Fahrenheit 451

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RAY BRADBURY

Arguably the most celebrated American author of science fiction and fantasy, Ray Bradbury grew up in Illinois, Arizona, and Los Angeles. He graduated from high school, chose not to go to college, got a job selling newspapers, and began seriously writing science fiction and fantasy stories. His first book, *Dark Carnival*, was published in 1947. Over the course of a long and prolific career, he has produced over five hundred short stories, plays, novels, and poems, not to mention screenplays and teleplays. Many of Bradbury's tales have been reworked for film, television, and radio. In addition to *Fahrenheit 451*, his best known works include *The Martian Chronicles*, *Dandelion Wine*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. In 2000 he received the National Book Award for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Book burning and censorship feature prominently in *Fahrenheit 451*. Under the Nazi regime in Germany, book burnings of works by "degenerate" authors were held in public. The 1950s in the United States saw the blacklisting of certain filmmakers, actors, and screenwriters who the FBI considered Communists, as well as faculty purgings at universities for similar reasons. The 1950s also saw the rise of television ownership and the expansion of television broadcasts in the U.S.—perhaps foreshadowing the full-room four-walled televisors that Bradbury imagines in *Fahrenheit 451*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many authors have created states and societies in their works of fiction and philosophy. Some authors have created utopias, or ideal states, with the intention to show how civilization might be improved. Plato's *Republic* is one of the earliest and best-known utopias, while Sir Thomas More's sixteenth century work *Utopia* gives the genre its name. Edward Bellamy, writing at the end of the 19th century, imagined an ideal future society in *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*. In the 20th century, fictionalized societies frequently took on a darker, oppressive aspect. Rather than create ideal societies meant to serve as models for improvement, authors instead created dystopias, or nightmare societies, designed to sound a warning about modern society's problems. Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," and Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, are among the most-read dystopian novels and short stories of the past century. *Fahrenheit 451* fits squarely into this dystopian literary tradition.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Fahrenheit 451
- **When Written:** 1947–1953
- **Where Written:** The United States
- **When Published:** 1953
- **Literary Period:** Modern American
- **Genre:** Dystopian novel
- **Setting:** An unnamed city in America in the future
- **Climax:** Montag's escape from the Mechanical Hound; the bombing of the city
- **Antagonist:** Captain Beatty; the Mechanical Hound
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Fahrenheit on film: *Fahrenheit 451* was made into a movie by acclaimed French director Francois Truffaut in 1966. A new filmed version has been in the works for over a decade. Ray Bradbury reportedly took offense at the title of Michael Moore's controversial documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, though apparently not for political reasons.

PLOT SUMMARY

Guy Montag is a fireman who believes he is content in his job, which, in the oppressive future American society depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*, consists of burning books and the possessions of book owners. However, his discontent, secret even from himself, becomes clear after he meets Clarisse McClellan, a teenage girl and his new neighbor, who engages in such outlandish behavior as walking instead of driving and having conversations. She asks him if he's happy. When he returns home to find that his wife, Mildred, has taken a bottle full of sleeping pills, he realizes that he is not happy. Mildred is saved, but the next day she has no memory of her suicide attempt. She sits in the parlor, engrossed in its three full walls of interactive TV.

Back at the fire station, Montag is threatened by the Mechanical Hound, a robotic hunter that can be programmed to track any scent. Captain Beatty tells him not to worry—unless, Beatty adds jokingly, Montag has a guilty conscience. For the next week, Montag continues to talk with Clarisse and to examine his own life. One day, while the radio in the fire station mentions that war is imminent, Montag asks

Beatty if there was a time when firemen prevented fires, instead of started them. The alarm rings, and the firemen all head to the house of an elderly woman whose neighbor has turned her in. The woman refuses to leave her house as they douse it in kerosene. She lights a match herself and burns along with the house.

In bed that night, Montag asks Mildred—who, as usual, is zoning out listening to her earbud radio—where they met. Neither of them can remember. Mildred tells Montag that Clarisse has been killed. Haunted by the vision of the old woman's death, and by the news of Clarisse's death, Montag doesn't go to work the next day. Beatty visits him at home and delivers a long lecture on the history of censorship, the development of mass media, the dumbing down of culture, the rise of instant gratification, and the role of firemen as society's "official censors, judges, and executors." Beatty says it's okay for a fireman to keep a book for 24 hours out of natural curiosity, so long as he turns it in the next day. When Beatty leaves, Montag shows Mildred twenty books, including a Bible, that he's been hiding in the house. He feels that their lives are falling apart and that the world doesn't make sense, and hopes some answers might be found in the books. Montag and Mildred try to read the books.

But reading is not easy when you have so little practice. Mildred soon gives up and insists that Montag get rid of the books so they can resume their lives. Montag, however, remembers a retired English professor named Faber whom he met a year ago and who might be able to help. On the subway trip to the man's house, Montag tries to read and memorize passages of the Bible he's brought with him. Faber is frightened of Montag at first, but eventually agrees to help Montag in a scheme to undermine the firemen. They agree to communicate through a tiny two-way radio placed in Montag's ear. When Montag returns home, his wife's friends are over watching TV. Montag loses his cool. He forces the women to listen to him read a poem by Matthew Arnold from one of his secret books. They leave, greatly upset. When Montag goes to work, Beatty mocks him with contradictory quotations drawn from famous books, which point out that books are useless, elitist, and confusing. Montag hands over a book to Beatty and is apparently forgiven. Suddenly, an alarm comes in. The firemen rush to their truck and head out to the address given. It's Montag's house.

As they arrive, Mildred leaves the house and ducks into a taxi. She is the one who called in the alarm. Beatty forces Montag to burn his house with a flamethrower, and then tells him he's under arrest. Beatty also discovers the two-way radio and says he'll trace it to its source, then taunts Montag until Montag kills him with the flamethrower.

Now a fugitive and the object of a massive, televised manhunt, Montag visits Faber, then makes it to the river a few steps ahead of the Mechanical Hound. He floats downstream to safety. Along some abandoned railroad tracks in the countryside, Montag finds a group of old men whom Faber told him about—outcasts from society who were formerly academics and theologians. They and others like them have memorized thousands of books and are surviving on the margins of society, waiting for a time when the world becomes interested in reading again. Montag is able to remember parts of the Book of Ecclesiastes, so he has something to contribute.

Early the next morning, enemy bombers fly overhead toward the city. The war begins and ends almost in an instant. The city is reduced to powder. Montag mourns for Mildred and their empty life together. He is at last able to remember where they met—Chicago. With Montag leading, the group of men head upriver toward the city to help the survivors rebuild amid the ashes.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Guy Montag - A fireman and the book's protagonist. As the novel opens, Montag takes pride in burning books and the homes of people who illegally own books. After meeting Clarisse McClellan, however, he begins to face his growing dissatisfaction with his life, his job, his marriage, and the pleasure-seeking, unthinking culture in which he lives. In fact, he has been secretly hoarding books, without actually reading them. After Clarisse's death, he eventually begins to read the books. From that point on, there's no turning back, and Montag begins to take action against his oppressive society.

Captain Beatty - Montag's boss at the fire station. Beatty is a complex character. He has committed to memory many passages of classic literature, and can quote them at will, yet as a fire captain he is devoted to the destruction of intellectual pursuits, artistic efforts, and individual thought. Bradbury uses Beatty to explain how mid-20th-century America becomes the joy-seeking, irresponsible, unemotional, and intellectually repressive future world depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*. Beatty claims he, like Montag, once became interested in books, but he now endorses instant gratification. Yet Beatty uses his extensive learning to push Montag past the breaking point and goad Montag into killing him. After Montag kills Beatty, Montag becomes convinced that Beatty actually wanted to die (though it's never clear if this is true). Beatty is an intellectual wearing the uniform of the intellectual's worst enemy. Perhaps the contradiction is too much for him in the end.

Mildred Montag - Montag's wife. She drowns her unhappiness with pills and a constant barrage of media, fast driving, and other mindless distractions. The day after attempting suicide she has no memory of the event. She and Montag have lost whatever connection they once had. Mildred is a hollow person—she doesn't seem to have a real connection to anyone.

Instead, she's devoted to her interactive TV shows. After Montag brings books home and reads poetry to her friends, she betrays him to the authorities, wanting to preserve her life of instant gratification and comfort.

Faber - A former English professor who describes himself as a coward because he did not act to try to change the direction in which society was headed. He uses a two-way radio to direct Montag through situations in which he is too frightened to place himself. He provides a counterpoint to Beatty's arguments against literature and thought. Faber is named after a famous publisher (Faber & Faber) and a brand of pencils.

Clarisse McClellan - Montag's teenaged neighbor. She is unlike anyone Montag has met before. She has no interest in the violent, thrill-seeking pastimes of her peers. She prefers to walk, engage in conversation, observe the natural world, and observe people. Her questioning, free spirit starts Montag thinking about his own life and his place in society.

Granger - One of the scholar-outcasts Montag meets on the railroad tracks in the countryside. Unlike Faber, Granger has had the courage to act on his convictions and leave civilization. He and his comrades memorize works of literature, waiting for the day when books will no longer be banned and humanity is ready to learn from its past.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Phelps - A friend of Mildred's.

Mrs. Bowles - A friend of Mildred's.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MASS MEDIA

Much of *Fahrenheit 451* is devoted to depicting a future United States society bombarded with messages and imagery by an omnipresent mass media. Instead of the small black-and-white TV screens common in American households in 1953 (the year of the book's publication), the characters in the novel live their lives in rooms with entire walls that act as televisions. These TVs show serial dramas in which the viewer's name is woven into the program and the viewer is able to interact with fictional characters called "the relatives" or "the family." Scenes change rapidly, images flash quickly in bright colors, all of it designed to produce distraction and fascination. When not in their interactive TV rooms, many characters, including Guy Montag's wife Mildred, spend much of their time with "Seashell ear thimbles" in their ears—miniature radio receivers that play constant broadcasts of news, advertisements, and music, drowning out the real sounds of the world.

Throughout the novel, Bradbury portrays mass media as a veil that obscures real experience and interferes with the characters' ability to think deeply about their lives and societal issues. Bradbury isn't suggesting that media other than books *couldn't* be enriching and fulfilling. As Faber tells Montag, "It isn't books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books.... The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisors, but are not." In an interview marking the fiftieth anniversary of the novel's publication, Bradbury indicated that some of his fears about mass media had been realized. "We bombard people with sensation," he said, "That substitutes for thinking."

CENSORSHIP

Books are banned in the society depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*. When they're found, they're burned, along with the homes of the books' owners. But it's important to remember that in the world of this novel, the suppression of books began as *self-censorship*. As Beatty explains to Montag, people didn't stop reading books because a tyrannical government forced them to stop. They stopped reading books gradually over time as the culture around them grew faster, shallower, intellectually blander, and centered around minor thrills and instant gratification. In such a culture, books became shorter, magazine and newspaper articles became simpler, cartoon pictures and television became more prevalent, and entertainment replaced reflection and debate.

Another factor that contributes to the growth of censorship in *Fahrenheit 451* are minorities and what we might call "special interest groups." In order not to offend every imaginable group and sub-group—whether organized around ethnicity, religion, profession, geography, or affinity—every trace of controversy slowly vanished from public discourse, and magazines became "a nice blend of vanilla tapioca." In time, the word "intellectual" became a swear word, and books came to be seen as a dangerous means for one person to lord his or her knowledge and learning over someone else. Books, and the critical thinking they encouraged, became seen as a direct threat to equality. By making widespread censorship a phenomenon that emerges from the culture itself—and not one that is simply imposed from above by the government—Bradbury is expressing a concern that the power of mass media can ultimately suppress free speech as thoroughly as any totalitarian regime.

CONFORMITY VS. INDIVIDUALITY

Pleasure-seeking and distraction are the hallmarks of the culture in which Montag lives. Although

these may sound like a very self-serving set of values, the culture is not one that celebrates or even tolerates a broad range of self-expression. Hedonism and mindless entertainment are the norm, and so long as the people in the society of *Fahrenheit 451* stick to movies and sports and racing their cars, pursuits that require little individual thought, they're left alone by society.

However, whenever individuals start to question the purpose of such a life, and begin to look for answers in books or the natural world and express misgivings, they become threats. Their questions and actions might cause others to face the difficult questions that their culture is designed to distract them from. For that reason, in the society of *Fahrenheit 451* people who express their individuality find themselves social outcasts at best, and at worst in real danger.

Clarisse McClellan represents free thought and individuality. She's unlike anyone else Montag knows. She has little interest in the thrill-seeking of her peers. She'd rather talk, observe the natural world firsthand, and ask questions. She soon disappears (and is probably killed). *Fahrenheit 451*'s society is set up to snuff out individuality—characters who go against the general social conformity (Clarisse, Faber, Granger, and Montag) do so at great risk.

DISTRACTION VS. HAPPINESS

Why has the society of *Fahrenheit 451* become so shallow, indifferent, and conforming? Why do people drive so fast, keep Seashell ear thimbles in their ears, and spend all day in front of room-sized, four-walled TV programs? According to Beatty, the constant motion and titillation is designed to help people suppress their sadness and avoid any kind of intense emotion or difficult thoughts and experiences. The people of *Fahrenheit 451* have to come to equate this motion, fun, and distraction with happiness.

However, *Fahrenheit 451* makes the case that engaging with difficult and uncomfortable thoughts and experiences is the only routes to true happiness. Only by being *un*comfortable, or experiencing things that are new or awkward, can people achieve a real and meaningful engagement with the world and each other. The people in the novel who lack such engagement, such as Mildred, feel a profound despair, which in turn makes them more determined to distract themselves by watching more TV, overdosing on sleeping pills, or letting technicians use a specialized machine to suck away their sadness. The result is a vicious cycle, in which people are terrified to expose themselves to any kind of emotion or difficulty because doing so will force them to face their pent-up despair, though in reality it's their avoidance of those thoughts and feelings that creates their despair. Only after he acknowledges his own unhappiness can Montag make the life-changing decision to find Faber and resist his society's oppressive "happiness" and thought-suppression that he, as a fireman, once enforced.

ACTION VS. INACTION

In the years up to and before World War II, many societies, including Germany, become dangerous and intolerant. Even so, their citizens were afraid to speak out against these changes. *Fahrenheit 451* was published in 1953, just a few years after WWII ended, and is very concerned with the idea of taking action versus standing by while society falters. In particular, the novel shows how Montag learns to take action, in contrast to Faber who is too cowardly to act. At the same time, Faber does help teach Montag the difference between reckless and intelligent action, so that by the end of the novel Montag is ready to act in a constructive rather than destructive way.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FIRE

Fire is an interesting symbol in *Fahrenheit 451* because it symbolizes two different things. Through the firemen, who burn books and wear the number "451" on their helmets, fire symbolizes destruction. (451°F is the temperature at which paper and books burn.) Yet at the same time, Clarisse reminds Montag of candle-light, and so fire, when controlled, symbolizes the flickering of self-awareness and knowledge.

THE PHOENIX

The mythologies of many Mediterranean cultures include the story of the **phoenix**, a bird that is consumed by flames but then rises from the ashes. The phoenix is a symbol for renewal, for life that follows death in a cleansing fire. After the city is reduced to ashes by bombers in *Fahrenheit 451*, Granger makes a direct comparison between human beings and the story of the phoenix. Both destroy themselves in fire. Both start again amid the ashes. If people keep books—which preserve the past and allow people to learn the lessons of prior tragedies—Granger hopes that humanity will remember the suffering caused by destruction, and will avoid destroying itself in the future.

THE HEARTH AND THE SALAMANDER

"The Hearth and the Salamander" is the title of the first section of *Fahrenheit 451*. Both **hearths** and **salamanders**

are associated with fire. Hearths (fireplaces) are traditionally the center of the home and the source of warmth. The firemen wear salamander imagery on their uniforms and call their fire truck a "salamander" because salamanders were once believed to live in fire without being consumed by it.

THE SIEVE AND THE SAND

"The Sieve and the Sand" is the title of the second section of *Fahrenheit 451*. The title refers to Montag's childhood memory of trying to fill a sieve with sand. He's reminded of this episode as he's trying to read the Bible on the subway. While he's trying to memorize what he's reading, an announcement for toothpaste keeps derailing him. To Montag, the sand represents the knowledge that he seeks—something of material importance—and the sieve represents his mind trying to grasp and retain this knowledge.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Fahrenheit 451* published in 2013.

Part 1 Quotes

"It was a pleasure to burn.

Related Characters: Guy Montag (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The famous first sentence of the novel introduces readers to a world in which firemen start fires instead of putting them out. Guy Montag, the main character of the novel, is a fireman, and seems to take great pleasure in his work. Guy doesn't see anything morally objectionable about using fire to destroy "improper" literature--on the contrary, he seems to believe that he's doing the right thing.

The sentence also alludes to the dark side of Guy's society. Authority figures like Guy act as if they're doing the "right thing" by burning down people's houses. But secretly, it's implied, they act out of a savage, primal desire to destroy--in short, Guy's society is controlled by cruel and brutal people pretending to be voices of morality. Guy's society is also hopelessly violent thanks to the omnipotence of television and sensationalized entertainment.

"Are you happy?"

Related Characters: Clarisse McClellan (speaker), Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Guy's mysterious neighbor, Clarisse McClellan, asks Guy a simple yet slightly sinister question: "Are you happy?" Even more oddly, Clarisse runs inside before Guy can answer, leaving him alone to ponder his own happiness.

The very fact that Guy perceives Clarisse's question as bizarre tells us a great deal about their society. In the future, it would seem, conversations about one's emotions and deep thoughts are discouraged--people focus more on distraction and entertainment than on their feelings. Thus, a question as simple as "Are you happy?" is a shock. Up until now, Guy has blindly accepted the rules of his society without questioning any of them. In doing so, Guy has ignored his innate sense of morality, and even his innate sense of happiness. By analyzing his own happiness, Guy can begin to rebel against his society's corruption.

"You're not like the others. I've seen a few; I know. When I talk, you look at me. When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that."

Related Characters: Clarisse McClellan (speaker), Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Guy and his neighbor, Clarisse, bond over their common characteristics--their thoughtfulness, their curiosity, etc. Clarisse is amazed that Guy is a fireman--a profession that she associates with brutality and cruelty. Clarisse sees a different side of Guy: she finds him sensitive and compassionate. In an increasingly superficial, vapid society, Guy is still capable of (somewhat) deep thought, as evidenced by the way he studies the moon.

Clarisse's comments on Guy's personality suggest that Guy's society is forcing him to become something he's not.

Because his society celebrates distraction and superficial entertainment, thoughtful, introspective people are pressured into mindlessness. Over the course of the novel, Guy will learn to escape the deafening influence of television and get in touch with his inquisitive spirit.

> The Mechanical Hound slept but did not sleep, lived but did not live in its gently humming, gently vibrating, softly illuminated kennel back in a dark corner of the firehouse.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, we're introduced to the "villain" of the novel, the Mechanical Hound. The Hound is a machine used by the firemen to track down traitors and criminals--i.e., those who don't agree to conform to society's corrupt laws. The Hound is a frightening figure--it's mindless and never asleep, and therefore always watching for potential offenders, and never questioning the morality of its orders.

In a sense, the Hound is the embodiment of everything wrong with Guy's society. While most people embrace technology in their lives--cars, radios, televisions--the Hound embodies the dark side of this technology, proving that it can be used to hurt, not just entertain (and with the Hound, hurting *is* entertainment, as later seen in the highly-televised hunt for Montag). In a more subtle sense, the Hound could be said to represent the average *citizen* of Guy's society--always chained to the television, and therefore never fully awake or asleep.

> "I'm antisocial, they say. I don't mix. It's so strange. I'm very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn't it? Social to me means talking to you about things like this."

Related Characters: Clarisse McClellan (speaker), Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

As Guy gets to know Clarisse, he discovers that she's been punished in the past for being, allegedly, "antisocial." Clarisse didn't have a good time at school because of her suppose antisocial tendencies, which alienated her from her peers. But here, Clarisse makes it clear that "antisocial" is a biased, arbitrary term. By readers' standards, Clarisse is interesting and thoughtful. And yet because she refuses to conform to society--to be superficial and loud and aggressive--she's labeled antisocial and condemned by her peers. Ironically, Clarisse is both the character who most resembles the likely reader of *Fahrenheit 451* and character who least resembles the average citizen of the fictional society of *Fahrenheit 451*. Thus she is a kind of link character, a voice of sanity in an overwhelming, insane world.

Bradbury critiques the strong conformity of American society in the 1950s. Those who are "different," both in the 50s and in the novel, are condemned and made to feel imperfect. It takes a lot of courage and strength for Clarisse to remain aloof from her society--instead of giving in and watching television with everyone else, she remains curious and thoughtful about the real world and her own inner life.

> The woman on the porch reached out with contempt to them all and struck the kitchen match against the railing.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Guy and his fellow firefighters try to arrest an old woman who refuses to conform to society. Instead of obeying the censorship guidelines of her country, the old woman continues to read whatever books she chooses. When Guy tries to arrest the woman, she refuses to cooperate. Defiant to the end, she lights herself on fire rather than be brought in to the police.

The woman's behavior suggests that she's a martyr for her beliefs. Like so many martyrs throughout history, the woman dies for what she believes in--free speech and the freedom to read what one chooses. Paradoxically, the fact that the woman herself takes action and *chooses* to burn to death suggests that she, not the firemen, is in control. Even if Guy and his peers have physical power over the old woman, they can't force her to conform to society.

"Speed up the film, Montag, quick... *Uh! Bang! Smack! Wallop, Bing, Bong, Boom!* Digest-digests, digest-digest-digests. Politics? One column, two sentences, a headline!... Whirl man's mind around about so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcasters that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!"

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker), Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Captain Beatty--Guy's superior at the fire station--gives Guy a condensed history of the United States. Once, information was thorough and analytical. But with the rise of the mass media and the invention of television, information became increasingly brief and superficial. In an effort to entertain, rather than inform, newspapers condensed their articles. The result is that the overall "pace" of human society seemed to increase: people processed information at a quicker speed, but only because the information was designed to be simpler and less nuanced.

Beatty's informal history (itself a highly "simplified" version of a big, complicated topic) suggests that American society as a whole has embraced the tenets of modern advertising. Just as the point of an ad slogan is to be quick, digestible, and above all entertaining, newspapers and books have begun to aspire to simplicity, with the goal of attracting as many "customers" as possible. It's easy to see the costs of the social changes Beatty describes, even if he never explicitly names them: in trading popularity and simplicity for thoroughness, society has become less thoughtful, less well-informed, and generally less mature.

"Bigger the population, the more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the dog lovers, the cat lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second-generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico. The people in this book, this play, this TV serial are not meant to represent any actual painters, cartographers, mechanics anywhere. The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy, remember that!... Authors, full of evil thoughts, lock up your typewriters. They *did*."

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker), Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Captain Beatty continues offering Guy an informal history of the changes in information flow during the 20th century. With the rise of identity politics, the media were placed under close scrutiny. If a newspaper article was perceived as being insensitive to a particular religion, occupation, or ethnic group, that group could lobby to have the article removed or even permanently erased. In general, demographic groups gained more and more political power, to the point where all media had to be extra careful not to offend any group of people in particular.

The passage is one of the most famous and widely quoted in the entire book, because it's often interpreted as a scathing critique of "political correctness." As Bradbury sees it, it's wrong to censor a book for its perceived insensitivity to a group of people, because doing so will lead to a slippery slope in which *no* remotely controversial opinions can be printed. The end result, then, is that creativity and free speech are neutered, and only socially-approved ideas can be publicized. As Bradbury makes very clear, however, the reason for the slippery slope of political correctness has very little to do with genuine respect for the demographic groups who claim to be offended. Rather, media groups censor their own products for fear of alienating potential customers--in other words, censorship prevails because it makes *economic* sense. Companies make the most money when they appeal--however blandly--to "everyone."

"We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon."

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Captain Beatty gives one final historical explanation for the supremacy of censorship in his society: anti-intellectualism. In Beatty's society, intelligence is treated with suspicion and even outright hatred, because it makes the less-intelligent feel inferior. While anti-intellectualism can be found in any society, it's usually protected by certain laws and rules, such as the laws of free speech, which allow intelligent people to express their ideas freely. In Beatty's society, however, no such protections exist; as a result, the less-intelligent can "wage war" on intelligent people with impunity. Books, then, are perceived as dangerous, because they can make certain people more intelligent than others. The inevitable endpoint, Beatty concludes, is to make everyone the same.

The passage suggests that Beatty's society has perverted the tenets of the American Constitution, which argues that people should be *born* equal (meaning equal under the law, supposedly), by trying to make people *remain* equal throughout their lives. This is a darker side to the ideas of democracy and equality (and was also an aspect of some historical totalitarian Communist regimes)--the forced equality that doesn't just mean lifting up the lower, but also cutting down the higher. Ideally, America was founded to be a complex, pluralistic society, in which each person brought different experiences, skills, and ideas to the table. Now, with the popularity of television, everyone seems to have the same experiences (because they watch the same programs on TV). Human beings' natural resentment for smart people, combined with the new scope of mass media, has resulted in a dull, homogeneous society.

"Burn all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean."

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Beatty sums up his ideas about censorship and conformity with a simple sentence: "Burn all, burn everything." Beatty has just been describing the history of censorship in the United States. He fully recognizes the scope of his work as a fireman: by burning forbidden literature, he realizes, he's strengthening a system in which all people have the same experiences and thoughts.

Beatty's work as a fireman represents the "dark side" of his society. People in the U.S. enjoy lives of fun and mindless pleasure--but their pleasure is dependent on Beatty burning down houses (and occasionally burning the people in them, too). And yet though Beatty knows the truth, he still seems untroubled by the nature of his work. Because he celebrates conformity and homogeneity, he sees his work as noble and pure. Fire, he implies, is the "great equalizer"--the weapon that allows everyone to be happy.

"The important thing for you to remember, Montag, is we're the Happiness Boys... you and I and the others. We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought. We have our fingers in the dike. Hold steady. Don't let the torrent of melancholy and drear philosophy drown our world."

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker), Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Beatty tells his employee, Guy Montag, that he and Guy are agents of happiness. As firemen, Beatty and Guy have one crucial job: destroy literature that doesn't conform with society's standards. While Guy has some reservations about the morality of burning books, Beatty seems not to doubt the nobility of his profession. Beatty sees intelligence and deep thought as dangerous diseases, which lead to unhappiness and anxiety. The only way to ensure that society remains happy is by preserving its innocence--in other words, by destroying all "conflicting ideas."

Beatty's speech to Guy is, of course, darkly ironic, since, as we've seen, it is *Beatty's* society (the society of conformity and television) that is actually "melancholy and drear." Theory and deep thought do not, contrary to what Beatty claims, always lead to sadness--rather, they represent the only way that human beings can achieve true happiness and move beyond the glib pleasures of superficial entertainment.

"At least once in his career, every fireman gets an itch. What do the books *say*, he wonders. Oh, to *scratch* that itch, eh?"

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Guy Montag asks his superior at the fire station, Captain Beatty, what happens when a fireman gives in to the temptation to read some of the books he's supposed to burn. Beatty, an experienced fireman, replies that all firemen feel the temptation Guy has described.

Beatty's speech implies that Beatty himself has given into temptation and read some forbidden books. (Beatty's awareness of literature and history, demonstrated throughout the first part of the book, further implies that he's a secret reader.) In a broader sense, too, the passage suggests that all human beings feel a natural sense of curiosity; a desire to learn about the world and about themselves. In Beatty and Guy's society, however, the government strongly discourages people from giving into their natural human curiosity. Thus, the passage suggests that Guy's society is barbaric because it perverts human nature.

Part 2 Quotes

"We have everything we need to be happy, but we aren't happy. Something's missing. I looked around. The only thing I positively *knew* was gone was the books I'd burned in ten or twelve years. So I thought books might help."

Related Characters: Guy Montag (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Guy and his wife try to read some of the forbidden books that Guy was supposed to burn. While reading the books is a challenge for Guy (who's barely read anything in his life), Guy senses that a solution to his sadness *must* be hidden in literature--literature is the only thing missing from his life, and therefore literature must be capable of nourishing his soul.

The passage makes an important distinction between spiritual and material needs. When Guy says that he has everything he needs to be happy, he's referring to his material needs exclusively: as a typical American, he has a nice house, plenty of food, constant television, etc. And yet Guy senses that his deeper needs aren't being addressed: television can entertain him, but it can't take away his sense of melancholy and unfulfillment. In order to remedy his sadness, Guy looks to literature for help--precisely because it's the one thing denied to him.

"It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were it books....The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through radios and televisors, but are not."

Related Characters: Faber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faber--an elderly professor whom Guy first met years before--gives Guy his theory for why books are superior to television. Faber believes that books are important because they offer a complex view of life. In a good book, there are no clear heroes and villains--life is not described in terms of "black and white." Instead, good books describe reality in nuanced terms. It's different on television: on the TV shows of Montag's society, life is described in terms of good and evil, sensationalism and pure entertainment, so that everything is simplified and, at heart, unrealistic.

Faber adds an important qualifier to his point. It's not that books are inherently better than movies--rather, TV producers have *chosen* to create TV shows that ignore the "infinite detail" that literature offers. It's certainly possible for TV to convey moral and intellectual complexity; but, perhaps because complexity doesn't sell well, TV producers opt instead for cartoonish simplicity. (Makes you wonder what Bradbury would have said about shows like *The Wire* or *Breaking Bad*...)

"We are living in a time when flowers are trying to live on flowers, instead of growing on good rain and black loam."

Related Characters: Faber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Professor Faber, Guy's new mentor, offers a tragic metaphor for the way American society has come to function. Faber compares America to a field of flowers. The flowers are beautiful and delicate-looking--symbols of sensual, material pleasure. The people of the United States believe that they can survive on a "diet" of happiness and sensual pleasure only (i.e., "flowers are trying to live on flowers").

Faber suggests that modern Americans try to satisfy their deepest spiritual needs in the shallowest of ways. A human being can't find peace and comfort in a superficial program on TV--and yet people in Faber's society increasingly attempt to do so. Faber suggests that people can only get spiritual nourishment from "good rain and black loam"--i.e., from books and ideas that, while not conventionally pleasurable, provide a deeper channel for thought and insight. Perhaps Faber considers literature, religion, and philosophy to be "black loam"--it might not always "taste" sweet, but it gives people the strength to live well.

"Those who don't build must burn. It's as old as history and juvenile delinquents."

Related Characters: Faber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faber sums up his ideas about modern American society. Society, he says, has become a place for destruction. Firemen destroy forbidden literature, and even the average American citizen watches TV programs in which people and machines destroy each other. In short, society has become mindlessly violent because it's entertaining, and because people have nothing positive to offer in place of violence. As Faber sees it, society's love for destruction is indicative of a fundamental lack of creativity: "those who don't build must burn."

Faber's theory of modern American society is rooted in his knowledge of history. There have always been destructive people, he acknowledges. But for most of history, mankind's potential for creativity overshadowed its potential to destroy. Societies celebrated creation more highly than destruction. Nowadays, society fetishizes destruction and greets all unique creativity with suspicion.

He would be Montag-plus-Faber, fire plus water, and then, one day, after everything had mixed and simmered and worked away in silence, there would be neither fire nor water, but wine.

Related Characters: Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Guy Montag resolves to use Faber's teachings to undermine the censorship and repression of his own society. Faber is deeply cynical about the state of society--he condemns his society's ignorance, its sadism, and its lack of empathy--but he's always reluctant to put his ideas to practice. Guy, by contrast, is eager to improve the state of society, trying to bring the engagement and empathy Faber celebrates and put it into action.

The passage is an interesting description of what the 19th century anarchists called "creative destruction." Guy has spent most of his adult life destroying books on behalf of his society. But henceforth, Guy will use his destructive tendencies in order to *create* something new and valuable: an empathetic, engaged society. In doing so, Guy hopes to engineer a near-miraculous transformation in his country (Note the Biblical allusion in this passage: Guy wants to change his world, like Christ changing water into wine.)

"They are so confident that they will run on forever. But they won't run on. They don't know that this is all one huge big blazing meteor that makes a pretty fire in space, but that someday it'll have to *hit*."

Related Characters: Faber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faber offers some harsh thoughts on Guy's

wife and her friends. Guy has just returned from a long conversation with Faber about the superficiality of modern society. During his ride back to his home, Guy learns that his country has just declared war. When Guy returns to his home, he's shocked to find that his wife and her peers are mostly indifferent to the political details of the war--they're more concerned about the TV program they're about to watch, "The White Clown."

Faber, who's communicating with Guy via an earpiece, claims that Guy's peers are naively confident that their society will last forever. In other words, they don't *need* to think about politics or war, because they're confident that America will win every military conflict, allowing them to go on watching TV and enjoying themselves. The reality, however, is that Guy's friends are partying on a sinking ship--and soon enough, their country's actions will catch up with it. Also note that Faber again uses fire imagery here, suggesting that the fires society uses to burn books will grow beyond its control, and burn up society itself.

Part 3 Quotes

"What is it about fire that's so lovely? No matter what age we are, what draws us to it?... It's perpetual motion; the thing man wanted to invent but never did. Or almost perpetual motion. If you let it go on, it'd burn our lifetimes out."

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Captain Beatty has discovered that Guy Montag is a "traitor" to society: Guy has been reading the books he was supposed to destroy. As Beatty prepares to arrest Guy for his acts of treason, he mocks Guy by musing on the beauty of fire. Beatty claims that all human beings are attracted to fire, because it has the potential to last forever, because it is capable of destroying everything, and because it is constantly moving and entertaining (like a primitive form of television, almost).

It's interesting that Beatty praises fire for its destructive capabilities as well as its immortality. One could argue that fire symbolizes Beatty's society as a whole: an incredibly destructive country that wages war on its neighbors and broadcasts violent TV programs, all for entertainment and pleasure.

"Now, Montag, you're a burden. And fire will lift you off my shoulders, clean, quick, sure; nothing to rot later. Antibiotic, aesthetic, practical."

Related Characters: Captain Beatty (speaker), Guy Montag

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Here Beatty offers Guy a chance to burn down his own house, which--as we've seen--has been targeted for destruction because of Guy's "subversive" behavior. As Guy grips the flamethrower in his hands, Beatty mocks Guy for being a "burden" and suggests that he'll enjoy burning Guy to a crisp.

It's not a great idea to antagonize someone with access to a working flamethrower. But perhaps Beatty's behavior in this passage is indicative of a broader problem with his society. On some level, Beatty seems to *want* Guy to attack him with the flamethrower (which Guy does immediately after this passage). Beatty's hatred for Guy--his desire to burn Guy to death--suggests his *self*-hatred, and his desire to end his own pathetic life. In short, Beatty's behavior exposes the hidden depression and self-loathing of modern American society-- feelings encouraged by the vapidity and violence of the modern media.

"We're nothing more than dust jackets for books, of no significance otherwise."

Related Characters: Granger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Guy has now fled away from his city and into the wilderness. There, he makes contact with a man named Granger, the

leader of a ragtag group of intellectuals. Each intellectual in the group has memorize the entirety of one book: Guy's will be the Biblical Book of Ecclesiastes. Granger gives Guy some advice: he encourages Guy to be modest, and to think himself as the mere "dust jacket" for the book he's memorized.

Granger's comments in this passage are indicative of the oral tradition to which mankind is returning. Because of the dangers of possessing books, Granger and his followers have memorized long texts. Like the poets of the ancient world, such as Homer, Granger and his peers don't think of themselves as great thinkers or writers; rather, they're just the passive receivers of other people's great ideas. Put another way, their duty is to remember and repeat, not to create.

Granger's comments also reinforce the differences between his followers and Guy's former society. In Guy's society, people were encouraged to be vain and self-absorbed; indeed, a vast network of advertisers and TV corporations existed to appeal to people's vanity. In the wilderness, Granger has no patience for vanity; his followers are expected to be humble and respect the majesty of literature and timeless ideas.

"...We're going to build a mirror factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them."

Related Characters: Granger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel--when Guy's former society has seemingly been destroyed by nuclear war--Granger plans to rebuild human civilization from the ashes. Half-seriously, half-jokingly, Granger envisions a "mirror factory" that will allow all human beings to see their own faces and learn introspection again.

Why does Granger want to replace civilization with a society of mirrors? As Granger sees it, Guy's society was guilty of constant distraction, and thus of profound ignorance: ignorance of politics, ignorance of history, and above all, ignorance of the self. Guy and his peers watched television and went shopping, but never stopped to ask themselves if they were happy, or if the people around them were happy. Because they never listened to their own instincts and spiritual needs, Guy's neighbors allowed themselves to spiral into depression and misery. Thus, by planning a "mirror factory," Granger indicates that he's learned from society's mistakes. In Granger's new society, human beings will never again be allowed to lose sight of their own unique desires and thoughts. Instead of confirming to society's expectations, people will celebrate uniqueness and individuality.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1

As the novel begins, Guy Montag is taking an intense pleasure in burning a pile of books on a lawn. It's his job—he's a fireman. He loves the way things look when they burn and the way he feels when he burns them. When he's done, he returns to the fire station, changes out of his equipment (including his helmet with the number **451** on it), and takes the subway to his stop.

The opening plunges you into the different world of the novel. The job of the fireman is the opposite of what we expect—firemen set fires. Montag, the protagonist, likes his job. He seems happy, and he doesn't appear to think there's anything wrong with burning books.

As he walks home, Montag encounters a teenage girl standing alone. She introduces herself as Clarisse McClellan, a new neighbor, and asks if she can walk home with him. She notes that Montag is a fireman, and says that she isn't afraid of him and tells him that fireman used to put out fires rather than start them. Montag finds Clarisse fascinating, but she also makes him nervous. For some reason she reminds him of an early memory of **candlelight**.

Based on Montag's reactions to Clarisse, it's clear that she's unconventional simply for engaging him in conversation, but also for the things she knows. Montag's memory of candlelight seems to symbolize the flickering self-awareness that Clarisse awakens in Montag.

Clarisse says that in her family people actually walk places, in contrast to people in their jet cars who don't know what the world looks like. She says that she doesn't take part in the entertainments that her peers do. When she tells him that there's dew on the grass in the morning, Montag suddenly isn't sure if he knew that. When they reach Clarisse's house, all the lights are on because her family is still up talking. She asks Montag if he's happy, then runs inside before he can answer.

The fact that everything about Clarisse is strange to Montag reveals a lot about normality in this society. People are rarely out or even awake at night, they rarely walk anywhere or notice everyday aspects of the natural world, and no one seems to have deep meaningful conversations.

Montag enters his own house, troubled by Clarisse's parting question. Of course he's happy. But the image of Clarisse's face stays with him, reminding him of doubts he keeps in a hidden place within him—his "innermost trembling thought."

This is the first hint that Montag is dealing with inner doubts—doubts that he had managed to hide even from himself.

Upon entering the cold, dark silence of his bedroom, which the narrator compares to a tomb, Montag realizes that he is not, in fact, happy. His wife, Mildred, is stretched out as usual on her bed, with radio earplugs called "Seashells" filling her ears with sound. Montag accidentally steps on an empty bottle of sleeping pills on the floor and remembers that the bottle had contained 30 pills earlier in the day. He flicks on a hand-held igniter and sees that Mildred is pale and barely breathing.

The description of the bedroom as a cold, empty tomb with separate beds suggests that Montag's marriage with Mildred is dying. Notice also the contrast between Montag and Mildred: Montag admits to himself that he is unhappy, but Mildred avoids acknowledging her unhappiness and instead overdoses on sleeping pills.

Suddenly, a squadron of jet bombers rips through the sky overhead, shaking the house with a supersonic roar.

The bombers suggest a threat of war, and that this is a society capable of great violence.

Montag calls the hospital. Two technicians arrive with machines—one to pump out Mildred's stomach, the other to replace her blood with fresh, clean blood. The pump is also equipped with an Eye, a device that allows the machine's operator to clean out of the melancholy from a patient. The technicians chatter while they work, and Montag grows more upset. They finish, charge him $50, and leave to take another call for a similar case in the neighborhood.

The fact that technicians, rather than doctors, come to revive Mildred's indicates that suicide is very common in this society. The technicians use their machines to suck all the sadness out of a person and simply dispose of it like trash. No one addresses or even acknowledges the underlying causes of unhappiness.

Montag watches Mildred as color returns to her cheeks. He opens the window across the lawn and hears laughter coming from the McClellans' house. Montag walks across the lawn and stands outside his neighbors' brightly lit home, listening to their conversation. The uncle is talking about how people are treated like "disposable tissue."

Opening the windows and eavesdropping on his neighbors' conversation hints at the beginning of the process of opening Montag's mind. The McClellans' are happy, and are having a real conversation, about real issues and ideas. .

The next morning, Mildred has no memory of the previous night and denies taking the pills. Later, when Montag gets ready for work, Mildred is in the TV parlor preparing to watch a TV show that lets her participate. The TV fills up three full walls. Mildred complains that they don't have a fourth wall yet. Montag makes sure the TV program has a happy ending before leaving for work.

Mildred drowns her unhappiness in a constant media blitz. She keeps radio earphones in her ears and spends her day captivated and superficially content, surrounded by an interactive, three-wall TV. In doing so, she conforms utterly to the society around her.

On his way to work, Montag meets Clarisse again. She is walking in the rain, tasting the raindrops and holding dandelions. She applies a childish dandelion test (rubbing the flower on his chin) to see if Montag is in love—her test shows that he isn't in love with anyone. Montag is upset and insists that he *is* in love.

Clarisse earlier forced Montag to think about a big question he'd avoided—whether he was happy—now she forces him to think about whether he's actually in love. Tasting raindrops is a perfect metaphor for interacting with the natural world.

Clarisse tells Montag that she thinks it's strange that he's a fireman, since other firemen won't talk to her or listen to her. Clarisse's comment makes Montag feel as if he's split in half. But rather than say anything, he sends her on her way to see her psychiatrist. The authorities make her see the psychiatrist because of her tendency toward independent thought.

Clarisse now also forces Montag to face his own individuality by making him see that he's not a typical fireman. But Montag isn't yet ready to say or do anything about it. Notice how the authorities try to control and silence independent people like Clarisse.

After Clarisse leaves, Montag opens his mouth to taste the raindrops while he walks to work.

Montag has been affected by Clarisse., though.

At the fire station, Montag looks in on the "sleeping" Mechanical Hound, a robotic creature that can be programmed to track the scent of an animal (or person), which it then kills with an injection of morphine or procaine. To entertain themselves, the firemen sometimes program the hound and let rats loose in the firehouse and watch the hunt. Montag doesn't usually participate. Now, when Montag touches the Hound's muzzle, it makes a growling noise, shows its needle, and moves towards him. Shaken, Montag escapes to the second floor.

The Mechanical Hound is one of the more chilling parts of the world of Fahrenheit 451. It's one of the firemen's terrible weapons, but it's supposed to be without personality or motive—a machine that attacks only what it is programmed to attack. Yet the Mechanical Hound threatens Montag. Maybe he has something to hide? Bradbury is foreshadowing later events here.

Upstairs, four firemen are playing cards. Montag complains to Captain Beatty (whose helmet has a **phoenix** on it) about the Hound's threatening gestures toward him. The Captain says the Hound doesn't like or dislike, it just does what it's programmed to do. Montag wonders if someone has programmed the Hound with his partial chemical fingerprint. The Captain dismisses this but says they'll have the Hound checked out. Montag thinks about something he has hidden behind the ventilator grille at home. Out loud, he says he wouldn't want to be the Hound's next victim. Captain Beatty asks him if he has a guilty conscience, looks at him steadily, and then laughs softly.

Captain Beatty is Montag's boss. Outwardly he reassures Montag, yet there's a quiet but distinct undertone of threat to what he says. When Beatty stares at Montag, it's almost as if Beatty can sense what Montag is thinking about. Beatty's phoenix insignia symbolizes rebirth through fire—but the renewed world promised by the firemen is one without books. This image of a phoenix will be contrasted with another image of a phoenix at the end of the novel.

For the next week, Montag sees Clarisse every day. They have conversations about their friendship, about children, about the smell of old leaves. Montag feels comfortable and peaceful. Clarisse tells him she's left school because they think she's antisocial. She describes the school day to Montag—TV class, lots of sports, making pictures, transcribing history, and memorizing answers. She also describes what passes for sociability among her peers—going to a Fun Park, breaking windows, daredevil games in cars, shouting, dancing, and fighting. Six of her friends have been shot in the last year. Clarisse prefers to talk, or simply to observe people and figure out who they are. She eavesdrops on conversations. She tells Montag that people talk without saying anything.

Bradbury uses the character of Clarisse to describe how mass media culture has affected the youth in Fahrenheit 451. Clarisse's peers have no respect for their elders and don't seem to value their own lives. They seek pleasure and instant gratification, they speed around in their cars and crash, they shoot each other, and they break things. Their education consists of learning answers without asking questions. In contrast, instead of searching out cheap thrills, Clarisse does what she can to try to understand and engage with other people.

Over the same seven-day period, Montag works at the firehouse, sometimes entering through the back door. Someone mentions that a fireman in Seattle committed suicide by setting the Mechanical Hound to his own chemical fingerprint. And then, one day, Clarisse is not there to walk him to the subway when he goes to work.

Montag's life actually does seem split in two during this period. On his walks with Clarisse he is his real self, at ease, talking, and listening. At the firehouse, the Hound preys on his peace of mind.

At the station that day, Montag and the firemen play cards as the radio in the background reports that war may be declared at any moment. Montag, meanwhile, feels that Beatty can sense his guilt. He says he's been thinking about the man whose library they burned last week—thinking about what it would be like to have firemen in their own homes. With a knowing tone, Beatty asks whether Montag has any books. Montag says no.

Although Montag's guilty secret hasn't yet been disclosed to the reader, it seems more and more likely that the secret involves books. Montag's guilt about burning the man's books also indicate that he's starting to rethink whether he really should be a fireman—he's starting to think for himself.

Montag asks if there once was a time when firemen prevented fires, rather than setting them. The other firemen scoff at this and take out their rule books, which state the history of the Firemen of America (established in the 18th century to burn books of British influence in the Colonies) and the basic rules of being a fireman—answer the alarm, burn everything, return to the fire station. They all stare at Montag. Suddenly, the fire alarm goes off.

In this future America, people are taught an alternate history that connects burning books to the patriotic acts of American independence—the first burned books were British-influenced books. But Montag's questions are starting to make him stand out from the others who merely accept this history without questioning it.

The firemen arrive at the house of an old woman whose neighbors reported her for having books. They break down the door and find the woman staring at the wall, reciting an obscure quotation. The woman remains in the house as the firemen ransack the house, pile up the books, and pump kerosene into the rooms. While they work, Montag grabs a book and instinctively hides it in his clothing.

The woman knows what will happen to her and, but she remains in the house. Unlike everyone else in this society, she has something to live and die for—books. By taking a book and hiding it, Montag signals that he may have his own secrets about books..

The woman refuses to leave the building. Montag desperately tries to lead her out, but she won't leave her porch. Kerosene fumes are rising from the books. Captain Beatty holds his igniter and counts to ten, but before he reaches ten, the woman strikes a match and lights herself and everything else on **fire**. The neighbors come out to watch the spectacle.

By choosing to burn herself rather than simply accept the burning of her books, the old woman becomes a martyr for books and the intellectual freedom they represent. Rather than letting the firemen kill her, she takes action and kills herself first.

Driving back to the firehouse, Montag asks what the woman was reciting when they entered. Beatty knows it by heart. It's a phrase that one man said to another before they were both burned for heresy in England in 1555: "We shall this day light such a **candle**, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

The woman chooses an appropriate quotation for her death. Her hope is to serve as an example to others, to serve as a flickering light or inspiration in the minds of those like Montag who witness her burning.

At home that night, Montag hides the book he took from the old woman's house under his pillow. Mildred talks to Montag for a while but it seems to him that she is saying nothing. Later that night, as Mildred listens to her Seashells, Montag feels like she's a complete stranger. He asks her where they originally met. Neither of them can remember. Mildred gets up and goes into the bathroom, where she begins to swallow sleeping pills.

Mildred, who's entire life is consumed by watching TV and listening to the radio, has nothing to say for herself. She is empty, and can't even remember the facts of her own life. Montag suffers from the same affliction, but he at least tries to remember. Mildred doesn't try—she escapes her sad thoughts by taking pills.

Montag realizes he's not in love with Mildred anymore. He feels like he's lost her to high-speed driving, the Seashells that are always stuffed in her ears, and the chattering "relatives" on the three TV screen walls in the living room. On the occasions when he tries to watch TV with Mildred, he's overwhelmed by the noise and nonsense of it, and Mildred isn't ever able to explain what the "relatives" are arguing about, either.

Both Montag and Mildred are clearly unhappy. But while Montag begins to investigate why he's unhappy, Mildred uses the distractions provided by their society to hide her unhappiness, even from herself. Montag, by asking himself hard questions, is trying to find himself. Mildred, by avoiding the same questions, is losing herself.

Montag mentions to Mildred that he hasn't seen the neighbors in a while and wonders what happened to them. Mildred responds that the McClellans moved out four days ago. She adds that the girl (Clarisse) was run over by a car and killed.

Though it's never made clear, it seems likely that the McClellans were either forcibly relocated or killed by the authorities to eliminate their dangerous ideas.

The next morning, Montag feels ill and vomits. He's late for work and considers calling in sick. He tells Mildred that he's haunted by the woman that the firemen burned along with her books. Montag also describes his guilt over all the books he's destroyed. Mildred refuses to have a real discussion about it. The painful exchange is interrupted when Captain Beatty unexpectedly arrives.

Montag's guilt about the woman's death has made him physically unwell and has caused him to question his job as a fireman. The old woman succeeded in lighting a candle in his mind that won't go out. Mildred, as always, refuses to engage in any deep conversation.

Once inside, Beatty tells Montag that he anticipated Montag would call in sick. He says that all firemen, at some point, struggle with the issues now bothering Montag. Beatty then tells Montag the real history of firemen, beginning with the development of mass media. It's the story of life speeding up in the 20th century, the world getting more crowded, and people having less time. Books were condensed to digests and tabloids and 15-minute radio shows. Information was delivered faster and faster, in briefer and briefer packages, with an emphasis on instant gratification. Education was simplified and shortened. Entertainment was everywhere.

Beatty's knowledge of the subject implies that he at one time shared Montag's concerns and researched the subject, even if he ultimately chose to remain a fireman. Incidentally, Beatty's critical descriptions of omnipresent entertainment and media distractions, dumbed-down news coverage, condensed literature, and shortened attention spans—all envisioned by Bradbury midway through the 20th century—look like fairly accurate predictions of early 21st-century society.

Another factor in the dumbing down of culture, according to Beatty, were the demands made by every imaginable minority group (geographical, ethnic, occupational, religious, and so on). No one would accept being offended, no one wanted to offend, and so books and magazines became bland and harmless, and people stopped reading, turning instead to comic books and sex magazines. No governmental censorship was necessary in the beginning. The effects of technology and the pressuring tactics of minorities of every sort were enough to make people hate debate and deep thought, and resort to burning books.

Beatty describes how a society comes to value and impose conformity on itself out of an innocent desire to avoid offending anyone. But being a free individual among other free individuals requires a willingness to offend and be offended. Bradbury again predicts the future with remarkable accuracy—though the term "political correctness" didn't exist when Bradbury wrote this novel, modern critiques of political correctness as censorship often echo Beatty's account.

As Beatty talks, Mildred starts straightening up the house. She soon discovers the book that Montag hid behind his pillow. When she tries to point out the book to Beatty, Montag snaps at her to sit down. Beatty notices the exchange, but continues speaking as if he hadn't noticed.

Beatty's willingness to overlook the book that Montag has taken suggests again that Beatty has been where Montag is now and is willing to let Montag work it out for himself.

Beatty says the word "intellectual" became a swear word. No one wanted to feel less intelligent than anyone else—everyone wanted to be equal. Books were like weapons used to make some people feel inferior. The job then fell to firemen to become the "official censors, judges, and executors" and to enforce the ban on books. Beatty comments that, after all, people just want to be happy, and this culture provides pleasure.

This society equates happiness with not feeling offended and having easy access to instant gratification. To ensure that they attain this state of "happiness," society has empowered firemen—who don't necessarily have any training in literature, or ethics, or law—to destroy books and knowledge.

Montag asks about Clarisse, and Beatty reveals that he'd been keeping an eye on the McClellan family for some time because of their odd and independent behavior, adding that it's for the best that Clarisse is dead.

Beatty's comment here makes it clear that in addition to destroying books, firemen are also willing to kill people.

Before leaving, Beatty mentions that every fireman eventually feels the urge to read a book. Montag asks what would happen to a fireman who accidentally took a book home. Beatty says the fireman could keep the book for 24 hours, but then would have to burn it, or else the rest of the firemen would come burn it for him. Beatty leaves, expecting Montag to return to work later that night. After Beatty leaves, Montag is angry and confused, and finds that he wants to hold onto these feelings.

Again, Beatty implies indirectly that he was once in a situation similar to Montag's and that he chose to remain a fireman. But it's clear that Montag will make a different choice. Unlike everyone else in this society, Montag lets himself remain unhappy, instead of drowning his feelings in entertainment or drugs.

Montag tells Mildred he never wants to work as a fireman again, and shows her a secret he's been keeping behind the ventilator grille: 20 books. Mildred becomes hysterical and tries to burn them, but he stops her. He says that they're both emotional messes, whether she admits it or not, and says that maybe there's something in the books that can help. She's reluctant, but he convinces her that they should give themselves 48 hours to look at the books, and if what Captain Beatty says is true—that books are meaningless—then they'll burn the books together. Montag wants to understand why someone like Beatty would be afraid of someone like Clarisse. Montag and Mildred sit on the floor and start reading.

This is the emotional climax of the first part of the book. Montag is at last voicing his fears about his relationship with Mildred, as well as his curiosity and hope about the books he's been hoarding without reading. He has a creeping suspicion that what the firemen stand for is wrong, while what Clarisse represents is right. He's ready to try to engage intellectually with other people's ideas and ways of looking at the world. He starts to read.

PART 2

Montag and Mildred spend the afternoon flipping through books, reading passages, and trying to make sense of what they read. Mildred doesn't see the point of it. She would rather be in the parlor with her TV "family" and is also nervous about what Captain Beatty would do if he found the books. Montag is more worried about Mildred's depression, Clarisse's disappearance, and the bombers he hears flying overhead. He says that their country has started and won two atomic wars since 1990, yet no one talks about the rest of the world, which supposedly hates their country and is starving. He doesn't understand it, but he hopes the books might help.

In his confusion and despair, Montag places his hopes in books. But he has no practice reading or understanding complicated ideas or arguments, so understanding what he reads is a real struggle. Mildred tries to read along with Montag, but she's addicted to the easy familiar pleasure of watching TV, and is afraid of the authorities who enforce the ban on books.

Montag remembers a retired English professor he met in the park a year ago. The man, Faber, was fearful of Montag at first, but after Montag assured Faber that he was safe and the two of talked for a while, Faber felt secure enough to recite poetry. The man made an impression on Montag—he was less interested in things than in the meaning of things. At the end of their talk, Faber gave Montag his phone number. Now Montag decides to call Faber for help. On the phone, Montag asks how many copies exist of the Bible, Shakespeare, and Plato. Faber, frightened and thinking this is some sort of trick, says there are none and hangs up.

Montag doesn't think he can get what he needs from books on his own, since he has no practice reading. Contrast the difficulty of reading and understanding books with the easiness of watching TV, which anyone can watch and understand immediately. But Faber, conditioned by years of violently enforced censorship, is too fearful to offer help.

Montag shows Mildred the book he took from the old woman's house: it's a Bible, maybe the last Bible in existence. Mildred tells him to hand it in to Captain Beatty, but if it really is the last Bible Montag doesn't want to destroy it. He would rather hand in a substitute book. Montag then realizes that if Beatty knows that he took the Bible, by handing in the substitute Montag will make it clear that he has more than one book. He decides that he'll have to get a replica of the Bible made.

Like the old woman in the house, Montag is now willing to put himself in danger for the sake of preserving books. He has taken a stance against his society, though at this point he is not in outright rebellion, but he trying to protect the Bible while also protecting himself.

Mildred yells at Montag that he's ruining them. Soon, however, she calms down and tells him that her friends are coming over to watch a show called the White Clown. Montag, hoping to get through to her, asks her, Does the White Clown love her? Does her TV "family" love her? She says it's a silly question. He leaves, dejected, and heads for the subway to go to Faber's house.

Mildred can't maintain feelings of anger for any length of time—like everyone else, she's too busy being excited about the next TV show! Unlike Montag, who engaged with Clarisse's question about love, Mildred dismisses her question as silly to avoid thinking about it.

On the subway, Montag feels numb. He remembers a time as a child at the beach when he tried, unsuccessfully, to fill a sieve with sand. Now he realizes he's holding the Bible open on his lap. If he can read the text in front of him and memorize it, he thinks that he can keep some of the sand in the sieve. He tries to read a passage but he's distracted by an advertisement for toothpaste. He stands up, screams for the advertisement to shut up, and waves the Bible, alarming the other passengers, before he gets off.

The sand falling through the sieve is a metaphor for knowledge in this society in general, and for Montag's effort to get and keep knowledge in particular. Montag no longer accepts the basic values of his society, and until he can find some other values to take their place, he is lost.

Faber is frightened when Montag shows up at his house, but is reassured when Montag shows him the Bible. Faber describes himself as a coward because he didn't speak up long ago when he saw the way society was changing. He then asks Montag to tell him why he's come.

Faber believes in books and knowledge, but as of now does not have the courage to stand up for them. Unlike Mildred, who conforms because she is addicted to distraction, Faber conforms out of fear.

Montag says that something is missing from people's lives, and books are the only things he knows for sure are missing. So, maybe books are the answer. Faber responds that it's not the books that are missing, it's what's *in* the books—and could also be on radio and television, but isn't.

Faber's point here is that it's knowledge and deep thought that are important, not what contains the knowledge and thought.

Faber says three things are missing from people's lives. The first is quality information that has a detailed and "textured" understanding of life. As a parable, Faber mentions the story of Hercules and Antaeus, a giant wrestler who was invincible so long has he stood firmly on the earth, but whom Hercules defeated after lifting him off the ground. He agrees when Montag relays Mildred's contention that TV seems more real than books, but he responds that he prefers books because television is too fast and controlling—you can't stop watching or you will miss what's happening. With books, in contrast, you can put them down and consider them to digest what they say before reading on.

Faber's mention of the parable of Hercules and Antaeus suggests that mass media has lost its connection to real life by leaving out thought and knowledge. In turn, it provides no strength to those who consume it. While Faber believes that any form of media can contain the type of information he prizes in books, he thinks that the effort required to read books makes them the best suited type of media for disseminating rich and complicated ideas.

The second missing thing in people's lives is leisure time. Leisure time doesn't mean hours spent speeding in cars or sitting in front of four-wall TV shows. Instead, it means the leisure of silence and having the space in one's life to examine and digest one's reading and experience.

There is plenty of leisure time in the society of Fahrenheit 451, but it is consumed by noise, images, speed, and explosions. No one really processes what they see or hear or feel.

Faber's third requirement is the freedom for people to act based on what they learn when they have access to both quality information and the peace of mind to think it through.

This is a reminder that the threat of physical violence hovers over people like Faber and now Montag.

Montag wants to do something, but Faber is reluctant to act. Faber does hypothetically suggest a scheme of printing books and planting them in the firehouses to discredit the firemen. Montag jumps at the idea, but as a bomber flies overhead, Faber says that the firemen are actually just a symptom because the populace doesn't want to read anyway. Faber says that they'd be better off just waiting for the coming war to destroy the current civilization.

The weight of seeing his civilization decay and of his feelings of cowardice have left Faber almost unwilling to act. He can't face risking anything for what seems like a losing cause. Nevertheless, Montag's appearance at his home gives him a tiny spark of hope.

Unwilling not to act, Montag rips a page out of the Bible, then another, until Faber's agrees to help. Faber promises to get in touch with an old friend of his who owns a printing press. He also agrees to help Montag deal with Captain Beatty and give Beatty a substitute book instead of the Bible. Faber gives Montag a tiny two-way radio transmitter he's built that can fit in someone's ear. The device will allow Faber to hear whatever Montag hears and to talk Montag through difficult situations.

Montag is worried that Captain Beatty will talk him out of the resolve he now feels. The Captain has a way with words, but so does Faber, and with Faber's help, Montag may learn and grow stronger. Faber and Beatty are set up as opposites.

As Montag takes the subway home, Faber reads to him from the Bible while pleasant announcements that the country has mobilized for war play over the radio.

The contrast between Montag and Faber's reading of the Bible and the casual broadcasts about the war big shows the superficiality of this society.

At home, Mildred's friends Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles arrive to watch the White Clown. Faber, through Montag' earpiece, tells him not to do anything and to be patient, but Montag pulls the plug on the TV show and tries to talk with them. The women have no concern about the coming war—Mrs. Phelps says that if her husband, who's serving in the Army, is killed then she'll just marry again. Their apathy, disconnection from their families, and their decision to vote for President Noble because he looked nice while the opposition candidate was fat, enrages Montag, who leaves the room.

Mildred and her friends (and by extension all the people of this society) also seem utterly superficial. They don't care about the war, have no connections to their family, don't care about raising the next generation, and their opinions about politics are shallow and uninformed. They don't seem to have any real interests besides entertainment.

Moments later, Montag returns with a book of poetry. Although Faber, through the radio earpiece, begs him not to, Montag reads a poem—"Dover Beach," by Matthew Arnold. When he finishes, Mrs. Phelps is crying, while Mrs. Bowles denounces poetry in general and Montag for making them endure the messiness of poetry. At Faber's urging, Montag drops the book in the incinerator. He gives Mrs. Bowles an earful before she leaves, listing all the sad things that have happened in her life that she refuses to think about. The friends depart, Mildred rushes into the bedroom and takes sleeping pills. Faber calls Montag a fool through the earpiece. Montag finally removes it from his ear and shoves it in his pocket.

The women can't handle hearing the poetry. One reacts with anger and denial, another is reduced to sobs. The suggestion is that the poem contains the kind of reality that these women—like most people in this society—hide from themselves with television, radio, and fast cars. When they are exposed to it, they must also face their own hidden despair.

Montag searches the house for his books. He finds them where Mildred has put them behind the refrigerator, and discovers that she has burned several of them already. He hides the rest in the backyard. He leaves for work, feeling guilty that he has upset the women, and wonders if they are right to care only about immediate pleasures. Faber, talking to Montag through the reinstated earpiece, tells him that fun is fine if there is peace, but that now the world is on the brink of war.

Montag has made his choice to protect the books above all else, but he has still not completely made his break from his job. At this point he is also not entirely convinced that the pursuit of instant gratification is hollow.

At the firehouse, Montag hands over a book to Beatty, who welcomes him back to work and tosses the book in the wastebasket without reading the title. While the firemen play cards, Beatty recites contradictory passages from books by famous authors in an attempt to convince Montag that books are useless and untrustworthy. An alarm comes in and the firemen head out into the night. Beatty drives at breakneck speed to their destination. It is Montag's house.

Beatty's intimate knowledge of literature is impressive for someone whose job is to burn books. In fact, it's difficult to believe that Beatty, who has committed so many passages to memory, truly thinks the books those passages come from have no value and should be destroyed. Perhaps Beatty is himself conflicted about his job as a fireman...

PART 3

As the neighbors come out to watch, Montag glances toward Clarisse's empty house. Beatty notices and mocks Montag for being influenced by her nonsense. Mildred runs out of her house with a suitcase and disappears into a taxi. Montag realizes *she* was the one who raised the alarm.

Mildred is so emotionally disconnected that she's able to turn in her husband and slip off in a taxi to start another life without a word of farewell. After all, she can be with her TV "relatives" anywhere.

Beatty orders Montag to destroy his own house with a flamethrower or get hunted down by the Mechanical Hound. Faber (speaking through the earpiece) begs Montag to run away, but Montag has no choice and burns his house.

Montag burning down his own house recalls the old woman who burned down her house instead of allowing the firemen do it.

Beatty arrests Montag, then mocks him for the foolishness and snobbery that led him to quote poetry to Mildred's friends. Beatty strikes Montag and Faber's earpiece falls out. Beatty promises to use it to track down Montag's helper. Montag is still holding a flamethrower as Beatty provokes him with a quotation from Shakespeare and dares him to pull the trigger. Montag does. Beatty dies. The other firemen stand still, shocked. Montag knocks them out. The Mechanical Hound attacks Montag, and Montag destroys it with the flamethrower, but not before it stabs him with a needle full of anesthetic.

Beatty is aggressive up to the last moment. He taunts Montag—who has just lost his house, his wife, and his liberty—with lines from Shakespeare. This seems like a very unwise way to thwart someone with a loaded flamethrower, unless you have a death wish. Montag's actions, meanwhile, have made him an outright enemy of the state.

On one numb and one good leg, Montag hobbles to the backyard, grabs four remaining books, and limps away. He suddenly feels certain that Beatty actually *wanted* to die. As he runs, Montag fishes out a Seashell radio from his pocket and listens to coverage of the citywide manhunt for him. As Montag stops at a gas station bathroom to clean off the soot, he hears over the radio that war has been declared.

Why does Beatty continue to taunt Montag? Does Beatty in fact want to die—is his provocation of Montag a form of suicide? It's another suggestion that Beatty, who quotes so readily and fluently from the same books he destroys, is himself a tortured soul who regrets his decision to remain a book-destroying fireman.

Crossing a street, Montag is nearly run down by what he thinks is a police vehicle but what turns out to be joyriding teenagers. He wonders if they're the same kids who killed Clarisse. Continuing in darkness, he sneaks into the house of another fireman, hides his books in the kitchen, and calls in an alarm from a nearby phone booth.

The teenagers who try to run down Montag—a stranger they know nothing about—are a typical sample of Clarisse's peers. The younger generation is, if anything, even worse than Montag's generation. The future for this society looks grim.

Montag goes to Faber's house and tells him what happened. Faber feels invigorated for the first time in ages. Montag gives Faber his remaining money and the old man advises him to follow the river until he reaches the abandoned railroad tracks, and then to follow the tracks. There are hoboes living along the tracks, many of them refugee intellectuals with Harvard degrees. They agree to try to meet up eventually in St. Louis, where Faber plans on visiting a retired printer. They watch the manhunt of Montag briefly on TV. Montag finds it undeniably captivating to see the arrival of a new Mechanical Hound to the scene of Beatty 's death, and is tempted to stay and watch until the end.

The live coverage of the manhunt, complete with helicopter footage and running commentary, is another of Bradbury's predictions that came to pass in the United States before the end of the 20th century (see OJ Simpson). It also shows the intoxicating power of television: for a moment, Montag himself is spellbound by the spectacle. He almost wants to stay and watch until the end so he can see himself on-screen as the Hound's victim.

Montag advises Faber on how to eliminate Montag's scent from the house by burning things, wiping others with alcohol, and turning on the sprinklers in the yard. Montag takes a suitcase with Faber's old clothes, bids farewell, and leaves the house, heading toward the river. On the way he's able to track the Hound's approach by looking at TVs through the windows of houses. The Hound stops at Faber's house, but moves on. On his Seashell radio, Montag hears the announcer tell everyone in the neighborhood to step outside of their houses and look for the fugitive. He reaches the river just as doors begin to open. He throws away his clothes, douses himself with alcohol to mask his scent, puts on Faber's clothes, jumps into the water and floats with the current.

Since everyone's TV is tuned to the chase, Montag is able to be both fugitive and audience at the same time. But notice how easily the authorities can use the TV and radio to mobilize the masses to look for Montag. Here Bradbury is showing how TV and radio can be used to turn individuals into a mob that can executive the will of a central authority. Media like TV and radio are much more powerful and potentially destructive than books because books alone cannot mobilize a populace. Unlike TV and radio, books can't be controlled from a central source.

By the time the Hound and the searchlight-equipped helicopters reach the river, Montag is already beyond their reach downstream. As he floats along, he watches the helicopters turn around and head back to the city. He comes ashore somewhere in the countryside and is overcome by the natural smells and the vast darkness. He begins walking and stumbles across a railroad track. As he walks along the track, he feels certain that Clarisse once walked the same route.

The wild outdoors and the darkness of nighttime affect Montag deeply—he is truly engaging with the natural world. Whether or not Clarisse actually walked along those same rails, it was her conversations with Montag that prepared him to appreciate and pay attention to the natural world—the world in which he now finds himself utterly alone.

Montag follows the railroad tracks, feeling more alive and at home in his body. After a while, he comes upon a group of five old men warming themselves around a fire. They welcome him, and a man named Granger offers him coffee, as well as a beverage that changes the chemical makeup of his sweat (to throw the Hound off his scent). They all know who he is—in fact, they've been watching the chase on a portable TV, and they've been expecting him. Granger predicts that the police will pick out a scapegoat so that the public won't realize that they've lost Montag. Together, the men and Montag watch the end of the chase as the Hound pounces on an unsuspecting victim—whose face is never quite in focus—and the announcer declares that Montag has been found and killed.

Montag finds a deep joy in the natural world that he never found in the commotion and distractions of the city. He also feels more like himself. By engaging with the world, he finds himself. The men around the fire are similar to Faber, in that they are educated and thoughtful, but have chosen to live as fugitives outside of society. In this way, they are like a combination of Montag and Faber. Notice, also, how the authorities use television to lie to their people.

The men around the campfire—a reverend and four academics—ask Montag what he has to offer. He says the Book of Ecclesiastes, though only what he's memorized of it since he's lost the physical book. Granger is pleased. He says that there's one other Book of Ecclesiastes, but if anything happens to that man, Montag will be the last copy.

Montag's limited but passionate attempts at reading have paid off—he has something to contribute to the effort. Granger describes Montag as a copy of the Book of Ecclesiastes, implying that his knowledge of the book is his main importance.

Granger says that he himself is Plato's *Republic* and another man at the campfire is Marcus Aurelius's work. He introduces the men by the authors they have memorized. Granger explains that they all memorized books and then burned them, because keeping the books was too dangerous.

By identifying themselves by the works they've memorized, the men show that their knowledge is more important than their identities. In other words, it's not the medium but the message that matters.

Granger explains that thousands of people across the country have memorized books and are lying low, waiting for the war. Once it's over, they hope people might be willing to listen to them. If not, they'll pass the books to a next generation until the people of the cities are ready. Granger wants Montag to understand that they must not feel superior to other people. They consider themselves "dust jackets for books, of no significance otherwise." Someday they'll recite the books they remember so the text can be written down again. The men put out the fire and move downstream.

Humankind has returned to an oral tradition of literature, as in the time of Homer, when long works of poetry were memorized and recited. In a sense, these men are waiting for society to be reborn, to rise from its own ashes until it is safe again to write down works of literature.

As they move downstream, Montag looks at the faces of the men, trying to find a sign of their inner resolve and of the great stores of knowledge within their heads. But the men just look old and uncertain if their efforts will be of great consequence to the world. One of the men jokes that Montag shouldn't judge a book by its cover, and they all laugh.

The men know that their effort and sacrifice don't guarantee success, but they have given themselves to the cause of preserving knowledge and that gives them an identity.

Suddenly, jets scream overhead on the way to the city. Montag thinks of Mildred, and tells the other men that something must be wrong with him because he doesn't think he'll feel bad if she dies. He can barely even remember her. Granger tries to comfort Montag by telling him about his own late grandfather, a sculptor. Granger believes that people are remembered when they touch the world with thought and care and, in doing so, change it, even if in very small ways.

Here Granger clearly expresses the idea of the importance of individual engagement with the world. Someone who conforms and does not think or act for themselves, such as Mildred, leaves no trace of themselves because they don't affect the world. But those who act as individuals, as Montag has started to do, change the world, even if just a bit.

The war ends almost instantly: the jets drop their bombs and the city is annihilated. The shockwave from the explosion knocks the men down. As he huddles against the ground, Montag thinks of Clarisse, already dead, Faber, on a bus to another annihilated city, and Mildred, whom he imagines in horrifying detail in a hotel room at the moment of detonation. Suddenly he remembers where he and Mildred met, in Chicago.

Faber described the mass media as having lost touch with reality, just as Hercules lifted Antaeus from the ground. Now, as the city and that mass media society is destroyed, Montag huddles against the ground. In the process, he reconnects with his past and remembers where he met Mildred.

Montag then remembers passages from the Book of Ecclesiastes and recites them to himself. Once the aftershock of the bombs passes, the men eat breakfast. Granger relates the story of the **phoenix**, a mythical bird that built a pyre and burned itself every few hundred years and then was born again. "He must have been first cousin to Man," Granger says.

The phoenix, with its connection to fire, appears throughout the book. On Beatty's helmet, it symbolized fire's destructive power. Now, though, it symbolizes rebirth from war and from the nightmare mass media society that had taken over the United States.

Granger says their job is to remember. The first thing they should do, he says, is build a mirror factory so that everyone can take a long look at themselves. With Montag leading the way, the men head upriver to help the survivors and the destroyed city rise up again from the ashes.

Granger implies that the value of the literature they've memorized is that it forces people to recognize and think about themselves—in doing so, it provides the self-knowledge and wisdom needed to rebuild.

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