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An Ontology of Conflict and Fire

In his novel *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury envisions a society in which books are burned and people thoughtlessly move from television show to television show. As an author he explores the negative effects of the world he saw around him, the rising popularity of TV and the blind following of the McCarthy trials amongst other qualms of the Cold War Era. He does so to warn his readers of the future that could be awaiting them, one void of individuals and dominated by the apathetic masses. Bradbury does so through the trials of Guy Montag, a fireman starting to question his role in the society. Guy becomes the catalyst for change in his society, but as a protagonist the character balances on the line of development and reversion. Montag continually exists in a conflicting state of being both an individual, but also lacking the capability to understand his own individuality at the same time. Montag becomes his own antagonist at times, fighting against himself as he explores individualism within the text. This duality of self is externally manifested, and thus correlated, to Montag's relationship with fire as both a creative and destructive force. Montag becomes the embodiment of fire. Montag's inherent and internal dichotomy destabilizes Bradbury's ending by leaving Montag not only a hero, but simultaneously never being one at all, both savior and victim. This complexity of Montag's ontology allows him to identify flaws, but never surpass or solve them. Guy inevitably

falls back on the same fireman mentality, disguising it as progress when trying to move forward, which keeps him from achieving real individualism.

Throughout *Fahrenheit 451*, the audience witnesses what could be seen as a bildungsroman as Montag's individuality is not only realized, but also simultaneously matured by the end of the novel. As readers we want this to be true, we want to identify with a character that grows and changes; however, Montag's growth can be seen as Montag accepting, and maintaining the beliefs of others as he has done his entire life as a fireman, burning and thus perpetuating the literature-less ideals of the masses. If this is true then Montag's supposed enlightenment and journey is no more than an illusion. On the other hand Montag could be read as reaching out towards those characters that embody his own beliefs in an effort to learn how to express his own thoughts. Does Montag reflect the character in front of him or does the character reflect Montag's own beliefs? In Montag's search to be an individual he quite possibly, as well as inadvertently, destroys all the individuality he could have had.

Montag is in conflict with himself just as much as any other character. He contradicts himself over and over again throughout his journey, leaving him stagnant as a character despite the appearance of character development. Due to Montag's inherent self opposition, Bradbury's novel, one he openly admits to being a cautionary tale, falters in meaning (Bradbury, "The Day After Tomorrow" pg.192). The ending speaks to the fictional society's capability of salvation and progression, all of which is dependent on Montag's own personal journey through the novel. Montag becomes a test run, a microcosm for all of society. If he is to have become an individual throughout his trials in *Fahrenheit 451*, then there is hope for betterment of the novel's society. On the other hand, if Montag's search for individuality remains stagnant, what can be said for the society that made him?

In a society lacking individuals, Montag has to explore his own meaning of individuality, the gage for which his “progress” as a character is measured. Montag defines his own idea of “progress” when he visits Professor Faber at his home. He begs Faber, ““I want you to teach me how to understand what I read,”” (Bradbury pg.78). Montag is capable of the physical process of reading, but he is unable to put any meaning behind the texts he reads. To understand and “think” about the texts, as Montag desires and also lacks, is to contemplate *original* and *uninfluenced* thoughts. Faber implores Montag to look inside himself for this because a book in itself is just an inanimate object and that, ““the magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us,”” (pg. 79). The stress is on the individual and their connection to texts not the books themselves. This *magic* of individuality is the ability to not only speak freely, but also to creatively express oneself. Montag struggles with this because he has never before had an outlet through which to reflect upon his relationship to himself.

Needless to say, the Montag the audience meets in the beginning of the short novel is not an individual according to the aforementioned criteria, but does he makes any progression in creating an individual self throughout the text? It could be said that surrounded by a culture and people who demean Montag’s questioning of society he actively reaches out to those with like ideals like Faber and Clarisse. However, Montag himself could be seen as simply absorbing the beliefs and ideas of those characters closer to him, easily switching personalities to conform to his audience. Time and time again throughout the novel Montag is presented as making progress while continuously exhibiting the very ideals he claims to be fighting against throughout *Fahrenheit 451*. Contemplating this taboo ideology concerning the reading of books,

shows he can recognize the need for change, but he confronts this problem by falling back on his fireman ideals.

At the beginning of *Fahrenheit 451* the only semblance of an identity Montag has is his occupation as a fireman. Obviously, Bradbury's fictional "fireman" takes a 180 degree turn from the conceptualization of a fireman in our own contemporary society. Bradbury's begin fires and our own are meant to put them out. Clarisse cleverly brings this up in her first encounter with Montag. First she asks if it's true that firemen used to put out fires, but when her question is dismissed as ludicrous by Montag. She says, "Strange. I heard once that a long time ago houses used to burn by accident and the needed firemen to *stop* the flames," (pg. 6). At this moment Montag begins questioning his own identity. He is thrust into an identity crisis because his own identity is so diluted and makeshift in the first place especially in comparison to the strong willed character of Clarisse . Clarisse's idea, what we know and also later find out to be true for this fictional world, conflicts with Montag's own understanding of purpose; his occupation is in conflict with its original job. Similarly, their worth as "firemen" is called into question because if it is true that firemen were always meant to put out fires, would not Montag and his colleagues be the very antithesis of their supposed identities? Yet, in this society, somehow, the firemen are still seen as heroic figures by destroying literature and essentially "saving" the people from themselves. The good men become the villains.

Similarly, from this point Montag's relationship to fire itself begins to shift. In the very first sentence the audience is given Montag's perspective, "It was a pleasure to burn," (pg. 1). Immediately, the perspective that is telling the story shows a past blind acceptance, even a thrill in maintaining the ideology of the masses. Fire is meant to burn, destroy; its creative aspect is only in the void made once the books have turned to ashes. Fire's essence itself is perverted to

mean its opposite in each state. Its destructive power is glorified as it tears through the pages of histories, stories, and occasionally lives. Mildred, who acts as an embodiment of the masses, exemplifies this when she responds to Montag's comment about watching a woman burn to death. She says, "She's nothing to me; she shouldn't have had books. It was her responsibility, she should've thought of that. I hate her," (pg. 48). Montag is clearly traumatized. He remarks to his wife, "God! I've been trying to put it out, in my mind, all night. I'm crazy with trying" (pg. 48). Juxtapose this against Mildred's brutal callousness towards the violence of fire and Montag begins to see a difference between himself and the people he is surrounded by. He begins to fear fire and its perverse uses. Fire is the mechanism through which society passes judgment, through which Montag himself has passed judgment and he begins to grapple with the consequences of this throughout *Fahrenheit 451*.

Montag himself is, as are the majority of the people in his society, the perversion of what originally made them human. Their creative forces, never reigned in, eventually collapsed in on itself creating the bleak society in which they exist. As a fireman Montag not only exists within this perversion, but is the one who quite literally feeds the fire. When Faber is briefly describing how the masses have played a leading role in allowing society to deteriorate, he says, "Remember the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord. You firemen provide a circus now and then...it's a small sideshow indeed, and hardly necessary to keep things in line," (pg. 83). Montag becomes aware of the sheer pointlessness of his occupation, of the identity he has been embracing for years; however, Montag is also given an outlet through which to deter full responsibility in the world he sees around him and thus he can begin to separate himself from those ideals.

Not all the fire imagery throughout in *Fahrenheit 451* focuses on the more destructive aspects of fire. Positive images are scattered throughout the text. Alan Lenhoff, in his article, "Making Fire Mean More than Fire. How Authors Use Symbols", says, "If Fire is a symbol of destruction and conflict in *Fahrenheit 451*, it is also a symbol of light and peace," (pg. 14). In his article Lenhoff compares the language between Montag's first description of burning and his recollection of a the small fire on a candle wick on page 5. Lenhoff writes, "Rediscovery, illumination, comfortably, hoping--as opposed to python, venomous, blazing, and gorging. Bradbury has shifted from violent language to language of peace. The transformation of Montag--and of fire--has begun," (Lenhoff pg. 14). Montag's journey towards individuality corresponds with his embracing of fire as a creative force and not simply one that destroys. Fire's duality in the text mirrors Montag's own ontology within *Fahrenheit 451*. Montag's relationship not only to himself as fireman, but his relationship to fire itself is continuously in evolving. Just as fire is both a life affirming and life taking force Montag exists as a life giving entity, but can also be nothing more than a "fireman" slowly burning away at his own self when it comes to giving his individualism a chance to grow.

This duality is the very essence of fire as a natural element. To create it must destroy, and in destruction fire is warmth, life. David Mogen, in his 1986 book of criticism on Bradbury's life works writes,

"As the title suggest, fire provides the central metaphors for *Fahrenheit 451*. It opens and closes with contrasting images of fire and light, and the shifts in their symbolic associations illustrate how the novel's theme develops. In the opening description Montag revels in flame... This fire is associated with darkness rather than light. But by the book's conclusion Montag has learned of the other fire of the 'hearth,' which warms and lights... When he stumbles upon his first campfire in the wilderness, he finally comprehends fire's natural role in the 'hearth,' and

he draws the moral himself, 'It was not burning, it was warming,' (Bradbury 130)" (Mogen pg. 109- 110) .

Fire is always in its natural state, its only growth is in size and ferocity. So when Mogen argues that fire returns to its "natural role", it is actually only an instance of its destruction being contained, it is not that it is any less destructive in its essence. Fire in any "state" requires burning. Similarly, Montag exists in the same fashion; whether or not he experiences change, he exists within a position that destruction and creation are inherently integrated, similar, and necessary for each other. Initially, this is exhibited in his occupation, creating a void in society, by destroying literature, then by burning those persons, Captain Beatty and Faber, in an effort to create for himself his own identity, thus Montag is the embodiment of fire's own dichotomy as seen in his faltering individualism.

Montag's first begins to contemplate his possible individual self when he meets his quirky new neighbor Clarisse McClellan, the catalyst for Montag's trials throughout the novel. She begins by questioning his identity as fireman. Because of his lack of individuality, having just done what he was told for so long, Montag cannot answer simple questions like why he became a fireman. He doesn't entertain these questions to any real extent until Clarisse says, "So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean. But you're just a man, after all..." (Bradbury pg. 5). Montag has, up until this point, put himself on a pedestal as a hero; after all it was a, "special pleasure" to burn. When Clarisse demeans this "honor" she is also taking away Montag's only semblance of identity and he must quickly scramble to fill that void. Her interrogation leaves Montag reeling, reaching out to reassert himself. There is a moment of contemplation when Montag gives a description of Clarisse and the subtle light of her being. Montag compares a moment in his childhood when his own mother brought out the "last candle" in a black out to his meeting with Clarisse; "There had been a brief hour of rediscovery, if such

illumination that space lost its vast dimensions and drew comfortably around them” (pg. 5). In this brief moment Montag is experiencing himself in a new way. Clarisse opens up Montag to the possibility of not only fire in a different more positive form, but also who he can be in a different form for after all he is “just a man”; he has the space to grow. Clarisse offers Montag an outlet through which to explore himself and reflect, but he is unsure of himself and quickly falls to the ideology of the fireman for the remainder of Clarisse’s questioning.

Once Clarisse breaks the charade of Montag’s only identity he tries to have her conform to his own understanding, using his authority, nothing more than a salamander symbol on his jacket, to deter Clarisse. If successful, Montag would be reaffirmed in himself. If he can enforce the preexisting ideals then they remain pertinent. Clarisse does not abide, but rather continues her questioning; only furthering Montag’s identity crisis. She presents to Montag not only an example of an individual, but also works as a reflexive self, questioning Montag in a way he could not do for himself. Jing- Jung Kuo would go so far as to call Clarisse Montag’s conscience. In Kuo’s evaluation of Montag, as he relates to Martin Heidegger’s theory of an “authentic life”, he writes, “The appearance of Clarisse McClellan, actually, triggers [Montag’s] self-examination. Clarisse awakens his latent doubt about the rightness of his work, his thoughts and feelings... and points out his self-deception,” (Kuo pg. 7). He continues to say that she works as a guide leading Montag to an “authentic life”, but Montag does not follow Clarisse as a guide and does not reach an authentic lifestyle; rather Montag is *dependent* on Clarisse for this, never learning how to do this on his own, which is essential if Montag if to ever to establish his own individuality.

Throughout their daily meetings Montag only ever looks or experiences what Clarisse leads him to look at. He never takes the initiative to look at anything outside of Clarisse’s own

suggestions. Clarisse asserts, “You’re not like the others... When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that,” (Bradbury pg. 21).

Montag considers himself as separate from the others only because Clarisse tells him so. And yes, he is beginning to break for society’s mold, but only does so through other characters.

Montag’s capacity to think extends as far as to listen, exactly what he has done with his Captain at the firehouse and what the audience is led to believe he has done his own life. Montag is separate from his peers in that he wants to progress, but he still doesn’t know how to do so on his own, which inhibits the process. Montag never takes initiative; the reader never sees Montag look at anything just for the sake of looking as Clarisse prompts him too.

Clarisse begins Montag’s search for individualism by being an example of individualism. She exemplifies those characteristics he himself feels he should exhibit. He attempts to mirror her actions. Rafeeq McGiveron, in his essay, “‘To Build a Mirror Factory’: The mirror and Self Examination in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*”, writes, that Clarisse acts as a mirror not only for Montag, but also to society (McGiveron pg. 283). “Clarisse is a mirror because she is mirror-like in her informing...she has no ideological agenda. For the most part Clarisse does not interpret or offer suggestions; she merely draws Montag’s attention to facts he should already understand.” (pg. 284). Her relative happiness, and understanding allows Montag to see just how unhappy he is, but it is not until her disappearance that he is thrust into any real attempts to create a self separate from the mirror image he is with Clarisse. This only furthers Montag’s dependence on Clarisse and in her absence, despite wanting to achieve individualism; he still cannot do so on his own. He has no mirror in which to copy. If Montag does not become an individual, and thus replacing Clarisse after her death as a hopeful combatant to society, then there exists no hope for society to better itself, even in the wake of total nuclear destruction.

Montag then turns to literature thinking that the key to being himself will come through reading and that this will make him more like Clarisse. Books will make him the individual he is seeking to be. When he first comes to read the books he says, ““She was the first person in a good many years I’ve really liked... These men have been dead a long time, but I know their words point, one way or another, to Clarisse,” (Bradbury pg. 68). When he is unable to decipher the meaning behind the words and stories, and he no longer has his mirror, Montag questions,” Where do you find a *teacher* this late,”” (pg. 70)? Without a fully realized self Montag is unable to contemplate and explore his blossoming individuality on his own and must express himself through other characters and their beliefs. Thus, Faber, a retired English professor, is then introduced. The two characters had met over a year before Montag’s meeting with Clarisse. In their first interaction Montag shows his capacity for self progression as he assures the professor that he will not be held accountable for the poem hidden in his jacket (pg.70). In not reprimanding Faber for the poems, Montag is showing he questions the world he lives in, even if he himself doesn’t understand what he is doing. Were he totally blind to the injustices of his occupation Montag would have turned Faber in right away, not listened to the recitation and still not reported it a year later. Faber *offered* his information saying, ““For your file in case you decide to be angry with me,”” and Montag is surprised to find he isn’t angry although acknowledging this he cannot understand why (pg. 71). Despite having this capability for compassion, Montag, yet again, falls back on being a fireman, keeping the address for his files of “future investigations (?)”. Unable to understand or interact with his own actions and emotions, ones not dictated by an authority figure, Montag relies on the only available authority to him, the ideals of the firemen, letting only a lack of true visual evidence halt him in arresting Professor Faber.

In the two characters second meeting there is an increased urgency in Montag realizing his self. As Montag listens to Faber through the ear shells he begins to realize he is just taking orders yet again. Their first exchange by the ear shells reads,

“I’m not thinking. I’m doing like I am told, like always. You said get the money and I got it. I didn’t really think of it myself. When do I start working things out on my own?”

‘You’ve started already, by saying what you just said. You’ll have to take me on faith.’

‘I took the others on faith!’

‘Yes, and look where we’re headed. You’ll have to travel blind for awhile. Here’s my arm to hold onto.’

‘I don’t want to change sides and just be told what to do. There’s no reason to change if I do that,’” (pg. 88).

This passage exemplifies Montag’s internal dispute. He can recognize the situation he is in, see the flaws for their face values and can even articulate those thoughts and worries in a meaningful way, but only *after* the fact. There is no immediate reflection on Montag’s part; he still needs another character as a mindful puppeteer to explain individuality, but on their own terms, not Montag’s. Montag makes no conscious effort to avoid this mentality, to do things by himself, despite obviously being aware of it. He continues to follow directions, not even asking questions in an effort to understand those decisions. Montag does not have the capability of maintaining and maneuvering his own individuality and thus must rely on Faber to do so for him. Despite having an individual self Montag cannot interact with or understand it himself and so other characters, like Clarisse and Faber, must step in and define it for him.

Montag first breaches his puppet strings, making his first big individual leap when he brings out the book of poetry in front of Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles despite Faber’s warning. He tries to be an influential force in the same manner that both Clarisse and Faber were to him.

In an introduction to *Fahrenheit 451* explaining precautionary tales, Bradbury himself says there are many things the book speaks to and, “if [I] influence people, well and good. But I don’t want to set out to influence people. I don’t want to set out to change the world in any self-conscious way. That leads to self-destruction,” (Bradbury “Audio Introduction” pg. 195). This is exactly what Montag does. In exhibiting his new found, yet minimal, individualism Montag scares his audience and fumbles with his actions. Montag still cannot process his thinking nor his choices and his wife, Millie, who exemplifies the masses’ apathy, asserts dominance over Montag, explaining away his odd behavior. Where Millie was nervous for her image Faber was concerned for his mission and begins making new demands of Montag. Montag exercises his still forming thinking capabilities, yet they are not strong enough to fight both the unseen, yet understood ruling ideologies of both society as well as Faber and Montag gives in to these demands.

It is not until Montag is asked to burn his own home that Montag fights back against the ideological figures battling for his loyalty. Along with Faber, Captain Beatty has been a form of teacher for Montag; Beatty attempts to define Montag just as much if not more than Faber. McGiveron believes that where Clarisse was a mirror, something Montag tried to copy or reflect, Beatty and Faber are teachers and unnaturally demanding in their roles. McGiveron writes, “[Beatty and Faber try] to sway Montag with different interpretation of the past... They reflect society to some extent, but more often they evaluate and advise—tasks of the viewer and thinker,” (McGiveron pg. 284). They have been the two opposing sides of Montag demanding, instructing, and attempting to prove favor of their own ideologies. In turn, throughout *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag has abided by their demands even in the wake of understanding he shouldn’t.

That is, until he burns them both. In the pages leading up to this scene, Faber and Captain Beatty are incessantly forcing their ideologies upon Montag stressing the rightness of each.

Montag listens, but he makes no immediate decision on them, he just consumes the ideas. His thinking process, still infantile, cannot evaluate information on an immediate basis. On the way to his own home Montag is under Beatty's influence while appearing to affirmatively shift allegiances to Faber's way of thinking, "I can't do it he thought. How can I go at this new assignment, how can I continue burning things? I can't go in this place," (Bradbury pg. 106). Still Montag thinks it is only a choice between the two, not exercising his own individuality to create a third possibility. This is when we receive the definition of fire as it belongs to society; Beatty says, "Its real beauty is that it destroys responsibility and consequences. A problem gets too burdensome, then into the furnace with it," (pg. 109). Montag reverts into this belief because he is faced with the consequences of exercising his own individuality and thus; burns down his own house, a majority of the books he had stolen, going room by room to watch the flames engulf and burn his old life, his old self. It is through this destruction though that Montag is cleansed of his old life, the old self he was by experiencing it one last time while simultaneously ridding himself of the space in which he had lived that existence:

"He burnt the bedroom walls and the cosmetics chest because he wants to change everything, the chairs, the tables, and in the dining room the silverware and plastic dishes, everything that showed that he had lived here in this empty house with a strange woman who would forget him tomorrow, who had gone and quite forgotten him... And as before, it was good to burn, he felt himself gush out in the fire, snatch rend, rip in half with flame, and put away the senseless problem. If there was no solution, well then now there was no problem, either. Fire was best for everything," (pg. 110).

Montag is both separating from and retaining his identity as a fireman and fire's destructive purposes. He is however, purifying himself in this destruction. Just as he mentions changing everything in his house he has been changing pieces of himself throughout the text. Burning his own home is Montag's method of accepting his own need to become entirely new. Through this

destruction Montag opens space for the completion of his identity, for his individualism to take hold in his life; nonetheless, he does so by exploiting fire's destructive power, what he has done for as a fireman for years. In this manner though he uses fire selfishly where he had supposedly used it before the events in the novel under the guise that it was for the good of the populous. How Montag uses fire here is the opposite from the beginning, but can this be accepted as "progress" if he is still influenced by selfish purposes?

Montag's burning rampage only escalates after further taunting from Captain Beatty. It is then that Montag, "shot one continuous pulse of liquid fire on [Beatty]," after proclaiming, "We never burned right..." (pg. 113). Captain Beatty, so sure in his control over Montag and the ideological hold over all of society, must die in his ignorance. This is Montag's final thrust in separating himself from his society to establish his individualism. He denies the numb acceptance and lifeless existence exemplified by Beatty's beliefs that runs rampant in the society of *Fahrenheit 451*. Kuo relates this act to the old women's "martyrdom" in being burned with her books. Kuo believes that this is a moment of true individual thought as well as individual sacrifice. Montag become an individual, "since it indicates man's fight for freedom and dignity under oppression. Montag's murder of Beatty stands for his revolt against the government since Beatty is represented as the champion of its principals," (Kuo pg. 13). In destroying both ideals Montag has the capacity to fill the void with his own beliefs without the biases of the opposing ideologies clouding his own thought processes. Similarly though, Montag is just as much at fault for falling back on to his norm Fire gets rid of problems, first books were the problem then Montag himself was, then it was Captain Beatty. Montag believes he is making progress even if that progress requires a regression into old, *proven* methods. "Beatty, he thought, you're not a problem now. You always said, don't face a problem, burn. Well, now I've done both. Goodbye,

Captain,” (Bradbury pg. 115). Montag has finally expressed himself, understanding his actions as he is doing them instead of running off of pure emotion.

On the other hand had Montag’s great expression of self been a manipulation too? Kuo contemplates if Beatty lived a “double life”. He is so well versed in literature Beatty could very well have purposefully agitated Montag in his own form of martyrdom, knowing his own death could incite a revolution. Montag himself later questions whether or not Beatty had wanted to die. The idea is that Beatty thought his death would prove the instability of the system, and cause more people to question it, “ Thus, Captain Beatty may represent those who only offer lip service to the principles of the government but will revolt against them when the right time comes,” (Kuo pg. 14). Even though this would mean Beatty was more on Montag’s side than he let on, Montag still allowed himself to be manipulated by an authority figure, doing exactly what others wanted of him. If we accept this to be true, Montag’s act of individualism does not have the significance previously mentioned and Montag remains stagnant allowing his individuality to be controlled by the thoughts and wants of those characters positioned around him.

Beatty though, is not the only one burned in the outrage of flame. The earpiece, through which Faber has been coaching Montag, is also destroyed in the fire. Later Montag reflects, “He had burnt Faber, too. He felt so suddenly shocked by this that he felt Faber was really dead,” (Bradbury pg. 117). Thus, Montag is separating himself from the old professor who also tried to control Montag’s thoughts. Yes, Faber was trying to help Montag “think”, but in doing so he was also unknowingly forcing his ideology upon him. Montag breaks away from those entities that were in conflict with each other inside himself. Because of this Montag can make those individual thoughts and decisions completely lacking any overarching beings. This is not to say Montag actually reaches the progress he has been seeking. There are still the flaws, previously

mentioned, that leave Montag grappling with his individualism and how to define and uphold in the absence of these figures.

By losing Beatty, Faber, and most importantly Clarisse, Montag no longer has any method of distinguishing himself. He cannot imitate those actions he likes, nor can he act against those he doesn't agree with. In the death of these characters Montag has created a vacuum of identity for himself. We see this manifested in his injuries from the Hound's injection. He loses the ability to use one of his legs; he becomes crippled, his movements forward are slower, more difficult to maneuver himself, both physically and mentally. He describes his leg as, "A numbness in a numbness hollowed into numbness... He stood and he had only one leg. The other was like a chunk of burnt pine log he was carrying along as a penance for some obscure sin," (pg.114- 115). Although, Montag has the space in which to bring his whole individualism to fruition, it becomes a much slower process. He had become dependent upon the aforementioned characters and in their absence it is like his legs got swept out from under him quite literally. He needs to relearn how to identify himself. Faber Clarisse and Beatty were the legs for Montag's identity, walking him through the process of finding himself. Without them Montag is forced to crawl.

Through this crawling Montag finally escapes the Hound and comes to be among the "book people", a group of nomadic scholars who remember great works of literature, hoping one day they will be able to share their knowledge. Before Montag encounters these men though, he sees their fire. "The small motion, the white and red color, a strange fire because it meant a different thing to him. It was not burning, it was *warming*," (pg. 139). After such a violent display of flames exhibited at his home he is surprised to find the gentle flames of the book people's campfire. Despite a growing self, Montag had only truly experienced the

destruction that fire leaves in its wake and Montag had only ever used fire to *burn*. These scholars have contained the destruction using it for nothing more than a little heat to make it through the night. Montag is beginning to understand the duality that fire exists within and how its uses are dependent upon those with the capacity to use it. In a similar fashion Montag, in still forming his individuality, both destructive and creative aspects of it, has the power to control his identity for himself as long as he exerts to capability and the desire to do so.

Montag has left behind those characters that had tried to make those decisions for him, but Montag still has remnants of his old self as a fireman with him. That part of Montag still has the power of persuasion and influence over Montag. That part of him is being chased by the Hound; society still wants to punish that character. Metaphorically, that self becomes the nameless, faceless nobody the Hound kills at the end of the chase sequence. The character is a physical manifestation of Montag's old life, his old self, who was no one. And after this, "Montag cried out in the silence and turned away. Silence," (pg. 142). He briefly mourns his old self, crying out almost as if feeling that part of him die.

Despite this immense opportunity through which Montag could exercise his individuality and thus show the hope of society doing the same, Montag inevitably gives that up to the assumed voice of reason from the scholars. When Montag is given the chance to join the clan of intellectuals he quite literally becomes the 'Book of Ecclesiastes'. Montag offers several titles that he remembers, but instead of choosing one for himself, one that would exemplify who he is, Montag is ordered to be the 'Book of Ecclesiastes'. Instead of embodying himself Montag embodies a piece of literature. Once again Montag does not engage with his individuality, in wanting to be like those book people, Montag allows his individuality to be molded by others. He has returned to copying. McGiveron says that this book is the final mirror Montag finds

himself in front of: “In the very last scene of the novel, Montag holds up the Bible as a mirror in which to see the world from a different perspective. (McGiveron pg. 286). Again Montag, so engrained to following orders, has put himself in a position to copy and exemplify those beliefs of another. Not to mention he is still *second* to the previous ‘Book of Ecclesiastes’, Harris in Youngstown (Bradbury pg. 144). He allows his identity to be demeaned. After Montag explains his intentions in setting fire to Captain Beatty, Granger does not commend Montag for his efforts, but rather chastises the only self-made choices Montag ha made. Granger says, ““You did what you had to. Carried out on a national scale, it might have worked beautifully. But our way is simpler and, we think better... We are model citizens in our own special way,”” (pg. 145). Although, not vicious in intent, Granger puts Montag in a position to see his brief experiment with identity, despite all his efforts, was a failure. Thus Montag turns to be the self the “book people” want him to be, the “Book of Ecclesiastes’.

Although Montag appears to have forsaken his identity to become ‘Ecclesiastes’, his last moment in *Fahrenheit 451* shows that Montag’s duality is still intact and that there is possibility of Montag continuing to explore is individualism. He has been deemed the “Book of Ecclesiastes’ and appears to have embraced that role; however, as the men are walking towards the city after the nuclear explosion instead of remaining true to the ‘Book of Ecclesiastes’ Montag saves a quote from ‘Revelations’ to recite at noon: “*And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of nations,*” (pg. 158). Thus, we see that Montag has the capability of deterring from his assigned identity having other outlets through which he can explore and express his individualism. The quote itself speaks to Montag’s inherent duality, the opposing banks of his river, his self.

As the scholars make their way towards the destroyed city, there is no way of knowing whether or not the world Bradbury had envisioned can be saved, whether there is hope after nuclear destruction. Montag, more so though than the intellectuals, has the opportunity to help society heal and progress for he has started that progression himself reaching out to find his individuality. He could act as an example, not unlike the role Clarisse played for him, by embracing the variances of his identity. Where Granger and the intellectuals have the knowledge of the past, Montag has an understanding of the present, the mentality of the public and what it takes to overcome those existing ideologies for himself; however, he has yet to become an authority figure for himself. He still bows to the overarching beliefs of the “book people”, but realizes the need in taking full control of his individuality. Montag has barely survived his own trials, and although his personal salvation in the terms of progression has not been fully realized he has begun to reflect on himself and who intends to be. It is through understanding and accepting of this duality that Montag can move forward in understanding his role and how as an individual he can enter back into his city a new man to try his hand at *the healing of nations*.

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