

# Fahrenheit 451 symbolism-the river

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In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag's escape through the river symbolizes his salvation, along with several other things. . In several other instances besides the river, water is used to contrast fire and to thus show the difference between good and evil. Also, the forest through which the travels river symbolizes the innocence of mankind before civilization. This is merely a scratch on the surface of this novel's seemingly endless symbolism. *Fahrenheit* tells the story of a fireman named Montag whose job is to set fire to books in order to maintain society's ignorance.

When Montag kills Beatty, the Fire Chief, he decides to run from the world that he has lived his whole life in. His newfound friend Faber, another person on the outskirts of society, tells him that he will be safe if he makes it to the river. This is an illustration of literal salvation. Rivers often represent "divine emissaries, life, and the entrance into the afterlife" (Jobes 1341).

"After a long time of floating... [Montag] knew he must never burn again" (Bradbury 141). This shows that the river changes Montag or is at least the cocoon in which he stays while he undergoes a metamorphosis into what is basically a different person. Also, it is interesting that, in the old South as well as in Biblical times, the baptisms of new Christians often would take place in the nearest river or creek.

Montag's journey in the river seems to be a baptism of sorts, as it frees him from the shackles and chains of his former life.

The river, however, is only the vessel in which Montag travels to the heart of the forest. The forest is the "abode of man in his state of innocence, and a Hebrew symbol for kingdom" (Jobes 594). In the novel, the forest and the

river are likened to one another at times, such as when Montag describes the forest floor as “ a dry river smelling of hot cloves and warm dust” (Bradbury 144). When Montag sees several men who, like him, are on the outside of society looking in, they are at the old railroad tracks that cut through the heart of the forest like a rusty dagger wielded by the filthy hand of industry. It is here that he finds his real redemption.

The river is not the only use of water as symbolism in Fahrenheit 451. Water symbolizes “ baptism, cleansing, resurrection, and is a source of both good and evil” (Bradbury 167). Water is used on numerous occasions to contrast with fire, which is representative of “ divine love, fervor, and life, but also divine anger, destruction, and death” (Bradbury 571).

Usually, they contrast good and evil, and although fire is generally associated with evil, its symbolism begins to change toward the end of the novel. When Montag sees the fire the men in the forest are using to warm themselves, he realizes “ he [has] never thought in his life that fire [can] give as well as take” (Bradbury 147). The fire is a metaphor for Montag; he finally realizes that he can change the world for the better instead of for the worse.

Ray Bradbury's novel offers a rich tapestry of symbolism to all those who read it.

Bradbury weaves a seemingly endless amount of symbols into his story in a way that is wonderfully eloquent, distinctly American, and easily accessible to the casual reader. His passionate cry against censorship and engaging story has enthralled readers for the past 50 years. He uses symbolism to

help get his point across, and thus makes the story work on a deeper level. Through symbolism, Bradbury has found a way to affect the reader in the very core of their being, and he has made this novel one whose jarring impact stays with the reader long after they have turned the final page.