



## Fahrenheit 451

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Guy Montag, a fireman whose job it is to burn books, begins to doubt his society's high-speed, hedonistic way of life when he meets Clarisse McClellan, a young girl whose family lives a slower, more graceful existence. Clarisse shares her values with him until the McClellans mysteriously disappear.

As Montag's dissatisfaction increases, he seeks out a retired English professor named Faber for support. However, Montag's chief, Beatty, correctly suspects Montag of being a secret reader and book collector. After Beatty burns down Montag's house, he must flee civilization and, on Faber's advice, find a group of outcasts who have dedicated themselves to memorizing whole books while their society destroys itself in a pointless war.

Though the novel focuses on a book burner, it is more than a diatribe against censorship. Rather, it pictures a society, not far removed from our own, in which books and the leisure, thought, and tolerance necessary to enjoy them are no longer valued. The firemen simply enforce the will of a people who desire only conformity, unrelated facts, and immediate gratification. The most frightening aspect of the story is the portrayal of Montag's wife, Mildred, and her friends, who live through electronic entertainment devices.

The debasement of the quality of life through the misuses of technology and the neglect of literature is a persistent theme in Bradbury's fiction, but this novel remains his fullest treatment of the subject. The lyric power and symbolic richness of the book make this Bradbury's most satisfactory long fiction and a classic of speculative literature.

The title of the novel is derived from the combustion temperature of paper: 451 degrees Fahrenheit.

## Bibliography

Greenberg, Martin Henry, and Joseph D. Olander, eds. *Ray Bradbury*. New York: Taplinger, 1980. This collection contains several essays discussing aspects of *Fahrenheit 451*. Extensive bibliography.

Johnson, Wayne L. *Ray Bradbury*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980. Deals with central themes related to science fiction and fantasy in Bradbury's works.

Mogen, David. *Ray Bradbury*. Boston: Twayne, 1986. Provides biographical background as well as analyses of major works. Sees *Fahrenheit 451* as satire of the McCarthyism of the 1950's, as well as a general attack on totalitarianism.

Spencer, Susan. "The Post-Apocalyptic Library: Oral and Literate Culture in *Fahrenheit 451* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*." *Extrapolation* 32, no. 4 (Winter, 1991): 331-342. Contrasts Bradbury's more positive view of cultural development with the pessimistic historical determinism of Walter Miller's post-doomsday novel.

Touponce, William F. *Ray Bradbury and the Poetics of Reverie: Fantasy, Science Fiction, and the Reader*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984. Applies reader-response theories to Bradbury's works. Focuses on *Fahrenheit 451* as a critique of technological rationalism and the contemporary culture industry.

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