

Analysis of Fahrenheit 451

While ostensibly we have access to all the information we want, in reality a large portion of information remains restricted and inaccessible. This idea is known as censorship. Ray Bradbury's most famous social criticism, *Fahrenheit 451*, is an eminent example of censorship. Guy Montag, the protagonist of *Fahrenheit 451*, works as a fireman and sets books on fire for a living as the government wishes to censor its people from knowledge. The gift from Prometheus also holds some weight when it comes to analyzing the story by Bradbury. Therefore this paper will first examine the censorship present in the novel then analyze the hidden meaning fire holds in the story.

Bradbury starts his story off with "*it was a pleasure to burn*" (Bradbury, pg1), this sentence immediately grabs the reader's attention and states the unfortunate position our hero stands on the idea of books being burned. Our protagonist was a burner of books and an instrument of suppression. Montag lived in a world where the past has been destroyed by kerosene-spewing hoses and the brainwashing methods of the government. Although as the book progressed, the hero was transformed from a narrow-minded and prejudiced conformist into a dynamic individual committed to social change and to a life of saving books rather than burning them. The idea hidden behind the theme of censorship was Bradbury's criticism of the control the American government has on mass media. The author utilizes the issue of censorship in his novel to tie personal freedom to the right of an individual having the freedom of speech as it is stated in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Bradbury clearly portrays the catastrophic consequence if we allow the government to take total control of what people do and do not read, watch and discuss. Although most people in the society of Fahrenheit 451 fall victim to censorship, some insightful citizens still remain and they are willing to sacrifice their lives to ensure that books are passed down from one generation to another. As stated in the story, "it is not books that the people need, it is [the information] that once were in the book". A direct consequence of censoring so much information in the society was that the citizen became oblivious to what was truly happening in their world which led to the destruction of their entire city as propaganda wouldn't allow individuals to see their imminent destruction. (Muganini 2006)

The beauty and power fire gave off was the catalyst in the explosion of evolution. It has the ability to sustain life but at the same time cause great destruction; thus the symbolic meaning of fire is often ambiguous. Ray Bradbury

successfully uses the ambiguity of fire in his novel as Montag's mental transformation and relationship to society changes his understanding of fire. At the beginning of the story, fire symbolized destructions and suppression. As firemen not only burned the contraband but also destroyed the will of anyone who was in possession of it. Most people lived in such terror that the fear alone prevented them from reading and thinking. Fire is fear, "an ordinary kitchen match. The sight of it rushed the men out and down away from the house" it's quite amazing how such a small object could send people running. Even before the match is struck, to reveal the dancing flame, fear is ignited in their mind just as it ignited the fear of the citizens in the world of Fahrenheit 451. However, just as fire is fear, fire is also beauty. "It was not burning. It was warming...how long (Montag) stood, he did not know but there was a foolish yet delicious sense of knowing himself as an animal coming from the forest drawn by the fire"(Bradbury, pg 72-73). Everything about fire screamed beauty; from its brilliant colors to its dancing flames, it is loud without having to say anything. It has the same power that knowledge does, it draws you towards it, it puts you in a trance, and it sparks the curiosity in our mind and kindles questions in our head about the consequences of the flame. Fire is life, fire is death. As much as fire gives us, it takes away as well. Fire brings the death of the old and the birth of new. Ray Bradbury uses the symbol of fire as a destructive force, which allows its victim to start over again. To build another society, where man would not be afraid of knowledge but embrace it instead. Where people have ideas and thought of their own. Fire is destruction, when it takes away the knowledge of the people in books. Fire is power and fear, when it keeps the knowledge away from them. Fire is beauty, when it sparks the curiosity of the people in the novel. Fire is death, when it burns a city to the ground. Fire is life when it allows the city to rise from the ashes and rebuilds itself. This is what Bradbury is trying to tell us in his novel Fahrenheit 451.

In conclusion, when we combine the knowledge we obtained from the theme of censorship and the hidden meaning behind fire we arrive at the broader picture of ignorance and knowledge. The transformation of Montag from an ignorant follower at the beginning of the story to someone who understand the renewing and comforting power of fire that is forgotten in his violent and ignorant society he beings to personify fire and understand the true importance of fire. Often, there are many interpretation of one thing and Bradbury successfully shows the various meanings of fire through the evolution of Montag's thinking while coyly criticizing the suppression the American government has placed upon their people by controlling the information the mass media releases to the public.