

Analogy and mind is  
engrossed in the



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## **Analogy of the birds**

The novel focuses on the suppression of the masses through the media and censorship. Books have been outlawed and consequently, the fire department has been allocated a new role: burning books (Bradbury, p. 1). Guy Montag, the main protagonist in the novel, is a firefighter who is tasked with incinerating books.

He is a troubled man since his job does not afford him happiness. Though he burns books, his conscience constantly haunts him. That is why he hides some of the books so that he can read them later.

At the beginning of the novel, a moving description of one of the book-burning escapades is brought to the fore (Bradbury, p. 1). The exercise nearly drives Montag berserk. His whole body and mind is engrossed in the exercise and as he throws book after book into the raging inferno he has created, the books seem to come alive.

They are transformed into birds before flapping their way into the fire. This comparison is significant. Books contain knowledge, which can easily be lost when they are destroyed. Once that happens, it will be difficult to retrieve the lost knowledge. In the same way, once birds are threatened, they fly away and it is almost impossible to recover them.

It is also important to note that books, just like birds, are alive. This is because they enshrine knowledge, which is important in man's life. The importance of books is illustrated in the novel when a woman chooses to die rather than watch her most prized books set to the flames (Bradbury, p.

1). It is clear that people cannot do without books since they lend meaning to their existence.

### **Symbolism: Kerosene**

Kerosene is used to accelerate the burning of the written materials.

Naturally, its smell sticks on the users long after coming into contact.

Therefore, Clarisse, being very observant, is able to tell that Montag is a fireman responsible for burning books. This implies that the agents of suppression can never quite shake off the guilty conscience that follows them everywhere they go. In as much as they may justify their actions in whichever way, they lead disturbed lives.

This fact is not lost on captain Beatty, Montag's boss, who states that it is common for a fireman to make off with one or two books during the burning exercise (Bradbury, p. 2). Beatty seems to understand the guilt that the firemen experience and, therefore, allows them to have some books so long as they are destroyed within 24 hours. This is the reason why Beatty expects

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Montag back at work the same day that the latter takes a sick leave (Bradbury, p. 25).

Guilt is the source of unhappiness in Montag's life. He leads a plastic life, devoid of any feeling - or so he would have liked to believe. He discovers that he is not happy after all; he has been wearing a false smile all the time. It is his encounter with Clarisse that forces this discovery on him (Bradbury, p.

2). Consequently, he decides to drop the facade and look for the true meaning of life. This would involve quitting his job, which he eventually does. The assertion that kerosene can never be washed off completely also points to the inevitability of reality. One can never quite escape the reality.

Montag is jerked back into the harsh reality by Clarisse while his wife's attempts to block out the real world by immersing herself in electronics seems to fail as she constantly has to resort to sleeping pills.

### **The contrast between Mildred and Clarisse**

The author introduces Clarisse before Montag's wife in order to underline the stark contrast between the two women. For once, Clarisse has been described as vivacious: full of life and a passion for everything around her.

When Montag encounters her at night, she is having a walk just to enjoy the gifts that Mother Nature has provided. She confides in Montag that at times she stays awake all night in order to watch the sunrise and even the moon (Bradbury, p. 4).

She further informs him that were he to look closely, he would see the man in the moon (Bradbury, p. 4). This is in stark contrast to Montag's wife, Mildred who has totally no interest in nature and the immediate environment. She spends most of her time in front of the TV and the few times she ventures out are to do speed-racing. She has lost all personal contact with others, including her own husband. Her eyes are glued to the screens and her ears shut to the outside world as they are perpetually plugged by ear pieces, listening to music continuously. Clarisse is a member of a happy family consisting of herself, an uncle and her parents.

They spend ample time talking to each other. They rarely watch the " parlour walls" and they hardly go to speed races (Bradbury, p. 3). They have maintained their human touch and, therefore, are able to enjoy their lives to the full. Generally, Clarisse is happy and contented with life, unlike Mildred who has to resort to drugs to make life bearable. The contrast between the two women is important because it helps the reader to understand why Montag is drawn to Clarisse rather than his wife.

He is completely devastated when he learns about her death. The contrast also serves to heighten the estrangement between Montag and his wife. He is unable to relate freely with his wife the way he does with Clarisse.

### **The contrast between the Montags and Clarisse's house**

It is evident that life in Montag's house is radically different from life in Clarisse's house. In Montag's house, family values have been replaced with TV and radios. Consequently, Montag and his wife are inexorably alienated

from each other. Familial love is completely non-existent and the few times they interact are to disagree on every issue.

Basically, they lead separate lives; sleep on separate beds despite being man and wife. In Clarisse's house, however, family love is held supreme. The members of the family spend enough time talking and sharing with each other. They have the TV and the radios, but do not allow such devices to compromise their relationship. Due to the constant interaction, Clarisse has benefited a lot from her uncle and parents who have evidently done a commendable job in molding her.

In her conversation with Montag, she makes reference to one of the things she has learnt from her uncle: at seventeen, she is most likely crazy. The import of this is that she has learnt to tread carefully. This is essentially a happy family. Unlike in Clarisse house where there is warmth, Montag goes back to a cold house. When he gets into the house, he does not wish to draw the attention of his wife. So, he plans to walk quietly to his bed without turning the lights on (Bradbury, p. 5). In a strange twist of fate, it is his attention that is drawn to his wife, who has overdosed herself with sleeping pills (Bradbury, p.

6). The lack of warmth in this house further aggravates Montag's unhappiness. The two houses are indeed radically different from each other.

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