Fahrenheit 451 Study Guide

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This prophetic novel, first written and published in the early 1950s, is set in a future where books, and the ideas they represent and manifest, are burned to prevent disruptions in society. Its central character, Guy Montag, is a fireman responsible to that society for ensuring those burnings takes place, but an unexpected chain of events leads him to question both himself and the society in which he lives. Through its intense, action-packed telling of Montag's story, the narrative explores themes relating to the need for and power of independent thought, humanity's capacity for self-limitation, and the value of courage.

The novel begins with a graphic description of the pleasure and satisfaction experienced by Montag as he burns a house and the collection of books it once concealed. Later, as he walks home, he encounters a beautiful young woman who disturbs him with probing questions about happiness. Over the next week, Montag has regular encounters her, causing him to question who he is and what he does. At the end of that week, he is disturbed to discover that the woman, along with the rest of her family, has disappeared.

Montag's disquiet increases when he participates in a burning at the home of an elderly woman who, much to the surprise of Montag and his fellow firemen, watches calmly as they douse her home and precious books with kerosene and then lights a match, setting herself on fire as well. During the confusion of this burning, Montag conceals a book under his coat, later concealing it at home as well.

After a troubled night's sleep that results in him absenting himself from work, Montag is visited by his captain who, while reminding him that books are dangerous, implies that any fireman who finds himself curious about what books are actually like can have one for as long as twenty four hours, but it must eventually be burned. Meanwhile, Montag's wife discovers the concealed book, which narration reveals is a Bible. Montag later confesses that he has a concealed collection of books, eventually convincing his wife (who is worried that their home will be destroyed if anyone finds out what they've got) to read with him. She is unable, or unwilling, to get any meaning out of the books, eventually returning her attention to the house's expensive, addictive entertainment system. Meanwhile, Montag desperately memorizes verses from the Bible and also makes contact with a man with whom he had once had an unguarded conversation about books, the elderly Professor Faber. Together, the two men begin to plan a subversive attack on the book-burning system.

When he gets home after his conversation with Faber, Montag discovers that his wife has invited friends to join her for an evening of entertainment. Montag's frustration with the superficiality and violence of that entertainment leads him to confront his wife and her friends with a reading of poetry. This causes upset in the friends, who both leave. At the firehall that night, a potential argument over the value of books and the thoughts they contain (an argument which Beatty fuels with strings of literary quotes) is interrupted by an alarm which, Montag is dismayed to learn, has been called in by his

wife. After she flees the scene (and her marriage), and after being forced to torch his own home, Montag's anger, frustration and fear lead him to turn his flamethrower onto his captain, who is incinerated. Montag then flees himself, making his way to Professor Faber's, where the two men plot his escape.

Pursued by authorities desperate to demonstrate that his crime of independent thinking cannot and will not go unpunished, Montag flees to the countryside, where he eventually evades capture and finds himself drawn into a group of learned men, themselves escapees from society and each of who carries, in his memory, the text of an important piece of writing. As the men compare notes and dream of the future, the city from which Montag just escaped is destroyed by airborne bombers, fighting a war that has been looming over the action throughout the narrative. As he watches the dust settle from the bombing raid, Montag recalls the Bible verses he memorized and vows to one day live by them.

Part 1,

Part 1, Summary

p. 1 - 20. The narrative begins with a description of the intense sensual and emotional pleasure experienced by fireman Guy Montag as he aims his kerosene-fueled flamethrower at stacks of books and then at the home that housed them. After cleaning himself up at the firehall, he walks home in the night, encountering a pretty girl, Clarisse, dressed all in white.. They introduce themselves, and Clarisse recognizes him as a fireman by the salamander tattoo on his arm and the phoenix emblem on his chest. Conversation reveals that Montag and Clarisse are living in a future society in which firemen cause fires through burning books and the homes that house them rather than putting them out as they did in the past.

As they part, Clarisse asks Montag whether he's happy, leaving him unsettled as he returns home, where he pauses beneath a ventilator grille and remembers that "something lay hidden behind the grille, something that seemed to peer down at him now". He also remembers another strange meeting he had, with an old man in the park with whom he had talked. He shakes off the feeling and enters his darkened bedroom to see his wife Mildred staring into the ceiling as she listens to the words and music coming from the Ear Thimbles plugged into her ears. Montag suddenly realizes that he's quite unhappy, and as he goes to his bed, kicks something on the floor, which is a bottle of sleeping pills that had been full that morning. He realizes that Mildred has taken an overdose. As he calls the hospital, there is a roar of fighter jets overhead.

In response to Montag's call, a pair of medical technicians arrives and performs a pair of procedures, pumping Mildred's stomach and cleansing her blood, their commentary revealing that they're doing increasing numbers of similar visits. After they go, Montag marvels at how people have become strangers to each other and impulsively goes out to Clarisse's house, where her family is still awake and talking, her uncle discussing how everyone in society has become "disposable". The following morning, Montag wakes to find Mildred in the kitchen, still plugged into her Ear Thimbles and unaware of what happened the night before. He lets her believe that she had too good a time at a party, and then prepares to go to work. As he's about to leave, he discovers Mildred excitedly looking forward to engaging in that evening's parlor entertainment.

As Montag walks to the firehall, he encounters Clarisse, happily lifting her face to the rain and opening her mouth so she can taste it. Conversation reveals that she finds Montag an unusual kind of fireman in that he actually seems to listen to and hear what she's saying. After she goes, Montag lifts his face to the rain and opens his mouth.

Part 1, Analysis

This section of the novel finds protagonist Guy Montag at the beginning of the journey of transformation that anchors the work's primary narrative line and thematic considerations. Animalistic, sensation-oriented, essentially mindless, the first images of him are, in fact, an evocation of the society in which he lives; perhaps "functions" would be a better word, since among the narrative's clearest thematic contentions is the idea that an existence without thought and contemplation, such as that triggered by books, is not really living. Consideration and understanding of this premise begins, for Montag and for the reader, with the introduction of Clarisse (note the resemblance between her name and the concept of clarity) and her questioning, innocent, joyful perspective. It's interesting to consider that she, at the end of this section, is associated with water - water puts out fire, and Clarisse's gentle but incisive probing of Montag essentially "puts out" the fire of unthinking, unquestioning "passion" that dominates his life. It's also interesting to note that Montag becomes aware of this fire/water aspect of their relationship, narration commenting on that awareness in the following section.

Meanwhile, as the narrative establishes itself, it layers in several important pieces of foreshadowing. These include the reference to the ventilator grille and shaft which, as the narrative later makes clear in Part 1, Section 3, is where Montag has been concealing the books he has been collecting. Other important foreshadowings include the reference to the old man in the park (a similar reference appears in the following section, and the old man is eventually revealed to be Professor Faber, who plays an important role in turning Montag's life and perspectives around). Finally, there is the reference to the fighter jets, which race across the sky several times over the course of the narrative, which keep the presence of war alive in the minds of both the citizens and the reader, and which play an essential role in defining both the destruction and the hope arising at the novel's conclusion.

Part 1,

Part 1, Summary

p. 20 - 36. As Montag arrives at the firehall, narration describes its Mechanical Hound, an eight-legged, doglike creature used by the firemen during downtimes as amusement, betting on how long it will take to catch and kill a target animal, like a chicken or a mouse. Narration describes how Montag used to participate in these games, but a short while ago stopped, and how, when he goes down to look at the Hound, it responds to him in a threatening way that it's not supposed to. When he reports its activity to Captain Beatty, Beatty says the only way something like that could happen is if some programmed Montag's genetic material into the Hound, defining Montag as something to be watched for.

Narration describes how Montag encounters Clarisse every day, and how they become closer with each encounter. One time she plays a game with him that results in her jokingly declaring that he's not in love with anyone, a joke that he takes very seriously, wondering how he feels about Mildred. Another time, she talks about how people her age kill each other for recreation, and how most people don't really talk to each other about anything meaningful or experience anything meaningful. Meanwhile, Montag hears about a firefighter in another city who deliberately set a Mechanical Hound to kill him. Then, at the end of the week, he is disturbed when Clarisse is nowhere to be found.

Montag and his fellow firemen play cards to fill the time, the radio in the background referring to the impending war. As the game continues, Montag's mind wanders, again recalling his encounter with the old man in the park and wondering aloud about a question posed by Clarisse - specifically, whether it's true that in the past firemen fought fires instead of caused them. Beatty and the others remind him of what it says in their rule book - that firemen came into being in the late 1700s, and the first of them was Benjamin Franklin. At that moment the alarm goes off and they rush out of the firehall, Montag having a brief scare from the growling Mechanical Hound.

When they reach the house to which they have been called, they discover an old woman, who speaks what Montag believes are strange words. Firemen have been alerted to the presence of the books by a neighbor, and they rush into the attic to find the books and douse them with kerosene. In the confusion, Montag conceals a book within his uniform. As the firemen leave, they attempt to persuade the old woman to come with them but she refuses, indicating that she wants to stay and showing them a match in her hand. The firemen rush out, watching from the street as the woman comes out on her porch, "her quietness a condemnation", strikes the match, and sets herself, her home, and her books ablaze.

On their way back to the firehall, Montag wonders what was meant by the words said by the old woman. Beatty says they were spoken by a man being burnt alive for heresy in 1555, adding that his mind is "full of bits and pieces".

Part 1, Analysis

Among the important elements in this section is the appearance of, and narrative commentary on, the Mechanical Hound. There are several points to note here. The first is how its presence and behavior foreshadows later behavior (when, for example, it is set in pursuit of Montag and how a second Hound is also set in pursuit once he destroys the first). The second is how the story of the betting indicates that, even before the narrative begins and before his first encounter with Clarisse, Montag was experiencing an awakening of conscience. The third important element associated with the Hound is Beatty's reference to it being trained to hunt down Montag's genetic material, which one assumes is how the two Hounds are sent after him, a process (one might also assume) that has already begun by the time this conversation takes place. Finally, there is the reference to the suicide of the firefighter as assisted by the Hound. Aside from its gruesomeness and the sense of horror surrounding this death, the suicide is one of several suicides, or attempted suicides, including Mildred's, referred to throughout the narrative. This collection of self-killing suggests this ostensibly happy, carefree society has, in its underbelly, a growing sense of despair, becoming so strong for some people that they see no alternative but to get themselves out of it any way they can.

There are also several important elements of foreshadowing in this section, aside from the references to the Mechanical Hound. There is a second recollection by Montag of the old man in the park, Clarisse's comment about young people killing each other for recreation (foreshadowing Montag's near-fatal encounter with joyriding young people in "Part 3, Section 1), and the alarm bringing the firemen to the house of the old woman. This last foreshadows events at the end of Part 2, where the firemen are again called out, this time to Montag's home.

The encounter with the old woman is, for Montag, a pivotal one for several reasons. His own awakening conscience and awareness are wakened even further as he watches the martyrdom of the old woman, an awakening symbolized or perhaps manifested in his taking of one of her books, revealed in the following section to be The Bible, a work that, over the centuries, has become associated with all kinds of spiritual awakenings. Then, in terms of the old woman specifically, there is his encounter with the courage to love and passion to protect books of all sorts, a passion he discovers in himself and in others, particularly Professor Faber but also in the group of learned men he encounters after his escape from the city. Finally, there are the words the woman speaks, which Beatty says were originally spoken by a man burned at the stake in the mid-1500s. The words were spoken by a British Protestant Archbishop named Ridleywhile being burned at the stake for refusing to convert to the Roman Catholic faith. In other words, he was a martyr to his faith, in the same way as the old woman becomes a martyr for what she believes and Montag himself, in a way, becomes a martyr for what he believes - that is, his identity comes to an end, but not his life.

Part 1,

Part 1, Summary

p. 36 - 62. Montag arrives home, stashing the concealed book under his pillow. As Mildred talks, he finds his attention drifting and realizes he has been weeping. He listens to her take more pills, realizing how her attention and feelings have been absorbed into the entertainment system in their parlor, and starts a conversation about Clarisse, saying he's been meaning to talk with Mildred about her for a while. Mildred tells him that she believes Clarisse was killed after being hit by a car a few days ago, and that the rest of the family has moved away. As Montag drifts off to sleep, he imagines the Mechanical Hound out looking for him.

The next morning, Montag tells Mildred to call Beatty and tell him he (Montag) is not coming in because he's sick, but Mildred refuses. Montag says that the burning the night before troubled him, but Mildred tells him to leave her alone. He asks when she was last really bothered by anything, but then remembers her suicide attempt.

Beatty arrives, aware that Montag (now two hours late) is not coming in. He speaks at length about the history of book burning, describing how, over the course of centuries, writing became simultaneously less detailed and more potentially troublemaking. As a result, he says, and in the name of societal simplicity and happiness, all books were/are to be burned. As Beatty talks, and in spite of Montag's best efforts, Mildred plumps up his pillow and discovers the book concealed beneath it. Montag shouts at her, and she leaves, going into the parlor. Meanwhile, Beatty continues, explaining further about the necessity for keeping books out of public hands. Beatty also says Clarisse and her family had been watched for some time, and that she's better off dead. He concludes by saying that if, by some chance, a fireman accidentally got hold of a book, or was interested in looking at one, he was allowed to keep it for twenty-four hours, but then it had to be burned.

Montag forces Mildred to turn her attention from the parlor and listen to him, explaining that he is thinking that he may not go back to work ever, that what Beatty says about people feeling happy and peaceful is right but that he (Montag) hasn't felt happy and peaceful in a long time. Mildred tells him to go for a drive, saying that it's satisfying to go quickly and to accidentally kill animals. Montag shuts the parlor off and says it's time for him to confess something, that she has a right to know what he's been doing. At that he goes to the ventilator grille, pulls it off, reaches into the shaft, and pulls out about twenty books. Mildred grabs one and runs with it to the kitchen, where she intends to incinerate it. Montag runs after her, pulls her to the ground, grabs the book, and tells her that maybe they can help each other through this difficult period, saying that because of his encounters with the old woman and with Clarisse, he realizes that he doesn't like himself or what he does. An arrival at the front door spooks them both, but they wait it out, and the arrival goes away. Montag then starts to read one of the books aloud. Mildred protests that it means nothing. Montag tells her that they'll keep trying.

Part 1, Analysis

There are several important points to note about this section, several of which define the narrative's central conflict and increase the dramatic stakes. These include Montag's concealment of his book in dangerous circumstances (i.e., the presence of the captain) and the revelation that he has been concealing others, indications that his curiosity is both powerful and of long standing. Then there are the actions of Mildred, not only her discovery of the hidden book but her decision to keep quiet about it, which at first glance doesn't make sense, but which does become understandable in the first section of the following part when she confesses her fear of losing access to her precious parlor and its entertainments.

Also in this section, the disappearance of Clarisse becomes a fact for Montag, rather than merely a suspicion, triggering in him the sense that what she believed and what he is beginning to believe are even more dangerous than he suspected. At the same time, Beatty's lengthy history lesson clarifies just how long the philosophies governing societal treatment of books have been in place and just how twisted they have become. And there are the references to the Hound, which again foreshadow its coming pursuit of Montag. The sounds at the door here and at the beginning of Part 2, at first made anonymously, are revealed later in the narrative (at the end of Part 2, Section 2) to have in fact been made by the Hound, sent by Beatty in pursuit of what he believes to be Montag's secret.

Finally, a word about the title of this first part - "hearth" is a term traditionally used for a fireplace, or more specifically, the area around a fireplace. In other words, it is a term associated with fire. Meanwhile, a salamander is, according to mythology, a being that is either made of the element of fire or lives within fire, or both. Putting these two pieces of information together, the reader can see an image evoking the character and situation of Montag - a being surviving within the "fire" of his work, of society's determination to eliminate any trigger of thought, feeling or insight that might challenge the status quo, its power and/or its authority.

Part 2,

Part 2, Summary

p. 63 - 82. Mildred's attention keeps turning to the silent, empty parlor as Montag struggles to make sense of the things he's reading. He's interrupted by the sound of a faint scratching at the front door, an electronic sniffing that makes Montag nervous. As bombers again fly overhead, Montag angrily wonders how the country got to be in such a permanent state of war, adding that maybe a few hours with books might help them understand. The telephone rings and Mildred answers it. As she laughs and talks with friends, Montag wonders where he could get help understanding the books, and recalls again his meeting with the old man in the park, now identified as Professor Faber and who gave Montag a means to contact him.

Montag contacts Faber, asking the increasingly nervous Professor how many copies of the Bible are left. Faber shouts that he suspects a trap and hangs up. Meanwhile, Mildred, who had been talking on another phone, reveals that her friends are coming over. Montag reveals that the book he saved from the old woman's house was a Bible. Mildred loses her temper, saying he's got to turn it in, saying that if they're caught, their house (and particularly her precious parlor) will be destroyed. Montag realizes that she's right, but that he's got to make a copy of it first. When Mildred asks whether he'll be home that night to watch "The White Clown" with her in the parlor, he asks whether the White Clown loves her the way he does. When she doesn't answer, he goes out, taking the Bible with him.

As he rides the subway, Montag is overwhelmed by the noise of the advertisements that blare over the loudspeakers, their words initially fighting with, but then merging with, the words he's reading in the Bible. He also recalls a frustrating experience from his youth that he likens to his efforts at trying to memorize what he's reading. He eventually arrives at his destination - the home of Professor Faber, who is at first reluctant to let him in, but when he sees the Bible, opens his door. Montag admits that he's desperate for help in finding something to keep him from feeling dead and asks for Faber's help in finding it from books. Faber calls him a romantic, but then speaks at length of all the things that can be found in books that might help: "'Number one,' he says, is '... quality of information. Number two: leisure to digest it. And number three: the right to carry out actions based on what we learn from the interaction of the first two.'"

Montag then confesses his plan - to get his hands on more books and start educating people. Faber tells him the only way his plan will succeed is if they destroy the institution and practices of the firemen. As bombers roar overhead, Faber then says such a plan would never work and urges Montag to go home. This leads Montag to start ripping the pages out of the Bible, which in turn leads the frightened Faber to say he'll go along with the plan. He tells Montag to bring some money so they can pay a secretive printer to print another copy of the Bible and other works. Montag then says he wishes Faber could help him face down Beatty, leading Faber to show Montag a

device he has invented - a version of the Ear Thimble that sends as well as receives. They can, Faber says, communicate using that - he Faber can listen to what Beatty is saying and tell Montag what to say in response so that together they might be able to learn whether Beatty is, in fact, one of them. Montag leaves, the modified Ear Thimble in his ear.

Part 2, Analysis

As was the case with the title of the first part, and will prove to be the case with the title of the third, the title of this section is a metaphoric evocation of its action. Unlike the titles of the other two parts, however, this part provides at least a partial explanation of the title's meaning - specifically, through Montag's memory of trying to fill a sieve with sand. The essential emotional quality of this image is associated with frustration and futility, with meaning and insight slipping into and out of Montag's experience and perception in the same way as sand slips into and out of a sieve.

Meanwhile, the revelation that the book removed from the old woman's house by Montag is a Bible is a powerful one, the Bible being one of the most powerful, not to mention one of the most famous books of all time, a symbol of the uncorrupted hope, faith, and courage now making their presence felt in Montag's life. A related point is Montag's memorization of some of its pages, which the narrative later reveals (Part 3, Section 3) are from the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Other noteworthy elements in this section include the threatening presence of the Mechanical Hound (foreshadowing its later pursuit of Montag) and the return of the jet bombers (reminding the characters and the reader alike of the threatening presence of war). Then there are the appearances of allies for both Montag (Professor Faber) and his wife (her two friends), with the latter making their appearance in the following section but their support for Mildred's entertainment-addicted position manifesting even in her invitation.

An interesting aspect of Faber's appearance here, and his presence throughout the narrative, is his giving Montag the specially modified Ear Thimble. While the usual Ear Thimbles (those used by the addicted Mildred, by society at large, and later by the escaping Montag) are only receivers, the modified thimble developed by the Professor is both a sender and a receiver - in other words, a means of communication, rather than a means of focusing attention on only one voice, one perspective. The function of the modified Ear Thimble echoes, reflects, and manifests the function of books - to define and shape an expansion of perception, understanding, and dialogue.

Part 2,

Part 2, Summary

p. 82 - 100. As he walks home after collecting money for the printer from an all-night robot teller, Montag listens to military broadcasts in his ear and to Faber's cynical comments on those broadcasts. Montag says he doesn't want to go from being told what to do by one side of the battle to being told what to do by someone on the other side - he wants to think independently. Faber tells him he's already becoming wise but that Montag has to trust him for a while. He then starts reading to Faber from the Bible's Book of Job.

After Montag gets home, he's in the middle of a late dinner when friends of Mildred's, Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles, arrive, to watch the parlor with her. As they laugh and scream at the antics on the parlor walls (which include a pair of clowns dismembering each other) Montag becomes increasingly angry until he shuts down the parlor and confronts them with conversation.

That conversation reveals that both Mrs. Bowles and Mrs. Phelps have husbands fighting in the war, and that Mrs. Phelps views children as a waste of time while Mrs. Bowles views them as merely necessary to sustain the race. Conversation also implies that politics is more a matter of image than substance and that elections are entirely manipulated. Montag loses his temper and, in spite of warnings whispered in his ear by Faber, grabs a book and starts reading poetry. Mildred covers up by explaining that "once a year, every fireman's allowed to bring one book home, from the old days, to show his family how silly it all was, how nervous that sort of thing can make you, how crazy." Montag then reads a poem called "Dover Beach" quoted in the text and which speaks of the retreat of faith from humanity.

After he's finished, Mrs. Phelps is in tears. As Mildred and Mrs. Bowles calm her, the latter speaks of how dangerous, foolish, and painful reading is. As she's preparing to leave, Montag makes a great show of putting the book into the parlor's incinerator and, after Mrs. Bowles goes, hunts out the rest of the books he had concealed, noting that Mildred had already gotten rid of some of them, and then hides the rest in some bushes. He then leaves for work, trying "not to see how completely dark and deserted Clarisse McClellan's house was ..."

On the subway, Montag contemplates how glad he is that he and Faber are connected. Through the Ear Thimble, Faber speaks reassuringly, warning him to be careful but saying they're on their way to success. Montag pleads with him to stay with him. As he arrives at the firehall, Montag discovers that the Mechanical Hound is gone and that Beatty is waiting for him. As the two men join the other firemen in playing cards, Montag becomes increasingly uncomfortable. As Faber again whispers caution into Montag's ear, Beatty describes a dream he had in which he and Montag got into an argument in which they quoted books at each other, a dream that ended, Beatty says, with a blazing

bonfire of books and a return to peace. After Beatty has finished, Faber says quietly to Montag that now Montag has heard both sides of the conflict, it will be up to him to ultimately decide which side he wants to be on. "It's up to you now," he says, "to know with which ear you'll listen."

Montag is about to answer when the alarm goes off and the firemen spring into action. Beatty learns the address to which they're being sent and insists that the uneasy Montag come along. As the firemen race out, Montag contemplates the foolishness and futility of doing what he did with the poem even as Beatty is crying out "Here we go to keep the world happy, Montag!" The firemen soon arrive at the site of the next book burning: Montag's house.

Part 2, Analysis

At the beginning of this section, Faber reads to Montag from the Book of Job. While many of the Bible's various books are well known, that of Job is particularly noted for its narrative of faith - specifically, of the faith of Job, a middle aged man, challenged by God to retain his faith after a series of increasingly difficult, emotionally and spiritually trying, tests. The implication of the reading is that Faber knows, just as the author does, that Montag is about to endure a series of tests in the same way that Job did. It's therefore possible to see Faber's choice of reading as his attempt to inspire both faith and patience in Montag, both of which are seriously tested by the appearances of Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles. These two characters manifest and/or embody mindless adherence to the wishes and ways of society that Montag is coming to detest and that the narrative is warning the reader to beware of. Ironically, however, while the reaction of Mrs. Bowles to the poetry is clearly evocative of Montag's societal opponent, the reaction of Mrs. Phelps is, arguably, exactly what a reaction to poetry is supposed to be and exactly what the society of the time is afraid of. This is a connection, triggered by emotion-rich imagery, with a previously unremarked, untapped aspect of the self. In other words, Mrs. Phelps experiences the kind of connection to self and to soul that Montag is in search of.

Other important elements in this section include the revelation that the Mechanical Hound is gone. It eventually turns out to be on the loose, prowling in preparation for another attempt to frighten Montag into revealing what Beatty now clearly believes him to be concealing (and which, he reveals in the following section, he knows at this point that he is concealing). Also in terms of Beatty, it's important to understand in more detail the nature of his dream - or rather, of what and how that dream contains; i.e., detailed, specific quotes from books. The extent and breadth of Beatty's knowledge of writing seems, at this point, to go beyond what he hinted at before - that he, and other captains of the firemen, know "bits and pieces". Beatty's repertoire of quotations is extensive and impressive, suggesting that he has done more reading and retained more of what he has read than would seem to be the norm for this society. This, in turn, might provide at least part of an explanation for a question that comes up in the following section - why does Beatty want to die? It may be that he is at least as knowledgeable and as able to retain text in memory as the learned men encountered by Montag after he escapes from

the city. In other words, it seems here that Beatty is who he persecutes, a situation that may indicate, at least in part, an apparent and deepening, not to mention despairing, psychosis.

Then there is the position in which Faber places Montag as this section, and indeed this second part of the book, is drawing closer to its climax. This choice, to make up his mind based on information and tuition (as opposed to an order or a habit, which is how everyone else in this society seems to function) is the same choice Montag seems to want society to make, and that the work seems to want its readers to make. Finally, there is the revelation at the end of the section, the climax of this second part of the book, an inescapable and compelling turning point for both the protagonist (Montag) and the reader.

Part 3,

Part 3, Summary

p. 101 - 123. Montag stands immobile, frozen in disbelief and confusion as Beatty taunts him about the foolishness of having read the poetry to the women and the stupidity of listening to Clarisse. Mildred rushes by, gets into the family car and drives away, mumbling to herself as Beatty tells Montag she was who called in the alarm, after her friends had called in an earlier alarm which Beatty had chosen to ignore. As Faber, through the Ear Thimble, asks what's going on, Beatty tells Montag that he has to be the one to burn his own house - and that once he's done, he's under arrest. Faber urges him to run away, but Montag shouts that he can't, the Mechanical Hound would come after him. Beatty hears his comment and says yes, the Hound is indeed out there.

Montag realizes he has no choice, lights his flamethrower, and torches his home, taking particular pleasure in burning the now empty and impotent parlor. He also burns the books, which he realizes Mildred had brought out from their hiding place and thrown in the front lawn. Meanwhile, Beatty realizes Montag is listening to something and clouts him on the head, releasing the Thimble. Beatty picks it up and announces his intention to trace whoever is speaking. This triggers Montag to turn his flamethrower onto Beatty, who screams as he goes up in flames. Montag then knocks the other two firemen unconscious and turns from them just in time to see the Mechanical Hound coming for him, its poisonous claw extended. The claw shoots toxins into his leg even as he incinerates the Hound, his leg going numb. As people in the other houses on the street begin to stir, Montag releases he can't wait around, and hobbling on his useless leg, runs away down an alley.

As he runs, and as feeling and function return to his leg, Montag realizes that for some reason, Beatty wanted to die. He also realizes he still has the money he withdrew for Faber and heads to Faber's home to hand the money over and perhaps catch his breath before moving on. Through his personal Ear Thimble, he hears news that police forces have mobilized to track him down. As he runs from shadow to shadow, he imagines every car that goes by is pursuing him, and comes close to being run down by one that actually seems to be aiming at him. But as it passes and he hears the laughter coming from it, he realizes it was just young people out for fun, and that they would have killed him for fun. As he runs away, he wonders whether it was them, or people like them, who killed Clarisse. He also stops at the home of a fellow fireman, plants the books recovered from the hedge in the kitchen, and calls in an alarm, part of the plan he discussed earlier with Faber to discredit the firemen.

Montag finally arrives at Faber's, where he explains what happened to the modified Ear Thimble, marvels at how quickly and thoroughly his life has changed, and agrees when Faber says he has finally been doing what he's been thinking about doing for a long time. For his part, Faber comments that he has never felt more alive and tells Montag to

follow a disused railway where, he has heard, there are camps of university educated refugees from society.

The two men check Faber's mini-parlor for information and discover two things - that the war has restarted, and that a new Mechanical Hound has been set in pursuit of Montag. They realize that the Hound could very well track Montag to Faber's and destroy both the old man and the house. Meanwhile, Montag imagines the tracking and his inevitable execution broadcast in parlors all over the country. Together, the men plan to remove as much of Montag's scent as possible from the house, and Montag grabs some of Faber's oldest and smelliest clothes in order to disguise his smell. And then he again runs into the night.

Part 3, Analysis

The title of this section carries with it several layers of meaning. First, it seems to be a quote from a famous poem by William Blake: "Tiger tiger, burning bright, in the forests of the night". The tiger in the poem is viewed as a powerful and dangerous, wild and untamed, all characteristics which could, arguably, apply to Montag and, perhaps to a lesser degree, to Faber. Second, and in a related metaphor, it could be argued that in their souls, both Montag and Faber are "burning" with the fervor of having discovered new, passionately realized truths about both themselves and the society in which they live, and are determined to fight. Third, there is a layer of irony, in that literal burning throughout the novel has been seen as a negative, and at the beginning of this section still is a negative (i.e., the burning of Montag's house and the books that inspired him and triggered the process of change in which he finds himself). It is also, however, seen as a positive, albeit a gruesome one, when the destructive power of flame is turned on the apparently vicious perhaps somewhat insane Beatty - the vindictive destroyer, perhaps an embodiment of the destructive forces in play throughout this futuristic society, is himself being destroyed. And yet, as Montag himself comes to understand, on some level Beatty seems to want to die.

On a technical, storytelling level, this section cranks up the narrative momentum and sense of suspense, triggering increased interest in the reader by injecting that most reliable of tension-building devices, a chase scene. Even more tension is added with the appearance of first one, then another Mechanical Hound, their deadly relentlessness foreshadowed several times throughout the narrative. Other narrative points previously foreshadowed but coming into play here include the idea of teenagers killing for fun (foreshadowed by Clarisse's comments in Part 1, Section 2) and Montag's planting of the remaining books in the home of a fellow fireman (part of his plan to discredit the firemen as an institution).

A final note of interest in this section is the reference to the abandoned railway, which is symbolically important for a couple of reasons. First, by surviving in spite of having been abandoned, there are echoes of the circumstances of the learned men whose lives, work and intellects have themselves been abandoned and use it as a centralizing, gathering point in their involuntary exile. Second, there are echoes here of the

legendary "underground railroad", the term used to describe the route used by black Americans in the late 1800s to escape the tortures and humiliations of their lives in the slavery-defined Southern United States. The "underground railroad" was their route to freedom. The railroad here can be seen as functioning in a similar way for Montag and the other "learned men" with whom he becomes associated.

Part 3,

Part 3, Summary

p. 123 - 139. Shortly after leaving Faber's home, Montag looks through a large window into an unsuspecting household's parlor, where he sees the Hound pursuing him through streets and alleys, finally arriving at Faber's house. As he silently urges the Hound to move on, it pauses, tests its poisonous claw, and then leaves. Montag moves on, listening to his Ear Thimble as he hears the authorities broadcast an order for everyone in the area to look out their windows at exactly the same moment in hopes of catching a glimpse of the fugitive. Even as he realizes what a brilliant idea this is, Montag plunges into the river, where he removes his clothes, puts on the clothes he took from Faber, and allows himself to be swept away by the current. Moments later, the Hound reaches the river, tracked by helicopters. Montag watches as the Hound and helicopters realize they've lost his trail and turn away.

Montag continues to drift along with the river, further and further into the countryside, enjoying the silence and the appearance of the stars, letting the suitcase he had taken from Faber's sink to the bottom of the river, and contemplates the relationship between the burning of the sun and the burning he had done. Eventually, he allows himself to be drifted towards shore. As he climbs out of the river, the sight of open expanses of land and the smells of nearby farms trigger a memory of being on a farm as a child, and he half-hallucinates/half-remembers resting in a loft, seeing a beautiful woman (who, in his imagination, looks like Clarisse) in the moonlight, and finding fresh food left for him. His reverie is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of what he at first believes to be the Hound, but is in fact a deer. He climbs up the riverbank, discovers the railway track that Faber had told him about and, as he imagines it becoming a path to safety, suddenly realizes with strange certainty that, "once, long ago, Clarisse had walked here, where he was walking now."

After walking for a while, Montag glimpses a fire in the distance, draws closer, and then stops, amazed that fire can be something other than the violence he has always known, something warm and welcoming. After a while, the men gathered around the fire invite him to join them, revealing that they're aware of who he is and what he's done. The man who seems to be their leader, Granger, introduces the men as learned refugees from the tyranny of society, and shows Montag, on a portable news screen, how that society is falsifying his capture and death at the hands of the Hound.

As Montag mourns the innocent man's death, Granger tells him what bands the men of his group with thousands more like them - each has memorized a piece of writing or a segment of a piece, while one of them has invented a process by which anyone can remember any/everything he ever read. Montag reveals that he himself remembers parts of the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, leading Granger to speak of the faith held by him and other members of the group that eventually, the governing society will fail and there will once again be room for books and words and thoughts and ideas. The

memorized texts may have to be passed on to a generation of young people, but they will continue.

Part 3, Analysis

There is a clear and vivid irony in Montag's watching those pursuing him on someone else's parlor walls, the viewing on his own walls having been such a source of trouble in his marriage. Meanwhile, there is metaphoric value in his watching the walls through a window, in that he is seeing what used to be such a defining aspect of his life, and indeed a profoundly defining aspect of the society he is both escaping and challenging, at a level of distance, or of remove. In short, the narrative portrayal of his situation here echoes and reveals his spiritual situation - he is removing himself from what was, and positioning himself to accept the challenge of creating what will be. This metaphoric idea is developed further in the sequence in which he essentially rides the river, literally "going with the flow" and cleansing himself of his past life as he symbolically puts on a new life and new way of living. The final phase in what might be called Montag's embracing this new life is his intuitive experience of Clarisse having physically been "there" before him which, when his physical journey is considered in a metaphorical life, she of course symbolically has.

Meanwhile, Montag's encounter with the fire around which the learned men gather also functions on several levels. First, the atmosphere is warm and inviting physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Second, it is one of Montag's two experiences of fire (at least as described in the narrative) portrayed as affirming, rather than destructive. The first is in the very first chapter in which fire is again associated with warmth, positive vulnerability, and intimacy. Thus, portrayals of the horrors and destructive power of fire are "book-ended" with portrayals of its life-giving, safety-affirming, aspects. Finally, fire here symbolically and positively represents the "fire", or passion, burning in the hearts and lives of the learned men, their ongoing commitment to the words, memories and ideas carried gently in their minds.

All this positive energy is counterpointed by the narrative of the Mechanical Hound's killing of an innocent man, the desperately needed and heartlessly slaughtered scapegoat found by the society which Montag and the other learned men have escaped. The nameless murdered man, as described by Granger, is independence-minded, at least to a degree, his death again serving as a manifestation of humanity's unjust tendency to destroy what is perceived as not fitting in.

Finally, however, the section ends on a powerfully moving note of hope, with Granger's narrative of how he, the learned men in the group, and other learned people across the country, carry words, ideas, memories, and ultimately profound hope in their minds. It could be argued that this is, in fact, the most affecting image in the book, with the potential to stir a deep-seated, instinctive, almost primal desire and determination of the human spirit to survive. This determination, of course, powerfully contrasted to the equally primal human desire for physical survival of which the ideas, attitudes and

practices of the society from which Montag and the others have escaped is a corrupted, perverted manifestation.

Part 3,

Part 3, Summary

p. 139 - 149. As the men break camp, Montag watches their faces and realizes that the hope they have in their heads isn't visible in their faces. "Don't judge a book by its cover", one of them jokes. Meanwhile, fighter jets scream over head as the men move on and Granger speaks at length of his grandfather, a man who advocated living fully and inquisitively and who believed in human beings leaving something good behind when they die. At that moment, the war begins in earnest as jets fly overhead and the city is bombed.

In his mind, Montag cries out to Mildred, to Faber, and to Clarisse to get out of the city, but then realizes that Faber is safe and Clarisse is already dead. This leaves Mildred, who Montag imagines being incinerated in her hotel room, realizing in her last moments of life that that life is as empty of meaning and truth as the images on her parlor walls. He also imagines the city rebuilt and reborn, transformed and beautiful and alive, but in actuality, Montag and the others lie on the ground with the heat and dust of the bombing of the city blowing over them, the silence of death and destruction building around them. Montag frantically struggles to remember the parts of Ecclesiastes he had memorized, crying out to himself that a new world is beginning with him in that moment.

As the men slowly get to their feet, they look to where the city once stood and realize it has been blown to ashes. Montag wonders how many other cities had been destroyed in that way. The sun then begins to come up, and the men start a fire to cook some breakfast. As it's cooking, Granger speaks of the mythological Phoenix and how humanity, in its capacity to destroy itself and then become reborn, goes through the same sort of process. He adds that that unlike the Phoenix, however, humanity has the memory of its past to take into account as it plans for its future.

The men eat their breakfast, the sun rises into the sky, and the birds scattered by the explosion return to the trees. Montag finds himself in the lead of the procession of walking, remembering men, and finds himself remembering the words of Ecclesiastes he had memorized. He imagines that the other men will, after a while, begin murmuring their memorized words to themselves to make sure they're still there, and resolves to not murmur his own words, the Ecclesiastes words, until later that day,when they reach the city.

Part 3, Analysis

As the narrative draws to a close, it could be argued that in terms of narrative action, the bombing of the city is something of an anti-climax. It takes place at a physical remove from the lives of the characters, it is described in an almost offhanded, casual fashion, and when juxtaposed with the assumption/acceptance by the learned men of what they

see as their mission, it seems less like an overwhelming obstacle has been removed and more like an inevitability has finally come to pass. As far as the men and the narrative are concerned, the destruction of the city doesn't come across as the metaphorically significant trigger for hope that the narrative seems to want it to be (as evidenced by Montag's fantasy). Instead, it seems to be more of an ultimate, decisive manifestation of societal despair, the undercurrent of empty fatalism foreshadowed, it could be argued, throughout the narrative by the various suicides and suicide attempts. To take the metaphor one step further, the city essentially destroys itself, in thematic terms, the ultimate and inevitable result of surrendering to communal and mandated, rather than independent, thought.

Meanwhile, this section also contains more ambiguously shaped images of fire - that of the phoenix and of the sun which, like the phoenix, is simultaneously self-immolating and self-reforming. Both are symbols of life emerging from destruction, significantly appropriate under the circumstances in which Montag and the learned men find themselves - faced with the challenge of rebuilding and redefining life in the face of the intellectual destruction of the past and the apparent physical destruction of the present.

Characters

Guy Montag

Montag is this futuristic novel's central character and protagonist, a so-called "fireman".. As the narrative begins, he is portrayed as finding a similar, sadistic, socially and morally righteous pleasure in what he does, and then as having both that pleasure and that righteousness disturbed by an encounter with the mysterious, thoughtful, questioning Clarisse. As the narrative continues, however, it reveals that Montag has been troubled by his own questions about who he is, what he does, and why he does it for some time before the novel begins, a situation made evident by the fact that he has been collecting banned books for some time.

As the narrative progresses further, Montag questions himself, his situation, his world, and the societal conventions that shaped them all. As a result, he flees everything that defined his life to that point, starting on the road towards rebellion, not so much actively fighting as actively resisting the pervasive and alluring, but still somewhat insane, influences of those soul-and-identity destroying conventions (conventions embodied and manifested in his wife Mildred and his captain).

All in all, the novel portrays Montag as a reactive protagonist, one who undergoes a journey of transformation in response to outside influences and circumstances. Granted, he has an inner desire, an inner questioning, that fuels his actions and choices throughout that journey. There is also the sense, however, that without the triggers he encounters (i.e., the Bible, the martyrdom of the old woman) he would have remained as he was, troubled and questioning but ultimately inactive. He is somewhat more aware than most of the people living (functioning?) within the socio-cultural-moral climate of the time, but without the triggers he would, in all likelihood, remained as docile and accepting as they. In short, while the world in which Montag lives is a literary warning against what humanity could turn itself into, Montag, in his questioning and resistance to societal pressures and expectations, is an exhortation to be aware, a call if not to action, at the very least to awareness and questioning.

Firemen

In the world of "Fahrenheit 451", firemen no longer put out fires, but set them. Houses have been fireproofed, so there is no need for the former sort of fireman. Instead, firemen are, as Captain Beatty reveals to Montag, entrusted with the responsibility of burning that which has the potential to disrupt the mindlessly happily, or happily mindless, status quo - books, and the houses in which they are kept. They are a force of destruction, rather than a force of salvation.

Captain Beatty

Beatty is the captain of the squad of firemen to which Montag belongs. He is, as mentioned above, a mouthpiece for and embodiment/manifestation of the thought-denying, soul-denying, individuality-denying rules of the society of the time. At first glance he appears reasonable and thoughtful, but as tensions between what Montag does and what he believes/understands rise, Beatty's reactions become more aggressive, eventually appearing insane. Aand yet, as Montag realizes, Beatty wishes to die.

Clarisse McClellan

The enigmatic Clarisse appears only in the early stages of the narrative. Young (only seventeen) but thoughtful, ingenuous and wise, she questions not only everything about the world in which she lives but everything about Montag, who seems to her to have the kind of soul that most other firemen, and most other citizens, don't. As their friendship is developing, however, Clarisse disappears. Montag is told she is killed, but the question of what happened to her is never definitively answered, and the reader would be justified in holding out at least a degree of hope that, in the absence of a dead body, she somehow managed to escape into the life of wandering resistance that Montag escapes into at the novel's conclusion.

Clarisse's Uncle

In her conversations with Montag, Clarisse comments repeatedly on how many of her insights and questions were triggered by the considerations of her uncle. Montag himself only hears her uncle once - on his dark-of-the-night visit to Clarisse's home, where he hears the uncle discuss how everyone in society has become "disposable". The never-named uncle disappears at the same time as Clarisse, but as is the case with his niece, there is a faint possibility that he has merely gone to ground. This idea is supported by the existence of the group of learned men encountered by Montag in the novel's final stages, a group to which, it seems, Clarisse's uncle might well belong.

The Old Woman

In Part 1, Montag and the other firemen are called to the home of an old woman who is reported to have a large collection of books. Instead of protesting and fighting what is about to happen, the woman calmly watches as her home and precious possessions are doused with kerosene. She then quotes the words of a famous and lights a match, setting herself and her home ablaze. Her actions and attitudes serve as a catalyst for Montag's emerging, developing conscience.

Mildred

Mildred is Montag's wife, a cold, distant woman evidently absorbed into the mindless desperation to be constantly entertained that defines and motivates society-at-large. There is, however, something more to her than that, as evidenced by the fact that, early in the narrative, she takes an overdose of pills. While the narrative never explicitly states whether the overdose was a deliberate suicide attempt, in the context of the many other suicides mentioned in narration (all of which, it seems, have to do with profound feelings of emptiness in the lives of those who make the attempt), Mildred's attempt was, in fact, deliberate. If this is the case, then her fanatical devotion to the entertainments in the parlor and seemingly permanent attachment to her Ear Thimbles suggests a desperation to fill that emptiness with whatever society is making available to her. In short, she personalizes and embodies the empty society with which Montag eventually comes into conflict and flees.

Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles

These two friends of Mildred's are invited to the Montag home to watch the "parlor". They are as superficial and as self-indulgent as Mildred, just as susceptible to the suggestions and demands of the entertainment-oriented society in which they live and just as reluctant to have their thoughts altered or challenged in any way. It's interesting to note, however, the different reactions these two women have when Montag confronts them with poetry. Mrs. Phelps weeps uncontrollably, the release of feelings triggered by the imagery and the language, a situation that presumably poetry is intended to accomplish and which the society of the time, with its ban on poetry and on literature of all types, intends to head off. Mrs. Bowles, on the other hand, reacts with anger and outrage, manifesting the views of society to the point where, as the narrative later reveals, she calls an alert about the Montags to the firemen.

The Old Man in the Park (Professor Faber)

Faber is initially referred to in two or three anonymous foreshadowings, narration describing him only as a thoughtful old man in a park with whom Montag has occasional, troubling, informative encounters. Later, as his awareness awakens, Montag makes contact with the old man, identified as Professor Faber and one of what is revealed to be a large number of thinkers and writers who have essentially gone underground during the thoughtless, mindless ascendancy of the governing authorities. Faber describes himself as having lived the life and made the choices of a coward. It could be argued, however, that in preserving his life and his intellect, in choosing to gamble on being able to wait out the current regime rather than fight against it, Faber has in fact made the wisest choice he could. He becomes a valuable and welcome ally for Montag in his struggle to understand the truth of both his own intuitions and of the society against which he begins to struggle, and in doing so, awakens himself to a more active, confrontational sense of responsibility and courage.

Although Faber disappears from the narrative and from the world in which it's set in the book's final quarter, there is the sense, as there is with Clarisse and her uncle, that he survived the physical, social and moral carnage of Montag's escape and fled to the countryside. There he, like Montag and possibly Clarisse and her uncle, might have joined up with the secret army of the learned. Again, however, the narrative offers no firm indication that this is in fact the case.

The Learned Men

Following his escape from the city and his evasion of his pursuers, Montag encounters a group of haggard men sitting around a campfire. He eventually learns that the men are all well educated, university professors and writers and spiritual thinkers, all having taken refuge from the morally and mentally corrupt, book burning society that has no use for them. Montag eventually learns that not only are there men like them all over the country, but that each man carries with him the memorized text of a burned/banned book, text that, the men hope, they will one day be allowed to have transcribed and published once again.

Granger

When Montag encounters the group of learned men, Granger becomes their spokesman, telling Montag about who the men are, why they are in the situation they are in, and what they intend to eventually accomplish. Granger speaks of the hope, faith, and compassion taught to him by his grandfather, and of his belief that eventually, he and the other learned men (of which Montag is now one) will pass on what they have learned and have stored in their memories in the same way as his grandfather passed on important truths to him.

Objects/Places

The City

The novel's primary setting is an unnamed urban center, prosperous and peaceful, at least on the surface. While the part of the world in which the city is found is also unnamed, there is a distinct sense of capitalist, media-centric and/or first world-ness about both the city and its region/country, as well as about the socio-political-economic cultures of both. In short, it all feels very Anglo-Saxon and very Western Hemisphere, perhaps most like America (meaning the city might be someplace like New York) but also like Canada or Britain. It must be noted, however, that rather than evoking a literal recreation of a specific place, the city is intended to be perceived as more of a metaphor for a particularly mindless, hedonistic, self-righteous and self-protective way of living, thinking, believing and behaving.

Books

The existence and reading of books is at the center of the novel's central conflict, said conflict playing out between those who see danger in the enlightenment they offer, and those who see hope in exactly the same place. Books themselves, in the narrative, represent and/or evoke humanity's capacity for free thought, and indeed for freedom in general).

The Salamander Tattoo and the Phoenix Disc

In mythology and symbolism, salamanders and phoenixes are both associated with fire, salamanders being composed of fire and having the ability to live within it and phoenixes having the ability to incinerate themselves and emerge anew from the ashes. The tattoo and the disk, as worn by Montag and the other firemen, are emblems of their work, essentially propaganda proclaiming to the citizenry the good of the work they do. Conversely, the emblems proclaim to the reader the thematically central irony associated with that work - specifically, that no matter how much they burn, the words and ideas they are attempting to destroy will, like the salamander and the phoenix, survive the flames.

451

451, aside from being a number in the work's title, is also the number on the uniforms of Montag and all other firemen. According to the author, 451° Fahrenheit is the temperature at which paper burns, although scientifically, this degree ranges.

Montag's Home

The house where Montag lives with his wife Mildred is, the narrative suggests, equipped with the latest technology. It is also, the narrative further suggests, decorated in cold, distant colors and sparsely furnished. It is, in short, unwelcoming and un-individualized, just like everyone else's.

The Parlor

The center of activity in Montag's home, as it apparently is in every home in the city and across the country, is the Parlor, where interactive audio-visual presentations serve as distractions and entertainment. The amount of wall space taken up with screens for those presentations varies from house to house. Montag's house has recently added a third wall, but the entertainment-hungry Mildred is eager, or perhaps desperate, to add a fourth.

The Firehall

Traditionally, and as contemporary society understands them, firehalls were the centrally located buildings where firemen waited to be called to put fires out, rather than start them as they do in "Fahrenheit 451". Here, Montag and the other firemen, including Captain Beatty, spend their off hours, playing cards, talking, and placing bets on the success of the predatory Mechanical Hound.

The Mechanical Hound

Also traditionally, contemporary firehalls have been portrayed as having a kind of mascot, or house dog, often (either stereotypically or archetypally) a Dalmatian. In the futuristic world of "Fahrenheit 451", the firehall dog has been replaced with the predatory, murderous Mechanical Hound, which can be programmed to pursue any target desired. The Hound in Montag's firehall is programmed to pursue Montag himself, although the Hound is eventually destroyed by Montag. Another Hound, similarly programmed, is set after Montag when he is discovered to have had books in his possession, but is fooled by him when he takes refuge in a river.

The Bombers

Throughout the narrative, the sound of military jets (bombers) screaming overhead provides a frightening backdrop to the action, evoking the constant looming threat and presence of war. Eventually, that war actually takes place, resulting in the city from which Montag escaped being entirely destroyed.

Ear Thimbles

Also referred to in the novel as Ear Seashells, the Thimbles are small headphones, miniature speakers and radio receivers that can be fitted easily and comfortably into the ear of the listener. Programming broadcast directly into the Ear Thimbles (and, the novel implies, directly into the mind of the listener) includes news broadcasts, advertisements, music, propaganda, and entertainment.

Faber's Modified Ear Thimble

For a short time, Montag is able to engage in two-way conversation with Professor Faber with the assistance of an Ear Thimble specially modified by the Professor. The modified Thimble can be seen as a metaphoric manifestation of Faber's role in Montag's life - as a trigger and/or externalization of both his conscience and his sense of personal truth.

Montag's Bible

In the midst of doing his job and torching the books and home of an old woman, Montag conceals a Bible in his coat. Narration eventually reveals that there are very few Bibles left in the world, and that Montag's possession is a very precious one. He memorizes parts of it, in particular sections of the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes.

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Montag memorizes excerpts from the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes while riding the subway to meet with Professor Faber. Later, after he has escaped Beatty, the firemen and the Mechanical Hound, Montag's memorized words help him fit in with the group of learned men who themselves have memorized text and who hold their memories close in preparation for what they believe is the inevitable time when what they remember, the words and ideas, will once again be valued.

The Abandoned Railway

First mentioned by Faber and later discovered by Montag, the railway is referred to as a centralizing element in the lives and activities of intellectuals and readers escaping from the society that condemns them.

Themes

Independent versus Controlled Thought

It would be easy, and understandable, for readers to consider "Fahrenheit 451" as primarily a condemnation of censorship. It's more appropriately argued, however, that its central issue, both narratively and thematically, has less to do with the controlling of thought and more to do with REACTIONS to that control. In other words, the narrative's action and its themes are grounded in, and defined by, conflict arising between those who advocate and sustain independent thought (manifest in books) and those who devalue and suppress such thought, their actions manifest in the destruction of books. That conflict is dramatized in and defined by the experiences and actions of the central character, Guy Montag who, long before the narrative even begins, has experienced awakenings of independent thought and is confronted by the forces working to suppress both societal and personal experiences of what he is beginning to explore.

That confrontation is embodied and manifest in the characters of Beatty and Mildred, who represent the two primary reactions of those who accept controlled thought as the norm - in the case of the former, active destruction, and in the case of the latter, passive avoidance. What Montag does, as he undertakes his journey of transformation, defined by equal parts action and reaction, is come to an acceptance without necessarily completely understanding the power and importance of independent thought, feeling, and contemplation. It's important to note, however, that at the end of the narrative, while Montag has completed one phase of his journey, he is about to embark on the next - a fuller investigation and integration of the new way of living, thinking, and being that he has only just begun to explore.

Humanity's Capacity for Self-limitation

As the narrative explores its central theme (see above), it repeatedly incorporates a pair of contrasting secondary thematic motifs. The first motif, or repeated narrative/thematic image, relates to illustrations of how controlled thought manifests in society - specifically, to how humanity can, and often chooses to, limit itself in pursuit of happiness, conformity, and security. All are portrayed as ideals in the novel's societal context, and all are portrayed as empty illusions. This thematic perspective is perhaps most vividly exemplified in the parlor, with its constant bombardment of mindless, sensation oriented entertainment (one wonders, when giving contemporary consideration to the type of programming offered by the parlor, how much pornography might make its way onto the living room walls of the nation) and propaganda. The parlor is safe, predictable, and stimulating — everyone gets their entertainment this way — it's an exciting, but ultimately perfectly harmless, way of living.

The Ear Thimbles do the same sort of thing, providing a constant backdrop of foggy white noise within which individual feelings, reactions, experiences and perspectives

disappear. It's important to note, however, what the narrative thematically associates with this way of living, thinking, and being - emptiness and despair. These are manifest first by the various suicides and suicide attempts (including Mildred's), and second by violence — to thought, to life and to body — violence perceived as both a necessary evil in order to perpetuate the illusion of happiness and safety and as an entertainment.

The Value of Courage

The second motif, or repeated narrative/thematic image, that the narrative employs as it considers its primary theme (the tension between independent and controlled thought) is that of courage - specifically, acts of bravery and rebellion defined and motivated by a powerful belief in the power of independent thought. Appearances of this motif contrast vividly and powerfully with manifestations of the self-limitation motif. The acts of destruction undertaken by Beatty are counterpointed, for example, by the quiet, determined defiance of the old woman. The acts of deliberate self-delusion undertaken by Mildred and her friends are juxtaposed with the cautious but strengthening courage discovered by Faber. For every revelation of societal suppression, there are the actions and attitudes of Clarisse, of Granger, and of the other learned men.

Finally, for all that the societal setting of the narrative attempts to establish itself as a kind of Utopia (i.e., land of ultimate happiness, there is Montag himself. His discomfort with the illusion of that happiness grows from something vague and subconscious into something definite and mindful. His allowance, acceptance, and embracing of that growth is in fact an act of rebellious internal courage that eventually externalizes and takes active shape. By the end of the narrative, he has begun to absorb the teachings and philosophies of Clarice, the old woman, Granger and the other learned men who, to use the novel's metaphor, have carried burning torches of courage and faith into battle against enforced, manipulated docility, fighting instead for freely chosen, freely shaped independence of mind, body, and spirit.

Style

Point of View

In terms of the narration, the story is told from the third person, past tense, point of view. Its primary perspective is that of the central character and protagonist, Guy Montag, recounting or contemplating events from his standpoint. In terms of authorial point of view, the story can be looked at in a number of ways, most of which interrelate. There is a sense of satire about the work, of aspects of society being exaggerated to the point where their fundamental shallowness can be seen for what it is. Perhaps the most noteworthy example of this point of view is the parlor, with its realistic, enveloping, mind-numbing, constant presentation of superficial entertainment.

When considering the parlor, it's important to remember that "Fahrenheit 451" was first written and published in the very early days of television, at a time when radio and the movies, while still attracting large numbers of audiences, were losing populist ground to entertainment in the home, of a sort that seems to have clear parallels with home entertainment today. Here is where the novel's satirical sensibilities take on a darker tinge, becoming more of a warning than a mere commentary. In other words, here is where the work's authorial point of view goes beyond the merely exaggerated and into the likely. This is true not so much in terms of technology but more in terms of what the author contends is the human majority's long-extant desire for sensory pleasure over soulful contemplation, for fitting in over being an individual, for mindless acceptance over considered, rational independence of thought and action. With "Fahrenheit 451", the author is, in essence, warning us against ourselves and our socialized tendencies.

Setting

The novel's setting is one of its most important elements. While the primary components of setting, time and place are never defined explicitly, they defined are in general terms - that is to say, the novel is set at some time in the future and in some large, probably American, urban center. This sense of what might be called "generic" elements functions, on one level, to create and define a sense of universality not so much around the specific events of the story but around its themes and warnings. In other words, the book is less about the particulars of what happens but more about the generalities of why, and how.

Further - setting the narrative in the future clearly and pointedly suggests that the actions and attitudes of society as a whole are, if not inevitable, at least a highly possible potential outcome of current actions and attitudes. This theory is supported by the sense that while there are some very clear evolutions in technology and philosophy, those evolutions are portrayed as extensions of present day situations. As well, how human beings vocally and verbally communicate with each other in this unspecified

future is not all that different from the present - in other words, these people of the future are not all that different from us.

Finally, setting the narrative within an urban environment reinforces the work's mostly sub-textual contention that at least part of the reason why society, in the narrative, became what it did was is the technology behind, and emerging from, urbanization. Also, something else emerging from urbanization, as contemporary studies have show, is a lack of knowledge and awareness of others in the community, not to mention the desire for such knowledge and awareness. Said lacking tend to reinforce the desire for and tendency towards mindless acceptance of the entertainment, politics, and social opportunities most readily available, the sort experienced and advocated by Mildred, her visitors, and by the vast majority of the people of the time. The fewer people and perspectives one encounters, the less likely one is to face challenges to one's beliefs, and to have one's views changed and/or expanded by those challenges.

Language and Meaning

There are two main elements to note about the work's use of language, one of which might be defined as what is missing rather than what is present. Specifically, there is an engaging lack of what often handicaps novels that are either futuristic or set in other worlds, the often self-consciously clever attempts to fill the alternative world with inventive technologies, slang, or socio-moral conventions. Language used in both narration and dialogue has a timeless feel to it that includes, rather than impresses, the reader. Granted, there are terminologies and usages that exist only in the future world and not, as yet, in the contemporary world - Ear Thimbles or Ear Seashells and the Mechanical Hound are examples of terminologies and technologies outside of the contemporary norm, while usage and application of the terms "parlor" and "fireman" are also evolutions, or corruptions, of contemporary concepts. Again, however, the emphasis on the novel's language seems to be mostly on the day to day and the already extant, reinforcing its overall point of view that what happens in this future is beginning to happen now.

The other main element of language at work here is its essential power, its economy and intensity. There is the sense that every word has been chosen carefully and deliberately, every phrase carefully and deliberately shaped so that they are all exactly the right words, quotable and packed with emotional, metaphorical, and philosophical meaning. The vast majority of the prose is what might best be described as quotable, with dialogue that, while occasionally overly expository (as in the speeches of Captain Beatty) or preachy (the speeches of Faber and Granger) is, for the most part, to the point and clearly based on or defined by character. Generally, there are very few extraneous words. Language is tight and concise, meaning is distilled and, therefore, intense and potentially very moving.

Structure

The narrative's essential structure is linear, moving forward in what might be described as traditional narrative form - from action to reaction to action, from cause to effect to cause, from beginning (i.e., a point of innocence and/or normality) through middle (i.e., growing awareness and/or complication) to end (i.e., a point of increased knowledge and/or transformation). That narrative structure is defined by the experiences of fireman Guy Montag, with his journey of transformation forming the anchor for the novel's narrative journey. Within that overall structure, the narrative is broken down into three parts, the first and third longer than the second and each titled with a phrase and/or image that metaphorically sums up and/or suggests each section's individual content. Within itself, each part follows a smaller version of the narrative form described above - a beginning, a middle, and an ending, a movement from normality or suspension (as at the beginning of Part 3) through complication ending in resolution. In the instances of both the overall narrative and the narratives in the three parts, the action builds to a point of climax, or point of emotional and/or narrative intensity that draws the reader further into the action. The second part builds on the intensity of the climax in the first part, while the third part builds on the intensity of the climaxes in the first two. In other words, as things become more intense for Montag, the vicarious living through of his experiences becomes more intense for the reader.

Quotes

"With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history."
Part 1, Section 1, p. 1

"One time, as a child, in a power failure, his mother had found and lit a last candle and there had been a brief hour of rediscovery, of such illumination that space lost its vast dimensions and drew comfortably around them, and they, mother and son, alone, transformed, hoping that the power might not come on again too soon ..."
Part 1, Section 1, p. 5

"'It's fine work. Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn 'em to ashes, then burn the ashes. That's our official slogan.'"
Part 1, Section 1, p. 5

"She had a very thin face like the dial of a small clock seen faintly in a dark room in the middle of a night when you waken to see the time and see the clock telling you the hour and the minute and the second, with a white silence and a glowing, all certainty and knowing what it has to tell of the night passing swiftly on toward further darknesses, but moving also toward a new sun."
Part 1, Section 1, p. 8

"'People don't talk about anything ... they name a lot of cars or clothes or swimming pools mostly ... but they all say the same things and nobody says anything different from anyone else. And most of the time in the cafes they have the joke-boxes on ... or the musical wall all lit up ... but it's only color and all abstract ... that's all there is now ... a long time back sometimes pictures said things or even showed PEOPLE."
Part 1, Section 2, p. 27

"'Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.'"
Part 1, Section 2, , p. 31

"His hands had been infected ... he could feel the poison working up his wrists and into his elbows and his shoulders, and then the jump-over from shoulder blade to shoulder blade like a spark leaping a gap. His hands were ravenous. And his eyes were

beginning to feel hunger, as if they must look at something, anything, everything."
Part 1, Section 3, p. 36

"'Last night I thought about all the kerosene I've used in the past ten years. And I thought about books. And for the first time I realized that a man was behind each one of the books. A man had to think them up. A man had to take a long time to put them down on paper. And I'd never even thought that thought before.'"
Part 1, Section 3, p. 46

"'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, or there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against.'"
Part 1, Section 3, p. 52

"'If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war. If the government is inefficient, top-heavy, and tax-mad, better it be all those than that people worry over it ...'"
Part 1, Section 3, p. 55

"'[C]ram [the people] full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely 'brilliant' with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy ... don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy."

Part 1, Section 3, p. 55

"'I've read a few [books] in my time, to know what I was about, and the books say NOTHING ... they're about non-existent people, figments of imagination, if they're fiction. And if they're nonfiction, it's worse, one professor calling another an idiot, one philosopher screaming down another's gullet. All of them running about, putting out the stars and extinguishing the sun. You come away lost.'"
Part 1, Section 3, p. 56

"'[I]s it because we're having so much fun at home we've forgotten the world? Is it because we're so rich and the rest of the world's so poor and we just don't care if they are? I've heard rumors; the world is starving but we're well fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we're hated so much?'"
Montag, Part 2, Section 1, p. 65

"'I don't talk things, sir,' said Faber. "I talk the MEANING of things. I sit here and know I'm alive.'"
Part 2, Section 1, p. 67

"Once as a child he had sat upon a yellow dune by the sea ... trying to fill a sieve with sand because some cruel cousin had said 'Fill this sieve and you'll get a dime!' And the faster he poured, the faster it sifted through with a hot whispering ... seated there in the midst of July, without a sound, he felt the tears move down his cheeks."
Part 2, Section 1, p. 69

"'I often wonder if God recognizes his own son the way we've dressed him up, or is it dressed him down? He's a regular peppermint stick now, all sugar crystal and saccharine when he isn't making veiled references to certain commercial products that every worshiper absolutely needs.'"
Part 2, Section 1, p. 73

"'The good writers touch life often. The mediocre ones run a quick hand over her. The bad ones rape her and leave her for the flies.'"
Part 2, Section 1, p. 74

"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. Out of two separate and opposite things, a third. And one day he would look back upon the fool and know the fool."
Part 2, Section 2, p. 93

"'[R]emember that the Captain belongs to the most dangerous enemy to truth and freedom, the solid unmoving cattle of the majority. Oh God, the terrible tyranny of the majority.'"
Part 2, Section 2, p. 98

"'She chewed around you, didn't she? One of those damn do-gooders with their shocked, holier-than-thou silences, their one talent making others feel guilty. God damn, they rise like the midnight sun to sweat you in your bed!'"
Part 3, Section 1, p. 101

"'What a dreadful surprise ... for everyone nowadays knows, absolutely is certain, that nothing will ever happen to me. Others die, I go on. There are no consequences and no

responsibilities. Except that there ARE."
Part 3, Section 1, p. 102

"How strange, strange, to want to die so much that you let a man walk around armed and then instead of shutting up and staying alive, you go on yelling at people and making fun of them until you get them mad, and then ..."
Part 3, Section 1, p. 110

"'It was saving itself up to happen. I could feel it for a long time, I was saving something up, I went around doing one thing and feeling another. God, it was all there. It's a wonder it didn't show on me, like fat.'"
Part 3, Section 1, p. 118

"Twenty million Montags running soon, if the cameras caught him. Twenty million Montags running, running like an ancient flickery Keystone Comedy, cops, robbers, chasers and the chased, hunters and hunted ... behind him now twenty million silently baying hounds, ricocheting across parlors, three cushion shooting from right wall to center wall to left wall, gone, right wall, center wall, left wall, gone!"
Part 3, Section 2, p. 124

"He imagined thousands on thousands of faces peering into yards, into alleys, and into the sky, faces hid by curtains, pale, night-frightened faces, like gray animals peering from electric caves, faces with gray colorless eyes, gray tongues and gray thoughts looking out through the numb flesh of the face."
Part 3, Section 2, p. 125

"The sun burned every day. It burned Time. The world rushed in a circle and turned on its axis and time was busy burning the years and the people anyway, without any help from him. So if he burnt things with the firemen and the sun burnt Time, that meant that everything burned. One of them had to stop burning. The sun wouldn't, certainly. So it looked as if it had to be Montag and the people he had worked with until a few short hours ago."
Part 3, Section 2, pp. 126-27

"'They're faking. You threw them off at the river. They can't admit it. They know they can hold their audience only so long. The show's got to have a snap ending, quick ... so they're sniffing for a scapegoat to end things with a bang.'"
Part 3, Section 2, p. 133

"[H]e was looking for a brightness, a resolve, a triumph over tomorrow that hardly

seemed to be there. Perhaps he had expected their faces to burn and glitter with the knowledge they carried, to glow as lanterns glow, with the light in them. But all the light had come from the campfire, and these men had seemed no different than any others who had run a long race, searched a long search, seen good things destroyed ..."
Part 3, Section 2, p. 139

"To everything there is a season. Yes. A time to break down, and a time to build up. Yes. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. Yes, all that. But what else ... 'And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bare twelve manners of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations ...'"
Part 3, Section 2, p. 149

Topics for Discussion

Obtain, read aloud, and study the poem "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold. Why, do you think, did it make Mrs. Phelps cry? What about the poem is relevant to the themes and narrative of the novel?

Examine the summary and the quotes for situations, belief systems, technologies - anything that has an echo in contemporary culture and society. Discuss how those echoes form a connection between the book's warnings about what society might become and what contemporary society has become.

Examine the Biblical "Book of Ecclesiastes". What resonances can you find between the teachings it contains and the themes/narrative lines of the narrative? Why do you think the author chose this particular book to excerpt in his novel?

Do you agree with Montag's suggestion that Captain Beatty wanted to die? If yes, why do you think that was the case? If no, why not? In your discussions, take into account Beatty's frequent, and detailed, knowledge of literature and books.

Obtain and read aloud a copy of "Tiger Tiger Burning Bright" by William Blake, the apparent source of the title of Part 3. What resemblances, literal and metaphoric, can you see between the poem and the novel?

In what ways does the novel's thematic consideration of humanity's capacity for self-limitation, as discussed here in "Themes", find reflection and/or echo in contemporary society and culture?

How does the novel's thematic contemplation of the value of, and suppression of, independent thought, as discussed in "Themes", resonate with attitudes and events in contemporary society and culture?

Consider and comment upon notable acts of courage in support of free, independent thought that have taken place in contemporary society and culture. Do you support the principles behind these actions? What kinds of free thought would you stand up to advocate and enact?

It could be argued that in its advocacy of free, independent thought, and in its warnings against mindlessly following the orders and demands of a controlling society, Fahrenheit 451 is a singularly American novel, the United States having been founded and developed upon exactly those lines. Discuss whether the thematic values explored and debated by the work are uniquely American or whether they are, in fact, universal.