

Celsius 233: clarisse the catalyst essay



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Celsius 233: Clarisse the Catalyst “ We are like chameleons; we take our hue and the color of our moral character, from those who are around us” (John Locke, English philosopher and physician). Everyone in the world influences others in many various manners. The influence can be diminutive or extremely significant but they always have an impact. In the novel, Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury introduces a string of influential figures that drive the protagonist, Guy Montag, through a complete metamorphosis. This dystopian novel, set in a futuristic society, focuses on the life of Guy Montag, a fireman whose job it is to start fires.

At first, Montag takes great pleasure in his profession of burning illegally owned books and the homes of their owners. However, after meeting Clarisse McClellan, an inquisitive young lady, he begins to question the value of his profession and, in turn, his life. Clarisse embodied a serene innocence amidst the bitter reality of a corrupt world. She was the first to influence Montag towards the path of self-awareness. I will explore Clarisse’s role in the futuristic society, how and why her words changed Montag and the symbolic purpose of her “ death”.

Clarisse McClellan’s main function in Fahrenheit 451 is to play the role of innocence, both in mind and in action. She serves as a catalyst that forces Montag to go through a painful but necessary self-examination. ““ That’s why I think it’s so strange you’re a fireman. It just doesn’t seem right for you, somehow. ’ He felt his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and a not trembling, the two halves grinding one upon the other” (p. 24). Clarisse finds interest in parts of the

world Montag doesn't understand, such as, " watching people, tasting the rain and smelling autumn leaves".

Her carefree, yet observant, personality appealed to Montag. " She didn't want to know how a thing was done, but why" (p. 60). Clarisse didn't care about how; so much as she wanted to know why the thing was done in the first place. To her, the reason why something happened or was done was far more important than how. Her role in the novel is only the forerunner of Montag's spiritual renaissance which is completed by Faber and Granger. In many ways, Clarisse is a foil for Mildred. Guy Montag's wife is an inattentive and mindless " zombie" that strictly abides by the laws of their futuristic society.

On the other hand Clarisse seems to be such a simple character, taking walks and asking questions. But in the end, it's her simplicity and expression of individual thought that ultimately leads Montag to question the purpose of his profession and, in turn, his life. Clarisse plays her role as the guide perfectly. Her constant questioning pokes and prods Montag onto the correct path that decides the fate of their society. If Clarisse McClellan had survived through the duration of the entire novel, she could've emerged as the leader for their new society built on knowledge. " But Clarisse's favourite subject wasn't herself.

It was everyone else, and me" (p. 72). Clarisse's altruistic thinking is a quality that even many of our current political leaders lack. Clarisse's motivation and leadership reflects on many influential leaders that have left their mark on the Earth. But the one she can be most correlated with is

Mahatma Gandhi. Born in Porbandar, India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi became one of the most respected and influential spiritual leaders of the twentieth century. He helped free the Indian people from British rule through non-violent resistance and is honoured by his people as the father of India.

The Indian people call Gandhi, Mahatma, which means Great Soul. Similar to Gandhi, Clarisse freed Guy Montag from the firm grasp of the firemen foundation. Her "lessons", on expressing individual thought, were far from violent. But it's not solely their actions that depict similarities between these two figures; it's their personalities as well. Both leaders displayed immense courage in their ordeals. Gandhi was brave enough to stand up to an entire British nation and Clarisse was fearless in questioning the purpose of the firemen foundation. Gandhi also displayed endless patience with his followers and their tendency to resort to violence.

On the other hand Clarisse displayed great patience with Montag's ignorant perspective on life. In conclusion, these two figures are linked in many positive ways despite their separation in reality. The only difference; Mahatma Gandhi led a country; Clarisse led the man who rebuilt a country. Despite her young age, Clarisse displayed wisdom beyond her years, which helped guide Montag in his journey to restore society to its former grandeur. Ever since their first encounter, Clarisse had left quite an impression on Montag. "Montag shook his head. He looked at a blank wall.

The girl's face was there, really quite beautiful in memory: astonishing, in fact" (p. 10). It wasn't just her physical appearance that lingered in his memory; it was her words, her questions and her ideas about how she lived

her life and how other around her lived their lives. Clarisse's perceptive and blithe personality led Montag to question his ideology regarding the true meaning of life. But it was never Clarisse's intention to teach Montag anything. "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires out instead of going to start them?" (p. 8). She was just seeking answers about the firemen foundation and their "futuristic" society.

But, in the end, her persistent questioning drives the already-doubt-ridden fireman over the edge. When Montag developed somewhat of a newfound self-concept, he reflected on himself and those around him. The people that encompassed Montag's daily life weren't like Clarisse at all. "These men were all mirror images of himself!" (p. 33). It occurred to him that all firemen had a strong resemblance to him or he had a striking resemblance to them. Either way, Clarisse's words were beginning to unveil the truth about their fraudulent society. But why did Clarisse choose to "help" Montag realize the truth about their world?

Her insatiable curiosity in peculiar things drew her to Montag, a fireman without the typical fireman qualities. "You're not like the others. I've seen a few; I know. When I talk, you look at me. When I said something about the moon you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that" (p. 23). Even before meeting Clarisse McClellan, Guy Montag harboured doubts about the purpose of his profession and his life. "... he reached up and pulled back the grille of the air-conditioning system and reached far back inside to the right and moved still another sliding piece of metal and took out a book" (p. 5). At this point in the novel, Ray Bradbury hints at the fact the Guy Montag may have stolen a few books during his many house raids before the <https://assignbuster.com/celsius-233-clarisse-the-catalyst-essay/>

period of time covered in the story. His “ treacherous” actions are the result of human curiosity and perhaps Clarisse was drawn to Montag because she could sense his curious nature beneath his stolid exterior. In the novel, *The Black Unicorn*, the author, Terry Brooks, introduces a protagonist who is unaware of his own true identity.

Ben Holiday, the King of Landover, is attacked by Meeks, a sorcerer of the highest calibre, who casts a glamour over each of them, so that Meeks appears as Ben and Ben appears as a common peasant. Failing to recognize his true identity, Ben is thrown out of his own castle, while Meeks reigns as Lord of Landover. After several days of aimlessly wandering about, Ben meets Edgewood Dirk, a prism cat from the fairy world. The prism cat follows Ben around on his journey and treats him in a manner similar to how Clarisse responded to Montag. He urges Ben along on the right path without completely giving him the answer.

Clarisse does the same with Montag; she opens Montag’s eyes to the flaws of society and lets him choose the road he wishes to follow. In the end, Edgewood Dirk’s constant questioning led Ben to discover the truth about the glamour and reclaim his throne. Clarisse’s words helped Montag realize how the people around him really were. Naive people are unwilling to grasp the notion that people were, at one time, intelligent and full of knowledge learned from books. Along with his realization of society’s harsh truth, Montag began to understand the value and beauty of the literature he had once tried to eradicate.

Immediately he realized that his action weren't humane. It wasn't right and it must be stopped. Throughout the course of the entire novel Clarisse never tells Montag what to believe and think; she just shows him that thinking is an option. She invites him to try it for himself and he walks through the door she holds open. The news of Clarisse McClellan's untimely death was one of the most tragic moments in the novel. Her influence over the protagonist, Guy Montag, was crucial in the development of many of the story's major themes. Clarisse's "death" emphasized the futuristic society's intolerance with free thinkers. You can't rid yourselves of all the odd ducks in just a few years.... The poor girl's better off dead" (p. 60). It shows that, in this world, an imaginative girl like Clarisse cannot compete with the strict laws of society. She's incompatible with her surroundings, so she's not allowed to live. "And he was surprised to learn how certain he suddenly was of a single fact he could not prove. Once, long ago, Clarisse had walked here, where he was walking now" (p. 145). The death of Clarisse not only accentuates the flaws of their futuristic society but it also gives Montag an eye opening experience through which he begins to make his own choices.

Her death brings many of the questions that Montag toyed with in the past to an almost self-inflicted obsession that forces him to act. It is only after her death that he begins to understand literature and confront Mildred, Beatty and the rest of society. As quoted by Quintus Ennius, the father of Roman poetry "Let no one weep for me, or celebrate my funeral with mourning; for I still live, as I pass to and fro through the mouths of men". Although Clarisse's physical body died in the accident, a little bit of her soul still resides within Montag.

Her soul acts as a guide for Montag in his journey to restore books and bring back free thinkers. It offers him Clarisse's strength, determination and her free spirit; so, in a way, her visions and ideals still live on within Montag. In the novel, *The Wright 3*, the author, Blue Balliett, writes about three young sleuths are cryptically drawn into another art mystery - this time involving a Frank Lloyd Wright architectural masterpiece, The Robie House. As Petra, Calder and Tommy's sixth-grade class attempt to save the Hyde Park landmark from demolition eerie happening in the house are reported.

As the "Wright 3" become tangled in mystery involving hidden treasure and a coded message, the spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright contacts them. His solitary spirit sends a message to kids: the Robie House must remain intact. Similar to Clarisse, the spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright guides the three detectives through the story as they try to save an artistic masterpiece from demolition. "Grandfather's been dead for all these years, but if you lifted my skull, by God, in the convolutions of my brain you'd find the big ridges of his thumbprint. He touched me" (p. 157). Even after her death, Clarisse continued to affect and drive Montag.

Similar to the thumbprint left by Granger's grandfather, Clarisse's spirit guided Montag through the tale. In the end, Bradbury's dystopian themes were unable to prevent good from prevailing over evil. Influential figures, more specifically Clarisse, played a large role in Guy Montag's transformation from a stolid character, incognizant of his surroundings, to a person conscious of everything, so enlightened by the new world he is exposed to. As a result of Clarisse's positive influence, Montag acted differently in every

situation that presented itself and he learned to accept and adapt to the harsh realities of his society.

Influence plays a key role in Fahrenheit 451. It allowed for Clarisse, Faber and Granger to positively impact Montag's perspective on life but you should always "think twice before you speak, because your words and influence will plant the seed of either success or failure in the mind of another" (Napoleon Hill, American writer and author)

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