

Fahrenheit 451 ignorance

Literature, Russian Literature



Rational ignorance is very similar to apathy, and by reading, we can rid ourselves of the urge to just not care. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* attempts to warn readers of the price that comes with rational ignorance by creating an example society much like our own. This society has given up all intellectual thought and sharing of ideas. By "paying the price" characters like Mildred give up the human experience and become void due to lack of independent thoughts. Characters like Clarisse pay a much higher toll: life and dignity.

Characters like Guy Montag and Granger pay the price by being surrounded with nothings but Mildreds. In *F451*, society believes that limiting education and sharing of ideas actually enhances life by excluding bad thoughts. In Ray Bradbury's dystopian future, every character pays the price for ignorance. Most characters, though, willingly and unknowingly do so. In the novel, life is not valued the way it should be; living is not meaningful anymore. In the very beginning of the book, Mildred tries to kill herself for, what seems like, no reason. This happens so often that technicians are sent to speedily fix the problem rather than doctors.

After the technicians do their duty to Mildred, her parlor "uncle" states myvcell, after all, this is the age of disposable tissue. Blow your nose on a person, wad them, flush them away, reach for another, blow, wad, flush" (17). Even after the ordeal, Mildred is not upset that she failed in taking her own life, as if indifferent to the subject. For her, life is no different than death. Mildred's "uncle" is correct in comparing a modern day person to a tissue. People have worth based on their thoughts, actions, and relations

with people. If one has no thoughts, real actions, or connections, their life cannot be worth very much.

Mildred has as many independent thoughts as a tissue and values her life precisely for how much it is worth. In the same sense, one cannot value another's life if they cannot value their own. When Guy confronts Mildred about where Clarisse McClellan has been, Mildred nonchalantly says she died, as if it did not matter. Mildred shows that Clarisse's death means nothing to her when her reasoning for not telling Montag sooner was "I forgot all about it" (47). Mildred says that she wants to forget sad things, but it does not seem like this event makes her very sad at all. Mildred's fickle mind cannot assess a tragedy.

It was not a surprise that Mildred did not pay heed to her death, but that she died with nothing to show for her life. The multitude of suicides, mentioned earlier, are no tragedies considering the quality of the life being taken. Clarisse's death was unfortunate because she lived. To Clarisse, there was a large difference between life and death because she, unlike her peers, experienced life. Comparable to Clarisse's death, the death of the random citizen (who seems to enjoy life too; he was on a stroll at night) killed in place of Montag (149) suffered a similar fate of no dignity after death.

Intellectuals like Montag, Granger, and all of the travellers who memorize books pay by being surrounded by an endless amount of Mildreds. After introducing himself and showing Montag the end of the manhunt, Granger explains, "When we were separate individuals, all we had was rage. I struck a fireman when he came to burn my library years ago. I've been running ever

since" (150). Granger bridges his own experiences to Montag to illustrate Montag's future. Granger is far too wise to be bitter about his situation.

When intellectuals have no choice but to either suffer amongst the ignorant or outcast themselves, they are the ones who pay the most. Ignorance is most certainly not a satisfying path, but neither is a life of suffering. Not one character in Bradbury's controversial novel escapes the price of ignorance. However, the payment methods differ from character to character. "Ignorance is void" should become a popular saying for in the midst of ignorance, one either becomes empty or outcast. Either way, no one wins. Ridding the world of complex, "painful" thoughts does not lessen pain, it lessens emotion and human experience.