

# Fahrenheit 451 - information as poison essay examples

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Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* features a dystopian future wherein "firemen" are given the task of burning subversive books that challenge the governmental establishment. In this world, reading is outlawed, as the current mode of thinking is anti-intellectual, and bereft of learning or knowledge. The protagonist, Guy Montag, one of the firemen, has his ideas about his job and the world in which he lives challenged by an intellectual love interest. This work provides provocative, exciting science fiction about a member of the establishment changing their ideas about the horrific future in which they live, and fighting for both survival and positive change.

In the world of *Fahrenheit 451*, books and reading are illegal, and the police ("firemen") are sent to track down books and any kind of literature and burn it. The title of the book, in fact, comes from the temperature at which paper burns, according to the novel. The world is hedonistic and pleasure-centered, and intellectualism is frowned upon; the revisionist history of the world is framed to the point where people are trying to frame the narrative into making anti-intellectualism a good thing: "We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the constitution says, but everyone made equal . . . A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind" (Bradbury). *Fahrenheit 451* features a protagonist who starts out as a wholehearted believer in the system. Guy Montag is one of these firemen, a man satisfied with the work he is doing and does not question what he does.

Montag's attitude changes, however, mostly through the intervention of the women in their lives. In the case of Guy Montag, he is influenced first by Clarisse McClellan, an intellectual and free thinker, who is killed not long

after talking with Montag and introducing him to the world of literature, reading and criticism. After she dies, his wife overdoses on sleeping pills, much to the lack of interest of the paramedics who are sent to save her. The death of these two women, in addition to the general lack of interest and caring displayed by everyone around him, makes him disillusioned about his life and the job he is doing. He begins to hoard books as well, secretly sympathizing with the rebel element. This character is torn between his allegiance to the government and his growing realization that all is not well with the state of their societies.

This novel discusses issues of social consciousness and responsibility, as well as intellectualism. Everyone in these societies are blind to their own destruction and failings, lost in a world of sex and pleasure-seeking. In Fahrenheit 451, censorship is soundly indicted, as the consequences of such an anti-intellectual society are shown through an uncaring, unfeeling populace who would rather watch television than interact with each other. Montag's wife is one of these people, as is most of the population. Therefore, the primary solution is to provide a freer, more informed society through books - this is something that the strictly controlled, yet inhuman, society Guy Montag lives in cannot provide for him. From Faber, Montag learns to question the importance of what he is doing: " Do you know why books such as this are so important? Because they have quality. And what does the word quality mean? To me it means texture. This book has pores" (Bradbury). To rediscover the importance of books is to regain optimism about the future; it means to instill meaning in life through 'quality,' which is something that is lost in Montag's adherence to the law and to the maintenance of order.

The eventual fate of Guy Montag is bitterly optimistic. Eventually, Montag flees his job in the government, after killing his boss for threatening to reveal the secret of his growing sedition. This event becomes a media circus, though this is primarily to stave off the growing thoughts of war which threaten to annihilate the world. He escapes, though the government pretends they killed him anyway for the audience, and he finds refuge in a small community of elders who have a thorough oral history of books. There, he can ride out the war, and he ready to rebuild society once the dust settles. Here, he begins to understand the importance of living life viscerally, and with concern for the moment: " Ask no guarantees, ask for no security, there never was such an animal. And if there were, it would be related to the great sloth which hangs upside down in a tree all day every day, sleeping its life away" (Bradbury 157-158).

This novel is under the impression that, in order to repair this society, it must be destroyed first. Bradbury, the author of Fahrenheit 451, believed that a society taken that far down the road of anti-intellectualism and totalitarianism must fall apart before it is to be rebuilt. Those who are in power (Montag's central government) will not let it go without a fight, and so collapse must occur in order to smoothly transition into a more orderly, just world.

Ray Bradbury, the author of Fahrenheit 451, once said that the claims that the book was about censorship were false, and that his real concern was the usurping of books by television. This is also evident in the book, as television is used as an opiate to dull the senses of the masses, Montag's wife and others using it to distract themselves from real life (Johnson, 2007). This,

however, still leans toward the stance of anti-intellectualism the book's villainous government takes; it is not strictly about censorship, it is about the dumbing down of the masses to keep them compliant.

This novel shows what might be, in the event that the world decides to take dramatic measures to reduce freedom in order to protect humanity from itself. These imaginary horrors are manifested in two distinct ways: Fahrenheit's America damns intellectualism for giving people ideas for revolution and upheaval. However, the people of this society is missing out on vital parts of life as a result, which the protagonists get to taste before their rebellion. Montag learns the value of knowledge and free thinking. He becomes a symbol for his cause, especially as someone formerly deeply entrenched in their masters' doctrine.

## **Works Cited**

Bradbury, Ray. Fahrenheit 451. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967. Print.

Johnson, Amy. " Ray Bradbury: Fahrenheit 451 Misinterpreted." LA Weekly. N. p., 30 May 2007. Web. 23 July 2011. .