

The Philosopher Hero in Ray Bradbury's Science Fiction

Camilo Peralta

Ray Bradbury corresponded regularly with a large group of friends and admirers around the world. Russell Kirk (1918-1994), who lived in rural Michigan, was a frequent recipient of his letters, and a man of some prominence in his own right: an historian and author who is often regarded as one of the twentieth century's most eloquent defenders of traditional, or Burkean, conservatism. Kirk also wrote a good deal of Gothic fiction, and he and Bradbury often praised each other's work, both in their letters to each other and in public. One effusive compliment from Bradbury was printed on the cover of the most recent collection of Kirk's stories, 2004's *Ancestral Shadows*. Kirk devoted nearly a whole chapter in *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, a 1969 treatise on morality in contemporary literature, to Bradbury's incomparable gift as a writer of fantasy and science fiction. Bradbury, Kirk writes, was always motivated by far more than financial considerations or the hope of fame:

For like [C. S.] Lewis, like [J. R. R.] Tolkien, like other talented fabulists, Ray Bradbury has drawn the sword against the dreary and corrupting materialism of this century; against society as producer-and-consumer equation, against the hideousness in modern life, against mindless power, against sexual obsession, against sham intellectuality, against the perversion of right reason into the mentality of the television-viewer. His Martians, spectres, and witches are not diverting entertainment only; they become, in their eerie manner, the defenders of truth and beauty.¹

¹ Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations of Abnormity in Literature and Politics* (1969; repr., Peru, IL: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1988), 117.

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THE NEW RAY BRADBURY REVIEW

Kirk regarded the futuristic settings of Bradbury's stories and books as ideal for exploring concepts such as truth and beauty in a context that would be acutely urgent to his readers, yet still relevant fifty or more years later. The enduring popularity of Bradbury's works seems to confirm this view.

It is not truth or beauty I would like to explore in this paper, but another timeless value or idea that was just as important to Kirk, and which is in dire need of attention in the present: heroism. What does Bradbury have to say about heroism, especially in the classic science fiction he wrote during the 1950s, which includes some of his best-known works, such as *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) and *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)? Curiously, the heroes in these stories seem to reflect what I believe to be an overlooked influence on the author: classical philosophy, as represented, in particular, by Plato and the Stoics of ancient Rome. Like Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, many of Bradbury's heroes are fearless critics of society who end up being persecuted for their determination to speak truth to power. At the same time, they share the Stoics' sense of cosmopolitanism: the belief that, "in order to flourish, a human being must be a full member of the human community, i.e., refrain from harming other human beings, and if possible, contribute to the good of the human community by working with others."² Bradbury's heroes therefore have a good reason to carry on with their attempts to reform their fellow citizens' ways of thinking, despite the hardship it entails for them. Before considering the impact of classical philosophy on Bradbury's conception of heroism, I will provide a brief overview of the thought of Plato and the Stoics. I do not mean to imply that he was a devoted follower of either, but there are enough references in his books to suggest that, at the least, he was familiar with, if not strongly influenced by, both.

The Socratic Gadfly and Stoic Cosmopolitanism

Plato was an ancient Greek philosopher who died in the fourth century BC. One of the most important figures in the Western tradition, he wrote a number of dialogues addressing some of the core philosophical issues, such as those related to ontology, epistemology, and the nature of the universe. Many, though not all, of his dialogues feature his teacher, Socrates, as the central character, and though it would be inappropriate to describe the fictional Socrates as a "hero" in any narratological sense (i.e., since Socrates does not do anything in these dialogues except talk), nevertheless, the portrayal of him in certain dialogues does suggest a great deal about what Plato thought of things like courage or heroism. In the *Symposium*, for instance, we learn that Socrates fought on the side of Athens during the Peloponnesian War, and acquitted himself well. A comrade from those days, Alcibiades, reports that Socrates was not troubled by the harsh camp conditions and demonstrated exceptional bravery in repeatedly saving his life.³ In the *Apology*, Socrates himself discusses several incidents from his life that demonstrate his commitment to virtue and justice. He was the only member of an important council that voted against the flagrantly illegal act of prosecuting ten generals as a single group for failing to rescue survivors after the successful Battle of Arginusae in 406 BC. Later, following Athens' loss in the war to Sparta, Socrates defied orders from the ruling Thirty Tyrants to arrest Leon of Salamis. "On that occasion, however, I

² Sandrine Berges, "Loneliness and Belonging: Is Stoic Cosmopolitanism Still Defensible?" *Res Publica* 11, no. 1 (March 2005): 11, <https://www.dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11158-004-1197-1>.

³ Plato, *Symposium*, in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2012), 220a-221c.

THE PHILOSOPHER HERO IN RAY BRADBURY'S SCIENCE FICTION

showed once again not by words but by deeds that I couldn't care less about death. [...] but that all I care about is not doing anything unjust or impious," he explains.⁴

But the greatest display of heroism by Socrates is shown, surely, in the manner of his trial and death, the former of which is recounted in the *Apology*. He had been accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and denying the existence of the gods, among other crimes. In his defense, Socrates makes several speeches that touch upon everything from wisdom to the proper respect owed to government authorities. Declining to either beg for mercy or flatter his accusers with sophisticated arguments, Socrates instead admits to behaving like something of a pest, having spent the majority of his adult life examining "in response to the god, any person, citizen, or foreigner I believe to be wise," and disabusing them of that notion as well as he is able.⁵ In one of his most famous lines, Socrates remarks that "the unexamined life isn't worth living for a human being,"⁶ suggesting that, for Plato, true heroism does not depend, primarily, on courage in battle, but on one's willingness to pursue the truth despite societal pressures that can include the threat of ostracism or even death. This view of heroism is emphasized again in the *Crito*, which depicts Socrates' final moments before his execution. An escape plan has been prepared for him, but he declines to make use of it, insisting that "the most important thing isn't living, but living well,"⁷ that, as a citizen of Athens, he has certain obligations to the state that he could not in good conscience leave unfulfilled.

Stoicism dates to the early third century BC and is characterized by a strong emphasis on virtuous living and the need to accept setbacks or suffering with equanimity. Its central tenets can be difficult to describe, since they were never formally codified, and every practitioner was free to modify or disregard the precepts of other Stoics. One thing about which almost all Stoics agreed was the central importance of virtue. The English "virtue," however, is but an imperfect translation of the Greek *arete* and Latin *virtu*, both of which encompass a range of what we consider individual "virtues," such as justice, temperance, and courage. To live virtuously, for a Stoic, means to cultivate all of these qualities at once. One of the most influential Stoics, the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, argued that virtuous living entails a certain mindfulness of our obligations towards other members of a *cosmo-polis*, or "world-city," representing the whole of humanity. "Injustice is impiety," he writes in his *Meditations*. "For since the universal nature has made rational animals for the sake of one another to help one another according to their deserts, but in no way to injure one another, he who transgresses her will is clearly guilty of impiety toward the highest divinity."⁸ Cosmopolitanism marks a sharp contrast with the Greeks' tendency to regard themselves as inherently superior to other races. The Stoics encouraged their followers to remember, instead, that all humans are rational beings worthy of compassion and respect. Even a slave ought to be treated with dignity.

What is the likelihood that Bradbury would have been familiar with all of this? Despite his lack of formal education, there is much evidence to suggest that he was at least cognizant of the

⁴ Plato, *Apology*, in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2012), 32b-32d.

⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 23b.

⁶ Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

⁷ Plato, *Crito*, in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2012), 48b.

⁸ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. George Long (Mineola, NY: Dover Books, 1997), 67.

THE NEW RAY BRADBURY REVIEW

basic outlines of the thought of Plato and the Stoics. He refers to the former numerous times throughout his novels and short stories, often in a positive manner. In *Dandelion Wine*, his classic paean to small-town living, he equates the pleasures of gardening with the practice of philosophy. “Nobody guesses, nobody accuses, nobody knows, but there you are, Plato in the peonies, Socrates force-growing his own hemlock. A man toting a sack of blood manure across his lawn is kin to Atlas letting the world spin easy on his shoulder.”⁹ Plato is mentioned on at least two separate occasions in *Fahrenheit 451*. First, while talking to Faber on the phone, Montag wonders how many copies of the works by the great canonical authors have survived. Plato is cited directly after the Bible and Shakespeare, suggesting the high regard with which Bradbury may have held him.¹⁰ Later, after meeting up with a group of outcasts from the city, Montag discovers their method of preserving these works: they simply memorize them. “Would you like, some day, Montag, to read Plato’s *Republic*?” one asks him. “I am Plato’s *Republic*. Like to read Marcus Aurelius? Mr. Simmons is Marcus.”¹¹ Again, it is not my contention that either Plato or Marcus Aurelius influenced Bradbury in a profound manner, any more than did Gandhi, Thomas Jefferson, or others mentioned in this passage. But I do believe their influence can be detected in some of his protagonists from the 1950s, who embody principles strikingly similar to those of Plato’s Socratic gadfly or the Stoics’ cosmopolitanism. Of course, Bradbury was famously prolific, and wrote much science fiction in this decade that presents various conceptions of heroism. Still, it is hard to overlook how many of his best-known works from this era, including *Fahrenheit 451* and stories from *The Martian Chronicles* and *The Illustrated Man*, feature what I would describe as a Socratic or Stoic hero. Indeed, in Leonard Mead, his most well-rounded and best-known science fiction hero, one will even find traces of both.

Bradbury’s Philosopher Heroes

A Socratic hero may be defined as one who, in pursuit of the truth, is willing to challenge societal conventions even at great personal risk. An early example of this type of hero appears in Bradbury’s short story, “The Pedestrian,” which was first published in *The Reporter* magazine in 1951. Leonard Mead is an unemployed writer living in the future, who for many years has indulged in the innocent habit of going for long walks after dark. He is single and, unlike the vast majority of his neighbors, he has little interest in sitting in his air-conditioned home, watching television, night after night. From the early lines of the story, Bradbury works to highlight the character’s almost complete estrangement from society. “He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D. 2053, or as good as alone [...]”¹² The houses are dark, the streets are devoid of traffic, and there is no one else around: “In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, [Mead] had never met another person walking, not once in all that time.”¹³ The isolation is not just physical, but psychological. In an effort to

⁹ Ray Bradbury, *Dandelion Wine* (1957; repr., New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 54.

¹⁰ Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 72.

¹¹ Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 144.

¹² Ray Bradbury, “The Pedestrian,” in *Bradbury Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 569.

¹³ Bradbury, “The Pedestrian,” 569.

THE PHILOSOPHER HERO IN RAY BRADBURY'S SCIENCE FICTION

alleviate his boredom, Mead has fallen into the habit of talking to himself as he goes along, whispering imagined conversations with the inhabitants of the darkened homes he passes. “‘What is it now?’ he asked the houses, noticing his wrist watch. ‘Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?’”¹⁴ Someone watching him from inside one of those houses would certainly think him odd, if not crazy, as many of Socrates’ contemporaries thought him.

One day as Mead is walking along, minding his own business, he is stopped by a police car. A “strange, metallic voice” calls to him from inside: “Stand still. Stay where you are! Don’t move!”¹⁵ Having no reason to fear, because he has done nothing wrong, Mead instantly complies. The “officer” demands to know what he is doing, and cannot seem to comprehend the simple explanation that Mead is out and about for no special reason. “Just walking [...] Walking for air. Walking to see.”¹⁶ Nor can it understand why he would prefer this activity to the technological comforts that await him at home. It asks for more information, and seems to grow increasingly frustrated with Mead’s honest, yet admittedly impish, responses. Finally, he is ordered into the backseat of the car, where he discovers that there is no one in the front. He has been talking to the computer of a self-driving car all along. Mead’s total isolation from others is, therefore, reinforced in the manner of his arrest. The story ends with his being driven away to the ominous-sounding “Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies.” The implication is that Mead’s quiet and self-contemplative lifestyle has become as dangerous for him in this future dystopia as it was for Socrates in Athens. He may not be engaged in the overt pursuit of wisdom, but the references to his interests in such neglected pastimes as reading and writing suggest that he might be the closest thing to a philosopher this world can offer. As this story “sparked the composition of *Fahrenheit 451*,”¹⁷ serving as a sort of trial run for ideas that Bradbury would explore in greater depth in that novella, so can Mead be perceived as a prototype for his best Socratic hero, Guy Montag.

The same is true of Fiorello Bodoni in 1950’s “The Rocket,” which was republished the next year as part of *The Illustrated Man*, and adapted for television as an episode of the *CBS Television Workshop* during the winter of 1951-52.¹⁸ Bodoni owns a junkyard, where he lives with his large family. Every night, he dreams of sailing away on one of the huge rockets that set off for distant worlds, such as Mars, Saturn, or Venus. But tickets are prohibitively expensive, and he only has enough saved up for a single seat. When he offers the ticket to his family members, all are excited, at first. Soon, however, the realization that only one of them can go, leaving the rest behind, dampens their enthusiasm. In the end, they all decide against going. The next day, Bodoni agrees to buy a full-scale model of a rocket, made of aluminum and practically worthless, which costs him most of his life savings. He spends the rest of his money on various pieces of machinery and other equipment. After a full day’s work, he is ready to take the children on a week-long trip to Mars. All of his money and labor had gone into fixing up the rocket so that, seated within, his children would never know they hadn’t left the junkyard. “The moon dreamed by. Meteors broke

¹⁴ Bradbury, “The Pedestrian,” 569.

¹⁵ Bradbury, “The Pedestrian,” 571.

¹⁶ Bradbury, “The Pedestrian,” 571.

¹⁷ Matthew Beaumont, “Stumbling in the Dark: Ray Bradbury’s Pedestrian and the Politics of the Night,” *Critical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2015): 81, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/crq.12232>.

¹⁸ Jonathan R. Eller, *Becoming Ray Bradbury* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 243.

THE NEW RAY BRADBURY REVIEW

into fireworks. Time floated away in a serpentine of gas. The children shouted. Released from their hammocks, hours later, they peered from the ports. ‘There’s Earth!’ ‘There’s Mars!’”¹⁹ Against the dictates of his materialistic society, Bodoni has proven that imagination and love are far more valuable than money. Though they lack the means to seek a better life on far-off worlds, the Bodonis have everything they need to make their life on Earth a satisfactory, and even happy, one.

Like “The Pedestrian,” there are few references to anyone but the protagonist and his family in “The Rocket.” The character’s isolation from the rest of society is thus emphasized in a narratological manner. He is ostracized, as well, through the nature of his job as the owner of a junkyard, as well as the location of his house by a river, far away from any neighbors. At one point in the story, he sits in his fake rocket alone, talking feverishly to himself—as ripe a target for ridicule and suspicion as Leonard Mead whispering to the houses at night. There are hints that Bodoni is willing to engage in the same pursuit of truth in defiance of societal conventions that got Mead arrested as a madman, albeit on a more modest scale. While talking with an old man, Bramante, at the start of the story, Bodoni refuses to corroborate his pessimistic view of human nature: “This is a rich man’s world. [...] Do we fly rockets? No! We live in shacks like our ancestors before us.” Bramante encourages Bodoni not to let his children grow up believing that such a thing could ever happen to them. “Don’t set that goal, I warn you. Let them be content with being poor. Turn their eyes down to their hands and to your junk yard, not up to the stars.”²⁰ Bodoni also faces opposition from a source closer to home, his wife: “‘You have ruined us,’ she said. ‘Our money used for this—this thing. When it should have been spent on equipment.’”²¹ Despite the opposition of society, as represented by Bramante, and that of his own family members, Bodoni carries on with his noble pursuit of truth, which in his case entails the simple attempt to ensure the happiness of his loved ones.

Some of Bradbury’s protagonists are driven by this pursuit into actions that are not dangerous or subversive, but reveal, instead, a concern for the welfare of others that is reminiscent of Stoic cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the theme of universal brotherhood (extending even beyond the human race) is emphasized repeatedly in *The Martian Chronicles*, a collection of short stories published in 1950, which deals with repeated attempts to colonize Mars following a series of disastrous wars on earth. Some of these stories, such as “The Green Morning,” feature characters doing their best to help other humans survive the extremely difficult conditions of their new home. After arriving on Mars, 31-year-old Benjamin Driscoll is dismayed to discover that the surface of the planet is almost completely devoid of trees and other greenery, resulting in an oxygen-deficient atmosphere in which breathing proves difficult. He decides to rectify the problem single-handedly: “He would plant trees and grass. [...] He would have a private horticultural war with Mars.”²² Driscoll spends the next 30 days spreading seeds all over the ground, like a modern-day Johnny Appleseed. After a sudden, unexpected fall of Martian rain, the seeds begin to grow exponentially. By morning, there are trees everywhere, thousands of them all across the land, fully-grown, and already beginning to transform the environment of the whole planet. One of Driscoll’s final thoughts (before he faints and the story ends) is of the transformative effects his actions will have on his fellow colonizers, most of whom he has never met, of course. “In a moment the town doors

¹⁹ Ray Bradbury, *The Illustrated Man* (1951; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 277.

²⁰ Bradbury, *The Illustrated Man*, 267-68.

²¹ Bradbury, *The Illustrated Man*, 275.

²² Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950; repr., New York: HarperPerennial, 2011), 103.

THE PHILOSOPHER HERO IN RAY BRADBURY'S SCIENCE FICTION

would flip wide, people would run out through the new miracle of oxygen, sniffing, gusting in lungfuls of it, cheeks pinking with it, noses frozen with it, lungs revived, hearts leaping and worn bodies lifted into a dance.”²³

In other stories from *The Martian Chronicles*, Bradbury seems to suggest that, due to the technological advancements that have occurred since the time of the Stoics, the *cosmo-polis* extends even beyond the earth itself—that it follows humans wherever they go, and encompasses whatever rational creatures they encounter there. “The Martian” centers around an elderly couple, LaFarge and Anna, whose son, Tom, had died many years ago when he was still a young child. They meet a Martian, whose telepathic abilities (shared by the whole race in Bradbury’s text) enable him to assume the form of the couple’s deceased son. Whatever other motivations he may have, it is clear that he is desperate for companionship. “Why can’t you accept me and stop talking?” he pleads in response to their repeated questioning. “Don’t doubt, please don’t doubt me!”²⁴ Later, they go to town, despite the Martian’s fervent protests against being taken there. Just as he is able to sense the person LaFarge and Anna want to see most, and assume their form, so is he able to do the same for everyone else; and in a town of hundreds or even thousands of people, the pressure of attempting to please all of them at once proves ruinous. “They shouted, they pressed forward, pleading. He screamed, threw out his hands, his face dissolving to each demand. [...] They snatched his wrists, whirled him about, until with one last shriek of horror he fell.”²⁵ The townspeople’s longing to see their loved ones blinds them to the Martian’s own importance as a sentient being. LaForge’s belated attempt to advocate for Martians is replicated with better success by Father Peregrine, who in “The Fire Balloons” proposes the radical notion that, as children of the same God worshipped by humans for thousands of years, Martians are just as deserving of salvation.

In “The Long Years,” the object of compassion is neither human nor alien, but a machine. Hathaway, a doctor, had arrived on Mars with the Fourth Expedition of 2032.²⁶ 25 years later, now an old man, he is visited by his former captain, Wilder, whose travels through outer space have kept him preternaturally young. Hathaway is living with his wife, Alice, his son, John, and his two daughters, Marguerite and Susan. It soon becomes apparent that the family members are all robots Hathaway had created to keep him company after his real family died of an unknown disease many years ago. After he dies, Marguerite explains to the captain that Hathaway had always wanted to prevent his creations from having to suffer needlessly, in the same way that humans must: “He didn’t want us to feel badly. He told us it would happen one day and he didn’t want us to cry. [...] He said it was the worst thing that could happen to a man to know how to be lonely and know how to be sad and then to cry. So we’re not to know what crying is, or being sad.”²⁷ With Hathaway dead, the crew is faced with the dilemma of what to do with his robot family. One suggests turning them off, and is given a gun, but cannot bring himself to carry through with it. “I went in the hut with the gun,” he reports. “One of the daughters smiled at me. So did the others. The wife offered

²³ Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 106.

²⁴ Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 187.

²⁵ Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 198.

²⁶ When preparing a new edition of the book for publication in 1999, Bradbury revised the original fictional chronology, moving all dates on by 31 years.

²⁷ Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 244.

THE NEW RAY BRADBURY REVIEW

me a cup of tea. Lord, it'd be murder!"²⁸ In the end, Wilder and his men decide to simply leave the robots alone, a tacit acknowledgement of their inherent rights and value as rational beings.

Guy Montag, the protagonist of *Fahrenheit 451*, seems to resemble, at first, yet another variation of the Socratic gadfly. In time, he also reveals a keen regard for the welfare of others that compares favorably with Stoic cosmopolitanism. Of all the heroes who populate Bradbury's science fiction from this era, Montag is the one who best represents his interest in classical philosophy—an interest that helps to explain some of the character's complex and sometimes conflicting motivations. As Daphne Patai points out, Montag's path to redemption is a long one: the fireman who burns books "begins as a happy conformist and then slowly awakens to the significance of the society in which he lives and the profession he exercises."²⁹ A brief but unforgettable exchange with the young girl living next door leads him to the realization that, far from being successful or happy, his whole life has been a lie, or "mask":

He was not happy. He was not happy. He said the words to himself. He recognized this as the true state of affairs. He wore his happiness like a mask and the girl had run off across the lawn with the mask and there was no way of going to knock on her door and ask for it back.³⁰

All this time, Montag has been living exactly the kind of "unexamined life" decried by Socrates at his trial. After meeting Clarisse McClellan, he finally begins to ask some of the hard questions about himself, taking the first, tentative steps towards a new kind of life. Montag's quest for truth becomes even more acute after his wife, Mildred, accidentally overdoses on sleeping pills. The paramedics who revive her demonstrate an appalling lack of sympathy that forces him to question not only his own values, but those upon which his mechanistic and utilitarian society is based: "There are too many of us, [Montag] thought. There are billions of us and that's too many. Nobody knows anyone. Strangers come and violate you. Strangers come and cut your heart out."³¹

Soon, Montag is willing to do more than just question values: he begins to challenge them instead, collecting books and consorting with dangerous subversives, such as the former English teacher and bibliophile, Faber. His role as a Socratic gadfly is brought into sharp relief in his debates with Beatty, the fire chief who serves as a symbol of and mouthpiece for the state. During their final confrontation, Montag wears an earpiece through which he is able to listen to Faber, though he cannot speak to him in return. Whether deliberate or coincidental, the situation is reminiscent of Socrates and his "daimonic" voice: a divine messenger he has heeded since childhood, which, he explains at his trial, "always holds me back from what I'm about to do but never urges me forward."³² Just like this daimonic voice, Faber seems more concerned with helping Montag avoid making obvious mistakes than recommending a specific plan of action. Consequently, and again recalling the outcome of Plato's *Apology*, he is unable to prevent Montag from falling into the trap set by his enemy, Beatty. The metaphorical trial in the firehouse is followed by a literal arrest, with death or long incarceration almost certain to follow. Rather than

²⁸ Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*, 246.

²⁹ Daphne Patai, "Ray Bradbury and the Assault on Free Thought," *Society* 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-012-9617-x>.

³⁰ Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 9.

³¹ Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 14.

³² Plato, *Apology*, 31d.

THE PHILOSOPHER HERO IN RAY BRADBURY'S SCIENCE FICTION

accept his fate, as Socrates does, Montag rebels against it, turning his firehose on Beatty and destroying the Mechanical Hound sent to hunt him down. Then he goes on the run in a desperate attempt to evade the massive manhunt launched against him. From oblivious, kerosene-dispensing fireman, Montag has become a criminal, guilty not of corrupting the youth, but of similarly vague “crimes against the state.”³³

In the woods outside the city, Montag teams up with a group of outcasts led by Granger. These former teachers, writers, and priests have given themselves the task of preserving the ancient wisdom of the past by memorizing certain books. They plan, in time, to use that wisdom to restore some of the broken remnants of their civilization—a cosmopolitan goal if ever there was one. Indeed, a Stoic tone pervades the novel’s final scenes, beginning with Granger’s repeated warnings about their need for humility: “The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves,” he says, “was that we were not important, we mustn’t be pedants; we were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world.”³⁴ Thus, despite having the works of Shakespeare or Aristotle in their heads, the outcasts must not think themselves above the mindless or drug-addled masses they are trying to save. It is only through cooperation (another important concept for the Stoics) that they can hope to succeed. The moral is emphasized in a brief passage, as Granger begins to put out the fire and others rush to his aid. “The other men helped, and Montag helped, and there, in the wilderness, the men all moved their hands, putting out the fire together.”³⁵ They head off to see what help they can offer the survivors of a ruined city leveled by bombs. Despite everything he has already been through, Montag’s work as a hero—a philosopher hero—has just begun.

³³ Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 117.

³⁴ Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 146.

³⁵ Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 147.

THE NEW RAY BRADBURY REVIEW

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THE PHILOSOPHER HERO IN RAY BRADBURY'S SCIENCE FICTION

Camilo Peralta is an English instructor at Fort Hays State University and a former Wilbur Fellow at the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal. He has been teaching ESL, composition, and literature for over a decade, and now lives in rural Kansas with his wife, Li, and Cho the Cat. His main research interests include science fiction/fantasy, religion, and conservatism. Recent publications include a study of the symbolic function of Tolkien's dragons and a criticism of the postmodern values evident in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Abstract

Though he apparently disliked the label, Ray Bradbury is still remembered as one of the preeminent science fiction writers of the twentieth century. He also had an abiding interest in classical philosophy, as suggested by the numerous references to Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek and Roman thinkers scattered throughout his works. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this interest manifests itself in his fiction in a variety of ways, especially in the fact that so many of his protagonists seem to embody a kind of heroism based on a combination of Platonic and Stoic virtues. On the one hand, Bradbury's heroes are often Socratic "gadflies," courageously challenging their contemporaries' values and belief systems, and eventually being punished for their determination to do so. At the same time, they tend to feel a profound sense of responsibility for others, reflecting the Stoic emphasis on *cosmopolitanism*, or the universal community of humans. Ultimately, Bradbury's philosopher heroes serve as the ideal embodiment of the same humane values the author frequently espoused in interviews and letters, and which served as guiding principles in his own life.

Keywords Plato, Stoicism, heroism, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Martian Chronicles*

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