

“huge great hammers that did never rest,” hammers which “like bells in greatness orderly succeed.” The combination of this crew working all night and a pack of howling dogs permits the knight no sleep, but the purpose of the episode is not to represent the blacksmith’s trade but to convey the anxiety of Sir Scudamour at this point in the narrative. What is most “real” for Spenser throughout is not the material, sensible world but the life of the human spirit.

—Robert P. Ellis

Fahrenheit 451

Author: Ray Bradbury (1920–)

First published: 1953 (expanded version of “The Fireman,” *Galaxy Science Fiction*, 1951)

Type of work: Novel

Type of plot: Science fiction

Time of plot: The future

This dystopian novel about the future creates a primary dichotomy between city and country. A complex juxtaposition of natural and mechanical images dominates the novel and reflects its central tensions between the country and the city, or culture and technology.

City. Unnamed urban center in which the protagonist, Guy Montag, lives and works. In this future world, culture is reduced to the lowest common denominator. Montag’s wife, for example, is completely dependent on her wall-sized television screens. Books are banned because they contain contradictory ideas and can confront the comfortable prejudices and ignorance that abounds. Montag himself works as a “fireman”; his job is to burn books as they are discovered hidden in people’s homes. In this world of state-sponsored book-burning, books are not simply carriers of potentially subversive messages—their very physical existence evokes a rich cultural tradition antithetical to the leveling tendencies of the mass media. When Montag discovers the joy of reading, he begins hiding books in his own house. Eventually, his wife reports him to the police, and he is sent to burn out his own house. He flees the city for his life.

Meanwhile, a constant threat of war overhangs the city, and most of its people view with suspicion anyone who lives outside carefully proscribed social boundaries. The book ends with the destruction of the cities by atomic bombs and the hope that civilization, like the mythical Phoenix, will rise again from its ashes. At the end of the story, the classical allusion to the phoenix is explained by Granger, the leader of the book people. The symbol is appropriate to their mission, he says, because like humankind,

“every few hundred years he built a pyre and burnt himself up... But every time he burnt himself up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again.”

Countryside. The world outside the city contrasts sharply with the urban environment. Ray Bradbury is a romantic writer who often yearns for the simpler, rural life he knew as a child. When Montag is forced to run for his life from the city, the source of all the evils he has come to hate and fear, he escapes to the countryside. His journey ends when he comes upon an old railroad track, a symbol of the long-lost American past. There, he joins a new social group, made up of people who share his beliefs. Its outcast members, who have rejected society’s standards, keep literature alive by memorizing books.

River. Wide stream down which Montag floats until he reaches the community of book people. This river operates as a dividing line between past life and new, signifying a kind of baptism: After he began “floating in the river he knew why he must never burn again in his life.”

—Gary Zacharias

The Fair Maid of Perth

Author: Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832)

First published: 1828

Type of work: Novel

Type of plot: Historical

Time of plot: 1396

This novel is Sir Walter Scott’s account of a legendary battle between the champions of two rival clans, a historical event that took place on the North Inch of Perth in 1392, although the reasons for the battle and the identities of the combatants are unclear. The novel absorbs into this event others that actually happened over the following ten years in the same region.

***Perth.** County in the center of Scotland that embraces both highland and lowland regions. It is described by Scott’s notional narrator, Chrystal Croftangry, as the most varied, picturesque, and beautiful of all Scottish counties; in the novel it becomes a microcosm of medieval Scotland. The early chapters of the novel are set within the town of Perth, which is two miles south of the ancient Scottish capital of Scone, and was itself regarded as the capital at the time in which the novel is set.

The most important settings within the town of Perth are Simon Glover’s house in Couvrefew, or Curfew Street, and the Dominican monastery—which had been founded in

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