

Fahrenheit 451

"I did/did not like this book because..."

The general feedback was positive. The book was convicting, if unnerving. Bradbury's predictions of future technology were uncanny.

"I wish the author would have...."

The lack of closure and uncertainty of the future of several characters disappointment some.

We discussed that Mildred and her friends reflected the stereotypical 50s female character rather than the post-feminist era woman. While there are indeed checked out, frivolous, and self medicating women today they are not nearly as passive or concerned with propriety and social norms. This suggests perhaps Bradbury did not have as good a handle on the feminine character then or now.

"It convicted me about something in my own life..."

"It aligned with/opposed Catholic thought in this way..."

Given that this was a cautionary tale it invites much self reflection. One comment made over and over was how striking was man's inhumanity. This circled back to ideas discussed in our last book (Man's Search for Meaning) that to harm another you must first dehumanize him. There was unanimous horror over the violence of the youth. ("Those who cannot build must burn.")

When asked about their concerns about imminent war the women comment that, "It is always someone else's husband." In fact, all the suffering of others is routinely dismissed as having nothing to do with the characters personally. ("Am I my brother's keeper?")

We discussed the fine line between using technology and it using us. Much as we condemn Mildred's complete escape from reality via screens, we should also consider our own screen time. We discussed "phubbing" or ignoring family members while on the phone or computer or video games. What should be our attitude towards technology? The Church maintains that technology and machines in general are morally neutral. It is our use of it that determines. What safeguards do we have in place to protect ourselves and our families from those who would use these tools in negative ways or from the addictive nature of some technology?

We decided the message of the author which is articulated by Faber is that man craves substance and connection. Entertainment is a poor, but popular, substitute for both. Do society/media/govt encourage this? Why? What can we do to encourage authentic connection with others, particularly those who have been swept up in this cycle of fast-paced, often poorly considered responses? How do we learn to cultivate civil discourse in an era of increasing hostility?

What is the best response to this increasing hostility and diversity of opinion? In Fahrenheit the societal conclusion was conformity of thought and the avoidance of uncomfortable discussion. Can we do better?

What can we deduce from comments strewn through the text about how other nations viewed this future society?

What does it tell us that it took war and devastation to bring people back to their senses? What does this tell us about comfort and suffering?

What role does religion play in this future society?

We know the Bible has been banned with other books. We know that even non religious intellectuals were memorizing and preserving the books of the Bible. The question is posed, "Christ is one of the "family" (a media character) now. I often wonder if God recognizes His own Son the way we've dressed Him up or is it dressed Him down?" Faber indicates that Jesus is used as a marketing tool more than for personal transformation. Does this happen today? Does society ban religion or re-brand it to make it more palatable as well as financially advantageous?

Beatty remarks that we must all be alike and how this must happen. He says, "Not everyone *born* free and equal as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal." He asserts that books would make this impossible. The assumption is that some would read more or differently than others and naturally improve themselves more than others and thus perfect equilibrium would be impossible.

What does equality mean? What does the Constitution affirm? Are we equal in essential value and opportunities or should we be assured of equal success?

Diversity is both invoked and suppressed in this book. On the one hand the great diversity of future society is said to be the reason for censorship. Strict control of language and thought and education arose in the interest of appeasing many diverse groups. Beatty reveals society and business, rather than actual altruism, were the driving forces, "The bigger your market, the less you can handle controversy. Remember that!"

Faber succinctly sums up by saying that each one is now made in the image of the others. How does this compare to the biblical truth that we are made in the image and likeness of God? And if we are all made in God's likeness how do we explain the diversity? What is the unity and similarity the Bible is referring to? (Hint: it is our underlying humanity vs our individual characteristics. The soul vs the mind and body)

The professors remind Montag repeatedly to remain humble, not to inflate one's ego because they are well read. The purpose of reading is not to puff oneself up but to give back to society, to rebuild culture, and to pass on something of value and substance to future generations who will eventually demand to know how society degenerated to such an extent.

Faber tells Montag three things are missing from a world without books: quality information, the leisure to digest it, and the freedom to act on what they've learned. Beatty and Faber explain that covertly discouraging rich language and replacing it with graphic and sound saturated intense media prevent contemplation. Authority and peer pressure work to subdue the few who slip through the cracks and begin to form questions.

What role does nature play in the reforming of Montag's character? What role can it play in our lives? "...the more he breathed the land in, the more he was filled up with all the details of the land. He was not empty. There was more than enough here to fill him. There would always be more than enough."

Why do we read fiction? **Fiction is a lie that tells us the truth.** - Albert Camus

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