

# The role of montag in fahrenheit 451

Business



The protagonist of Bradbury's novel is Montag. At the beginning of the story he is no more than a fireman who lives devoid of thinking or feeling. But by the end of the story, he is changed into a true human; an individual who realizes the worth of knowledge. He transforms from a fireman dedicated to burning books to an itinerant refugee dedicated to their safeguarding. Guy Montag is very dedicated to his work with the fire department.

As third-generation fireman, Montag fits the stereotypical role due to his physical appearance. Montag enjoys his work and serves as a model of twenty-fourth-century professionalism. Smelling of cinders and ash, he enjoys putting on his uniform. He also likes playing the function of a symphony conductor as he directs the brass nozzle toward illegal books, and smelling the kerosene that raises the temperature to the 451 degrees Fahrenheit required. This is the temperature at which book paper ignites.

When Montag burnt his books he was filled with relief and happiness; "Montag grinned the fierce grin of all men singed and driven by black flame"(4). During his first eight years of employment, Montag even participated in the firemen's cruel game of setting small animals loose and gambling on which ones the Mechanical Hound would kill first. However, in the last to years, Montag has become very discontent. But he cannot yet pin point the root of his emptiness and disaffection. He characterizes his agitated mind as full of bits and pieces and he has to take sedatives to sleep.

He returns to a loveless, meaningless marriage daily. This is symbolized by his cold bedroom which has twin beds. Although he is drawn to the lights and conversation of the McClellan family next door, who he watches through the

windows, he forces himself to stay at home (Bradbury 12). In the first of three parts comprising Fahrenheit 451, entitled the hearth and the salamander, is when Montag gets the realization that he is unhappy and unfulfilled. It also marks the beginning of his journey to change his life.

Bradbury puts across the bigger idea that without the freedom to seek truth, it is not possible to find true fulfillment in this section. Montag here represents the middle ground between two extremes. Although he once believed he was happy, Montag discovers society is not perfect, as many take it to be. Montag becomes friends with a neighbor girl called Clarisse and through her discovers a sense of curiosity and desire for knowledge that he did not have before. Through Clarisse and later through books, Montag embarks on a road to freedom and happiness (Bradbury 20). Montag personifies the salamander, enclosed in a fire, yet struggling against censorship.

Fire is symbolic for purification as it is used to free society of that which is unwanted. Books and the houses where they are hidden are destroyed by fire. They are burned out of existence so as not to pollute society. Captain Beatty, in his lengthy chat with Montag, mentions the standard practice of immediately cremating the dead so society is not laden with decaying bodies or memorials and the sorrow linked with them. As Montag comes to understand the truth about his society, he recognizes fire as a type of oppression.

That it is a means of withholding the information in books. Fire is also a symbol awareness and memory. In the second part of the novel, the sieve

and the sand, we observe Montag's continued awareness of transition. The sieve and the sand is a metaphor for Montag's frustration at not being able to immediately understand what is true in the world. Through his own memory on the train, the reader sees Montag as a young boy. He is frantically trying to fill a sieve with sand which is an impracticable task.

Similarly, Montag is upset to find himself a sieve of sorts since he is not able to retain what he reads from the Bible, however hard he tries. To a greater extent, it becomes obvious that it is not only the words of the Bible, but truth in general that Montag finds hard to attain. He is aggravated that he cannot feel whole. In spite of his intentions, we see Montag exhibit a self-destructive streak. He does this when he insists on engaging Millie and her friends and reading poetry to them despite being advised against it by Faber.

The poem that Montag reads to his guests entitled Dover Beach, has themes found all through the novel. They include loss of faith and the need to care and be cared for. Also included is the destruction of war and the desire for happy illusions to be true. The second part ends with the arrival of the firemen at Montag's house. It is here that his former life comes to an end. He deviated from the norm by opting for books and truth over the illusion of happiness he once accepted.

Therefore Montag loses his home and livelihood (Bradbury 80). Burning bright is the title of the third and final section and which references many allusions to fire and burning in the text. Montag sets ablaze his home and his belongings. But Montag does not grieve for the loss of his home. Instead, he

feels free by releasing himself from the disturbing television walls that weighed down his life.

This implies that, Montag's flamethrower has powers of obliteration and of cleansing. Compared to normal fire, the fire presented is much friendly. It is unlike the fire Montag has always recognized. It shows him that fire can be a cause of tenderness and sustenance rather than a cause of death and destruction. Montag murders Beatty but later realizes that he wanted to die.

Beatty did not make an effort to avoid the flames that Montag threw at him. At this juncture, Bradbury acknowledges that even individuals in the middle of oppression can recognize their actions are wrong, but are weak to resist them. For this reason, death of Beatty is in fact one of self-destruction. In his unhappy and dissatisfied life which has resulted due to his inaction, Beatty accepts death (Bradbury 97). Montag gets in trouble for all the truth he has ruined. However, he gets through it because his actions are now important to sustaining an academic society.

While he escapes from the authorities, he overhears a broadcast that war has been declared. At the same time, Montag has started his own war. He is committed to his mission. He has killed the enemy and is a fugitive to survive. Thus it emerges that as society fights amongst itself, Montag is fighting against the society.

Montag is re-born when he gets out from the river to begin afresh. Montag floats down the river calmly and easily. The large mass of water carefully puts him on the riverside. The river here represents renewal and rebirth and offers Montag a new opportunity at life away from the city and with new  
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acquaintances who share his thinking. He moves up the shore clothed as an academic since he is wearing Faber's clothes. He is also cleaned of his kerosene smell.

His conversion is completed when he takes the bitter drink offered to him by the men on the rail tracks. He alters the chemical composition of his body scent and is no longer Montag the fireman or the fugitive. He becomes Montag the intellectual and keeper of truth (Bradbury 115). Montag meets a group of men who are a total contrast of those he left in the city. They are intellectual men who revere books. Their camp fire acts as a guiding light for Montag to follow.

It represents affection and security and not the destruction he is used to. The death of the man set up to look like Montag is symbolic not only of the dishonesty spread by society but also of the end of Montag the fireman. He completes his metamorphosis and becomes a new person. When Granger says, "welcome back from the dead," (140), he is introducing the new Montag to a life of thinking and awareness, rather than the fantasy of happy existence he had previously been living (Bradbury 130). This is the book's last section and is where the dramatic peak is illustrated.

Montag's house is destroyed along with his marriage. He murders his boss and runs for his life. He finds safety and observes as the city is ruined. As the book ends, Montag and his new found friends are walking towards the destroyed city. Their hearts and minds filled with hope for the chance to build a new society and hope for the future of man.