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Now Was Then, Then Is Now: The Paradoxical World of Fahrenheit 451

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The Painter

As a writer who has fully enriched the minds of literary scholars for decades, Ray Bradbury easily ranks highly among the ranks of literary highlights such as Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, Aldus Huxley, and George Orwell. While bookstores place this once banned book in the vague section of science fiction, *Fahrenheit 451*, is readily acclaimed as one of the most thought provoking novels to have come out of any artist's pen. In pertinence towards the repertoire of such thematic elements that the novel has called its own, its reputation consists of a work of art which focuses particularly on the consumerism of American culture and the decline of morals in the mid twentieth century. In the following essay, through the analysis and interpretation of Ray Bradbury's novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, I will create a juxtaposition of the world that we live in today and compare it to the eerily similar version known as Elm City, in which Bradbury creates a dark representation of 21st century America. This essay will carefully analyze and interpret themes, symbols, and futuristic inventions in which Bradbury claims he was, "Trying to prevent futures," as well as bring everyday uses and patterns of today's society to light, revealing the prescient and prophetic text in which the novel encompasses.

With a life starting out far from ordinary, much like his mind, Bradbury was born August 22, 1920, to Esther Marie Moberg Bradbury and Leonard Spaulding Bradbury, Ray is said to remember his own birth.

I have what might be called almost total recall back to the hour of my birth. I remember suckling, circumcision, and nightmares-about-being-born experienced in my crib in the first weeks of my life. Most people don't remember.

Psychologists say that babies are born underdeveloped, and that only after some

few days and weeks are they capable of seeing, hearing, knowing. But, I saw, I heard, I knew. And, later in my life, wrote a story about myself called “The Small Assassin,” in which a child is born fully aware and sets out to revenge itself on its parents for having thrust it into the world. (*The Ray Bradbury Companion*)

Raymond Douglas Bradbury, on more than one occasion, recounts a closer relationship with his Mother, when compared to his Father, which Bradbury recounts, “For Dad, whose love, very late in life, surprised his son” (*A Medicine for Melancholy*).

The five Bradbury’s, Ray’s mother, father, and two brothers, grew up very poor in Waukegan, Illinois-a suburb outside Chicago. Bradbury’s two siblings, twin brothers Leonard and Samuel, were born in 1916, however, Samuel died at the age of two. Ray Bradbury came into the world with one older sibling, who thrived at sports, and adopted the nickname of “Skip.” Ray, nicknamed “Shorty,” however, showed an early love for Buck Rogers, Tarzan, scary movies, and magicians. Bradbury, pointing other evidence towards his extraordinary memory, remembers his Aunt Neva giving him a book on fairytales, *Once Upon a Time*, when he was five-years-old, which he claims sparked his love, for fantasy. Coincidentally, from this point on, Bradbury often remarks that the milestones he remembers in his life were not the average events such as his first bike ride or his first school friend, but his first experiences with literature. As early as age twelve, the young Bradbury spent two nights a week quenching his thirst for fantasy and science fiction in the local library. When looking at the inspiration for the events in *Fahrenheit 451*, it is easy to see where the climax came from. “I was really quite a glutton. I used to memorize books. I suppose that’s where the ending of *Fahrenheit 451* comes from-where the book people wander through the wilderness and each of them is a book. That was me when I was ten. I was *Tarzan of the Apes*,” (*Literary Compassion Series*).

Much like most artists, Bradbury learned to go through life in his own manner with his own passions and his own dreams. Falling in love with comic strips and novels, Bradbury learned at an early age what torment and the cultural norms were, which were later echoed in *Fahrenheit 451* when Captain Beatty rants to the protagonist Guy Montag,

With school turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word 'intellectual,' of course, became the swear word it deserved to be. You always dread the unfamiliar. Surely you remember the boy in your own school class who was exceptionally 'bright,' did most of the reciting and answering while the others sat like so many leaden idols, hating him. And wasn't it this bright boy you selected for beatings and tortures after hours? Of course it was. (*Fahrenheit 451*)

In 1926, the Bradburys began a teetering travel that consisted of a move from Waukegan to Tucson, Arizona-looking for work, then back to Waukegan and once again back to Tucson, on his father's behalf until 1932, when they settled in Tucson. The only positive aspect of these moves, according to Ray, was that he found his first job in Radio where he read comic strips on the air to children every Saturday. Bradbury has recounted on numerous occasions that he believes comics have had a major influence in all of his writings because of the artistry that comes with forming storyboards. However, only after spending a year working in Arizona, the Bradburys moved west to Los Angeles, where Ray would spend the majority of his life.

In 1936, Ray published his first piece of writing, *In Memory of Will Rogers*, a poem which would be showcased in the Waukegan News-Sun. Poetry, according to Bradbury, was what taught him how to write. He began with writing poems about photographs, which he

believed set the foundation for his writing by, “Tying myself to an image, it was a metaphor on top of a metaphor” (*Literary Compassion Series*). Later that year, Bradbury graduated from high school and desired to further his education. Growing up in a lower class family, college was out of the question, so he decided to further his study not in the classroom, but in the library. While selling newspapers on L.A. street corners for ten dollars a week, he met at the library nightly and began writing one thousand words of fiction a day and completing one short story a week, on top of reading as many works of literature from as many parts of the globe he could.

Steinbeck and Hemingway, John Collier, a wonderful short story writer who did a lot of scripts for Alfred Hitchcock’s T.V. Series and *The Twilight Zone*. Writers like Willa Cather, a lot of women writers. Edith Wharton. Eudora Welty. I read every short story by every American writer over the years going back to Washington Irving, Poe, Melville, Rudyard Kipling and Dickens in England. I pretty well educated myself in the short story in every country in the world. If you’re going to write them, you better know them. (*Literary Compassion Series*)

While harnessing his craft and finding his voice, Bradbury rented a tiny space that acted as an office in a tenement building after getting advice from his friend Henry Kuttner, “Ray, stop running around bothering people with your ideas. Stop tearing at every sleeve you can find and shouting in people’s ears about your grand ideas. Go home, get your typewriter out, and *write!* You can’t *say* you want to be a writer, you have to *write* to be a writer!” (*Literary Companion Series*). In 1942, after what Bradbury considers to be the first really good story he had ever written, *The Lake*, even though it wouldn’t be published until a couple of years later, he began to write in many genres other than science fiction. Due to his widely read background, this is where

Bradbury began to develop his signature style and his own genre, which I will describe later on, as *Prophetic Existentialist Fiction*.

In what Bradbury cites as one of his most defining moments as a writer, he borrowed one of his friend's psychiatrists for an afternoon and went and complained to him that "nothing was happening," and that "he wanted to be the greatest writer that ever lived." The psychiatrist responded and told him to go read about the great writers like Tolstoy and Dickens and see what it took for them to become the literary elite.

I went and discovered that they had to wait, too. And a year later I began to sell to the *American Mercury* and in *The Best American Short Stories* when I was twenty-six. I still wasn't making any money, but I was getting recognition I wanted, the love that I wanted from people I looked up to. The intellectual elite in America was beginning to say, 'Hey, you're okay, you're all right, and you're going to make it.' And then my girlfriend Maggie told me the same thing. And then it didn't matter whether the people around me sneered at me. I was willing to wait. (*Literary Companion Series*)

In 1947, Bradbury married what could be considered his muse, Maggie McClure. McClure is the only girl that Bradbury ever dated, and they are still married today. She acted, and still acts as his partner and companion and inspiration in his everyday life. On numerous occasions, Bradbury has made clear, that without McClure, he wouldn't be one-third of what he is today. Kurt Vonnegut once said, "Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia," (*Bagombo Snuff Box*). For Bradbury, he wrote for his Maggie.

In 1949, Bradbury decided it best to meet with editors in person, rather than through the mail. He sat down with the editor of Doubleday, William Bradbury (no relation to Ray) and he was then urged to transform many of his stories about Mars and outer space into a novel. Bradbury quickly realized, in one night's time, that he could arrange his various short stories in a sequence and write what he referred to as "interchapters" which would link the stories to a whole. The next day, Doubleday accepted the outline to *The Martian Chronicles* and gave Ray a \$1,500 advance for two novels. In 1950, Doubleday published *The Martian Chronicles*, and Bradbury held a book signing at a Santa Monica bookstore, where he would finally get the break he was looking for.

Working as a newly appointed book reviewer for *Tomorrow Magazine*, *The Martian Chronicles* just happened to be the first novel that Christopher Isherwood would be reviewing. As Brian Aldiss inquires, "Isherwood discovered Bradbury in the science fiction ghetto and announced his genius to the world. His name became famous overnight and he has remained one of our eminent dreamers ever since," (*Literary Companion Press*).

Coincidentally, at the same time in which Bradbury was receiving the praise and recognition that he had been yearning for--Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee were attempting to start a movement that would expose and destroy what they considered subversive elements of the United States. Using innuendos, broad attacks, and guilt by association, the movement made Hollywood one of their major targets, attempting to convince the public that they were a, "Hotbed of communist sympathizers and saboteurs." Bradbury, living a life that did not boast of political speech or interest, however, was one of the few members of the Screen Actors Guild who personally objected to the loyalty oath that the group required in order to protect itself against communists. In a tone of rebellion,

Bradbury wrote a short story called *The Fireman*, which would later be expanded to *Fahrenheit 451*. (*Literary Companion Press*)

Society's habits and patterns easily quenched the thirst for creativity in Bradbury's mind for the novel that would start a movement. For example, one night Bradbury and a friend were walking down a sidewalk in Los Angeles, when they were stopped by a police officer and questioned. When questioned on their actions of walking, Bradbury simply responded, "We are putting one foot in front of the other. It doesn't make any sense logically that we would call attention to ourselves by walking...If we were criminals, we would drive up in a car, burgle the joint, and drive away. That's the way you do things in our society" (*Literary Companion Press*). The police officer despised the logic of Bradbury and in turn, got in an argument, which prompted Bradbury to go home and write a short story about his encounter called, *The Pedestrian*. A month or two later,

Out of that short story, I took my pedestrian out for a walk, he turned a corner and there's a little young girl standing in the middle of the sidewalk and she looks at him and she sniffs his uniform. She says, 'You smell of kerosene. I know who you are. You're Montag, the fireman, the man who burns books.' And nine days later the novel was finished. (*Literary Companion Press*)

At this point in his life, having two children and searching for a quiet place to write what would turn into his masterpiece, he heard typewriters typing in the basement of the UCLA Library. Exploring his wonder, he stumbled upon a room where you could rent a typewriter for ten cents a half hour. He went home, meticulously planned the idea for *Fahrenheit 451*, and returned to the room full of typewriters with \$9.50 worth of dimes, and spent nine days writing.

The Paint

In an instance so full of irony, even the novel's anti-movements are hard to believe. "Fahrenheit 451, is an indictment of censorship and expurgation, so the fact that this book was expurgated and marketed by the publisher that way for 13 years before the author became aware of the abuse is particularly irony," (*Banned Books*). The novel *Fahrenheit 451*, was originally published by Ballantine Books in 1967, and in complete disregard for the novel's overall message, a special version was published, which was specially modified to alter certain words, such as: hell, damn, abortion, drunkman being changed to sick man, and cleaning fluff being changed to cleaning ears. The censoring made no statement in the copyrights and no mention that the novel was altered from its original form. Ballantine Books published two versions of the novel, the "Adult" version, which they sold to bookstores, and an edited version which was sold to schools, and after ten years of publication, the publisher stopped publishing the "Adult" version of the novel altogether. Mind you, this all happened without the knowledge of Ray Bradbury. However, in 1979, tipped off by a friend, Bradbury was alerted of the expurgation. He proceeded to contact the publisher and demand that all censored copies of the novel be removed from shelves and be replaced by his original version. As of 1980, all copies now available are from the original manuscript. Due to Bradbury's efforts and his personal stand against censorship and expurgation, *The American Library Association (ALA) Intellectual Freedom Committee, Young Adult Division*, was set in motion.

Upon the founding of this committee, the investigation of censored novels under school book clubs, such as *Scholastic*, were found to be censored in some sort of way. The ALA threatened to strip the Newbery and Caldecott medals from the novels, as well as demanded that a statement appear in the copyrights page stating, "Edited school book edition." However, even

as late as 1992, students of Venado Middle School in Irvine, California were distributed copies of the novel with various words in which the teachers viewed as “obscene” were crossed out with pens and markers. Outraged parents however, reported to local newspapers and reported the irony of a book dealing with such extreme levels on censorship actually being expurgated itself. Due to parents standing up for Bradbury’s piece, the censored copies were replaced by the original. As a renegade amongst the literary elite, Bradbury had his own quote inserted into the front cover of his own novel, and it is truly difficult not to admire his stature. “I will not go gently onto a shelf, degutted, to become a non-book” (*Fahrenheit 451*).

Stated best from author Dawn B. Sova in her critical research on the topic of banned books, *Fahrenheit 451* tells the tale of a futuristic, paradoxical society that is eerily similar to our own. It relates the story of an oppressive society in which books are forbidden objects and firemen are hired and treated as kings who burn all books in which they encounter. The novel’s original version is an expansion of the 1950’s short story, titled, “*The Fireman*,” and given the new title of *Fahrenheit 451*, which is the temperature at which paper burns. One of a number of dystopic novels published after World War II, this piece particularly emulates the idea that humans are losing touch with the world, the hope for free-thinking, and human relationships. Captain Beatty, the burly, chief fireman in the novel, believes, “The word ‘intellectual’ became the swear word it deserved to be,” (pg. 58).

People are forced to rush from their homes to their jobs and back, never speaking of what they feel or think, but only to talk about unimportant, soulless facts. At the homes of these people, much like today’s world with miniscule differences, they are surrounded by T.V. screens that are made interactive, so people can actually interact with the T.V. programs. A slight difference from today’s world, the screens occupy all four walls of a room and contain characters

who are viewed by most as, “family members.” The streets, which are eerily similar to today’s world again, have become extremely dangerous due to speed limits beginning at a minimum of 55-miles-per-hour, which must be constantly maintained, and speeds, which are much more common, increasing to well over 100-miles-per-hour. Adults and teenagers careen through the streets without regard for anybody in their way and absolutely no regard for human life. The citizens of “Elm City” find themselves on the cusp of a raging war against an unnamed enemy.

The main character, Guy Montag, with the help of 17-year-old Clarisse McClellan, has a realization that there is a better life outside of a closeminded world full of evils. McClellan, an “odd duck” among the other teenagers in Elm City, has an affinity for nature, an interest to explore feeling and human emotion, and a constant happiness that stems from the idea that she is happy to be alive. Easily marked as an elixir for Montag’s growth and change throughout the novel, the story begins with McClellan questioning Montag as to why he became a fireman and why she does not see his job fitting for him.

After a life changing event that deals with a call to a house to burn a collection of books, an older woman refuses to leave her collection, and in rebellion, ignites herself with her books. This moment changes Montag’s life infinitely and he seeks out his wife, Mildred, in hopes of understanding the reasoning behind such an action. Mildred blocks out her husband’s voice and presence with her “seashell” ear thimbles, which are tiny radios that are worn in each ear that play continuously, and occupy the involvement of many ears, allowing them to interact with the T.V. screen “family.”

Later in the novel, Montag finds out that the main reason for the abolition of the books was to keep people happy. His fire captain, Captain Beatty, in a life altering soliloquy, explains to Montag, that without books, there are no conflicting theories or thoughts, and no one else

learns anything more than anybody else, forcing equality. Stated as a climactic expression of ignorance and superficial thought, “Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man?” (*Fahrenheit 451*).

After Montag’s wife reports to his own fire department that he has been silently and secretly collecting books over the years, their house is destroyed by the firemen and Montag flees, seeking help from a wise old english professor, Faber, who is part of a broad, secretive movement that works to preserve that art of knowledg and literature and the knowledge of the past. Carefully following Faber’s direction, Montag goes to the railroad yards, where he comes into contact witha group of old men all of whom are former literature professors who have memorized a specific piece of literature. They preach that they are part of a network of thousands of individuals who will keep literature alive in their hearts and heads, untillt he time comes when the oppression of the intellect ceases and they can set the literature out upon the world once again. Montag, who has memorized several books of the Old Testament, joins the groups of scholars, the novel ends on a positive, uplifiting note (Banned Books).

The Frame

As Bradbury makes clear, the world we live in today is a horrifying place. Sure, there are sancities in the same things that there were over 50 years ago--family, friends, past times, and baseball--but look at us as a nation and a diverse group of insatiable creatures. We are selfish souls seeking a way to increase our expenses and get more out of whatever is we can get our hands on. Bradbury claimed his masteriece, *Fahrenhaiet 451*, was written in an attempt to “prevent futures,” and looking at today’s shard of humanistic obsession and greed, some could say he failed. I guess, when it comes down to the grit, did he?

In a piece of literature that has no problem standing on its own two feet in any genre, it acts as a prophetic work that opens the reader's eyes to a world that mirrors our own. So, in retrospect, can a prophet fail? I'd say no. Bradbury doesn't have any super-human powers, nor has he ever claimed to, but he has predicted and warned the insatiable creatures in this world, that the direction in which they are heading leads to a dark and hopeless fate. *Fahrenheit 451* forces the reader to ask themselves, does misery really need that much company? Is it true that bad things happen to so many good people? Is our world really in shambles? Are the news stations avoiding good news because they won't make as much money? Or are we just not interested in other people's happiness?

Bradbury forces us as readers, as well as freethinkers, to realize that life is measured in hearts beating. The harder you push yourself, the harder your heart beats. Hearts beat along to a clock, which beat along to a moment, which beat along to a day. Each day has an important meaning which brings some sort of twinkle to our eye--a twinkle and a feeling that reek of defiance and a better plan. Bradbury urges us to push and change and fight back against the hopeless yearning of excess and superficial thought that has been burned into our minds by society's never ending message that success is excess. Every morning life's clock ticks on until eventually, the ticking translates into beats, beats turn into tears, and tears turn into tombstones. The novel pleads with the reader to keep moving.

Science fiction is the most important literature in the history of the world, because it's the history of ideas, the history of our civilization birthing itself...Science fiction is central to everything we've ever done, and people who make fun of science fiction writers don't know what they're talking about. Science fiction is the history of towns and cities unbuilt, ghosting our imaginations and lifting us to

rise up and find hammers and nails to build our dreams before they blow away. I am not so much a science fiction writer (which many deny) as I am an idea beast. Any idea that nags or bites or waves at me I respond to with a yell and a dash for the typewriter. (*Literary Companion Press*)

To the dismay of many literary professionals, *Fahrenheit 451* sits lonely and bold in the vague genre of science fiction. However, I believe Bradbury has created his own genre--Prophetic Existentialist Fiction.

As mention before, *Fahrenheit 451* was Bradbury's attempt to prevent futures. However, as a complete contradiction to his own message, which is blatant, Bradbury encourages the reader to live and breathe and be who we are and not to mold into what society wants us to be. He pleads with the reader to dive in and swim in the deepest ocean, rather than wait for the rest of the world to tell us it's safe and acceptable. "We are here, dead matter left on Earth and struck by lightning and somehow life developed. We are something that is totally impossible. It's time we land on Mars to find out for ourselves. Then there will be life on Mars and that life will be us," (*Literary Companion Press*). The novel's example of existentialism stems from the protagonist, Guy Montag.

Montag is a stern, obedient servant to the state which despises and preaches against knowledge and freethinking. When the reader first meets Guy Montag, he is unquestioning and full of pride for his job as a book burner, or "fireman." However, after his wife, Mildred, nearly dies because of an overdose on sleeping pills, our protagonist begins to question the world that he lives in and who he is as a person. Bradbury cleverly lays subtle messages to the reader, pleading them to think for themselves and be whoever they desire. After Montag's mind begins to shake at the thought of self-realization, the novel then finds him engulfing himself in the

literature he has secretly collected over the years of being a book burner. After seeking out and meeting with Faber, and obtaining the earpiece in which Faber has created, the two are able to keep in constant contact. That specific earpiece however, is by-no-means the same as the seashell piece in which the rest of Elm City obsesses over.

Faber's earpiece broadcasts knowledge and wisdom and freethinking into Montag's ear. This is Bradbury's urging message to obtain our own knowledge however it is we see fit. This hint allows us to realize we are whoever we want to be. By choosing a different type of earpiece, much like the seashell, except standing for the exact opposite of the shell, it acts as an elixir to a world that has been shot down and set a flame. Once again, through the obstinate rigor of Faber's earpiece, the wisdom and knowledge that Montag begins to obtain, allows him to ignite the dull wick of society and once again have pride in his job, except this time, his job is to transfer knowledge to other individuals. The message is clear all the way through to the end of the novel, when Montag overthrows his captain, who powerfully preaches against knowledge and freethinking, and turns the flame thrower onto the Captain, rather than on his books. Bradbury creates an existential hero that becomes a leader of his own movement among mind-numbing conformists.

The Portrait

This project, much like the novel, opened up my eyes to a different side of the world and urged me to explore. After spending hours that turned into days, then days that turned into weeks, and weeks that eventually turn into months in the library thinking about how I was going to find research that relates this novel to today's world, I decided to take Bradbury's advice,

“Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things. You simply must do things,” (*Ray Bradbury*).

I threw myself into the world and gathered evidence to support the thought that the world we live in today is a mirror image of the world in *Fahrenheit 451* through real life experiences, real people, and real evidence that stated supported my opinions and ideas. While traveling on planes, trains, and automobiles to different places in this country, I interviewed firefighters, literary scholars, and people that I found along the way in subways, street corners, and bus stations. My goal was to be as close to an everyday Guy Montag as I could be, because I realized to find the answers I was looking for, I couldn't sit around and wait for things to happen to me, I had to go out and happen to things.

I started my research by interviewing people that lived in the time that the novel was written, that way, I could get a hint at what Bradbury was seeing at the time when he wrote it. The people that I met along the way described a society that was nothing like the one that we live in today. Speed limits, deaths, crime, T.V.--everything differed so severely, that the world we know today, resembled a futuristic society. The elderly that I talked to, spoke of today's technology and how it seems like something out of a science fiction film. Technology, phones that are computers that can do anything you ask them, cars that talk to you with navigation systems to tell you exactly where you need to go and how to get there, clocks that work on their own, and highways, that have billboards just like Elm City's that easily surpass 200 feet. They talked about highway speeds, violence, the need for a police force, the death tolls rising numbers, and the youth in society's need for T.V. and their obsession with pop culture. Throughout my research, both in texts, anthologies, novels, critiques, and real life people and their experiences, it is scary to see how eerily similar our world today is compared to a fictional society that was

created over 50 years ago, originally intended to represent a farfetched version of the 21st century.

The Hearth, the Salamander, and Modern America

The novel starts simple, yet profound and with volume. Within the first few pages, as Bradbury begins to describe the futuristic world, there are haunting similarities in comparison to today's society. Clarisse McClellan, the elixir for the protagonist's transformation, is introduced by chance, at the very beginning of the novel when the main character, Guy Montag, is walking home from work. As made known in the text, and through the close-minded perspective of Guy Montag, Clarisse is "an odd one." Clarisse is viewed as "odd" because of her curiosity and wonder towards the world. When the novel begins, the first few pages set the attitude of the environment, and a carefully placed character juxtaposition between Mildred and Clarisse, allows the reader to see the norms of society and how Clarisse is a puzzle piece that just doesn't fit. She is a representation of today's children, and Montag is a representation of what society has done to the adults in this world. She represents innocence, whereas the early version of Montag, represents conformity. She questions the rationale and asks questions in regards to the rules that form Montag's life.

Montag fits into the role of many adults in this world. They wake up, do their everyday routine, brush their teeth, read the paper, have a morning cup of coffee, take a shower, and leave at 5:45 to be at work by 6:15. Most, don't have a passion or a love for their work, they do it for the same reason Montag does. They work whatever job pays the bills, because that is what society tells them to do. Society maps out a routine that consists of work and pay, work and pay,

work and pay. People work 9-5 jobs in cubicles for bosses that they never meet. Why? Because everybody else says you're supposed to. It's the people, the ones like Clarisse McClellan that go ignored, unless you're Guy Montag. Nobody ever proposed the question to him that she did. The one that really stirred his heart and head and forced him to find the answer. "She seemed to remember something and came back to look at him with wonder and curiosity. "Are you happy?" (pg. 10).

Montag's answer easily resembles that of 2010. He realizes that he has never been asked, or thought about an answer to a question of that proportion. His answer, he realizes later on, is simple. Like many adults going through the motions of a life with a lack of excitement and passion, they are separated into three distinct categories of answers. The first, like Mark Ludwig, a 54-year-old man I met during his daily commute on a train into Boston at 6a.m., who works as an executive for a company that specializes in manufacturing, are not happy--they are accepting. They work the job that they have for years because they are used to it and they need the money to support their family and they have been doing the same routine for years. The second third, like Margaret Scranton, a 42-year old woman I met at a coffee shop in Boston, who works as a secretary for an investment firm, are not happy with their routine and they wished that they had changed it and gone with their passions or loves, like Margaret's love for painting or singing, but instead, like Margaret, they fell into the security of a check that comes every two weeks and acts as a means to pay the bills. Coincidentally, the third category of adults that answer the question of happiness, are like Tom Barnes. Tom Barnes is a 51-year-old Captain of a Fire Department a few towns over from me that I met in an airport. Tom is happy, he grew up wanting to follow in his father's footsteps and become a captain of a fire department, and succeeded. Tom realizes that at times money is tight, but at other times, life can get far worse than not being able to drive

a really expensive car. Tom has worked in the department for 22 years. Tom's advice on life, "Never settle for security."

The novel starts off with the main characters epiphany that consists of changing his life. The changing however, very similar to the lives of many people today, doesn't happen until something serious happens to them. In Montag's case, he doesn't start to question anything until he has an encounter with the possibility of losing a loved one. Mildred, whose name at the novel's opening, is only spoken by Montag at a time of extreme emotional meltdown. The first instance, like most life altering experiences, is when he walks into his bedroom and finds that Mildred has overdosed on a bottle of sleeping tablets. After he picks up the telephone in his bedroom and screams, "Emergency Hospital," into the speaker, two people that Montag has never seen, rush over and stick a tube with a camera down Mildred's throat and do what is today known as a "stomach pump." After Mildred's life is saved, the strangers, who in today's world are referred to as paramedics, charge Montag \$50 dollars and explain that they need to leave immediately, because, eerily similar today's overdoses, they get about ten calls a night and they have to go tend to the other citizens who have followed in Mildred's footsteps.

After the paramedics leave, and Montag realizes that the hospital didn't even have the decency to send an M.D. to assist in Mildred's attendance, Montag sits by his wife and utters her name for the second time. This time, however, shaken by the events, he begins to see the world for what it is. "There are too many of us, he thought. There are billions of us and that's too many. Nobody knows anyone. Strangers come and violate you. Strangers come and cut your heart out. Strangers come and take your blood. Good God, who *were* those men? I never saw them before in my *life!*" (pg. 16) The scary part is that he's absolutely right. We've all been there, tended to by unfamiliar faces and vampires walking around in white robes taking blood

because they're told to. We never know them. They never try and get to know us. In hospitals, the patient is a lab rat. They are a way to make money and a way to stay open, for without the patient, there would be no need for the hospital. Sure, hospitals save lives and there are heroes that work there, but at the same time, Joseph Campbell had it right, heroes have a thousand faces. It seems a tragedy that only on rare occasions do we ever get to recognize or get to know one.

He glanced back at the wall. How like a mirror, too, her face. Impossible; for how many people did you know who refracted your own light to you? People were more often—he searched for a simile, found one in his work—torches, blazing away until they whiffed out. How rarely did other people's faces take of you and throw back to you your own expression, your own innermost trembling thought?
(pg. 11)

"I've got to go see my psychiatrist now. They *make* me go. I make up things to say. I don't know what he thinks of me. He says I'm a regular onion! I keep him busy peeling away the layers." (pg. 22) The world's view of normalcy varies on the levels of normalcy that are in the novel. Normal, it seems, is almost a religious experience or a right of passage. Captain Beatty says it best,

Surely you remember the boy in your own school class who was exceptionally 'bright,' did most of the reciting and answering while the others sat like so many leaden idols, hating him. And wasn't it this bright boy you selected for beating and tortures after hours? Of course it was. We must all be alike. (pg 58)

It may sound absurd, sure, but it sounds eerily familiar does it not? In this statement we see 2010. Take fashion ads and T.V. shows and popular culture. Everything is an astute

representation of a travesty. The message given off by the media is that everybody should look like their T.V. stars.

Caitlin Sherman, 21, has been a dear friend since grade school. Attending the University of Massachusetts on a full academic scholarship to study psychology, she appears to most, as a role model. In many ways she is. Sadly, there are a few details involved in Caitlin's life that the public doesn't know. Caitlin is anorexic, and has been since she was 14-years-old. Her reasoning for the illness isn't profound or new or any different than anyone else's. It matches the statistics perfectly.

It started once her parents let her start watching MTV, just like everybody else. It was the people on the shows and the people in the magazines. Everybody was so beautiful and thin and envied. Caitlin's life follows the same patterns as most other teens suffering from anorexia or bulimia. First, she engulfed herself with the programs, and tuned in every single Monday night to watch the new episodes, and then, using the computer and popular magazines on her own time, she learned as much as she could about the characters. She learned where they were born, where they went to school, their favorite shoes, where they live, who they're dating, who they've married, and so on. Her friends would refer to the characters on a first name basis, and talk about what they were doing outside of the show, just like Mildred. She became so involved with the shows that she wanted to dress like the characters, because they were on T.V. That was the second step. Then she wanted to look exactly like them. She cut her hair, dyed it to the color of her favorite character, bought a whole new wardrobe to match the expensive tastes of the reality T.V. Stars, and finally, began to throw up after every meal because she wanted to be as "skinny." Bradbury may not have had Mildred trying to look like the people inside the parlor walls, but he did have Mildred obsessing over them. After Caitlin started to see the results she wanted by

throwing up her food, she began to eat one meal every three days. She got the results she wanted, of course, and started to look as miniscule as a T.V. star, however, a myriad of other obstacles arose during the process.

Caitlin's been hospitalized several times. In her senior year of high school, she was rushed to the emergency room during a school pep rally because she collapsed. Doctors did numerous tests to figure out what sparked the collapse. It turned out, she didn't eat a single thing for six days. Her excuse, was that it was April, and she wanted to have the same beach body that everybody on Laguna Beach had. It's paradoxical to think that reality T.V. is a multi billion dollar industry, yet at the same time, it plays a major role in causing teens to worry about what they look like. In 2009, Anorexia Nervosa was proclaimed as the third most common chronic illness among adolescents and the average onset for the disease was among 17-year-olds. Children as young as 10-years-old have been diagnosed with the disease, 40-60% of high school girls partake in diets, 50% of all girls between the ages of 13-15 believe that they are overweight, 80% of all 13-year-olds have dieted, and approximately 40% of all nine-year-olds have dieted. (*Eating Disorder Clinic*) All of these symptoms are highly influenced by the media, pop-culture, and the role of society's pressure on teens.

Ray missed the boat about how many screens would be required for a successful people-transplant. One lousy little Sony can do the job, night and day. All it takes besides that is actors and actresses, telling the news, selling stuff, in soap operas or whatever, who treat whoever is watching, even if nobody is watching, like family. 'Hell is other people,' said Jean-Paul Sartre. 'Hell is other real people,' is what he should have said. (*Bagombo Snuff Box*).

Bradbury makes a distinct representation of the influence of pop-culture on society through his characterization of mind-numbing conformists, such as his wife Mildred. Mildred, just like Caitlin, is an example of how pop-culture is guilty of puppeteering. Mildred listens to the parlor walls. The parlor walls are predictable and appear addicting. Just like Caitlin being influenced by the media to look and dress and be a certain way, Mildred is being told the same thing.

The converter attachment, which had cost them one hundred dollars, automatically supplied her name whenever the announcer addressed his anonymous audience, leaving a blank where the proper syllables could be filled in. A special spot-wavex-scrambler also caused his televised image, in the area immediately about his lips, to mouth the vowels and consonants beautifully. He was a friend, no doubt about it, a good friend. "Mrs. Montag-now look here." Her head turned. Though she quite obviously was not listening.

(pg.64)

Caitlin and Mildred are victims, sure, but they're not alone. The statistics stated before show how people of younger age, the people being brought up in the culture today, the ones that don't see the horrors of how the way media creates its norms, they're the ones that are virtually brainwashed to think that pop culture is completely normal. The quote above states exactly what Caitlin and thousands upon millions of others do. "Her head turned. Though she quite obviously was not listening" (pg. 64). People of today's culture do what they're told. Only is it a rarity to see the people questioning authority, standing up for what they believe in, and allowing themselves to become victims of ridicule and being looked at as "different," like Captain Beatty says in his moving soliloquy where he preaches against free-thinking and a well read man. There

are the people that stand up for themselves, sure, but they are few and far between because it takes a courage, a courage that is not preached by the media what so ever. When Bradbury creates his hero, Guy Montag, he urges us to stand up for what we believe in, just like Montag does, even if in the end you end up away from society on a train track. He urges us to do what we believe to be right, not what is easy. He urges us to be who we are, because dreams should never be traded for security. He urges us not to become one of the brainwashed souls like Mildred and Caitlin have become.

The Sieve, the Sand, and the Standard

In Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, not only did he create a dark representation of 21st century America that eerily resembles our own, he also, unconsciously perhaps, created a model for the standard of today's groups in society. Each character in the novel who is given a vital role in Guy Montag's transformation, is cleverly placed for a reason. What Bradbury has done is created an awareness for his readers to pay more attention to the people around them in their own lives. He has created three distinct, yet incredibly important, sects of individuals. By creating Montag's wife, Mildred, and making her out to be a mind numbing conformist to the futuristic society, Bradbury has placed her in the category of the "Glass Houses." By creating Montag's boss and the novel's antagonist, Captain Beatty, to be a sort of villain who does his best to stop the world from obtaining knowledge, Bradbury has placed him in the category of "The Gravel." Finally, by creating existential representations of characters who do their best to help people become all they can be, Faber and Clarisse, Bradbury has created an elite category of individuals known as "The Rose."

As mentioned above, Mildred is a clear representation of the group of individuals, that Bradbury has created, that never challenge society--"The Glass Houses"--an average individual. "Glass Houses," on the outside, appear to be shiny, unbreakable, and flawless--but if the tiniest stone or pebble grazes the surface, it scratches or shatters the world around them. Like the average person's reaction to a situation that requires strength, either physical or emotional, "Glass Houses" do their best to fit their role in society, the norm. Much like glass in its transparency, the group is fitted with types of people that have the ability to make or break you with trust, love, or artificial integrity. Glass, coming in all different shapes, types, and sizes, will always remain a necessity in this world, much like people. People are like glass, some are transparent like superficiality, but others protect you and keep you out of the cold, like windows.

Mildred, as well as her friends in the novel, fall into this category of normalcy because of their lack of interest in standing up for what they believe in. To be honest, the only thing that they ever stand up for or show any passion for at all, is their 'family,' which, as mentioned before, is Bradbury's demonstrative example of how pop-culture seems to run the lives of the average person in modern America (the Glass Houses). An example from the novel that demonstrates this superficial idea comes from the instance when Montag comes into the parlor and asks Mildred and her friends to 'talk.' The woman thinks he has lost his mind.

The woman showed their tongues, laughing. Mildred sat a moment and then, seeing that Montag was still in the doorway, clapped her hands. "Let's talk politics, to please Guy!"

"Sounds fine," said Mrs. Bowles. "I voted last election, same as everyone, and I laid it on the line for President Noble. I think he's one of the nicest-looking men ever to become president."

“Oh, but the man they ran against him!”

“He wasn’t much, was he? Kind of small and homely and he didn’t shave too close or comb his hair very well.”

“What possessed the ‘Outs’ to run him? You don’t go running a little short man like that against a tall man. Besides-he mumbled. Half the time I couldn’t hear a word he said. And the words I *did* hear I didn’t understand!”

“Fat, too, and didn’t dress to hide it. No wonder the landslide was for Winston Noble. Even their names helped. Compare Winston Noble to Hubert Hoag for ten seconds and you can almost figure the results.”

“Damn it!” cried Montag. “What do you know about Hoag and Noble!”

“Why, they were right in that parlor wall, not six months ago. One was always picking his nose; it drove me wild.”

“Well, Mr. Montag,” said Mrs. Phelps, “do you want us to vote for a man like that?”

Mildred Beamed. (pg. 96-97)

“Glass Houses,” as Bradbury has made evident, focus on the glimmer of a diamond ring rather than the meaning behind it. They do their best to fit the mold. They don’t challenge or stand up for the rest of the people who feel lost, they do their best to do as their told. They listen to “The Man” as Bradbury makes quite clear when he creates “The Man” who stands for the leader of the fight against the free-thinking intellectual. This is represented through the characterization of Captain Beatty, who leads the group of individuals in which Bradbury has created, known as “The Gravel.”

Captain Beatty is clearly represented as a leader amongst the spoiled, superficial phonies--"The Gravel." "The Gravel," are people out for blood, even if they don't need it. Their job is to put everybody else down as a means to build themselves up. Like rocks, they set out to break "The Glass Houses." These are the people that try to be leaders, but instead become bullies. Bradbury makes evident that they represent the kind of people that beg for trust and compassion, but once they eventually receive it, they abuse it to get ahead in their own lives and leave the rest of the world to rot.

Bradbury makes clear how "The Gravel" are the enforcers of the norm, when he has the antagonist of the novel, Captain Beatty, describe why firefighter burn books, in a soliloquy filled with knowledge, a tone of ignorant superficial thought, and pride.

School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything except pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts? (pgs. 55-56)

Bradbury freakishly represents today's view and stand on free-thinking and knowledge. He has his "lead conformist" describe the hope and movement for the absence of art and the deletion of anything that doesn't render immediate results. He continues to be even more ignorant in his hope for a world that is absent of beauty and dependent on instant gratification.

...More sports for everyone, group spirit, fun, and you don't have to think, eh?

Organize and organize and super-organize super-super sports. More cartoons in books. More pictures. The mind drinks less and less. Impatience. Highways full of

crowds going somewhere, somewhere, somewhere, nowhere. The gasoline refugee. Towns turn into motels, people in nomadic surges from place to place, following the moon tides, living tonight in the room where you slept this noon and I the night before... (pg. 57)

Bradbury describes the ideal situation and repression of education and the push for pure satisfaction in something like sports. There's nothing wrong with sports, but he describes here, a situation that would present a scenario that would only seem to educate the young generation on a competitive instinct and a 'survival of the fittest' attitude.

...Now let's take up the minorities in our civilization, shall we? Bigger the population, the more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the cat-lover, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second-generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, people in this book, this play, this TV serial are not meant to represent any actual painters, cartographers, mechanics anywhere. The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy, remember that! All the minor minorities with their navels to be kept clean. Authors, full of evil thoughts, lock up your typewriters. They *did*. Magazines became a nice blend of vanilla tapioca. Books, so the damned snobbish critics said, were dishwater. No *wonder* books stopped selling, the critics said. But the public, knowing what it wanted, spinning happily, let the comic books survive. And the three-dimensional sex magazines, of course. There you have it, Montag. It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy

all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions, or trade journals... (pg. 57)

Bradbury makes clear, in a demonstrative example of a mere obsession based on the idea of pop-culture, and putting the beauty and simplicity on a pedestal. Marketing, as made clear through Captain Beatty's hint at mass exploitation, puts money as a God in society. Simplicity is the key and instant gratification reigns as a hope for everybody to get what they desire constantly. It demonstrates the deletion of happiness in our society. Beatty talks about making everything the same, mass exploitation to every kind of person he can think of. Giving everybody what they want will cancel out the idea of individuality and hope for everybody to be completely identical.

...You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred. Ask yourself, what do we want in this country, above all? People want to be happy, isn't that right? Haven't you heard it all your life? I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren't they? Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these... (pg. 59)

Bradbury uses Captain Beatty as a representation of "The Gravel," cleverly put in its place to preach against any sort of unique thinking. He speaks of free-thinking as a sin. He also speaks of making everybody happy by making everybody a mindless sponge that does what they are told, which Montag has been raised has, and he makes evident, "I'm not thinking. I'm just doing as I'm told, like always. You said get the money and I got it. I didn't really think of it myself," (pg. 92).

...Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely 'brilliant' with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy, because facts of that sort don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy. Any man who can take a TV wall apart and put it back together again, and most men can, is happier than any man who tries to slide rule, measure and equate the universe, which just won't be measured or equated without making man feel bestial and lonely. I know, I've tried it; to hell with it. So bring on your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your daredevils, jet cars, motorcycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with the automatic reflex. If the drama is bad, if the film says nothing, if the play is hollow, sting me with the Theremin, loudly. I'll think I'm responding to the play, when it's only a tactile reaction to vibration. But I don't care. I just like solid entertainment.

(Pgs.60-61)

Bradbury, through the characterization of a leader who preaches mass conformity, pleads with us to understand that once you reach the point in your life when you are associated with "The Gravel," you have accomplished a title of being a 'follower' who refuses to think for yourself and be who you choose to be, thus hitting 'rock bottom.' hence where the group got the name. However, as much as these people make the lives of others miserable, they are also a necessity. They teach others how to gain strength, both emotional and physical as well as give an example of how to overthrow pop-culture and conformity. They teach people how bad life can be, and make us appreciate the enjoyable times.

The final group of people that Bradbury chooses to describe represented through the astute characterizations of Clarisse McClellan and the old English professor named Faber, is epitome of beauty and honesty that is represented by the age old symbol of a rose. People who associate with the prestigious sect known as "The Rose," are good for any occasion--just like the flower it was named after. "The Rose," holds everybody together. They're the kind of people that are the first to make a toast at a wedding as well as the shoulder to cry on at a funeral. They're not overly confident or pompous, but they do have an awareness of life and the world around, the belief that they are creating or have created who they are, all of which comes packaged with a happiness that is eternal. The truth, Bradbury allows the reader to understand, is spoken like a religion, whether beautiful or terrifying.

From the first instance in which our protagonist meets Clarisse McClellan, she is already acting as "The Rose" does, and is looking to find out exactly who he is, what makes him who he is, and how she can bring out the best version of Guy Montag. "Do you mind if I ask? How long've you worked at being a fireman?" (pg. 8). Clarisse, even though, she is only present as a character in the novel for a very short period of time, she, herself, is a vital theme through the entire piece. She is the elixir to Montag's awakening to a world that has been destroyed by pop-culture, materialism, and the disposing of free-thinking. Clarisse, from the start, is the epitome of free-thinking and a role model for individuality. Since Clarisse begins to grace the pages, Montag is enveloped by her curiosity and belief in his ability to be his own individual.

How did it start? How did you get into it? How did you pick your work
and how did you happen to think to take the job you have? You're not like the
others. I've seen a few; I know. When I talk, you look at me. When I said
something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would

never do that. The others would walk off and leave me talking. Or threaten me.

No one has time any more for anyone else. You're one of the few who put up with me. That's why I think it's so strange you're a fireman. It just doesn't seem right for you, somehow. (pg. 23-24)

Clarisse questions Montag on who he is and why he does what he does--something that nobody has ever done. Of course, Montag's answer is absent and we are allowed to see the beginning of his character growth in his lack of awareness and failure to understand who he is at all. The next crucial example of Clarisse's importance in Montag's self realization and self-understand which eventually leads to his overall growth in character, as well as Clarisse's own representation of the sect of "The Rose," is when she points out her awareness and admiration to the world and its intricacies.

I sometimes think drivers don't know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly," she said. "If you showed a driver a green blur, Oh yes! He'd say, that's grass! A pink blur? That's a rose-garden! White blurs are houses. Brown blurs are cows. My uncle drove slowly on a highway once. He drove forty miles an hour and they jailed him for two days. Isn't that funny, and sad, too? (pg. 9)

"The Rose," is separated into a small class of people that understand the true beauty that culminates life and self. Much like the flowers, this ancient symbol is said to not only be beautiful, but have the ability to hold secrets, or be trusted. The group "The Rose," as Bradbury seems to demonstrate with his characterizations, seem to be based off the early Greeks and Romans who would place a wild rose on the door of a room where secret or confidential matters were discussed. The phrase "sub rosa" or "under the rose," means to keep a secret, (Scotland).

When Montag puts all of his hope, faith, and dependence on Faber, it is no surprise that he is a major theme of Montag's search for trust, as well as a type of person that Montag can count on.

Faber, from nearly his first appearance in the novel, is portrayed in a cleverly placed juxtaposition in which Montag is displayed as a changing agent in a society full of travesties. The instance occurs when Faber sends Montag out to get money. Montag quickly obtains the money and speaks with Faber, who at the time, is a voice inside his head because he has been given an earpiece, contrary to the seashell piece that Mildred wears, that allows Montag to talk to Faber at all times.

I'm not thinking, I'm just doing like I'm told, like always. You said get the money and I got it. I didn't really think of it myself. When do I start working things out on my own?

You've started already, by saying what you just said. You'll have to take me on faith! (pg. 92)

Faber pushes Montag and forces him to understand the fact that he is thinking for himself. Montag has done what he has been told for his entire life and now, based solely on the fact that he is trying to think for himself, he is in fact, being a free-thinker. Bradbury introduces this instance to make us think of our own lives and find those same people, the Fabers, who have forced us to be the best versions of ourselves. Bradbury urges us to find the people in our lives that guide us when we're lost and help us when we don't know what to do. He tells us to look around and realize that there are people in this world, like Faber to Montag, that believe in us and want to see us become the absolute best versions of ourselves.

Very similar to Clarisse, Faber pushed Montag into the best possible version of himself. Bradbury characterizes Faber in the novel as a bridge to a different life. Faber is an astute representation of an existential life. Faber urges Montag to be who he is and carefully craft himself through experience and the world.

You're afraid of making mistakes. *Don't* be. Mistakes can be profited from. Man, when I was younger I *shoved* my ignorance in people's faces. They beat me with sticks. By the time I was forty my blunt instrument had been honed to a fine cutting point for me. If you hide your ignorance, no one will hit you and you'll never learn. Now pick up your feet, into the firehouse with you! We're twins, we're not alone any more, we're not separated out in different parlors, with no contact between. If you need help when Beatty pries at you, I'll be sitting right here in your eardrum making notes! (pg. 104)

This instance above happens at a crucial point in the novel, where Montag is entering the firehouse to talk to Captain Beatty and return a book in which he has stolen. However, Montag has pilfered numerous books throughout the years and is trying to return another book, while allowing Faber to keep the copy of The Bible, to make copies of, because it is believed to be the last copy in the world. Faber's wisdom and urgency here demonstrates his belief and pride in Montag and his pushing of Montag as a person to stand up against society and be who he is. Montag is scared to step foot in the firehouse, of course, he is going up against the destructors of intellect and trying to tell them that he is not part of their ideals anymore. Faber acts as a catalyst for Montag's spiritual and personal development throughout the story.

The three distinct categories of people that Bradbury makes clear throughout this story are the standard for our own society. Bradbury, hiding subtle messages and urgencies in between the lines, forces us to be a “Rose” rather than a “Glass House.” He pleads with us to think for ourselves and be individuals because the patterns of society are too simple and mind numbing and they act like traps, forcing out the wisdom and truth in the world. Throughout the novel, the portrayal of people through the uses of the main characters--Bradbury presents a blueprint for today’s world. When we look around we see several distinct representations of “Roses,” “Glass Houses,” and to our own dismay, we see many people that would fall into “The Gravel.” Bradbury acts as a Faber-esque character through his writing, and urges us to think and be and fight to be who we want to be, and with any luck, the people close to us, the “Roses” will help us find that best version. Bradbury said it best, “First you jump off the cliff and build your wings on the way down” (Ray Bradbury).

Burning Bright, and Fading Away

The third and final section of the novel begins with Montag turning the flamethrower upon Captain Beatty, which is an act of existentialistic courage that can also be viewed as the final act that distinguishes Montag as his own as an individual. After Beatty disintegrates, Montag begins his escape from the hound and the rest of society, which is now after him. T.V. screens all across the country are turned to the helicopter that is chasing him and nearly everybody can see him. It is in this instance, when Montag is fleeing through the dark representation of 21st century America that Bradbury has created, that we are able to see the true horrors and the mirrored similarities that our world today has come to call it’s own.

While Montag is running, Elm City becomes a mere obstacle course in his path. One of the main obstacles that he is forced to encounter is crossing, what would be described today, as a freeway. Earlier in the novel, the speeds are touched upon when Montag is talking to Clarisse and she asks him if he has noticed how big the billboards have gotten over the years.

Have you seen the two hundred-foot-billboards in the country beyond town? Did you know that once billboards were only twenty feet long? But cars started rushing by so quickly they had to stretch the advertising so it wouldn't last. (pg. 9)

When Clarisse says this to Montag, it sounds absurd. However, in today's world, a two hundred-foot-long billboard advertisement is just an everyday occurrence--and highway speeds--well, it seems that they have increased in order to accommodate the billboards. Time Square in New York City for example, is home to the Walgreens advertisement, which is a billboard that is 17,000 square feet. Granted, it doesn't take the truth from Clarisse's statement of a two hundred-foot-long billboard, and it is Time Square right? Everything must be bigger, right? Well, maybe, it is the epicenter of virtually every form of business as well as art, so the attraction is vast. However, 17,000 square feet may be tall, but it's not long, so maybe we should try another city, just to prove that Bradbury wasn't exact false in the prediction of billboards at all.

Stop Handgun Violence, a non-profit organization dedicated to the prevention of gun violence, today unveiled its newest advertising campaign on the nation's largest billboard alongside the Massachusetts Turnpike in Boston. The billboard stretched the 252-foot billboard displays a new powerful and provocative call-to-action message urging lawmakers to close the "gun show loophole" in

federal gun laws that allows terrorists and criminals to purchase firearms at gun shows, "no questions asked," without a criminal background check or ID. The billboard, created by the Boston-based advertising agency Modernista, is designed as a mock gun show advertisement containing the message that highlights the ease and accessibility for individuals to legally buy guns in the U.S. without detection: "We Sell Guns! No ID Required. No Background Checks. Criminals and Terrorists Welcome! (Stop Handgun Violence)

It seems a tad scary that a company trying to raise awareness to the amount of deaths accumulated each year due to handguns would have to make a giant billboard so cars wouldn't ignore it, doesn't it? Well, not exactly. As Bradbury points out to us through Clarisse's conversation with Montag at the beginning of the novel,

Sometimes I'm ancient. I'm afraid of children my own age. They kill each other. Did it always use to be that way? My uncle says no. Six of my friends have been shot in the last year alone. Ten of them died in car wrecks. I'm afraid of them and they don't like me because I'm afraid. (pg. 30)

Clarisse, at the time in which Bradbury finished the novel, would have been talking like she was crazy. However, as scary as it is to think that Bradbury predicted the future, in 2005, 75% of the 10,100 homicides committed using firearms in the United States were committed using handguns. (American Firearms Institute). This may sound terrifying, but the scary thing to think, is that this statistic has increased over the last ten years. For example, just 20 years after Bradbury wrote *Fahrenheit 451*, in 1995, 56% of murders committed in the United States were with a handgun, and 68% were committed with a firearm, (PBS). When the novel first came out

and was highly acclaimed, the people that read it were probably thankful that the world in the novel was so farfetched compared to their own. However, when we read it, what are we going to be thankful for? The statistics that Clarisse claims to be scared of, on page 30, are virtually, if not lower, than the statistics of today, they're unexaggerated facts.

When Bradbury has Montag try to complete the task of crossing the freeway, it seems to be completely science fiction that cars would go so fast to the reader. However, on paper it tells a completely different story.

Once you started walking you'd have to gauge how fast those beetles could make it down here. Well, how far was it to the other curb? It seemed like a hundred yard. Probably not a hundred, but figure for that anyway, figure that with him going very slowly, at a nice stroll, it might take as much as thirty seconds, forty seconds to walk all that way. (pg. 126)

Here, Bradbury describes a version of today's freeways. It isn't an exact replica of what a freeway would seem like in the east coast, but in a place like Texas or Utah or California, it would fit the description perfectly. While Montag slowly crosses the freeway and tries to avoid the cars, their speeds are described as though they are mythical machines that come from the future. The only difference is that they are alive and well and most of us own them.

Since the Repeal of the Federal Limit in 1995, 33 states have increased their speed limits for better compliance to the driving laws. As the limits increased, as of last year, there has been a 90% better compliance rating. 10 different states have a 75mph speed limit and Texas and Utah, on certain segments of their highways, have an 80mph speed limit. (IIHS) Now, when Bradbury describes Montag's adventurous cross of the highway, "The beetles? Once started, they could leave three blocks behind them in about fifteen seconds. So, even if halfway across he started to

run...?” (pg. 126), It doesn't seem any different than today, does it? How about when Montag falls and he is lucky for his life? When Bradbury introduces the reader to this instance, it seems that the cars again are out for blood and that they have a mind of their own. However, according to the statistics, there is an average of 5,000 pedestrian deaths each year due to driver's speeding and over 64,000 injuries due to the same occurrence. Bradbury, it seems, truly was trying to “prevent futures,” as he said when writing the novel, sadly however, he was not successful.

After reading the novel, there are certain items, or vague, futuristic descriptions that stand out to the reader as similarities in our own households or items that we may own today. The novel eerily mirrors our society and we are forced as readers to ask ourselves if we are truthfully like the characters in the novel. Most of us would like to be like Faber or Clarisse of course, and obtain their knowledge and wisdom towards the world. Some of us might want to be like Montag and be on an adventure trying to overthrow the movement to terminate free-thinking altogether. Some would probably even want to be Captain Beatty, the ‘could-be’ genius who knows everything about literature, yet burns it so he doesn't have to compete with anybody trying to threaten his knowledge. There's a character in the novel that anybody would want to be, however, does it seem appropriate to propose the thought that in this day and age, most of the youth has turned into a Mildred?

One of the defining characteristics throughout the novel, in which Mildred obtains, is her obsession with her seashell earpiece, in which Bradbury creates a clever juxtaposition when he creates an identical, yet entirely different invention through the character of Faber. However, Mildred is never mentioned to be without her seashell piece.

And in her ears the little Seashell, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind. The room was indeed empty. Every night the waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning. There had been no night in the last two years that Mildred had not swum that sea, had not gladly gone down in it for the third time. (pg. 12)

In today's world, nearly everybody has a constant piece of something in their ears, most of the time however, it is an iPod. Bradbury's description sounds exactly how somebody would describe what an iPod does. However, not only was Bradbury trying to "prevent futures," he was creating them.

Scientists and engineers working on virtual reality machines call him "the father of virtual reality," he reports, because of his short story "The Veldt" (which carries the wall screens of *Fahrenheit 451* into a new dimension, and he says, "When a bright Sony inventor read about my seashell radios [in *Fahrenheit 451*], he invented the Walkman. (Literary Companion Press)

It seems paradoxical that a man trying to prevent futures would end up creating something that has single-handedly transformed the world. As of 2008, over 173 million iPods have been sold, which, if stacked, would be over a mile high, (Squidoo). When Bradbury created the seashell radio in the novel as a dark representation for an obsession with pop-culture, he was trying to warn the reader on how the media tries to constantly make us listen to them, which is why, with the clever juxtaposition of Faber's earpiece, Bradbury would have the well-read man

spitting knowledge and wisdom into our ears, which would later help us with our further endeavors.

The iPod is a paradox in itself. Studies show that 1 in 5 Americans owns an iPod. Apple, the company that produces iPods, has recently started to sell iBooks, which in turn, will be almost an identical match to what Faber was doing when he would read into Montag's ear. People will be able to download electronic books off of iTunes, which is the digital service that supplies music, movies, T.V. shows, and now books for the iPod. iTunes has sold over 5 billion songs (Schonfeld), and in the future, hopes to be the market leader for all bookstores as well. With the future of books looking to go digital, with places like iTunes, it seems that *Fahrenheit 451* truly has become a reality, except, where are the Captain Beatty's and the Salamander trucks?

Inventions are arising all around us everyday that are threatening to destroy everything that a book stands for and replace it with instant gratification and one-dimensional thinking. Today's version of a Captain Beatty is Amazon.com's new invention called a Kindle. The Kindle is a device that works as one screen that can connect to the internet and download books instantly. With eBooks on the market now for devices like Kindle, Sony Reader, and Barnes and Noble's Nook, libraries all around the country are threatened with the thought that they might go out of business. Each device is about the size of a hardcover novel and as thick as a magazine. It can hold up to 1,500 different books at once, and each novel can be downloaded in less than 60 seconds. However, just like Captain Beatty, the Kindle acts under the Digital Rights Management (DRM) system.

DRM, as fictitious as it may sound, operates under the same rule that the firemen in the novel do. Novels such as George Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm are prime example of novels that have been deleted from the system. Holmes Wilson, of the Free Software Foundation states,

The Amazon Kindle provides convenience, but at the cost of freedom. When you purchase a Kindle, you must agree to use the Digital Restriction Management (DRM) system. Since all of the Kindle eBooks you purchase from Amazon are in their proprietary DRM format, you are also promising to not share them with friends. And, because you promise to not circumvent the DRM, there is no way to move them to another device or a computer. You are locked into the Kindle and you are locked into Amazon. If you try to move them to a new eBook reader or a computer, Amazon can end your service and remove access to the books you have already purchased. (Thomas)

However, just Like Guy Montag and Faber, petitions have been started to rule out the expurgation. On August 5, 2009, a petition was started that gathered the support of 1,400 authors, librarians, and scholars including such luminaries as Richard Stallman, Lawrence Lessig, Clay Shirky, and Cory Doctorow. The petition states:

We believe in a way of life based on the free exchange of ideas, in which books have and will continue to play a central role. Devices like Amazon's are trying to determine how people will interact with books, but Amazon's use of DRM to control and monitor users and their books constitutes a clear threat to the free exchange of ideas.

However, the expurgation grows, much like it does in *Fahrenheit 451*. After the petition is signed, the members are highly encouraged to tell their friends and families about it and plead them to join, however,

Unfortunately, some popular sites for sharing news are a problem for technology users - they are set up to lock users to their services and deny them basic privacy and autonomy," before going on to list Digg, Facebook, Twitter, StumbleUpon, Delicious and Amazon's user review system. (Thomas)

I guess, after finding out that the same book-burners and firemen in Bradbury's novel, are alive in well in today's world, just like Bradbury warned us forty years ago, we need to think for ourselves, because as far as we know, the government isn't forcing us to only use Kindle's. The true selfishness of the Kindle lies in its failure to be shared. Nicholle Sigh of the Augustana Mirror said it best, for all the book lovers.

The selfishness of e-books doesn't stop there, though, as e-books don't allow the reselling or sharing of books. Half the fun of leisure reading is to absorb a great piece of literature and then pass it on to your best friend. The very foundation of libraries is the concept of lending books to strangers. Without traditional books, literature could lose the camaraderie it promotes... My biggest beef with this trend, however, is the romance issue. E-books erase all the romance out of reading. I can't imagine it is the same effect curling up with a crisp, new hardcover book as it is with a cold, computer-like screen. Holding a book, turning the pages and getting lost in a tangible story is what makes reading an experience. I realize that I might be in the minority, but this trend is one I'm hoping fades

quickly. For those of us who are English majors, that doesn't make the future look too bright. (Sogh)

Ray Bradbury is indeed a prophet, however, it is too upsetting that he did not predict any good news for the future of artistic expression, free-thinking, or individuality. With new inventions being created everyday, Ray Bradbury makes evident that the world we live in is becoming dependent on technology and destroying other forms of free-think credibility. The world we live in today eerily mirrors Bradbury's dark representation of 21st century America-so much in fact, that it is not a dark representation at all; it is a perfectly painted portrait of the United States of America.

The Exhibit

In conclusion, through the analysis and interpretation of Ray Bradbury's novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, I have created a juxtaposition of the world that we live in today and compared it to the eerily similar version known as Elm City, in which Bradbury creates a dark representation of 21st century America. I have carefully analyzed and interpreted themes, symbols, and futuristic inventions in which Bradbury claims he was, "Trying to prevent futures," as well as brought everyday uses and patterns of today's society to light, revealing the prescient and prophetic text in which the novel has encompassed. After reading the novel and being influenced by Ray Bradbury, it is no secret that we are mere mortals in a place where travesty lives. Some of us love it here, while at the same time, some are at a constant battle with the opportunity of escape. Many a times, we find ourselves seeking what we sought when we were young. Life was easier then, and simplicity was all we knew. Bradbury encourages us to not focus on the material

things, like money or fame. He urges us to set out on paths because we want to, not because somebody is telling us to.

While researching society and taking notes of the patterns of how the world works in the 21st century, numerous thoughts came to mind, but one especially, was ethereal. When Bradbury wrote this novel, he wrote it to try and prevent what has happened, but he failed, and as the above mirroring of worlds demonstrates, he failed quite miserably. Displaying his failure of prevention, it proposes the question of ignorance. When that bright Sony inventor set out to create the real version of those seashell earpieces, did he understand where he got the idea or was he just on a never ending search for self-satisfaction which would come accompanied with endless wealth? When it's made evident through Bradbury's warning about freeway speeds and rising death tolls and the constant obsession with pop culture, why didn't anybody pick up on the fact that they were reading a current display of culture? Didn't anybody realize what was happening?

On Ray Bradbury's website, Roger Moore interviewed him in pertinence to the current state of the world on his 80th birthday. Bradbury is still trying to prevent a future.

I'm working to prevent a future where there's no education," Bradbury said from his Los Angeles home. "The system we have has gone to hell, so I'm trying to encourage teachers and parents to rebuild it. We're not teaching kids to read and write and think. There's no reason to burn books if you don't read them.

(Bradbury)

Once again we are forced as individuals to ask ourselves if the world around us is crumbling just like it was in the novel. Is it possible that we could let it get as decrepit and

superficial as it has become? Looking at the novel's main theme of book burning as a metaphor for the absence of original thought, would be horrifying, because instead of things like firefighters burning books, we have celebrities and T.V. stars screaming at us to watch them instead of read a novel.

A nation sits, transfixed before a box, lured by interactive infotainment that invites viewers to apply, join in, become a cutthroat "survivor" or be meekly "voted off" by their compliant peers. We tap out bloodless conversations at our keyboards, removed from genuine human interaction. We sit in the hot seat, ready and willing to spit out facts without context or face the consequences. (Moore)

It seems that we all are members of a society that lives in a fishbowl that looks at the world through rose colored glasses. With things like pop-culture, T.V. and Kindles being invented, books are on the run from becoming the same outdated versions that VHS videotapes have become. Technology is a vast, never ending, never settling demon that is tearing apart all originality from everything, in turn making things easier, simpler, and allowing everybody to experience instant gratification. We are all becoming victims of it. We all own T.V.'s and most of us would rather watch the movie than take the time to read the novel. Hopefully, like Bradbury pleads, free-thinking and originality isn't dead and the use for books will never dissipate, because books contain knowledge and books stand for so much more than various pieces of paper.

I still love books. Nothing a computer can do can compare to a book. You can't really put a book on the Internet. Three companies have offered to put books by me on the Net, and I said, 'If you can make something that has a nice jacket, nice paper with that nice smell, then we'll talk.' All the computer can give you is a

manuscript. People don't want to read manuscripts. They want to read books.

Books smell good. They look good. You can press it to your bosom. You can carry it in your pocket. (Bradbury)

After reading *Fahrenheit 451* numerous times and researching the world that we live in and juxtaposing it with Elm City, one should be scared. One should be scared for the future, because Bradbury created a farfetched idea of disaster and it came to fruition. It came to fruition so severely that people literally read his novel and created inventions that he invented through text and creativity. People took inventions that were originally created as a warning of “what not to do” and then went ahead and did it, in turn becoming incredibly wealthy and successful. One thing we all need to understand is that Bradbury doesn’t just urge us to be ourselves, he urges us to stand up for what we believe in. He tells us to stand up against society because sometimes, even when “The Man” is staring us in the eye and telling us to conform, sometimes the only way out is through.

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