

Mildred and Clarisse Foil Reflection

The similarity between Mildred and Clarisse that was the most prominent to me was the fact that both were portrayed in some sort of darkness. Clarisse always met Montag at midnight on the sidewalk, and Mildred has been revealed to us in the dreary darkness of her bedroom. However, the connotations of this “dark” differ: in Clarisse’s case, there was always a sense of thought and brightness, warm and soft: “the strangely comfortable and rare and gently flattering light of the candle” (7), as Montag recalled it. However, the room that Mildred was sleeping in was first described as a “cold marbled room of a mausoleum” (11) - gloomy and empty. This is where the contrast exists: instead of being in the dark of the current society like Mildred, Clarisse is shown as a bright spark within all of this darkness; with her darkness, there exists hope and a sincere happiness.

Secondly, the descriptions of their physical appearances stood out: both the faces and eyes of Mildred and Clarisse were elaborated in detail. Clarisse’s face was “white as snow in the moonlight” (7), and Mildred’s face was “like a snow-covered island” (13); Clarisse’s had dark eyes, and Mildred had eyes like moonstones. But what was interesting was that with the following descriptions, it seemed as though Clarisse’s face harbored the calm, sparkling quality of the snow, while Mildred’s had the cold and lifeless side; similarly, Clarisse’s eyes were full of thought, while Mildred’s were glazed over and empty. It seems as if there was no thought, no happiness, no life in Mildred with her overdose and her cluelessness in the morning.

Focusing on these two subtle differences alone, I feel that Bradbury effectively uses foiling to separate and distinguish the characteristics of the two girls. With these descriptions, he uses similar ideas with different connotations to create slightly different attributes that adds much more meaning to the story. Clarisse is in a society of conformity, where she is supposed to be like everyone else, including Mildred - but she’s not. She’s similar, but different: she’s a moonlit darkness, a thoughtful gaze, a thing of the past. Mildred is none of these, a regular entity in a uniform society, married to a regular man. But Mildred’s role in the story is important as the foil; without her close to Montag, he wouldn’t have noticed how different and correct Clarisse is in her speculations; he wouldn’t have noticed how much his life, including Mildred, doesn’t make sense. Clarisse is his enlightenment, but Mildred is the necessary reality check.