RAY BRADBURY (1920-2012)

LIFE

Love for writing

Born in Waukegan, Illinois: strongly attached to it – loved horror, sci-fi & magic – decided to write at 12 and never stopped! – moved to Los Angeles – published his own sci-fi "fanzine".

First publications

Publication of first short stories on major magazines – marriage: a very long and happy one (56 years!) with four daughters – fantasy and horror in his works and in his home office.

Huge success & death

Fame and recognition with *Fahrenheit 451* – a return to the Midwest for his new novels – poetry and drama from the 1970s, mystery & horror from the 1980s – died after long illness.

FAHRENHEIT 451

Background

Written not long after the Nazis burned books &, eventually, human beings – America living under a cloud of fear *(McCarthyism),* which brought political repression, blacklists, censorship.

Title & genre

Title: refers to the temperature at which books burn. – **Genre***: a* sci fi, dystopian novel.

Significance

It speaks against censorship and blind conformity defending literature and critical thinking as necessary both to individuals and to civilization.

KEY POINTS

A prolific writer

Wrote **over 400 short stories** and **nearly fifty books** across a **variety of genres** – also penned numerous **poems, essays, plays, operas, teleplays, and screenplays**.

Fantasy in his life

Lived in a surreal world: home basement office filled with items like *cartoons, figurines, stuffed animals, masks, his own drawings of devil faces, monsters, pumpkins* as well as TOYS!

Concern for humanity

Concerned about **man's loss of critical thinking** due to *the threat of mass media to reading, the bombardment of digital sensations, the loss of our memory* – **What has actually happened?**

1.reading habits in the world (5 min a day in Italy); 2.emoji & language; 3.fake news & memory.

FAHRENHEIT 451 (1953)

STRUCTURE

Setting

An unspecified city in a distant future under a technocratic, totalitarian and oppressive social organization in which books are banned & firemen burn down houses where they are found.

Content

Guy Montag, a fireman, takes great joy in his work but after meeting a free-spirited teenager he starts having doubts – he turns into a book-reading rebel, ready to risk his life for books.

Themes

Censorship *(which leads to manipulation & loss of freedom)* – technological innovation *(which is anesthetizing & destructive)* – ignorance vs knowledge *("treacherous" books)* – life vs death.

CHARACTERS

Guy Montag / Mildred

Guy Montag: *clumsy, confused, frustrated – acts rashly but seeks answers to his discontent.*
Mildred Montag: *shallow, mediocre, acquiescent – completely immersed in an electronic world.*

Clarisse / Prof. Faber

Clarisse: *seventeen & crazy, has a curious mind about the world – spurs Montag into action.*
Professor Faber: *cowardly and heroic by turns – acts as the brain directing Montag's body.*

Beatty / the mech. hound

Captain Beatty: *dangerously perceptive manipulator – has a vast knowledge of literature.*
The Mechanical Hound: *an omnipresent menace – stands for government control.*

FEATURES

Style & symbols

Style: lyrical and descriptive with frequent use of similes, metaphors, and personification.
Symbols: fire *(destruction/life)*, blood *(instincts)*, electric-eyed snake *(~~misery~~)*, phoenix *(rebirth)*.

Tone

Intense & gloomy given by *an apocalyptic atmosphere* (through constant threat of nuclear war), *totalitarian policies* (to punish lawbreakers), *extreme violence* (in the real world & on TV).

A dystopian novel?

Yes: *a technocratic social order using censorship, oppression, a distracting pursuit of images.*
No: there is *no focus on a ruling elite, no portrait of a higher society, no despair.*