

The Use of Literary Quotations and Allusions

in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451

PART ONE:

p. 5/p. 8: Guy Montag (page references are to the Cornelsen edition by Dieter Vater; cf. bibliography below): the protagonist's Christian name may refer to Guy Fawkes and his famous gun powder plot in order to kill King James I in 1605 ("Remember, remember the fifth of November"), whereas his family name seems to suggest a new beginning.

Clarisse McClellan: her Christian name is based on the Latin adjective *clarus*, which means "clearly".

p. 8: Millay, Edna St. Vincent: American writer (1892-1950);

Whitman, Walt : perhaps the most important American poet of the late 19th century (1819-1892); above all, he was influenced by the transcendentalists, particularly by Ralph Waldo Emerson. He wanted to show how man might achieve for himself the greatest possible freedom within the limits of natural law.

Faulkner, William: famous novelist and short story writer of the American South (1897-1962) and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950.

The pattern to destroy the works of these writers directly reflects the McCarthy era, in which so-called Un-American books were burned in order to 'protect' the U.S.A. against Communism. For Bradbury, there exist also some parallels to Hitler's torching books in 1934 and to the Salem witch hunts in 1680, during which his "ten-times-great grandmother Mary Bradbury was tried but escaped the burning". [\(5\)](#)

p. 21: The Parlor: It becomes obvious very quickly that Mildred watches three-dimensional TV programs all day long; cf. also p. 45, p. 49, p. 70, pp. 74-75, p. 85, p. 91, pp. 98-99, etc. the references to her 'family' and the 'White Clown', which suggest that the members of her family have become substitute figures and that she suffers from a considerable loss of reality. It should be kept in mind that Bradbury criticized such an abuse of the new medium when it was just becoming a nation-wide institution in the early 1950s.

p. 27: the Phoenix: this is the symbol which the Captain of the firemen wears on his hat, while the firemen themselves have got a phoenix-disc on their chests (cf. p. 7 in the text). There is another allusion to it at the end of the novel (cf. comment on p. 156), where it points to possible resurrection or rebirth.

p. 35: First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin: Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), statesman and philosopher, is said to be one of the fathers of the American Dream and famous for his Autobiography. At the same time he is the founder of America's first fire brigade, which came into being in Boston in 1736.

p. 36 and p. 40: "Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

This quotation refers to Hugh Latimer, the leading English reformer of the sixteenth century and

Nicholas Ridley, Anglican bishop: they refused to recognize Roman Catholic doctrine and therefore were burnt alive for heresy in 1555. In a similar way the old woman refuses to sacrifice her views; therefore her death puts Montag's development into motion: she becomes a candle which will last him the rest of his life (cf. p. 51).

p. 37: Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine: the statement comes from the chapter 1 of Dreamthorp, a collection of essays by Alexander Smith, a Glasgow lacemaker.

p. 39: Tower of Babel: according to this myth described in the Bible (cf. Genesis, 11:6-8) God created diversity of speech among men.

p. 50: Dante, Alighieri : Italian poet (1265-1321), who wrote the *Divina Commedia*, one of the most famous works of European literature;

Marcus Aurelius : Roman emperor (121-180 B.C.), who also wrote philosophical works.

p. 55: there's your intellectual pattern for the past five centuries or more: this statement seems to show that the events described in the novel must be supposed to take place in the very remote future. However, their relationship with our time cannot be overlooked. (also p. 71)

p. 58: the Constitution (1787): the original seven articles are concerned with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government; the statement made by Beatty may be an allusion to the Declaration of Independence which preceded it. Cf. comment on p. 74.

p. 59: People want to be happy ... Don't we give them fun? In the American Declaration of Independence the Pursuit of Happiness is defined as an unalienable human right (cf. comment on p. 74). Beatty's definition of this concept is very limited, however: it is reduced to having fun, which means to give up thinking altogether.

Little Black Sambo/Uncle Tom's Cabin: Harriet Beecher-Stowe (1811-1896) published a novel with the title Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), in which she severely criticized slavery and which has become known in many countries including Germany. Sambo is a character in Uncle Tom's Cabin; by extension this has become a pejorative term which implies discrimination of the Blacks. Uncle Tom has become the stereotype of the black slave. Little Black Sambo also is the title of an illustrated children's book which was first published in 1898 by Hellen Bannerman and is still available today.

p. 61: We have our fingers in the dike: this is an allusion to the legend about a Dutch boy, who performed a selfless public service in holding back the sea by keeping his finger in a hole.

p. 67: It is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end: This quotation, which is taken from Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), Gullivers Travels (a famous satire), First Book, Chapter IV, paragraph 5 illustrates the struggle between being reasonable and being saddled to tradition up to the point of ridiculous suicide. In the instance quoted above, Jonathan Swift uses exaggeration, of course, as a satirical tool in order to point out the absurd degree which is used in order to enforce conformity.

PART TWO:

p. 69: The Sieve and the Sand: the title of this part is explained on pp. 75-76; it refers to an episode which is rooted in the protagonist's childhood.

We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed ...: James Boswell, Life of Dr. Johnson, 1791; footnote September 1777. Dr. Johnson is one of Great Britain's most important

eighteenth-century critics and lexicographers (cf. his Dictionary of the English Language), and the Scottish lawyer James Boswell is both his most famous biographer and personal friend.

p. 70: That favorite subject, Myself: James Boswell, "Letter to Sir William Temple", July 26th, 1763. Sir William Temple was a famous British statesman. Significantly enough, Guy Montag and his wife Mildred show quite different reactions to this quotation, which testify to the alienation that exists between them.

p. 71: We've started and won two atomic wars since 1960: This statement is interesting in two respects. (1) Since the book was published in 1953 it clearly shows that the events described in it are probably intended to take place in the near future; cf. however, also the comment on p. 55. (2) Bradbury was obviously haunted by the idea of an atomic war: when he wrote his novel it was a few years ago only that the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the course of the novel it becomes quite clear that war is a recurrent motif: it is a threat which is more or less permanently present, and in the end it really takes place. However, for Bradbury, this seems to contain the possibility of rebirth or resurrection (the reader should think of the associations connected with the phoenix: cf. the comment on p. 156).

p. 72: His name was Faber: because of the association with *homo faber* this may be understood to be a speaking name connected with creativity. His invention of the electronic audio-capsule (which may be used as a kind of ear-phone) may be quoted as an example. The name may also allude to the historical figure of Peter Faber (1506-45), who was the founder of two Jesuit colleges.

p. 73: Plato (427-347 B.C.): Greek philosopher; cf. comment on p.144;

p. 74: Jefferson, Thomas (1743-1826): third American president (1801-1809); as a member of the Continental Congress he was almost wholly responsible for the spirit and the phrasing of the Declaration of Independence (1776). There it is claimed that all people are born equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.

Thoreau, Henry David (1817-1862): American writer who called himself 'a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher'.

p. 76: Consider the lilies of the field ...: see the Bible, for example St. Luke, 12:27 or the Sermon of the Mount as it has been recorded by St. Matthew, 6:28 (the same quotation is found in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale). Significantly enough, in Montag's perception, the text of the Bible is superseded by a huge advertisement for toothpaste, thus testifying to the large influence of advertising in the society depicted by Bradbury: at this stage material needs play a greater role than man's natural thirst for knowledge.

p. 81: Hercules: famous Greek mythological hero who had a lot of physical strength;

Antaeus: giant in Greek mythology who was defeated by Hercules.

p. 83: Caesar, Gaius Julius (100-44 B.C.): Roman emperor;

"Remember Caesar, thou art mortal": Although William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is quoted elsewhere in Fahrenheit 451 (cf. p. 113), this quotation is not taken from that tragedy. It is reminiscent of the Latin slogan, *Memento mori*. It is meant to remind even Roman emperors of the brevity and end of their lives.

p. 84: Pirandello, Luigi (1867-1936): one of the most influential Italian 20th century writers of plays and narratives; in 1934 he got the Nobel Prize for Literature;

Shaw, George Bernard (1856-1950): famous Irish playwright who was a severe critic of the norms and values of society;

p. 85: John Milton (1608-1674): most famous English writer next to Shakespeare.
Sophocles (ca. 496-406 B.C.): well-known Greek writer of tragedies.

p. 86: Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.): well-known Greek tragedian;

O'Neill, Eugene (1888-1953): American dramatist; works are often based on Greek myths.

p. 90: The Book of Job (=in German "Hiob"): Montag is taught to memorize this book in his sleep, which illustrates Job's submission to faith: he has become the prototype of human suffering who, in spite of all, remains God's humble servant. Probably this points to a similar attitude taken by Montag.

... **their Cheshire cat smiles** : the reference is to a grinning character from Lewis Carroll's famous children's book Alice in Wonderland .

p. 92: In again out again Finnegan : this is a common nonsense rhyme indicating the lady's lack of concern about the war and her husband's part in it. The quotation restates "Off again, on again, gone again, Finnegan", which is a telegram about a rail crash, sent from Finnegan to his employer.

p. 94: Winston Noble and Hubert Hoag: The Christian names possibly allude to Winston Churchill and to Hubert Humphrey; Winston Churchill was British Prime Minister during the Second World War (1940-1945), whereas Senator Hubert Humphrey was defeated by Richard Nixon in 1968 in his struggle for becoming American President. However, more important than this is that, in the society depicted by Bradbury, political decisions, such as voting, are completely dependent on outer appearances. Politics has degenerated into a show business. The President's family name seems to have an ironic tinge.

p. 97: Dover Beach: this is a poem by Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), a well-known British critic and poet. The subject of the poem is love, which is conceived as a last way out of conformist behavior [\(8\)](#).

p. 101: All isn't well with the world.: this may be an allusion to the last line of the poem "Pippa Passes" by Robert Browning (1812-89), which runs: "All's right with the world." [\(9\)](#)

p. 102: Who are a little wise, the best fools be: John Donne, "The Triple Fool", concluding line. John Donne (1571 or 1572-1631) is the greatest of the writers of so-called 'metaphysical' poetry, in which passion is intertwined with reasoning. Obviously Beatty wants to confuse Montag.

p. 103: Ruth: book of the Old Testament;

We're all sheep who have strayed at times: the origin of this idea may be found in the Old Testament; cf. Isaiah, 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray".

Truth is truth ...: cf. William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, v,i,l.45.

They are never alone ...: this is a verse taken from Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia which is a paraphrase of Beaumont and Fletcher's Love's Cure, Act III, Scene iii.

Sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge: Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), The Defense of Poetry (published in 1585). A second edition which was entitled An Apology for Poetry appeared in the same year. The work is a critical discussion of the state of English poetry in the author's time and a methodical examination of poetry in general, such as had not before appeared in England.

In the latter edition I found the following statement: "Verse being in itself sweet and orderly ...the

only handle of knowledge." This means that either Bradbury's quotation is incorrect or that Sidney rewrote his thesis completely.

**Words are like leaves and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found :**

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), Essay on Criticism, ll. 309-310. The work is a didactic poem in heroic couplets, published in 1711, when the writer was only 21 years old. In later years this was followed by his Essay on Man (1732), a philosophical poem, which is now generally regarded as his masterpiece.

**A little learning is a dangerous thing
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:**

Alexander Pope, Essay on Criticism, ll. 215-218.

Pierian: Piera is a place in Greece which was thought to be the seat of the Muses, whose task it was to inspire the poets.

p. 104: Knowledge is more than equivalent to force:

Dr. Samuel Johnson, Rasselas, chapter XIII; Rasselas is a didactic romance which was published in 1759. As to Dr. Johnson, cf. comment on p.69. The quotation is reminiscent of Bacon's "Knowledge is power".

He is no wise man that will quit a certainty for an uncertainty:

Dr. Samuel Johnson, The Idler (1758-1760), no. 57.

Truth will come to light, murder will not be hid long:

William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, II, 2, 73.

Oh God, he speaks only of his horse:

William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, I, 2, 36. Bradbury's quotation is not quite correct; the original version runs: He doth nothing but talk of his horse.

The Devil can cite Scripture for his Purpose:

William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, I, 3, 93.

**This age thinks better of a gilded fool,
than of a threadbare saint in wisdom's school:**

Thomas Dekker, Old Fortunatus. Thomas Dekker (1570?-1632) was a playwright; the quotation is taken from one of his comedies; it was published in 1600.

The dignity of truth is lost with much protesting:

Ben Jonson, Catiline: His Conspiracy, III, 2. Ben Jonson (1572-1637), originally an actor, became famous as a writer of comedies. The quotation comes from a tragedy modeled on Seneca's work and was published in 1611.

Carcasses bleed at the sight of the murderer:

Robert Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy, part I, section I, member 2, subsection 5. Robert Burton (1577-1640) was vicar of St. Thomas's, Oxford. Today he is mostly remembered because of his above quoted treatise, which in purpose is a medical work, but its subject is expanded until it covers the whole life of man. It is marked by a tolerant spirit in religion.

What, do I give you trench mouth? I have been unable to locate this as a quotation in English literature. The noun refers to an infectious disease of the mouth and the throat caused by a bacterium. It used to be frequent with soldiers who had to fight in trenches ("Gräben").

Knowledge is power:

Francis Bacon, Meditationes Sacrae (1597), "De Haeresibus"/The New Organon, i,3 (1620); Francis Bacon (1561-1626), a lawyer by profession, is the author of a number of works philosophical, legal and literary, many of which were originally written in Latin. In The New Organon it was Bacon's ambition to develop a new system of philosophy based on a true interpretation of Nature.

A dwarf on a giant's shoulders sees the furthest of the two:

This insight may be found in George Herbert (1593-1633), Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy (cf. commentary above). You also find the following statement in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's comprehensive essay The Friend, first section, essay 8: "A dwarf sees farther than the giant, when he has the giant's shoulder to mount on." Coleridge (1772-1834) is one of the most famous English Romantic poets. The earliest known source of this idea probably is the Roman writer Lucan (39-65 A.D.)

The folly of mistaking a metaphor for a proof ... is inborn in us: [Bradbury's quotation is not quite correct.] Paul Valéry, Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci (1895). This French poet lived from 1871-1945.

A kind of excellent dumb discourse: cf. William Shakespeare, The Tempest, III, iii,38.

The ample use of quotation on pp. 103-104 shows Bradbury's affirmation of the timelessness of great ideas (10). Considering the fact that the reading of books is forbidden it is somewhat curious that Beatty has so many quotations from famous books of English literature at his disposal. The reader never learns whether or why Beatty had the privilege of reading what he wanted. There is only one hint, where Beatty claims he "had to read a few [books]" in his time (cf. p. 62 of the text), by which the scope of his knowledge of literature cannot be satisfactorily accounted for. Astonishingly enough, by using so many literary quotations, he tries to prove the uselessness of literature, but the effect is one to the contrary.

p. 105: All's well that is well in the end: The allusion is to William Shakespeare's comedy All's Well that Ends Well.

PART THREE:

p. 108: Burning bright: The title of this part may refer to the first line of the poem "The Tiger" by William Blake (1757-1827).

Old Montag wanted to fly near the Sun and ... he's burned his wings: This is an allusion to the Greek myth of Daedalus and his son Icarus, who in their attempt to fly on self-made wings approached the sun too closely and therefore lost their lives.

p. 112: You think you can walk on water: This is an ability which, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is reported to possess; cf. St. Matthew, 14:25, St. Mark, 6:48 and St. John, 6:19.

p. 113: There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats: William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, IV, 3, 66-69.

p. 114: Beatty flopped over ... and lay silent: Ironically enough, Beatty becomes a victim of his own principle to burn a problem rather than to face it. This idea is also expressed on p.116 and has been foreshadowed on p. 66, where the text says it were the best if the firemen themselves were burned.

p. 126: Harvard degrees: people who got a degree from Harvard, the oldest and one of the most renowned U.S. universities, situated chiefly in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

p. 132: Keystone Comedy: from 1914 to 1920, director Mack Sennett and Keystone Studios produced a series of madcap silent film comedies featuring the Keystone Cops.

p. 133: he was at the river: from Greek mythology onwards it has become a familiar literary device that the river has a symbolic function. First of all, the Mechanical Hound is unable to pursue Montag any longer, since he loses his trail in the water. Secondly the river is the dividing line between the city corrupted and degenerated and the so-called book people who live in accordance with Nature. For them books, with their links to the past, provide a counterforce to the society of mass consumption.

p. 139: I [the fire] was not burning, it was *warming*: For Montag this is quite a new experience, since for him fire has always been a destructive force.

p. 140: My name's Granger: again Bradbury uses a speaking name, since "grange" means farm and therefore has to be linked up with Nature. It has been pointed out that for Bradbury the American Dream seems to have become an "Agrarian Dream" [\(11\)](#).

p. 143: Thomas Hardy (1840-1928): 19th century English novelist; his best known work is Tess of the d'Urberville;

U. C. L. A.: University of California, Los Angeles;

Ortega y Gasset, José (1883-1955): famous Spanish philosopher and sociologist;

Columbia University: one of the oldest and most famous American universities, situated in the province of New York.

p. 144: Ecclesiastes: book of the Old Testament, written by the preachers;

Revelation: last book of the New Testament, written by St. John;

Plato's Republic: first link in the long tradition of utopian works; it is written in the form of a political dialogue. However, it should be remembered that the Greek philosopher's attitude towards poets was a hostile one.

p. 145: Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels: cf. comment on p. 67;

Charles Darwin (1809-1882): English scientist; author of the theory of natural selection and the survival of the fittest;

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1788-1860): German philosopher;

Einstein, Albert (1897-1955): German-born physicist of American nationality; author of the theory of relativity of time and place; perhaps the most important scientist of the 20th century;

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965): German philosopher, musician, doctor and theologian, who went to Africa in order to help the poor people by building a hospital and practicing charity. He got the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1952.

Aristophanes (about 445-385 B.C.): Greek writer of comedies;

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948): Hindu nationalist leader, who fought successfully for the independence of India; by using so-called passive or non-violent resistance he became a model for Dr. Martin Luther King and the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s;

Gautama Buddha: (about 560-480 B.C.), Indian founder of Buddhism, which is still one of the most influential world religions;

Confucius (about 551-479 B.C.): Chinese philosopher who is said to be the most revered person

in Chinese history;

Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866): English novelist and poet;

Thomas Jefferson: cf. comment on p.74;

Mr. Lincoln: the reference is to Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th President of the United States, who was shot immediately after the end of the Civil War; cf. comment on p. 54.

Byron, George Gordon Noel Lord: famous English poet (1788-1824) who belongs to the Romantic movement;

Tom Paine (Payne): American political philosopher and author, who lived from 1737-1809;

Machiavelli, Niccolò: Italian historian (1469-1527); author of the notorious thesis that, in politics, the means are justified by their ends.

p. 146: Thoreau's Walden or Life in the Woods (1854): his most famous book; in it he described his life at Walden pond, where he lived by himself for more than two years in close contact with Nature in order to get to the very core of the universe; cf. also comment on p.74.

Bertrand Russell: British social philosopher; cf. comment on p. 71.

This comprehensive international list of writers, scholars, scientists, philosophers who are mentioned on the last pages shows quite impressively what an important role books may play for men's knowledge and education.

p. 147: Magna Charta: basic rights granted by King John in 1215; this event has often been regarded as the beginning of democracy in Great Britain.

p. 151: "... disintegrate, leave no stone on another": allusion either to St. Luke, 21:6 or St. Mark, 13:2, where Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple.

p. 153: Ecclesiastes/Revelation: cf. comments on p. 144.

p. 156: Phoenix: famous myth which alludes to the rebirth of mankind after their destruction. The significance of this myth seems to be intensified by the following quotation from the Bible, which also suggests a cyclical view of man's history.

p. 157: To everything there is a season. Yes. A time to break down, and a time to build up. A time to keep silence and a time to speak: Ecclesiastes, 3:1,3 and 7.

p. 157f: And on either side of the river was there a tree of life ... And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations: this quotation comes from Revelation, 22:2. Thus the novel ends with a tinge of long-term hopefulness.