing the cycle back to reality" (Bradbury 83).

In contrast, "consciousness is attached" to the ego; the ego also "goes to sleep at night" (Freud, The Ego and the Id 7). The ego is associated with common sense, organization, and reasoning; the ego observes the external world and controls reactions and actions:

We have formed the idea that in each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes, and we call this his ego. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached; the ego controls the approaches to motility—that is, to the discharge of excitations into the external world. (Freud, The Ego and the Id 7)

Pictorially, Freud illustrates that the ego rests on top of the id (14); the ego does not completely engulf the unconscious or the id, but the ego constantly “endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle” (15). Essentially, the ego and the id are a definition for the conscious and the unconscious or subconscious self. This important distinction between something that is conscious and something that is unconscious is an important component in relation to Mildred.

Mildred appears to have an unbalanced mind in regards to the ego and the id. There are several instances in Fahrenheit 451 that suggest an abnormal existence. The best way to describe Mildred’s odd and tragic existence is to begin with an examination of her ego and id. Mildred’s psychological composition appears strangely inverted with her id, or her unconscious, masquerading as her conscious self. Her ego appears to be unusually usurped by an insatiable id drinking in all the pleasures and desires of her environment. It has already been stated that the “pleasure principle” reigns in the id and the “reality principle” reigns in the ego. Faber articulates society’s desire to never return to reality, the realm of the ego (83). It is this desire to constantly please the id that leads to an ill inversion of the ego and the id.

Another piece of evidence that suggests an inverted psyche is Bradbury’s meticulous description of how Mildred never really goes to sleep. Bradbury describes her constant habit of taking sleeping pills and plugging her musical, audio “Seashells” in her ears. Bradbury narrates that this combination of music and sleeping pills simply float Mildred, wide-awake, until morning:

Every night the waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning. There had been no night in the last two years that Mildred had not swum that sea, had not gladly gone down in it for the third time (12).

The passage provides significant evidence that there is something deeply wrong with Mildred's psychological composition. The lines between consciousness and unconsciousness become blurry. Although Mildred never sleeps, it is virtually impossible to describe her trance-like state described above as consciousness. Her altered state of awareness appears to be influenced by the machines that create an overwhelming appeal to the "pleasure principle" in the id. In Fahrenheit 451, the machines, specifically the TV-walls and "Seashells", appear to over-stimulate the "pleasure-principle." Since this "pleasure principle" is said to reign "unrestrictedly" (Freud, The Ego and the Id 15), the id's insatiable desire to satisfy the "pleasure principle" appears to eventually result in an unusual inversion. The unconscious, the id, seizes the rightful position of the ego and masquerades as the conscious self.

The id's charade of the conscious self, the ego, is apparent in the proximity of the TV-walls and the ever-present sleeping pills. David Seed comments on the relationship between the pills and the TV-walls in his article, "The Flight from the Good Life: Fahrenheit 451 in the Context of Postwar American Dystopias." Seed explains that the pills and the TV-walls create "a kind of narcosis" (230). It is interesting that Seed also recognizes the almost unconscious state of Mildred's existence. Seed also connects the pills with the

TV-walls: “there is both a continuity and an analogy between Millie watching the wall-screens and then taking sleeping pills” (230). The apparent purpose of the sleeping pills is to keep the ego at bay and allow the id unrestricted access to the dream of the machines.

The images on the TV-walls are also an interesting study of how the machines have an adverse effect on the human mind. The machines instill a sense a repetition that has an adverse effect, but it is not clear why the machines appear to be so addictive and powerful. One powerful attribute that the machines appear to have is the ability to simulate dreams. It is this attribute that appears to entice the id out of the “unknown and unconscious” (Freud, The Ego and the Id 14). This ability to simulate dreams is a powerful attribute for the machines because dreams are the route to the subconscious. Terry Eagleton summarizes Freud’s work on dreams and states that “the ‘royal road’ to the unconscious is dreams”(136). The images on the TV-walls contain a surrealistic feel. The images are unconnected and cryptic as Bradbury describes what Mildred and her friends are watching:

Abruptly the room took off on a rocket flight into the clouds, it plunged into a lime-green sea where blue fish ate red and yellow fish. A minute later, Three White Cartoon Clowns chopped off each other’s limbs to the accompaniment of immense incoming tides of laughter. Two minutes more and the room whipped out of town to the jet cars wildly circling an arena, bashing and backing up and bashing each other again. (94)

In essence, the passage reflects how the TV-walls become the dream, the only dream for the id, and Montag meditates on how Mildred's dream will soon be complete when all four TV-walls are installed. Montag meditates on "the three walls soon to be four walls and the dream complete" (46). The dream connotation associated with the TV-walls is also evident when Montag turns the TV-walls off to talk to Mildred and her friends: "The three empty walls of the room were like the pale brows of sleeping giants now, empty of dreams" (95).

Bradbury's machines appear to create a surrealistic world that appeals very strongly to the "pleasure principle"; this powerful appeal seemingly has an adverse effect on the ego and causes the id, which is supposed to be "unknown and unconscious" (Freud, The Ego and the Id 14), to masquerade as the conscious self. Clinging to the surrealistic images of the TV-walls, this ill inversion of the ego and the id is fueled by Mildred's heavy consumption of sleeping pills. It is this grave imbalance and inversion that appears to cause other serious psychological problems in Mildred.

This inversion of the ego and the id seems responsible for Mildred's difficulty with reality and memory, because the ego is the "coherent organization of mental processes" (Freud, The Ego and the Id 7). One significant example of Mildred's difficulty with reality is illustrated in her relation with her husband, Guy Montag. Because her world has become a dream, Guy often seems to slip behind her TV-walls and becomes a part of her dream that is detached from reality. While trying to talk to his wife about his angers and doubts of his profession, Bradbury narrates how Mildred looked at Guy as if he were in the TV-

wall: “she looked at him as if he were behind the glass wall” (64). Mildred’s tendency to view Montag as a mere part of her dream is illustrated in another desperate attempt from Montag to try and talk with his distant wife:

He felt he was one of the creatures electronically inserted between the slots of the phono-color walls, speaking, but the speech not piercing the crystal barrier. He could only pantomime, hoping she would turn his way and see him. (46)

Mildred is not a special or unique individual in the society of the novel. There is an advantage to keeping society in an unconscious state comparable to a perpetual state of id. Since only the ego is described as being common sense and reasoning, no one will meditate on the real problems in society: no one will question the nuclear wars (73), the jet planes constantly flying over the city (73), the rumors of the world starving to death (73), or the husbands that go to war and never return home (101). The above issues are all brought to the surface in Montag’s reading of “Dover Beach” to Mildred and her friends (100). The Matthew Arnold poem addresses several issues in Montag’s society including the dream world that Mildred and other members of society live in: “for the world, which seems/ To lie before us like a land of dreams” (100). Immediately after reading the poem, Mrs. Phelps—one of Mildred’s Friends, starts crying. Mrs. Phelps’ reaction is interesting, because it raises an important question: why are books so antithetical to the dream world created by the machines? One answer may be that books are not cryptic and surrealistic; books have structure and form. The structure, form, and meter in writing may appeal to the ego or the

“coherent organization of mental processes” (Freud, The Ego and the Id 7).

Since the ego “represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions” (15), the ego may respond more to the syntax or the structure of writing. The id, “which contains the passions” (15), may respond to the images and meanings instilled in books. Books may be antithetical to the society simply because books maintain a balance between the conscious and the unconscious.

The surrealistic images on the TV-walls entice the id out of the “unknown and unconscious” (14). Although the programs on the TV-walls appear to have a negative effect on the mind, it is important to note that Bradbury does not condemn the technology itself but only the content. Even Faber tells Montag that the TV-walls could contain the same substance that is found in books: “The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisions, but are not” (Bradbury 82). Faber explains that books were just one of the many places where memories and meanings were recorded; Faber emphasizes that it is the content and not the books themselves that are important.

Unlike nature’s ability to feed and fill the mind, as discussed in the previous chapter, Mildred’s hedonistic environment causes her psyche to become deprived and starved. Mildred’s world, which is created by the machines, can provide no sustenance for the mind. According to Bradbury, it is nature that nourishes the mind. Since Mildred is detached from the natural world and completely submerged in her empty and deprived environment created by

the machines, then her mind apparently starves. Shortly after Montag escapes at the conclusion of the novel, the city is bombed. As Montag drops to the ground, he has a brief image of Mildred sitting in front of the TV-wall just before the impact:

Montag, falling flat, going down, saw or felt, or imagined he saw or felt the walls go dark in Millie's face, heard her screaming, because in the millionth part of time left, she saw her own face reflected there, in a mirror instead of a crystal ball, and it was such a wildly empty face, all by itself in the room, touching nothing, starved and eating of itself. (159)

The surrealistic images of the TV-walls entice the id out of the "unknown and unconscious" (Freud, The Ego and the Id 14). Another factor that may contribute to the ill inversion between the ego and the id is the sheer starvation of the id. Unlike the false dream-like world created by the TV-walls, nature is described as real. After reaching the wilderness, Montag escapes the Hound by retreating to the river. As he floats away from the city, he reflects how "the river was very real" (140). The dream world created by the TV-walls is a lie and cannot fulfill the id. The ego is helpless, because the ego cannot compete against the machines. The ego is attributed to common sense and reasoning (15), and the ego cannot beat down the machines with common sense and reasoning in Fahrenheit 451. Faber explains the ill effect that the machines have on the ego to Montag:

It [the TV parlor] *becomes* and *is* the truth. Books can be beaten down with reason. But with all my knowledge and skepticism, I have never been able to argue with a one-hundred-piece symphony orchestra, full color, three dimensions, and being in and part of those incredible parlors. (84)

Considering the over-powering description that the machines have over the ego, the ego becomes weak. The apparent imbalance between the ego and the id creates a severe case of melancholia in Mildred. Although she denies any depressing emotions, Bradbury emphasizes the severity of her illness by investing her depression with a tangible connotation. This tangible connotation of Mildred's depression is evident when the technicians arrive to revive Mildred after her pill overdose:

They had this machine. They had two machines, really. One of them slid down into your stomach like a black cobra down an echoing well looking for all the old water and the old time gathered there. It drank up the green matter that flowed to the top in a slow boil. Did it drink of the darkness? Did it suck out all the poisons accumulated with the years? (14)

Donald Watt examines the above passage in his article "Burning Bright: Fahrenheit 451 as Symbolic Dystopia." Watt examines the use of dark and light images in the text and explores how Bradbury's use of light and dark enriches the symbolic nature of the novel. Watt examines the dark imagery in the above

passage and emphasizes the negative connotation associated with the dark images:

The poisonous darkness within her has become endemic to their way of life. The darkness suggests all the unimagined psychic bile that builds up in people, to embitter them, alienate them from one another, snuff out any inner light on their mode of existing. (201)

After pumping out the poisons in Mildred's blood and stomach, the two technicians hurry off in response to another pill overdose across town (Bradbury 16). As they pack up their equipment and machines, they take away the "case of liquid melancholy and the slow dark sludge of nameless stuff" (16). The connection between the weakened ego and Mildred's melancholia is illustrated in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." Freud states how the ego "becomes poor and empty" in melancholia (127).

Within this realm of the ego and the id, there are also two opposing instincts that are locked in constant struggle: Eros, the life force and also the source of sexual energy, and the "death instinct." According to Freud's The Ego and the Id, the "death instinct" wishes only to return to the inanimate state before conception and Eros wishes to constantly go forward (30). Terry Eagleton explains this struggle between the two instincts in Literary Theory, "We strive onwards only to be constantly driven backwards, struggling to return to a state before we were even conscious" (139).

Mildred's sleeping pills appear to aid the id in maintaining a surrealistic dream world, but the pills also have an appeal to the "death instinct." This

connection between the pills and the “death instinct” is obvious. Upon arriving home from work, Guy makes the horrifying discovery that his wife has taken an entire bottle of sleeping pills. When later questioned about this act, Mildred denies the accusation, claiming she would never take an entire bottle of pills. Her denial and lack of memory of the act could be entirely true. It has already been argued that Mildred illustrates a severe imbalance between the ego and the id. It has also been argued that the ego, which is associated with reasoning and common sense, appears absent and is instead replaced by a partially unconscious state comparable to an inverted id. Even Montag recognizes a severe problem with Mildred that he describes as another Mildred that lived inside his wife: “But that was another Mildred, that was a Mildred so deep inside this one, and so bothered, really bothered, that the two women had never met” (52).

Just as a severe imbalance exists between the ego and the id, a grave imbalance exists between the two instincts. Mildred’s pills are a constant presence, and the pills appear to be an outlet for the “death instinct.” In addition to the sleeping pills’ appealing to the “death instinct,” the surrealistic images on the TV-walls often depict violent images that fuel the “death instinct.” Mildred and her friends watch as “Three Cartoon Clowns chopped off each other’s limbs to the accompaniment of immense incoming tides of laughter” (Bradbury 94). The violent images also include an arena of cars “bashing and backing up and bashing each other again” (94). While watching the cars crash into each other, Bradbury narrates how “Montag saw a number of bodies fly in the air” (94). This

ritual of fueling the “death instinct” by driving and smashing cars is an image seen often in the novel. Mildred relates her exhilarating experience of driving fast in the beetle: “Sometimes I drive all night and come back and you don’t know it. It’s fun out in the country. You hit rabbits, sometimes you hit dogs” (64). By contrast, the healthy Clarisse relates to Guy how she doesn’t participate in society’s leisure activities of going and racing in cars, ““trying to see how close you can get to lampposts, playing ‘chicken’ and ‘knock hubcaps’” (30).

A grave imbalance exists between the ego and the id, and an equally disturbing imbalance exists between Eros and the “death instinct.” In The Ego and the Id, Freud states that the Eros is “the sexual instincts” and also the instinct that desires to move forward and preserve life (30). Bradbury is meticulous in describing the coldness and darkness of Montag’s bedroom. Just before Montag looks at his wife and realizes that she taken an entire bottle of sleeping pills, he walks into the dark and cold room:

It was like coming into the cold marbled room of a mausoleum after the moon has set. [. . .] Without turning on the light he imagined how this room would look. His wife stretched on the bed, uncovered and cold, like a body displayed on the lid of a tomb, her eyes fixed to the ceiling by invisible threads of steel, immovable.

(11-12)

This cold and dark description implies a lack of Eros. Instead of walking into a warm and inviting room, Bradbury narrates that Montag’s bedroom is comparable to a grave; this death connotation associated with Montag’s bedroom

emphasizes a severe lack of passion and love. There is no warmth or intimacy. There is only coldness and death. This lack of Eros is emphasized when Montag is destroying his own house. Shortly after Captain Beatty tells Montag to destroy his house and the books, Montag immediately goes to the bedroom and sets the twin beds on fire:

He stepped into the bedroom and fired twice and the twin beds went up in a great simmering whisper, with more heat and passion and light than he would have supposed them to contain. He burnt the bedroom walls and the cosmetics chest because he wanted to change everything (116).

This apparent lack of intimacy between Montag and his wife is a significant example of a lack of Eros. There is no passion or desire in their marriage. The Eros, the passion, is smothered in a stagnate environment created by the machines.

According to Freud, the Eros also “aims at complicating life” (The Ego and the Id 30). Automated gadgets that create a hedonistic existence oversimplify Mildred’s life; the absurdity of Mildred’s simplistic existence is also apparent in a device that prepares, butters, and delivers her toast to her plate (Bradbury 18). Her life of watching the TV-walls is far from complicated and this simplistic existence denotes a significantly weak Eros. Since Eros is considerably weaker, the “death instinct” is given a significant advantage. This imbalance between Eros, the instinct that aims at preserving life, and the “death instinct” is evident

throughout Montag's society and not evident exclusively in Mildred. Clarisse articulates this imbalance in society between Eros and the "death instinct":

I'm afraid of children my own age. They kill each other. Did it always use to be that way? My uncle says no. Six of my friends have been shot in the last year alone. Ten of them died in car wrecks (30).

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud examines the differences between mourning and melancholia and also explores suicide. According to Freud, "we have long known that no neurotic harbors thoughts of suicide which are not murderous impulses against others redirected upon himself" (133). Freud continues to explain that it is difficult to understand exactly how these impulses turn into actual action against the self; he explains that these murderous impulses can only turn into action if one begins to see oneself as an object:

The ego can kill itself only when [. . .] it can treat itself as an object, when it is able to launch against itself the animosity relating to an object—that primordial reaction on the part of the ego to all objects in the outer world. (133)

Since Mildred's psychological state is comparable to an inverted id resulting in her becoming lost in a surrealistic world fueled by her society's machines, her surroundings, including her husband, become a part of her dream—a part of the unreal. The severely altered psychological state appears to make her less of a human being and more of an object. When Montag calls for medical assistance upon discovering his wife has consumed an entire bottle of

pills, two impersonal technicians arrive to pump out her stomach. While the technicians are working on Mildred, Montag meditates on how the process is comparable to burrowing into the earth. Montag reflects that “the woman on the bed was no more than a hard stratum of marble they had reached” (Bradbury 14). Montag’s thoughts illustrate that Mildred is no longer human and is simply a piece of stone; she becomes an object. David Seed also addresses the object connotation associated with Mildred in “The Flight from the Good Life: Fahrenheit 451 in the Context of Postwar American Dystopias.” After watching a woman burn with her books, Montag comes down with a fever the next morning. Mildred questions Guy trying to make him get up. Seed examines Mildred’s appearance as she stands over Montag’s bed:

Mildred stood over his bed, curiously. He felt her there, he saw her without opening his eyes, her hair burnt by chemicals to a brittle straw, her eyes with a kind of cataract unseen but suspect far behind the pupils, the reddened pouting lips, the body as thin as a praying mantis from dieting, and her flesh like white bacon. He could remember her no other way. (Bradbury 48)

Seed argues that the above quote illustrates that Mildred is more an object than a human being, “He [Montag] contemplates her as if she has ceased to be a human being” (231). Seed further states that “Millie here fragments into disparate features transformed by dye, cosmetics or dieting” (231). In addition to being “disparate features” (Seed 231), Millie is also described as “a wax doll melting” (Bradbury 76). When Millie and her friends are talking in the TV parlor,

Montag compares their voices to “a monstrous crystal chandelier tinkling in a thousand chimes” (Bradbury 93). After reviving Millie from her pill overdose, Montag meditates on his possible reaction if she were to die; his meditation reflects that Millie is less of a human being and more of a two-dimensional image:

And he remembered thinking then that if she died, he was certain he wouldn't cry. For it would be the dying of an unknown, a street face, a newspaper image, and it was suddenly so very wrong that he had begun to cry, not at death but at the thought of *not crying* at death, a silly empty man near a silly empty woman. (44)

One of the most important things to Bradbury is individuality, and he also closely associates personal meaning with individuality. I propose personal meaning is impossible to grasp if too many components of the human psyche are unbalanced. Furthermore, Bradbury's machines have an adverse effect on individuality because the repetitive routines created by the machines appear to disrupt the balance and harmony of the human mind.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: STANDING STILL

There is a Chinese proverb that is relevant to the purpose of this thesis: “Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid only of standing still.” The machines create an empty environment symbolizing stagnation; there is no meaning or purpose in life. In essence, one is simply standing still and never trying to grow mentally or spiritually in the midst of the hedonistic world created by the machines. Since the machines dictate daily agendas, then individuals no longer have to think for themselves; life no longer becomes challenging or stimulating and is instead reduced to a routine. Bradbury’s life and writing career is diverse and eclectic; he has written various works of different genres and forms. He even lived in Ireland for several months to write the screenplay for John Huston’s Moby Dick. Like many writers, Bradbury finds the ideas for his stories in his own life and experiences. Bradbury’s many accomplishments and extensive publications substantiate his passion for life and mental growth. Bradbury’s publications include short stories, novels, screenplays, and poetry; he has written an eclectic blend of science fiction, fantasy, and non-fiction. In essence, Bradbury despises just standing still and proclaims how he explodes every morning when he leaps out of bed in Zen in the Art of Writing (“Preface” XV).

The machines in Bradbury's works do not stimulate or challenge the human mind. The machines cannot provide real sustenance for the individual, and the mind ultimately becomes weak and empty. In many of his works, both fiction and non-fiction, Bradbury infers that nature is the source of mental rejuvenation and spiritual awakening. In Fahrenheit 451, Montag finds strength and peace in the wilderness around him. According to Bradbury, nature is the source of self-discovery. Nature is sustenance for the mind and provides a healthy environment for one to discover his or her own uniqueness and individuality. One attribute of nature that Bradbury praises is nature's spontaneous and unpredictable quality in Zen in the Art of Writing: "flick like an eyelash, crack like a whip, vanish like steam, here this instant gone the next" ("Run Fast" 13). This movement and quickness exemplified in nature is antithetical to just standing still. Based on Bradbury's works, he would likely agree with the Chinese proverb to fear only standing still.

NOTES

¹ Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles (1950; Garden City: Doubleday, 1958). All references will be to this edition.

² Ray Bradbury, The Illustrated Man (1951; New York: Bantam, 1967). All references will be to this edition.

³ Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451 (1953; New York: Ballantine, 1991). All references will be to this edition.

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