

**DYSTOPIC IMAGES OF “NO MAN’S LAND”: WILDERNESS, LITERATURE, AND  
THEATRE IN BRADBURY’S *FAHRENHEIT 451* AND MANDEL’S *STATION  
ELEVEN***

de

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**TRABAJO FINAL PARA EL TÍTULO DE MÁSTER**

**Entregado en el Área de Atención Integral  
al Estudiante (ARATIES)  
de la Universidad de Almería  
como requisito parcial conducente  
a la obtención del título de**

**MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: APLICACIONES PROFESIONALES  
Y COMUNICACIÓN INTERCULTURAL**

**2021/2022**

**ITINERARIO: INVESTIGACIÓN Y DOCENCIA**



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***Fecha***

I, the undersigned, Juan Fernando Gómiz Rodríguez, as a student of the Faculty of Humanities and Psychology at the University of Almería, hereby declare under the penalty of perjury, and also certify with my signature below, that my Master's Thesis, titled:

*Dystopic Images of "No Man's Land": Wilderness, Literature, and Theatre in Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 and Mandel's Station Eleven*

is my own work, except where indicated by the reference to the printed and electronic sources used according to the internationally accepted rules and regulations on intellectual property rights.

*To María José, Eduardo, and Guillermo. I will never be able to give you back all the long periods I have spent studying hard and not sharing my time with you. These have been hard times, we are well conscious of it; hard times never last forever, though. I will compensate you for all the time I have not been able to dedicate to you. Take for granted that we will eventually make our dream come true.*

*To my friend Mike and his dad Merrick, two gentlemen: Thank you so much for your good advice and patience, and for sharing your wide knowledge with me when I asked you to read this Master's Thesis.*

*I would also like to say that during this journey of learning I have luckily met two warmhearted people to chat with whenever I felt that things were falling apart: Esther Castellary and Noelia Fernández, my brilliant classmates, what thought-inspiring characters you are!*



*I would like to especially thank Prof. Jesús Isaías Gómez López for his support. You, in the same way as you speak about the most relevant authors in your classes, are the Man. Our witty and open-minded conversations and the way how you transmit your vast knowledge have been, without any doubt, one of the greatest pleasures that I have experienced in my academic life. Thank you for coaching me, caring for me, listening to me, and, last but not least, never judging me. I equally would also like to thank Prof. Blasina Cantizano Márquez for her unique dedication to this Master's Degree: You have always been there when I needed it, giving me advice, and listening to my necessities without needing to hear my words as you have got that special sensibility that only a few select people own nowadays.*

*To both of you, thanks for coming in.*



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

“And so? Find Art.  
Seize brush. Take stance. Do fancy footwork. Dance.  
Run race. Try poem. Write play.”  
(Ray Bradbury, “We Have Our Arts So We Won’t Die Of Truth”)

## 1.1. Justification

The purpose of the present research is to explore, in the branch of dystopian literature and in its apocalyptic scenarios, the relationship between the setting of “no man’s land” and the significance of art heritage (notably, literature and theatre) in order to understand the way how the environment and human behavior are interconnected in these particular cases. To carry out our study, two major postmodern dystopian novels written in the English language will be considered referential and therefore analyzed through the lens of ecocriticism: the postwar American novel *Fahrenheit 451*, published by Ray Bradbury in 1953, and the

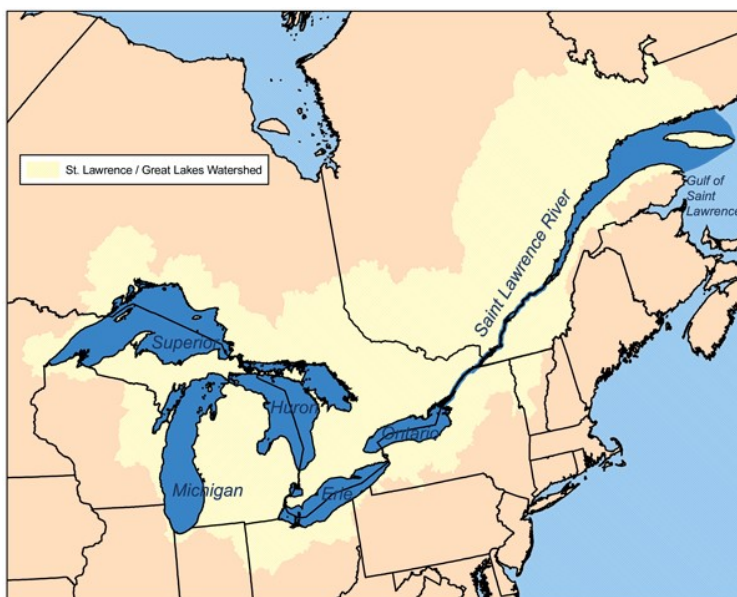


Figure 1. "[Grlakes lawrence map.png](#)" by [Karl Musser](#) CC BY-SA 2.5

contemporary one *Station Eleven*, published by the Canadian writer Emily St. John Mandel in 2014. It must be stated here that, after the recent covid-19 pandemic, *Station Eleven* could well be reinterpreted, so some notes on it will be made in this study.

*Fahrenheit 451* is set in an unspecified city and, after considering the two geographical references given

by the author throughout the novel through the characters, mentioning a bus station in the city where Faber could take a bus to St. Louis and Montag’s remembrance of meeting his wife in Chicago, we could establish that this fictional metropolis might

well be located in the region of the Laurentian Great Lakes in North America, nearby the author's birthplace in the city of Waukegan, the county seat of Lake County, Illinois, USA. Likewise, *Station Eleven's* plot takes place in the Great Lakes area, though this time in the city of Toronto, Canada, and mainly in different locations in Michigan, USA, close to Lake Michigan principally and Lake Huron (this latter geographical area is to be the region where the Travelling Symphony wanders after collapse). In some way, we could state that both novels are set near both sides of the frontier<sup>1</sup>, in the environs belonging to the boundaries of the United States and Canada, and this fact is to be taken into consideration in the analyses of both works too.

The main characters in these two stories, Montag and Kirsten, have become nomadic people who survive by trying to preserve and hold on to their cultural identity: Montag, in Bradbury's novel, was a man who mechanically burnt books, considered to be forbidden objects in his totalitarian world, to eventually become self-aware and evolve into a container of literature, a book man, as well as a renegade living in the forests, outside his civilization, while Kirsten, in Mandel's novel, is a young actress who travels from one place to another after the collapse of her world due to a swine flu pandemic with a troupe of actors staging Shakespeare's plays, accompanied by an orchestra, in exchange for food. Both characters wander a no man's land, the wilderness, after the degeneration and fall of the world in which they lived. In Mandel's world without electricity, the troupe of actors moves through roads that are potential danger zones and continuously remind us of Cormac McCarthy's setting for his novel *The Road* (2006).

In the third part of *Fahrenheit 451*, titled "Burning Bright", Montag desperately tries to escape from the city, where he has been working as a fireman who, zombified, burnt books, while being pursued by the Mechanical Hound, to finally enter the unknown territory of the forest. As a fugitive, he becomes a man who wanders as the holder of a fragment of the Bible, the Book of Ecclesiastes, one of these banned cultural manifestations in his old community. In the second part of

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<sup>1</sup> It can be noted in Figure 1. "Grlakes\_lawrence\_map.png" by Karl Musser CC BY-SA 2.5 that the boundary between US and Canada crosses through four out of the five lakes in the region.

*Station Eleven*, titled “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, Kirsten starts to confront hostility as the keeper of the graphic novel *Dr. Eleven* and as a member of a peaceful theater troupe, the Travelling Symphony, a group of men and women who tries to get over the trauma of having contemplated the annihilation of more than ninety-nine percent of the population by a deathly virus and wanders from one place to another staging *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, among others, while giving hope for those who survived.

These territories outside the city limits where they meander, surrounded just by wild nature, and even the devastated city of Toronto itself conquered by wild nature after the collapse of civilization in *Station Eleven*, are a perfect metaphor to emphasize the consequences of having to abandon the commodities and security of modern contemporary cities and, in the same way, how human beings fight against uncertainty when they are forced to leave their comfort zone to eventually reconnect with their lost human essence again.

We could affirm that our present modern world has become a complex place where First-World cities and governments act to alienate citizens. We have forgotten nature. Individuals are exposed to a process of surviving, repeating daily the same rituals as zombies, at the service of ‘slave capitalism’. In Western societies, we are used to living with mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety increasing year in, year out. Jonathan Bate summarizes the issue perfectly by saying:

Proponents of the establishment of a system of English and Welsh National Parks did not base their arguments on a theory of nature’s rights. Rather, they argued from human needs. To look at a lake or walk on a mountain makes us feel relaxed; the encounter with nature is a form of recreation, all the more necessary because of the stress and alienation of urban modernity (2001: 132).

The current citizens are also slowly being dispossessed of free thought and awareness. Technologies and commodities seem to be enough for modern societies to fulfill all the human necessities, which will turn out not to be true in the end. Human beings have never been as disengaged from nature in the past as they are in the present. Furthermore, even when living in a globalized world, these citizens are

losing their roots, and their local cultural identity, and have also become unable of tolerating that of other foreign countries or persons. As a consequence, culture is relentlessly canceled due to ideological reasons without previous reflection on the convenience or not of doing it. Political correctness seems to be everywhere and is to demolish the progress of knowledge. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the term “cancel culture” as “the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure”, and also “the people who engage in or support this practice” (“Cancel culture”). Nowadays, cancel culture has also invaded the academic context, being many scholars and writers canceled due to ideological reasons. Two significant cases are those of *The Harry Potter Series’* British author J.K Rowling and the Chinese-American composer and professor Bright Sheng<sup>2</sup>. In Bradbury’s, some characters such as Clarisse and Faber could be considered to be dangerous people, those who think differently as they read and avoid watching TV or focus on other brand new technologies, mass media exerting a strong influence on citizens and similar to the current social networks we use nowadays. They are persecuted by those other citizens who blindly support totalitarian government politics and strict legislation. Following Joseph Campbell’s academic text *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, it can be interpreted that these outsiders turn into the ones who make Montag, the hero, conscious of a new reality. In *Station Eleven* it is the character of Miranda with her creativity, Arthur Leander’s ex-wife, who, in some way, gives Kirsten her purpose in life after the collapse and makes her comprehend that ‘survival is insufficient’.

The setting, the wilderness, is portrayed as an isolated place where the existing rules in modern civilization stop operating. There, a group of men and women live in perfect harmony with their inherited cultural expressions as a fundamental reference to find their inner self: ‘Because survival is insufficient’, a quote which has been taken from the series *Star Trek: Voyager*, has become the motto of the Travelling Symphony. Shakespeare is considered to be the universal institution in Mandel’s

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<sup>2</sup> In December 19, 2019, J.K. Rowling supported on Twitter the British researcher Maya Forstater, who had questioned the legitimacy of trans identities. After her tweet, she faced backlash. In September, 2021, Bright Sheng started a composition seminary showing a 1965 film adaptation of *Othello* starring Laurence Olivier using the dated technique of blackface. Students complaint and University of Michigan decided that Sheng would not continue teaching the class.

*Station Eleven*, so the playwright and his work become a metaphor speaking about one unique worldwide cultural identity, an emblem, eliminating any particular distinction between countries and cultures. This situation could be read considering the two poles, the positive and the negative one. As stated by Dennis Kennedy about Shakespeare's plays, and taking into consideration the positive pole, "[f]rom *Titus Andronicus* to *The Tempest* Shakespeare's work repeatedly turns to themes touching on the stranger, the alien, the other, and often deals openly with questions of empire and colony" (2001: 251), so the message in Shakespeare's claims for the freedom of the different peoples of the world. On the other hand, it is crystal clear that colonization (biological and religious) is a crucial theme in Mandel's novel, and we have to bear in mind the case of the influence of the Stratford Festival (Ontario, Canada) on Canadian culture and, concretely, in nationalist's responses to imperialism, an idea expressed by Ian Rae when he aims:

Debates rage in dramatic and academic circles over the question of whether the SF [Stratford Festival] has been an aid or an impediment to the development of Canadian theatre and cultural sovereignty. In theatre criticism, the SF figures as the primary site of the contest between pre-centennial nationalisms . . . preoccupied with the preservation of cultural ties to Europe and a centennial nationalism that rejects this focus on European high culture. . . . (2016: 386).

In the post-apocalyptic world of *Station Eleven*, the character of the prophet will once again become the constant human threat after the catastrophe: using religion, the extremist Tyler Leander and his group of religious fanatics try to control the survivors and impose a totalitarian regime of single-mindedness and oppression; on the contrary, the theater troupe travels freely, and its members cooperate and share their vital experiences and ideas in complete connection with the land and art. In other words, Tyler is to symbolize the Latin saying of 'Homo Homini Lupus', translated as 'man is a wolf to man' in English. The virus itself and Tyler Leander himself become colonizers trying to eradicate one society.

In the same way as the peasants in the Middle Ages in Europe and England, the main characters in both novels could be considered to be freemen in their apocalyptic, in Bradbury's, and post-apocalyptic, in Mandel's, societies, being able to

travel from one place to another without needing to be permitted by any other person or institution. The “no man’s land” becomes their liberation and their reconnection with their human essence, though the remembrance of the past remains intensely.

## 1.2. Theoretical Framework

We will elaborate our research on dystopian literature by considering ecocriticism as literary criticism of reference, with literary scholar Lawrence Buell<sup>3</sup> as one of its leading theorists, and focusing especially on ecopoetics to examine *Fahrenheit 451*, paying particular attention to Jonathan Bate’s work in this field about the British Romantic poets and their connection with the landscape. Some thought-provoking ideas concerning the new branch of ecoGothic and its connection to Southern Ontario Gothic literature are to be taken into consideration to study *Station Eleven*.

Bate exemplifies, using the British author Thomas Hardy as an allusion, our relationship as human beings with the modern world by saying:

Our instinct about [Thomas] Hardy is this: he values a world—for him vanishing, for us long vanished—in which people *live in rhythm with nature*. Presumably we value such a world because we are not entirely happy with our modernity, with

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Jonathan Bate’s *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) were considered two of the most significant foundational works in ecocriticism, also known as environmental criticism when the field was developed as an organized initiative in the early 1990s principally in the Anglophone world. Literary and environment studies refer to the study of literature from an environmental orientation, though other arts, namely painting and cinema, can be researched from ecocriticism. From this theoretical perspective, it is assumed that literature helps us to understand environmental problems. In 1992, it was established the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). Its peer-reviewed, international, and transdisciplinary journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, is published quarterly by Oxford University Press (OUP). Currently, in environmental criticism, there is still a predominance of scholars from the United States and the United Kingdom. Two different waves in the field have been identified: First-wave scholarship, in the 1990s, “tended to equate environment with nature; to focus on literary renditions of the natural world in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as means of evoking and promoting contact with it; to value nature preservation and human attachment to place at a local-communitarian or bioregional level; and to affirm an ecocentric or biocentric ethics, often intensified by some conception of an innate bond—whether biological, psychological, or spiritual—conjoining the individual human being and the natural world”, while second-wave scholarship at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century “has shown greater interest in literatures pertaining to the metropolis and industrialization; has tended to reject the validity of the nature-culture distinction . . .; and has favored a sociocentric rather than biocentric and/or individual-experience-oriented ethics and aesthetics, placing particular emphasis on environmental justice concerns” (Buell, et al. 2011: 419).

speed, with noise. We sense that there is something wrong about our comfortable insulation against the rhythms of the seasons, something alienating about the perpetual mediation of nature through the instruments of culture, whether radio and canned food, which Hardy lived to see, or television and genetically-modified crops, which he would have had grave difficulty in imagining (1999: 542).

Andrew Smith and William Hughes, when introducing and defining the ecoGothic, suggest that Bate's omission of Gothic consideration in his seminal work *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) seems to be an odd one given the critical synergies between Romanticism and the Gothic (2013: 1). We consider ecoGothic to be of relevant interest to apprehend the link between nature and mankind in *Station Eleven*.

In addition, we will likewise center on certain aspects of post-colonial ecocriticism: It is significant to point out one of the forms of ecological imperialism highlighted by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin citing the scholars Andrew Kimball (1996) and Vandana Shiva (1997), that of 'biocolonisation' with its biopolitical implications of western technological experiments and trends, such as biopiracy and western-patented genetic modification (2015: 4). Huggan and Tiffin also add to these examples that of "other recent instances of biotechnological suprematism and 'planetary management' (Ross, 1991) in which the allegedly world-saving potential of science is seconded for self-serving western needs and political ends" (2015: 4). We do not know if the virus that has annihilated the population in *Station Eleven* might have been created by hidden governmental or corporate interests and control of the situation has been lost; it could be a genetically-modified virus, and after the covid-19 pandemic it is relatively easy to consider by citizens in our society the intervention of pharmaceutical laboratories or governments as the reason for its spread. Nevertheless, as readers, we are only to know about this virus eventually colonizing the planet Earth and killing human beings. To worsen things, the character of the prophet will try to take advantage of the circumstance of having survived the virus to make people follow him, by mistakenly believing that they have been the Chosen ones by God, so he can be interpreted as the new ideological colonizer, a cult leader,

of a decimated land. Tyler Leander seems to represent totalitarianism and its premises. His story reminds us of that of Puritanism in the first American colonies.

To conclude, as previously pointed out, Joseph Campbell’s influential work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* will be taken into consideration to concisely explain how some events happen in the storyline and the role played by the main characters, with our spotlight on the concept of “the hero’s journey” or “monomyth”. According to Campbell, “[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (2004: 28).

### 1.3. Methodological Framework

Stephen R. Philips reminds us that “the private, idiosyncratic, and essentially non-verbal experience of literature is inaccessible to teaching; when we begin to talk about literature, we are no longer dealing with the literary experience but instead with ways of approaching literature — that is, with criticism” (1975: 1). That is the main reason why we must first decide through which one of these ways of approaching literature to develop our literary research. As previously said, we will follow ecocriticism in order to examine mostly the third and final part of *Fahrenheit 451*, “Burning Bright”. We will pay particular attention to the changes that Montag undergoes when entering the wilderness and how nature is portrayed by the author in contrast with the city. Concerning *Station Eleven*, we will especially center on the second part of the novel, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, covering chapters from 7 to 12, as here Mandel presents to the readers how life is after the collapse of civilization and, at the same time, the beginning of a fight between two opposing forces, those of creation and destruction. We have chosen these two parts as the most representative of the novels to study, lucidly, the function of nature in the stories and its relation with these fugitives and survivors who inhabit the pages of both novels.

The three main research questions to be answered in our study are: What are the authors of both novels stating about the relation between the main characters and their environment before the collapse of civilization?; how will landscape and



wilderness influence the characters' behavior after the fall of their worlds?; and last, but not least, what is the purpose of using art (literature and theatre) as a motif in the out of the ordinary scenarios of both novels?

Before presenting our conclusions, we will pay briefly particular attention to the adaptations of *Fahrenheit 451* into a film in 1966, and of *Station Eleven* into a TV series in 2021. We will shortly compare, again under the umbrella of ecocriticism, whether the treatment given by the creators of these audiovisuals to the concepts of “no man’s land” and art is similar to that expressed by the authors of the novels.

## 2. FAHRENHEIT 451: BOOKS AS A HUMANISTIC WEAPON TO INSTILL FREEDOM

“Short man. Large dream. I send my rockets forth between my ears,  
Hoping an inch of Will is worth a pound of years.  
Aching to hear a voice cry back along the universal Mall:  
We’ve reached Alpha Centauri!  
We’re tall, O God, we’re tall!”  
(Ray Bradbury, “If Only We Had Taller Been”)

### 2.1. Ray Bradbury

#### 2.1.1. Short Biographical Notes



Figure 2. "[06 World Fantasy Con III 1977 Ray Bradbury Signing Next to Robert Bloch](#)" by [Will Hart](#) CC BY 2.0

*Fahrenheit 451*, the classic novel on book burning in a totalitarian society, was published in 1953 and it is said by literary critics to be one of the most significant works by American writer Ray Bradbury, who was born in Waukegan, Illinois, in 1920, and died in Los Angeles, California, in 2012. Bradbury was considered an essential science fiction writer by the mainstream, though “[s]ystematic genre criticism, when it discusses Bradbury at all, tends to drum him solemnly out of the science fiction corps for alleged inconsistencies of thought” (Jonathan R. Eller and William F. Touponce 2015: 34).

Bradbury’s encounter in 1932 with the carnival magician Mr. Electrico became a powerful influence on him and the beginning of Bradbury’s habit of writing daily. Other professed by the author significant influences on his writings were some old classic films, namely *The Phantom of the Opera* with Lon Chaney (Rupert Julian, 1925), *King Kong* (1933), and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* starring Charles Laughton and Maureen O’Hara (William Dieterle, 1939); and various prestigious authors, namely Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Edgar Allan Poe, among others. It must be highlighted here that William Shakespeare and

Herman Melville are to become frequent references in Bradbury's poetry.

After living in Waukegan, his beloved 'Green Town' in the novel *Dandelion Wine*, for the years of his childhood, sadly, he had to move with his family to Los Angeles in 1934, where in 1937, the young boy would meet a group of young professional science fiction writers who empowered him to initiate a career as a writer. Bradbury would write his first novella, *Lorelei*, in 1938. "The Lake", a tragic short story about the loss of the first love written in 1943, is considered by the author himself to be his first literary work of quality. After reading it, Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) would be the work that made Bradbury considers the genre of science fiction as the best one to express his ideas.

Bradbury won an Emmy for his animated adaptation of *The Halloween Tree* in 1994 and was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2004. Later, in 2007, he would also be awarded a Special Citation for his career by the Pulitzer Prize Board.

#### 2.1.2. Main Works and Brief Notes

Amongst Bradbury's most important literary works we can find his first collection of short stories *Dark Carnival* (1947), the short stories about the colonization of Mars compiled with the title of *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), the collection of science fiction short stories *The Illustrated Man* (1951), the dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), the anthology of short stories *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953), the autobiographical novel *Dandelion Wine* (1957), the compilation of short stories *A Medicine for Melancholy* (1959), and the fantasy story *The Halloween Tree* (1972). His non-fiction book *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1992) is a collection of essays on Bradbury's thoughts on writing that has become a reference among those who are interested in creativity and starting a career as writers.

Bradbury's literary style is easily identified by his readers. Robin Anne Reid indicates that "Bradbury uses images associated with fire and burning as well as images of light and running water, throughout *Fahrenheit 451*" (2008: 78). His use of language was frequently poetic and his works were full of metaphors and similes, a tendency that could be the reason why the author finally decided to spend more time writing poetry from the 1970s on. A perfect example of Bradbury's poetic use of

language could be the description of Montag being mirrored in Clarisse’s eyes when Bradbury writes, “He saw himself in her eyes, suspended in two shining drops of bright water, himself dark and tiny, in fine detail, the lines about his mouth, everything there, as if her eyes where two miraculous bits of violet amber that might capture and hold him intact” (14). Some of Bradbury’s poetry books are *When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed* (1973), *Where Robot Mice and Robot Men Run Round in Robot Towns* (1977), *This Attic Where the Meadow Greens* (1979), and *The Haunted Computer and the Android Pope* (1981). *The Collected Poetry of Ray Bradbury: They Have not Seen the Stars* (2002) was translated into Spanish in a referential bilingual edition by literary scholar Jesús Isaías Gómez López and published by Ediciones Cátedra with the title of *Poesía completa* (2013). A recent critical edition and translation into Spanish by Gómez López of Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* has been published by Ediciones Cátedra in 2022 with the title of *Crónicas Marcianas*.

The basis for Bradbury’s masterpiece *Fahrenheit 451*, a reference to the temperature at which paper burns, can be found in a previous novella by the author, “The Fireman”, which had been published two years before, in 1951, in the magazine *Galaxy*. In only nine days, Bradbury wrote this original novella, which would be expanded later to become the novel, in a rented basement typing room at the library of the University of California in Los Angeles. *Fahrenheit 451* would be adapted into a film by French filmmaker François Truffaut in 1966 and later, even into a graphic novel. Bradbury also adapted his novel into a play that would be first performed in 1979 by the Studio Theatre playhouse with some significant changes influenced by Truffaut’s film adaptation, being the most meaningful that of Clarisse’s survival at the end of the plot.

Not only did Bradbury write short stories, novels, and poems, but he also wrote scripts for cinema and TV, being his greatest achievement the screenplay which he co-authored with the prestigious director John Huston for his classic film *Moby Dick* (1956). Bradbury spent six months in Ireland in the company of his family working with Huston, whom Bradbury admired, and the result would bring him recognition within the film industry in Hollywood thanks to his ability to create powerful visual metaphors. However, Bradbury went from idolizing the American filmmaker to

considering him an unscrupulous man who is capable of claiming authorship of a screenplay of which he has not even written a single line, so his experience in Ireland ended up being a bad memory. Bradbury's *Green Shadows, White Whale* (1992) tells the readers about Bradbury's journey to Ireland in 1953–54 to write the screen adaptation of Herman Melville's novel. Some of Bradbury's short stories were adapted into episodes of the iconic TV series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, and Bradbury himself was eventually the showrunner of his personal anthology TV series, *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (1985–1992), which showed TV viewers adaptations of many of his short stories by the author himself.

## **2.2. Defining Totalitarian Dystopia in *Fahrenheit 451***

The concept of 'dystopia' in literature is interconnected to that of 'utopia' and 'science fiction', although some critics separate them into different branches of literature. When we use the word 'utopia' nowadays, we do it to refer to the representation of ideal societies, whereas the term 'dystopia' mainly means the opposite. Gregory Claeys claims:

'Dystopia' is often used interchangeably with 'anti-utopia' or 'negative utopia', by contrast to utopia or 'eutopia' (good place), to describe a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as a satire of utopian aspirations which attempts to show up their fallacies, or which demonstrate, in B. F. Skinner's words, 'ways of life we must be sure to avoid' – in the unlikely event that we can agree on particulars (2010: 107).

This way, we can see that the term 'dystopia', or 'cacotopia', is used to refer to a 'bad place'. The word 'dystopia' was coined in 1747, spelled as 'dustopia'. One year later it would be defined as 'an unhappy country' and it would be in 1868 when John Stuart Mill would use it in a parliamentary debate. However, the term will not become commonly used until the late twentieth century.

The term 'totalitarianism' was first introduced in 1928 and it was essential to thinking during the Cold War period (1947–91), trying to define "the common core of both dictatorships in terms of a militantly anti-liberal, anti-bourgeois philosophy hostile to most ideas of individualism and individual rights in particular" (Claeys 2010:

119).

*Fahrenheit 451* is one of the most representative American postwar dystopian novels, and it was written during the first years of the Cold War period. One of the main themes in Bradbury’s work is that of ‘totalitarianism’<sup>1</sup>. We also find elements of science fiction in this masterpiece, namely the Mechanical Hound that goes hunting those who threaten the order of the totalitarian system in the story and that reminds us of the current robotic dogs used by the authorities to broadcast anti-pandemic measures in eastern China. Four out of the seven features that totalitarian regimes assume (Claeys 2010: 119–120) can be identified, unquestionably, in the novel: a monopoly over cultural and informational sources, so reading is not allowed; the use of the media and surveillance techniques, employing stultifying TV programs to prevent the citizens from thinking, the intervention of firemen as a military force who destroy books, and the Mechanical Hound as the robot that watches; furthermore, the intellectuals are perceived as domestic enemies; and a ‘totalist’ philosophy or ideology which demands absolute loyalty and the complete submission of the citizen to the state is presented in the form of the prohibition of free thought to avoid unhappiness. *Fahrenheit 451* can be interpreted, as Reid claims following Kevin Hoskinson and David Mogen, as a criticism of excessive dependence on new technologies by the American population, Cold War attitudes, and McCarthyism (2008: 76–77).

### **2.3. The Story of *Fahrenheit 451***

Ray Bradbury presents the reader with a society set in an undated future where firemen are no more in charge of extinguishing fires for a living. Now houses are fireproof. Firemen’s work is that of pursuing those who read and destroying, by burning them with a flamethrower, their collections of books. They have become those who watch. Books are evil and individualism is forbidden, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, environmental injustice might well be considered, as stated by Carly A. Krakow, “a totalitarianism of our time” (2021). Krakow discusses the concept of ‘the right to have rights’, originally expressed by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, indicating that “[g]overnments and corporations practice environmental racism by withholding resources from and forcing toxic exposure on minority communities, stripping communities of the ‘right to have rights’ and exploiting cases where the ‘right to have rights’ is already absent” (2021).

knowledge. Those who question their reality and think are considered to be outlaws. Mass media, particularly TV, are used to control the masses in this totalitarian world where censorship is the fundamental pillar. The main focus for the citizens must be on the present and the past is no longer valued. The story in the novel is introduced through the character Guy Montag, one of these firemen. The book is divided into three parts (“The Hearth and the Salamander”, “The Sieve and the Sand”, and “Burning Bright”) and the events are narrated in chronological order. Harold Bloom considers the work to be a “period piece”, and that “this short, thin, rather than tendentious novel has an ironic ability to inhabit somewhat diverse periods” (2008: 1).

The first part starts when Montag meets the teenager Clarisse McClellan. Montag comes back home late at night after his shift when the seventeen-year-old girl approaches him and introduces herself. Clarisse seems to be a freethinker. Full of energy, she wants Montag to converse with her about crazy little things that he has never considered before. Her magnetism and eccentric personality make him feel anxious, though, at the same time, captivated by the girl and her thoughts on life in general. This encounter reminds him of a meeting in the past with an old man in a park. Montag, a man who tends to think little, discovers that he cannot get the girl and her questions out of his mind after their encounter. When Montag arrives home, he finds an empty bottle of sleeping pills lying in his bedroom. His wife Mildred seems to have overdosed on the pills. He immediately calls the emergency team, and they urgently come to the house with two strange machines that are to save Mildred’s life eventually. When they wake up the next morning, Montag cannot achieve to clarify what happened the night before, mostly because Mildred avoids the conversation and only pays attention to the new script she has been sent to participate in a ridicule interactive TV program on the three walls they have in the house. She is even obsessed with purchasing a fourth wall, which seems to be a bad idea for Montag due to its expensive price. Montag heads off to work without being capable of discovering if Mildred's experience with the pills was intended to commit suicide or if it was just an accident. Montag encounters Clarisse again while walking on his way to work and both of them speak about unusual themes connected with the manifestations of the nature they contemplate. At the fire station, Montag runs into

the Mechanical Hound, and the beast growls at him. The fireman becomes conscious of the Hound's dislike concerning him, and he refers his thoughts on it to his fellow fireman, Captain Beatty. Several days go by since Montag's last meeting with Clarisse and Montag cannot help thinking about the conversations he and the girl had. In the fire station, the firemen receive a call communicating that an old woman hides books in her house. They go there to burn the place. Montag asks the woman to leave the house, though she decides to stay and die burnt with her books. Traumatized by the incident, Montag leaves the house carrying a book he has stolen. At night, Montag needs to speak with Mildred, but she is not interested in listening to him. Mildred tells him that Clarisse seems to have been killed in a hit-and-run accident, a common car accident that would not be investigated by the police. The next morning, Montag communicates to his superiors that he will stay at home because of some health issues, but Captain Beatty, who mysteriously knows that Montag stole a book, unexpectedly visits him. Beatty explains to Montag that firemen are always seduced to read the books they destroy to protect society and permits him to read this one he took with one condition: In twenty-four hours maximum, he must return to the fire station and destroy it. Montag confesses to Mildred he has been hiding books at home by saying:

This is your house as well as mine. I feel it's only fair that I tell you something now. I should have told you before, but I wasn't even admitting it to myself. I have something I want you to see, something I've put away and hid during the past year, now and again, once in a while, I didn't know why, but I did it and I never told you (85).

In the second part, after asking Mildred to sit and read the books together, Montag discovers that she is unable to understand what they are reading and, even, considers reading a waste of time. Montag thinks of Faber, the retired English professor whom he met in the park, and visits him to ask for help with the readings and his thoughts. Faber receives him with fear believing he has betrayed him and wants to burn his books. When the old professor sees the Bible that Montag carries he rapidly changes his mind about Montag's intentions. Montag confesses to Faber that he wants to learn and Faber decides to teach him the real history of their society.



At the end of their meeting, Faber gives Montag a seashell earphone that he has designed so they can use it to communicate with each other. Montag comes back home to find there that Mildred is watching the three walls with two friends, Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles. Montag loses his temper and starts to read aloud Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach"<sup>2</sup>, which angers the women. Montag's behavior infuriates Mildred. After the event, Montag returns to the fire station with the seashell earphone in his ear to give Beatty the book to be burnt. At the same time, the alarm gives the firemen the signal to leave to burn another house. This piece ends when Montag surprisingly discovers that the house they must destroy is his own house as Mildred has informed against him.

The third and last segment of the novel begins when Montag is forced to destroy his home by Captain Beatty by saying "I want you to do this job all by your lonesome, Montag. Not with kerosene and a match, but piecework, with a flamethrower. Your house, your clean-up" (150). The fireman takes the flamethrower to become conscious of the pleasure of destroying the three walls inside the house and, eventually, kills Beatty by burning him. The Mechanical Hound attacks Montag and Montag destroys it to escape carrying four books. He decides to visit Faber asking for help, though he knows that the old man is in danger if he stays there. On his way, he stops at the home of another fellow fireman to hide the books there in order to incriminate him. At Faber's home, Faber tells him to escape down the river because another Mechanical Hound has been sent to search for him, so Montag helps Faber rid of all traces of him and leaves the house with some clothes that Faber provides him to replace those he wears when he reaches the river. By the time the Mechanical Hound reaches the river, Montag has changed his clothes and his trail is lost. He safely makes his way through the wilderness toward a group of social outcasts and fugitives like himself. After leaving the river, he immediately finds the group that Faber told him about. They have been looking for him. The leader of the group, Granger, welcomes Montag. As stated by Seán McCorry, Montag

flees the city—the privileged space of modernity— and finds refuge on the

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<sup>2</sup> First published by the English poet in 1867 in the collection *New Poems*, the lyric poem shows the point of view of a man who believes that society is not as beautiful as it once was.

margins of an agrarian community. This spatial relocation materializes the rejection of modernity, and the deployment of the countryside repeats the postwar *topos* of the salvific potential of organic authenticity . . . (2018: 39).

While eating, the men, mainly scholars, show Montag how an innocent guy who strolls along the city streets is deliberately identified as him and executed for the television audience to see. The group moves on and Granger explains to Montag the purpose of the outlaw group: They preserve books by memorizing their contents. Each person in the group is a living version of one book and now Montag has become the Book of Ecclesiastes from the Bible. Here, it is important to highlight, as stated by Eller and Touponce, that

[t]his wisdom book of the Bible is famous, of course, for the assertion that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ and for the view that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. While some have labeled its author a pessimist weary of life, we think rather that the wisdom of the intertext here is that only when men are aware that nothing is really new can they live with an intensity in which everything can potentially become new (2008: 111).

While the group walks, the war begins and bombs fall upon the city destroying everything in their path. Men try to escape the city, though the group of fugitives decides to return to the city with Montag in the lead to make their books available again.

#### **2.4. Extremist Politicians, Neoliberalism and Cancel Culture: The Evolution of Book Burning to an Ecological Crisis**

Ray Bradbury’s portrayal of the life of his characters in the city, the civilization, cannot be classified as a positive one. The concept of freedom in his fictional world is linked to achieving happiness, and happiness implies banning free thought. To be happy, one must avoid reasoning. It is better to let go. This way, days go by, and so life does. No time to regret. Montag is a man who loves book burning and book burning is what he must continue to do. That is how he flows. He seems to envision that his wife is not happy, likewise, he is not, though the best thing he can do is not to take into consideration their unhappiness at all. People who think, who read, who try

to understand themselves, are the only ones who are unhappy. The three walls on Montag's house broadcast an interacting show intended to distract the masses' attention. In this case, Mildred's one. Happiness is a matter of consciousness: If one does not reason, one continues feeling joyful. James Filler identifies images of "The Allegory of the Cave" in Plato's *Republic* through Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and claims that major themes in the book are knowledge and freedom (2014: 529). Clarisse, the teenage neighbor, shows Montag the real vision of the outside of the Cave, making him feel uncomfortable with her questions, while Montag's wife, Mildred, and Montag's boss, Beatty, try "to keep Montag chained to the wall of the Cave, staring at images" (Filler 2014: 536).

We can state that literacy in *Fahrenheit 451* represents the condemnation of mankind to suffer. Freethinkers and the products they generate, namely books or other cultural expressions are the enemies in this nightmarish society. Eliminating free thought, mankind becomes a plague of zombies and this dystopic scenario is the perfect basis for a community where extremist politicians and cancel culture applied by the citizens using their social networks become the main protagonists. Governments do not need to continue acting as censors, now people have assumed this function. When something disrupts, it is immediately pursued. Those who think are considered to be dangerous and harmful. Those who claim that freethinkers are the enemies and cut down on citizens' rights for the good of mankind are considered to be the models to follow. In this scenario, where nothing can be discussed in order not to disrupt individualities, truth blurs becoming unrecognizable.

This scenario is not only a fictional one. Eller reminds us that even Bradbury's masterpiece was censored in the 1960s

to make the novel more likely to win school-board approval as a classroom text. A special 'Bal-Hi' edition, first printed in 1967, retained the typesetting of the first edition, but the text was altered at nearly a hundred points to remove profanity and references to sexuality, drinking, drug use, and nudity . . . Since 1979 new typesettings of the restored text—and *only* the restored text—have reached print (2013: 185).

Nowadays right-wing extremism, radicalism, and populism are inexplicably seen by many citizens around the world as the forces that can change our present. This situation creates scenarios where, again and again, censorship invisibly operates, though this time inside supposedly democratic governments and by citizens ignorant of the real context. We could expose here how some right-wing political parties in countries such as Spain denounce that educational texts used in schools contain content that tries to indoctrinate children concerning norms and values. These parties and their leaders, sometimes without having any knowledge in the field or scientific justification, condemn and use it in an attempt to cancel other ideological manifestations in the left-wing<sup>3</sup>. Those scholars and experts in the different fields who developed these materials are this way canceled by these governments. In other words, their objectiveness is brought into question. Illegal immigrants without resources, forced in many cases to abandon their countries, are seen and presented as menaces by extremist governments in our First World. We observe how these facts are dangerously rising day to day. The same parties deny that climate change is happening. These described episodes are part of the phenomenon that we know as denialism, that of denying every event that we are not willing to accept as it is an uncomfortable truth, and we have previously seen being manifested by, for instance, some Republican politicians in the US, namely exformer President Donald Trump. It is crystal clear the parallelism with the fictional citizens in *Fahrenheit 451*: They must not read to avoid unhappiness, a similar process of denialism.

These events might well be part of a literary totalitarian dystopia, though this time is real and we are the protagonists. It seems to be that the only valid ideological values and norms are those imposed by, following the previous examples, these extremist political parties that deny reality. Furthermore, just because they have been voted by citizens living in a democratic system, they blindly believe that their ideologies, norms, values, and identity must be the only ones to be implemented and they violently cancel any other expressions that may differ: Totalitarianism is disguised as democracy. Big Data capitalism threatens and enslaves us, and, as

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<sup>3</sup> Another example of cancel culture, cancelling, or call-out, can be found concerning the Creationists in the USA and the scientific community.

Kylie Jarrett states, “digital labour practices may have negative impacts on other workers or citizens, reproduce cycles of waste and obsolescence, or perpetuate other inequalities or social and environmental damage typical of capitalist system” (2019: 110). Significant issues to bear in mind in this scenario are untrustworthy information on social networks and the fact that citizens have further become unable to discriminate true information from fake news due to the overuse and overexposure, with the subsequent emergence of a particular lack of literacy. Groups of citizens have denied in our present world the existence of covid-19. Contradictory discourses have been published on social networks about the pandemic by charlatans and people have believed them to be true without discerning inconsistencies. This illiteracy that makes us unable to reason properly and to discriminate true knowledge from inventions is a new one: We attend schools and universities and we have learned to access the information on the Internet using complex devices, however, we are not able to deliberate due to the lack of reading habits and critical thinking. Brian Stableford affirms that *Fahrenheit 451*

brought the literary man’s fear of the illiterate masses into uniquely sharp focus in its portrayal of future ‘firemen’ whose job is to burn books and thus prevent the spread of the kinds of grief which, according to Ecclesiastes, inevitably stem from wisdom and the kinds of sorrow produced by the increase of knowledge. Here, too, a nostalgic regard for Nature is carefully conserved, and it is the wilderness that ultimately provides a refuge for the last custodians of literary value (2010: 269).

The circumstances of modern illiteracy lead to reflect on the very latest term ‘doublespeak’<sup>4</sup> presented by Orwell as the ‘Newspeak’ of the party in his outstanding totalitarian dystopia *1984*. The Internet and social networks have come to worsen the current outlook. If we, as citizens, do not start to read and do not disconnect from the digital world, we will continue to be unable to perceive how ambiguous and

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<sup>4</sup> “Politics and the English Language”, the essay published by George Orwell in 1946, is a fundamental reference to understanding the role of ‘doublespeak’ and ‘doublethink’. Homi K. Bhabha summarizes Orwell’s ideas by saying that “linguistic clarification keeps consciousness focused and makes it capable of sustaining ‘one man’s truth.’ Concreteness of thought plays its part by ensuring that the intellectual apparatus—the whole body—is inoculated against ready-made abstractions, prefabricated phrases, and, above all, the epidemic of euphemism” (2007: 180).

euphemistic the language used by our politicians is and how they manipulate us<sup>5</sup>. They flawlessly comprehend what the power of the new social networks to obscure is. Greg Simons indicates that, in the twenty-first century, politics and political mobilization are relocating

from the offline physical world to the online digital world . . . Social media operationalization is the frontline of the current political struggle underway in Western civilization for shaping the ideological cultural identity of citizens (across national boundaries) through informational and cognitive domain dominance and bringing about the End of History through the complete hegemony of liberal democracy (2021: 72).

Cancel culture is, as described by Simons, “a new and contentious concept and practice that is at the center of many heated emotional debates and discussions currently . . . Cancel culture fuels the intense polarization that is resulting from issues related to identity politics, which creates a cognitive environment where participants are inclined to be quick to judge and somewhat slow to question” (2021: 74). It must be assumed that, as human beings, we psychologically tend to cancel that which is opposed to what we think. The main issue here is, to clarify it, how to know when, as citizens, we are canceling for true social justice, which could be occasionally ethical, or as a form of online harassment, which could not. The point is that “[t]he rise of cancel culture and the age of the social justice warrior has been propelled by the disastrous policies of neoliberalism that have magnified inequalities and especially economic inequality . . . The ‘tyranny’ of the majority in a democracy has been supplanted by the tyranny of the minority in the world of cancel culture” (Simons 2021: 76–77). Reading and critical thinking become the only valid resources for fair discrimination. If we forbid reading some texts written by some intellectuals due to cancel culture, cancel culture will eventually become a black hole from which it is impossible to escape. Ideas must be expressed and discussed freely if we want to reach conclusions on fundamental values without simply attacking or rejecting them. Written texts are fundamental resources in the current times. The visionary Bradbury came to raise the idea of cancel culture in *Fahrenheit 451* when Beatty, speaking to

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<sup>5</sup> This is how the Brexit referendum in the UK might have been won.

Montag, argues that “[c]oloured people don’t like *Little Black Sambo*. Burn it. White people don’t feel good about *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Burn it. Someone’s written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book” (78). The citizens of our modern world need to disconnect from online platforms and reconnect with books, humanities, and humanism. This process implies rethinking the purpose of scientific and technological progress and coming back to our essence in connection with nature, to the physical world outside modern civilization. Far from the digital and technological universe, and the coming of the metaverse<sup>6</sup>, humankind might start to rethink the problems that our world must confront in years to come.

From an ecocritical perspective, dystopia teaches us that it is of paramount importance to preserve our relationship with our environment, particularly the wilderness. Jamie Slagel states:

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the idea of society leading itself into subjection and dehumanization is symbolized by society burning rather than reading books. Significantly, we are told that ‘the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord’. Analogously, we have chosen to separate and shun nature and hence not only to destroy the world we occupy, but also to lose our humanity (2021: 12).

The separation from nature is portrayed in the novel by showing people who have renounced the habit of reading books and turn into unresponsive TV viewers. Only those who read go for a walk in the countryside and follow the stream of a river, listen to the singing of the birds or contemplate the vegetation. Those who are connected

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<sup>6</sup> Concerning the concept of ‘metaverse’, Lauren Holt, a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge exploring the impact of humanity on biological complexity and technology’s effect on ecosystems, looks back on the idea of decoupling when she states that “[a]t other times, the proposed decoupling is framed as a form of escapism. The newly touted “metaverse”, for instance, promises a form of spatial, workplace and recreational departure from the “meatspace” of the physical world: why visit a polluted forest or lake when you can access a near-perfect digital simulation of a clean one from your home? Elsewhere in Silicon Valley, technologists and billionaires talk of the need to abandon a degraded Earth altogether, and are taking the tentative first steps to develop Mars-bound spaceships” (2022).

to mass media in the form of the four walls<sup>7</sup> try to escape their moments of desperation by driving their cars at full speed, which is a clear signal of the proliferation of unadapted behavior and psychopathologies in this dystopian scenario. Bate reminds us by citing F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson<sup>8</sup> that

the function of a literary education was to develop critical awareness, to resist the blandishments of the mass media shouting their breathless praise of ‘progress’ and of everything shiny and new. The business of literature is to work upon consciousness. The practical consequences of that work—social, environmental, political in the broadest sense—cannot be controlled or predicted. They will be surprising, haphazard, indirect, long-term (1999: 558).

Academic books tend to differ from social networks and the Internet by providing quality and factual information, and knowledge that makes us act in new ways based on what we have learned. Furthermore, we could affirm that the development of this academic research would never be accurate without books as primary sources. We must remember that academia interprets and analyzes, so observation is a primordial means for scholars. Nature teaches us to observe and understand. In the history of physics, for instance, this is perfectly illustrated by Newton and an apple falling down from a tree.

To conclude this point, we could signify that, unlike the overexploited new technologies, books seem to be linked to the protection of the Earth in *Fahrenheit 451*. Mass media used as a form of control by totalitarian authorities symbolize the expression of scientific and technological progress as the root causes of an

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<sup>7</sup> The theme had been previously used by Bradbury in his short science fiction story “The Veldt”, where a virtual reality room realistically reproduces what some of the characters imagine. It was originally published in 1950 with the title of “The World The Children Made”, to be republished as “The Veldt” in the anthology *The Illustrated Man*.

<sup>8</sup> In the 1930s, Leavis and Thompson revolved around two books by George Sturt documenting the decline of the old village crafts, *The Wheelwright’s Shop* and *Change in the Village*, and published a jeremiad in the form of a textbook for English students in schools titled *Culture and Environment* (Bate 1999: 256).



ecological crisis, an expression that climaxes when nuclear war begins and the city is destroyed<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The theme of escaping from a poisoned, war-torn Earth, was used by Bradbury many times in his works.

### 3. STATION ELEVEN: SHAKESPEARE AS THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL WEAPON TO STIMULATE AWARENESS

“As blind almost as Homer, Herman never read  
The good or bad or in-between Othello  
The dead put down by Richard Third,  
Iago’s boast,  
Never, gone out at midnight in his mind,  
Had Ahab with a small «a»  
Stumbled and fallen blind against  
Mad Hamlet’s father’s murdered ghost.”  
(Ray Bradbury, “That Son Of Richard III”)

#### 3.1. Emily St. John Mandel

##### 3.1.1. Short Biographical Notes



Figure 3. "[Emily St John Mandel](#)" by [ActualLitté](#) CC BY-SA 2.0

Emily St. John Mandel was born in 1979 in Merville, British Columbia, Canada. She has written six novels, being *Sea of Tranquility* (2022) the most recent one. The previous one, *The Glass Hotel* (2020), was selected as one of his favorite books of the year by President Barack Obama, shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and would be translated into 23 languages.

*Station Eleven* (2014), the theme of this research, was a finalist for a National Book Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award and won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2015. This post-apocalyptic dystopia has been translated into 36 languages and even broadcasted as a limited series on *HBO Max* created by showrunner Patrick Somerville.

Mandel’s mother, a social worker, is a Canadian citizen. Her father, a plumber, is American. St. John is Mandel’s middle name and it was her grandmother’s surname. When she was ten, she moved with all the members of her family to Denman Island off the west coast of British Columbia, the place where she would be

brought up. There she would be home-schooled until she was 15. During this period she started to write in a diary routinely. At 18 she decided to leave high school to study contemporary dance at The School of Toronto Dance Theatre and eventually never got her high school diploma. Then, she lived in Montreal for a short while before moving to New York City. Mandel is also a staff writer for the online magazine on books, arts, and culture *The Millions*, founded in 2003 by C. Max Magee, where she has written numerous essays.

### 3.1.2. Main Works

Mandel's first three novels before becoming a successful writer were published by the publisher Unbridled Books. Her debut novel would be the thriller *Last Night in Montreal* (2009), which tells the story of a young woman called Lilia who is experiencing difficulties settling into the city where she is living. She is being pursued by two men, a private detective, and her former lover, so she will have to confront a dark past and secrets of a childhood that she is incapable of remembering. Mandel's second novel is a crime fiction work, *The Singer's Gun* (2009), and tells the reader about the character Anton Waker, a man who has spent his whole life in an environment of corruption linked to organized crime. Now, Anton wants to abandon it determined to live a new respectable life. Things are to become complicated when he is blackmailed by his cousin in order to do the last job. Anton's falsification of his Harvard diploma is revealed and he is forced to make a choice between being loyal to his family or fulfilling his needs. Her third novel is *The Lola Quartet* (2013), a literary noir novel set in the afterward of the 2008 economic collapse in Florida. Gavin is a former jazz musician who has been fired from his job as a journalist. He is contacted by his sister. She thinks she has discovered a daughter he does not know he has. Gavin comes back to his hometown to look for the unknown child and her mother, that could be his high school girlfriend.

Mandel's fourth novel, the literary dystopia *Station Eleven* (2014), is a post-apocalyptic novel set shortly in a desolated world after the outbreak of a virus that annihilates more than ninety-nine percent of the population. The novel follows a troupe of Shakespearian actors and musicians who travel from town to town around the Great Lakes region staging Shakespeare. Mandel's work was nominated for the

National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and the Baileys Women’s Prize for Fiction, and won the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the Toronto Book Award in 2015. A ten-episode limited TV series adaptation of the novel was developed by showrunner Patrick Somerville and premiered on December 16, 2021, on *HBO Max*. Mandel’s fifth novel was the mystery thriller entitled *The Glass Hotel* (2020) which would be shortlisted for the Giller Prize and also would be recommended by Barack Obama in the list of his favorite books from that year. In April 2022 was announced that HBO Max will be adapting the novel into a television series, produced by Paramount Television Studios. Mandel and Patrick Somerville will co-write the adaptation. Mandel’s sixth novel is *Sea of Tranquility* (2022).

### **3.2. Defining Post-Apocalyptic Dystopia in *Station Eleven***

We could simply define post-apocalyptic literature as those stories set in a world after the collapse of their civilization; in post-apocalyptic literature, the characters try to survive in a hostile environment that tends to remind us of the Dark Ages. To better understand the concept of post-apocalyptic dystopia we must come back to the first years of the twentieth century when the American novelist Jack London (1876–1916) wrote what is considered to be the first dystopian novel, *The Iron Heel* (1908), though it is not this work that is the most significant one here. In 1912, Jack London would write a post-apocalyptic novel entitled *The Scarlet Plague*<sup>1</sup> that could be considered to be the basis of what we have seen later. *The Scarlet Plague* tells us about the collapse of civilization after a plague at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with a return to the Dark Ages, a place where only some tribes remain and humanity has become illiterate and savage. *Station Eleven* shares with *The Scarlet Plague* many elements of the plot, and we can affirm that Mandel’s work, like many other post-modern works, is a rewrite of a story previously told.

In the twenty-first century, some significant post-apocalyptic works have been published, being one of the most recognized that of *The Road* (2006), by Cormac McCarthy, a novel “[d]efined by its sparse, stark, economical, transparent prose . . .”

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<sup>1</sup> Scholar Jesús Isaías Gómez López translated into Spanish the novel during the covid-19 pandemic. This translation, including an introduction also by Gómez López, has been published by Editorial Visor in 2022 with the title of *La Peste Escarlata*.

(Claeys 2017: 485). In this story, after a supposed nuclear war and various epidemics, most of the population has been annihilated. The resulting landscape is a nightmarish place where survivors do not have enough food. A man and his son wander this “no man’s land” exposed to the dangerous and deathly beings that humans have become. *The Road* can be considered an example of the Southern Gothic tradition, and it is a much darker and more pessimistic novel than that of Mandel. We could say that *Station Eleven* could be a fairy tale version of McCarthy’s novel. Along with McCarthy, the Canadian Margaret Atwood can be considered one of the most important authors in the twenty-first century concerning post-apocalyptic dystopia. Claeys states that regarding dystopia in the new century, Atwood is “the premier writer in this field” (2017: 481). Atwood’s famous trilogy *MaddAddam* is composed of the books *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), and some elements and themes in the novels are corporate dictatorship, global warming, the collapse of civilization, and the creation of new species. Atwood has also been recognized as one of the Southern Ontario Gothic<sup>2</sup> authors in Canada.

We can consider Mandel’s work to be a post-apocalyptic dystopian novel, though it is important to highlight Carmen M. Méndez-García’s nuance when she describes Mandel’s *Station Eleven* as

a postapocalyptic post-scarcity text as compared to other texts in the genre such as the aforementioned *The Road* or the first seasons of *The Walking Dead*. The (very limited number) of humans left seem to have their basic needs secure (food, a place to sleep safely). . . . *Station Eleven* is a fantasy mostly about goodness and decency in human nature, and the possibility of communal creation of little cells of camaraderie, a kind of preservation of the best of culture, society, and previous models of civilization (2017: 113).

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<sup>2</sup> Southern Ontario Gothic is a tradition in Canadian literature derived from the Gothic that appears in the 1960s and 1970s and has evolved until the present. Another important Canadian writer included in this literary tradition is Alice Munro, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. Concerning ecocriticism, Alanna F. Bondar indicates that the evolution of environmental consciousness in the Canadian novel “appears ideologically entwined with a Gothic mode imbued with postmodernism, postcolonialism and, frequently, magic realist possibilities” (2013: 74).

### 3.3. The Story of *Station Eleven*

*Station Eleven*, like many postmodern novels, is a non-chronological one with a multi-perspective narrative structure constituted of nine parts (“The Theater”, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, “I Prefer You With a Crown”, “The Starship”, “Toronto”, “The Airplanes”, “The Terminal”, “The Prophet”, and “Station Eleven”). The story jumps back and forth through time essentially to show the Travelling Symphony’s journey, Arthur’s rise to fame, his relationship with Miranda and the creation of the graphic novel *Dr. Eleven*, and Arthur’s relationship with Elizabeth, his second wife, who gives birth to Tyler, the prophet. In reference to the story, Charles Conaway states that

Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* presents a post-apocalyptic world in which allusions, quotations, performances and other references to Shakespeare invite us to consider the nature of his continued cultural importance in a world where civilization as we know it has been devastated (2021: 4).

The novel starts on the night of the outbreak and the beginning of the spread of the so-called Georgia Flu in Toronto, Canada, a virus that finally is to annihilate more than ninety-nine percent of the world’s population. That night, while performing *King Lear*, the successful actor Arthur Leander has a heart attack, and Jeevan Chaudhary, an ex-paparazzo who is watching the performance with his fiancé and has been training as a paramedic, tries to perform CPR, though Arthur passes away. After the fatal event, Jeevan helps Kirsten Raymonde, a little child who plays a brief silent role in the staging and seems to be scared. When leaving the theatre, he discovers that his girlfriend has left without waiting for him as well as he starts to receive calls from a friend who works as a doctor, warning him of a deadly virus outbreak. Jeevan decides to stop at the supermarket on his way home to buy as many supplies as possible. Then he calls his girlfriend to warn her of the collapse and tells her to go with her family by saying “I’m going to stay with my brother. I think you should pack up now and go to your mother’s place before everyone finds out and the roads get clogged up” (24). Some days later, social networks stop working, a huge number of citizens die of the virus, and cities around the world start to fall. Two months later, Jeevan and his paraplegic brother Frank continue to be alive, though supplies have

run out and Frank kills himself feeling that he will not be able to survive in this apocalyptic scenario. Jeevan heads south and eventually joins a settlement where he will provide medical services and marry. To attend Arthur's funeral, Clark Thompson, Elizabeth Colton (Arthur's second wife), and Tyler (Arthur's son) catch the same flight to Toronto, though it is redirected due to the virus spreading to land at Severn City Airport, where they establish a small community with other survivors. Two years later, Elizabeth and Tyler will leave with a religious cult.

Kirsten, the young girl who acted in *King Lear*, and her brother survive the first year after the outbreak of the flu, though the boy will eventually die. Kirsten will live on her own for a few years until she finally joins the Travelling Symphony, a group of actors and musicians that wander from town to town staging Shakespeare. Conaway explains that "[a]ccording to Mandel, art adds something to a life or mere survival in order to make existence sufficient" (2021: 5). Kirsten is relentlessly looking for information about Arthur in newspapers and gossip magazines abandoned in the places they visit, "[b]ecause we are always looking for the former world, before all the traces of the former world are gone" (130). Her most valuable treasure is a sci-fi comic series called *Dr. Eleven* that Arthur gave to her when working together before the apocalypse. *Dr. Eleven* was created by Miranda Carroll, Arthur's first wife.

The Travelling Symphony comes back to a town that they visited two years earlier. Twenty years have passed since the outbreak of the virus. Surprisingly, two members of the theatre troupe that stayed in the town on the last visit are not there waiting to rejoin them as they promised. One of these two members, Charlie, is Kirsten's best friend after the collapse, who was on the verge of childbirth. After one of their performances, they become aware that the town is being controlled by Tyler Leander, now a religious fanatic who is known as the prophet, when he tries to brainwash the spectators by saying to them that "the great cleansing that we suffered twenty years ago, that flu was our flood. The light we carry within us is the ark that carried Noah and his people over the face of the terrible waters, and I submit that we were saved" (60). Likewise Kirsten, the prophet is fascinated by the graphic novel *Dr. Eleven*. The troupe leaves the town to go to the Museum of Civilization in Severn City, founded and run by Clark Thompson, after hearing rumors that the disappeared

members could be there. What the Travelling Symphony members do not know is that a girl called Eleanor who has been forced to be the prophet's next wife is hidden in one of the caravans to escape the town. The prophet and his men pursue the Symphony looking for Eleanor. Several members of the theatre troupe (Sayid, Dieter, and Sidney) are captured by the religious fanatic. Concerning these events in the novel, we can quote here Philip Smith explaining that "[f]or St. John Mandel, like Shakespeare, the apocalypse triggers a regression to a more violent time" (2016: 292). Kirsten and August decide to leave the group and go to a golf course where they are to find some supplies, but they lose the Symphony, so they must continue traveling on their own. While wandering on their way to Severn City, they meet two of the prophet's men and a boy and kill the men to rescue Sayid, but the boy manages to escape. Powerless, Sayid confirms to Kirsten and August that Dieter died while in captivity by covering his face with his hands and saying "I couldn't..." (286). The prophet had held Sidney prisoner to exchange her for Eleanor, but she managed to escape and has warned the Symphony to change the route. It will be near Severn City that the prophet, Kirsten, and the two members of the Travelling Symphony accompanying her, are to meet. The prophet will try to kill Kirsten, though he fails as a boy in his group shoots and kills him to then commit suicide. All the members of the theatre troupe finally arrive at the Museum of Civilization. When Clark listens to the Travelling Symphony members' chronicles of the prophet, he identifies him as Tyler Leander, Arthur's son. Kirsten, who owns two copies of *Dr. Eleven* now, leaves one of them in Clark's care before setting off to new territory. The novel concludes with the Symphony heading south toward a set of electric lights that has appeared on the horizon, which is to represent hope and the dawn of the new world, and Mandel writes:

THE TRAVELLING SYMPHONY left the airport on a bright morning in September. They'd stayed for five weeks, resting and making repairs to the caravans, performing Shakespeare and music on alternate evenings, and an orchestral and theatrical hangover lingered in their wake (331).

Pieter Vermeulen explains the reason for the election of the style in the novel by stating that



[t]he tone of *Station Eleven* is composed, tender, and melancholy, and it studiously avoids shock and dread. . . . this approach makes it possible to situate the novel's contribution in the context of philosophical and theoretical interventions on the stakes and affordances of human life in the Anthropocene (2018: 11).

### **3.4. Biological, Cultural and Psychological Post-colonialism: The Paradox of 'Shakespeare Vs. The Unitary Mindset'**

Generally speaking, in the twenty-first century, few educated people would deny that William Shakespeare could be considered the most important British playwright ever, and one of the greatest authors in world literature together with the Spanish Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that the British history of colonization has become a major problem in our current democratic times. Some groups (social and political ones) of member states of the Commonwealth of Nations claim independence and the free expression of those particular cultural differences that were annihilated by the British dominion<sup>3</sup>. Canada, the second-largest country in the world, is one of these member states where today we can find some crystal clear manifestations of the strong influence of the British Empire and the result of it in Canadian cultural manifestations. To identify this influence, we must pay particular attention to Canada's national drama, a strange entity where Shakespearean drama seems to hold sway and might well be in part responsible for the lack of the expression of self-identity. Craig Walker illustrates the general idea by saying:

It is also true that when we speak of either the history of Canadian theatre or Canadian dramatic literature, we are speaking, for the most part, of work created squarely in the Western European tradition . . . It is intriguing to imagine what eventually might have come out of an effort to create a synthesis of European and Aboriginal performance traditions in the earliest periods of contact, but we know of none that was made (2016: 370).

The use of William Shakespeare's plays in Mandel's *Station Eleven*, integrated into

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<sup>3</sup> Some countries, however, have voluntarily joined the Commonwealth of Nations.

the story of a post-apocalyptic world, continues to be the manifestation of the British civilization that returns to recolonize the new world after the collapse, bringing the culture of the old one again to the tribal society that remains. As stated by Philip Smith referring to the claims of R. J. Miney of the Shakespeare Association of India concerning the importance of Shakespeare to the British Empire, “they attest to a strongly held belief among certain agents of the British Empire that all people craved Shakespeare, and that by studying English literature, and Shakespeare specifically, the colonial subject would come to appreciate the cultural dividends of imperial occupation” (2016: 299). The Canadian Mandel expresses in the novel this appreciation of the cultural dividends of imperial occupation when a former actor in the Travelling Symphony, Dieter, says that “People want what was best about the world” (38). Shakespeare is considered by scholars in English Studies, along with Chaucer, to be the point of origin of English literature written in Modern English. We can state that the portrait of the human psyche by the Bard is memorable in his literary corpus: each play, each character, will speak to us of universal themes, capturing the essence of the complexity that defines what the human being is. Bloom’s in-depth analysis of his work, *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human*, can be considered referential to better understand the importance of Shakespeare. Bloom proclaims Shakespeare’s universalism by saying that

[e]arly modern English was shaped by Shakespeare: the *Oxford English Dictionary* is made in his image. Later modern human beings are still being shaped by Shakespeare, not as Englishmen, or as American women, but in modes increasingly post-national and postgender. He has become the first universal author, replacing the Bible in the secularized consciousness (1998: 10).

This is the reason why the author continues to be a current reference in the modern narrative, and not only in the English language. His stories are rewritten and reinterpreted, adapted into various formats, and his work is performed in Western and Eastern countries. Perhaps Shakespeare is no longer what he was, perhaps his essence has been distorted, but his influence on global culture is undeniable. In *Station Eleven*, Shakespeare is chosen by Mandel as a representation of the best of the old world that must be brought to the present. The plays of the author come to

bring hope to the survivors, and the actors of The Travelling Symphony thus become colonizers who come to bring the culture of the British civilization to the local inhabitants of the new world: the literacy of the survivors is achieved by accepting that Shakespeare is the best resource for bringing back civilization, a new world. Margaret Maurer, paying attention to intertextuality in Mandel's novel, draws a parallel between the Star Trek crew and the Travelling Symphony. The Travelling Symphony is seen as a group of adventurers, of pioneers, who share the same doctrine as the Star Trek fleet. In Maurer's words, "[t]he Travelling Symphony follows a 'strict policy of non-intervention in the politics of the towns through which they passed' (Mandel 2014: 124), which mirrors the famous Prime Directive which all Starfleet crews follow: 'no interference with the social development of said planet(s) [that they explore]' (Senensky 1968)" (2019: 40–41).

We can state that *Station Eleven* shows colonization as a major underground issue throughout the story. There are several levels of colonization at work in Mandel's novel: The first is that of biological colonization: The virus that has ravaged the planet is in a sense a colonizer who has come to exterminate the original inhabitants. We, as readers, are not to learn if the new virus has been created by a laboratory. After that colonization, those few survivors try to preserve their old values and customs, and these are strongly rooted in this Canadian novel in those of the British Empire. In Mandel's work, that of a Canadian author, the influence of the old world is at work again in the reconstruction of the new world after the collapse. This might well be the second colonization in the story. Concerning the third and last colonization in *Station Eleven*, we must highlight that the representation of nature that Mandel presents us in *Station Eleven* is very different from that which Bradbury delivers in *Fahrenheit 451*. Whereas nature welcomes those who represent culture and flee from the mass media that seek to manipulate in Bradbury's work, in Mandel that same nature is presented as a threatening space for those who wander homeless. The perception of wilderness in Canadian tradition is summarized by Bondar when claiming:

[f]aced with an unexpected, unexplainable and unimaginable wilderness, Canadians erased pastoral expectations (in contrast to New World American

writers) and replaced them, as Margaret Atwood suggests in her thematic summary of the Canadian literary consciousness, with stories of disaster and survival, which fostered (or confirmed) a ‘violent duality’ within the literary imagination (2013: 72).

In the novel, the last recolonization, the religious one, is again at work, led by the character of the prophet, a man who tries to impose his rules on the inhabitants of the post-apocalyptic world and who may well be identified with the arrival in New England of the Pilgrim Fathers and the consequent introduction of Puritanism. The prophet, conscious of the dangerous power of culture as food for thought that makes people free, tries to convince the survivors with an eloquent speech that they are the Chosen ones by God as soon as the performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the town of St. Deborah by the Water ends, but his message is not a message for liberation but for oppression. In the novel, any deviation from the norms he imposes is punished and, as the prophet, Tyler Leander believes to have the power to decide about others’ rights. The sexual oppression he exerts on women is to prove that his purpose is not that of creating a better and more secure world for those who survived<sup>4</sup>. Shakespeare, although clearly identified as an element of the British Empire to impose cultural colonization, also paradoxically becomes a humanistic weapon of combat against those ideological colonizers who try to control the survivors. Philip Smith explains how the issue of colonization in *Station Eleven* is introduced to the reader by stating that Mandel

avoids the problematic representation of Shakespeare in the colonial encounter by presenting a world conveniently free of natives . . . One nevertheless finds a colonial fantasy played out whereby an apparently primitive people are civilized through the work of Shakespearean actors (2016: 301).<sup>5</sup>

Shakespeare is necessary for survival and the use of his plays, those performed by

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<sup>4</sup> A more profound analysis could be developed on the controversial custom of the prophet of selecting and forcing young women to be his wives. The focus would be on developing the idea, defended by the ecofeminist discourse, of men’s belief of having their right to exploit nature, to connect it to the idea of men making use of women believing to have the same right (Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy 1998).

<sup>5</sup> *Terra nullius*, a Latin term meaning “the land of no one”. It was the justification used by the British to colonize Australia.

the troupe that wanders from village to village, also present other readings in the novel. The distrust of nature in Mandel's bestseller can be described as ecophobia. The surviving characters desperately seek to return to the old world that brought them security. Here, wilderness does not become a space of protection or welcome, but a hostile environment. Wild nature cannot be controlled by the survivors and a return to a safe environment that only civilization offers is necessary. That is why the search for a place where the power supply has been restored is so important, a place where coming back to use modern technology. The wilderness in Mandel's *Station Eleven* is a distressing return to the Dark Ages. The survivors of the lethal virus are free to go from one place to another, but that freedom implies survival: Kirsten needs to carry her knives with her and even kill some people to continue to live. Shakespeare and his plays are going to remind us metaphorically that the times of the Bard were hard times, with similar plagues to that presented in the novel. *King Lear* is the play that Arthur Leander performs at the beginning of the novel, as well as the play that the theatre group performs after the collapse. The idea of ecophobia invading this play is evident: Lear, as Leander does, cannot control his life. He has lost his kingdom and becomes stripped of his home. As a homeless person, his life is subjugated by the conditions of a hostile environment that he cannot dominate, the same hostile environment that the survivors have to deal with daily. Lear, with her fear of nature, also speaks of another storm: the emotional storm that is fought inside every human being in a hostile environment of survival. When Lear loses control of the space he inhabits, he also loses control of his identity. As stated by Simon C. Estok, "*King Lear* is vivid in its foregrounding of environmental unpredictability and in its dramatization of a fear of nature. The play markets this dramatic ecophobia to an audience very familiar with grain shortages, bad harvests, cold weather, and profound storms" (2011: 19). In Mandel's work, the survivors who wait for the caravan of the Travelling Symphony to visit their towns are a similar audience to that of Shakespeare's times.

## 4. THE LAURENTIAN GREAT LAKES AS A DYSTOPIAN SETTING

“In far towns toward the East and North toward Michigan  
Do grandmothers and boys go forth to lawns,  
And lines strummed there ‘twixt oak or elm and porch,  
And tie thereon great beasts of Indian grace  
Loomed taller than their heads?”

(Ray Bradbury, “When Elephants Last In The Dooryard Bloomed”)

### 4.1. An Overview of the “No Man’s Land” in the Region of the Great Lakes as a Dystopian Scenario

As previously indicated in the introduction to this research on dystopian literature, we have taken into consideration the concept of “no man’s land” as referential to analyze both novels. We have associated this term with the idea of spaces where nobody rules and the main characters wander and live in freedom. This “no man’s land” where the characters move through in Bradbury’s and Mandel’s works is to be located in the region of the Laurentian Great Lakes.

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the term “no-man’s-land” by providing two different and complementary definitions. The first one presents three meanings: “an area of unowned, unclaimed, or uninhabited land”; “an unoccupied area between opposing armies”; and “an area not suitable or used for occupation or habitation”. The second one refers to “an anomalous, ambiguous, or indefinite area especially of operation, application, or jurisdiction” (“No-man’s-land”). These definitions perfectly describe the apocalyptic scenarios that we are to find in the novels written by Bradbury and Mandel: In Bradbury’s work, the wilderness is an uninhabited land, an unoccupied and indefinite area, where the exiled find peace<sup>1</sup> and freedom and can

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<sup>1</sup> It is stated and assumed that the Western Renaissance artists invented landscape painting, though it should be considered that China could have invented landscape art in the first place. Jonathan Jones wrote an interesting article in *The Guardian* after attending the Victoria and Albert Museum’s exhibition ‘Masterpieces of Chinese painting’ in 2013. Zhang Hongxing, the curator of the exhibition, among other ideas, pointed out that Bruegel’s much-loved *Hunters in the Snow* presents all the elements that delighted medieval Chinese landscape painters, including the snow. The snow is an element that we are to find in the last minutes of Truffaut’s *Fahrenheit 451*, and it is connected to the idea of finding peace in the wilderness. The original idea of finding peacefulness in the landscape, following this article, could be, as stated by Jones, in an institutionalized culture

join together in communities where their inhabitants share a vision of the world focused on biocentrism and far from the wrong idea of humans as the higher priority; In Mandel's novel, this "no man's land" is that of an anomalous area, where, unlike *Fahrenheit 451*, anthropocentrism is primordial and humans continue to be the central species in the world.

These two dystopian images of "no man's land", as previously said, are to be located in the vast region of the Great Lakes, being concretely an unidentified place in the area in *Fahrenheit 451*, that we have located in the surroundings of Bradbury's birthplace in Waukegan. In *Fahrenheit 451* we are to find a space that, following John R. Knott (2011) and bearing in mind that at the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a change in the way that American wilderness was perceived, can be understood as influenced by European Romanticism. English writing on the aesthetic dimension of the natural landscape at the end of the eighteenth century popularized the categories of the sublime and the picturesque, along with that of the beautiful. Not only did nature start to be identified with a place where the divine truth can be found, but it was also considered to be a manifestation of what the sublime was.<sup>2</sup> As we can see, in this way nature and the Bible share a similar function, that of containers of the divine truth. It is Thoreau who is to give us the clue to interpreting Bradbury's novel. As stated by Knott,

Thoreau's provocative view of nature as representing an 'absolute freedom and wildness', which he opposed to civic culture and conventional ways of thinking, would have its greatest influence much later, on such iconoclastic defenders of wildness as John Muir at the end of the nineteenth century and Edward Abbey and Gary Snyder in the latter half of the twentieth (2011: 7).

On the other hand, this "no man's land" is to be an area of the Michigan shore in

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of contemplation in China during the Song dynasty. Jones explains it by writing: "But why did China invent landscape art in the first place? Why did artists begin to depict, not gods and battles as elsewhere, but the grandeur of nature? It has something to do with Buddhism, which spread to China before AD1,000 and inspired a culture of contemplation" (2013). This way, we could say that the British pastoral is a reference in our research, but the idea of that link between nature, contemplation, and humanities in the novel is to be found in Chinese paintings such as *Winter Evening Landscape* (1120) by Li Gongnian.

<sup>2</sup> William Blake's works are perfect examples.

*Station Eleven*, concretely Michigan’s northern coast, though it must be mentioned here that some towns and places used as settings in Mandel’s novel are to be fictional ones (the most significant ones, Severn City and St. Deborah by the Water). Here, nature will be interpreted as an antagonist in the same way as the prophet will. Knotts explains that

the English settlers who arrived on Cape Cod in the early seventeenth century were culturally conditioned to see the North American forest as a hostile wilderness. It recalled for them the dark forest of European tradition, thought to be evil as well as dangerous, and also the inhospitable, desert wildernesses of the Old Testament. In the words of the poet Michael Wigglesworth, the immense, forested country was ‘A waste and howling wilderness, / Where none inhabited / But hellish fiends and brutish men / That Devils worshiped’ (2011: 6).

We understand that it is mandatory to provide a brief description of the real geographical area where both dystopias take place, the Laurentian Great Lakes, considering the fact that the boundary between Canada and the USA crosses through this area. Furthermore, the story in *Station Eleven* starts in Toronto (Canada), though the members of the Travelling Symphony will wander through the territory of Chicago (US) some years later, which will add a further sense of strangeness to the lives of these characters. Nevertheless, in the particular case of *Station Eleven*, the sociocultural extent continues to be Western-centric. Placed in east-central North America (Figure 1), Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario form a chain of deep lakes known as the Laurentian Great Lakes, which is also the largest surface of fresh water on the Earth, containing eighteen percent of the world and ninety percent of the US fresh surface water. Nearly 17,000 km of coastline, including islands, can be found in this region. This coastline is referred to as the North American ‘Third Coast’. Four broad terrestrial provinces are identified in the Great Lakes region: The Boreal Forest, on the north shore of Lake Superior, populated by vegetation such as white spruce, black spruce, balsam fir, jack pine, paper birch, and trembling aspen; The Laurentian Mixed (Great Lakes-St. Lawrence) Forest, in the shores of southern Lake Superior, the northern half of Lake Michigan and all but the southern tip of Lake Huron, where red pine, eastern white pine,



eastern hemlock, yellow birch, maples, and oaks can be identified; The Midwest Broadleaf Forest, in the shores of southern Lake Michigan and Huron and the shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario shores, with beech, maples, hickories, and oaks; and the Prairie Parkland, nearly reaching the southern shore of Lake Michigan. The Great Lakes help moderate the regional temperatures, which are cooler in the summer and milder in the winter<sup>3</sup>.

## 4.2. Nature as Setting in Poetry, Narrative, and Drama

### 4.2.1. Landscape and Poetry: The Eco-poetry<sup>4</sup>

There is a crystal clear link between *Fahrenheit 451* and poetry, not only because of the author's use of poetry in the story as an engine of change but also because of the intentional poetic use of language in his work. When Montag escapes the city, Bradbury poetically describes his move from a frightening unreality into an unreal reality by writing “[t]he black land slid by and he was going into the country among the hills. For the first time in a dozen years the stars were coming out above him, in great processions of wheeling fire. He saw a great juggernaut of stars form in the sky and threaten to roll over and crush him” (180). Abandoning civilization, Montag will be able to see beyond and, at the same time, he is to confront his fear of the unknown. This is the reason why an approach from ecopoetics to Bradbury's work is justified.

The use of Matthew Arnold's poem “Dover Beach” in Bradbury's novel is quite significant. Montag's reading of the poem represents a point of no return in the story. This action is to signify both Montag's condemnation and salvation: From this moment on, Montag ceases to be a persecutor and becomes an outlaw. Arnold's

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<sup>3</sup> Those interested in learning more about this geographical area will find the book written by scholar James G. Bockheim from the Department of Soil Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (Madison, WI, USA), *Soils of the Laurentian Great Lakes, USA and Canada*, to be a useful resource. This text was published by Springer in 2021. In his work, Bockheim introduces the readers with some understanding of science to the soils of the Great Lakes, focusing on their history, soil-forming factors, soil taxonomic structure, soil geography, pedodiversity, and the importance of soils for the preservation of the Great Lakes Coastal Zone.

<sup>4</sup> As stated by Bate, the true importance of ecocriticism may be more phenomenological than political. In Bate's discourse, “‘ecopoetics’ will be a more helpful denomination than ‘ecocriticism’”. Eco-poetics asks in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place – the prefix -eco is derived from Greek *oikos*, ‘the home of place of dwelling’” (2001: 75).

poem is, as Bate explains, a rewrite of the poem "Composed by the Sea-side, near Calais, August, 1802" by William Wordsworth, though this way "from the other side of the Channel by turning England into a 'darkling plain' and replacing the star with a gleam of light from the French coast" (2001: 212). Montag, too, will find out how things look from the other side after reading the poem to Mildred and her friends.

It would be William Wordsworth who, concerning the theme of the patriot in *The Prelude*, would remind us of the alienation of the human being, one of the central themes in *Fahrenheit 451*. The patriot is, in Bate's own words, "a devotee of liberty and hence a staunch supporter of the revolution" (2001: 209). When Wordsworth came back to England, a "sense of almost inexpressible alienation" (Bate 2001: 209) overcame him. The character of Montag is to become, like Wordsworth, a patriot. In his pursuit of freedom, he will have to leave his world behind, after confronting that sense of "inexpressible alienation" in the city, to start a revolution that will restore the lost essence of this world.

We find that the third part of Bradbury's novel is a return to mother nature, to a pre-urban world. Nature thus becomes the protector of mankind against scientific and technological progress. Civilization has failed to provide some human beings with security and comfort, so these human beings need to return to their mother nature to find the support which has been denied to them. Montag will begin to remember those little details of his life at the same moment that he begins to remember the book he had memorized, the Book of Ecclesiastes. Books are the memoirs of a civilization that is to ban them because it does not want to remember in order to maintain a supposed state of happiness, and that will be the reason why when Montag becomes a book man, he starts to remember what he had forgotten in his past life, basically when and where he met Mildred. Wordsworth's eco-poetics, as stated by Bate, expresses that "'the mind of man' can be part of nature" (2001: 148). We could also state that the Book People's minds become part of nature.

#### 4.2.2. Wilderness and Narrative: The EcoGothic

We could affirm that Mandel's *Station Eleven* must be studied from the perspective of

the EcoGothic<sup>5</sup>. The landscape represented by the Canadian author is far from that of Bradbury's novel. In Mandel's work, as previously stated, the world after the collapse has been conquered by nature, and "no man's land" has become hostile territory where the characters have to carry knives to protect themselves from other human beings. Young people can recognize spots on maps, though they are unable to understand the function of the lines representing the old boundaries in them. It will be Bonnar who reminds us that "Canadian literature shows consistent patterns of retreat from the 'unnatural' wilderness as non-nurturing mother to seek comfort, instead, in the garrisoned security of a colonial mother-country's psychological and physical fortresses" (2013: 72). Those who wander have to be careful if they want to survive. Taking an unknown route could signify death. The main danger in the novel is represented by the prophet, an antagonist that is connected to religious radicalism and pedophilia: The prophet will suggest the Symphony leaving fifteen-year-old Alexandra, the youngest girl in the group, in St. Deborah by the Water as a guarantee of future good relations between the troupe and the town (62–65). As stated by Smith and Hughes,

[i]mages of a desolate wilderness function as a precursor to the dungeon or haunted castle of later Gothic fictions – a fearful space inhabited by threatening characters (or creatures) and marked by deep-seated secrets or past transgressions that threaten the status quo. This concept of nature as haunted house (to borrow a phrase from Emily Dickinson) has persisted in American culture . . . There has been recent ecocritical interest in 'ecophobia' . . . (2013: 9–10).

The prophet can be identified with a Puritan settler coming to Massachusetts in the early 1600s, following this ecoGothic perspective, and as Tom J. Hillard explains, "the typological understanding of the New World 'wilderness' held by many of these settlers established an important imaginative symbolic structure that allowed them to 'read the world' to interpret signs from God" (2013: 106). The prophet interprets these

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<sup>5</sup> As defined by Smith and Hughes, their volume on EcoGothic is "the first to explore the Gothic through theories of ecocriticism" (2013: 1). The authors state that "[w]hile the origins of this ecoGothic can be traced back to Romanticism the growth in environmental awareness has become a significant development" (2013: 5).

signs from God when reading the outbreak of the deadly virus of the Georgia Flu and tries to impose his norms believing himself to be the Chosen One.

Some members of the theatre troupe such as Sidney, the clarinet, will expose in the end that Shakespeare might well not be enough to survive. They need to come back to the life of the pre-pandemic world. The caravans that take the road could be considered similar to that of a group of explorers in the blankness of the Arctic: They need Shakespeare to continue their travel, bearing in mind that the Bard is not an end in himself but the emotional support to reach the final destination. When the novels go forward, we are to discover that Shakespeare takes a back seat. Reaching the place where the power supply has been restored comes first.

#### 4.2.3. Environment and Drama: The Ecodrama

One of the most captivating ideas developed in Mandel's novel is that of the theatre actors returning to the road. The members of the Travelling Symphony travel in their caravans from one village to another to perform Shakespeare's plays accompanied by music, bringing hope and entertainment to those who survived the outbreak of the virus and their descendants. The highlight here is the twist on how the concept of performance is understood twenty years after the collapse. If we pay attention to the idea of Shakespeare as one of the main themes in the novel and its function in the story, already studied previously in this research, one thought immediately comes to mind. In the novel, we do not find any space similar to that of The Globe, the famous London theatre that burned down at the end of June 1613 during a performance of *Henry VIII*, in the years following the outbreak of the Georgia Flu until the novel concludes in the airport of Severn City. Shakespeare has continuously been associated with the idea of the theatre, the building, as a physical space to welcome performances. Today, an iconic world-renowned reconstruction of the old Elizabethan theatre can still be found in the City of London, which serves as a stage for the Bard plays and is visited by many tourists who tour the city daily.

Mandel's novel opens with an ill-fated performance of *King Lear* at the Algin Theatre in Toronto on a winter's night. On this very night, the virus will break into the lives of many people and bring about the end of the world as we know it. From this

point on, the theatres as public spaces as we know them nowadays will cease to exist too. The troupe of actors will return to the road and nomadic life. The theatrical performances will henceforth take place under the moonlight and in open spaces, with the dim light of candles as the principal illumination. From this moment on, the natural environment and performance will be joined in communion too. The cold and the heat, the storm and the wind, and every other meteorological manifestation or climatological variation will become part of the stage play. We have previously described how in *King Lear* these elements related to meteorology play a fundamental role in this dramatic text. While in the performance of *King Lear* at the Algin Theatre in Toronto the snow that falls is artificial, the post-apocalyptic world through which the Travelling Symphony travels no longer needs such special effects. A thunderstormy night can be perfect for a performance of *King Lear* near a lakeshore. A night nearby the forest becomes the ideal space for staging *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. What is most significant about this theme raised in the novel is to imagine how the spectators of such a performance might well feel. The elements of nature will condition the interpretation and experience of those spectators, and even the way how the actors play their roles in the performance. Mandel describes in the novel one of these nights staging Shakespeare when she writes:

WHAT WAS LOST IN THE COLLAPSE: almost everything, almost everyone, but there is still such beauty. Twilight in the altered world, a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a parking lot in the mysteriously named town of St. Deborah by the Water, Lake Michigan shining a half mile away. Kirsten as Titania, a crown of flowers on her close-cropped hair, the jagged scar on her cheekbone half-erased by candlelight. The audience is silent (57).

This is where Buell's interpretation of ecodrama comes into play. Buell states that ecodrama can be studied from the point of view of how the environment and environmental issues are represented in the dramatic texts. The scholar gives us some examples of remarkable plays from different countries in order to study the relationship between dramatic writing and environmental issues, namely Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882), Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*

(1960), Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967), and J. M. Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* (1904). We also suggest that it would be thought-provoking to study from ecofeminism the relationship between dramatic text and environment in some plays by the contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr<sup>6</sup>, namely *By the Bog of Cats* (1998). On the other hand, as Buell explains, focusing on studying plays that thematize environmental issues limits the field and it is fundamental to bear in mind that “[d]ramatic performance always requires and reproduces physical environments” (2005: 48). This new perspective on ecodrama comes to bring hope to theatergoers and those who want to connect with the real environments represented in the plays. We know that the space from which a film, a performance, or any other work of art is viewed influences the spectator’s perception. Nowadays, museums are setting up their spaces to create immersive experiences for visitors. Cinematography continues to experiment with the idea of improving 3D cinema and UHD images. The institutionalization of theatre in open spaces in accordance with what is represented is vital in our present world. We could affirm that the experience of watching Euripides’ *Medea* in an ancient amphitheater on a summer night could be distinct from that of watching the same play in a theatre hall. The actors and spectators of these performances will have two very different experiences. That is the idea defended by Buell when he claims that

[p]erformances also have a way of producing unplanned but telling environmental effects. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival stages a pastoral drama on a large tract of land sequestered for the tourist industry, contributing to disruption of the local settlement patterns and economy even as the exegetes of Shakespearean drama decry early modern enclosure laws. An open-air performance of *King Lear* is interrupted by the rumblings of a real electric storm – as the temporarily lucid King awakes in Cordelia’s arms. *The importance of Being Earnest* is hastily

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<sup>6</sup> Marina Carr was born in the Midland’s County Offaly in 1964 and is considered to be one of the most prestigious and prolific contemporary Irish playwrights nowadays, one of the heirs of the Irish theatre tradition by W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J. M. Synge. She is a member of Aosdána, an Irish association of artists formed in 1981 and supported by the Arts Council of Ireland. Carr, who attended University College Dublin to study English and Philosophy, has been teaching at Trinity College Dublin and Princeton University in the past years. The author currently teaches in The School of English, Dublin City University. Carr was awarded the E. M. Foster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2001.

staged on a terrace near an arbor packed with nasty stinging insects (2005: 49–50).

The ecophobia in Mandel's *Station Eleven* will prevent the idea of performing in the open air<sup>7</sup>, as well as the idea of showing Shakespeare as a therapeutic value, from progressing. As indicated by Méndez-García, "*Station Eleven* seems to be conservative both in its approach to the canonicity and conservancy of certain cultural products and in how technology seems to be what will bring humanity back into civilization" (2017: 124–125).

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<sup>7</sup> In December 1972, the British theatre director Peter Brook (1925–2022) and his staff planned for an excursion to Africa lasting for three and a half months to play for African spectators in their villages. Brook was interested in researching theatre and its relationship to audiences. Interviewed by Margaret Croyden on June 3, 1973, Brook described the experience by saying that the group "just stopped, even in the middle of a forest, and played". He continued to state that "[n]aturally, we played for everybody who turned up. There were the tiny babies on their mothers' backs. There were always hundreds of children of all ages. There were the young people, the middle-aged people, and the old, old people. That was an audience. And in Shakespeare's day, in his playhouse, there was something similar. All levels of society were there at one and the same moment. . . . You could have one section of the audience that was following the crude level, and one level of the audience that was following a sophisticated level. And yet they were satisfied, and were responding at the same time. And this is an ideal. The fact that what is being presented is understandable in a way that takes people who would not normally be rubbing shoulders and makes them rub shoulders because they're all linked in a common event—that, to me, is a great theater model. And one which, on a very, very simple scale, we found when we played in an African village" (2009: 102–103). This experience reminds us of that of the caravan of the Travelling Symphony in Mandel's novel as well as connects with the idea of staging in open-air spaces while exploring how actors and audiences interact and are affected by the context.

## 5. LITERATURE AND THEATRE AS DYSTOPIAN “PERSONAS”

“That laugh, that cry which says: Begin again,  
So all's reborn, begun!  
Now hear this, Eden's child,  
Remember in thy green Earth heaven,  
All beauty-shod:  
Joy is the grace we say to God.”  
(Ray Bradbury, “Joy Is The Grace We Say To God”)

### 5.1. The Book People in *Fahrenheit 451*

*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term “persona”, plural “personas” or “personae”, with two different meanings: The first one refers to “the aspect of a person's character that is presented to or perceived by others”; the second definition is used to refer to “a role or character adopted by an author or actor” (“Persona”). The origin of the use of the word in the English language, borrowed from Latin, dates back to the eighteenth century literally to refer to ‘mask, character played by an actor’. In the novels that we have analyzed, literature and theatre have their particular voice. Literature and theatre become “personas” and express themselves in the story. The means by which they particularly express themselves are the Book People, in *Fahrenheit 451*, and the theatre troupe of the Travelling Symphony, in *Station Eleven*. This way, both the Book People and the members of the Travelling Symphony adopt the role of literature and theatre, respectively, in the novels.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, it could be considered that the Book People have gone into exile forced by their totalitarian society, though this exile, as we can see in “Burning Bright”, the third and last part of the novel, is not a forced one but a conscious decision with a crystal clear purpose. “No man's land”, the wilderness, is a space where to connect with the essence of human life far from manipulative mass media and the oppression of controlling norms. At the same time, it is the place where the revolution is in the making. The image of Pastoralism represented here implies a life outside capitalism. There are circumstances in daily life that make human beings become conscious of being in a place where they do not belong. The world portrayed by Bradbury in his masterpiece brutally alienates human beings, though a vast



majority of them are not conscious of it or prefer not to consider their unhappiness: They suffer the anxiety that this situation generates and try to escape from angst by driving their cars at top speed. No time to contemplate. In this world, in order to preserve happiness, paradoxically knowledge has been banned and the reason for this decision is to be found in the Bible: “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief” (Eccles. 1.18). Wisdom is meaningless. Those who want to learn will be excluded from enjoying bliss so must be pursued for bringing sorrow and pain to model citizens.

As Diane S. Wood explains in her analysis of Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, “in these repressive circumstances, it is not surprising that the protagonists would wish to flee . . . , they have broken laws which would bring death penalty if they were apprehended. . . . The authorities are motivated by the desire to maintain power at any cost and blatantly violate human rights” (2008: 45). It is in the forest where they are going to settle in new free communities far from civilization, communities where they can share their knowledge and learn from each other. They have consciously decided to abandon a world where reading and owning books are forbidden and where people prefer to spend their time watching senseless TV programs. Life in this world does not offer anything interesting to those who reason and want to know, those who question things. The Book People need to feel what real life is like: They do not fear confronting emotions, to feel, as they well know that life is an emotional rollercoaster. They accept discomfort as part of life, as joy is. Human beings need to experience bad and good to appreciate the beauty of life. Nobody can discriminate what feeling good is by avoiding feeling bad: Avoiding feeling bad is itself a pathological behavior. What teaches us to appreciate life is to experience the contrast between the positive and the negative pole.

In the decision of going into exile, the Book People choose a life of freedom. In the forest, they are free to live in harmony waiting for the inevitable war that is to destroy the society eventually. This will be the moment to come back with their books and start again. Phoenix dies and rises from its ashes. The society portrayed in Bradbury's novel has decided that fire purifies and it is right. They, in the end, will

burn themselves with their own flamethrowers and will be the Book People who will rise from their ashes like the Phoenix to create a better world. The new world will bring back together progress and humanities, and science as a means of advance and not destruction.

We can interpret the exile of The Book People as a return to the Garden of Eden, the terrestrial paradise. This paradise could be linked to the previously expressed idea of the sublime, pastoral or picturesque, but it could also be connected to the idea of purgatory. Here is where *Fahrenheit 451* and *Station Eleven* are to find a common element. "No man's land" in *Station Eleven* and the forest in *Fahrenheit 451* come to represent limbo. The characters in these stories wait for restarting their lives coming back to an idealized past in *Station Eleven* or building a new one in *Fahrenheit 451*. In Mandel's novel, this idealized past is the world in which we live nowadays: Electricity would bring a secure life again, as the fire brought it in the early Stone Age. In Bradbury's work, this idealized past refers to organic communities. Bate finds in Raymond Williams's book *The Country and the City* a reflection on the problem of the historical perspective of "the better life is always just behind us", and considers Eden to be a perfect starting point for this idealization of the supposed organic communities of the past, though these idealized communities, "like idolization of the aboriginal peoples who have supposedly escaped the ills of modernity, may often serve as a mask for the oppressions of the present" (2001: 25). Bradbury uses this limbo to serve the Book People as a place where to unmask oppressions. In Mandel's, purgatory does not unmask the oppressions of our present, as norms and values are not questioned, and there seems not to be environmental awareness: the characters in the novel only want to come back to their old lives. Stephen Siddall, concerning Eden, claims that

Adam's disobedience destroyed innocence and complicated the hierarchy of creation. Renaissance philosophers believed that from this act, known as The Fall, life became unpredictable; mankind now could sometimes aspire to the condition of angels and also fall to the level of beasts. Man and woman now had knowledge of evil, as well as good: behaviour and events would be confused; the earth would no longer yield its produce automatically; the climate would

sometimes be harsh; suffering would be part of human destiny (2009: 16).

We could claim that the Book People living in the forest are those human beings aspiring to the condition of angels and repudiating human brutality in their return to the original Eden, though this time being conscious and assuming the consequences of The Fall. This point is extraordinarily shown by Truffaut in his film, where we can see the Book People working in a harmonious mood in the forest, the new Eden, to provide the necessary resources to survive. They strongly embrace what life offers them.

## **5.2. The Theatre Troupe of the Travelling Symphony in *Station Eleven***

If the reader of *Station Eleven* tries to imagine the characters that make up the theatre group of the Travelling Symphony and the caravan that accompanies them, images of the post-apocalyptic universe that we have already seen in many contemporary cultural products will immediately come to mind. We could think of films such as *The Mad Max Series*. It is not difficult to imagine these characters traveling in vehicles that cannot propel themselves due to a lack of petrol. Nor is it difficult to imagine these characters wearing strange recycled clothing and looking for supplies in abandoned stores that may conceal danger. We also know that any slight injury can be fatal if infected in a world where finding antibiotics has become impossible. All the comforts we could imagine in our real lives have disappeared.

In a world where there is no safety, there is only survival, though as the Travelling Symphony reminds us with its motto, 'Survival is insufficient'. This is the reason why year in, year out the troupe travels the roads, visiting the virtually uninhabited towns that have been left after the collapse nearby Lake Michigan. Theatre does or used to, bring a spiritual value to survival, but twenty years is a long time and the troupe cannot help but have contradictory thoughts about the purpose of its mission. As stated by Mark West about the psychological state shown by the characters,

Mandel's survivors experience 'solastalgia', which Robert McFarlane has called a kind of 'modern uncanny, in which a familiar place is rendered unrecognizable . .

. the home become[s] suddenly unhomey around its inhabitants’. The term, coined by Glenn Albrecht, describes the experience of people whose environment changes drastically around them (2018: 3).

Shakespeare has been a therapeutic value for many years, but now some Shakespearean actors wonder if Shakespeare has saved them. We could say that the answer is no: They have not been able to adapt to the new world. Only the clarinet seems to want to build a new world and leave the old one behind, as Matthew Leggatt explains by saying that she “wants to write something more ‘modern’ to reflect the specifics of their time. She desires, importantly, not just to remember or relive the past, but to instead interpret the new world around her” (2018: 11). Mandel writes “THE TRUTH WAS, the clarinet hated Shakespeare” (288). As explained by Maurer, the character of Dieter will also highlight that Shakespeare is not for all times, and “he posits that Shakespeare wrote specifically for times of plague, and as a result, the Travelling Symphony and the other survivors share a connection with Shakespeare’s writing” (2019: 33). The rest of the theatre troupe continues to dream of coming back to the starting point believing these last years to have been a nightmare and at some point, they will wake up from that bad dream. Shakespeare has kept them on track for many years and has given them a sense of hope. At the same time, it has prevented them from adapting. They have never thought of accepting the new life and building on it. Their only goal is and has been to return to a past that no longer exists since the outbreak of the virus.

Nevertheless, the Travelling Symphony and the Book People share two common features: Both groups live in communion and try to preserve culture. The differences between the two groups are related to the second feature, that of preserving culture. While the Book People try to preserve culture from a revolutionary point of view, those of the Travelling Symphony try to preserve culture from a conservative one. Méndez-García justifies concerning *Station Eleven* that

[t]here is also a deeply contradictory constituent at the basis of that deeply humanistic world: while it is a nostalgic celebration of modern, recent technology, at the same time the texts worth celebrating and preserving are literary classics, not *new* texts that speak directly to the characters’ contemporary experience

(2017: 125).

Moreover, the Book People have abandoned the symbolic and metaphorical Plato's Cave that the city represents. Meanwhile, they live in the forest waiting for the war to begin to come back and create a new world, unlike the troupe that wants to come back to reinstate the old world. In other words, the members of the Travelling Symphony and many other survivors want to come back to that Plato's Cave that the city represents.

## 6. WILDERNESS AND THE HUMANKIND ON THE SCREEN: BRIEF NOTES ON THE ADAPTATIONS

“Eire’s orphan children cluster  
Stashed in alleys, lost in sidewalks, cold in vestibules of movies  
There to chant and carol through the snowing winds  
In nights of rains.”  
(Ray Bradbury, “The Bread Of Beggars, The Wine of Christ”)

### 6.1. François Truffaut’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and the Forest

The French film director François Truffaut (1932–1983) adapted Bradbury’s novel into his first color film in 1966. *Fahrenheit 451* would be his only film in the English language. Concerning the portrayal of the relationship between human beings and nature in Truffaut’s masterpiece, in the last minutes of the film, the French director sublimely recreates an image of an idyllic pastoral or picturesque landscape that can be identified with that described by the Wordsworths (William and Dorothy), in the Lake District (Cumbria, England), and Henry David Thoreau, in Walden Pond (Concord, Massachusetts). There, in the forest, where the railway ends, the Book People work to survive and, at the same time, preserve books for future generations. This idea of physical and intellectual work connected with the characters of the Book People makes it necessary to focus on Bate when he encapsulates both meanings of the word culture, after considering the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary’s* two exemplary quotations for this sense, by stating that “[o]riginally ‘culture’ was the work done by a laborer in the fields, whereas for [Matthew] Arnold and his successors culture is intellectual, even spiritual, work which serves the moral needs of a society and is set in opposition to the very idea of physical labor” (1999: 544). Truffaut has come to join both meanings in his cinematographic representation of the pastoral.

This image of the pastoral has been previously anticipated in the film by showing the significant architectural differences in the city between the houses owned by those who follow the rules of their totalitarian government and those who read books. If we pay particular attention to the house where Clarisse has been living



until her family is investigated by the firemen, we could see how different it is from the rest of the houses in the city. Clarisse's house, a Tudor-style home surrounded by wilderness in the film,

**Figure 4. A Still Frame from *Fahrenheit 451* (Clarisse's house).**  
**Source: IMDB**

reminds us of that of a fairy tale, while the

rest of the houses that we find in the feature film are designed in a contemporary style following a model of symmetry: All the houses are identical in order to represent that nobody in this totalitarian regime is different from the rest of citizens. Elizabeth Parker summarizes that "elements of the fairy tale serve . . . to underline the themes of trial" (2020: 52).

The forest becomes "no man's land" where the Book People live freely, in peace and harmony. Parker explains that the classic text *Walden* by Thoreau centers "on humanity's redemption through wilderness" (2020: 52), which is to be also one of the readings in *Fahrenheit 451*. The cycle of life goes on and on. Truffaut depicts it by showing the passage from autumn to cold winter, but also in the characters of the child who persistently try to memorize the book that his uncle kept to replace him after his death. Here, life flows by itself and those who live in the woods accept it. This idea of acceptance implies respect for the wilderness. As previously stated in this research, nature in *Fahrenheit 451* is not a threatening place to humankind, but a place to be respected. As Rafeeq O. McGiveron claims,

Bradbury's treatment of the wilderness in *Fahrenheit 451* is more complex and

more true to life than it might first appear. Though his loving description of the wilderness and his persistent use of positive imagery clearly suggest that we should appreciate the natural beauties around us, Bradbury’s careful reminders that the wilderness is vast and powerful should not be ignored. To be truly human we must know our place in the natural world, not only appreciating the wilderness but humbly respecting it, too (1997: 108).

This way, the focus on biocentrism is a fundamental theme of the novel and the film.

Unfortunately, Truffaut’s film avoids showing the viewer the Mechanical Hound, perhaps because of the film’s limited budget, a vitally important theme in Bradbury’s novel. McCorry claims the importance of the Mechanical Hound in Bradbury’s novel by saying that

[i]n *Fahrenheit 451*, the Mechanical Hound again encroaches on human exceptionalism by exceeding the fixity of species taxonomies. Its body is an uncanny amalgam of various nonhuman morphologies, a composite of different traits and capacities from a heterogeneous collection of animals. The Hound is a ‘metal dog’ (155), but its canine form is complicated by its ‘eight legs’ with ‘rubber-padded paws’ and its ‘multi-faceted eyes’ (37) (2018: 38).

Another significant change in Truffaut’s film is related to the character of Clarisse, who here survives to become one of the Book People living in the forest and a crystal clear motivation for Montag’s change. Truffaut also makes the wise decision to have the characters of Montag’s wife, Linda (Mildred in Bradbury’s novel), and Clarisse played by the same actress in his film, Julie Christie. It is significant to highlight that in the film Montag keeps a copy of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories with him, as we can find here a similarity with that of “William Wilson” and the theme of the doppelganger concerning Linda and Clarisse. Clarisse’s survival at the end of the story pleased Bradbury and is one of the great successes of Truffaut’s film adaptation. The third and last important change in our opinion is related to the book Montag is to become: in the film, it will not be the Book of Ecclesiastes, but *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* by Edgar Allan Poe.



## 6.2. Patrick Somerville's *Station Eleven* (2021) and the "No Man's Land"

In the TV adaptation of Mandel's novel *Station Eleven*, created by the American novelist Patrick Somerville, we are to find significant changes in the plot, one of the most notable being shown in the season finale at Severn City Airport. Despite it, the TV series continues to show us an anthropocentric vision of the world, and ecophobia will also continue to be present.

The images showing the city of Toronto years after the spread of the virus are full of beauty and become sublime. They perfectly show the world that Mandel imagines in her novel, as described by Conaway, "in which Nature plagues us for no discernible reason" (2021: 5). The first episode opens by showing us the theatre where the story begins, the Algin Theatre in Toronto, covered inside by wild vegetation that has taken over what was once "man's land". The Toronto neighborhoods we see in this first episode of the TV series will also become covered by the same wild vegetation years later. These images are reminiscent of the Romantic landscape paintings in which the remains of medieval buildings can be seen surrounded by nature. Such remnants of the past fascinated Romantic poets and Gothic writers. The past was perceived as a better time to be recovered. The radical changes introduced by modern times, mainly during the years of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), were interpreted as a negative influence on the human species. A similar process works in Mandel's novel and its adaptation, though here the reading is totally distinct. Here, the spaces associated with the city and civilization, with technology, are perceived by the survivors in the same way as those remnants of the Middle Ages were perceived by the Romantics: Melancholy invades those who lived through those times before the pandemic and they only want to recover their electricity supply and Internet connection as soon as possible. The difference, as it can be seen, is that the poets of Romanticism longed for a time in the past they had not known, while the survivors of the hecatomb in *Station Eleven* long for a time in the past to which they have belonged and which the Romantics disavowed. The main characters in the book and TV series yearn to return to that civilization, to that old world. Mandel's novel and the TV series are not interested in the environmental issues of our modern world, with one particular exception in the TV

series, that of the clothes that the members of the Travelling Symphony wear. The costume material is real camping material and, as Bob Verini claims in his article for *Variety*, the “future life becomes a recycling cavalcade” (2022).



**Figure 5. A Still Frame from *Station Eleven* (The Travelling Symphony). Source: IMDB**

The old world comes to represent order and security for human beings and its recovery is the only goal to be achieved. Nature and nomadic life imply danger and vital anguish. That is why in both the series and the novel the protagonists are always searching for order and control:

Clark founding and caring for the Museum of Civilization at the Severn City Airport; Kirsten preserving the comic book *Dr. Eleven* and searching for newspapers in abandoned houses that are to reconnect her with her past; the group of Shakespearean actors rehearsing and performing Shakespeare’s plays accompanied by the melodies played by the musicians in the troupe; the prophet trying to control the town of St. Deborah by the Water and those who interfere with his plans. Anyway, for the Travelling Symphony, whose motto is ‘Survival is insufficient’, these actions linked to the performance of Shakespeare’s plays are still a sign of survival. They need to get out of the darkness of these new dark ages and back into the light of civilization.

In the first episode of the TV series, we see Jeevan leaving his brother’s house accompanied by Kirsten, a significant change in the story. Jeevan is to be portrayed in the TV series as a surrogate father to Kirsten. The light outside is grey and bluish, and everything around them is snowy. Eighty days have passed since the outbreak of the virus. Hiro Murai, the Japanese-born American director of the first episode of the TV series entitled “Wheel of Fire”, explains in an article written by Derek Lawrence for “Vanity Fair” that the shot from inside a bus that we are to see in the last seconds of the episode is his favorite one due to “even though this is the first

shot of the post-apocalypse we get to see, it's really beautiful. It's blanketed in snow, and it's an eerily beautiful sky. We wanted to frame this world as almost like a reset button for everything, rather than the end of times" (2022). We, as spectators, know from this moment on that nature, bright and full of color in contrast to the desaturated colors of the civilization, is to be associated with danger and the characters are to wander looking for restarting their previous lives. Later we will see how the chaos that the outbreak of the virus has brought into the lives of the survivors will also be the reason for their ills.

The character of the prophet receives a different treatment in the series. As stated in an article for "Los Angeles Times" by Steve Dollar, "[n]o longer purely villainous, the character becomes more sympathetic and complex" (2022). The prophet seeks to understand, and it is here in the TV series that the novel's therapeutic use of Shakespearean drama shines through and is taken to its ultimate consequences. The final episode will show us a character who is to confront and resolve his inner conflicts, and who will become completely transformed as a person while playing the role of Hamlet with his mother. Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare come together again. However, the highlight of the adaptation of the novel for television is to be found in the final theatrical performance of *Hamlet* at Severn City Airport. After almost two decades of wandering from town to town to perform Shakespeare accompanied by music, the members of the Travelling Symphony can finally stage a play indoors again using electrical lighting. At the airport, now we are to see the troupe performing *Hamlet* under the shelter of a terminal, in a protected environment, with was shot for the TV series at the Ontario Science Center. The open-air performances that we have seen during the story cannot be interpreted as a declaration of intent on the part of the creators of the series supporting ecodrama: the characters in the series clearly seek to return to a climactic action involving, as described by Verini, "a Globe Theater-like performance of 'Hamlet'" (2022). Finding a place where the electricity supply has been restored is the only goal. The reading of the series is faithful to the novel even though the story has been substantially altered: the ecophobia of the original story persists, and Shakespeare is used primarily as a tool to deal with life's anguish. A return to the old world is the ultimate goal, and

humanity is portrayed as naturally kind and it is the environment that corrupts it. The most interesting reading in the series is found in the characters' constant search for emotional or physical refuge. Civilization represents order and peaceful coexistence, the post-apocalyptic world is chaos and brings destruction. The association between decrepit spaces and human decay shown here is certainly reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe's gothic tale “The Fall of the House of Usher”. Kevin Corstorphine’s interpretation of the tale when he claims that “the ‘house’ takes on the double meaning of Usher’s literal abode and his family lineage as both destroyed utterly, unable to adapt to a changing world due to an inability to, ‘put forth . . . any enduring branch’” (2013: 126–127) is useful here to explain that the characters in Mandel’s novel survive, though they have proven to be unable to adapt to the changing world, to their new environment, and continue looking for the old one. The clearest reading is that both the novel and the TV series show a conservative and naïve humanistic perspective on life, totally opposed to that portrayed in Bradbury's novel and Truffaut's film.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

“Thus ending Death  
And night,  
And Time’s demise,  
And senseless weeping.”  
(Ray Bradbury, “Christus Apollo”)

The branch of dystopian literature offers the contemporary readers the best scenarios to understand and dissect our current world. Focusing on literature and environment studies, complex and useful analyses can be done of these works from different fields of knowledge that can help make a better world. Our research has paid particular attention to the relationship between the wilderness, behavior, and arts (literature and theatre) in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Mandel’s *Station Eleven*.

Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* may well be analyzed from the perspective of the first wave of ecocriticism. In our research, we have found that Bradbury establishes a clear negative relationship between the city (civilization) and mass media. The citizens who inhabit the city have renounced all contact with nature and literature and spend most of their time at work or watching the three or four walls they have in their homes. This lifestyle is to transform the ecosystem and produce environmental harm. People in this totalitarian regime, where reading is forbidden, drive their cars at top speed to calm down when they are stressed. In the civilization that Bradbury describes, bad habits connected to dependence on new technologies lead to the destruction of the ecosystem: Clarisse, the rebel teenager whose family habitually reads books, becomes collateral damage of one of the frequent car accidents that take place in this environment.

Bradbury’s idea of wilderness is linked, as we see in the third and final part of the novel, with the idea of the pastoral and picturesque in the British Romantic tradition, claiming a bond among the biological, the psychological, and the spiritual. This bond does not exist in the city, so ignorant citizens try to unrecognize the unhappiness in their lives. Nature, the forest with a river outside the boundaries of the city, comes to represent, following the pastoral imagination of Anglo-American

Romanticism and literary nature writing, among other cultural sources, beauty at its best. Bradbury, this way, idealizes a balanced representation of life in the wilderness in contrast to that of destruction in the metropolis. On the other hand, scientific and technological progress disconnects and alienates the individual from the natural world and has become environmentally unfriendly. An interesting fact to be noted in order to clarify this perspective is the episode of the abandonment of Montag's pursuit by the Mechanical Hound when he changes his clothes and throws them into the river. As seen, the machines that technological progress creates cannot be integrated into the landscape of the wilderness. In the forest, Montag is eventually free and, on his own, encounters a deer, which he, frightened and paralyzed, initially mistakes for the Mechanical Hound, only to discover that there is no threat at all in the natural surroundings. The forest is here far removed from its conception as a mysterious and dangerous place in fairy tales or gothic literature. The wild nature welcomes the fugitives, those who read and want to know. Montag walks the forest in search of other people like him and starts to contemplate reconnecting with his human essence. It is there, in the wilderness, that humanities reside, protected from the danger of scientific progress that corrupts everything in the civilization that he has abandoned.

The city will end up being destroyed by the explosion of nuclear bombs. Bradbury offers us a thesis very close to that of the prestigious British critic and scholar Jonathan Bate in his referential work *The Song of the Earth*, suggesting the need for human beings to reconnect with nature. We see the city as an unsustainable space in Bradbury's novel. In this way, humanities and environmental protection become united: Sciences need the humanities to advance ethically and sustainably, committed to society and the environment. The Book People who inhabit the forest are, among others, former professors of humanities from prestigious universities who were displaced from their professorships to be relegated by men from the field of science. These scientists are those who have developed the nuclear bombs that finally destroy civilization. In the forest, Book People live protected from the real threat of the story, which is not nature itself, but mankind itself. When the city is destroyed, the Book People decide to return to the city to establish a new world

where humanistic knowledge is not rejected. This way, we can see “no man’s land” as a space connected with the Garden of Eden from which to start a revolution destined to bring a new world where sciences and humanities are joined to make progress an issue far from the destruction of the environment. Human beings are seen here as part of this ecosystem, so must be preserved from environmental harm. Furthermore, humankind must take an active part in the preservation of the ecosystem and build sustainable cities. Mass media are to symbolize noise, generating a harmful environmental impact on human behavior that could be the root cause of mental illnesses. In a part of his work about William Wordsworth in the book *Romantic Ecology*, Bates explains concerning the city and wilderness that

[t]he ‘type’ of the city is very different from the ‘types and symbols of eternity’ which Wordsworth sees in the landscape of the Alps (vi. 571): here, ‘blank confusion’ springs not from the inward mental blockage associated with the Kantian sublime but from the distortion of social relations effected by the economy of the city (1991: 20–21).

In *Fahrenheit 451*, we could affirm that the mental blockage of the characters is connected to a similar distortion of social relations effected by the mass media and also by the deprivation of book consumption.

Taking an ecocritical approach as a starting point, Mandel’s *Station Eleven* can be interpreted as a text where nature is perceived as a hostile environment. Time has stood still and everything must be restarted after the collapse. The protagonists wander through this environment, which is to represent some kind of limbo, waiting to return to their old world. In Mandel’s novel, the idealized new world that the characters seem to be waiting for is simply the hope of regaining what these characters feel was the best of the old one. Shakespeare is used as a resource to make the anguish of everyday life more bearable. The members of the theatre group that travel the roads, now taken over by nature, have anchored themselves to Shakespeare only to survive. Eventually, Shakespeare is not the most important element in *Station Eleven*: It is a part of the cultural heritage bequeathed by the British Empire, only used as a means to abandon primitivism and enter into modernity and as a therapeutic value. The most important issue, in this dystopian

scenario, is to return to the starting point: To restore the power supply that provided security before the outbreak of the virus. The attachment to the leading figure of Shakespeare, who is to represent the primordial culture, is reminiscent of how many citizens in many parts of the First World reacted during the covid-19 pandemic: These citizens spent a large part of their time reading books, listening to music and watching films and TV series on digital platforms. The increase in the purchase of digital books and access to digital platforms was considerable. This positive attitude of citizens' acceptance of culture has not been maintained subsequently. We could say that culture was an escape route from despair because, as the Travelling Symphony reminds us in the novel, 'survival is insufficient'.

Shakespeare's most significant play in *Station Eleven* is to be *King Lear*, and we find a clear reason for its choice: *King Lear* can be interpreted as a crystal clear example of ecophobia. When the old King loses his home and is exposed to the extreme weather conditions of his environment, namely heavy storms, he also loses his identity. The character Arthur Leander is to discover while playing Lear that he has also lost his identity, but death prevents him from reversing the situation. The humanity depicted by Mandel in his novel is threatened as it wanders the post-pandemic abandoned roads and forests, the wilderness. As nomads, they need weapons to defend themselves, and along the way, some persons will die in this struggle for survival. We can say that every corner in this post-apocalyptic future hides a danger. This space once again is to represent a threat, connected with the idea of the forest in the traditional Gothic and moves away from the interpretation of nature as a place to reconnect with the human essence, which leads us to an ecoGothic reading of it. The character of the prophet becomes an enemy of those survivors who seek to live in peace, so the character is presented as a new colonizer carrying a dangerous religious message. The prophet's ultimate goal is to control the rest of the people in a land where borders have disappeared. The fictional town of St. Deborah by the Water thus becomes one of the first post-apocalypse spaces where rules exist again even if the fanatical religious leader indicates otherwise. The secure space that will finally host the troupe of actors will be Severn City Airport, in Illinois, where the Museum of Civilization is located. This place houses everything that



belongs to the old world and remains the survivors of better past times: credit cards, cell phones, iPads, laptops, Nintendo consoles, magazines, stamp collections, and so on. The characters in *Station Eleven* are desperate to return to order and leave behind the chaos that living outside the safety of the city brings. Kirsten and Clark collect things, and this habit of collecting could be a manifestation of a yearning of avoiding chaos in their lives.

We found the novel's focus on ecodrama particularly interesting. The return to the performance of plays in open natural spaces, outside of theatres, is a rather interesting contribution in our opinion. Unfortunately, from the point of view of ecocriticism, Mandel once again shows us that the interest is not in promulgating the goodness of ecodrama from a forward-looking perspective. Her characters, in their quest for the electricity supply, clearly identified with the discovery of fire in the early Stone Age, seek to return to the safe environment of the theatre halls. Buell (2005) tells us about a mysterious bacterium, possibly a mutant life-form generated by eco-disruption, that frenetically consumes what is in its path in Karen Tei Yamashita's magical realist *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990). The scholar claims this to be "[t]he revenge of the ecosystem" (2005: 60). Perhaps so was the outbreak of the Georgia Flu in *Station Eleven* and nobody was able to understand it.

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