

Contextual study of
science fiction texts,
and intertextual ideas
that transcend ...



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Comparing texts from different contexts has enhanced our understanding of intertextual ideas, by continuing to engage with modern audience. Stories revolving around science fiction have remained timeless by discussing the various dangers of technology. Ray Bradbury's short story, *The Pedestrian* (1951) depicts technology's detrimental effects on human interaction in regards to consumerism and television, whereas Kurt Vonnegut's *Harrison Bergeron* discusses how potential rebellion occurs under the oppression of freedom, in reference to the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, despite a different context, Kurt Wimmer's *Equilibrium* (2002), explores both these ideas by alluding to the disasters of 9/11 and the First Chechen War, hence demonstrating how common ideas have connected texts of different times.

In *The Pedestrian*, Bradbury condemns over-reliance on technology as leading to a loss of human connection. This reflects the rise of consumerism in the 1950s that led to over 60% of American homes owning a television, and developed the belief that society would be pacified by technology. Mr Leonard Mead takes his nightly walk in a city where humans are hypnotised by television and is arrested by an automated car. His initial isolation is established through the auditory imagery and metaphor in 'there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomb-like building was still open', revealing a faint presence of humans, forever confined within their houses. Humanity's over reliance on technology is displayed by the metaphor in 'it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard', to create a sense that humans have been 'pacified' by television. Bradbury emphasizes that this will only lead to a loss of human connection, where the tactile

imagery of the car's interior in 'it smelled too clean and hard' upon Meads

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arrest, indicates a lack of human presence and thus, interaction.

Furthermore, the personification of the car in ‘ The car hesitated ... ‘ ‘ To the Psychiatric Centre for Regressive Tendencies’’, provides justification for Mead’s arrest by portraying human connection as a Psychiatric illness in a world dominated by technology. Hence, Bradbury stresses to readers how a dependency on technology can result in lacking human interactions.

Despite a shift in context, Wimmer in *Equilibrium*, criticizes how creating a forced utopia by forsaking human emotion results in a loss of human connection. He reflects America’s Patriot Act in 2001 which suppressed individual privacy through extreme communication surveillance in fear of attacks following 9/11. John Preston is a victim of a future where human emotion is suppressed to prevent war. The opening montage of historical war footage provides justification behind subduing emotion, and the Father’s voiceover of ‘ at the cost of the highs of human emotion, we have suppressed its abysmal lows’ , reveals that human feeling has been neglected to maintain ‘ peace’. Hence, where *The Pedestrian* explores humanity’s dependence on television in reference to consumerism, *Equilibrium* regards humanity’s reliance on Prozium in reference to Americas Patriot Act. Ultimately Wimmer highlights that denying the right to human emotion through Prozium may lead to a loss of human connection, where Preston’s distinction of ‘ John’ by his son emphasises a lack of familial connection in a society that cannot feel. However, as Preston stops taking Prozium, his attempt to regain human connection through the overarching motif of ‘ touch’ is revealed by the tracking shot of his gloveless hand

running over Mary’s ribbon to indicate that he has developed an emotional
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connection to her through 'feeling'. Thus, albeit different contexts, Wimmer and Bradbury critiques how human connection may be lost in consequence to the suppressive nature of technology.

In his satire, *Harrison Bergeron*, Vonnegut criticises how excessive oppression of human freedom can result in rebellion. He alludes to America's racial oppression against 'blacks', which led to The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s to achieve racial equality. *Harrison Bergeron* is a victim of an authoritarian government, where its use of handicaps to achieve equality prompts him to revolt for freedom. The seemingly 'utopian' setting is established through the repetition in 'Nobody was smarter than anybody else / Nobody was better looking than anybody else', which highlights that total equality has been achieved at the expense of individuality. Vonnegut demonstrates that this is done by handicapping the gifted, where the imagery in 'Harrison's appearance was halloween and hardware', demonstrates that Harrison's characteristics have been excessively oppressed in attempt to achieve equality. Vonnegut highlights that such oppression of individual freedom is a catalyst for potential rebellion, where the dialogue in "' I am the Emperor'" cried Harrison. "' Do you hear? I am the Emperor'", indicates Harrison's attempt to rebel against the authoritarian government, by viewing himself as an egotistical revolutionary against humanity's oppression by handicaps. However, through the anticlimactic narration in 'She fired twice and the Emperor and Empress were dead before they hit the floor' Vonnegut ultimately reveals that any attempt to rebel against oppression is futile and results in death. Hence, he successfully

indicates how excessive oppression of human freedom can lead to rebellion, regardless of failure or success.

In spite of a different cause and context, In Equilibrium, Wimmer further develops the idea wherein rebellion can occur through restrictions on individuality. Wimmer reflects the First Chechen War in 1996, where Chechnya rebelled against the Russian government's oppression of the nation's autonomy. Libria's oppression of individuality is introduced through the long shot of a lecture in the city central, where the uniformity of the crowd reveal that the characters lack distinction. The extreme close up shot of Preston injecting the Prozium inside the car with Partridge, indicates the nature of the drug as a handicap to individuality, which directly resembles the satirical handicaps of Harrison Bergeron. However, Wimmer stresses how the oppression of human autonomy will only lead to inevitable rebellion as Preston becomes a 'sense-offender', where the medium shot of Preston rearranging his desk is symbolic of his desire to express himself freely by rebelling against the strict uniformity of this society. Furthermore, Wimmer demonstrates how successful rebellion can be achieved, where the closing aerial shot of Libria showing explosions throughout the city represents the successful uprising of the resistance. Therefore both he and Vonnegut are able to depict how rebellion may occur from oppression of freedom and autonomy through their respective contexts.