

An individual and the government in Fahrenheit 451

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



In Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury presents a recurring theme that individual activism can fight government oppression. An allusion is a literary device in which the writer refers to another work or author, and Bradbury relies on this to show relationships between books and to make connections to history and literary heritage. Bradbury uses allusions to Mahatma Gandhi, Walt Whitman, and Edna St. Vincent Millay to demonstrate how many great people made a stand and went against common beliefs. Like Guy Montag, the protagonist in the novel, these figures had to fight against the grain with rare ardor while mostly alone. They prove how sacrifice and speaking out benefits others, even if it takes them awhile to see a different point of view.

Mahatma Gandhi, born in 1869, was a well-known and admired peace activist. While in South Africa, he tried to end discrimination against the Indian minority; later, he succeeded in having a law passed to end this discrimination. Once he returned to India, he worked on winning India its independence from Britain. He believed in countries self-governing, and he feared British influence upon Indian culture and life. Although he was unsuccessful, he kept hope and started to work inside of India. He tried diligently to end the Hindu-Muslim hatred and to abolish the caste system. Even though Gandhi used peaceful methods like hunger strikes, a fanatic Hindu, angry at Gandhi's passivity with the Muslims, murdered him. Gandhi embodies the ideal of empathy and equality: " Here we all are, Montag. Aristophanes and Mahatma Gandhi and Gautama Buddha... "(Bradbury 151). Bradbury uses Gandhi to emphasize the varieties of works that the book people know. Gandhi relates to the theme, which, for this section, is that books and other published works can never be forgotten, because they are

remembered throughout Gandhi's life and the lives of the people he touched. Pushing for necessary changes and courage are a part of chronology: "No, nothing is ever lost... It'll come when we need it" (Bradbury 151). Here, Bradbury shows us that although we may not recall books or similar things on command, it is always there in our mind, waiting to be retrieved. Gandhi works well as an allusion because Gandhi has been remembered long after his life through other people, just like the books used to be remembered by people and told orally until written.

Walt Whitman is considered one of America's greatest poets because he changed the writing of poems by using free verse, expounding on his love of all from leaves to sex to Lincoln. He was also an abolitionist who wrote passionately about politics. Whitman died due to a stroke in 1892 after living an exemplary life; few can say that they so embraced the wonder of nature and humanity as he did. Perhaps his most famous work is "O Captain! My Captain!" which addresses President Lincoln's death. Whitman struggled with getting his work published and recognized, but he never backed down or altered his verse. Bradbury uses Whitman to explain that the books that are being burnt are being burnt due to the authors writing about topics that are not considered pleasant or acceptable by authority. A theme includes getting rid of the loudest and most opinionated first. Bradbury connects Fahrenheit 451 to Whitman: "Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn 'em to ashes, then burn the ashes" (Bradbury 8). Here, Bradbury shows us that although Whitman was freely expressive and broke some literary molds at the time, his work can still turn into forgotten

ashes and then it doesn't matter. Whitman helps the narrative by providing an example of standing up for one's beliefs and being remembered for them long after.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, a poet known for her feminist ways, did not permit people to tell her how to feel or think. Edna's mother divorced her father at a time where divorces were uncommon. She also rebelled against restrictions towards women at her college. After being the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for poetry, her many love affairs, and an illegal abortion, Edna settled down with a widower who was sensitive, pro-feminist, and did the chores. She later became involved in a protest that landed her in jail. After her husband's death in 1949 due to lung cancer, Edna returned to drinking and died shortly after in 1950. The allusion to Millay in the quote, "Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn 'em to ashes, then burn the ashes." (Bradbury 8) is how Bradbury uses Edna's amazing life to show the theme, which is that the government is doing away with books that have differing opinions. Millay provides a great choice for an allusion because she was such a vibrant and belief-oriented person; she stood up for her beliefs even if it meant jail.

Going against common beliefs and government-run ideas can be challenging, but many great people found success and happiness by doing just that.

Gandhi, Whitman, and Millay were all chosen as allusions by Bradbury for their revolutionary natures and actions. Gandhi was chosen because he used messages of peace and nonviolent means to speak out for the equality of his fellow man. Whitman, however, was chosen because of his love for people,

as well as his political stance in his poems. Bradbury styled Clarisse after Whitman. He chose Millay because she stood out as a woman in a time when women were oppressed and to be seen and not heard. If none of these elders had done what they did, then life today would not be the same. Not letting the government dictate opinions and thoughts of individuals is the main theme of Bradbury's classic and is still relevant today.