

“Of course i’m happy”: an analysis of *Animal farm* (Orwell, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 1953) dystopian modernity

“É claro que sou feliz”: uma análise da modernidade distópica de *Animal farm* (Orwell, 1945) e *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 1953)

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ABSTRACT: Utopia and dystopia, providing readers with diverging possibilities future, have always given them tools to rethink society. This is so because, even though texts are inserted within a context, they are also empowered with the possibility of shaping new contexts – literature is informed and informs reality, working as a receptacle and as a response to social and political turmoil. Bearing that in mind, this study aims at making out how *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) react to the epistemes with which we, as readers, come equipped. What both novellas demonstrate is that there is the possibility of accepting or the possibility of fighting – as long as we become aware that the latter option is a feasible one. Addressing issues such as that of subjects’ alienation and/or of their lack of critical abilities to interact fruitfully with one another as to change their condition, these narratives are a glimpse of the political arena whereto literary discourses might be taken. After all, to think politically about literary productions might be a choice, but the fact that literature per se is a political institution is not.

Keywords: *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945); *Fahrenheit* (BRADBURY, 1953); Dystopia.

RESUMO: Utopias e distopias, trazendo aos leitores possibilidades distintas de futuro, sempre nos ofereceram ferramentas para repensar a sociedade. Isto porque, apesar dos textos estarem inseridos em seus devidos contextos, eles são também empoderados com a possibilidade de dar forma à novos contextos – a literatura é informada e informa a realidade, operando como receptáculo e resposta à comoções sociais e políticas. Tendo isto em mente, este estudo analisa como *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) e *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) reagem aos epistemes com os quais nós, leitores, viemos equipados. O que ambas novelas demonstram é que existe a possibilidade de aceitação e de subversão – isso quando estamos cientes que a segunda opção é de fato factível. Abordando questões como a alienação dos sujeitos e a ausência de suas habilidades críticas para interagir socialmente de maneira frutífera em vistas de alterar sua condição, as duas narrativas nos dão indicações da arena política para a qual discursos literários podem ser trazidos. Afinal, pensar politicamente acerca de produções literárias pode até ser uma opção, mas o fato de que a literatura consiste, por si só, em uma instituição política não é.

Palavras-chave: *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945); *Fahrenheit* (BRADBURY, 1953); Distopia.

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out that one country at which Humanity is always landing; and when humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.

OSCAR WILDE, 1891

1 Introduction: The Crumbling Ground of Utopia

Since the conception of what we today understand as literature, the image of an ideal and perfect society has motivated a vast array of authors to devise new projects for the concoction of future social arrangements. As my epigraph implies, people tend to depend on idealisations in order to move on – to any direction, society walks because each of its members believe they might get to an ideal position, an ideal place. Moreover, political restructurings are – at least conceptually – generally inspired and justified by an endeavour to get to utopia; social movements envisage utopia, and, when things get better, they do because we are able to idealise them. Literature has, of course, helped us throughout these processes; inasmuch as, from the moment literary works were written, “[a]uthors have often searched for the perfect life, as described in the Biblical Garden of Eden, where man and woman dwell in an idyllic paradise without want, and in peace with nature and God” (YOUNG, 2013, p. 9). It is precisely due to the idyllic nature of utopia, and the apocalyptic one of its opposite (dystopia), that both sorts of fiction are traditionally taken as far too impalpable. Given their implausibility, literary Criticism often fails to acknowledge the importance and strength of utopian and dystopian fiction, notwithstanding the fact that their connection and impact on history are, it seems, rather unquestionable. It is important to state, nonetheless, that such connection does not take place perchance; the relevance of utopia and dystopia emerges given the role such narratives play during precise moments of Western history and development. Still in

the words of Young (2013, p. 13), one of the consequences of colonising enterprises was the fact that the world was “no longer an infinite realm of undiscovered territory. The locale of utopia was thus transformed from as yet undiscovered distant lands, to places where alternative societies were to be constructed in the present”. These ideas of alternative societies would ultimately be inevitably “projected into the future with attendant desirable and nightmarish visions of what was to come” (YOUNG, 2013, p. 14).

Bearing that in mind, the overall context of this study consists precisely in the Western tradition whereby utopias and dystopias have been conceived, developed, and ultimately established as foundational literary forms. Lives have been moulded vis-à-vis the desirable and/or nightmarish visions of what is to come – human society has, through the master narrative of illusion, learned to be afraid and aspiring at the very same time. One could say, perhaps, that two of the most prominent utopian narratives are Plato’s *The Republic* (380 BC) and Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). “Plato’s dream of order and rationality and More’s neatly constructed traveler’s tale have given way to a new form of narrative predicated on disorder, freedom, and intuition” (FUNCK, 1998, p. 76). Having thus such tradition of utopian narratives discussing the issue of freedom and intuition, the specific context of my analysis sets forth a scrutiny on books whose development move to the contrary direction: Orwell’s novella *Animal Farm* (1945), and Bradbury’s novella *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). My reading and analysis of both narratives shall focus on the converging and diverging aspects of their developments in what concerns the transformation of a utopian ideal into a dystopian environment in each setting. It would not be wise to state these are analogous narratives; but neither are they antithetical – their reading is per se enough for us to find out the analytical parallels that might be drawn, but not sufficient for one not to make out some foundational distinctions between them. According to Kennan (2014, p. 7), “while Bradbury asserts a positive view of individual

freedom in the face of oppression, Orwell concedes that there is going to be struggle present”. It is nonetheless far too early for us either to endorse or question Kennan’s assertion; my following analysis might provide us with an answer in what concerns the issues of struggle and oppression as they operate within the narratives.

I have not, though, yet provided us with an overall goal for such analysis. This would be to provide some level of restitution of social and aesthetic value to dystopian fiction in terms of literary analysis by testing how it informs Western history and offers a sage critique towards it. In the end, and as Lacan suggests, “[a]ll sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors” (1977, p. 201). Mirrors, however, does not provide the original image with a perfect copy of it – it is nothing but a simulacrum, an imperfect emulation of something that can never be integrally repeated. Lacan is right; and one could easily say that literature works in society as a mirror does in our homes – both provide us with imitations, with images responsible not simply to inform us about things we know are there, but also to make us aware of other details we have not noticed in the first place. It is through imitation, then, that the original image is transformed into something else. “[T]he effect of literature is essentially to deform rather than to imitate. If the image corresponds wholly to the reality (as in a mirror), it becomes identical to it and ceases to be an image at all” (EAGLETON, 2010, p. 47). Hence my specific goal, which is to analyse the development of *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) highlighting how they reflect and reconstruct the given contexts whence they were deployed. Diverging images of reality may, it seems, help us deploy new possibilities of reality; utopia and dystopia, by exaggerating on our desires and distresses, has always given us tool to look at society differently – allowing us to realise that such exaggeration does not pertain to the world of sole delusion and reverie. In the end, if these utopian and dystopian narratives do make sense,

it is because they are based on material and objective epistemes. There is no novelty herein, in this sense, insomuch as “the earliest division of poetry occurred when the graver spirits reproduced noble actions and praises of heroes. In contrast, spirits of a more trivial sort, who reproduced the actions of meaner persons, composed satires in order to criticise them” (PASOLD, 1999, p. 45). If one wishes to think in terms of analogy, it would be possible to compare the world of utopia with the noble actions and praises of heroes (as such sort of narrative emphasises human qualities and values) and the world of dystopia with the satires that criticise the former condition. There is no way, therefore, to think of this literary material without thinking of intertextuality which, in the words of Bauman (2007, p. 59), is the “sphere of postmodernism where literature encounters critical theory”.

Intertextuality, consisting in this sphere where literature and critical theory are placed in a dialectic position, takes us back to the structure of my research, which shall test two hypotheses. The first is that every social arrangement provides us with both utopian and dystopian possibilities; and the dystopian tradition in fiction is a response not simply to an exaggerated, overstated and/or impossible future (never-to-be-reached). It is, on the contrary, a reflection of our deepest fears and a warning regarding upcoming prospects. Hence my second hypothesis: as it happened within Western literary history, both novellas develop, initially, a Utopian image (More, Plato, Bible) which is gradually replaced by a dystopian one – even though, at the end, Bradbury seems to allow some level of optimism to emerge in what concerns human nature, different from Golding and Orwell. My point, thus, is that the objects of my research consist in narratives whose requests are tantamount to our social demands; to the moment wherein subjects are gradually noticing how “the ground is crumbling especially in places where it seemed most familiar, most solid, and closest to us, to our bodies, to our everyday gestures” (FOUCAULT, 1976, p. 30). Where the ground

has not crumbled yet, it is far from being as safe and concrete as it once seemed to be; and that is precisely why new lenses are required for subjects behavioural repositioning given their dystopian possibilities – and how my objects of research react to such need is to be scrutinised during my analysis. Theretofore, my research requires a robust array of analytical tools; and, among many possibilities, I shall rely basically on the following: Jameson’s (1981) view on the schizophrenic text; Kristeva’s (1966) intertextuality; Young’s (2013) definition of utopia and dystopia; Bachelard’s (1958) concept of applied rationalism; and Eagleton’s (2010) parallel between politics and literary theory. Even though the political issues related to the narratives analysed herein are not exactly the same if compared to our contemporary moment, I am quite certain they help us understand pretty much of what has been going on today. After all, “to understand both the past and the present more deeply [...] contributes to our present liberation” (EAGLETON, 2010, p. xiii).

Derrida (1992, p. 63) seems to endorse Eagleton’s view, affirming that for such awareness to be raised, literature plays a rather significant role as the literary “text both puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualisation”. That is to say that, even though texts are inserted within a context, they are also empowered with the possibility of shaping new contexts – literature is informed and informs reality, working both as a receptacle and as a response to social and political turmoil. Of course, divesting literature of its fictional status would be analogous to divesting humans of their ability to breathe – i.e. what makes literature effective in practical terms is its practical uselessness, the fact that it operates within a subjective and imaginative realm, that it is not enslaved by a commitment to the truth. In this sense, Derrida continues, perhaps one could assume that “[l]iterature is an institution which consists in transgressing and transforming” (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 72). When one

thinks nonetheless of some bestsellers which, if you will, do not deserve to be mentioned, it becomes though rather complicated to say all literature “transgresses” or “transforms”. As a matter of fact, profitable books are in general conceived as to move to the contrary direction – they are written as to reinforce epistemes, rather than to change them. To transform people’s perception is both troublesome and time consuming; it is much easier to please them if writers simply choose to validate whatever they might have in mind. This is why Eagleton (2010, p. 109) seems to articulate a soberer idea of literature, as he poses that literary texts might actually be either code-productive or code-transgressive; that is, “they may teach us new ways of reading [...or...] just reinforce the ones with which we come equipped”. As to make out how *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) respond to the epistemes with which we, as readers, come equipped, the focus of my analysis is organised as follows. First I elaborate upon how, in the narratives, subjects suffer alienation through the withdrawal of their critical abilities. Then I shall guide my reading to the lack of subjects’ interaction as a political strategy vis-à-vis the paradox of functioning socially and/or antisocially. Finally, we get to Bradbury’s optimism vs. Orwell’s pessimism when it goes to the denouement of both narratives.

2 Discussion: The System is Always Right

Regardless of the fact that, in *Animal Farm* (1945), George Orwell’s critique has been overtly against Stalinism, he had strong reasons to believe that utopia would never be possible in a communist society, especially after fighting in the Spanish Civil War and being arrested by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (N.K.V.D) under the accusation of Trotskyism. Written in 1945 – i.e. that is, four years before 1984 (ORWELL,

1949), this novella allegorically exposes minutely and meticulously how dictatorial regimes, which were pretty much in vogue at those times, find ways to manipulate peoples’ lives. Although his main focus was Stalin, as just mentioned, the careful development of the novella’s characters might be easily applied to several other cases of government control – as our comparison shall demonstrate. *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) emulates the structure of political revolutions and shows how government corruption and thirst for power have not only obliterated the possibilities of improvements after the command of a region is assumed by a party based on equality but also made the situation of the common citizens, who eagerly endorsed the revolution, much worse. This is a rudimentary summary of both narratives herein analysed, whose premises are, to some extent, in parallel. What this basic organisation of both novellas seems to imply is the fact that, for every forward movement that improves the superficial quality of human life, there is a potential backward movement in the inner quality of such life – that is to say: enhancing one’s appearance would be synonymic to undermining one’s essence. The future of *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) is a little bit different from Orwell’s one; the novella, in a nutshell, elaborates upon a dystopian prospect wherein firemen no longer stop fire but make it start in order to burn books – which, in the tale, are prohibited. Bradbury writes this story in the very midst of the XX century, moment when the rapport between the two most powerful nations (U.S.A. and U.S.S.R) were rather tense. Notwithstanding both these nations’ endeavour to temporise, to protract an attempt at making amends with one another, the growing uneasiness was ubiquitous enough for both Orwell and Bradbury to elaborate upon the possible consequences of such political figure – each discussing the realities they apparently knew most.

What I mean is that, even though *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) takes place during a futuristic fictional war that lasts from the beginning until

the end of the story, Bradbury is actually fictionalising on the backdrop of war common to the context wherefrom he designed the narrative: which was the context of the Cold War (1947 - 1953). After the well-known historical events during Hitler’s regime when he ordered thousands of books to be destroyed, during World War II, Bradbury saw how that was being repeated in the U.S.A by Senator Joe McCarthy’s (1908-1957) discourse about forbidding communist books and even burning such material “if necessary”. His firemen appear in the novella as to incorporate such condition: as the underpinnings applied for guaranteeing that hazardous literary information would disappear, incorporating a body of employees that many politicians would love to have at that moment. In 1953 United States Senator Joseph McCarthy recited before his subcommittee and the press a list of supposedly pro-communist authors whose works his aide Roy Cohn found in the State Department libraries in Europe. The Eisenhower State Department bowed to McCarthy and ordered its overseas librarians to remove from their shelves material by any controversial persons, Communists, fellow travellers, etc., on behalf of American polity. Some libraries did indeed burn the newly forbidden books – so Bradbury’s dystopia was actually not that distant from reality whatsoever. Firemen work restlessly, their nights consist in their waiting for anonymous tips informing them about anyone who might be hiding books – and they have all sorts of technological aids to provide them with the necessary means to burn such books into ashes. In *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945), the animals also work endlessly, and, as it happens with the firemen, they are taught to have as much satisfaction in their work – regardless of how tiresome such work might be. Animals are told that, if they work with discipline one day in the future they are going to retire in order to enjoy calm and workless days and eventually die peacefully: “Snowball did not deny that to build it [the windmill] would be a cult business, but he maintained that it could all be done in a year. And thereafter, he declared, so

much labor would be saved that the animals would only need to work three days a week” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 20). Our society may be very distinct from that controlled by the pigs Snowball and Napoleon, but the value given to work operates likewise.

In both narratives, there is then this similar picture: that of people overworking while they also leave behind any possibility of developing their critical abilities – a woe to any of us who might get how this condition is close to ours. The reason to work is to have more money, of course, and more money to do more things, but is it worth it? Let us a look at how this cycle is developed within Bradbury’s (1953, p. 8) novella, first of all. The protagonist of the story is named Montag, a fireman that is married to Mildred – a character whose alienation gradually starts to bother him, as he grows conscious of his condition and ultimately revolts against it. Getting home after a day at work, he asks his wife what she is watching in the television, and her answer is the following: “There are these people named Bob and Ruth and Helen... it’s really fun. It will be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed. How long you figure before we save up and get the fourth wall torn out and a fourth wall-TV put in?” Afterwards, he would ask her again what the film is about, and her response would be “I just told you”; that is, her alienation is so considerable that the only thing she knew about the plot is that there is someone called Bob, Ruth, and Helen. She is more preoccupied with the amount of screens in their home than with the story, as the development of their conversation evinces: “It’s only two thousand dollars.’ ‘That’s one-third of my yearly pay.’ ‘We could do without a few things.’ ‘We’re already doing without a few things to pay for the third wall, put in only two months ago, remember?’” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 9) Finally, at least for now, Montag’s wife capitulates to his arguments that it would be stupid to spend so much money on something so stupid, and the conversation is over. Before leaving home again, though, a curiosity detains

Montag: “He stopped and turned around. ‘Does it have a happy ending?’ ‘I don’t know, I haven’t seen that far’” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 10). Mildred does not even watch the film until the end, perhaps because she did not deem it necessary, perhaps because people were slowly losing their capacity to focus on anything at all.

Nevertheless, Bradbury’s characters knew how to read, they were educated people once – different from Orwell’s animals, whose education – pivotal piece in Snowball’s plan – was interrupted right at its beginning. In *Animal farm* (ORWELL, 1945), therefore, it seems that all animals have been successfully neutralised by the system, whereas in *Fahrenheit* (BRADBURY, 1953) there are some slight hints which indicate the existence of some potentially rebellious characters. Such character surfaces at first in Montag’s live when he meets Clarisse, a kid who lives nearby, and who, different from everyone else, is not afraid of him. He is attracted to the child’s house, envies the conversations she has with her family (he could not remember any meaningful conversation with his wife); their relaxed and hearty laughter, emerging during their socialisation, are foreign to his own “family life”, a reality were such domestic bliss. Eager to have such a plain, though enjoyable and meaningful existence as that of his neighbour, he starts to change his perspective concerning everything that surrounds him (his work, his house, his wife, his life). Even though he has a bigger house, more money, and a very important job (whereas Clarisse’s reality is less socially significant), he would love to exchange his life for that of this young lady. Furthermore, it seems this girl is much more mature than Montag in many terms; different from the latter, she stops to look around and tries to understand her reality, and even gets to conclusions concerning such reality that he, an adult, had not realised prior to meeting her. Her curiosity, for instance, is the reason why she would not be surprised by the fact that Montag and Mildred can have no serious conversation, inasmuch as actually

no one does. “I like to watch people. Sometimes I ride the subway all day and look at them and listen to them [...]. And do you know what? ‘What?’ ‘People don’t talk about anything.’ ‘Oh, they must!’” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 14). The only thing people say, in Clarisse’s words, is the name of people or things, the brands of cars, clothes, etc. – but no one elaborates upon anything anymore. Despite Montag’s cynicism towards her allegations, he would later realise they make a lot of sense – especially by recollecting his conversation with his wife about the film¹.

Nevertheless, alienation does not depend solely on lack of access to informative channels; it can actually be promoted by these precise channels, depending on the interests that one might be willing to serve. That is to say, sometimes it would be better not to have information, because in many occasions such information is biased and actually responsible for depriving us of knowledge by manipulating facts as we have experienced them. Political propaganda impersonates this condition almost perfectly, and, in *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945), the pig Squealer is the one given the role of controlling the other animals’ idea regarding any events they might happen to experience. The pigs had sold the hardworking horse Boxer to the slaughterhouse because he became of no practical use (instead of giving him the promised and merited compensation for his unquestionable contributions to the revolution). Some animals become suspicious of that because they were able to read the words “Horse Slaughterer” in the van that took the horse from the farm – and which belonged, supposedly, to the hospital. Squealer, then, summons all animals to take part in an audience

¹ At the final part of this excerpt, Clarisse, after discussing people’s alienation, seems to embody a criticism Bradbury might have conceived to raise his readers’ awareness to the problematic direction modern art had been taking (and has indeed taken): “And at the museums, have you ever been? All abstract. That’s all there is now. My uncle says it was different once. A long time back sometimes art really said things” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 14). Written more than half a century ago, Bradbury’s novella addresses here an issue ubiquitous to our contemporaneity, which is that of an empty art – an art that is no longer worried if it “says things” or not.

and there he claims such rumour lacks foundation, as he had already brewed a new narrative for them to believe in. “It was almost unbelievable, said Squealer, that any animal could be so stupid. Surely, he cried indignantly, whisking his tail and skipping from side to side, surely they knew their beloved Leader, Comrade Napoleon, better than that?” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 42) Animals’ surmises were, then, thoroughly mistaken – and they are stupid not to have realised that something else must have happened. Still in Squealer’s words, there was a very simple explanation: “The van had previously been the property of the knacker, and had been bought by the veterinary surgeon, who had not yet painted the old name out. That was how the mistake had arisen” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 43). How ironic: the one time animals are actually being smart Squealer’s political propaganda actually tries to convince them that they’re being stupid. Apparently, he succeeds, showing the two faces of alienation – lack of information and biased information.

This dystopian atmosphere that marks the moment when Boxer is killed does not, nonetheless, appear before the novella’s climax; until that moment, animals coexist in a world of profound utopia. At the onset of the narrative, they take the Manor farm from its human owners and begin to build a new society – whereby things seem to be taking place rather well. The reader realises that *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) is not about utopia but about dystopia as s/he discovers that the pigs, who are the ones leading the new regime, “fail to create a saner and perfect world” (KENNAN, 2014, p. 14) since they take over all power and privilege that were once divided equally between all animal. It does not take long for the first action regarding class privileging to take place: the moment when pigs determine that they deserve more apples in comparison to the other animals. Everyone knew the idea was that everyone should be given the same amount of everything the farm produced; “one day, however, the order went forth that all the windfalls were to be collected [...] for the use of the pigs. At this some of the other animals

murmured, but it was no use” (KENNAN, 2014, p. 17). Thenceforward, the differences between pigs and other animals would only grow, and utopia would ultimately be replaced by dystopia. Convinced that some benefit would accrue to them from their hard work, animals are convinced to work even more than they did before the revolution, and the benefits are never achieved. This free will to work hard, the passion to reinforce the hegemonic narrative of dystopia, is also something that the animals in Orwell’s (1945) narrative share with the firemen in Bradbury’s (1953) one. Before Montag realises that to set fire on books was a terrible thing, he shares with readers his feelings of intense pleasure to see things eaten, blackened, and obliterated by fire. The job of this fireman was not only a business activity: it was a matter of power. “With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 1). Doing his job was, for Montag, analogous to feeling dominant, to exerting through fire a judgment of what shall remain and what shall vanish forever. Images are strong, Montag manifests a rather metaphorical description as he tells readers how, when he burnt books, he felt as if “his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 2). This was a symphony whereby history could be rewritten – whereby the past could be destroyed.

Although Montag seems adamant that he would ever change his mind, he does go through a severe transformation, as mentioned before. If Orwell’s (1945) animals are never given a chance to think critically about the condition whereto they were guided by the pigs, the appearance of Clarisse in Montag’s path is what results in his realising that he is living in a dystopia rather than utopia. The fireman opens up some room for Clarisse in his life, but their seemingly idyllic conversations begin to trouble him – especially when they talk about his job. “How long have you 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’” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 4). Clarisse’s question seems to be a stupid one, but afterwards the reader would notice that Montag had actually never stopped to think of it. “‘Good night!’ She started up her walk. Then she seemed to remember something and came back to look at him with wonder and curiosity. ‘Are you happy?’ she said. ‘Am I what?’ he cried. But she was gone-running in the moonlight” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 5). Again, Clarisse asks a rather simple question; but, like the first, it is one that makes Montag think as he has never done before. “‘Happy! Of all the nonsense’. He stopped laughing. He put his hand into the glove-hole of his front door and let it know his touch. The front door slid open. Of course I’m happy. What does she think? I’m not? He asked the quiet rooms” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 6). It is at this point though that Montag gets at his apartment and, after thinking a lot about that weird encounter, realises that he is not happy at all, that he has actually never thought about how unhappy he was about that task he so eagerly accepted. Readers are happy to notice that, even though Montag is introspective and not very politicised, after meeting Clarisse he becomes eager to alter his life and the lives of others. His transition nonetheless does not come easily, as his struggles are just like our struggles as individuals and members of society, too. Fighting alienation is not an easy task – but surely identifying it is a pivotal first step. Montag is a reflection of the common man – especially at that historical moment. In the USA, when World War II was officially over, the Cold War began; so Bradbury was living in a period when the novelty was not to be in war: people were battling everywhere. That was the era that inspired Bradbury’s narrative, a dystopian fiction about how the world could become if things kept as they were in the political scene of 1953. Axis powers were being humanely rebuilt and guided by some of the victorious Allies, but the Allies themselves were turning on each other; impending apocalypse was averted

for the moment, but the possibility was far from gone. Joseph McCarthy’s hunts for communist sympathizers in the USA were, at that moment reaching unprecedented levels – and burning “communist material” was starting to be taken as a common activity. It was hell; it was dystopia.

Every dystopia, apropos, requires a bulldozer; someone to incorporate the face of a regime, someone to scare the others enough as to make they do whatever might be required for things never to change. In *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) such person is Montag’s boss, Beatty; and in *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) it is the pig Napoleon, who every other animal learns to fear. At the beginning of the narrative, animals do live in a democratic society, with assemblies and discussions to decide upon issues that interest them. Nevertheless, after banishing Snowball, the pig with whom he divided the coordination of Animal Farm, Napoleon ends up cancelling these meetings – on the premise they were no longer necessary, if anything new was decided he himself would form a committee ad hoc no longer to discuss an issue, but to inform the resolution whereto he would have come by himself. Napoleon also starts to threat the other animals with the possibility of their human ex owner, Jones, return – the animals no longer remember how things were in the past, and, therefore, Napoleon convinces them things were much worse (which could not be farther from the truth). At the onset of the narrative Napoleon presents himself as a demure subject, inconspicuous and reticent in his actions; after getting rid of Snowball (who indeed seemed to be honestly looking for a way to improve the lives of the animals), though, his confidence growth, and consequently so does his subjugation of his “comrades”. “No one believes more firmly than Comrade Napoleon that all animals are equal. He would be only too happy to let you make your decisions for yourselves. But sometimes you might make the wrong decisions, comrades, and then where should we be?” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 22) Squealer, like it happens here, is used cyclically to guide animals into believing in false tales – e.g. that Snowball

was the enemy, that he had always been working to Jones, that all the ideas he had presented had actually been stolen from Napoleon, etc. Since they have no means to keep records of events, “historical facts are easily adulterated or denied, and after some time the animals deny their own memories and accept Napoleon’s arguments” (PASOLD, 1999, p. 83).

One can arguably associate the story of Snowball–betrayed by Napoleon – to the life of Che Guevara (1928-1967) – betrayed by Fidel Castro – or Trotsky (1879-1940) – betrayed by Stalin. The former being more applicable since Orwell was a Trotskyite, as mentioned previously, and of course because Cuban revolution (1953) took place almost 10 years after the publication of *Animal Farm* (1945). Orwell’s foreshadowing is nonetheless mesmerising, as he provides us with a clear picture of how the fear of an imaginary enemy (Jones or Snowball) can be effectively set forth as for social control to be exerted, regardless of how impalpable the figure of this adversary might become. “Discipline, comrades, iron discipline! That is the watchword for today. One false step, and our enemies would be upon us” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 23). Snowball and Jones are but a fictional incorporation of mechanisms operating in our very society – e.g. the devil or terrorism; as Squealer embodies communication channels (such as the television, the church, or political propaganda) responsible for reinforcing our fear regarding things we have actually never seen nor understood. The direct consequence of our dogmatisation is indeed iron discipline, as subjects learn to blindly trust their power figure and consequently refrain from questioning any of his/her orders and verdicts. Before he is sold to the butcher by the pig to whom he devoted so much admiration, Boxer assumes this posture with excellence. “Boxer, who had now had time to think things over, voiced the general feeling by saying: ‘If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right’. And from then on he adopted the maxim, ‘Napoleon is always right,’ in addition to his private motto of ‘I will work harder’” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 22). Soviet censorship

would only prohibit the sale of *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) after it stopped to analyse its content – which was motivated by the fact that a huge number of parents complained to the owners of bookshops because their kids were desperate and could no longer sleep after reading what they thought was a children’s book. There is no way for readers not to feel compassion for Boxer, such a diligent, assiduous, and dedicated character who is a victim of his gullibility – his innocence betrays him, he is an easy victim of the regime.

If Boxer has a flaw it is precisely the fact that he is so hard working that he never stops to think critically of his actions – this is why he adopts those maxims, because he is not critically able to think of events in a more complex fashion. If Napoleon tells him to do something he does, and if he has to work hard he is happy to do so. Boxer wanted to fight his human owners, and so he did, triggered by the hope that he could trust in those who idealised the revolution in the first place. He is, though, one of the least educated animals – Snowball tries but is unable to teach him how to read a single letter; and he has no malice when he endeavours to come up with an idea about events taking place in the farm. Boxer is duped into alienation, in a social environment that becomes growingly empty as conversations disappear and are replaced by mere monologues delivered by Napoleon. What happens in the *Animal Farm* is coherent with what occurs to the social environment of kids’ schools in *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953), where people are taught to be fine with a superficial interaction with one another by the state since childhood. In a dialogue with Clarisse, apropos, Montag suddenly reckons she should be in class at that precise moment. “‘Why aren’t you in school?’ ‘Oh, they don’t miss me, I’m anti-social, they say. It’s so strange, I’m very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn’t it? Social to me means talking about things” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 13). Montag then becomes privy to the fact that Clarisse is not attending school, even though it is compulsory. He becomes curious, however, to understand why she does

not think the school environment is really social, in her terms. “We never ask questions, or at least most don’t; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film-teacher. That’s not social to me at all [...]. They run us so ragged by the end of the day we can’t do anything but go to bed” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 14). Just like it happens in *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945), where the rapacious pigs prevent the other animals to gather socially as to think critically about their situation, in Bradbury’s (1953) tale socialisation is only permitted if people stick to superficiality.

As in Orwell’s (1945) novella, in *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) subjects shall not move beyond paltriness; day life is structured with no substance and as for no energy to remain at the end of the day – heads must filled in with stupidity, so that any space is left blank for people to fill in with anything dangerous for state control. This is why Clarisse feels so lonely and ends up getting close to Montag: she does not fit in this social construct. “‘I haven’t any friends. Everyone I know is either shouting or dancing around like wild or beating up one another. Do you notice how people hurt each other nowadays?’ ‘You sound so very old.’ ‘Yes, sorry, sometimes I’m ancient’” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 15). Unlike his wife, Clarisse is imaginative, does not watch television or participate in the other mass entertainments common in the society. Talking to Clarisse, he notices it is much easier to establish a conversation to this so far complete stranger than to the woman he has been living with for years – she indeed proves to be much more mature than the other female example we have in the novella, unable even to describe the plot of a simple film. Montag finally learns to think critically about the reality Clarisse is disclosing – a reality that, hitherto, he deemed second nature, immutable, as if such way of living were a universal one. As his feeling of contentment regarding his condition shrinks, the meaning of his encounters with the girl keeps increasing. Clarisse’s interruption of his

routine has fascinated him, and the idle evenings of conversation between them both become rather common – until the day when she is killed in an “accident” – her rhetorical question concerning how people hurt one another work as a foreshadowing of Clarisse’s bereavement. The social environment of *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) is very similar to ours. It is one that, pretending to fondle us, operates through shamming community synergy. With this façade of thorough and unbreakable interaction (e.g. the smartphone illusion), this organisation actually separates us and transform our connection to one another into a hollow and uncommitted one. Clarisse’s colleagues – the ones she dismisses – live recklessly and, eventually, end up dying while they enjoy their purported freedom. Their lives, like the lives of many of us, is chaperoned by what Eagleton (1996, p. 79) names as a “floating desire”. He, among many other critics, understands the development of human civilisation as infused by “a kind of manic-depressive disorder, oscillating between the poles of textualist euphoria and constructivist dystopia, both underlying expressive of a desiring but decentred subjectivity, obsessed with freedom but with nothing to be free for”.

Montag and his wife had been controlled by the very system that convinces them there is nothing to be free for, while Clarisse’s rebellion would later result in her death. She is probably eradicated from the narrative by someone who saw her as a threat to the maintenance of the norm, but there is no literary evidence to support an assertive conclusion regarding that. Likewise, in *Animal Farm* (1945) anyone attempting to fight the system is chased and persecuted, just as it happens to Snowball when Napoleon can bear his insistence in educating the other animals no longer. Ousted from power by the pig he believed was his comrade, the story of Snowball is completely altered by Squealer’s propaganda. What – really – happens in the narrative is that Napoleon trains some dogs and order them to chase Snowball. “They dashed straight for Snowball, who only sprang from his

place just in time to escape their snapping jaws. Then he put on an extra spurt, and slipped through a hole and was seen no more. Silent and terrified, the animals crept back into the barn” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 20). As time passes, though, Napoleon takes advantage on the fact that animals become unchained to the memory of the past, and, through Squealer, manipulates the story. The latter pig tells his comrades that Snowball was trying to help Jones during the revolution, and that all his movements were to prevent the rebellion from happening. “I could show you this in his own writing, if you were able to read it. The plot was for Snowball, at the critical moment, to give the signal for flight and leave the field to the enemy. And he very nearly succeeded had not been for our heroic Leader, Comrade Napoleon” (ORWELL, 1945, p. 42). It sure is convenient for Squealer’s lies that most of the animals cannot read. Without the ability to read, the animals are, basically, willing victims of his lies. There is, in *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953), some indication that people can read – and this is the reason why the firemen are so essential, if the government cannot get rid of subjects’ reading ability, it must get rid of any books they might feel like reading.

In fact, the last pages of *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) regard another exasperating chase in parallel with that of Snowball (and also manipulated by the press); readers accompany Montag’s chase. After being denounced and killing Beatty he had no choice other than to disappear, and the readers accompany the stressful and nerve-racking pursuit where he runs from the police through a river and then following the railroad he hoped would guide him to the rebels refuge. Ultimately Montag would find them, and when he greets those people and is about to introduce himself he learns they already know who he is, as they have been watching the news at the television. It is at this moment that they show him his own supposed arrest – a lie just to keep the transmission of the chase even after the police knew where he was no longer, simply for the television channel to make more money.

After getting close to these strangers, Montag hesitates, but he then weighs events and makes out he has actually never been safer. Soon he feels practically at home, and begins to enjoy immensely that environment wherein people talked with one another – instead of preferring to watch television, listen to the radio, or drug themselves – about serious issues, nourished a close relationship, and still mastered a capacity to make and to be friends of one another. This reality has nothing to do with his former life; a life he does not seem to miss at all. Nevertheless, after everything seems to be settled, regardless of the tranquillity permeating the community whereto he gets, we notice that the war (that pervades the whole narrative) is still going on in the city – and it actually gets much worse, ultimately causing the city’s total annihilation. Only the rebels that Montag meets survive, and thenceforward assume the responsibility to make civilisation reborn from the ashes. It is important to mention that, before becoming rebels, most of these “freedom – and book – loving exiles, living like gypsies off the land” (BRADBURY, 1953, p. 63), were university professors, philosophy scholars, literature specialists. This is a group of intellectuals, which decided to wait for their turn; they knew there was no way to defeat the system, but they also knew such system would eventually collapse.

Bradbury’s (1953) critique here seems to dialogue with Marxist thinking, as one of its main tenets is the idea that capitalism as we know today walks in the direction of its doom – the implosion of the system is the natural result of its organisation. It would be from that point on that a more egalitarian and fair society would be devised – not sooner, not later. Cognisant of that fact, the rebels Montag meets wait to gain control of the city after the annihilation of those who wanted them dead. This is a revolution we do not experience, as the book finishes with the end of the war and the indication that they the rebels, now accompanied by Montag, are about to put their plan in operation. As a preparation for that event, perhaps readers would

expect these rebels to be getting ready for a battle, learning how to use guns, etc. – but what happens is rather different. Their idea of revolution is the erection of a critically aware society, and for that to occur each of that community members learn a complete book by heart. After they have memorised the story they are responsible for, books are destroyed (to dodge suspicions), and they incorporate the narratives as to use them later, to intellectualise the new society each of them are dreaming of. Patently, there is some optimistic implications in the final part of *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953), as these rebels – honest and motivated by altruistic ideas (very distinct thus from the self-conceited pigs who take over the control of Animal Farm – present themselves as a possibility, as something that could, indeed, work. This analysis demonstrates, then, how Bradbury’s (1953) dystopia might finish with a glimpse of utopia – it is a reminder that if things keep going as they are prospects shall remain being obscure, but it also reminds us there is still time to hope for something better. *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945), however, dismisses the scrupulousness of those who take up the control of the farm; it indicates how power transforms any honest ambition into egotistical ones. Animals overthrow the humans who abused them only to see the pigs become abusers themselves. The difference is that, after the revolution, animals are abused without being aware of that – they believe they are free, such as Montag thought he was before he reads his first book. In the end, something that both novellas analysed herein unveil is the fact that it is much easier to enslave subjects who are unaware they are slaves. After all, that is precisely “the magic of ideology: to make us do things that may be against our interests and to do them as if they were entirely self-willed” (WOLF, 2008, p. 101). Dystopia is a reminder of that. Paradoxically as it may seem, our illusion of freedom restrains us; our autonomous actions are actually controlled by an invisible social rheostat – by the very effective conditionings unmasked by both narratives. Realising we are living in a

dystopia is a pivotal first step, trying to change such picture is the challenge that awaits us.

3 Final Remarks: The Germaneness of Prophecies of Doom

The analysis presented heretofore manifest the vast array of political and social implications of both my objects of research. One of the cornerstones of apocalyptic narratives is a vital part of these novellas: the contrast established between the individual and the social. Funck (1998, p. 22), an avid reader and researcher on the issue of utopia/dystopia, poses that “social institutions pre-exist the individual; more often than not individuals are unaware of the hold of such institutions, assuming the values inherent in them to be natural and therefore true and desirable”. This is not to say, nonetheless, that there is no way to dodge the system; that social institutions are capable to get ahold of us and of our attitudes. Notwithstanding the evident fact that our social constructs pre-exist us (as we are born already within a given structure wherefrom it is rather difficult to outflow), there is, however, a wisp of free will in what regards our assuming the values inherent in these constructs. Becoming cognisant of the fact that the main epistemes of these institutions is enough for us to see that there is nothing natural, true, nor desirable in their functioning. Our positions as individual subjects, the manner we “choose” to relate with one another, are, to some extent, conditioned by our contextual environment – but they also are, at the same time, determined by the way we are willing to position ourselves vis-à-vis the institutions wherein we belong. What both *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) show is that there is always the possibility of accepting or the possibility of fighting – but awareness is of paramount importance. In the former, the animals surmount tremendous difficulties for the revolution to be successful, but see themselves subdued

by the pigs who precludes them from raising awareness to their real condition. In the latter, Montag only starts to question his role as a fireman when Clarisse guides him onto consciousness – moving from acceptance to upheaval. Just like Montag, we also need our “Clarisses” – i.e. we need an incentive to change our perception regarding the facts and epistemes that envelop us. “Different subject positions are proposed by a variety of social texts or discourses, and the individual or social subject may or may not, depending on his or her power to choose, take up the positions offered” (FUNCK, 1988, p. 23).

My objects of research are some of these texts and discourses that bestow distinct positions for us to take up; the narratives we behold are also beholding us. That is, the fictional realities concocted by Bradbury (1953) and Orwell (1945) mirror our ways of living, and elaborate upon a future that is closer than perhaps we would be eager to accept. Utopian and dystopian possibilities scavenge imaginative prospects – prospects that accompany our existence, as we live motivated by our dreams of utopia and our dread of dystopia. My reading of these novellas shall not nonetheless be misinterpreted; none of them are determinist – on the contrary, it is as if they were asking us to do something about it. To show something is moving to a certain direction is not antithetical of allowing it to move otherwise – *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) manifest how the onset of dystopian realities take place, their denouement, however, is still to be discovered. After all, “the author offers the addressee a work to be completed” (ECO, 1984, p. 61). If animals are going to rebel against the pigs, or how Montag and his friends shall reconstruct the city from the ashes, are things readers would love to know – but both are up to them. None of the narratives finishes then in a steadfast manner – they are both open to many readings. However, addressing issues such as that of subjects’ alienation and/or of their lack of critical abilities to interact fruitfully with one another

as to change their condition, these narratives are a glimpse of the political arena whereto literary discourses might be taken. To think politically about literary productions might be a choice, but the fact that literature is per se a political institution is not. As Eagleton (2010, p. 169) suggests “there is no need to drag politics into literary theory: it has been there from the beginning”. Literary material that is purportedly disregarding political issues is often reinforcing hegemonic epistemes – and this is the fallacy of neutrality: that is, when an author defends he is not writing about political matters he is, consciously or not, applauding the mainstream narrative. Every action is a political one, choosing not to fight the system means accepting its terms – simple as that. The social responsibility of literature must not be dismissed; sometimes it is the only tool that has a chance of providing us with slivers of fertile discussions and reflections that might help us amplify perspectives.

Sources of non-hegemonic positions are cardinal for us to decamp the austere condition wereto we are moving. As a matter of fact, “[q]uestioning the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life is arguably the most urgent of services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves” (BAUMAN, 1998, p. 47). One assumes, a priori, that such premises must be right – as does Boxer when he assumes that everything Napoleon says is probably the truth; but *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) grants us with the other side of the story. Becoming knowledgeable about other stories, in this sense, is, apropos, the sine qua non of a carefully planned path for us to alter our own. The modern project, triggered by a developmentalist spirit and profiteering enterprise, is no longer able to convince us as it has done in the past, and this is why so many images of utopia have been thoroughly replaced by the fear of dystopia. This may explain the undeniable growth of dystopian narratives both in literary and cinematographic productions today – much after the publication of the novellas analysed in this study. To the sake of illustration, one could come up with numberless contemporary

and popular examples of dystopian narratives – e.g. *Robocop* (VERHOEVEN, 1987), *Terminator* (CAMERON, 1991), *Matrix* (WACHOWSKI, 1999), *Hunger Games* (COLLINS, 2008), *Avatar* (CAMERON, 2009), and *The Walking Dead* (DARABONT, 2010). The emanation of these examples, well known to most of Western contemporary society, is an evidence of the popularisation of dystopia – initially a peripheral and uncharted genre, and now a guarantee of success in movie theatres. As Wolf (2008, p. 41) puts it, “[s]ince World War II, prophecies of doom have become clichés on everyone’s lips. Social critical themes hitherto reserved for an intellectual elite are now mass political culture”. If we were once certain of our perfection and motivated by great projects concerning our future, now we are aware that our future is one where our survival and well-being is far from being a safe bet. The reality has vitiated our reveries – our past utopian dreams are more likely to be seen as a hallucination by those who decide to think critically about them. The novellas written by Orwell (1945) and Bradbury (1953) are, I hope to have demonstrated, not obsolete whatsoever – they are both per se enough to make us aware of our own condition, as these narratives alert us regarding perils there are perhaps much closer to us than they were to the readers contemporary to their first publication. According to Derrida (1992, p. 64), even when they are transplanted to distinct contexts, texts “continue to have meaning and effectiveness”. That *Animal Farm* (ORWELL, 1945) and *Fahrenheit 451* (BRADBURY, 1953) are still meaningful is not amenable to inquest; if they are still effective depends entirely on us.

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