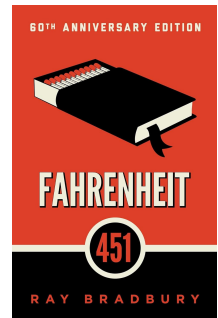


Fahrenheit 451

Ray Bradbury (1951)

Notes by Bob Evelyn
Wilmore, Kentucky; 2023.



This dystopian novel is about a day when all books are forbidden and burned. The logic, at least on the surface, seems to be about **political correctness** – don't offend *anyone*! But to accomplish this, censorship and firm control of the populace is a necessity. [Page numbers refer to the 60th Anniversary Edition of the book as pictured.]

"You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred." (p. 56)

"Colored people don't like *Little Black Sambo*. Burn it. White people don't feel good about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer in the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag." (p. 57) [Montag is the central character in the book.]

"If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. If the government is inefficient, top-heavy, and tax-mad, better it be all those than that people worry over it. Peace, Montag." (p. 58)

"Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely 'brilliant' with information." (p. 58)

"[If books are] nonfiction, it's worse, one professor calling another an idiot, one philosopher screaming down another's gullet." (p. 59)

"No front porches. My uncle says there used to be front porches. And people sat there sometimes at night, talking when they wanted to talk, rocking, and not talking when they didn't want to talk. Sometimes they just sat there and thought about things, turned things over. ... They didn't want people sitting like that, doing nothing, rocking, talking; that was the wrong *kind* of social life. People talked too much. And they had time to think. So they ran off with the porches. And the gardens too. Not many gardens anymore to sit around in. And look at the furniture. No rocking chairs anymore. They're too comfortable." (p. 60)

Censorship in the news media

When Montag was being pursued by the authorities, and when he wasn't caught in short order as everyone watched the news reports, an innocent pedestrian was apprehended. Montag's associate observed:

"They're faking. You threw them off at the river. They can't admit it. They know they can hold their audience only so long. The show's got to have a snap ending, quick! If they started searching the whole damn river it might take them all night. So they're sniffing for a scapegoat to end things with a bang. Watch. They'll catch Montag in the next five minutes." (p. 141)

Shortly after, the news reported (though the cameras stayed far enough away so the viewers could not see this wasn't Montag) ...

"The search is over, Montag is dead; a crime against society has been avenged." (p. 142)

Preserving knowledge

As for Montag's new associates who lived off the land along the river ...

"All we want to do is keep the knowledge we think we will need, intact and safe. We're not out to incite or anger anyone yet. For if we are destroyed, the knowledge is dead, perhaps for good. ... It's not pleasant, but then we're not in control, we're the odd minority crying in the wilderness. When the war's over, perhaps we can be of some use in the world." (p. 145-6)

Montag's associate referred to the era they were living thru as a "Dark Age." (p. 146)

The value of the individual

Speaking of his late grandfather, Montag's associate shared ...

"When I was a boy my grandfather died. ... And when he died, I suddenly realized I wasn't crying for him at all, but for all the things he did. I cried because he would never do them again, he would never carve another piece of wood or help us raise doves and pigeons in the backyard or play the violin the way he did, or tell us jokes the way he did. He was part of us and when he died, all the actions stopped dead and there was no one to do them just the way he did. He was individual. He was an important man. I've never gotten over his death. Often I think, what wonderful carvings never came to birth because he died. How many jokes are missing from the world, and how many homing pigeons untouched by his hands. He shaped the world. He did things to the world. The world was bankrupted of ten million fine actions the night he passed on."

"Everyone must leave something behind when he dies, my grandfather said. A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there. It doesn't matter what you do, he said, as long as you change something that's like you after you take your hands away." (p. 149-150)

On living ...

"Stuff your eyes with wonder. Live as if you'd drop dead in ten seconds. ... Ask no guarantees, ask for no security, there never was such an animal." (p. 150)

Here, then, is a warning for any society so extreme on "political correctness" that it is willing to forfeit personal freedom – using censorship of all kinds to exert control and accomplish its objectives.

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