**Unit on *Fahrenheit 451***

**Week Four**

**Supplementary Reading Materials Packet**

**Compiled by Alexandra Bell**

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[*Rafeeq O. McGiveron*](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/advancedSearch.do?inputFieldName(0)=AU&prodId=AONE&userGroupName=uiuc_uc&method=doSearch&inputFieldValue(0)=%22RAFEEQ+O.+MCGIVERON%22&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm)

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[*Kevin Hoskinson*](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/advancedSearch.do?inputFieldName(0)=AU&prodId=AONE&userGroupName=uiuc_uc&method=doSearch&inputFieldValue(0)=%22Kevin+Hoskinson%22&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm)

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The Life of the Mind and a Life of Meaning: Reflections on Fahrenheit *451*

*Rodney A. Smolla*

**"Do You Know the Legend of Hercules and Antaeus?" The Wilderness in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451**

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The importance of the wilderness in Ray Bradbury's 1953 Fahrenheit 451 has been relatively ignored by critics, and when it has been discussed, this crucial subtheme has been distorted by oversimplification. Many have commented rather briefly upon Bradbury's depiction of the wilderness, but few go beyond seeing, as John Huntington does, that "nature is good and technology is bad" (137). Certainly Bradbury shows nature to be preferable to the artificial sterility of the novel's compulsively hedonistic urban consumer society, yet he also wisely suggests that to be truly human we must know our place in the natural world not only by appreciating the beauties of the wilderness but by respecting its awesome power as well. The thoughtful and moral characters of the novel draw strength from the wilderness, and, when appropriate, they also respect and even fear it. It is this common approach to the world that makes them humane and admirable.

Clarisse McClellan, the inquisitive seventeen year old who helps the dissatisfied "fireman" Guy Montag turn away from his profession of burning books, illustrates how an appreciation of the wilderness helps lead to an understanding of one's place in the natural world. When she is first introduced, Bradbury characterizes her with very positive, lyrical nature imagery. Walking down a moonlit autumnal sidewalk, Clarisse, with her "slender and milk-white" face, seems as if she is "letting the motion of the wind and the leaves carry her forward" (5). Less than two pages later her face is "bright as snow in the moonlight," "fragile milk crystal with a soft and constant light in it" (7). Her eyes are like "two shining drops of bright water," "two miraculous bits of violet amber" (7), and Montag can catch "the faintest breath of fresh apricots and strawberries in the air" even though it is "quite impossible, so late in the year" (6-7). In the words of Donald Watt, "The meeting with Clarisse...introduces a contrast i n Bradbmy's narrative between the grimy, harsh, destructive milieu of the firemen and the clean, regenerative world of nature" (199). Whereas Montag's colleagues all have "the colors of cinders and ash about them, and the continual smell of burning from their pipes" (33), Clarisse is refreshing in her naturalness.

Just as she is associated so carefully with nature imagery, Clarisse happily and wisely appreciates the natural world. According to Clarisse, most of the scurrying inhabitants of the city fail to notice the natural beauties around them: "I sometimes think drivers don't know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly.. . . If you showed a driver a green blur, Oh yes! he'd say, that's grass!" (9). Unlike the average citizen, however, Clarisse has seen the sunrise (7) and has noticed the morning dew and the man in the moon (9). She knows that "rain feels good" and "even tastes good" (21), 'just like wine" (23)-- a positive thing to Bradbury--and she has found that old leaves "smell like cinnamon" (29). She rubs a dandelion under her chin to discover whether she is in love (21-22), and she often "hike[s] around in the forests and watch[es] the birds and collect[s] butterflies" (23). She may kill a few colorful butterflies now and then, but Bradbury merely winks at this old-fashioned form of "a ppreciation."

Because she makes the effort to appreciate the many beauties of the natural world, Clarisse also has developed a far better understanding of her place in nature than the average person has. Her schoolmates, for example, obviously do not understand their natural capacity for humaneness, for they all are "either shouting or dancing around like wild or beating up one another" (30). In a sense Clarisse truly is "letting the motion of the wind and the leaves carry her forward" (5), for she allows her human nature to guide her. It is natural, for example, for humans to be curious and thoughtful, and one of the first things Montag notices about Clarisse is that her "milk-white" face possesses "a kind of gentle hunger that touche[s] over everything with tireless curiosity" (5). Indeed, she questions much of the compulsive hedonism of her society, not "want[ing] to know how a thing was done, but why" (60). Considered antisocial (29, 60), Clarisse must see a psychiatrist regularly (22), yet she tells Montag, "It's so strange. I'm very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn't it? Social to me means talking to you about things like this" (29). Clarisse's evaluation is correct, of course, her understanding of human nature stemming at least in part from her appreciation of the wilderness.

Clarisse's understanding of her place in nature benefits Montag as well. Occasionally Montag finds "a bouquet of late flowers on his porch, or a handful of chestnuts in a little sack, or some autumn leaves neatly pinned to a sheet of white paper and thumbtacked to his door" (28), all gifts from Clarisse. In addition, more important than mere tokens of friendship, Clarisse's example helps stimulate Montag to wonder and to try new experiences. Even Clarisse notices it, for she tells him that he is unlike the other "firemen" she has met: "When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that" (23). Later, made curious by Clarisse, Montag tastes the rain (24), and at Clarisse's urging he smells the leaves (29). Though he claims feebly, "It's just I haven't had the time--" (29), Clarisse's example shows him that there is more to life than the moral and intellectual sterility of the unaesthetic workaday world. In other words, she helps him find his own place in th e natural world and thereby recognize the potentials of his own human nature.

Fire Captain Beatty, the novel's chief book burner, mockingly derides "that little idiot's routine. ... Flowers, butterflies, leaves, sunsets, oh, hell! ... A few blades of grass and the quarters of the moon. What trash. What good did she ever do with all that?" (113-14). One answer to Beatty's nervous question, of course, is that unlike the majority of the population-Guy's overdosing wife Millie, for example, who sees the wilderness only as a place to "get [the car] up around ninety-five and...feel wonderful" hitting rabbits and dogs (64)- Clarisse is truly happy. Whereas Beatty and the "firemen" bum down homes found to contain books while the owners are taken "screaming off to the insane asylum" (33), Clarisse and her example help Montag leam to think again. Even Bradbury in his Afterword admits that Clarisse "verg[es] on silly star-struck chatter" (172), but there can be little doubt that her simple appreciation of the wilderness nevertheless strengthens her humanity and Montag's also.

Donald Watt has noted that Faber, the old former literature professor who helps Montag learn to think again, is associated with "nature and natural smells" (203). Although Faber "look[s] as if he ha[s] not been out of the house in years" (80), Montag, significantly, first met Faber in a "green park a year ago" (74). "They had sat in the soft green light.... His name was Faber, and when he finally lost his fear of Montag, he talked in a cadenced voice, looking at the sky and the trees and the green park" (74-75). Along with symbolically associating Faber with nature, Bradbury demonstrates that the professor, like Clarisse--and unlike the mindless majority--appreciates the natural world and understands his place in it.

Even Faber's relationship to books is depicted with appreciative nature imagery. When Montag brings a Bible to Faber's house, Faber smells it lovingly: "Do you know that books smell like nutmeg or some spice from a foreign land? I loved to smell them when I was a boy" (81). Watt, of course, already has drawn attention to this imagery of "natural smells" (203). In addition, however, Faber describes books with a nice piece of visual nature imagery as well. According to Faber, "This book can go under the microscope. You'd find life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion" (83). Though he is speaking figuratively, the vehicle of the metaphor is as valid as the tenor. A book is the product of technological manufacturing processes just as, say, the novel's four-wall televisors are, yet it is a coarser, homier kind of artifact, rough wood pulp rather than fired glass and vacuum-sealed electronics. Whereas Beatty praises fire for being "clean" (61) and "antibiotic" (1 15), Faber recognizes that humans are a part of nature and thus directly opposes such unnatural sterility, even at the microscopic and metaphorical level. Faber's microscope metaphor is s urely the most subtle and unexpected piece of imagery tying together books and an understanding of the natural world, and to my taste it is also the most thematically effective.

In associating books with the natural world, Faber reflects Bradbury's narrative, wherein they are described with more poetic nature imagery. Throughout the novel books are "pigeon-winged" (3), like "white pigeon[s] ... [with] wings fluttering," "like slaughtered birds" whose pages are like "snowy feather[s]" (37), and "like roasted birds, their wings ablaze with red and yellow feathers" (117). Furthermore, Bradbury links books with nature again when Montag in a feverish daze takes the subway to Faber's house, illegal Bible in plain view in his hands, and the disillusioned "fireman" attempts in vain to consider the lilies of the field of Matthew 6:28 (78-80).

In addition to employing this type of nature imagery, Bradbury eventually has Faber make the connection between humanity and the wilderness explicit. The old man asks Montag, "Do you know the legend of Hercules and Antaeus, the giant wrestler, whose strength was incredible so long as he stood firmly on the earth? But when he was held, rootless, in midair, by Hercules, he perished easily. If there isn't something in that legend for us today, in this city, in our time, then I am completely insane" (83). Clearly Faber is not insane. He sees that "flowers are trying to live on flowers, instead of growing on good rain and black loam," because people refuse to recognize that "even fireworks, for all their prettiness, come from the chemistry of the earth." Faber knows that humanity cannot "grow, feeding on flowers and fireworks, without completing the cycle back to reality" (83). Unlike Millie and Beatty, Faber appreciates the wilderness, and he knows his place in it as well.

After Montag finally kills the taunting, suicidal Beatty, he escapes into the wilderness which--rather improbably, considering that "there are billions of us and that's too many" (16)--exists just on the edge of the city. Bradbury echoes the important dichotomy that Faber draws between "[t]he comfortable people" (83) and the Antaeuses who understand their place in the natural world. Montag imagines the people of the city with "pale, night-frightened faces, like gray animals peering from electric caves" (139), and when "in a sudden peacefulness" he floats away in the river, he feels "as if he ha[s] left a stage behind and many actors" (140). Bradbury writes, "The river was mild and leisurely, going away from the people who ate shadows for breakfast and steam for lunch and vapors for supper. The river was very real; it held him comfortably and gave him the time at last, the leisure, to consider this month, this year, a lifetime of years" (140). Whereas the city is shrouded by "the seven veils of unreality" and "the walls of [television] parlors," here "cows [chew] grass and pigs [sit] in warm ponds at noon and dogs [bark] after white sheep on a hill" (142). In the words of William F. Touponce, Montag journeys to "the real natural world... outside the narcissism of the city" (83), a place where people can have "a non-alienating relationship to nature" (84).

Montag's flight from the city--which, coincidentally, is about to be atom-bombed by one of the many faceless enemies of an America that has "started and won two atomic wars since 1990" (73)--reveals unmistakable imagery of the appreciation of the wilderness. When Montag startles a deer, Bradbury unleashes a heavy half-page of lingering description:

He smelled the heavy musk like perfume mingled with the gummed exhalation of the animal's breath, all cardomom and moss and ragweed odor...

There must have been a billion leaves on the land; he waded in them, a dry river smelling of hot cloves and warm dust. And the other smells! There was a smell like a cut potato from all the land, raw and cold and white from having the moon on it most of the night. There was a smell like pickles from a bottle and a smell of parsley on the table at home. There was a faint yellow odor like mustard from a jar. There was a smell like carnations from the yard next door. He put down his hand and felt a weed rise up like a child brushing him. His fingers smelled of licorice.

He stood breathing, and the more he breathed the land in, the more he was filled up with all the details of the land. He was not empty. There was more than enough here to fill him. There would always be more than enough. (144)

John Huntington suggests that Bradbury's "purple rhetoric obscures true perception" (137-38), and there is some truth in this. Some particulars may indeed be overdone, examples of what Kingsley Amis calls "dime-a-dozen sensitivity" (106); certainly the idea of an endearing, childlike weed that smells of licorice is syrupy sweet. Yet despite such occasional problems of heavy-handed execution, Bradbury's emphasis on the necessity of appreciating the wilderness should not be dismissed so easily.

As with Clarisse and Faber, this appreciation helps lead Montag to an understanding of his place in the natural world. Soon Montag "know[s] himself as a [sic] animal come from the forest.... He [is] a thing of brush and liquid eye, of fur and muzzle and hoof, he [is] a thing of horn and blood that would smell like autumn if you bled it out on the ground" (146). Though Huntington must "take it that somehow this reduction of the human to animal is somehow consoling and ennobling" (137), it really requires no special stretch of the imagination to see it as such. Clarisse already has demonstrated that to truly appreciate the wilderness is to have a better understanding of one's own humanity, and Faber has asserted that one must not forget that humans are a product of and a part of the natural world. Rather than "reduce" the human, Bradbury with this new image merely has linked it more explicitly with nature.

While Montag is still in the city, Bradbury's nature imagery consists mainly of that given by Clarisse and Faber. Once Montag escapes and begins to experience the wilderness for himself, however, Bradbury uses not only "purple rhetonric" but imagery appropriate to respect and awe as well. In Bradbury's scheme, the wilderness is not simply "good" and "nurturing" (Huntington 137-38), a "refuge" (Mogen 109), "a regenerative world" (Watt 199), "an arcadian utopia" (Touponce 83), or "a new Eden" (McNelly 23); indeed, it can be all of those, but the wilderness is also a force to be humbly respected. The only critic to have commented upon this previously is George Edgar Slusser, who merely notes with tantalizing brevity that nature is dark, overwhelming, and immense (54). Examining Bradbury's awed treatment of the wilderness in some detail is worthwhile, however, for it reveals a significant attitude of humility and respect.

Bradbury shows that the second aspect of truly understanding one's place in nature is being humbled by the vastness and power of the wilderness. When Montag first sees the stars in the wilderness, undimmed by the light pollution of the city, he sees not the pretty twinkling lights that readers might expect but "a great juggernaut of stars form in the sky and threaten to crush him" (140). Though the river in which he floats seems comforting, the land seems a threatening creature: "He looked in at the great black creature without eyes or light, without shape, with only a size that went a thousand miles, without wanting to stop, with its grass hills and forests that were waiting for him" (141). It is difficult to read this description as majestic or inviting, for the land's nightmarish darkness, its vast size, and its "waiting" seem brooding and ominous instead. When Montag finally steps ashore, the enormity of the wilderness is humbling: "The land rushed at him, a tidal wave. He was crushed by darkness and the look of the country and the million odors on a wind that iced the body. He fell back under the breaking wave of darkness and sound and smell, his ears roaring" (143). Bradbury compares the "dark land rising" to "the largest wave in the history of remembering," which in his youth "slammed him down in salt mud and green darkness, water burning mouth and nose, retching his stomach, screaming! Too much water!" The ocean was fearsome to the child, and now to the adult there seems "too much land" (143). Even the passage with the majestic, startled deer and the licorice-smelling weed that "rise[s] up like a child" describes the wilderness as a "huge night where trees ran at him, pulled away, ran, pulled away to the pulse of the heart behind his eyes" (144)--definitely no "flowers, butterflies, leaves, sunsets" (113) here.

Stumbling upon disused railroad tracks, Montag meets a former professor "significantly named Granger, a farmer, a shepherd guiding his flock [of book memorizing intellectuals]" (McNelly 23). In a rather lengthy aside, Granger tells Montag about his grandfather, who

hoped that someday our cities would open up more and let the green and the land and the wilderness in more, to remind people that we're allotted a little space on earth and that we survive in that wilderness that can take back what it has given, as easily as blowing its breath on us or sending the sea to tell us we are not so big. When we forget how close the wilderness is in the night... someday it will come in and get us, for we will have forgotten how terrible and real it can be. (157)

While this passage seems to begin with mere appreciation, it soon shifts to humility and respect even more marked than that of Faber's story of Hercules. Though Granger's assertion that an "atom-bomb mushroom" seen from a V-2 rocket two hundred miles up is "a pinprick. . . nothing . . . with wilderness all around it" (157) now seems dated in the age of the hydrogen bomb, in a wider sense his attitude of humility and respect toward a wilderness that might "someday . . . come in and get us" is still justified. Almost half a century after Bradbury wrote, the ravages of nature's "breath" may be more predictable, but they are no more controllable; moreover, if the camera in the nose of the V-2 were rotated up to look into the "juggernaut of stars" (140), with its climate-wrecking meteors, its supernovas, and its quasars, Granger's awe of nature's power would seem even more justified.

Despite such evidence of respect and even fear, Bradbury's last use of natural imagery is a comforting one. As Montag and the other book-memorizers walk back toward the atom-bombed city, blithely unconcerned with radiation poisoning, he remembers a passage from Revelations: "And on the other side of the river was there a tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (165). This final piece of imagery reminds us, perhaps more directly than any other, that even though the natural world may be vast and sometimes threatening, it still can be a source of strength.

Bradbury's treatment of the wilderness in Fahrenheit 451 is more complex and more true to life than it might first appear. Though his loving description of the wilderness and his persistent use of positive nature imagery clearly suggest that we should appreciate the natural beauties around us, Bradbury's careful reminders that the wilderness is vast and powerful should not be ignored. To be truly human we must know our place in the natural world, not only appreciating the wilderness but humbly respecting it, too. The humanity of Clarisse and Faber and Granger and Montag illustrate the benefits of understanding this--and the suicidal tendencies of the anesthetized Millie and the bitterly jesting Beatty reveal the grave dangers of forgetting it.

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**"To build a mirror factory": The Mirror and Self-Examination in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451***

[*RAFEEQ O. MCGIVERON*](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/advancedSearch.do?inputFieldName(0)=AU&prodId=AONE&userGroupName=uiuc_uc&method=doSearch&inputFieldValue(0)=%22RAFEEQ+O.+MCGIVERON%22&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm)

In Fahrenheit 451 Ray Bradbury creates an unthinking society so compulsively hedonistic that it must be atom-bombed flat before it ever can be rebuilt. Bradbury's clearest suggestion to the survivors of America's third atomic war "started . . . since 1990" (73) is "to build a mirror factory first and put out nothing but mirrors . . . and take a long look in them" (164). Coming directly after the idea that they also must "build the biggest goddamn steam shovel in history and dig the biggest grave of all time and shove war in and cover it up" (164), the notion of the mirror factory might at first seem merely a throwaway line. Indeed, John Huntington suggests, with no little justification, that the whole passage is "confuse[d]" by its "vagueness, ambiguity, and misdirection" (138). Despite that, however, Bradbury shows throughout Fahrenheit 451 the necessity of using a metaphorical mirror, for only through the self-examination it makes possible can people recognize their own shortcomings.

The novel's first use of the mirror, a failed one, emphasizes the need for self-examination. After a book burning, Guy Montag, the unsettled "fireman," knows "that when he return[s] to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked, in the mirror" (4). Montag's winking acceptance of himself here is not reflective but reflexive, for his glance is superficial rather than searching. Montag has the opportunity truly to examine himself, and if he did, he might see a glorified anti-intellectual stormtrooper. However, the situation, the surroundings, and even the mirror itself are too familiar, and he does not see himself as he really is. Instead of recognizing the destructiveness of his book-burning profession, his gaze is merely one of self-satisfaction.

Bradbury uses Clarisse, Guy's imaginative and perceptive seventeen-year-old neighbor, as a metaphorical mirror to begin reflecting truths that Montag otherwise would not see. The imagery of mirrors and reflection is very clear:

He saw himself in her eyes, suspended in two shining drops of bright water, himself dark and tiny, in fine detail, the lines about his mouth, everything there, as if her eyes were two miraculous bits of violet amber that might capture and hold him intact. (7)

Montag thinks of Clarisse again:

How like a mirror . . . her face. Impossible; for how many people did you know who refracted your own light to you? . . . How rarely did other people's faces take of you and throw back to you your own expression, your own innermost trembling thought? (11)

William F. Touponce suggests that Montag thereby receives "a tranquil affirmation of his being" (90); those passages bear that out.

But Clarisse's mirror imagery serves another function. Seeing himself in the mirror of Clarisse helps Montag realize that he merely "[wears] his happiness like a mask . . . " (12). He imagines that Clarisse has "run off across the lawn with the mask . . . (12). It would, however, be more accurate to say that Montag himself throws away the poorly fitting mask after Clarisse shows, or reflects to him, the truth underneath. Clarisse's game of rubbing a dandelion under his chin to determine whether he is in love (21-2) "sum[s] up everything" (44), showing Montag an aspect of his emptiness he otherwise could not see. Her curiosity about why he and his wife have no children (28-9) is another example of her mirror function. Perhaps most important, Clarisse asks about Montag's job: "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? . . . It just doesn't seem right for you, somehow" (23-4). With each little observation, game, or question, Clarisse reflects a previously unseen truth for Montag to examine and, in the words of Robert Reilly, "show[s] him how empty his existence is" (68).

In addition to serving as a mirror reflecting Montag himself, Clarisse also serves as a mirror held up to the rest of society. Her perspective helps Montag see that his contemporaries, as Clarisse says, really neither talk nor think about anything; "No, not anything. They name a lot of cars or clothes or swimming pools mostly and say how swell! But they all say the same things and nobody says anything different from anyone else" (31). That should be as familiar to Montag as the cloying stench of kerosene (of which Montag blithely observes, "You never wash it off completely" [6]). Yet really to notice and examine those too-familiar facts he needs to see the situation reflected in the mirror of Clarisse.

Clarisse is a mirror not simply because she informs readers about the state of society. Each of the characters does that. If informing were the sole criterion for being a mirror, then even the most minor character would qualify--and so would most of the novel's narrative description. The metaphor would be so all-inclusive as to be meaningless. Clarisse is a mirror because she is so mirrorlike in her informing. She "talk[s] about how strange the world is" (29), reminding Montag that "everyone . . . is either shouting or dancing around like wild or beating up one another" (30), but she has no ideological agenda. For the most part Clarisse does not interpret or offer suggestions; she merely draws Montag's attention to facts he should already understand but does not. Like a mirror, Clarisse guilelessly reflects the truth into Montag's eyes.

Guy's wife, Millie, is another mirror, although Bradbury has not set her up with imagery like Clarisse's. Like the firehouse mirror, however, she is such a part of Guy's routine that he cannot seem to see what she reflects. In the beginning of the novel, Guy may find it "a pleasure to burn" books (3) and may honestly claim that "[k]erosene . . . is nothing but perfume to me" (6), but Millie finds even more pleasure in the burning. She compulsively watches her three-wall television and begs Guy for a fourth wall that would cost one-third of his yearly salary (20-1). When not entranced by the television, she wears "thimble radios tamped tight" (12) in her ears, even in bed. Sometimes while her husband sleeps she drives all night out in the country, "feel[ing] wonderful" hitting rabbits and dogs (64). She has begun to overdose on sleeping pills but still maintains in bland disbelief, "I wouldn't do a thing like that" (18). Millie shows the superficiality and emptiness of the novel's society, yet Guy misses her mirror function. He finally recognizes her as "a silly empty woman" (44) who is "really bothered" (52), but he never seems to understand that she reflects an entire culture. As with the firehouse mirror, Montag has not looked carefully enough.

Beatty and Faber--chief book burner and former literature professor, respectively--both explain to Montag how the society of the past has turned into the inhumane world of Fahrenheit 451. Yet neither of those men is a mirror, for unlike Clarisse and Millie, they are overtly didactic. Each tries to sway Montag with a different interpretation of the past. Beatty wants Montag to "stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought" (61-2), whereas Faber has no plans but at least wants Montag to think. Although the two characters provide important historical and sociological information, they are teachers more than mirrors. As Donald Watt notes, Beatty and Faber articulate the ideas that Millie and Clarisse live (197). They reflect society to some extent, but more often they evaluate and advise--tasks of the viewer and thinker, not the mirror.

The book contains other important mirrors. After a week of daily talks with Clarisse, Montag is ready to look into one of them. This time he takes more initiative, for the mirror is one he must visualize himself. After ten years of simple acceptance, Montag finally sees himself by looking into the mirror of the other firemen:

Montag looked at these men whose faces were sunburnt by a thousand real and ten thousand imaginary fires, whose work flushed their cheeks and fevered their eyes. These men who looked steadily into their platinum igniter flames as they lit their eternally burning black pipes. They and their charcoal hair and soot-colored brows and bluish-ash-smeared cheeks where they had shaven close. . . . Had he ever seen a fireman that didn't have black hair, black brows, a fiery face, and a blue-steel shaved but unshaved look? These men were all mirror images of himself! (33)

Montag is "appalled" (Watt 199), for this mirror invites a disquieting self-examination.

After looking into the ready-made mirror of Clarisse and recognizing an unflattering image mirrored by the other mindless firemen, Montag begins holding up his own mirror to society. The first attempt, when he and Millie look through the books he has stolen (66-74), is a comparative failure. Guy tells Millie, "[Books] just might stop us from making the same damn insane mistakes [people have always made]!" (74), but he cannot find a text that mirrors his own society clearly enough to provide either criticisms or solutions. Montag reads, "`It is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end'" (68). Swift's Gulliver's Travels may be, as Peter Sisario claims, "an excellent one for him to choose" (203), but it is excellent for the well-read reader, not for Montag. The firehouse mirror and the mirror that is Millie are missed opportunities because Montag does not look hard enough, but this book-mirror may be too subtle for him even to recognize.

Despite that failure, Professor Faber reminds Montag that mirrors are all around him. Although he does not speak in terms of mirrors, the idea of the reflection of truths fills his discussion:

"It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books. The same things could be in the [televised] 'parlor families' today. The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisors, but are not. No, no, it's not the books at all you're looking for! Take it where you can find it, in old phonograph records, old motion pictures, and in old friends; look for it in nature and look for it in yourself. Books were only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget. There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what the books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us." (82-3)

Bradbury uses more than one type of imagery here, but the idea of the mirror could easily encompass them all. Throughout his talk Faber stresses examining the individual and society as reflected in a metaphorical mirror.

Faber says that books "can go under the microscope. You'd find life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion. The more pores, the more truthfully recorded details of life per square inch you can get on a sheet of paper, the more 'literary' you are" (83). Reiterating that idea, he says that books "show the pores in the face of life" (83). In other words, the microscope--or mirror--reflects important truths that otherwise would be missed. In that passage, Faber focuses on books; but his earlier discussion shows that a mirror can be found almost anywhere.

Finally, of course, Bradbury lets Montag stumble on a literary mirror that he, and even others, can recognize. When Guy reads Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" to Millie's friends, he holds up a mirror that reflects all too clearly:

"`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.'" (100)

Beatty calls American civilization "our happy world" (62), but families are hollow and loveless, suicide is commonplace, violence is endemic on the streets and in broadcast entertainment, and jet bombers circle ominously in the night. The poem's bleak conclusion rings so true that it makes the mindless Mrs. Phelps cry (100).

Just as Mrs. Phelps begins to get a glimmering of what it truly means to look in the mirror, Bradbury finally seems to allow Millie the same experience. As the bombs of one of the faceless enemies of an America that is "hated so much" abroad (74) begin to fall on the city from which he has fled, Guy's fancy conjures up a most significant image:

Montag . . . saw or felt, or imagined he saw or felt the [television] walls go dark in Millie's face, heard her screaming, because in the millionth part of time left, she saw her own face reflected there, in a mirror instead of a crystal ball, and it was such a wildly empty face, all by itself in the room, touching nothing, starved and eating of itself that at last she recognized it as her own. (159-60)

Guy's peculiar little fantasy, of course, may not actually happen to Millie, but its existence demonstrates the crucial importance of the mirror. Unlike her husband, the imagined Millie of that passage recognizes its importance too late.

In the very last scene of the novel, Montag holds up the Bible as a mirror in which to see the world from a different perspective:

And when it came his turn, what could he say, what could he offer on a day like this, to make the trip a little easier? To everything there is a season. Yes. A time to break down, and a time to build up. Yes. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak. Yes, all that. But what else? Something, something. . . . (165).

Ecclesiastes is a mirror providing some comfort, but Montag senses that Revelation is an even better one: And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (165). Like Mrs. Phelps, he sees his own situation reflected in a piece of literature, but there the mirror brings hope rather than despair. Without the mirror of the Bible, however, Montag would be hard pressed to see any positive "truths" in his postnuclear world.

Granger, leader of the book-memorizing intellectuals whom Montag meets after his flight from the city, ties together all the other uses of mirror imagery. "Come on now, we're going to build a mirror factory first and turn out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them" (164). The suggestions reaffirms the necessity of using mirrors for self-examination. Just as Montag struggles to use figurative mirrors to discover the shortcomings in himself and in society, the survivors must use them in striving for a humane future. If they successfully use the mirrors, perhaps they can avoid making "the same damn mistakes."

Considered along with all the other mirrors in Fahrenheit 451, Granger's suggestion begins to make metaphorical sense. Perhaps Bradbury's mirror imagery is not used as carefully as it could be; certainly it is possible to imagine its being more consistently employed or more fully articulated. Yet throughout the book, mirrors of a kind are missed and found, seen and used. With Montag's failures and successes, Bradbury shows that all of us, as individuals and as a society, must struggle to take a long, hard look in the mirror. Whether we look at ourselves from another's perspective or from the perspective of a good work of art, we need this self-examination to help avoid self-destruction.

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**What "Carried the Trick"? Mass exploitation and the decline of thought in Ray Bradbury's 'Fahrenheit 451.'**

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There is an interesting dichotomy in Ray Bradbury's 1953 Fahrenheit 451, a noticeable gap between the message that the author and we the readers receive from the novel and the message that the text actually seems to support. While I realize that some see little use for such old-fashioned attention to the text itself, Fahrenheit 451 is such an overtly didactic work that it almost invites such examination. Surely even the staunchest reader-response critic would agree that Bradbury is trying to sell the readers on ideas that he has put into his story. Yet there is a discrepancy between the ideas the author is selling--and readers are buying--and the ideas he has let the whole rest of the text support. I suggest this not necessarily to label it as a weakness but to show that the novel is thereby just a little bit richer and probably truer to life than many have supposed.

The discrepancy lies in the book's subtle treatment of the relationship between mass exploitation and the decline of thought. Fire Captain Beatty, the novel's chief book-burner, explains that "technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick" of supplanting independent thought with conformity and leading to censorship (58). Clearly Bradbury wants us to notice these three culprits in his fictional world and to beware of them in our own society as well. Often, however, readers have a tendency to miss the real textual centrality of mass exploitation, focusing instead on the minority pressure that Bradbury makes so much more apparent.

Technology allows for the existence of mass culture in the novel, and minority pressure helps enforce conformity, but the mass exploitation of easy gratification is the fundamental threat to thought, for this exploitation begins earlier than minority pressure, requires the participation of a far greater majority of the population, and has a more direct effect on the decline of thought. In Bradbury's work controllers of mass communication and other producers of entertainment exploit the public's desire for easy gratification by disseminating only mindless escapism, which the exploited willingly consume to the exclusion of independent thought. People grow unwilling to give up their pleasures, even momentarily, by thinking deeply about anything, and they also become unwilling to violate the norms of society by expressing any original thought. Recognizing this role of mass exploitation in the decline of thought is important because the lesson applies both in Fahrenheit 451 and in the real world as well.

Robert Reilly claims that the novel is "a frightening picture of how the products of science can destroy persons and human values" (67), but this is an unfortunate simplification. Although it helps maintain the conformist mass culture of Fahrenheit 451, technology itself does not cause the decline of thought, for people still make the important decisions. Controllers of mass communication and other producers of entertainment decide which ideas they will censor and which they will disseminate, and the public decides what it will enjoy, what it will believe, and how it will act. Fire Captain Beatty contrasts the "pastepudding norm" of modern mass communication with books, which once "appealed to a few people, here, there, everywhere . . . [and] could afford to be different" (54). He is unable, however, to support the idea that technology itself causes people to abandon independent thought in favor of simple conformity. Beatty claims, for example, that when zippers replace buttons "a man lacks just that much time to think while dressing at dawn" (56), yet he avoids the obvious fact that the man is making the decision about what and when to think. Willis E. McNelly is correct when he writes that the novel "is not . . . about the technology of the future" (19), and so is Marvin E. Mengeling, who finds that "Bradbury is no reactionary, antimachine `nut'" (98).

Faber, the old, former literature professor, explains the primacy of human choice to Guy Montag, the unsettled "fireman" who no longer wants to burn books: "The same infinite detail and awareness [which books have] could be projected through the radios and televisors, but are not" (82). According to Faber, "you can't argue with the four-wall televisor. Why? The televisor is `real.' It is immediate; it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It must be right. It seems so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn't the time to protest, `What nonsense!'" (84). Yet despite the fact that Faber, "with all [his] knowledge and skepticism, . . . [has] never been able to argue with a one-hundred piece symphony orchestra, full color, three dimensions, and being in and part of those incredible parlors" (84), he still has a small television he can "blot out with the palm of [his] hand" (132), and so do the book-memorizing intellectuals whom Montag later meets after his flight from the city (147-49). Clearly Bradbury is not simply attacking technology in general or even electronic mass communication in specific. Though technology can be used to brainwash people, Professor Faber and the other intellectuals show that people themselves are responsible for the condition of their own intellects.

Unlike technology, intolerant minority pressure that seeks to stifle ideas instead of arguing against them is a major cause of the decline of independent thought in Fahrenheit 451. Walter E. Meyers refers to this when he claims that "the danger to ideas and to their embodiment in books" comes from "a desire not to offend" and from "the unofficial sanctions of the appropriately named `pressure groups'" (503). My teaching experience with the book suggests to me that this is a very common thing for readers to think. It is easy to see why, for the unity and explicitness of the passage dealing with minority pressure make that pressure the single most noticeable and memorable cause of the decline of thought in the novel.

Beatty explains to Montag that in the past intolerant pressure groups were influential in stifling free expression, fostering the conformity that eventually allowed the government to begin its own censoring:

Bigger the population, the more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the

dog lovers, cat lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons,

Baptists, Unitarians, second-generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans,

Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico. The people of

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 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 . . . were dishwater. (57)

Beatty thus not only directly claims minority pressure as a cause of intellectual self-censorship and conformity but also emphasizes its pervasiveness with his rhetoric, listing fully twenty-one pressure groups organized by ethnicity, religion, geography, occupation, and even pet preference. He shows that from the major to, in the case of dog lovers and cat lovers, the ridiculously "minor minor," each narrow pressure group pares down free expression of individuals' thoughts a little more.

Beatty's reiteration of the idea just over a page later is similar in purpose, although its rhetoric is slightly more restrained. He explains, "You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred" (59): "Colored people don't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about Uncle Tom's Cabin. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag. Take your fight outside. Better yet, into the incinerator" (59). The mesmerizing Beatty again shows how intolerance for opposing ideas helps lead to the stifling of individual expression, and hence of thought.

While it is not actually part of the novel itself, Bradbury's postscript "Coda"--which between 1979 and 1982 was called the Afterword--likewise emphasizes the dangers of minority pressure. Commenting on the text, Bradbury claims that "Fire-Captain Beatty . . . describe[s] how the books were burned first by minorities, each ripping a page or a paragraph from this book, then that, until the day came when the books were empty and the minds shut and the libraries closed forever" (177). Here, in the author's own explanation of his work, he reminds readers that the pressure of intolerant minorities is the "first" and presumably most important cause leading to the decline of thought.

Bradbury also repeats Beatty's idea of the dangers of minority pressure in relation to the real world: "There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches. Every minority, be it Baptist/Unitarian, Irish/Italian/Octagenarian/Zen Buddhist, Zionist/Seventh-day Adventist, Women's Lib/Republican, Mattachine/Four Square Gospel feels it has the will, the right, the duty to douse the kerosene, light the fuse" (176-77). Like Beatty, he emphasizes the pervasiveness of the problem by defining the pressure groups with ridiculous improbability.

In addition to the evidence of the text itself and of Bradbury's coda, we are more likely to see the dangers of minority pressure in the novel because of the widespread perception that such dangers exist in our own society. In the 1950s readers might have thought of McCarthyism or perhaps the pious efforts to "clean up" comic books. Today adult readers are aware of various pressure groups' campaigns against sexually explicit music, the burning of the American flag, or sex and violence on television. Moreover, the current debate about political correctness also helps shape how we read Bradbury. Awareness of these controversies is certain to make us even more aware of Bradbury's treatment of minority pressure.

The threat of "mass culture" has been recognized by Peter Sisario (210), John Huntington (136), and David Mogen (107-08), and the idea, though not the term, has also been used by Donald Watt (212), Kingsley Amis (111-12), and Charles F. Hamblen (819). No one, however, has followed up with an investigation of the real importance of mass exploitation, especially in relation to Beatty's overemphasized scapegoat, minority pressure.

Despite the obvious role of intolerant minority pressure in the decline of thought, the text actually shows mass exploitation to be the more serious problem. Whereas Beatty's discussion of minority pressure is explicit and highly coherent, comprising mainly most of a paragraph over half a page long, his discussion of mass exploitation is less explicit and is diluted through eight pages. Yet Beatty himself cites mass exploitation as a problem that began even earlier, and both his exposition and the rest of the text show that mass exploitation requires the participation of a far greater majority of the population and replaces thought with conformity even more directly than does minority pressure.

Mass exploitation in the novel begins long before minority pressure, as soon as technology allows for the development of mass communication and mass culture. According to Beatty, the trends leading up to censorship "really got started around a thing called the Civil War," when modern technology, beginning with photography, enabled communication "to have mass" (54). Presumably this metaphorical use of "mass" refers to the greater amount of information carried; whereas earlier oral and printed communication still left much information to the imagination of the audience, photography and, later, moving pictures shifted this "mass" from the audience to the means of communication themselves. Rather than challenge audiences, controllers of communication chose to rely on "mass" to sell, thereby simplifying the ideas being transmitted: "`And because they had mass, they became simpler,' said Beatty. `Once, books appealed to a few people, here, there, everywhere. They could afford to be different. The world was roomy. But then the world got full of eyes and elbows and mouths. Double, triple, quadruple population. Films and radios, magazines, books leveled down to a sort of pastepudding norm'" (54). Although technology makes this change possible, technology itself is not the cause, as Faber's understanding of technology's capacity for projecting "infinite detail and awareness" (82) indicates. Minority pressure is also not responsible for this reduction of communication to the "pastepudding norm," for Beatty does not even bother to bring that last problem into the discussion for another three pages. The more important problem is the preexisting mass exploitation of easy gratification.

The responsibility for the decline of thought this exploitation causes belongs to a great majority of the population. Because the damage of minority pressure is caused primarily by intolerant pressure groups and secondarily by the controllers of communication who follow their wishes, the public is far less responsible; people for the most part may be unaware that pressure groups influence what they watch, hear, and read. Mass exploitation is very much different, however, for it is the result of the public's active desire to avoid controversy and difficult thought in favor of easy gratification and, eventually, intellectual conformity. Beatty tells Montag that the pressure for censorship and the abandonment of thought at first "didn't come from the Government down" (58), and this is especially true of mass exploitation. The disseminators of mindless escapism are to some extent to blame, and the consumers of this escapism are guilty as well.

Bradbury names the exploiters only once. According to Beatty, they are the "publishers, exploiters, broadcasters" who "whirl man's mind around about so fast . . . that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought" (55). Phrased another way, the exploiters are the controllers of mass communication who appeal solely to the public's desire for pleasure. Although Beatty does not say it, the exploiters are also those who design and market the dangerously powerful automobiles and drugs that the society consumes. They are those who encourage the acceptance of, as Granger, the leader of the book-memorizers, says, "dream[s] made or paid for in factories" (157). Knowing that the public prefers easy gratification to difficult contemplation and evaluation, the exploiters "empty the theaters save for clowns and furnish the rooms with glass walls and pretty colors running up and down the walls like confetti or blood or sherry or sauterne" (56). Beatty's imagery here, effective as always, mirrors the triviality, violence, and intoxication of the four-wall televisions. While Beatty explicitly identifies the exploiters only once, their effect on society is apparent throughout the novel.

Although the exploiters bear some responsibility for the decline of thought, the exploited are at least as guilty, for they are willingly exploited. Faber remembers that "the public stopped reading of its own accord" (87) and that when the newspapers died out "no one wanted them back. No one missed them" (89). Because he did not speak out when he could have, Faber even considers himself to be guilty as well (82). He explains to Montag that after half a century of the vigorous pursuit of easy gratification, the book-burning firemen are "hardly necessary to keep things in line. So few want to be rebels any more" (87). According to Faber, who paraphrases very closely from Henrik Ibsen's 1882 An Enemy of the People, "the most dangerous enemy to truth and freedom" is neither technology nor minority intolerance but "the solid unmoving cattle of the majority" (108). This important statement seems to refer to the public's acceptance of and even craving for mind-numbing mass exploitation and the comfort of its resulting intellectual conformity.

Beatty shows a similar understanding when he notes that the public, "knowing what it want[s], spin[s] happily" (57). He explains the motivation to Montag: "Ask yourself, What do people 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" (59). Beatty thus blames--or, according to ms view, credits--not only the exploiters but the willingly exploited.

According to Clarisse, the inquisitive seventeen year old who helps Montag learn to question and wonder, people no longer really think or talk about anything important: "No, not anything. They name a lot of cars or swimming pools mostly and say how swell. But they all say the same things and nobody says anything different from anyone else" (31). The public is happy to think of pleasure and brand names and talk in cliches.

One of the most pathetic examples of the public's willingness to allow itself to be exploited is not its attraction to obviously seductive pleasures but its automatic acceptance of even the least attractive things that the televisions and radios present. People are so accustomed to enjoying mindless mass communication that they also enjoy the accompanying commercials. While riding on the subway, Montag sees people "tapping their feet to the rhythm of Denham's Dentifrice, Denham's Dandy Dental Detergent, Denham's Dentifrice one two, one two three, one two, one two three . . . mouths . . . faintly twitching the words Dentifrice Dentifrice Dentifrice" (79). The masses are unwilling to break with conformity and relinquish even this least attractive "pleasure" by thinking for themselves.

Mass exploitation hastens the decline of thought even more directly than does intolerant minority pressure, for while pressure groups may make people avoid controversy, easily gratifying entertainment actually provides a seductive alternative to any and all difficult thought. Beatty neatly sums up the philosophy embodied by the mass exploitation of easy gratification: "Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?" (56) While minority pressure comes from a comparative few members of the public, the impetus for this exploitation comes instead from an overwhelming majority. "Publishers, exploiters, broadcasters" sense the public's desire for relaxation and pleasure and exploit this for profit by producing only entertainment which is easily gratifying, and the willingly exploited enjoy their freedom from independent thought.

Four main kinds of this exploitation exist in the novel: the simplification of intellectual challenges, competitive diversions, drug use, and commodifed physicality. Referring to such pleasurable distractions, Beatty says, "So bring on your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your daredevils, motorcycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with automatic reflex" (61). Easy gratification is to be pursued to the exclusion of independent thought.

Although, as Bradbury says in the coda, books may have been "burned first by the minorities" (177), works of art with the potential to be challenging were simplified even earlier. Beatty shows that this exploitation of easy gratification began "around a thing called the Civil War" and rapidly accelerated in the twentieth century with the increasing sophistication of mass communication technology, when "films and radios, magazines, books leveled down to a sort of paste-pudding norm" (54). Beatty explains that intellectually challenging works were made easier so that they would appeal to a larger audience: "Classics cut to fit fifteen-minute radio shows, then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, winding up at last as a ten- or twelve-line dictionary resume.... [M]any were those whose sole knowledge of Hamlet. . . was a one-page digest in a book that claimed: now at last you can read all the classics; keep up with your neighbors" (54-55). In this example the exploitation is two-fold in that publishers play both on the public's desires for shorter and easier readings and on desires to "keep up with [the] neighbors" as well.

After such exploitative cutting, books and magazines were watered down still farther so that by the time of the novel only "comics, the good old confessions, [and] trade journals" survive (58). Drama on television has been simplified to the level of the "Clara Dove five-minute romance" (95) and pointless serials featuring a "gibbering pack of tree apes that [say] nothing, nothing, nothing and [say] it loud, loud, loud" (44). Presumably films are similar. Radio is simply "an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk" that figuratively drowns the listener (12). In a more visceral metaphor, radio "vomit[s] . . . a great tonload of tin, copper, silver, chromium, and brass . . . pound[ing listeners] into submission" (79). Most sinister of all, Bradbury describes the ubiquitous thimble-sized ear radios rather ominously as "hidden wasp[s]" (12), "electronic bees" (18), and "praying mantis[es]" (48). The novel's equivalent of music videos on the "musical wall" are now "only color and all abstract," and even such musical art as previously existed in record-playing machines has been so drained of emotion and changed in form that the machines have gradually become merely "joke boxes" (31). Moreover, Clarisse says that in what passes for modern museums, art is "all abstract," paintings refusing to "[say] things or even [show] people" (31) and thereby risk making people think. The public wants easily gratifying entertainment, the exploiters help make the situation worse by producing only that which requires no original thought to enjoy, and thought is gradually abandoned.

Moreover, education is simplified as "school is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored" (55). Clarisse tells Montag that school now stifles thought rather than encouraging it: "An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball of baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don't; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film teacher" (29). To ensure that children do not grow up to ask what Beatty calls "embarrassing" questions, the government has "lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now [it is] almost snatching them from the cradle" (60). Even to parents school is simply a place to "plunk" the children is nine days out of ten" (96).

This reflects and reinforces the conformity already manifested in the public's acceptance of simplified entertainment, for children who are never taught to think about anything challenging are unlikely to want to be challenged by their entertainment or by anything else. According to Beatty, when "school turn[s] out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkerers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word `intellectual,' of course, [becomes] the swear word it deserve[s] to be" (58). Thus the simplification of education reinforces the public's existing desire to avoid difficult thought, reteaching the lesson already taught by mass entertainment: thoughtless conformity is simple and pleasurable.

Just as the simplification of intellectual challenges helps stifle independent thought by catering to and encouraging intellectual apathy, so does an emphasis on competitive diversions. Beatty shows how an overemphasis on sports can take the place of thought: "More sports for everyone, group spirit, fun, and you don't have to think, eh? Organize and organize and superorganize super-super sports" (57). Beatty is even more explicit about the mindlessness of contests: "Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. 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" (61). Feeling stuffed with unimportant facts thus replaces actual thinking. Likewise, Faber reminds Montag that most people are satisfied if they can "dance faster than the White Clown. shout louder than `Mr. Gimmick' and the parlor `families'" (87). Both sports and contests emphasize a simple competitiveness leading away from individual thought.

A more dangerous type of thought-destroying mass exploitation is socially condoned drug use. Heroin is the most powerful drug in the novel, and Beatty's reference to it is casual enough to suggest that its use is not uncommon (61). Although the sleeping pills prevalent in the society could be used responsibly, the book shows only escapist overuse. When Montag's wife, Millie, overdoses, perhaps accidentally, by taking "thirty or forty" pills (19), the medical technicians who detoxify her and replace her blood tell Montag that the problem is common: "We get these cases nine or ten a night. Got so many, starting a few years ago, we had the special machines built" (15). Millie also shows that alcohol abuse is still widespread, for when she wakes in the morning with a headache and no memory of the previous night, her first thought is that she has a hangover from "a wild party or something" (19). Just as people flee difficult thought with simplified challenges and competitive diversions, they also occupy their time with mind-altering drugs that, presumably, are marketed without care for their dangerous effects.

The most common of the distracting drugs is nicotine, which Bradbury often presents the enemies of thought as using. Beatty smokes compulsively (33, 53-59). Bradbury's conspicuous imagery of flame and smoke certainly reflects the destructive burning of Beatty's profession, but the act itself also reveals the nervous behavior of a mind mechanically avoiding thought; later Bradbury shows Beatty smoking automatically, lighting up habitually without any fanfare (105). The medical "handymen" who save Millie's life, "the men with the cigarettes in their straight-lined mouths," are able to stand "with the cigarette smoke curling around their noses and into their eyes without making them blink or squint" (15-16). Millie's imbecilic friends are similar, for when Guy turns off the television walls the women sit nervously "lighting cigarettes, blowing smoke" (95). Later Montag tells Granger that when he tries to remember his wife, one of the only things he can see is that "there's a cigarette in [her hands]" (156). Montag smokes early on in the novel (24), but as he grows more thoughtful Bradbury simply lets this habit disappear. For the others, however, the ritual of smoking fills the time that might otherwise be used for thought and self-reflection.

The final type of mass exploitation speeding the decline of thought is commodified physicality, both actual and vicarious. People can "head for a Fun Park to bully people around, break windowpanes in the Window Smasher place or wreck cars in the Car Wrecker place with the big steel ball" (30). Powerful "beetle cars" are designed, and probably marketed, for "driving a hundred miles an hour, at a clip where you can't think of anything else but the danger" (84). Millie often drives "a hundred miles an hour across town . . . hearing only the scream of the car" (46), and late at night she likes to "get it up around ninety-five and . . . feel wonderful" hitting rabbits and dogs out in the country (64). Children as young as twelve might go "playing `chicken' and `knock hubcaps'" (30) or go "out for a long night of roaring five or six hundred miles in a few moonlit hours, their faces icy with wind, . . . coming home or not coming at dawn, alive or not alive" (128). Violence and danger thus crowd out original thought.

Even dramatic entertainment contains a small element of actual physicality that helps replace emotional and intellectual content. Beatty reveals this when he says, "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 response to vibration. But I don't care. I just like solid entertainment" (61). Like Beatty's hypothetical play, Millie's insipid television serials use irresistibly climactic "thunderstorm[s] of sound" that alone give the impression of plot resolution "even though the people in the walls of the room [have] barely moved" (45).

Vicarious physicality provides a seductive alternative to thought just as the more dangerous actual physicality does. Vicarious physicality also comes in many forms in the novel, from entertainment of what Professor Faber calls "passionate lips and the fist in the stomach" (89) to "the three-dimensional sex magazines" (57-58), from the graphic violence of the animated White Clown cartoons to the televising of fatal jet car demolition derbies (94). Common people also go to such races (9). "Nights when things [get] dull, which [is] every night," the firemen "let loose rats . . . and sometimes chickens, and sometimes cats that would have to be drowned anyway" and bet on which will be the first killed by their eight-legged Mechanical Hound (24-25). Occasionally the public voyeurs of violence are treated to television coverage of "dangerous" criminals being similarly hunted down (124, 133-39, 147-49).

Even while Bradbury in the coda warns of intolerant minority pressure, he apparently cannot help but also attack the first type of mass exploitation, that of the simplification of challenges. Most of the coda discusses the way pressure groups threaten free thought by "ripping a page or a paragraph from this book, then that" (177), but some also concerns the simplification of challenging entertainment by exploiting editors. The motive for editors' censoring is sometimes ideological, but it is also sometimes simply economic:

How do you cram 400 short stories by Twain, Irving, Poe, Maupassant

and Bierce into one book?

Simplicity itself. Skin, debone, demarrow, scarify, melt, render down and

destroy. Every adjective that counted, every verb that moved, every

metaphor that weighed more than a mosquito out! Every simile that would

have made a sub-moron's mouth twitch--gone! Any aside that explained the

two-bit philosophy of a first-rate writer--lost!

Every story, slenderized, starved, bluepenciled, leeched and bled white,

resemble[s] every other story. Twain read[s] like Poe read[s] like

Shakespeare read[s] like Dostoevsky read[s] like--in the finale--Edgar

Guest. Every word of more than three syllables [has] been razored. Every

image that demand[s] so much as one instant's attention--shot dead. (176)

The economic rather than ideological motive shown in this impassioned passage is important to recognize. Although the rest of the coda attacks the intolerance of minority pressure groups, including editors who have censored the "controversial" ideas of Bradbury himself, in this instance the motive of the editors is simply to remove anything requiring even "one instant's attention." This exploits readers' desires for easy gratification just as do the "digests-digests, digests-digests-digests" (55), which Beatty in the novel cites as one of the first examples of simplified challenges.

Certainly present-day American society abounds with examples of the exploitation Bradbury discusses: the simplification of challenges, both artistic and educational; an overemphasis of competitive diversions like sports and contests; rampant drug use; and commodified physicality, both actual and vicarious. All of these pleasurable pursuits interest us so much that they threaten to replace independent thought. If it were not for the controversies over censorship and political correctness, the numerous examples of mass exploitation in American society might make readers wonder why Bradbury attacks the real but lesser problem of intolerant pressure groups so much more vehemently.

Professor Faber says that "books are to remind us what asses and fools we are" (86). Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 certainly fulfills this goal, for it shows readers more than forty years after its first publication how individual thought can so easily be supplanted by thoughtless conformity. Bradbury's warning about the dangers of intolerant minority pressure is perceptive and important, but it should not overshadow his subtler but more important warning about mass exploitation. Despite the ease of recognizing the problems of minority pressure in the book, mass exploitation begins earlier, requires the participation of a far greater majority of the population, and has a more direct effect on the decline of thought. This should remind us that even more dangerous than the pressure groups that attempt to peck away at the freedom of expression and, eventually, thought is our own desire for easy gratification. The "publishers, exploiters, broadcasters" have great economic incentive to exploit this desire, and when we allow such pleasurably escapist mass exploitation to replace our thoughtful interest in the real world, we abnegate our intellectual and moral responsibilities as human beings.

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**'The Martian Chronicles' and 'Fahrenheit 451': Ray Bradbury's Cold War novels**

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In a discussion about the thematic content of The Martian Chronicles with interviewer David Mogen in 1980, Ray Bradbury stated, "The Martian Chronicles and Farenheit 451 come from the same period in my life, when I was warning people. I was preventing futures" (83). In this pairing of the two books, Bradbury suggests a deep kinship between the pieces and indicates the probability that they are more than just successive novels in his overall body of work.(1) Though the two fictions are usually read as separate entities, if read as complementary works, they provide a more comprehensive view of a larger whole. As consecutive arrivals in Bradbury's postwar publications, and in their mutual attraction to similar major themes of the cold war era, The Martian Chronicles and Farenheit 451 distinguish themselves as Bradbury's "cold war novels."

The two works are on the surface entirely different kinds of fiction. The Martian Chronicles is a collection of twenty-six chapters (most originally published as short stories), written between 1944 and 195O and linked primarily by their setting on the planet Mars between the years 1999 and 2026. Since many of the stories were separately conceived, most of the characters in the finished book are contained within their initial tales and do not cross over into other chapters. And though Mars itself is in many ways the centerpiece of the book, and its treatment by the humans is "chronicled" over a twenty-seven-year period, there is no "protagonist" in the pure sense of the term, nor is there a "plot" common to the separate sections. In contrast, Farenheit 451 is structured as a novel, divided into three chapters; it is set on Earth; it is the story of one central protagonist, Guy Montag; and the plot of the novel--Montag's liberation from Captain Beatty and his acceptance of a new purpose in a new civilization--is carefully mapped out.

These surface differences of structure, character, and setting notwithstanding, The Martian Chronicles and Farenheit 451 share a distinction as "cold war fiction" because in them, much more deliberately than in earlier or later publications, Bradbury deals with subjects and issues that were shaped by the political climate of the United States in the decade immediately following World War II.(2) A number of significant events during these years transformed the character of America from a supremely confident, Nazi-demolishing world leader to a country with deep insecurities, one suddenly suspicious and vigilant of Communist activity within its citizenry. First, Joseph Stalin's immediate and unchecked occupation of Eastern European countries at the close of World War II left many Americans wondering if the United States and the Roosevelt administration hadn't foolishly misjudged Soviet intentions at the Yalta Conference in 1945. Second, the Soviet Union's subsequent acquisition of atomic weapons technology by 1949 would reinforce this position; it would also end the U.S. monopoly on thermonuclear weapons and raise questions about Communist agents in high-level government positions. Third, Senator Joseph McCarthy's public accusations of Communist activity in the State Department in 1950 (together with the inflammatory tactics of J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI, and a host of other right-wing government agencies) planted seeds of paranoia and subversion in the American culture that would blossom into fear and irrationality throughout the 1950s. As David Halberstam points out, "It was a mean time. The nation was ready for witch-hunts" (9). Through his examination of government oppression of the individual, the hazards of an atomic age, recivilization of society, and the divided nature of the "Cold War Man," Ray Bradbury uses The Martian Chronicles and Farenheit 451 to expose the "meanness" of the cold war years.

During the Truman years of the early cold war, when the administration attempted to reverse the image of the Democratic party as being "soft" on communism, the U.S. government attempted to silence individuals who were thought to be "potentially disloyal" through various offices such as the Justice Department and the Loyalty Review Board. Truman himself released a press statement in July 1950 that granted authority over national security matters to the FBI. The statement expressed grave concern over "the Godless Communist Cause" and further warned that "it is important to learn to know the enemies of the American way of life" (Theoharis 141-42). For Bradbury, such government-supported conformism amounted to censorship and ultimately led to the fostering of what William F. Touponce labels "mass culture" (46) and what Kingsley Amis calls "conformist hell" (110). We see Bradbury's strong distrust of "majority-held" views and official doctrine positions in several places in The Martian Chronicles; these areas of distrust, moreover, recur in Farenheit 451.

In the seventh chapter of Chronicles, "--And the Moon Be Still as Bright" (originally published in 1948), the fierceness of the individual and the official will of the majority clash violently in the persons of Jeff Spender and Captain Wilder. Spender is a crewman on the Fourth Expedition to Mars who feels a sense of moral outrage at the behavior of his fellow crewmen upon landing. While Biggs, Parkhill, and others break out the liquor and throw a party upon their successful mission, Spender is revolted at their dancing and their harmonica playing on the Martian landscape and at Biggs's throwing of wine bottles into canals and vomiting on the tiled city floors. Spender marvels at Martian literature and ancient art forms, and he views the others' actions as sacrilegious, lamenting that "We Earth Men have a talent for ruining big, beautiful things" (73). Like Spender, Captain Wilder also perceives the beauty of the cities; but as the officer of the crew, he does not allow his sympathies with Spender to override his need as commander in chief to preserve authoritative control of the mission. He doles out a perfunctory fifty-dollar fine to Spender for punching Biggs and orders Spender to "go back [to the party] and play happy" (74); later, following Spender's desertion and mutinous killing of several crewmen, Wilder acknowledges that he has "too much earth blood" to accept Spender's invitation to stay on Mars without the others (88).(3) Wilder is convinced by this time that he must stop Spender, but he is tormented by an uncertainty over whether he is stopping him because he believes Spender is wrong or whether he simply lacks Spender's individual conviction to lash out against the will of the majority: "I hate this feeling of thinking I'm doing right when I'm not really certain I am. Who are we, anyway? The majority? Is that the answer?. . . What is this majority and who are in it? And what do they think and how did they get that way and will they ever change and how the devil did I get caught in this rotten majority? I don't feel comfortable" (go). In order to preclude the disintegration of the mission, Wilder shoots Spender before Spender can kill anyone else. But the issue of individuality vs. conformity that has been raised by Spender's mutiny has not been resolved for the captain. The next day, Wilder knocks out Parkhill's teeth after Parkhill has shot out the windows of some of the buildings in a dead city. Wilder here releases his inner rage at his own ambivalent compliance with a "government finger point[ing] from four-color posters" described in the book's next chapter, "The Settlers" (94). On the one hand, he has eliminated the disruptive presence of an outlaw; on the other hand, in so doing he has taken the Official Position and removed from the expedition the value of "the most renegade of Bradbury's frontiersmen" (Mogen 85) as well as the one other individual who valued art and creative expression.

Bradbury picks up this theme of distrust for the officially endorsed view again in "Usher II," the seventeenth chapter of Chronicles (originally published in 1950 prior to the publication of the full book). In this chapter William Stendahl designs a replica of Edgar Allan Poe's House of Usher on Mars. His intent is twofold: to pay tribute to Poe and "to teach [the Clean- Minded people] a fine lesson for what [they] did to Mr. Poe on Earth" (135), which was to burn his works (along with the works of others who wrote "tales of the future") in the Great Fire of 1975. Here again Bradbury rejects the will of the majority through Stendahl's speech to Bigelow. the architect of Usher II. Stendahl sermonizes to Bigelow that the Great Fire came about because "there was always a minority afraid of something, and a great majority afraid of the dark, afraid of the future, afraid of the past, afraid of the present, afraid of themselves and shadows of themselves" (134). Another neurosis Bradbury places in Stendahl's litany of fears has roots in the "red scare" policies enacted through McCarthyist tactics in 1950s America: "Afraid of the word `politics' (which eventually became a synonym for Communism among the more reactionary elements, so I hear, and it was worth your life to use the word!) . . . "(4) Later, at the party Stendahl throws for his invited guests, the Moral Climates people, Stendahl kills all the "majority guests" with different approaches to murders seen in Poe's stories.(5) At the end of the chapter, Stendahl mortars up Moral Climates Investigator Garrett into a brick wall because Garrett "took other people's advice that [Poe's books] needed burning" (147). In contrast with "--And the Moon Be Still as Bright," where the individual is martyred by the majority, the individual in "Usher II" enjoys a sinister triumph over the majority.

In Farenheit 451 Bradbury resumes his attack on government-based censorship encountered earlier in "Usher II." Set on Earth rather than on Mars, this novel follows the metamorphosis of Guy Montag, a fireman (a starter of fires in this future dystopian society) who comes to question and break free of the government that employs him to burn books. The novel opens with Montag having just returned to the firehouse after igniting another residence, "grinn[ing] the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame" (4). He is clearly of the majority at this point, loyal to his job and proud of wearing the salamander and the phoenix disc, the official insignia of the Firemen of America. But seventeen-year-old Clarisse McClellan, who is dangerous in Beatty's eyes because "she [doesn't] want to know how a thing [is] done, but why" (60), points out some disturbing facts that Montag cannot escape: he answers her questions quickly without thinking; he can't remember if he knew there was dew on early-morning grass or not; he can't answer the question of whether he is happy or not. A growing unrest with his own lack of individual sensibilities creeps into Montag at Clarisse's challenges. As Donald Watt observes, Clarisse is "catalytic" and "dominant in Montag's growth to awareness" (197); her role for Montag parallels the role of Spender for Captain Wilder, planting the seed of doubt that enacts a process of critical self-examination. These doubts about the government he is serving accumulate through the latest suicide attempt by Montag's wife, Mildred (and her casual acceptance of this attempt after she is resuscitated); through his witnessing of a book-hoarding woman who chose to ignite her own home rather than flee in the face of the firemen's flamethrowers; through the government's systematic elimination of Clarisse; through his own growing need to read and understand books.

Montag ultimately realizes that he cannot return to the firehouse. At this point he rejects both the realm of the majority and his association with Chief Beatty, who professes to "stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought" (62). Montag's liberation from the Firemen of America is augmented when he locates Faber (a former English professor and current member of the book-preserving underground), who offers Montag moral counsel and employs him as an infiltrator at the firehouse. Mildred, in the meantime, breaks her silence and sounds a fire alarm at the Montag residence. In a dramatic confrontation of Individual vs. State, Montag refuses Beatty's orders to burn his own house and instead turns the flamethrower on Beatty. This revolt severs Montag from the majority permanently; he then joins the underground movement to preserve books for the future as global war descends on the city.

Another theme of the cold war years Bradbury takes up in both novels is the precariousness of human existence in an atomic age. The eventual "success" of the Manhattan Project in 1945, which resulted in the development of the atomic bomb, came about only after several years' worth of blind groping toward the right physics equations by some of the brightest physicists in the world.(6) The scientists were literally guessing about how to detonate the bomb, how big to make the bomb, and, most significantly, how strong the bomb would be. The project itself, in the words of Lansing Lamont, was "a bit like trying to manufacture a new automobile with no opportunity to test the engine beforehand" (50). After studying various reports on a wide range of explosions in known history, the Los Alamos physicists determined that the atom bomb's force would fall somewhere in between the volcanic eruption of Krakatau in 1883 (which killed 36,000 people and was heard 3,000 miles away) and the 1917 explosion of the munitions ship Mont Blanc in Halifax Harbor, Nova Scotia (killing 1,100)--"hopefully a lot closer to Halifax," Lamont notes, "but just where [the scientists] couldn't be sure" (51-52). The subsequent explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki made Americans more "sure" of the bomb's potential but not sure at all about whether the knowledge of its potential was worth the price of having created it in the first place. As a line of military defense against the spread of nazism, the bomb became a prime example of how science unleashed can, according to Gary Wolfe, produce "the alienation of humanity from the very technological environments it has constructed in order to resolve its alienation from the universe" (128).

It is difficult to comprehend the depth to which the atom bomb terrified the world, and America specifically, in the early cold war era. Richard Rhodes, author of the The Making of the Atomic Bomb, writes that "A nuclear weapon is in fact a total-death machine, compact and efficient" (746) and quotes a Japanese study that concludes that the explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were "the opening chapter to the annihilation of mankind." More than any single technological development, the atomic bomb made people think seriously about the end of the world. As a passport to Wolfe's icon of the wasteland, the bomb "teaches us that the unknown always remains, ready to reassert itself, to send us back to the beginning" (147).

Bradbury first captures the general sense of anxiety felt in a new atomic age in the fifth chapter of The Martian Chronicles, "The Taxpayer." This short chapter identifies fear of nuclear war as an impetus for leaving Earth; the chapter also establishes itself as one of several in Chronicles that serve as precursors to Farenheit 451 and centralize many of the early cold war themes Bradbury resumes in the second book: "There was going to be a big atomic war on Earth in about two years, and he didn't want to be here when it happened. He and thousands of others like him, if they had any sense, would go to Mars. See if they wouldn't! To get away from wars and censorship and statism and conscription and government control of this and that, of art and science!" (47).

Once the fear-of-nuclear-holocaust theme is introduced in the book, Bradbury structures the story-chapters so that references to the bomb and to atomic war in Chronicles are periodically repeated, thus sustaining anxiety throughout the novel. One of Jeff Spender's fears in "--And the Moon Be Still as Bright," for example, is that war on Earth will lead to "atomic research and atom bomb depots on Mars"; he is willing to kill off the members of the Fourth Expedition in order to keep Earth from "flopping their filthy atom bombs up here, fighting for bases to have wars" (84-85). "The Luggage Store," a later bridge chapter that echoes the points made in "The Taxpayer," picks up the theme of atomic war on Earth in the year 2005. In discussing whether or not members of the Earth society transplanted on Mars will return to Earth when the war begins, Father Peregrine explains to the proprietor of the luggage store man's inability to comprehend atomic war from millions of miles away: "[Earth is] so far away it's unbelievable. It's not here. You can't touch it. You can't even see it. All you see is a green light. Two billion people living on that light? Unbelievable! War? We don't hear the explosions" (164). The expanse of the physical distance between Earth and Mars in his dialogue mirrors the uneasy diplomatic distance the United States and the Soviet Union managed to somehow sustain throughout the cold war years, which kept atomic war in the abstract then as well.

In November 2005, however, the Mars inhabitants receive a light- radio message in The Watchers: "AUSTRALIAN CONTINENT ATOMIZED IN PREMATURE EXPLOSION OF ATOMIC STOCKPILE. LOS ANGELES, LONDON BOMBED. WAR" (180). the resulting picture of Mars--and Earth--for the remaining forty-two pages of the novel is desolate and, for the most part, apocalyptic. Viewers on Mars could point a telescope at Earth and see New York explode, or London "covered with a new kind of fog" (181). Bradbury also employs humor in driving home the gravity of nuclear catastrophe. In one of the novel's more ironic and darkly humorous chapters, "The Silent Towns," Walter Gripp believes himself the only man left on Mars following the wartime emigration back to Earth by most of the planet's inhabitants. Never having found "a quiet and intelligent woman" to marry when Mars was fully inhabited, Walter is shocked by the sound of a ringing phone. On the other end is the voice of Genevieve Selsor. Ecstatic, he arranges to meet her and conjures up a beautiful woman with "long dark hair shaking in the wind" and "lips like red peppermints" (187). When he meets her and sees that she in fact has a "round and thick" face with eyes "like two immense eggs stuck into a white mess of bread dough" (189), he endures a painful evening with her before fleeing for a life of solitary survivalism. Though the chapter provides a moment of levity compared to the ruined civilization chapters that follow and close out the book, the humor in "The Silent Towns" is carefully crafted toward nervousness. It is in the vein of comedy Donald Hassler identifies in Comic Tones in Science Fiction: The Art of Compromise with Nature that "refuse[s] to be tragic and yet [is] filled with pathos because [it] represents just survival" (27). The story's humor serves primarily to deromanticize the last-man-on-earth motif: though atomic war may have made Walter Gripp a master of all he surveys, it has also perpetuated and intensified his isolation.

"There Will Come Soft Rains," the novel's penultimate chapter, restores the tone in The Martian Chronicles to grimness, depicting the "tomb planet" character of Mars alluded to one chapter earlier in "The Long Years" (193). The "character" in this chapter is an ultramodern home on post-atomic war Earth in 2026, equipped with turn-of-the-twenty-first-century gadgetry. A voice-clock repeats the time of day each minute, and a kitchen ceiling reads off the date. The automatic kitchen cooks breakfast for four; the patio walls open up into bridge tables; the nursery walls glow and animate themselves at children's hour; the beds warm their own sheets; and the tub fills itself with bath water. This technology wastes away mindlessly, however, for "the gods had gone away" (207). This is the wasteland of thermonuclear destruction: the home is "the one house left standing" in a "ruined city" whose "radioactive glow could be seen for miles" (206). The only signs of life (other than the various "small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal") are a dying dog and the evidence of a family vaporized by atomic explosion: "The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him, a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down." The chapter ends with the house endlessly spinning out its daily mechanical routine to the ghosts of its vaporized inhabitants. It is perhaps the most vivid image Bradbury's cold war novels offer of the synthetic hell man makes for himself from the raw materials of science, technology, and irrationality.

Farenheit 451 resumes the examination of precarious existence in an atomic age that Bradbury began in The Martian Chronicles. Fire as the omnipotent weapon in Farenheit finds metaphoric parallels in the notion of the bomb as the omnipotent force in the cold war years. The early tests of the Los Alamos project, for example, paid close attention to the extreme temperatures produced by the fissioning and fusioning of critical elements. J. Robert Oppenheimer, Niels Bohr, and Edward Teller based key decisions in the atomic bomb (and later the hydrogen bomb) designs on the core temperatures created at the moment of detonation.(7) Montag and the Firemen of America, likewise, are ever conscious of the key numeral 451 (the temperature at which books burn), so much so that it is printed on their helmets. The linking of hubris with the attainment of power is evident in both the Los Alamos scientists and the Firemen as well. As the Manhattan Project was drawing to a close, the team of physicists who designed the bomb came to exude a high degree of pride in their mastery of science, but without an attendant sense of responsibility. As Lamont explains, the bomb "represented the climax of an intriguing intellectual match between the scientists and the cosmos. The prospect of solving the bomb's cosmic mysteries, of having their calculations proved correct, seemed far more fascinating and important to the scientists than the prospect of their opening an era obsessed by fear and devoted to the control of those very mysteries" (144). Farenheit 451 opens with Montag similarly blinded by his own perceived importance: "He knew that when he returned to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked, in the mirror. Later, going to sleep, he would feel the fiery smile still gripped by his face muscles, in the dark. It never went away, that smile, it never ever went away, as long as he remembered" (4). Like the engineers of atomic destruction, the engineer of intellectual destruction feels the successful completion of his goals entitles him to a legitimate smugness. The work of the cold war physicists, in retrospect, also shares something else with Montag, which Donald Watt points out: "Montag's destructive burning . . . is blackening, not enlightening; and it poses a threat to nature" (198).

Farenheit 451 also expands on the anxiety over the atomic bomb and fear of a nuclear apocalypse introduced in Chronicles. In Farenheit, Beatty endorses the official government position that, as "custodians of our peace of mind" (59), he and Montag should "let [man] forget there is such a thing as war" (61). Once Montag has decided to turn his back on the firehouse, however, he tries conveying his personal sense of outrage to Mildred at being kept ignorant, hoping to incite a similar concern in her: "How in hell did those bombers get up there every single second of our lives! Why doesn't someone want to talk about it! We've started and won two atomic wars since 1990!" (73). Mildred, however, is perfectly uninspired and breaks off the conversation to wait for the White Clown to enter the TV screen. But Montag's unheeded warning becomes reality; the bombs are dropped once Montag meets up with Granger and the book people, just as they became reality in "There Will Come Soft Rains," and Montag's horrific vision of the bomb's shock wave hitting the building where he imagines Mildred is staying captures a chilling image of his ignorant wife's last instant of life:

Montag, falling flat, going down. saw or felt or imagined he saw or felt

the walls go dark in Millie's face, heard her screaming, because in the

millionth part of time left, she saw her own face reflected there, in a

mirror instead of a crystal ball, and it was

such a wild empty face, all by itself in the room, touching nothing,

starved and eating of itself, that at last she recognized it as her own and

looked quickly up at the ceiling as it and the entire structure of the

hotel blasted down upon her, carrying her

with a million pounds of brick, metal, plaster, and wood, to meet other

people in the hives below, all on their quick way down to the cellar where

the explosion rid itself of them in its own unreasonable way. (159-60)

Perhaps Bradbury's own sense of fear at a future that must accommodate atomic weapons had intensified between The Martian Chronicles's publication in 1950 and Farenheit 451's completion in 1953; perhaps what David Mogen identifies as Bradbury's inspiration for the book, Hitler's book burnings, affords little room for the comic (107). For whatever reasons, unlike Chronicles, which intersperses the solemnity of its nuclear aftermath chapters with a bit of lightness in the Walter Gripp story, Farenheit sustains a serious tone to the end of the book, even in its resurrectionist optimism for the future of the arts.

This optimism for the future--this notion of recivilization--is the third common element between The Martian Chronicles and Farenheit 451 that has early cold war connections. Given such nihilistic phenomena of the cold war era as its tendencies toward censorship, its socially paranoid outlook, and its budding at;ms race, it may seem a strange period to give rise to any optimism. However, one of the great ironies of the period was a peripheral belief that somehow the presence of nuclear arms would, by their very capacity to bring about ultimate destruction to all humans, engender a very special sort of cautiousness and cooperative spirit in the world heretofore not experienced. Perhaps there was a belief that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had taught us a big enough lesson in themselves about nuclear cataclysm that we as humans would rise above our destructive tendencies and live more harmoniously. One very prominent figure who espoused this position was Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the very man who headed the Los Alamos Manhattan Project. Oppenheimer would emerge as one of the most morally intriguing characters of the cold war. He was among the first in the scientific community to encourage restraint, caution, and careful deliberation in all matters regarding the pursuit of atomic energy. "There is only one future of atomic explosives that I can regard with any enthusiasm: that they should never be used in war," he said in a 1946 address before the George Westinghouse Centennial Forum (5). He also refused to participate in the development of the hydrogen bomb following Los Alamos, calling such a weapon "the plague of Thebes" (Rhodes 777).(8) In one of his most inspired addresses on the cooperation of art and science, Oppenheimer stated that "Both the man of science and the man of art live always at the edge of mystery, surrounded by it; both always, as the measure of their creation, have had to do with the harmonization of what is new with what is familiar, with the balance between novelty and synthesis, with the struggle to make partial order in total chaos. They can, in their work and in their lives, help themselves, help one another, and help all men" (145).

Such a spirit of hope for renewed goodwill among men of all vocations is the optimistic vein through which society is reenvisioned following the atomic devastation of the Earth in "The Million-Year Picnic," the final chapter of The Martian Chronicles. Several days in the past, a rocket that had been hidden on Earth during the Great War carried William and Alice Thomas and their children, Timothy, Michael, and Robert, to Mars, presumably for a "picnic." The father admits to his inquisitive sons on this day, however, that the picnic was a front for an escape from life on Earth, where "people got lost in a mechanical wilderness" and "Wars got bigger and bigger and finally killed Earth" (220-21). The father literally plans a new civilization: he blows up their rocket to avoid discovery by hostile Earthmen; he burns up all the family's printed records of their life on earth; and he now awaits, with his family, "a handful of others who'll land in a few days. Enough to start over. Enough to turn away from all that back on Earth and strike out on a new line" (221). When his son Michael repeats his request to see a "Martian," the father takes his family to the canal and points to their reflections in the water. The book's last line, "The Martians stared back up at them for a long, long silent time from the rippling water" (222), is optimistic without being didactic. It suggests that this new society has in fact already begun, that it is already "making partial order out of total chaos," as Oppenheimer suggests the cold war future needs to do. William F. Touponce believes that it is "an altogether appropriate ending" that "summarizes the experience of the reader, who has seen old illusions and values destroyed only to be replaced with new and vital ones" (38). It also offers an image that invites the reader to extrapolate on the father's vision of "a new line" and trust the will of the colonizers for once. Bradbury's optimism for a recivilized world is also evident in the conclusion of Farenheit 451. The seed for an optimistic ending to this dystopian work is actually planted just before the bombs strike. As Montag makes his way across the wilderness, dodging the pursuit of the mechanical hound and the helicopters, he spots the campfire of the book people. His thoughts reflect an epiphany of his transformation from a destroyer of civilization to a builder of it: "[The fire] was not burning. It was warming. He saw many hands held to its warmth, hands without arms, hidden in darkness. Above the hands, motionless faces that were only moved and tossed and flickered with firelight. He hadn't known fire could look this way. He had never thought in his life that it could give as well as take" (145-46). This spirit of giving, of creating from the environment, is emphasized throughout the speeches given by Granger, the leader of the book preservers. In his allusion to the phoenix, which resurrects itself from the ashes of its own pyre, Granger's words reflect the new Montag, who can now see the life-sustaining properties of fire as well as its destructive powers; hopefully, Granger's words also contain hope for the American response to Hiroshima and Nagasaki: "we've got one damn thing the phoenix never had. We know the damn silly thing we just did. We know all the damn silly things we've done for a thousand years and as long as we know that and always have it around where we can see it, someday we'll stop making the goddamn funeral pyres and jumping in the middle of them" (163). The book ends with Montag rehearsing in his mind a passage from the Book of Revelation, which he says he'll save for the reading at noon. Peter Sisario sees in this ending "a key to Bradbury's hope that `the healing of nations' can best come about through a rebirth of man's intellect" (205); Sisario's interpretation of Farenheit's ending and Oppenheimer's interpretation of mankind's necessary response to the cold war share a belief in the triumph of the benevolent side of humans.

A fourth theme in Bradbury's cold war novels that has a historical "objective correlative" is the dichotomous nature of the Cold War Man. The Cold War Man is a man antagonized by conflicting allegiances--one to his government, the other to his personal sense of morals and values--who is forced by circumstance to make an ultimate choice between these impulses. This Bradbury character type has roots in cold war political tensions.

During the early cold war years, the United States's international stance frequently wavered between a policy of military supremacy and one of peacetime concessions. One historian notes this phenomenon in the about-face many Americans took toward Theodore Roosevelt's role in the shifting of global powers following World War II: " . . . both policy and attitude changed with the Truman administration. The rationale behind Yalta- -that a negotiated agreement with the Soviet Union was possible and that the development of mutual trust was the best means to a just and lasting peace--was now rejected in favor of the containment policy and superior military strength" (Theoharis 70).

These contradictory stances of peace and aggression in our nation's outlook occasionally found expression in the form of a single man during the early cold war. The figure of Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer again becomes relevant. Though primarily remembered for his contribution to physics, Oppenheimer also had strong leanings toward the humanities; as a youth and in his years as a Harvard undergraduates, he developed a range of literary interests from the Greek classicists to Donne to Omar Khayyam (Lamont 19). David Halberstam observes, "To some he seemed the divided man--part creator of the most dangerous weapon in history--part the romantic innocent searching for some inner spiritual truth" (33). For a government-employed physicist, however, this "division" would turn out to be something of a tragic flaw in the cold war years. When Oppenheimer would have no part of the U.S. government's decision to pursue the hydrogen bomb in its initial phase of the arms race with the Soviets, the government began an inquiry into his past. It was "determined" in June of 1954 that Oppenheimer was guilty of Communist associations that jeopardized national security.(9) He was then stripped of his government security clearance, and his service with the Atomic Energy Commission terminated. Thus, in Oppenheimer was a man whose pacifistic sympathies eventually triumphed over his capacity for aggression--and in the early cold war years he was punished for it.

The Oppenheimer figure finds interesting parallels in Bradbury's cold war novels. In "--And the Moon Be Still as Bright" in The Martian Chronicles, Spender is torn between the need to serve his Earth-based government (in his participation with the expedition crew on Mars) and the deep personal need to preserve the remains of the native Martian culture, which he believes is threatened by the very kind of expedition he is serving: "When I got up here I felt I was not only free of [Earth's] so-called culture, I felt I was free of their ethics and their customs. I'm out of their frame of reference, I thought. All I have to do is kill you all off and live my own life" (85; emphasis added). Spender's surrender to the personal impulse to defend Mars from Earth corruption over the impulse to follow the government-entrusted group leads to his death. Wilder is forced to shoot Spender when he threatens more killings, and his death-image symbolically reinforces his divided self: "Spender lay there, his hands clasped, one around the gun, the other around the silver book that glittered in the sun" (92). The gun, which is entrusted to him as a member of the expedition and the book, which he found in his walks through the Martian ruins, emblematize Spender's divided allegiances. The image is curiously akin to the image Lansing Lamont provides of Oppenheimer's dichotomous self: "With balanced equanimity he could minister to a turtle and select the target cities for the first atomic massacres" (285). Wilder also exudes characteristics of the dichotomous Cold War Man. The captain's sympathies toward the arts and toward Spender's appreciation of them lead him to bury Spender with an aesthetic touch. Finding a Martian sarcophagus, Wilder has the crew "put Spender into a silver case with waxes and wines which were ten thousand years old, his hands folded on his chest" (93). The scene immediately changes from Spender's ornate sarcophagus to the captain's catching Parkhill in one of the dead cities and knocking his teeth out for shooting at the Martian towers. Wilder's coexistent propensity for violence and aesthetic sensibilities mark his dichotomous cold war sides as well. Stendahl in "Usher II" further reflects both sides of this Cold War Man. He possesses the aesthetic appreciation of a literature devotee, a man with an architectural vision of Usher II, specifying to Bigelow the need for colors precisely "desolate and terrible," for walls that are "bleak," for tarn that is "black and lurid," for sedge that is "gray and ebon" (132-33). Yet this same man furnishes his home with all of Poe's macabre instruments of death: an ape that strangles humans, a razor-sharp pendulum, a coffin for the nailing up of a live woman, and bricks and mortar for sealing up a live victim.

The dichotomous Cold War Man theme is again treated in Farenheit 451 Both Montag and Beatty are simultaneously capable of the destructive and appreciative of the artistic. As Donald Watt remarks of Montag, "Burning as constructive energy, and burning as apocalyptic catastrophe, are the symbolic poles of Bradbury's novel" (196). Montag's divided self is clearly displayed by Bradbury at moments when his character is being influenced by the intellectually stimulating presences of Clarisse and Faber. Early in the book, when Montag is just beginning to wrestle with his identity as a fireman, Clarisse tells him that being a fireman "just doesn't seem right for you, somehow" (24). Immediately Bradbury tells us that Montag "felt his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and a not trembling, the two halves grinding one upon the other." Later, after offering his services to Faber and his group, Montag considers the shiftings of his own character that he has been feeling in his conflicting allegiances: "Now he knew that he was two people, that he was, above all, Montag, who knew nothing, who did not even know himself a fool, but only suspected it. And he knew that he was also the old man who talked to him and talked to him as the train was sucked from one end of the night city to the other" (to:). Fire Chief Beatty also suggests aspects of the Cold War Man. In spite of his wearing the role of the Official State Majority Leader as the fire chief and relentlessly burning every book at every alarm, Beatty acknowledges that he knows the history of Nicholas Ridley, the man burned at the stake alluded to by the woman who ignites her own home. He gives Montag the reply that most fire captains are "full of bits and pieces" (40); however, when he later warns Montag against succumbing to the "itch" to read that every fireman gets "at least once in his career," he further adds an ambiguous disclosure: "Oh, to scratch that itch, eh? Well, Montag, take my word for it, I've had to read a few in my time to know what I was about, and the books say nothing! Nothing you can teach or believe" (62). Though Beatty has an alibi for having some knowledge of literature, Bradbury urges us to question just what Beatty may not be telling us. Montag's later certainty over Beatty's desire to die at Montag's hands (122) raises even more questions about Beatty's commitment to the destructive half of his duality.

Through The Martian Chronicles and Farenheit 451, Ray Bradbury has created a microcosm of early cold war tensions. Though the reader will perceive a degree of Bradbury's sociopolitical concerns from a reading of either novel, it is only through the reading of both as companion pieces that his full cold war vision emerges. From the perspective that America has wrestled itself free of the extremism of the McCarthyists and, thus far, has escaped nuclear war as well, Bradbury's cold war novels may have indeed contributed to the "prevention" of futures with cold war trappings.

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**The Life of the Mind and a Life of Meaning:** Reflections on Fahrenheit *451*

*Rodney A. Smolla*

Excerpt:

III. The Life of the Mind and a Life of Meaning

We can reflect on *Fahrenheit 451* as futurism and as an exploration of the anatomy of censorship, but in the end for me the real genius of the book is more universal. *Fahrenheit 451* is a great work of literature—too great to be pigeonholed as mere muckraking, futuristic science fiction or as a manifesto against book burning and censorship. Muckraking, futurism, and manifestos against censorship are all worthy literary endeavors, but *Fahrenheit 451* is greater than all of them.

*Fahrenheit 451* retains a present resonance that exceeds another classic with which it is often compared, Orwell’s *1984*. For unlike *1984*, which is an exercise in political commentary railing against utopian tyranny and Big Brother, *Fahrenheit 451* is less overtly *political*, less overtly about *freedom alone*, and more deeply about the essence of humanity, about that which makes life worth living. At bottom, the characters, the plot, and the insights of *Fahrenheit 451* are, above all else, about the life of the mind and the essential link between a life of the mind and a life of meaning.

Bradbury identifies many forces that interfere with a life of the mind and diminish the possibility of a life of meaning. They include separation from the written word; separation from the simple senses of taste, smell, sight, and touch; and separation from the virtues of leisure, respite, and reflection. For all the fire of *Fahrenheit 451*, for all the book burning and city bombing, the novel is largely about the human need for peace—for peace among nations, for peace of mind and soul. And while we may have averted the book burning that Bradbury predicted for us, we have not yet found our peace, literally or figuratively.

A. *The Vast Wasteland?*

In 1961, Newton Minow, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, would make a speech before the National Association of Broadcasters describing television as a “vast wasteland.” Bradbury saw it the same way.

Bradbury’s indictment of what he regarded as the mind-numbing qualities of television may thus be extended more generally to the hypnotic effect of fast-paced visual expression and the carpet bombing of the marketplace with advertising and propaganda. As a futurist, Bradbury mostly got it right, anticipating flat-screen video, reality television, bombardments of mass ad- vertising and mass culture, and films that move faster than the eye can register. Commenting years after he wrote the novel, Bradbury used the film *Moulin Rouge* to make his point about the rapid pace of modern film editing and his claim that this degrades thinking. By Bradbury’s count the film had 4500 half-second clips in it. “The camera never stops and holds still.” The upshot of this visual need for speed is that we overwhelm people with “sensation,” and sensation becomes a “substitute” for thought.

However apt Bradley’s indictment of television and electronic media may have been in 1961, the world has now changed profoundly. It is no longer fair to characterize television, and certainly not all of electronic media, as a wasteland or to treat it, as Bradbury did, as the sworn enemy of all intellect and reflection. The proliferation of cable and satellite broadcasting channels and, exponentially more transforming, the explosion of the internet have fundamentally altered mass culture and communication. This much is obvious. What is not so obvious is the impact of this rapidly expanding, worldwide electronic network on the maintenance of a healthy life of the mind and the discovery of paths to a meaningful life.

The internet is not something Bradbury imagined in *Fahrenheit 451*. The internet has reinforced the First Amendment assault on the regulation of speech, creating a wide-open electronic marketplace so vast and robust that legal regulators are often powerless to stop even those messages that formal First Amendment law would permit them to block. Yet at the same time, much as the wonders of electronic communication depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*, the wonder of the internet alone does not guarantee a meaningful life of the mind, nor does it ensure peace, either among nations or within individu- als.

To be sure, as a society we have made a profound statement against *cen- sorship* on the internet, and one must suppose that the Bradbury who wrote *Fahrenheit 451* must approve. If anything, there is more freedom on the internet than in physical space, in part because of immunities Congress has created in federal laws, and in part because of the sheer technological diffi- culty of piercing veils of anonymity or containing the proliferation of internet speech—even speech properly adjudicated as illegal or beyond First Amendment protection.

For its part, Congress deliberately subsidized the internet when it cre- ated broad legal immunity for internet service providers for the content generated by others. In doing so, it placed a higher premium on freedom than on accountability, morality, or order. The most significant such federal law is section 230 of Title XVII, created by the Communications Decency Act of 1996.46 The law states in pertinent part that “[n]o provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.”47 This means that if the victim of defamation or invasion of privacy can determine who posted the offending material on line, the victim may sue that poster. But the victim may not sue Yahoo! or Google or Facebook or MySpace merely for providing the electronic forum for such “user-generated con- tent.”48

A somewhat different balance has been struck for copyright infringement under the so-called “safe harbor” provisions of section 512 of Title XVII, created by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. This law immunizes internet service providers from liability for hosting copyrighted material provided they have a “take down” mechanism in place that permits the rightful owner of the copyrighted material to issue a “take down” notice, which then triggers the removal of the material. The mechanisms of section 230 and section 512 are different—there is stronger legal protection written into federal law for property than for hu- man personality—and courts have carved some modest inroads on these immunities. The immunity of section 230 may be lost, for example, when an internet service provider is also itself responsible for shaping the content of the material generated by others.50 Yet the overriding reality is that the inter- net is remarkably censorship free, given the vast amount of expressive traffic that flows across cyberspace each day.

The internet, which has opened up a vast world of person-to-person dis- course, is naturally censorship resilient. Indeed, more than that, it is naturally law resilient. While the internet is not a lawless space, it is a space in which law is always several steps behind invention. Electrons and entre- preneurial ingenuity are faster than legislatures and courts. These features diminish the very physical and technical possibility of censorship, even where there is a public willing to censor.

B. *Civilization, Senses, and a Life of the Mind*

While we live in a relatively censorship-free era, particularly compared to that of *Fahrenheit 451*, we have not yet managed to escape many of the demons that vexed Bradbury’s characters. Intellectual, meaningful lives re- quire more than a censorship-free environment. And this is where the challenges and sufferings facing the characters in *Fahrenheit 451* remain remarkably constant with the challenges and sufferings of today. This is where *Fahrenheit 451* retains its greatest universality.

While Bradbury indicts the pace of modernity as an assault of sensation that pushes out thought, this should not be confused with an indictment of sensation itself. To the contrary, *Fahrenheit 451* warns us that a life without the senses is a life without memory, without meaning, without sensibility. Clarisse helps to save Montag by helping him to smell and see and taste and touch. Bradbury links the quality of human life to *physicality*.

Our world today is increasingly a world of diminished sensation. We trade physical reality for virtual reality. We are all too rushed to smell the rose, savor the sunset, taste the rain, feel the cool of the grass. So too, there is something pernicious in the loss of the very physicality of books, of libraries, of newspapers and magazines, of the solidity of the printed word, of the touch and feel and texture of bindings and pages, of the musky smell of the library stacks, of the sound of crinkling newsprint folded over the morning coffee. There is something more primal in this than clichés about “curling up with a book” instead of a laptop.

Bradbury links the burning of books to the ignoring of taste, smell, sight, sound, and touch, and he links the loss of both reading and sensation to a decline in our humanity. The link between the senses and books is a link between sense and *thought*, between sense and the taking of *time* to think. One of the profound insights of *Fahrenheit 451* is that we decline in our humanity when we mistake time for leisure and stimulation for a genuine life of the mind and soul.

Pausing to smell, see, feel, listen, and touch is the precondition to paus- ing to reflect, critique, brood, and invent. Pausing to read to a child is the precondition to pausing to pass on the traditions of civilized humanity.

C. *Privacy and Private Peace*

Beyond losing our senses, we live in a world of diminished *physical* pri- vate space. When Guy Montag is on the run from the Mechanical Hound, with the helicopters and surveillance cameras chasing him, the reader is fearful that Montag cannot escape because the authorities will be able to detect his every movement. What Bradbury imagined in 1953 we experience as reality today. With cell phones, GPS systems, Blackberries, recordings of credit card and bank card transactions, security swipe cards, surveillance cameras, tracing of email and internet messages, recording of telephone calls, and the myriad other ways in which our every transaction, movement, and hiccup are watched and catalogued and stored by someone somewhere, to recapture any genuine zone of privacy one must almost pull a Montag, strip to the bone, and float down the river into the wilderness. Even then, one might not escape the satellite photographs. It is no wonder that to find private space humans migrate to cyberspace, seeking to carve out zones of anonymity and autonomy there!

Yet the haunting warning of *Fahrenheit 451* is that an *overly* virtual world will ultimately become sensorially deprived, thought depleted, and meaning impoverished. We may be rearing an entire generation of young people who rarely experience the joys of *true leisure*, in the playful physical sense exemplified by Clarisse, and who, as Faber warned, will rarely know *true reflection*.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the breakneck pace of life is captured in part by the imagery of fast cars. We’ve slowed down on the highways—Bradbury did not predict the energy crisis and auto safety-consciousness of today. On the other hand, we still manage to kill too many people in cars; what we lose from speed these days we make up for with cell phones. And cell phones, like email, are new inventions that speed up life and crowd out repose.

All of us, across generations, increasingly suffer ridiculously oversched- uled lives. Every minute from waking to sleeping is accounted for. It starts all too early, with hours blocked for school, sports, music lessons, camps, clubs, church, whatever. The few moments of release are electronic, with iPods, text messages, video games, chat rooms—again, whatever. There is precious too little play—play of the heart, play of the spirit, play of the mind. There is precious little loafing. We struggle to pencil in quality time. I’ll have my avatar contact your avatar, and we’ll do a meeting.

This might be dismissed as romance and nostalgia, but I think not. Isaac Newton postulated the rule of physics that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This corresponds to a principle of culture and civili- zation. For every forward movement in science and technology that improves the physical quality of human life, there is a *potential* backward movement in the spiritual quality of human life. I use the word “spiritual” here not in an overtly religious sense but in the broader sense of the quest for a life of meaning. And I use the word “potential” to underscore that we can counteract these forces of repression and regression. Medical technol- ogy allows us to sustain human life much longer by artificial means, but for many this comes at the price of a life’s end without quality and a death without dignity. Cell phones and Blackberries keep us in constant contact, allowing instant communication, but this comes at the price of a decline in contemplation and a loss of taking the time to think and consider and exer- cise temperate judgment. A modern director may present a movie with thousands of cuts and scenes, like Bradbury’s example of *Moulin Rouge*, or Oliver Stone’s film *JFK*,52 and watching these films may be a thrilling es- cape, but they lose their capacity to challenge us to look more deeply inside ourselves.

It is not hopeless. If we are self-aware, we can have our technological advances and still fight to maintain our humanity. But we must be purpose- ful and contemplative to do so.

*Fahrenheit 451* timelessly conjures these tensions. The bombers are al- ways in the air. Human beings may split the atom and unleash the positive energy of nuclear power, yet that power may be impressed into the service of weapons of mass destruction, unleashing Armageddon.

The link of speech to peace for Bradbury, however, goes beyond peace as the absence of war. At the individual human level, Bradbury links books and reading and conversation and discourse to *inner peace*, to self- discovery, to food for thought and thought’s nourishment of the soul. All of the characters in *Fahrenheit 451* on the side of repression are ultimately miserable, and they perish. Beatty cannot find peace in his book pyres. However bravely he might have recited Shakespeare as he went down, it was a recitation in protest of too much. The captain somewhere deep inside knows he is doing evil, knows that his burning of books is linked to the burning of innocent people, and knows that the torch that ignites his body may also be sending his soul to the flames of hell.

So too, poor lost Millie and her smiling friends are familiar to us—still, characters desperately trapped in a cycle of botox, smile-frozen faces, and mood drugs. Millie nearly dies before our eyes, a victim of too much pharmaceutical attention, and she is saved only by the miracle medicine of the high-tech stomach pump. Yet if Millie lives on in body, to drink and pop another day, it is plain that in mind and spirit she is dead already. It was not the content of her stomach that killed her, but the absence of content in her mind and soul.

In contrast, there is peace in the hearts of Clarisse, Faber, and Montag. We don’t know for sure what happens to Clarisse or Faber, whether they were killed by the Mechanical Hound or the atom bomb that vaporized the city. And Montag ends the novel alive, but we cannot be certain what hap- pens next. But Clarisse, Faber, and Montag leave us with a sense of peaceful immortality, a sense of the irrepressible human mind and human spirit that cannot die, will not die—much as Ray Bradbury teaches us that ideas and books cannot and will not die, and that this is the promise and hope of humanity.

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