

## Shedding the Fireman's Skin

“With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world...” (1) The first instance snake imagery in Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury appears when describing the scene in which Montag is burning books in absolute enjoyment. Snakes are used as symbols of change, which is important to the plot because it shows Montag's initial state of mind, which will later shift, upholding the theme of change throughout the novel.

Montag's journey of change begins when he starts to consider his family life. This is sparked when Clarisse rubs a dandelion under his chin. “ ‘What a shame,’ she said. ‘You’re not in love with anyone.’ ” Montag immediately insists, “Yes, I am!” because he currently believes that he is in love with Mildred. However, as he is with her in the hospital he begins to think about their relationship. He realizes that they are just “... a silly empty man near a silly empty woman, while the hungry snake made her still more empty.” (42) This snake metaphor is part of an important scene in which Montag begins to see that he doesn't love Mildred, and that he is living an empty life. This is a large shift from Montag at the start of his journey who thought nothing, a robot of a man. For Montag to realize the hollowness of his life is monumental change.

Montag's next significant change happens the day after he steals a book. Mildred spots Captain Beatty coming, describing him as “a man in a black shirt with an orange snake stitched on his arm coming up the front walk.” (50) Once again, a snake appears opening an important scene in Montag's story in which he rebels against the fire chief, choosing to hide the book. Montag's actions are consequential to the plot and theme because he is not only hiding the

banned books, he also lies to someone of high status, showing bravery he hadn't before. Montag continues to display this bravery after Beatty threatens him, saying, "If he [Montag] hasn't burned it by then, we simply come burn it for him," referring to the stolen book. (60) When Montag doesn't turn in the book it strengthens the depth of his bravery, furthering the change in his character.

Montag continues growing as a character, and eventually takes the risk to visit the retired professor, Faber, at his house. As he leaves the train station, he notes that "... the train hissed like a snake." (78) The snake imagery is present once more, opening a monumental scene as Montag arrives at Faber's house for the first time. Montag's decision to trust Faber and to learn about books shows a fundamental change in his character, as he is now placing books before his own safety, as he once burned books. He again shows this new development by agreeing to spy for Faber, acting as "the drone, the traveling ear" (88). Montag is endangering his own safety, yet he agrees to so that he can help Faber stop the firemen. Books are now Montag's greatest priority, and his journey is almost finished.

"Yes, thought Montag, that's the one I'll save for noon." This final scene where Montag is remembering a passage he read and deciding to teach it to the fireman is a very significant scene relating to the theme of change. This scene doesn't have a snake in it because Montag has completed his journey, he has gone from fireman to thief to student to spy to most wanted to teacher. Montag has fully shed the skin of the fireman, and has evolved into a teacher. Here the absence of snake imagery is as important as its presence has been.