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Montag as an Anti-hero in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Montag as an Anti-hero in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Kamal Kanta Subedi has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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To
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Guy Montag as an Anti-hero in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

Abstract

This research paper explores Ray Bradbury's chief character, Guy Montag in Fahrenheit 451. It investigates the reason behind the presentation of Montag distinct from features of traditional fictional heroes. Using Northrop Frye's notion of five modes of hero as elucidated in Anatomy of Criticism, it posits Bradbury's intention of irony on technology-led American society through the characterization of Montag as a modern hero. His modern hero is lower than normal human beings, and thus, an anti-hero. The hero does not depict his heroism the readers feel the need of heroism. He instead runs away from the difficult circumstances when his heroism is expected. Montag resembles Frye's hero of ironic mode –Anti-hero. Bradbury, through his anti-hero, satirizes the American government's censorship of the freedom of American people.

Keywords: Characterization, modern hero, irony, anti-hero, scrutiny, dystopia

This research work projects the importance of characterization in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1952). It also explores the chief character Guy Montag's connection with the theme of the technology-led dystopian American society in Bradbury's novel. Besides, it seeks why the author considers Montag more an anti-hero than a hero in the traditional sense of the term.

Character, unlike other elements in the fiction –title, prologue, opening, narration, point of view, voice, dialogue, chronology, and plot –carries serious themes in the fiction. Characters may be real persons, historical ones, alter ego of the writers or fictitious persons as well. Writers give voice to their characters and convey the messages they want to impart among their readers. Novelists and movie makers often present characters through their actions, appearances, speeches and gestures, bodily

expressions, and their names. Generally speaking, characters are developed in two ways. In some fictions, readers are told about characters. Third-person narrators give readers the information about what characters are doing and thinking, what experiences they have had, what they look like, how they dress, and so on. They also make judgments of specific characters along with their behaviours. While in some others, first-person narrators also tell us about themselves or about other characters.

Characters can be broadly categorized into two types: protagonists and antagonists. In fictional narrative, protagonists are the chief characters around whom readers' interests center. With their positive worldviews, protagonists are socially accepted and legally institutionalized. They are the active supporters of the policies and movements, especially the ones trying to change the negative doctrine of the societies. They not only try to change such dogma but also suggest the other members of the societies to do so. They fight themselves with such negative principles of their societies irrespective of their self interests, welfare of the family members and other benefits as such. They very often do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the welfare of the people of their societies. They are regarded as the social role models of the societies. They often play the roles of the rescuers. Readers believe that protagonists can reestablish and restore the situation from any kind of danger. They accomplish the spectacular feats to prove themselves different from the other common people of the societies. Protagonists prove themselves as superior by settling the conflicts brought up by the antagonists in the fiction.

In fiction, antagonists are presented in contrast to protagonists. They oppose protagonists' ways through their negative accomplishments. Their principles do not match with those of the protagonists and it takes the form of the conflict. Unlike protagonists, antagonists egg on the innocent people of the societies and lead them

towards descends. They even do not hesitate to sell their morality and civic for their personal benefits. They are self-centered and hostile. They create obstruction in the path of the protagonists in creating the ideal societies. They do not care the social, moral and legal norms and values. Protagonists are tortured by the antagonists and so are the common people of the society. Antagonists create tumult in the society by obstructing the social norms and values at one side by torturing the common people on the other. It is antagonists who take the conflict to the climax in the fiction and it is the protagonists' responsibilities to resolve the climax. Antagonists justify the role of protagonists in the fiction.

Protagonists are considered as godly characters in the fiction whereas antagonists as demonic. Protagonists prove themselves as gods because of their deeds they show in the fiction and antagonists as demonic for their evil attitudes, behaviors and other features as such. Both the characters are important in the fiction because of the presence of one another. It is antagonists who give the plot the direction to move forward by creating the conflict in the fiction. Various conflicts take the plot to the climax of the fiction. It is protagonists who settle the apex in the negative direction and allow the normal people breathe the air of happiness. It is protagonists who improve the pathetic conditions of the common people of the society and lead the society towards the normal situation. For this due reason, protagonists are very often called the divine figures, whereas antagonists are devils just for torturing the common people, leading the society towards the difficult path and violating the social norms and values.

Protagonists are taken synonymously with heroes. Heroes are actually those who exhibit their bravery and confidence in accomplishing extra-ordinary deeds. The hero is presented as an ideal character that is worth following by the people of the

society. The concept of hero is associated with positive attributes. Hero refers to the character that embodies virtues ever since the ancient Greek civilization. In that period, the hero was taken as an ideal person more than ordinary human and less than god. The very concept regarded hero as an ideal who could rescue all human suffering in that human world. The hero is an ideal image of every person. The word 'hero', however, brings to mind different things to different people, since people tend to have different concepts of heroism. This is particularly the case with regard to the concept of hero in ancient and modern societies.

In this line of discussion, the hero can be described as a courageous person, who deliberately sets out to conquer obstacles for the benefits of others with his or her extra-ordinary feats. This could be the fact that there are certain traits that characterize both the ancient and modern heroes, such as bravery and selflessness. These traits form the bases of heroic acts that remained unchanged in the course of time. It is, however, important to note that the concept of the modern hero cannot be restricted to a specific goal of the writer. Different writers present modern heroes in their literary works for different purposes. Nonetheless, it seems that all ages' heroes do have some common qualities which govern heroic concept. Since the birth of the heroic concept, it has been changed over time; therefore, different heroic models have been created.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye proposes five modes of fiction based on the representation of the hero, drawing insights from the Aristotelian theory of character. First, when the lead character is superior to other men and environment in kind, the hero is a divine being, such as Jesus Christ in the *Holy Bible*, the prophet Mohammed in the *Holy Quran*, and Orpheus in the Greek mythology. In this mode of a fictional work, the hero is superior in kind and the narrative about him is myth in the common sense of the story of god or demigod. Second, when the character of a

fictional work is superior to other men and environment in degree, the hero is the typical figure of romance or legend, such as King Arthur or Sir Gawain. In this fictional mode, the hero is a human being appearing in legend or folktale. Third, in high mimetic mode of fiction, the hero is a leader who is superior to others to some degree and has passion and power greater than those of ordinary people. Like Oedipus and Othello, the hero of epic and tragedy, primarily the Aristotelian, fall because of the flaw of his own. Fourth, in the low mimetic mode, the hero is neither superior nor inferior to ordinary men, like Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urvilles* (1891) and Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). In the eighteenth and nineteen-century fiction, the hero as a virtuous human meets tragic death. Lastly, the hero is inferior to ordinary men in power and intelligence, in the ironic mode. In the ironic mode, the hero is represented by Murphy in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* (1938) or Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) in the twentieth-century. In Frye's model, the fictional modes are determined by the hero's specific roles and conditions in the fictional world, a manifestation of the real world.

Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is set in a futuristic space of the twenty-fourth century with Guy Montag as a protagonist in the fiction. The fiction tells the story of Montag who is a thirty years old fireman. Here fireman puts fire instead of putting them out. At first, Montag takes pleasure in his profession as a fireman, burning illegally owned books and the homes of the owners. However, Montag soon begins to question the value of his profession and, in turn, his life. Throughout the novel Montag struggles with his existence, eventually fleeing his oppressive, censored society and joining an underground network of intellectuals. With his new friends,

Montag witnesses the atomic destruction of his former city and dedicates himself to rebuilding a literate and cultured society.

At the beginning of the novel, Montag develops friendship with his seventeen years old neighbor, Clarisse McClellan, whose humanistic outlook and inquisitive nature prompts Montag to examine his life. Soon, he realizes he is unhappy and no longer loves his wife, Mille Montag. Meanwhile, she is unwilling to deal with reality and instead chooses to immerse in interactive television, seashell radio, and an addiction to tranquilizers. Unfulfilled by his occupation and discontent with a society unconcerned with reports of an impending atomic war, Montag begins to question the ways of the world. Specifically, Montag wonders why books are perceived to be dangers and why some people are so loyal to them.

Driven by his increasing uneasiness, Montag steals a book from a collection he is sent to burn. At the scene of the burning, Montag is shaken when the owner of the books, an older woman, refuses to leave her home. Instead, the woman sets fire to her kerosene soaked house and remains there as it is, and she is destroyed by flames. The woman's dedication to her books makes Montag realize that perhaps the happiness he lacks can be found in books. After the burning, Montag returns home, feeling ill as he relives the woman's horrific death. He begins to realize that although, over the past ten years, he thought he was serving society as a fireman, he was actually purely an instrument of destruction. The very night, in a discussion with his wife, Mille, Montag learns that his friend Clarisse was killed by a speeding car more than a week earlier. Upon hearing this news, Montag feels even more ill. He falls asleep that night with stolen book hidden underneath his pillow.

The next day, Montag refuses to attend work, claiming that he is sick. His boss, Captain Betty, visits him that morning, and appears to somehow be aware of the

internal struggle. Montag is suffering through, and that Montag might possess books. Beatty lectures Montag about the offensiveness of books and the superiority of their current society, where homogeneity and structure are mandated, to the old society where free thought was encouraged and people were permitted to express differing opinions. During Beatty's visit, Millie nervously organizes the bedroom and tries to pull Montag's pillow away. When he won't let her, she puts her hand underneath it and finds the hidden book. Mille is astonished, what would happen if a fireman brought a book home. Beatty says firemen are allowed to bring book home, but must burn it within twenty-four hours.

When Beatty departs, Montag retrieves some twenty books that he has stored from alarms over the years and begins to read. Unsure as to what to do next, Montag recalls meeting a retired professor, Faber, a year earlier and discussing with the old man the value of ideas. He decides to visit Faber, who is at first afraid to speak with him, fearing that he will be the fireman's next victim. However, as the two men grow to trust one another, Faber becomes a mentor to Montag, sharing insight with the fireman and conspiring with him to have copies of his books made. Faber gives Montag a small two-way radio of his own invention to insert in his ear so that the two men will always be in communication.

At home, Montag becomes disgusted with his wife and her friends as they sit idly, watching television and engaging in gossip that reveals their selfishness and lack of awareness or concern for the impending atomic war. Against Faber's objection streaming through the secret radio echoing in his ear, Montag engages the woman in a debate about family and politics. Next, he reads to them from a book of poetry. Mildred's friends react emotionally to Montag's reading, crying and not understanding the source of their tears. When Mildred's two shaken friends depart,

she retires to her room to take some sleeping pills and Montag hides his books in the backyard before heading off to work, where Beatty engages in more anti-book, anti-intellectual rhetoric. The firemen are called to an alarm, and Montag is dismayed to discover that it is his own house that is to be burned. His wife Mildred reports him.

After burning his home and possessions by himself, room by room, under Captain Beatty's command, Montag is chided by his boss, and the two men engage in a scuffle, during which Faber's radio is knocked from Montag's ear. When Beatty remarks that both Montag and his "friend", Faber, will be dealt with severely, Montag threatens him with the flamethrower. When Beatty continues to verbally abuse him, Montag flips the switch and kills the chief. At once, the Mechanical Hound, a computerized attack dog that can track down any human being by scent, pursues him. The Hound stabs him in the leg with a procaine needle, but Montag is able to annihilate it with the flamethrower before it can do more damage. Montag retrieves his remaining books from the yard before running to Faber's. On the way, he pauses to plant the books in the home of fireman Black, briefly collects himself at a gas station where he hears reports that war has been declared, and when crossing the road is nearly run over by a reckless driver.

Faber provides refuge for Montag, who is being hotly pursued by a second Mechanical Hound and the authorities. Faber provides Montag with some old clothes masking his scent and thus impeding the Mechanical Hound. He further suggests Montag to go to the river and float downstream to the train tracks, where he will hopefully find a hobo camp of intellectual outlaws who can help him. Montag, in turn, encourages Faber to turn on all of his sprinklers to throw the hound of his scent. Montag departs; Faber needs his advice, and then sets off for the St. Louis to commission a former printer he knows to print some books. Montag floats down the

river, successfully avoiding the Hound, and comes upon a group of former writers, clergymen, and academics by the riverbank. The leader of the group, an author named Granger, welcomes Montag and offers him a concoction to change his scent so that the hound cannot detect his presence. The men then use a portable television to watch the police chase Montag's escape has caused. Montag is shocked as he sees the Mechanical Hound killing another man as the announcer proclaims, "Montag is dead!" the police, not wanting to lose the confidence of the public, set the Hound after an innocent man it lost Montag's scent.

Granger tells Montag how the men in his camp have each memorized literary works, so that someday, when it is safe to do so, they can again print books, recreating them from memory. When atomic bombs destroy the city, the men set out to sift through the rubble and begin anew. They plan to foster a society where books and free thought can flourish.

The protagonist of the American science fiction, Guy Montag, is a thirty years old man who makes his living by burning books and houses where they are illegally kept. At the start of the fiction, Montag seems to be the typical fireman; delighting in the work of burning books and homes, and believing himself a happy man. However, he is unaware about the fear created among the people due to him and his office. Bradbury's hero, as the novel progresses, becomes increasingly discontent as he realizes he has been living an empty, unfulfilling life. He is unsure of the cause behind his apathy for his wife, job, and the society in which he lives. He realizes that he is living in dystopian society where people are not allowed to read the books, keep them at their homes or even they are not allowed to think freely. He is living in the society scrutinized society by the use of scientific tools and appliances. He also realizes that he is made an agent of such organization which makes the society as

such. After knowing that he is an agent of that organization, he decides to leave his job but does not fight with the conditions to make people free from the dystopian society. Instead he runs away from such circumstances and goes to take the surrender in the group of Granger. He joins in the group of intellectuals who aims to create an ideal society where people are allowed of free thought.

Throughout the fiction, Montag does not show any heroic characteristics which can be regarded as the characteristics of the role model of the society. His characteristics are not like those of a courageous individual who risks fighting against existing evil social rules, values and norms, and makes people breathe the air of freedom. He is instead attributed as a person lower than normal human beings who runs away from the situation in order to save his own life. He is not even able to save his own home, wife and family from being burnt. His attributes resemble that of the hero of the fifth mode that is the hero of ironic mode. Ray Bradbury has created such hero of ironic mode (anti-hero) in order to satirize the then American society which was claiming itself that it was exercising the democracy at the fullest on one side and censoring the freedom of its people using the means and tools of science and technology on the other.

In traditional realist fictions, heroes are basically the brave persons who are taken synonymously with the role models of the society. There are no any tags of weaknesses in the features of the heroes. They are like divine characters that always keep the people in their surveillance and stand as a savior of every people in case they face any problems and difficulties. Such heroes are never defeated by any kinds of evils or other il-situations as such. Byronic heroes, heroes in many myths and legends can be taken as instances of such heroes. These sorts of heroes are hardly found in

reality. Mike Alsford, in his book *Heroes and Villains*, gives some of the major characteristics of the conventional heroes in traditional fictions.

As we have seen, self-sacrifice –often in the face of overwhelming opposition and apparent lack of hope –are the hallmarks of the hero. . . . The decision to give up one’s life for another, to value another more than oneself, to place oneself between another and harm is, I believe, fundamentally heroic. (128)

The hero should have the fundamental character of self-sacrifice. He values others’ life more than his own. He does not count any harm on himself in saving others’ life. He does not even fall back to risk his own life for the sake of others.

Hero not only sacrifices his life to save others’ lives but also has a characteristic of being omnipotent. To be heroic is to share the joy and pain, to make no demands on other. Alsford further claims:

The hero has less to do with power and ability than with attitude. . . . They share joy and pain; they sympathize and sometimes even empathize with those whom they feel responsible for. They are prepared to be a resource for the other . . . to lighten the burden of pain and anguish without any apparent benefit to the hero themselves. . . . True hero makes no demands on the other. . . . To be heroic may mean nothing more than this then, to stand in the face of the *status quo*, in the face of an easy collapse into the madness of an increasingly chaotic world and represent another way. (129-32)

Heroes are, thus, god-like human beings. They are the rescuers of common humans who have fallen in the difficulties. They are like true friends who share joy and sorrows of the people but expect nothing in return from them. They are the reformer

of the society who change the evil and dogmatic types of rules and bring the new ones.

Unlike heroes, villains are the other chief characters who are inevitable in fictions. As heroes are god-like creatures, villains are evil creatures who dream to put the common people in problems. They enjoy victimizing the common people by creating different sorts of problems themselves and putting them in front of the common people. Alsford, again in *Heroes and Villains*, clarifies:

. . . a villain has more to do with a particular attitude of mind rather than any particular power, or indeed any action. To see the world and those within it as a thing to be made use of is, in my view, the height of villainy –whether this be witnessed to in the playground, the street, the home the office or internationally. . . . The villains lack the necessary sense of responsibility towards the other. . . . Absence of respect for the environment and the wider animal world can, I believe, be regarded as an act of villainy because of the lack of empathy with future generations that this exhibits. (132-35)

In contrast to the heroes, villains are irresponsible to the environment and even the future generations. They are self-centered and seek to gain everything by themselves. They adopt the monstrous way to fulfill these expectations of them.

The protagonist of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Guy Montag resembles none of the above mentioned features. His attributes are neither godly like that of conventional heroes nor monstrous like the villains as described in Mike Alsford's *Heroes and Villains*. Bradbury as a modern fiction writer has experimented with his protagonist in this fiction.

Modern fiction writers and movie makers deliberately connect the themes of their works with the elements of the fiction or film –title, characters, form, settings, tone and various other elements as such. They even experiment with those elements of their works in order to relate them with the theme of their works. Julie Armstrong, in her book, *Experimental Fiction: An Introduction for Readers and Writers*, gives various reasons why these experimental writers experiment with those elements in their literary works. She justifies the experimentations as follows:

There are also writers who are creating works in order to make sense of the world and their place in it, and in so doing, they produce works which depart from tradition realist fiction, a form considered to be too restricting to express some writers' thoughts and ideas. As a consequence, they create new forms, styles and genres of literary work. In addition, there are writers who consciously react against traditional realist fiction with the intention of creating work which will bring self-realization and change in people's lives, and in so doing, they too establish new forms and content. (2)

Armstrong too supports the fiction writers intentionally create the characters of their own breaking the rules of realist traditions of writing fictions; however, they do have their own purposes of doing so. They do not only create their own new element in their fiction but also they keep their readers in their mind and try their best to connect their elements with the reality as a result, the readers are easily convinced with their ideas of doing so.

In order to depict the reality of heroes in modern fictions, writers of modern fictions create their own heroes. Their heroes do not carry only the affirmative features as those of traditional heroes; they do have most of the features of normal

human beings –an amalgamation of both positive and negative characteristics. They are sometimes higher than normal human beings and sometimes lower than the latter. But the writers have some specific purposes for creating such heroes.

In this modern fiction, *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury's hero, Guy Montag is not brave as conventional hero. He is less than a normal human being. He cannot protest with the unfavorable circumstances that come forth in his life. He instead runs away from that situation and tries to put himself away from the unfavorable situation. He does not bear any role which can be attributed to conventional hero. In the fiction, Montag, a typical fireman who works in a fire station whose job is to burn the books and the house where the books are kept illegally, falls himself in love with the books and keeps those books. When Captain Betty, his boss and the fire chief, knows all this, Captain takes Montag to his house and asks Montag to burn the house. "At last Montag raised his eyes and turned. Beatty was watching his face. 'Something the matter, Montag?' 'Why,' said Montag slowly, 'we've stooped in front of *my* house'" (143). When Montag comes to know this he cannot convince the Captain about the worth of the books and silently burns his own house. "'Ready.' Montag snapped the safety –catch on the flame-thrower. 'Fire!' A great nuzzling gout of the flame leapt out to lap at the books and knock them against the wall. He stepped into the bedroom and fired twice and the twin beds went up in a great simmering whisper, with more heart and passion and light than he would have supposed to contain" (151). His house turns into the heap of ashes in no time. "The books leapt and danced like roasted birds, their wings ablaze with red and yellow feathers. . . . The house fell in red coals and black ash. It bedded itself down in sleepy pink-grey cinders and a smoke plume blew over it, rising and waving slowly back and forth in the sky" (151-52). He turns

numb at this situation. He does not appear brave enough to protest against the rule of his office and protect his own house from being burnt.

The fire chief not only gets the house burnt but also attempts to kill the hero. He uses Mechanical Hound to this. “‘When you’re quite finished,’ said Beatty behind him. ‘You’re under arrest.’ . . . He turned and the Mechanical Hound was there. . . . A shotgun blast went off in his leg every time he put it down and he thought, you’re a fool, a damn fool, an awful fool, an idiot, an awful idiot, a damn idiot, and a fool damn fool” (152-56); Montag goes to the fire station and hands over one of his books to Beatty. Beatty confuses Montag by barraging him with contradictory quotations from great books. Beatty exploits these contradictions to show that literature is morbid and dangerously complex, and that it deserves incineration. Suddenly, the alarm sounds and they rush off to answer the call, only to find that alarm is at Montag’s own house. Mildred gets into a cab with her suitcase, and Montag realizes that his own wife has betrayed him.

Beatty forces Montag to burn the house himself; when he is done, Beatty places him under arrest. When Beatty continues to berate Montag, Montag turns the flamethrower on his supervisor and proceeds to burn him to ashes. Montag knocks the other fireman and runs. The Mechanical Hound, the monstrous machine that Beatty has set to attack Montag, pounces and injects Montag’s leg with a large dose of anesthetic. Montag manages to destroy it with his flamethrower; then he walks off the numbness in his leg and escapes.

In the story, he seems very meek and coward in front of the Captain. He cannot save his house from being burnt on the one hand and instead of persisting to save himself logically like a cogent and brave hero from the chief, he runs away from him like a coward, on the other. Let us not talk about helping others in fighting

against the prejudices and injustice existing in the society, he runs away from the situation to save own life. He is intellectually unaware about his own job and its effects in his own life. A critique David Seed in his research paper entitled “The Flight from the Good Life: *Fahrenheit 451*” in context of Postwar American Dystopias”, characterizes Montag as a politically unaware person. He elucidates that “. . . Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*, known only by his functional label, comes gradually to realize the consequences of his participation in a system . . . but with the added irony that his realization comes too late to make any difference even to his own fate” (227). He, here, focuses that the hero, Montag, is very unaware about his life that he does not know what consequences his job will bring into his life. He is blindly following the system as an unaware person.

Bradbury’s hero is totally different from the conventional heroes. He creates an image of a modern hero in modern time. With the change of time, the concept of hero has changed from Greek to contemporary society. In the Greek age, morality was central to heroism while virtues were considered heroic qualities. However, these concepts no more support coming up to the middle ages when religious homage and respect toward Gods were taken as heroic qualities. Similarly, in the Renaissance period, humanism and human centre were respected as heroic concepts. However, in modern world, heroic concept of hero has been changed. Anne Morrow Lindbergh explains:

The balanced judgment of the historian is particularly valuable today when we are overwhelmed by an abundance of public media constantly creating images of public figures. In our present-day culture the image of a hero is sometimes blown up overnight and often torn down a few months later. The historian, as I see it, attempts to cut through the myth

of legend, propaganda, and gossip. He tries to test the image of the public man and find out, if possible what is false and what is true, or what is probable what is improbable, and what is relevant to the history of the mankind. (162)

The hero nowadays is different from the heroes in myths. Those powerful, omnipotent and cogent heroes are only found in myths. The real hero in modern time should be picked from the general public who does not bear only the positive attributes as heroes in the myths but also characterizes with some probable negative attributes as fear, cowardice and many others features as such. Modern heroes bear such features because those characteristics are inevitable in every human in this modern time.

Guy Montag is ironical in the fiction. He is a fireman in a fire-station by profession. Fireman generally saves the lives and properties of people by putting out the places caught by fires. This ironical tone of the writer is explicitly seen in the fiction itself. Bradbury's character and Montag's friend Clarisse McClellan who walks with Montag on his trip home asks about his profession. She puts a question into him how a person who destroys other people and their houses owning books illegally become a fireman. This question can be easily read in the first part of the fiction in a conversation between Montag and Clarisse. For example:

‘Do you mind if I ask? How long you have worked at being a fireman?’

‘Since I was twenty, ten years ago.’

‘Do you ever *read* any of the books you burn?’

He laughed. ‘That’s against the law!’ ‘Oh. Of course.’

‘It’s fine work. Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn ‘em to ashes, then burn the ashes. That’s our official

slogan.’

They walked still further and the girl said, ‘Is it true that long ago
fireman puts fires *out* instead of going to start them?’ (15)

Here, Bradbury has presented McClellan as an outgoing naturally cheerful, unorthodox and intuitive young woman. She is unpopular among peers and disliked by teachers for asking “why” instead of “how” and focusing on nature rather than in technology. A few days after their first meeting, she disappears without any explanation, although Mildred, Montag’s wife, tells Montag that Clarisse was hit by a speeding car and that her family left following her death. Furthermore, David Seed in his research paper entitled “The Flight from the Good Life: “*Fahrenheit 451*” in context of Postwar American Dystopias”, supports that Bradbury posits his hero as an ironical hero. He clarifies that “Montag clearly functions as a satirical means for Bradbury to question the impetus of consumerism and passages like the one just quoted estrange Montag from an environment he has been taking for granted” (232). He is also in a position that Montag is an ironical character created by Bradbury to satire the American consumerism culture of that time.

In the fiction, it seems that Bradbury has created this supporting character, Clarisse McClellan, just to satirize the scene going on through her. He, on the one hand, satirizes the profession of Montag and disliking the then technologically developed society on the other as Montag falls in love with her who prefers nature to technology. In this way, Bradbury’s hero Montag is presented as ironical hero in the fiction.

Moreover, James F. Scott, too, presents this novel as a satirical text. He views this text as it is founded upon paradox. He reviews this text as “only a man with a delicate sense of irony could do *Fahrenheit 451* as a motion picture, for the project is

founded upon paradox. Ray Bradbury's apocalyptic novel protests against the triumph of the image industries over the written word, the defeat of the book by the media” (105). He suggests that the reader should read this text with the delicate sense of irony as its primary sense is the same. He also focuses that it is a protest against the conquest of the industries developed due to the advancement in science and technology over the written word.

A critique Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, classifies heroes in five different modes and places such hero in the fifth mode as a hero in ironical mode. This hero is inferior to ordinary men in power and intelligence. In his model, the fictional modes are determined by the hero's specific roles and conditions in the fictional world, a manifestation of the real world. He explains the hero in ironical mode as:

If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the *ironic* mode. This is still true when the reader feels that he is or might be in the same situation, as the situation is being judged by the norms of a greater freedom. (34)

Hero who is presented generally inferior in power or intelligent to normal human beings is placed in the ironic mode by Frye. Such hero is looked down on a scene if bondage, frustration and absurdity. Bradbury's fiction *Fahrenheit 451* has both the elements and described above: the extreme situation of scrutiny where the freedom of normal human beings enjoying reading books or keeping them home is censored by the fire-station and the less powerful hero both in physical ability and mental intelligence.

Montag is very naive in the fiction. He has been starting his job since he was twenty and has continued it for ten years. “And then Clarisse McClellan said: ‘Do you mind if I ask? How long you have worked at being a fireman?’ ‘Since I was twenty, ten years ago’” (15). He is working as a fireman in the extreme environment where human beings are not allowed to keep the books and read them. It is against the law to keep or read them. “‘Do you ever *read* any of the books you burn?’ He laughed. ‘That’s against the law!’” (15). His job is to burn the books and the houses where the books are illegally kept. He is so unintelligent that he does not even know it is basic human right to enjoy reading books. He is incessantly burning the books and is feeling happy in his job. “It was a pleasure to burn. It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and *changed*” (9). He does not seem to be kept at the work by force but is there on his own interest.

Frye further elucidates the writers’ motive of creating the hero of ironic mode in their fiction. In doing so, he contrasts the sophisticated to naïve irony. Bradbury’s irony can be taken as naïve irony he putting forth through his hero Montag.

Sophisticated and naïve irony can be differentiated as follows:

The ironic fiction-writer . . . deprecates himself and . . . pretends to know nothing, even that he is ironic. . . . pity and fear are not raised in ironic art: they are reflected to the reader from the art. . . . Irony, as a mode, is born from the low mimetic; it takes life exactly as it finds it. . . . Irony is naturally a sophisticated and the chief difference between sophisticated and naïve irony is that the naïve ironist calls attention to the fact that he is being ironic, whereas sophisticated irony merely states, and lets the reader add the ironic tone himself.

(40-41)

In this way, it can be said that Bradbury, in *Fahrenheit 451*, has created Montag to put naïve irony by creating the real world in fiction of that time. The censorship of the American government is shown in an extreme form in the fiction. Satirizing the society through the modern hero is the practice of modern fiction writers. An anti-hero is the form of such modern hero created by the modern writers.

Anti-hero is a literary device used by writers for a prominent character in a play or book that has characteristics opposite to that of a conventional hero.

The protagonist is generally admired for his bravery, strength, charm, ingenuity and many more while an anti-hero is typically clumsy, unsolicited, and unskilled and has both good and bad qualities. The origin of this literary device is marked in 1714 but there have been literary figures who believe that the concept of an anti-hero existed well before that. Recently the usage of anti-hero in films and fictions has increased and became bolder than ever. This practice is admired by the audience and readers which encourages the writers and film makers to continue it in their works.

Skillfully used anti-hero can serve a great purpose. And anti-hero brings the spice and flavor to a script that an ordinary hero-villain format cannot. The more secular approach to the idea of using anti-hero shows that it has much more potential as compared to the conventional style. It can be used to represent many things at the same time such as social flaws, human frailties and political culture.

An anti-hero is usually given the most prominent role after the protagonist and is represented as an amalgamation of both good and evil. Instead of having two different people to represent two extremes, an anti-hero combines both into one person and thus shows the real human nature.

Moreover, in modern society when we are presented with a character that is overly righteous and upright, we find it too good to be true. The social turmoil that the

entire world as a community has been facing recently has disposed us to be skeptical of almost everything. The greatness that a conventional antagonist shows is something we do not witness in society, which is why we find it far from reality. Suffering and sorrow are a part of human life. So, we relate better to a character that has suffered through life and has both good and bad sides than a character that is only seen doing good.

Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, a critique, mentions that the fiction writers are able to trace the human qualities in the fiction along with the span of time. No human being can be without flaws and such human, with both types of characters, is traced in the works of fiction by the modern writers. He insists:

If heroes of fiction were endowed with the power of sensation, they would, no doubt, be oppressed with a similar consciousness of pre-existence. . . . Environments may change, and are continually changing; and a certain modification in the hero's external guise and speech and sentiment may be the result of what we call "modern improvement." . . . The fundamental traits of human nature, transmitted by inheritance from generation to generation, seem capable of but a limited amount of variation, and it would seem as if the novelists had already reached the limit. (694)

The above extract focuses that the fiction writers with the change in the human traits pertaining to time are also able to change the limitation of the features of their characters in their works. With the change in environment due to the advancement brought up by the development of science and technology, the human' thought, living style, guise, speech and sentiment have changed. And so are the characters in the fictions created by the modern writers.

The fiction shows censorship created by the government in reading and keeping books. It is against the law to keep books at home or read them. One who is caught of such guilt get one's books and even the house burnt. The fiction was written in the 1950s with the setting of some centuries later. The story portrays the extreme form of censorship of the American government against common people's right to freedom. The protagonist Montag who is presented as an anti-hero dislikes the scientific advancement and wishes to go back to nature. On her research paper, "The Conflict between Technology and Nature in *Fahrenheit 451*", Emi Koyama concludes that "Overall, the book traces Montag's flight from the dangerous mechanical world of the city to the traditional haven of the country. Then he escapes into nature, where he feels that he becomes a part of the natural world" (37). Through his anti-hero Montag, Bradbury satirizes the extreme scrutiny of the government caused by advancements of scientific tools and technologies. He also advocates for the democratic nature by creating the modern anti-hero in the fiction.

The fiction is also a satire on change of technologies since 1950s. The author is bemoaning the loss of many literary writers because of the advancements of science and technology. Benjamin S. Lawson on the review of this book critiques:

Fahrenheit 451 itself attacks in the mindless consumerism of characters like Mrs. Montag. Bloom does, however, touch upon a telling detail which reminds us that technologies have changed since the 1950s, that conventional print and oral traditions are no longer the only relevant media. He bemoans the emphasis on software and complains that "if you cannot read Shakespeare and his peers, then you will forfeit memory, and if you cannot remember, then you will not be

able to think" (1) even though the characters deprived of books are the memorizers and preservers in Bradbury's novel. (95)

Here, Lawson focuses on Bradbury's lamentation of the creativeness of the people of that time cause due to the censorship on the freedom of the people. Bradbury advocates for democracy and stays against the censorship as it causes mindlessness of the people. He warns the government that scrutiny causes the forfeit of memory which hampers regular thinking and memorizing.

On the same line, Evertt T. Moore, in "Intellectual Freedom" brings the author Bradbury to enquire the relevance of this book in the then American Society. Bradbury replies that the society that time was destroying the society itself in the shadow of the advancement of science. Moore moves his pen as:

We recently asked Mr. Bradbury if the future of civilization would look any less bleak to him if he were writing his book today. His answer was as follows: "When I wrote my novel *Fahrenheit 451* during the years from 1949 to 1953, we were living at the heart of what is known now as the McCarthy era. We were very close to panic and wholesale book-burning. I never believed we would go all out and destroy ourselves in this fashion. I have always believed in the power of our American society to rectify error without having to resort to destruction. . . ." (403)

The conversation above concludes the essence of Bradbury writing his text. He rationalizes the context why he formed the book in the form of fiction. The time, he was living that period, is explained as "McCarthy" era which was very close to panic and book-burning. He, thus, justifies that he prepared this book to rectify the error of the then American society to resort the destruction.

Therefore, the author is concerned with the American society which was heading towards dystopia led by the advancement of science and technology from the nature-led society during the decades of 1940s and 50s. The society used to be censored by using the means of technology against the principle of democracy –right to freedom in one way or the other. Due to this very reason, the writer is satirizing the then American government through his literary work *Fahrenheit 451* by creating a modern fictional hero. His hero is different from the powerful and all-positive-features-bearing traditional hero. He is presenting his hero lower than a normal human being to arouse the sense of reality in his readers. Such type of hero is called an anti-hero in literature. The author is successful evoking his intended purpose through the same modern hero, that is, anti-hero.

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