

Fahrenheit 451 critical essay

Business



HappyWhat is true happiness? It's a question humanity has been repeating since the beginning. To assume that happiness is just a state of being is unhelpful. We know that we are happy when we are glad with the situations around us, or if something good or pleasing happens, but there has to be more to it than that. The core of being happy seems to lie in the ability to find contentment or satisfaction, in everything.

The characters in Fahrenheit 451, especially Montag, the main character, a fireman in charge of burning houses instead of saving them, represent a lifestyle filled with discontentment, dissatisfaction, and ungratefulness. The characters of Fahrenheit 451 are not happy. They aren't allowed that privilege. It is part of human nature to create things in the likeness of our thoughts and emotions. Whether this be in art, music, or literature, this expression is necessary.

To share this freely, publicly, is a privilege, one that we all should be offered. Montag, Mildred, Montag's wife; and Beatty, the fire captain and Montag's boss, all of whom live under the government's thumb, are to perform as model citizens having this freedom of self expression squandered. They aren't given the chance to be truly happy because they aren't given the chance to think and feel freely. They use distractions, like the shell phones, to create noise to fill the emptiness of their thoughts. Those who begin to think on their own are struck down, just as they start identifying with the feelings they had ignored.

They are believed to be corrupted, mutts in a land of purebreds. Such a tragedy as an imperfect system is forbidden. We saw this with Clarisse, who

felt that the government was wrong for restricting so many things. She thought she should be able to enjoy staying up talking and wondering about the past, or tasting the rain. She couldn't. It didn't conform to the appropriate "happiness".

An even greater tragedy though, is the naivety that lives in our main characters. They believe that they are truly happy. The government's form of maintained categorized happiness is all there is. How could there be anything else? Without the opportunity to learn otherwise they've never had a reason to question it. It is only when Clarisse faces Montag with the question 'Are you happy?', that he begins to understand that he is not.

His eyes are opened. His wife, his house, his "important" job, they all mean nothing. He has no freedom, and even more importantly no love. We can't be happy without love. Our identities are rooted not only in what we believe – our thoughts, emotions, and decisions – but what and how we love. Also how we are loved.

The weight of this realization strangles Montag. He doesn't love Mildred, he is indifferent towards her. He doesn't love his house, it is worthless to him. He doesn't love his job because he spends all his time burning the things he might actually love...

words. Ideas. – 'You're one of the few who put up with me. That's why I think it's so strange you're a fireman, it just doesn't seem right for you, somehow.' Montag felt his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and not trembling, the two halves grinding one upon the other.' Montag feels conflicted, Clarisse has just

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pinpointed the truth he was ignoring, to have someone else bring it to light made it real.

In the words of the books he sees meaning and life, reason to believe that the government and everything he has been taught to believe in is wrong. He discovers what fighting for something really means. Montag sees the sacrifice smoldering in the woman whose house and books he has come to burn. The determination, the fierceness, snatches his breath. These people have purpose. They have reason to be courageous.

That reason is love. With this Montag begins to wonder for the first time, his thoughts echoing those famous words from an author he may never discover, "Is it better to have loved, and to have lost? Or to have never loved at all?" His decision is made, it is better to love and lose, so his hidden books become uncovered. His choice is confirmed when Beatty comes, hysterical with his own knowledge gained from the books he is pledged to burn, when Montag realizes Beatty wanted to die. He was miserable. Just as everyone else is. People like his wife, who can entertain the idea of happiness just long enough to plead for another side of the tv wall until it is too much to bear and she "accidentally" has too many sleeping pills, and can't remember having her stomach and blood pumped the next morning.

The fact that this is normal only adds to the fact that people somehow know they aren't happy, yet don't know why not. How could this be? How could someone believe they are happy but truly aren't? They are taught that true happiness revolves around the "families" that were created for them and the things they own. The citizens of Fahrenheit 451 have been brainwashed

into believing that the government is absolutely right, and that deep intimate relationship is not necessary to have happiness. It simply isn't true. Without the ability to feel things other than the things the government perceives as right, there has never been room for intimacy. Love is the beginning of thanksgiving.

If you aren't loved, or don't love, then it is hard to be thankful. It is only after Montag's life is turned upside down that he begins to learn the language of love. One of his first lessons – love is dangerous. Love caused him to plant books in other firemen's houses, and to run away and start printing books with Faber. It was because he valued himself and his ability for the first time that caused him to risk everything for a new beginning.

And begin again he did. After his city was blown away, meeting his new companions that saw the same value he saw, does he realize the importance of true love. Happiness lies in self expression. In being able to live thoroughly by our hearts dreams. That's the beauty of books, the hope they capture, a beating heart lying between each freshly printed page. The context of who we are and how we love lies in those words.

This is why the fireman's job is pointless. And what those who burn the books don't realize is, if they really wanted to burn out words, they would have to set fire to us all.