

Brennan and Davie's Fahrenheit 451

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Themes

There are many messages/themes in Fahrenheit 451. In writing the book, Bradbury sends a warning to his readers about the direction of society.

One warning sent is about the dangers of technology. Technology is always thought of as a good thing, but it is not necessarily as shown in the book. When people begin to rely on technology, as in the novel, problems occur. This being dependent upon technology can be detrimental to intellectual growth, as people stop thinking of better ways, only accepting the current standard.

Also, Bradbury warns us of the importance of the knowledge of history, as illustrated by Beatty telling Montag the first fireman was Ben Franklin. Just imagine if nobody knew history-what would happen? Knowledge is power, as clearly illustrated in the novel.

Also illustrated in the novel is the importance of thought. Bradbury shows us that when people do not have their own thoughts, think for themselves, or come up with better ideas than those present, society will never go forward. This is the situation in the book. Long ago, people in their society ceased to question the format of the society, and therefore power was concentrated into the hands of a select few- those with knowledge, again portraying that knowledge is in fact power. When people stop thinking and begin to accept whatever the few powerful,

knowledgeable people decide, the people are in trouble, because through time, they will gradually lose all influence on the society.

Significant Quotes

p132- "I haven't had time to think"

This quote is very important in comprehending a key message in this novel. In the book, the people have their minds occupied 24/7 without any time or, for that matter, desire, to think. This is detrimental to the society, because thought is so crucial. The "Denham's Dentrifice" advertisement in the subway is showing how people always have their minds occupied. Often, if people would cease action momentarily to think about it, it would be beneficial to them. So often a little logical thought is a savior, and people in this society never have those thoughts.

p 62- "The books say nothing, nothing you can teach or believe. They're about nonexistent people, figments of the imagination if they're fiction. If they are nonfiction, it's worse, one professor calling another an idiot, one philosopher screaming down another's gullet...you come away lost."

This quote represents the lack of in-depth thought that occurs in the society. The people need simplicity, and they consider the history to be worthless. They need to be told what to think, they need one, simple, "correct" answer to everything. Instead of considering conflicting opinions and forming an opinion of their own, people want only one view, the "correct" view. This is part of the reason books were not liked by these people.

Critique by Michael M. Levy

The critique of Fahrenheit 451 written by Michael M. Levy, first describes Ray Bradbury's love for figurative language such as similes

and metaphors. He explains he is "One of the most sophisticated users of language in the sci-fi genre." Many figurative words and phrases are used throughout the book. For example, "A book lit, almost obediently, like a white pigeon in his hands, wings fluttering. In the dim, wavering light, a page hung open and it was like a snowy feather, the words delicately painted thereon." These two sentences written by Bradbury, are an example of his feelings toward figurative language. Also throughout the book, you will find many uses of symbolism. One that stood out to me, was in the very first paragraph. "It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history." I love how he used the "great python" to describe the hose that was spitting out the kerosene. Many other examples of symbolism can also be found throughout the book.

The critique also compares Bradbury's predictions for future life, to how it was during the 1950's, and how other people thought that the future would come out to be. Clarisse asks Montag, "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires out instead of going to start them?" Montag explains that houses are fireproof, therefore having no need for firemen who put out fires.

The critic also writes, "Fahrenheit 451 is set solidly within the tradition of dystopian literature. Such literature portrays an imaginary world where misguided attempts to create a utopia, or a socially and politically perfect place, results in large scale human misery." I couldn't agree with

Levy more myself. Montag and the government were so obsessed with trying to create this perfect world where everyone is equal, and no one gets offended for being a part of a minority, that the society results in a dystopia. In other words, it is worse than it would have been if nothing was done to try and create this utopia, or perfect world. And once Montag realizes this, he transforms from a server, to an opponent. He suddenly realizes that creating a utopia is indeed impossible, and the society that he lives in is far from it. He also recognizes people's thirst for knowledge and books. People want to be able to understand life, and without the books, they cannot do that. Part of this is described when Montag is riding on the subway, reading the Bible. He is trying to memorize as much from the Bible as he can, in a condensed amount of time. But because he cannot stop to think, and try to understand this, the text that he is reading does not go through his head. He is reading the words, but not the meaning of it. This is what will happen if books are banned. People will know how to read the words, but not the deeper meaning of the book. I can relate to this because I am a high school student. It is very similar to a situation where you forgot about a test, and you are trying to cram three weeks worth of notes into your head within five or ten minutes.

"Once as a child he had sat upon a yellow dune by the sea in the middle of the blue and hot summer day, trying to fill a sieve with sand, because some cruel cousin had said, 'Fill this sieve with sand, and you will get a dime!' And the faster he poured, the faster it sifted through with a hot whispering. His hands were tired, the sand was boiling, the sieve was empty. Seated there in the midst of July, without a sound, he felt the tears move down his cheek."

I think this childhood memory has great symbolism for his life today. Trying to pour the sand into the sieve represents him trying to pour all of this knowledge into his head, but it keeps falling out. And this reward of a dime that he will get from his cousin, represents the reward for reading and remembering, knowledge.

Though all of these themes that are demonstrated by Bradbury, he does illustrate a main theme. This is the importance of independent thought and intellectual freedom. "He sees reading as a key method of cultivating intellectual curiosity. Books confront readers with a variety of conflicting opinions and ideas, forcing them to think for themselves."

Fahrenheit 451 and McCarthy/the McCarthy era

The novel, Fahrenheit 451 and the McCarthy era are related in multiple ways. In an anti-communist movement, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, some controversial books were rejected and taken off the shelves of libraries, and some books were even burned, just as in the novel. In Oklahoma, a committee of women appointed by the school board burned books that were classified as dealing improperly with socialism or sex. Also, a librarian in Oklahoma was fired for subscribing to certain magazines. As a result, libraries began removing controversial literature from the shelves, which, in reality, is censorship. The similarities between this and the novel are striking. These events happened in the late 40's and early 50's, and the book was written in '53. This points towards the events having an impact on the novel, and in fact the scenario that occurred in real life is similar to the one which occurred in Bradbury's book. I believe that Bradbury's book is a satire of the society that he lived in. The society in the novel is only an exaggerated version of what the real society could become.

