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# Study Of The Use Of Fictional Symbolism in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451

## Dystopian Symbolism

Ray Bradbury's novel Fahrenheit 451 explores a dystopian society where books have been banned. Bradbury refrains from including the exact location of the novel, as well as the date. Bradbury's minimalist writing style forces readers to fill in the blanks. This is what makes Fahrenheit 451 unique; it is a different book to everyone. Ray Bradbury uses symbols throughout his novel Fahrenheit 451 to represent abstract ideas to the reader.

The most influential symbol in Fahrenheit 451 is the character of Clarisse McClellan, a young woman that challenges the social norm. Clarisse's family does things that the society in Fahrenheit 451 would consider taboo. The family goes hiking, walking, being a pedestrian is considered illegal; and spends time together. The character of Clarisse McClellan is only in the novel for a short period of time, but her influence on Guy Montag, a fireman who changes his ways when he realizes the emptiness of society. Arguably the Character of Clarisse is the most influential symbol in the novel, even though she is only in the novel for a short period of time. Clarisse represents everything that Guy is not; she questions his happiness and makes him rethink his approach to life. Guy Montag is a man who lives a monotonous life; he burns books and comes home to his wife who is hypnotized by her "TV Family." Clarisse is so easily able to change Guy because subconsciously he has been screaming for help for years. Paradoxically Clarisse is simply a care-free, seventeen-year-old girl, but her effect on Guy is immense. Clarisse changes Guy Montag's view on life completely in only one encounter. Guy no longer wishes to drench himself in the perfume of kerosene and burn the books from days-of-old. The propaganda becomes clear and his eyes are opened when Clarisse asks him a question that shakes him to his core. Clarisse and Guy are talking outside on the sidewalk late at night when Clarisse asks "Are you happy?" she said. "Am I what?" he cried. But she was gone- running in the moonlight. Her front door shut gently." (Bradbury 10). Clarisse's question makes Guy finally realize that he is, in fact, not happy. Guy is tired of living a life that drones on and this simply question turns his world upside down. This quote shows how important Clarisse is as a symbol in Fahrenheit 451; her character makes the spiritual reckoning in Guy possible. Guy would have continued living his day-to-day life without ever thinking twice without the "help" of Clarisse McClellan.

Another symbol seen in Fahrenheit 451 is mirrors. A mirror at its core is a reflective surface that allows the user to see their reflection. A mirror is used to look at yourself, Fahrenheit 451 society must take a good look at themselves. The society has put up with censorship without the blink of an eye. The citizens of this society have sat idly by while everything that they worked for was destroyed. Later in the story Granger, head of the "book people", is speaking to Guy "Come on now, we're going to go build a mirror-factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them" (Bradbury 157). This quote demonstrates that the society in Fahrenheit 451 must reevaluate themselves if they wish to rebuild and learn from what has happened. This society must change before they attempt to rebuild; if they do not, they will eventually lead themselves to the same demise. Similarly, Clarisse McClellan is Guy's mirror. Guy looks at Clarisse and sees the care-free, fun-loving person that he yearns to be.

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This young woman represents the reflection that Guy wishes to see when he looks into the mirror. This young woman is the reason that thirty-year-old man changes himself to become a someone different. Above all, mirrors are real. The “three walls” project falsities; they feed you everything that you want to believe. Mirrors do the exact opposite. Mirrors show the user’s true reflection, good or bad. Mildred Montag, Guy Montag’s wife, was so easily lost in her “TV Family” because it was not real. If her parlour walls reflected, rather than projected, she would have saw herself for what she truly was. Mildred was a sad, depressed woman who made it through life by losing herself in things that were not real. Mildred even attempted to kill herself, but then quickly denied it after Guy saves her. In conclusion, mirrors are whatever you make them. A mirror can be an evil, disgusting thing, or a pleasant piece of yourself. Everyone makes their own mirror.

Finally, the hearth and the salamander play a role as one of the larger symbols in Fahrenheit 451. Firstly, they both revolve around fire. Fire is Guy Montag’s life. Guy is a fireman and day in, day out Guy’s life is fire: setting it, smelling like it, and enjoying it. Before Clarisse Guy saw nothing wrong with burning books; afterwards he cannot stand the smell of kerosene and his old job as a fireman. Moreover, the salamander encompassed his old way of life. The salamander is a large part of Fahrenheit 451; it is one of the symbols that represents the firemen, and also the name of their fire trucks. Some myths and beliefs state that the salamander is able to live in flames, and be unaffected by them. This is ironic as Guy, before Clarisse, was the salamander. Guy Montag started fires and practically lived in them; he was unaffected by his old lifestyle until Clarisse came along and made him question his morals. Guy is talking to Clarisse outside on his way home from work "Kerosene," he said because the silence had lengthened "it's nothing but perfume to me." (Bradbury 4). Guy Montag loved what he did; he lived for it. Setting books on fire was nothing but a job for him, not once before this had he ever stopped to think maybe what he was doing was wrong. The kerosene that Clarisse despised was nothing to him but a perfume. On the other hand, the hearth is the traditional symbol of the home. The hearth is able to contain the fire that provides heat to a home. These symbols come together as the hearth holds the fire, and the salamander lives in it. This explains Guy Montag exactly. Guy is a salamander living in the hearth, and because he is immune to the fire he never knows that anything is wrong, until Clarisse “helps” him to see clearly.

Fahrenheit 451 is a novel that hits close to home with many readers because, in a way, it could actually happen. Bradbury purposely leaves out certain information, like locations and dates, to make the read fill in the blanks. This style of writing is unique as the novel changes for every reader as the interpret the information and imagine places and times in their minds. Bradbury conveys certain ideas with symbolism, such as: Guy being a salamander, Clarisse being a voice for change, and society’s need to “look in a mirror.” There is no right or wrong in the novella of Fahrenheit 451; each reader comes out of it with a different message. One thing is certain though; Ray Bradbury wrote one of the most controversial stories of our generation.