



Fahrenheit 451

Ray Bradbury

- Born 1920, Waukegan, Illinois
- Family moved to L.A.
- Graduated high school (1938) but didn't go to college
- Sold newspapers on the corner
 - “Libraries raised me. I don't believe in colleges and universities. I believe in libraries because most students don't have any money. When I graduated from high school, it was during the Depression and we had no money. I couldn't go to college, so I went to the library three days a week for 10 years.”

The Author

NAY
BRADBURY

- 1940s: Began writing stories for pulp magazines
 - *Super Science Stories*
 - *Galaxy Science Fiction*
 - *Weird Tales*
 - *Amazing Stories*
- *Fahrenheit 451* began as a short story: “The FireMan”
- A series of five separate stories over three years

The Author

- 1950s Prosperity
 - Post-WWII
 - Booming Economy
 - Rise of the Suburbs
 - Promise in Collectivity
 - Success in Sameness
- 1950s Anxiety
 - Fear of the Unfamiliar or Different
 - Cold War
 - McCarthyism



The Time

- Written with a bag of dimes and a rented typewriter in the basement of a UCLA library—in 9 days
- During McCarthyism, no one wanted to publish a novel about past, present, and future censorship
- Young Chicago editor saw the manuscript and bought it for \$450 to publish in issues no. 2, 3, and 4 of his yet-to-be-born magazine
 - Playboy
- Published as a full-length novel in 1953

The Book

BOOK BURNING!



Origin

- “Well, Hitler of course. When I was fifteen, he burnt the books in the streets of Berlin . Then along the way I learned about the libraries in Alexandria burning five thousand years ago. That grieved my soul. Since I'm self-educated, that means my educators—the libraries—are in danger. And if it could happen in Alexandria, if it could happen in Berlin, maybe it could happen somewhere up ahead, and my heroes would be killed.”

• Irony

- Bradbury’s own indictment of censorship has itself been repeatedly censored, the first and perhaps most successful effort coming 14 years after its release when his publisher was persuaded to release a “special” edition, modifying some 75 pages to eliminate “profane” language, as well as to “clean up” two separate incidents within the story.

The Inspiration

- *Fahrenheit 451* can be separated into three separate but connected sections, each marking a stage in the intellectual development of Montag, the protagonist, and each section ending in a fire of some kind
- **Part One:** The Hearth and the Salamander
A Life Lived in Darkness and Ignorance
- **Part Two:** The Sieve and the Sand
The Power and Danger of Light and Knowledge
- **Part Three:** Burning Bright
The Cost to Humanity

“It was a pleasure to burn”

- **Montag:** a friendly but unreflective fireman whose civic duty demands that he start, rather than stop, fires
- **Mildred:** Montag's wife, she is a sickly, small-minded woman absorbed by a world of mind-numbing media
- **Clarisse:** a teenager, whose romantic naïveté appeals to Montag and throws his world view into question
- **Beatty:** the fire chief, and Montag's foil, he is a man whose values Montag once defended but now resists
- **Faber:** a former professor, he is an old acquaintance who reluctantly agrees to guide Montag down a new path

The Characters

- The Hearth
- The Salamander
- The Sieve
- The Sand
- Fire
- Front Porches
- Pills
- Counting
- Mechanical Hound
- Phoenix
- Paradoxes



Symbols and Motifs

- Ignorance and Censorship
- Technology and Speed vs. Intimacy and Reflection
- Conformity vs. Individuality
- Distraction vs. Happiness
- Action vs. Inaction

Themes



“First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist; Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist; Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist; Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew; Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out for me.” –Martin Niemoeller

What's It Really About?
