

Theme of phoenix in fahrenheit 451

Literature, Russian Literature



Fahrenheit 451, composed by Ray Bradbury during the 2nd World War, is a futuristic unique about a paradoxical society in which it is the task of firemen to set fires instead of to put them out. The firefighters are explicitly charged with looking for out and burning any books they discover in the city. In the middle of the chaos of this backwards-thinking society, the sign of a phoenix becomes a representation of the protagonist Montag's improvement and development. The phoenix is a prominent figure in Greek mythology and represents renewal and immortality.

In Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury uses a phoenix to illustrate how Montag purposely goes through a series of modifications in his desire to eliminate versus an unjustified and acquiescent society. At the end of its life, the phoenix thoroughly constructs a pyre of wood and sets it ablaze. The bird then falls upon the pyre and permits itself intentionally to be taken in by the hot flames it has actually created.

Quickly, it emerges from the ashes as a new phoenix, stronger and more beautiful than ever. Montag's disillusionment with society triggers him to go through an extreme and liberating improvement, just like the phoenix itself.

Like the phoenix that desires a clean slate, Montag recognizes the devastating nature of his old beliefs and longs to liberate himself from the narrow views society holds. Returning to his home one day after work, Montag meets Clarisse, an eccentric yet refreshingly honest girl who lives next door. She postures an easy question to Montag: "Is it real that long back, firefighters put fires out rather of going to start them?" (8). This relatively innocent query unsettles Montag and forces him to reexamine who

he is as a firefighter and as a man. Why is he continuing to perform a job which is neither logical nor rational? Never prior to have Montag's beliefs and behaviours been directly challenged, and Montag begins to recognize that he has actually never when examined or questioned the impacts of his actions.

Furthermore, Bradbury allows Montag to compare himself with the people around him. When he comes to a house where books are reportedly hidden, Montag realizes that some people value their freedom more than their own lives. He ponders that, ““ There must be something in books, things we can't imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house; there must be something there. You don't stay for nothing””(78). For any individual who strives for truth in knowledge, the loss of books is akin to a loss of one's identity. The author creates two disparate groups in society: those who cannot see the value in books and those willing to jeopardize their lives to protect books and retain their own freedom and imagination.

As Montag begins to reflect on his own life, he questions his current system of beliefs as he imagines the possibility of living a life free from fear and society's irrational expectations. Montag is left to think about the purpose of saving books, and this fuels Montag's desire to change his beliefs and his life. Bradbury deliberately uses the repetition of the word “ something” because Montag has never before had to justify his actions; rather, he has chosen to lead an unfeeling life driven by automatic responses. Finally, Montag's commitment to questioning societal values comes to him when Clarisse provides Montag with the following insight: ““ You're not like the others. I've seen a few.... 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 doesn't seem right for you, somehow" (23).

Clarisse's emphasis on the word "you're" serves to highlight the author's intention of indicating that Montag is unique in his ability to bravely challenge the status quo. Like a phoenix who becomes burdened and wearied by its current existence, Montag's interaction with Clarisse encourages him to reexamine his core beliefs. He thought he enjoyed his life as a fireman, but becomes skeptical once he realizes that his life's work is built on a foundation of deception, ignorance, and lies. Once these initial doubts set in, they become the driving force or fuel behind Montag's inner transformation.

Like the reemergence of the phoenix from the ashes of the pyre, Montag abandons his old beliefs and establishes a newfound respect for the knowledge contained in books. Engaging in a conversation with Faber, Montag's mind is opened up to new ways of viewing the world. When Faber is initially skeptical of Montag's intentions and asks him: "What knocked the torch out of your hands" (82), Montag responds, "I don't know. We have everything we need to be happy, but we aren't happy. Something's missing, I looked around. The only thing I positively knew was gone was the books I'd burned in ten or twelve years. So I thought books might help" (82). Montag regrets torching the books because he understands that they were concrete things that might have given his otherwise insipid life meaning.

The torch he once wielded so confidently has robbed Montag of his identity; however, he chooses to undergo a spiritual rebirth when he acknowledges

his past mistakes and confirms his desire never to repeat them. Faber's allusion to the torch, a universal symbol of the spirit and knowledge, serves to exemplify Montag's willingness to undergo this absolute transformation. Much like a phoenix that seeks a revitalization of body and spirit, Montag understands that he is capable of change if he deliberately rejects expectations imposed on him by an inflexible and judgmental society and embraces books. In this way, both the phoenix and Montag undergo a baptism by fire in order to become stronger.

Bradbury furthermore compares the cyclical life of the phoenix to Montag's own development and evolution. Like the mythical bird which experiences rebirth through death, Montag undergoes a spiritual death and resurrection. Emerging from the ashes of his old beliefs, Montag realizes the devastating effects of his past actions and commits himself to never repeating past mistakes. As Granger and Montag observe the fire from the ruins of the city, Granger comments:

There was a silly damn bird called a phoenix back before Christ; every few hundred years he built a pyre and burnt himself up. He must have been first cousin to Men. But every time he burnt himself up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again. And it looks like we're doing the same thing, over and over, but we've got one damn thing the phoenix never had. We know the damn silly thing

we just did (163).

Granger understands that man possesses one quality missing from the phoenix: the ability to deliberately reflect upon the past and evolve spiritually. In this case, Bradbury indicates a distinction between the phoenix and Montag. Unlike the phoenix which lives its life making the same mistake repeatedly, Montag differs in that he will not make the same mistakes. This is reinforced when, after escaping the city with Faber, Granger touches Montag's arm and says, "' Welcome back from the dead'" (150). The image of Montag looking, " fixed to the blank screen, trembling" marks a new beginning for Montag. Although having to seek a new destination and forging a new path in life frightens Montag, he nevertheless feels confident that his choices were correct.

Furthermore, the exaggeration that Bradbury uses, "' Welcome back from the dead'" is a reference to how Montag's old life is like death, it illustrates what a long way Montag has come with regards to his spiritual change. This is a reference to the chasm between what he used to be and what he is now, just like the chasm between life and death. In this way, Montag's changes in life take a similar path to that of a phoenix. It is only through struggle and pain that Montag emerges a man who better understands himself and the world around him. He has entered into a new state of consciousness whereby he sees things for what they are. Like a phoenix, Montag emerges from the city rejuvenated and better prepared to deal with future challenges.

In the book Fahrenheit 451, changes in Montag's life take the same path as the phoenix. Eventually, all the evil will become ashes and something

beautiful and pure will emerge from it. In the society where Montag lives, he must endure consequences because he wants to be different. His motivations change after meeting Clarisse McClellan and others that challenge Montag's beliefs. This awakens within Montag a desire to question why things are the way they are. In this way, Bradbury makes reference to Montag as a burdened phoenix ready to undergo changes. Montag soon achieves knowledge and wisdom and gains insights into the purpose of life and he undergoes spiritual resurrection like the phoenix.

Bradbury compares the phoenix to Montag to illustrate how both of them undergo positive transformation with the usage of fire. By the end, Montag's shift in the view of the world will change how Montag can be seen as someone who has an intense desire to reignite a passion for life just like the phoenix. Bradbury's usage of the phoenix is a representation of Montag's complete transformation from destroyer to preserver of knowledge. Bradbury draws similarities between Montag and the phoenix as a way of illustrating Montag as a dynamic character who goes through positive transformation.

Works Cited

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1979. Print.