

**A Study of Hidden Ideas in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451***

**M. Valarmathi and Dr. R. Palanivel**

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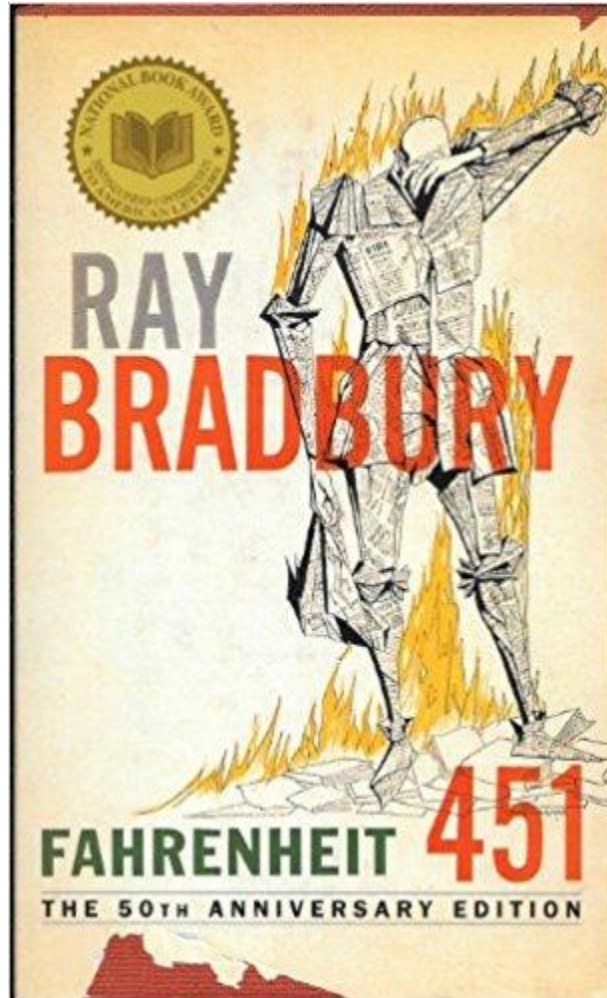
Ray Bradbury 1920-2012

Courtesy: <http://books.blogs.starnewsonline.com/16027/ray-bradbury-r-i-p/>

**Abstract**

Ray Bradbury is one of the well-known American writers, and he is famous for his cross genre works. His *Fahrenheit 451* is a symbolic dystopian of twentieth century and published as a novel in 1953. This article aims to analyse extensively on the hidden ideas such as influence of mass culture on society. His works belongs to anti McCarthy era as he said the importance of books and uses specific allusion from literature to increase the depth of the novel.

**Keywords:** *Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451* Dystopia, Hidden ideas, Specific Allusions, Mass Culture.



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Fahrenheit-451-50th-Anniversary-Bradbury/dp/B004TLVDKW>

### Ray Bradbury

Ray Bradbury is one of the well-known American writers. He is famous for his cross genre works. A prolific author of hundreds of short stories, close to fifty books as well as numerous poems, essays, operas, plays, tele plays, and screen plays. He has inspired the readers to dream, to think, and to create and has a very unique style of writing. *Fahrenheit 451* is a prophetic novel which is one of the popular fictions of American literary canon and in which temperature book papers catches fire and burn. This book is written in shorter version for a science fiction magazine in 1950 and published as a novel in 1953. He depicts a dystopian society in which artistic production is prohibited, libraries are burnt and books are regarded as a crime against state in *Fahrenheit 451*.

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## Focus of This Article

This article aims to analyse extensively on the hidden ideas such as the influence of mass culture on society and this work belongs to anti McCarthy era as he uses specific allusion in a work of fiction. He uses several direct quotations from the works of literature, including the Bible. These analyses of allusions show their function of adding subtle depth to the ideas of the novel. He details the dehumanizing nature of mass society in *Fahrenheit 451*. It is a dystopian tale that depicts the futuristic society in which reading is prohibited and a Fireman's job is to burn books. This novel is usually read as an anti-McCarthy era and a criticism of American consumerist society. He feared the effect of technology on society and the human spirit.

## A Critique of Mass Culture

In this novel, he confined himself to a critique of mass culture that reflects the elite cultural view of the post war period and censorship in a dystopian society. The books are banned because they can lead people to think and question against the society such as issues like freedom and happiness from worry through the elimination of controversy. This society which has seen to nuclear wars is a mass consumption in which television spread to four walls.

## *Fahrenheit 451*

*Fahrenheit 451* is based on the quest of the protagonist Guy Montag. The major motif of the novel is book burning and the opening description gives us a picture of competence. "It's fine work. Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn 'em to ashes, then burn the ashes. That's our official slogan" (Bradbury5). Guy Montag is a devoted fireman obeying orders without question who happens to question his job to burn books and what is more, taking pleasure in what he does, and a instrument for destruction. Montag who has committed the crime of stealing books to read and keep hiding it in his house escapes into wilderness, where he meets a band of dissident intellectuals to memorize books hoping to help humanity to rebuild itself in the future.

Bradbury took this issue to an extreme to show the potential effects of a course on our culture. If we look into the novel more closely one can see the biblical allusion, and deeper information that our society is headed for intellectual stagnation. The biblical allusions trace carefully towards a solution and help us to bring out of this "dark Age" (Bradbury 23). The author stated that how mass culture changed the people of America. In this novel, chief book burner Fire captain Betty explains that mass exploitation, technology, and minority issue carried the trick of replacing independent thought and leading to censorship. Author clearly wants to tell these three issues in his fictional world and to become of them in our own society as well. Mass communication and other entertainment exploit the public's desire for their fulfilment. People grow unwilling to violate the norms of society by expressing any original thought.

## Impact of Radio and TV Invention

When Radio was invented, people used it to get their information and keep the books aside and when television started to replace radios, most of the people forgot books. In America television became the primary socialiser and it was a tool of choice for spreading information or

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messages through mass media. Our social media was created by the people themselves not the government. People refer to text each other rather than to talk in person, even if they are in next room. An example of a person controlled by the government is Montag's wife Mildred even though she only likes to watch television and wanted to receive information not by thinking but just being feed of media. Author warns us that if we continue to rely on mass media, we human beings end up living in exact mirror of Montag. Through conformity we also see how people use the same products, do the same things, how the same ideas. Author did an excellent job of making us to think and drawing connection between his fictional world and our society.

### **Guy Montag**

*Fahrenheit 451* revolves around the life of protagonist Guy Montag who is introduced to both as an expression and an extension of. He is living as fireman, but not a common fireman in this current scenario. In this novel fireman do the exact opposite of the fireman of today and start fire rather than put them out in an effort to censor books from the society. In Montag world, anybody who is found to have books would in turn have their books burned and houses to as well. In *Fahrenheit 451* books are fully throw out by the government. The novel opens with the line, "It was a pleasure to burn" (Bradbury 1) which clearly depicts the mindset of the writer in advocating the readers to avoid neglecting reading habit. The firemen are felt excited and pleased while burning books. Guy Montag is one among them, who feels thrill in starting fires in people homes,

"He wanted above all, like the old joke, to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace, while the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch and lawn of the house. While the books went up in sparkling whirls and blew away on a wind turned dark with burning" (Bradbury 3).

### **Bradbury's Alternatives**

By these lines, Bradbury uses pigeon flapping its wings to the pages of the books. He uses this metaphor as pigeon is a common bird like books which are common.

Another beautiful metaphor in *Fahrenheit 451* is Phoenix which is a mythical bird of ancient Egypt that periodically burned itself to death and resurrected from its own ashes. Here Bradbury expresses his hope on mankind through the characterization of Granger that people might use their intellectual to keep from going through endless chain of disintegration and rebirth. Author associated phoenix with the minor character Betty who has knowledge of what civilization was like before the contemporary society. He tries to satisfy Montag's curiosity and hopefully to control further questioning as a chief. Betty wears the sign of the phoenix on his hat and rides in a phoenix car. He has a vast knowledge of the past yet ironically and tragically does not know how to use it. The writer states that all great ideas are controversial and debatable; books then are too indefinite. Betty is burned to death and his death by fire symbolically states that the rebirth is associated with his phoenix sign on his cap. When Montag killed Betty, he is forced to escape, and joins with Granger. This action is like a rebirth for Montag, a rebirth for a new intellectual life.

Bradbury used specific references from literature that carries through a basic irony in the novel. Clarisse McClellan, a girl in next door to Montag who meets her it became a turning point for him to have an emotional attachment that was sincere in a word hostile to honesty. She was consequently eliminated by the government. Death of Clarisse which made Montag to think and question more seriously, until he completely breaks from his diseased society. Author employs another direct quote from literature in second part of the book. Montag return from the meeting of Faber and had a talk with his wife Mildred and her two friends. The conversation of the women reflects shallowness in women's thinking that is the products of empty culture. Mildred friends are shocked that he has a poetry book and she managed that firemen are allowed to bring books home occasionally to show how silly books are. Montag reads from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" which is particularly apt and show two lovers looking at what appears to be a happy world, but recognizing the essential emptiness that exists:

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which  
Seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor  
Light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for  
Pain;  
And we are here, as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle  
And flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

### **Vast Emptiness**

Montag is finding that the exterior is a vast Emptiness, "a darkling plain." We can see how Bradbury has used allusion in literature to describe the current situation of world. In the beginning home of women discovered owning books where she refuses to leave and choosing to die with her soulful books. This incident made Montag shaken and that women last word alludes: "we shall this day light such a candle, by god's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out." These words recall phoenix idea of rebirth by fire and ironic in the sense that the intellectual candle in Montag's world is burning rather dimly at the time, an acceptable statement of the indestructibility of questioners, and thinkers in any society.

### **Biblical Allusions**

There are four biblical allusions in this novel which shows support the idea and solution to helping us out of. The reference to the "Lilies of the Field" (Matthew 6:28) and to *The Book of Job* is used to portray faith in God. In saint Mathew tale Lilies elucidate that God will take care of all things and no need to worry and *The Book of Job* is another one of the strongest statement of faith in the face of adversity in the Western Culture. The allusion from the "Lilies of the Field" refers to Montag is on his way to see Professor Faber who agrees to help Montag learn books and plan for the future. Montag gets information from Faber through the small earplug he



wears to keep in contact. This information simply says, *The Book of Job* in the sense recalls Montag that he must have faith, for the uneven new risk.

Other two biblical references are in the end of the novel. Bradbury used it when Montag joined to Granger. This group of men memorize great works of our literature where Montag is allocated to read and memorize *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. Next quote comes from *The Book of Revelation* which is last book of New Testament also teach us that a victory of God is certain. We have to struggle first must have faith and endure before enjoy the fruits of victory. Bradbury hopes that the healing of nations can come best about through a rebirth of man's intellect. Here Montag, Granger, and other wander away from the city with hope that their new world be established soon. Bradbury uses lines from other writers like Shakespeare, John Donne, and Robert Burton which shows his affirmation of the timelessness of great ideas. These things are the various hidden ideas in *Fahrenheit 451* illustrated by Bradbury, who structured carefully this work to the world of literature which changed our life.

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