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Fahrenheit 451

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Teaching Ray Bradbury's

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by

Elizabeth Osborne

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General Introduction to the Work

About the Author

RAY BRADBURY WAS BORN IN Waukegan, Illinois, in 1920. As a child, he was fond of libraries and spent much time reading in them. Bradbury's family moved to Los Angeles when Bradbury was thirteen. After he graduated from high school, he decided not to go to college. He worked odd jobs and spent nights in the local library, where he educated himself. In the 1940s, Bradbury submitted short stories to science fiction magazines. He also joined a group of prominent science- fiction writers in Los Angeles. In 1947, he published his first collection of short stories.

The Martian Chronicles, Bradbury's first long work, was published in 1950. It is actually a collection of short stories held together by a framing device. Its subject is the settlement of Mars by earthlings. It considers some of the problems of American society, such as emotional alienation, racism, and destruction of the environment.

In 1951, Bradbury published a collection of short stories called *The Illustrated Man*. This collection also has a framing device: the tattoos on a man the narrator meets each lead into different stories.

Bradbury has said that most of his stories are not science fiction. He defines science fiction as something that could plausibly happen according to the laws that govern life on Earth, and notes that many of the things in his books could not happen. Nonetheless, his books are often classified as science fiction because they deal with a topic specific to this genre: the dangers that technology poses for human society and the human soul. Many of the stories are set in the future, at a time when the mistakes of the present have come to fruition and people are living in a *dystopia* (the opposite of a *utopia*, or perfect place; a society in which nothing functions). Alienation, especially of individuals from their society and family members from one another, is common. For instance, in the short story "The Veldt," which appears in *The Illustrated Man*, parents trying to make their children happy end up losing control of the children, who take over the house. Another important recurring element is people's loss of power over the technology that is supposed to make them happy.

Many of Bradbury's stories have been turned into films. Legendary French director Francois Truffaut, for instance, made a movie out of *Fahrenheit 451*. Bradbury also hosted a television program called *The Ray Bradbury Theater*, which showed adaptations of stories he had written.

• Reject the application of male standards to the female personality. Feminists believe that the female personality is a separate entity from the male personality, and if judged by the same measures, is judged incorrectly. The female personality must be judged independently from the male personality and vice versa.

• Examine, and possibly celebrate, the creative, life-giving role of femininity. Although women have traditionally been portrayed as dependent on men for everything, the fact is that men are dependent on women for the most basic necessity in the world—birthing children. A male's relationship to his mother has always been portrayed as a very strong bond (whether in the Freudian theory of the Oedipal complex or modern phrases such as "Mama's boy").

• Explore the concept that men and women are both incomplete without each other (women cannot conceive without men, etc.) not of feminine "incompleteness" alone (Adam's rib, Freudian theories on sexuality, etc.). ■

The 1950s were a time of prosperity for a large segment of the American population. World War II was over; the soldiers who had returned started families. Industry grew and jobs, at least for men, were plentiful. Women, many of whom had been employed in support of the war effort in the 1940s, went back to being housewives in the 1950s—many rather unwillingly, while others embraced their return to "femininity." They soon found that some of their conventional tasks had changed, however. Read about some of the important changes to women's lives in the 1950s:

Cooking: After World War II, a number of things happened that changed how meals were prepared in the "typical American home."

The retooling of factories allowed for the mass production of refrigerators, stoves, and other cooking appliances that, before the War, had been expensive luxury items but were now affordable and "necessities."

Food rationing ended, and a variety of new foods flooded the markets.

Soldiers, who had learned to cook—at least for survival—during the War, returned home with a new interest in what food was prepared and how. They often wanted to "share" the kitchen with their wives.

Television was becoming widely available, changing America's family-time habits, including how, when, and where the "family dinner" would be eaten.

Along with the increase in television sets and television programming came an increase in television commercials plugging foods, appliances, and new, convenient food products like the frozen "TV dinner."

Whereas the pre-World-War-II housewife spent a major part of her afternoon shopping for and preparing her family's evening meal, the onslaught of new appliances and convenience foods (including packaged mixes and frozen foods) greatly reduced the amount of time a woman needed to devote to putting a home-cooked meal on her table.

The new, easy-to-cook foods, however, often took away the pride a woman felt in preparing meals.

There was an explosion of convenience food recipes. It was fashionable to open a few cans, boil some frozen vegetables, and pour oil and vinegar and pre-packaged spices over torn lettuce leaves, and call it dinner. Plus, the hours saved in meal preparation allowed the new suburban housewife to spend her time in other pursuits.

Cleaning: Just as the food industry's prepackaged products changed women's roles in the kitchen, new cleaning products and appliance changed what they did around the house. Vacuum cleaners, once a luxury item, were now available to the middle classes, as were electric washing machines. The chemical industry, which was also retooling itself for a post-War marketplace, introduced a host of new cleaning products, all designed to make the harried housewife's work easier and less time-consuming.

Mythological/Archetypal Analysis of *Fahrenheit 451*

Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Approach

MYTHOLOGICAL, ARCHETYPAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM are all closely related. This is because Freud formulated many theories around the idea of the social archetype, and his pupil, Carl Jung, expanded and refined Freud's theories into a more cross-cultural philosophy.

Critics who examine texts from a mythological/archetypal standpoint are looking for symbols. Jung said that an archetype is "a figure...that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested." He believed that human beings were born with an innate knowledge of certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lies in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology have counterparts in Chinese and Celtic mythology, long before the Greek and Roman Empires spread to Asia and northern Europe. Most of the myths and symbols represent ideas that human beings could not otherwise explain (the origins of life, what happens after death, etc.). Every culture has a creation story, a-life-after-death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories—when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different.

When looking for archetypes or myths, critics take note of general themes, characters, and situations that recur in literature and myth. In modern times, traditional literary and mythological archetypes are successfully translated to film. For example, Jane Austen's *Emma* was adapted into the popular Hollywood film *Clueless*. By drawing on those feelings, thoughts, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, modern

Activity One

Identifying Archetypal Characters in *Fahrenheit 451*

1. Copy and distribute the handout: *Fahrenheit 451* Archetypal Activity One: Identifying Archetypal Characters.

2. Divide the class into three groups, or a number of groups divisible by three.

3. Assign each group (or allow each to choose) one of the archetypes on the worksheet and answer the questions relating to that archetype.

4. Reconvene the class and have each group present its findings.

5. As a class, answer the following questions:

   • Think of some other characters from literature, film, and television who resemble the main characters in *Fahrenheit 451*.

   • Which character in *Fahrenheit 451* best conforms to the archetype of the spirit/intellect, and why?

   • Which character in *Fahrenheit 451* best conforms to the description of the sage, and why?

Fahrenheit 451: **Archetypal Activity Three**

Uses of Fire in *Fahrenheit 451*

Instance of Fire	Creative	Destructive	Ambiguous	Similar Examples
The fire that consumes the woman's house				
The fires referred to by the same woman ("We shall this day kight such a candle…"), especially as it is passed from her to Montag				
The fire that consumes Montag's house				
The fire that kills Beatty				
The campfire around which the men are gathered at the end of the book				

Essential Questions for A Psychoanalytic Reading

1. What are the traits of the main character?

2. How does the author reveal those traits?

3. What do you learn about the character through the narrator?

4. What do you learn about the character from the way other characters relate to him or her?

5. What do you infer about the character from his or her thoughts, actions, and speech?

6. What discrepancies exist between the author's portrayal of the character and how other characters react to him or her?

7. What discrepancies exist between the author's portrayal of the character and the reader's inferences?

8. Is the main character a dynamic character (does he or she change throughout the course of the story)? If so, how and why?

9. How does the character view him or herself ?

10. What discrepancies exist between a character's view of him or herself and other characters' reactions, the author's portrayal, and/or reader inference?

11. How do the characters view one another?

12. Is there any discrepancy between a character's personal opinion of himself or herself and how others think about him or her?

13. What types of relationships exist in the work?

14. What types of images are used in conjunction with the character? What do they symbolize?

15. What symbols are used in the course of the story? What do they symbolize?

16. Do any characters have dreams or inner monologues? What is revealed about a character through dreams that would not otherwise be revealed?