The literary, tech and thinking worlds are mourning the loss of Ray Bradbury, the revered science-fiction writer who died Tuesday at age 91. Bradbury, best known for his 1953 novel "Fahrenheit 451," used his imagination to take a hard look at a world locked in a growing love affair with technology. His stories examined what humanity gained - and lost - by being plugged in.

Here are some of Bradbury's more prescient predictions.

- The people in the "Fahrenheit 451" society sport "seashells" and "thimble radios," which bear a striking resemblance to earbuds and Bluetooth headsets.

- Members of that futuristic society are also as obsessed with their large, flat-screen televisions as are today's technophiles, and the viewing screens in Bradbury's stories often take up an entire wall.

- In fact, the novel mentions that people are talking to their friends through the digital wall - the same terminology that Facebook would use years later for the digital hub that enables friends to post and see messages.

- The loneliness that can come from constantly paying attention to the screens around you, rather than the life around you, is a prevalent theme in Bradbury's work. He explored it in his short story "The Pedestrian," in which protagonist Leonard Mead is arrested for the crimes of taking a walk and not owning a television.

- Far ahead of the research and analyses that have spawned books on the effects of technology overload, such as Sherry Turkle's "Alone Together," Bradbury outlined how he feared that televisions would change the world.

In this passage, he compares a neighborhood of television-watchers to a tomb:

    He "would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind he windows. Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomblike building was still open."

- "The Pedestrian" also features a self-driving - and self-thinking - car, which arrests and commits the protagonist to a mental hospital. While far less advanced and much less sinister, self-driving cars are on U.S. roads as part of a Google project. As of last month, Google's cars, which are clearly marked, can legally drive on Nevada's roads and highways as long as two people are in the vehicle during the tests.
The idea of electronic surveillance also popped up in Bradbury's work way before closed-circuit television became a fixture in cities around the world. He was early in warning people about how surveillance could be abused - worries that echo today.

Bradbury's criticism of the coverage of live media events in "Fahrenheit 451" is fodder for media critics' columns today. Bradbury disparaged constant, sensationalized news.

Bradbury also envisioned automated banking machines in the novel. The machines bear a striking similarity to ATMs and provide 24-hour financial information to users.

In "I Sing the Body Electric!" and other stories, Bradbury explored artificial intelligence and the philosophical implications of advancements in AI that could perhaps produce thinking, feeling machines.

Books aren't banned - thank goodness - in today's society, but reading a paper-and-glue version of a story isn't as common as it once was. Bradbury loved physical books and did not allow "Fahrenheit 451" to be published as an e-book until November, London's Guardian reported.

Bradbury once said that e-books "smell like burned fuel," but he allowed his classic to be published digitally because it wouldn't be possible to have a new contract without e-book rights.

Finally, Bradbury made an imprint on the future. In his story "A Sound of Thunder," he portrayed how changing one small thing in history could have larger, unpredictable effects on what was to come. A man on a safari to the past steps on a butterfly, and the insect's death drastically changes the future.

After the story was published, its turning point entered the modern lexicon, referred to as the "butterfly effect."

Item: wapo.4a2c1410-afeb-11e1-80ac-dab76d0e77c0

http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.dcccd.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nfh&AN=wapo.4a2c1410-afeb-11e1-80ac-dab76d0e77c0&site=src-live