

## The Theme of Alienation in Two Dystopian Novels: Brave New World and Fahrenheit 451

Eylem Altuntaş

Özyeğin University Çekmeköy Kampüsü Nişantepe Mah. Orman Sok. 34794 Çekmeköy  
İstanbul / Turkey

eylemaltuntash@gmail.com

**Keywords:** Dystopia, Alienation, Technology, Isolation, Outcast.

**Abstract.** Brave New World and Fahrenheit 451 are both about how the influence of technology affected mankind. Brave New World depicts a future where people are produced scientifically. Fahrenheit 451 is about a future where firemen start fires instead of extinguishing them, in order to burn books. Huxley's and Bradbury's novels are above all about the theme of alienation and people that are affected by it. The aim of this paper is to analyse the theme of alienation in Aldous Huxley's Brave New World and Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 from sociological and psychological viewpoints and to present evidence that support the paper's purpose.

### 1. Introduction

The search for one's authentic self is the main focus of 20th century literature, especially in future dystopias. Within these novels, technology, science and new means of communication are presented as dehumanizing and alienating sources. Instead of leading to a better world, scientific progress makes the world a worse place to live in, because the ones who have the power oppress the others in the name of creating or maintaining a stable society under their own absolute authority. In science fiction literature, there are three common types of styles of alienation: an individual's alienation from himself, his alienation from the society or the world he lives in, and his alienation from nature. In the modern age, an individual finds it difficult to be himself and becomes a stranger to himself. In addition, he becomes estranged from other people in the society he lives together with. There is no social attachment; human beings are very close to each other in modern world but feel remarkably alone at the same time. Also, since the stories take place in the modern machine age, the human beings are alienated from nature. In these two novels, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, people are alienated from each other and from their individuality. When compared, it is observed that they have some common features to give us a shared sense of alienation in both the period and its literature.

### 2. Features of Alienation in Both Novels

First of all, *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451* are both books set in the future. Both Huxley and Bradbury attempt to create a dystopia in which citizens are dehumanized and alienated by the state through technology. They warn contemporary society about the possible dangers of advanced technology, little value in human relationships and the ban on free intellectual thought. In both novels, people lost their sense of freedom and individuality; they are conditioned according to the wishes of the state. When we look at the concepts which are used for alienation in both novels, we see many

similarities.

## 2.1 Rejection of Family Values

One of the alienating factors in both novels is the rejection of family values. In *Brave New World*, individuals don't have parents since they are not born from their mothers but mass-produced in tubes scientifically. The point is to control the "quality" of the future generations. It aims to improve productivity using the assembly line and people working automatically without using their skills and brain much since the production process is standardized. They are produced faster but without souls. They lack the emotions and ability for critical thought that are essential to being human. Thus they are alienated from their true nature. Pregnancy is considered "obscene", and marriage is replaced by officially encouraged promiscuity. Being only with one person is absurd in this world. Family life is beyond reason and imagination. Furthermore, family relationships are believed to be dangerous and insane. They don't have parents and talking about parents is considered obscene. Father and mother words are considered swears. Paden asserts that the reason why childbirth and parenthood is regarded this way is "because new citizens must be programmed so as to fit tightly into rigidly defined social roles" [1]. Byfield also comments on the reasons for the eradication of family in *Brave New World* stating that families "produce self-sacrifice, unpredictable idealism, strong personal identity, intellectual independence, unbreakable personal alliances and (worst of all) a spiritual vision that can transcend and transform human society" [2]. One of the reasons for the eradication of parenthood is that parents are the biggest influence on children. They may disrupt the children's point of view easily which threatens the stability of the government. To be able to direct the populace easily, the government must be the only one which has an effect on children. Creating people through decanting is also advantageous economically because it takes time for a person to be physically capable of working in natural ways. In the novel, albeit not yet successful, they are working on trying to find ways to create individuals capable of working at an earliest age. Individuals fully-grown at six and a half were created at Mombasa, however they were too stupid to do even the simplest tasks. In *Fahrenheit 451*, although babies are born from their mothers, parenthood doesn't exist. Children live with their parents only three days a month and the rest of the time they are at school. Giving birth is thought to be necessary only for the continuity of race and it is preferred by Caesarean section since a baby is not worth all the pain that occurs in natural birth. In the works of Huxley and Bradbury, parents don't play role in the education of children. Any kind of emotional relationships are forbidden so as to keep the individual under control. They live alienated and isolated from any emotional contact. In *Brave New World*, this alienation is clearly perceived in the Director's reaction when John calls him father by kneeling in front of him: "Pale, wild-eyed, the Director glared about him in an agony of bewildered humiliation. My father! The laughter, which had shown signs of dying away, broke out again more loudly than ever. He put his hands over his ears and rushed out of the room" (132). Upon being called father, he feels humiliated and runs away in shame. Similarly, in *Fahrenheit 451*, this alienation is illustrated in Mrs. Phelps' talk about her children as if they are one of the chores: "I plunk the children in school nine days out of ten. I put up with them when they come home three days a month; it's not bad at all. You heave them into the 'parlour' and turn the switch. It's like "washing clothes; stuff laundry in and slam the lid" (93). In both novels, people are conditioned not to have any emotional contact since strong feelings break individual stability and so the stability of society and the state. People are alienated from their human nature and even their basic instincts such as a mother's love for her baby.

## 2.2 Ban on Books & Sacrificing Beauty and Truth

Another striking similarity between these two novels in terms of features of alienation is ban on books. In both societies, books of the past are destroyed so as not to disrupt the stability of society. Knowing and happiness do not go hand in hand. Reading is not allowed anymore, because books raise

awareness and makes people ask questions that will lead to question the state and threaten the stability of society. The government doesn't want to face this danger. In both societies, beauty and truth are only superficial and sacrificed for happiness and stability.

In *Brave New World*, books are banned since they are regarded as dangerous and diverting; they might undesirably decondition one of people's reflexes and now nobody cares enough to read. The State needs intellectuals, clever Alphas to direct the people, but at the same time those same Alphas mustn't question the system. That's why they need intellectuals but intellectuals without curiosity and critical thought. Mustapha Mond, Resident Controller of Western Europe, fears that these values "might easily decondition the more unsettled minds among the higher castes, make them lose their faith in happiness and the World State" (154). So, all these values are eliminated because Alphas are "frightfully" clever. They are extremely clever so it is also frightening. If this cleverness is not controlled, it may cause trouble for the stability of the State. Instead of art and books, there are electromagnetic golf courses, feelies (movies in which the audience feels what happens on screen), television and synthetic music. They have replaced the old books about spiritual relief through love or religion. Art, religion and science were completely removed or changed to such a degree that they cannot be recognized anymore. They are suppressed because it's easier to control people without these values for their own and society's good. They all lead you to think about the world, yourself and everything around you. They make you think and question. Şeran claims that these entertainment technologies in the novel "cause mindless contentment, cultural emptiness and political passivity" [3]. Absence of high art makes people alienated from their inner thoughts by removing their ability to think and question. Lowenthal claims that by abandoning the high art, "[f]rom the realm of beauty man walks into the realm of entertainment" [4]. So stability must be protected at all cost in the World State. O'Neill claims that "Huxley's citizens are essentially brain-dead – or, at least, soul-dead" [5]. Since people have no soul anymore, high art fades away. In *Fahrenheit 451*, books are believed to contain painful and conflicting half-truths. "Because books disturb people by posing questions and contradicting each other" [6], people want the books to be burned and it is firemen's job to destroy them. Burning books represent the destruction of knowledge and freedom of thought. According to the chief of the firemen, Captain Beatty, burning books is a way to make people equal and firefighters are "the official sensors, judges, and executors" (56) of the society, protecting the citizens' happiness. This happiness doesn't mean freedom in any sense of the word. Happiness means pleasure for people as Beatty states "[t]hat's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation?" (56). So pleasure giving tools such as televisions, seashells or speedy cars in this society are designed to help people avoid any kind of intense emotions or critical thought. Then they become shallow, indifferent and conforming members of society. They live for pleasure and aren't bothered by being alienated from their human character while forsaking everything for it. Technology alienates people from nature and books; and people start to spend their time in front of television rather than outside in nature or reading books.

### 2.3 Conditioning

In modern age, "man is forced to choose between nature and culture, and that to enjoy the securities of civilization, he must necessarily renounce his impulses" [7]. The individual in this conflict feels discontented from himself since he has forsaken his individuality for a civilized life, thus becoming alienated from himself. In both novels, people are conditioned through technology against their nature in order to ensure consumerism and social conformity.

In *Brave New World*, there is a caste-like society which is accomplished through physical and mental conditioning. Electrical shock and hypnopaedia, or sleep learning, are employed to make people believe that the state is necessary to ensure social conformity. Babies are given an electrical shock if they crawl towards flowers and books which are dangers to state's conformity socially and

economically. Alarm bells and electric shocks teach them to stay away from books and flowers, which prevent people from fully participating in a consumerist society. As the Director explains, “[t]hey’ll grow up with what the psychologists used to call an ‘instinctive’ hatred for books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned. They’ll be safe from books and botany all their lives” (17). If people like flowers or books, they stop spending money. As Mond states, “[y]ou can’t consume much if you sit still and read books” (42). Meckier points out the fact that the World State “creates good by attaching pleasure to certain objects and actions. It designates evil by connecting them with pain... The only criterion for morality in Ford’s London is whether or not an act or item promotes the general happiness” [8]. General happiness is equated with consumerism in the novel. Only the acts and objects which are potential to provide money are valuable. The World State uses electrical shock on babies, and thus changes their natural reflexes, alienating them from their instincts. Books are also dangerous and diverting since they have the potential to decondition the people from higher castes and make them aware of things. Hypnopedia is called “the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time” (23). In hypnopedia, people are made to listen to the rules of the society while sleeping, so they internalize them and don’t ask questions. While sleeping, people are conditioned to love their class and the job they’ll do according to their class, to know that each class is necessary for the society and not to envy other classes. This is again necessary to achieve state’s conformity. Each person is exposed to hypnopedia in their sleep to have opinions about other classes and those classes’ purpose in life; so that “individual judgments correspond to social requirements” [1]. Since each person is conditioned to be happy in his class, there is no hostility between classes: “all men are physic-chemically equal” (63). In her thesis, Şeran describes hypnopedia as “the moralizing and socializing force of the masses” [3]. The government doesn’t want anyone to question the state and their lives so that the government can control its citizens. Through hypnopedia, people’s natural feelings and the ability to think and question are eliminated. The purpose behind all this conditioning according to the Director in the World State is: “That is the secret of happiness and virtue-liking what you’ve got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny” (12). Via electric shock and hypnopedia, people are alienated not only from their nature but from themselves. Babies are conditioned to hate roses (and nature, in general) and books through electric shock and they are conditioned to belong to a class and love what they are supposed to do.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, advertisements give people false needs and make them consume to meet their new nonessential needs. Since it’s an industrialized world, the wheels must turn. Advertisements distract people from nature and their natural needs. The media is everywhere and repetitive in order to make people react the same way automatically, then there would be no risk of individualism. Having televisions, interactive wall-sized televisions, on all four walls of the houses is expensive and something everyone wishes in the novel. By creating demand, the government makes people work to earn money to buy these things. Alienation results from consumption and the manipulation of needs by the mass media. Capitalism controls people and destroys individual freedom, creativity and thought. Objects dominate people by eliminating individual thought and people cannot decide on their true needs anymore. In a society where everything is seen as commodity, alienation is inevitable. This “mindless consumerism” [9] is depicted in the character of Mildred, Montag’s wife. Mildred wants a television on the fourth wall which costs the one third of Montag’s yearly salary. As Baudrillard argues, consumption is the main reason of alienation [10]. This technological object dominates people by eliminating individual thought and divesting them of their human qualities; thus alienation becomes inevitable. Televisions also symbolize propaganda. Through them, the government spreads its propaganda amongst people; create an unreal world to manipulate the opinions of people, which makes people alienated from reality. One example of this is when the police fail to catch the fugitive Montag, they blame someone else walking on the street and claim that they have caught the fugitive for people, enabling them to sleep comfortably and maintaining the illusion of the government’s power.

## 2.4 Advanced Technology & Science

Products of advanced technology and science are other alienating tools in both novels. What is accomplished using soma in *Brave New World* is done through television in *Fahrenheit 451*. As quoted by Robert MacNeil, "Television is the soma of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*" [11].

People in *Brave New World* are alienated from their nature through soma in the sense that they don't have real feelings or a real life. In addition to being unaware of what people think and feel about anything, or what they like or don't like, they are strangers even to themselves. They are not aware of their own feelings and they don't think deeply about anything. They are in a kind of unreal or an imaginary world through soma. Laurenzano describes soma as "render[ing] people unable to feel genuine emotion... subordinat[ing] the interests of the individual, rob[b]ing him of the power of thought and feeling, and essentially render[ing] him unable to deal with life as it really exists (and thus even to be fully human)" [12]. Schermer agrees that "soma stands for alienation, de-humanization and superficial mind-numbing pleasure...soma promotes a superficial hedonism and causes alienation from the kind of 'real human life' that we know" [13]. By using soma, they are taken away from pain of real life and take holidays in the mind. It "raise[s] a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds" [12]. They are unaware of what's going on. The point is this. If they don't think and question anything, it's easier to control them. They don't even know their own identity, how they feel, what they think, or like. In using soma, the point is to make people like what has to be done. Citizens regularly use soma and experience an artificial happiness. They are in a kind of unreal or an imaginary world. They are not aware of their own feelings and they don't think deeply about anything. The point is this. If they don't think and question anything, it's easier to control them. Thus, they are alienated from their human emotions and life itself.

However, in *Fahrenheit 451*, it is rather to make people believe that leisure is the real point of life and it is accomplished through the addiction of television. Citizens lose their connection with real life and nature. Televisors demonstrate people's obsession with technology. Wilensky claims that "[w]e must first grasp the fact that the mass media are the core of American leisure and that television has become the core of media exposure" [14]. There is a superficial unity in society and also loneliness. People are so close to each other but so much alone at the same time, alienated from each other, which is a problem of modern age. People don't have intimate relationships with their own family. Instead, they have close relationships with "the uncles, the aunts, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that [live] in those walls" (41). As a result, "[n]obody knows anyone" (14). With televisors on all walls, Mildred is alienated from both society and her husband. They barely talk since she communicates with the characters on televisor more than with her husband. People in the novel watch mindless TV series such as "Clara Dove five-minute romance" or "the gibbering pack of tree-apes that [say] nothing, nothing, nothing and [say] it loud, loud, loud" (41). This creates a society where people "all say the same things" (28). According to Grossman, "[t]he purpose of this mass programming is ...to perpetuate a state of false equality" [15]. As Captain Beatty says "[w]e must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal... , but everyone *made* equal" (55). In fact, everyone is made the same. No one has individual thought, individual feelings, or individual freedom. Individuality is destroyed; alienated citizens are created by media. Jameson claims that "people are immobilized by their media satisfactions and spend their lives in what is called bed-ecstasy, artificially imbibing media pleasures" [16]. The media in general aims to keep the citizens happy and ignorant of the facts. They keep talking about a war going on which no one knows anything about and how successfully they repel the enemies even if that's not the case. The televisor is also used to show the police chase and give wrong information which makes people sleep safe, thus creating a fictional reality. One example of this is when the police fail to catch the fugitive Montag, they blame someone else walking on the street and

claim that they have caught the fugitive for people, enabling them to sleep comfortably. Another example is that people who are not aware of what's going on in reality remain in the city while the city is bombed at the end of the novel. Spencer argues that the media is to blame for, remarking that:

[t]he ignorant oral-culture [in which culture is transmitted orally since there is no written literature] citizens, radios tampered securely in their ears, remain in the city to be blown up by an enemy they could easily have escaped, if it weren't for the fact that their monolithic media preferred to keep them ignorant and happy. (335)

Since the ongoing war is glorified and not covered honestly in media by the government, the citizens talk about war as if it's a game, they don't understand the real meaning of war and the severity of death. War, the horrors of which are hidden, is reduced to a mindless entertainment by the media. In the novel, there is another technological object called seashell, which alienates people from themselves and from each other. These ear -thimble sized- radios are defined as "a hidden wasp" (9), "electronic bees" (16) and "a praying mantis" (45) to show that it's an unnatural man-made technological item that buzzes in the ear and prevents communication between people. So technology makes people anti-social and prevents people having any sort of real connection with others, thus making them alienated from each other. In this world, if people are not watching their televisions, they are listening to their seashells. They are completely shut off to human communication. As a result, nobody really knows anyone. That's a world full of strangers. The seashell prevents people not only from listening to other people but also from their inner thoughts and feelings, thus alienating them from their human qualities. Because of technology, they don't have even one second to listen to themselves, to their heart or thoughts. They live in unreality as described with Millie drifted off to sea in the novel:

And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind. The room was indeed empty. 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. (10)

She is so miserable that she escapes from reality by putting her seashell in her ears, watching three-wall televisions or taking sleeping pills. Thus, she stays unaware of her dissatisfaction.

In both novels, people sacrifice their ability to think and feel deeply in order to have a comfortable life. Science, technology and media are used to make people believe that state is necessary for social conformity.

## 2.5 Crisis of Identity & Inauthenticity

Some characters in both novels suffer from a crisis of identity, causing their alienation from themselves and the society they live in. They fail to function properly both internally and externally.

An example of this inauthenticity of self in *Brave New World* is Bernard, who tries to become a member of the system by dictating orders to his inferiors while criticizing people's conditioning by the World State. Helmholtz tries to regain his authenticity by attempting to write a poem about solitude in order to find his hidden self and to prove his beingness.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Millie is preoccupied with TV, and tries to conceal her guilt, irresponsibility, and inauthenticity by using sleeping pills. She relies on pills in order to distance herself from the pain of

consciousness. Her excitement about participation in a screenplay stems from her subconscious effort to revive her own authenticity. On the other hand, Clarisse is alienated from society from the very beginning. She depends on her senses while others on technology. Lost authenticity is hoped to be regained with the group of intellectuals in *Fahrenheit 451* in contrast to that of *Brave New World*. They suggest that it is better for people to face their flaws and accept their guilt in order for life to go on as stated by Granger, the leader of the group: "Come on now, we're going to go build a mirror-factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them". According to Granger, every human in the city has to be bombed in order to be born out of his ashes, in order to be real and find their authenticity. It is worth noting that McGiveron agrees that "we need this self-examination to help avoid self-destruction" [17]. To get rid of alienation and stop making the same mistakes again and again, they should first look at themselves in the mirror. They should discover the shortcomings in themselves and then in society. Even if these shortcomings such as pride, ambition or insensitivity cannot be fully overcome, they should face, accept and try to fix them as much as possible. To judge others, first you should judge yourself. As Socrates says, you should "Know thyself" meaning examine yourself, question who you are, what's your place in the world and then you can create a better world.

## 2.6 What Happens to the Misfits?

Although life is designed to distract people from asking questions, we have some characters whose beliefs don't conform to the norms of society. However, if anyone starts to question the purpose of such a life and look for answers in the books or in nature, they become threats since their questions might cause other people to ask questions; and it is dangerous for the stability of the government. Therefore people who express their individuality become either outcasts or in real danger.

In *Brave New World*, when these people are detected, they are sent away so as not to corrupt others. So Bernard and Helmholtz are exiled to an island.

But in *Fahrenheit 451* there is a mechanical hound, an evil man-made creature, which kills the people who don't obey the rules set by the government. Guy Montag has to flee far away from the city in order not to be caught by the mechanical hound. What happens to Clarisse stays a mystery and there is a possibility that she has been killed. She is a real danger in the eyes of the government because she doesn't want to know how but why a thing is done.

## 2.7 Who to Blame?

In both novels, it is the people themselves who are responsible for their alienation both internally and externally. Freethinking is abandoned in favour of conformity and life is degraded for fun. In *Brave New World*, as Mustapha Mond explains, it was the citizens who allowed the government control of their lives; it wasn't a top-down decision. "People were ready to have even their appetites controlled then. Anything for a quiet life" (201). During the Nine Year's War, which involved chemical and biological bombs and a great economic collapse, people are so helpless that they allow the government to control everything, in exchange for a quiet and comfortable life. Likewise, in *Fahrenheit 451*, Captain Beatty also explains that it didn't come from the government down. Faber also explains to Montag that it was people who abandoned a life of high culture, preferring to remain unaware of the world; and now the government is just giving them what they want. "The public itself stopped reading of its own accord. You firemen provide a circus now and then at which buildings are set off and crowds gather for the pretty blaze, but it's a small sideshow indeed, and hardly necessary to keep things in line ... People are having fun" (78). For Heidegger, alienation occurs when we let others direct our lives. If an individual cannot make his own decisions and doesn't ask questions about his existence, then he or she becomes alienated. We become alienated when we don't accept our free will

or the responsibility of the consequences of our actions. It's our choices which lead our lives. If we reject this responsibility, alienation happens. People in both novels can't cope with the consequences of their own actions and decisions and let the government control their lives, alienating from their human nature.

### 3. Conclusion

In the 20th century, we see that man sacrifices individuality and deep moral values for the hope of a better future. This alienation, inauthenticity and death of moral values were depicted in many science fiction novels. In the books *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451*, the alienation of man with men is clearly depicted and people are warned about the consequences of their ignorance. Both novels try to raise people's awareness about both the state's abuse of power and the use of technology at the expense of human individuality. Hoping to have a comfortable and stress-free life with the help of technology and science, man agrees to give the reins to the government and sacrifice their human characteristics such as love and freedom. Human interaction has lost its meaning since it's replaced by technology. Both dystopias claim that stability without emotions, individualism and free thought just leads to a darker and inhuman world.

The popularity of these books does not rule out the possibility that such a society will exist in the future, though. The state of people is not about to change, and their ignorance will continue regardless of the harshness of the wake up calls issued.

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