

Dandelion Wine by Ray Bradbury, a collection of poignant vignettes about one summer in the life of 12-year old Douglas Spaulding, is a powerful mirror into childhood, growing up, and life in general. Bradbury, generally considered one of the Grand Masters of science fiction, did not in fact write science fiction. While his books and stories had some of the overtones of science fiction, their themes went much deeper than simple space opera or shoot-'em-up action. His books were often quite surrealistic and were very emotional. (Wolfheim 42) Critiquing Bradbury is difficult as it dulls the fantasy, and it is usually better to concentrate on what Bradbury himself wrote rather than archetypally analyze the book to truly enjoy and understand his fantasy. (Bradford 69) In Dandelion Wine, Bradbury's deeper themes mainly have to do with the world of inner feelings of fantasy and the soul. Three sets of opposite characteristics that have a strong influence over feelings and the soul contribute to the depth and character of Dandelion Wine: life and death, heaven and hell, and the past and the future.

The themes of life and death become entwined with raw fantasy in Dandelion Wine. One of the first experiences of young Douglas Spaulding is to realize that the pure, unbridled energy, emotion, and fantasy of the summer make him truly alive. (Bradford 69) The pure, unadulterated fantasy of life and joy in Dandelion Wine gives a more than magical feeling to the book and leaves the reader wishing that he or she lived in this world. (Bradford 69) One of the reasons that the fantasy of Dandelion Wine is so appealing is that Bradbury masterfully crafts the expressions of fantasy that everyone takes part in, such as dreams and the inner world of the mind, into a recognizable whole and masterfully expresses it in Dandelion Wine. Fantasy comes easily to Douglas Spaulding, shown by fact that that realization that he, along with everything else, is truly Alive. This realization heightens his senses and expectations of the summer to come. But along with fantasy, happiness, magic, and life comes death. Death plays a major role in Dandelion Wine as the Unseen One, a semi-mythical murderer and kidnapper, takes people from the town and hideously mutilates them in a deep, dark, and fearsome ravine. While we do not directly see the Unseen One, his dread exploits are often mentioned. Douglas takes little heed of the warnings and goes on life as always, but the adults seem deeply troubled by the presence of the Unseen One. The presence of death seems to be equalled out by the mystical, magical fantasy of Douglas' summer. (Bradford 69) Douglas seems to not take as much notice of death and it seems to have a lesser thrall over him because of his fantasy. While death does not necessarily seem wonderful to Douglas, he notes it along with everything else in his fantastical summer, and Ray Bradbury expertly gives the same sense of wonderment to death as he gives to life. (Bradford 69)

The ravine that divides the center of town in Dandelion Wine, bringer of death and home of the Unseen One, is also Bradbury's metaphorical Hell in Dandelion Wine. While one of Dandelion Wine's vignettes has many of the elements of the archetypal Snow White story, the character of Prince Charming is noticeably missing. (Rosenman 85) In this vignette, Lavinia Nebbs, the most beautiful woman in Green Town, must cross the ravine at night and return safely home. The crossing of the ravine at night is extremely dangerous and Lavinia spends a lot of time in complete and total darkness and with quite a bit of fear before she finally makes it home and can bar her door against the evil of the night. (Rosenman 84) The presentation of the archetype is very similar to the Greek Persephone myth in that the Satan figure comes to Earth to try to imprison Eve in Hell. (Rosenman 84) Lavinia Nebbs represents that archetypal figure of Eve from the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden, and in most modern stories that build on the Garden of Eden / Fall / Heaven and Hell archetype, the Eve character must somehow understand herself much better than previously to understand her dark, evil, inner core. This exploration is not explored on the surface by Bradbury, but Lavinia's aloneness in the ravine almost certainly causes Lavinia to think about her life, and reflect on her inner soul. (Rosenman 85)

This sort of exploration in Bradbury's Hell can be analyzed psychologically from a

Jungian point of view. What Hell does, according to Jung, is to bring out the shadow traits of a person. (Rosenman 85) The shadow traits are repressed emotions and characteristics of a person that rarely show up, but can be expressed in times of severe need or stress. The characteristics are often opposite to normally expressed feelings. Hell is also a coming-together place for the fears that all people have as expressed through a collective subconscious which all people share. (Rosenman 85) Another important characteristic of the ravine is that it splits the town in half. This represents an archetypal viewpoint of a continual war of good against evil that neither side will ever truly win. (Rosenman 85) This archetypal viewpoint is further represented by many parallels of Bradbury's ravine to classical notions of hell. The ravine contains many images commonly associated with Hades, the Greek equivalent of Hell. (Rosenman 85) It is dark, deep, and dangerous. While the ravine is not underground, it is certainly deeper and lower than the town. Furthermore, the ravine is represented as containing the classical notions of Hell as a certain part of creation as well as Hell as the cause of lost innocence. (Rosenman 85) The ravine gnaws at and insidiously erodes the down, gradually moving it towards its eventual destruction at the hands of the great danger held within.

It has been postulated that Bradbury's work has been influenced by that of William Faulkner. Bradbury may have obtained his idea for the use of the heaven and hell archetype from one of Faulkner's works, "That Evening Sun". (Rosenman 85) Both Faulkner and Bradbury use many classical allusions to various mythical figures, especially to those figures central to the Heaven and Hell archetype, including Eve, Satan, and Hell. (Rosenman 85) Furthermore, each of the writers use a theme of initiation of the main character into some ritual, into a more grown-up flavour of life. In addition, both Bradbury and Faulkner seem to have an innate distrust of machines and technology, a somewhat common theme in literature. Both *Dandelion Wine* and "That Evening Sun" end with the image of a setting sun- perhaps foreshadowing technological disaster or otherwise. (Rosenman 85) However, these themes are quite common in a literary sense and may not represent a direct influence on Bradbury by Faulkner.

The theme of initiation comes into play with the theme of conflict between the past and future. Bradbury is perhaps the most studied writer who uses this as one of his common themes. (Stupple 69) The conflict between the past and the future, stasis and change, is one of Bradbury's unique trademarks. (Stupple 69) In *Dandelion Wine*, this conflict is primarily expressed between things changing or staying the same, and the pros and cons of each. (Stupple 69) This conflict is shown to the reader through the magical and fantastic summer of Douglas Spaulding as he experiences various philosophical and psychological conflicts Douglas' past and present are very complex, containing multiple dimensions and layers of memories, nostalgia, fun, and mischief. (Stupple 70) Bradbury's past has the power to create or destroy, encourage or discourage, give hope or despair, comfort or threaten. *Dandelion Wine* is much like another of his books, *The Martian Chronicles*, in that progress and change are essential to avoid complete and total annihilation of all that is important. (Stupple 70) The impression is given to the reader the past is quite tempting but ultimately fatal. In *Dandelion Wine*, Bradbury more fully explores all the implications of this theme than in the earlier work, *The Martian Chronicles*. Douglas is much less confident of the fact that change is essential as compared to the characters from *Martian Chronicles*. (Stupple 70) Not only does he doubt the future, but once he does realize the future is the right path, he never becomes convinced that the future is as overwhelmingly better than the past, as it is shown to be in the *Martian Chronicles*. Furthermore, *Dandelion Wine* is interesting in that Douglas becomes able to face the future because of his use of a specific item from the past- dandelion wine. This concoction allows those who are stuck in the middle of winter to experience the joy and beauty of summertime. This drink of "bottled stasis" allows Douglas to move towards the future. (Stupple 69) This implementation of the past-future conflict does not quite make sense. Bradbury's confusing message seems to show that Douglas celebrates the past while he moves on towards the vastly better future, a message that does not make sense. (Stupple 69) The odd mixing of the dichotomies of stasis and change, the past and the future, cause Bradbury's

Dandelion Wine to be somewhat confusing. In order to rectify this confusion, an explanation of Bradbury's motives in writing Dandelion Wine is needed. One theory is that Dandelion Wine is an outlet for the confusion of the middle class over the relative value of the future over the past. It creates a vague feeling of nostalgia that would certainly appeal to this older, middle-class audience that Bradbury may have targeted it towards. (Stupple 70) One of the messages it seems to convey the message that people can be scared of yet strangely attracted towards technological change. Whatever the reasons for Bradbury's use of the past-future theme, it is a unique part of his art form and a component part of his own personality and history. (Stupple 70) Bradbury's past-future speculations have depth. They show that a "denial of the past demands a denial of that part of the self which is the past." (Stupple 70) Bradbury himself recognizes the "ambiguity, the complexity, and the irony" (Stupple 70) of his works, especially Dandelion Wine and the Martian Chronicles. (Stupple 70)

Overall, Bradbury's remarkable depth and complexity in his execution of Dandelion Wine as well as the skilful use of multiple themes render it a masterpiece to be treasured for ages to come. His use of universal themes that appeal to all make it more likely to be read and understood by all who come across it, bringing Bradbury's essential message to all.

---