

Moby Dick

By Herman Melvil



Summary

- ▣ *Moby Dick* is told by Ishmael, a young man who wants to go to sea as a sailor to seek adventure. He signs on the whaling ship, *Pequod*, along with his newfound Indian friend, Queequeg, whom he has met one night at the Spouter Inn in New Bedford. Queequeg is a native of the Fiji islands and an expert harpooner.
- ▣ The captain of the ship, the dark brooding Ahab, is obsessed with hunting a giant white sperm whale, Moby Dick. Some years ago during an encounter at sea, Moby Dick had bitten off Ahab's leg. Thirsting for revenge, the one-legged Ahab decides to hunt the whale down. Thus, Ishmael, along with the ship's crew, is caught under the spell of Ahab's obsession for Moby Dick.
- ▣ The *Pequod* leaves Nantucket on Christmas Day for the Pacific, and along its journey, the narrator introduces the reader to quite a few of the ship's members. The narrator not only describes the crew but also provides a lot of information about sperm whales

Summary

- ▣ One night Ahab gathers the crew around him and tells them of his quest: to catch the great white whale. The crew excitedly backs up his challenge to kill this deadly creature; the rest of the night is spent in revelry.
- ▣ While Moby Dick is being hunted, the crew catches several sperm whales. On the first sighting of a whale, Ishamael ends up falling into the ocean after his boat is capsized. Along the way, the *Pequod* meets several other ships; Ahab has only one question for each of them: "Hast seen the white whale, Moby Dick?" Some ships give Ahab news about the elusive white whale, but they report that all their attempts to catch him have ended in disaster. One of the captains has lost an arm to the whale. Ahab, excited by this news, goes back to the ship to make a new harpoon; in his excitement, he splinters his ivory leg.

Summary

- Eventually, the *Pequod* enters the Japanese sea, where the white whale is often sighted. Then a typhoon hits the ship, battering it with heavy seas. Ahab then spies the *Rachel*, whose crew explains that the white whale has destroyed a whole boat of crewmen, including the captain's son.
- Soon after meeting the *Rachel*, the *Pequod* sights the white whale. Two attempts on two consecutive days go in vain as Moby Dick escapes. On the third day, Ahab drives a harpoon into Moby Dick's side. Furious, the wounded whale drives its massive head into the *Pequod*'s side, smashing its bow. Ahab still refuses to give up the chase. He throws another harpoon at the whale, as his entire ship is sinking. As he throws the second harpoon, the rope gets entwined around Ahab's neck and drags him down into the water. The captain drowns, along with his crew. Only Ishmael survives, rescued by the *Rachel*.

Ishmael

- ▣ **Ishmael:** The narrator of the story, Ishmael disappears into his own tale after the first ten or so chapters, popping up periodically to give comments on the text. He is an every man; as such, it is difficult to describe specific things about him. He is a schoolteacher on the land, and has an open mind when it comes to the world around him. Also, he has prodigious knowledge of whaling, which he shares between chapters of plot in the narrative. Ishmael is the only man aboard the Peqoud to survive the novel.

Queequeg

- ▣ **Queequeg:** The friendly cannibal Ishmael first meets in the city of New Bedford; they become fast and good friends, despite Queequeg's less than Christian background. Queequeg is an extremely noble, decent man, with an almost child-like wonder at the world; he is willing to put his life in jeopardy to save anyone. He becomes one of the

Captain Ahab

- ▣ **Captain Ahab:** Captain of the Peqoud. Ahab is the main focus of Moby Dick. He is a tall, tremendously proud man, in at least his fifties, who lords over his ship like a dark god of vengeance. He has a vivid line, either a birthmark or a scar, which runs the entire length of his body, seemingly splitting him in two. His leg was taking in whaling accident by Moby Dick, and ever since then, he has become obsessed with hunting down the whale and killing it. In his mind, Moby Dick comes to represent all of the injustice in the world. He is the novel's most famous character, and an easily recognizable symbol of monomania. Ahab does have human decency in him, but it is continually driven out to sea by his need for revenge. He is killed when trying to harpoon Moby Dick.

Theme: The Limits of Knowledge

- ▣ As Ishmael tries, in the opening pages of *Moby-Dick*, to offer a simple collection of literary excerpts mentioning whales, he discovers that, throughout history, the whale has taken on an incredible multiplicity of meanings. Over the course of the novel, he makes use of nearly every discipline known to man in his attempts to understand the essential nature of the whale. Each of these systems of knowledge, however, including art, taxonomy, and phrenology, fails to give an adequate account. The multiplicity of approaches that Ishmael takes, coupled with his compulsive need to assert his authority as a narrator and the frequent references to the limits of observation (men cannot see the depths of the ocean, for example), suggest that human knowledge is always limited and insufficient. When it comes to Moby Dick himself, this limitation takes on allegorical significance. The ways of Moby Dick, like those of the Christian God, are unknowable to man, and thus trying to interpret them, as Ahab does, is inevitably futile and often fatal.



Theme: The Deceptiveness of Fate

- ▣ In addition to highlighting many portentous or foreshadowing events, Ishmael's narrative contains many references to fate, creating the impression that the *Pequod's* doom is inevitable. Many of the sailors believe in prophecies, and some even claim the ability to foretell the future. A number of things suggest, however, that characters are actually deluding themselves when they think that they see the work of fate and that fate either doesn't exist or is one of the many forces about which human beings can have no distinct knowledge. Ahab, for example, clearly exploits the sailors' belief in fate to manipulate them into thinking that the quest for Moby Dick is their common destiny. Moreover, the prophecies of Fedallah and others seem to be undercut in Chapter 99, when various individuals interpret the doubloon in different ways, demonstrating that humans project what they want to see when they try to interpret signs and portents.

Theme: The Exploitative Nature of Whaling

- ▣ At first glance, the *Pequod* seems like an island of equality and fellowship in the midst of a racist, hierarchically structured world. The ship's crew includes men from all corners of the globe and all races who seem to get along harmoniously. Ishmael is initially uneasy upon meeting Queequeg, but he quickly realizes that it is better to have a “sober cannibal than a drunken Christian” for a shipmate. Additionally, the conditions of work aboard the *Pequod* promote a certain kind of egalitarianism, since men are promoted and paid according to their skill. However, the work of whaling parallels the other exploitative activities – buffalo hunting, gold mining, unfair trade with indigenous peoples – that characterize American and European territorial expansion. Each of the *Pequod*'s mates, who are white, is entirely dependent on a nonwhite harpooner, and nonwhites perform most of the dirty or dangerous jobs aboard the ship. Flask actually stands on Daggoo, his African harpooner, in order to beat the other mates to a prize whale. Ahab is depicted as walking over the black youth Pip, who listens to Ahab's pacing from below deck, and is thus reminded that his value as a slave is less than the value of a whale.



Motif: Whiteness

- ▣ Whiteness, to Ishmael, is horrible because it represents the unnatural and threatening: albinos, creatures that live in extreme and inhospitable environments, waves breaking against rocks. These examples reverse the traditional association of whiteness with purity. Whiteness conveys both a lack of meaning and an unreadable excess of meaning that confounds individuals. Moby Dick is the pinnacle of whiteness, and Melville's characters cannot objectively understand the White Whale. Ahab, for instance, believes that Moby Dick represents evil, while Ishmael fails in his attempts to determine scientifically the whale's fundamental nature.



Motif: Surfaces and Depths

- Ishmael frequently bemoans the impossibility of examining anything in its entirety, noting that only the surfaces of objects and environments are available to the human observer. On a live whale, for example, only the outer layer presents itself; on a dead whale, it is impossible to determine what constitutes the whale's skin, or which part—skeleton, blubber, head—offers the best understanding of the entire animal. Moreover, as the whale swims, it hides much of its body underwater, away from the human gaze, and no one knows where it goes or what it does. The sea itself is the greatest frustration in this regard: its depths are mysterious and inaccessible to Ishmael. This motif represents the larger problem of the limitations of human knowledge. Humankind is not all-seeing; we can only observe, and thus only acquire knowledge about, that fraction of entities—both individuals and environments—to which we have access: surfaces.

Symbol: The Pequod

- ▣ Named after a Native American tribe in Massachusetts that did not long survive the arrival of white men and thus memorializing an extinction, the *Pequod* is a symbol of doom. It is painted a gloomy black and covered in whale teeth and bones, literally bristling with the mementos of violent death. It is, in fact, marked for death. Adorned like a primitive coffin, the *Pequod* becomes one.

Symbol: Moby Dick

- ▣ Moby Dick possesses various symbolic meanings for various individuals. To the *Pequod's* crew, the legendary White Whale is a concept onto which they can displace their anxieties about their dangerous and often very frightening jobs. Because they have no delusions about Moby Dick acting malevolently toward men or literally embodying evil, tales about the whale allow them to confront their fear, manage it, and continue to function. Ahab, on the other hand, believes that Moby Dick is a manifestation of all that is wrong with the world, and he feels that it is his destiny to eradicate this symbolic evil.

Symbol: Moby Dick

- ▣ Moby Dick also bears out interpretations not tied down to specific characters. In its inscrutable silence and mysterious habits, for example, the White Whale can be read as an allegorical representation of an unknowable God. As a profitable commodity, it fits into the scheme of white economic expansion and exploitation in the nineteenth century. As a part of the natural world, it represents the destruction of the environment by such hubristic expansion.

Symbol: Queequeg's Coffin

- ▣ Queequeg's coffin alternately symbolizes life and death. Queequeg has it built when he is seriously ill, but when he recovers, it becomes a chest to hold his belongings and an emblem of his will to live. He perpetuates the knowledge tattooed on his body by carving it onto the coffin's lid. The coffin further comes to symbolize life, in a morbid way, when it replaces the *Pequod's* life buoy. When the *Pequod* sinks, the coffin becomes Ishmael's buoy, saving not only his life but the life of the narrative that he will pass on.

ANIMAL FARM.



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Summary

- ▣ Old Major, a prize-winning boar, gathers the animals of the Manor Farm for a meeting in the big barn. He tells them of a dream he has had in which all animals live together with no human beings to oppress or control them. He tells the animals that they must work toward such a paradise and teaches them a song called “Beasts of England,” in which his dream vision is lyrically described. The animals greet Major's vision with great enthusiasm. When he dies only three nights after the meeting, three younger pigs – Snowball, Napoleon, and Squealer – formulate his main principles into a philosophy called Animalism. Late one night, the animals manage to defeat the farmer Mr. Jones in a battle, running him off the land. They rename the property Animal Farm and dedicate themselves to achieving Major's dream. The cart-horse Boxer devotes himself to the cause with particular zeal, committing his great strength to the prosperity of the farm and adopting as a personal maxim the affirmation “I will work harder.”

Summary

- At first, Animal Farm prospers. Snowball works at teaching the animals to read, and Napoleon takes a group of young puppies to educate them in the principles of Animalism. When Mr. Jones reappears to take back his farm, the animals defeat him again, in what comes to be known as the Battle of the Cowshed, and take the farmer's abandoned gun as a token of their victory. As time passes, however, Napoleon and Snowball increasingly quibble over the future of the farm, and they begin to struggle with each other for power and influence among the other animals. Snowball concocts a scheme to build an electricity-generating windmill, but Napoleon solidly opposes the plan. At the meeting to vote on whether to take up the project, Snowball gives a passionate speech. Although Napoleon gives only a brief retort, he then makes a strange noise, and nine attack dogs – the puppies that Napoleon had confiscated in order to “educate” – burst into the barn and chase Snowball from the farm. Napoleon assumes leadership of Animal Farm and declares that there will be no more meetings. From that point on, he asserts, the pigs alone will make all of the decisions – for the good of every animal.

Summary

- ▣ Napoleon now quickly changes his mind about the windmill, and the animals, especially Boxer, devote their efforts to completing it. One day, after a storm, the animals find the windmill toppled. The human farmers in the area declare smugly that the animals made the walls too thin, but Napoleon claims that Snowball returned to the farm to sabotage the windmill. He stages a great purge, during which various animals who have allegedly participated in Snowball's great conspiracy – meaning any animal who opposes Napoleon's uncontested leadership – meet instant death at the teeth of the attack dogs. With his leadership unquestioned (Boxer has taken up a second maxim, “Napoleon is always right”), Napoleon begins expanding his powers, rewriting history to make Snowball a villain. Napoleon also begins to act more and more like a human being – sleeping in a bed, drinking whisky, and engaging in trade with neighboring farmers. The original Animalist principles strictly forbade such activities, but Squealer, Napoleon's propagandist, justifies every action to the other animals, convincing them that Napoleon is a great leader and is making things better for everyone – despite the fact that the common animals are cold, hungry, and overworked.

Summary

- ▣ Mr. Frederick, a neighboring farmer, cheats Napoleon in the purchase of some timber and then attacks the farm and dynamites the windmill, which had been rebuilt at great expense. After the demolition of the windmill, a pitched battle ensues, during which Boxer receives major wounds. The animals rout the farmers, but Boxer's injuries weaken him. When he later falls while working on the windmill, he senses that his time has nearly come. One day, Boxer is nowhere to be found. According to Squealer, Boxer has died in peace after having been taken to the hospital, praising the Rebellion with his last breath. In actuality, Napoleon has sold his most loyal and long-suffering worker to a glue maker in order to get money for whisky.
- ▣ Years pass on Animal Farm, and the pigs become more and more like human beings – walking upright, carrying whips, and wearing clothes. Eventually, the seven principles of Animalism, known as the Seven Commandments and inscribed on the side of the barn, become reduced to a single principle reading “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” Napoleon entertains a human farmer named Mr. Pilkington at a dinner and declares his intent to ally himself with the human farmers against the laboring classes of both the human and animal communities. He also changes the name of Animal Farm back to the Manor Farm, claiming that this title is the “correct” one. Looking in at the party of elites through the farmhouse window, the common animals can no longer tell which are the pigs and which are the human beings.



Characters

- ▣ **Napoleon** - The pig who emerges as the leader of Animal Farm after the Rebellion. Based on Joseph Stalin, Napoleon uses military force (his nine loyal attack dogs) to intimidate the other animals and consolidate his power. In his supreme craftiness, Napoleon proves more treacherous than his counterpart, Snowball.
- ▣ **Snowball** - The pig who challenges Napoleon for control of Animal Farm after the Rebellion. Based on Leon Trotsky, Snowball is intelligent, passionate, eloquent, and less subtle and devious than his counterpart, Napoleon. Snowball seems to win the loyalty of the other animals and cement his power.

Characters

- ▣ **Boxer** - The cart-horse whose incredible strength, dedication, and loyalty play a key role in the early prosperity of Animal Farm and the later completion of the windmill. Quick to help but rather slow-witted, Boxer shows much devotion to Animal Farm's ideals but little ability to think about them independently. He naively trusts the pigs to make all his decisions for him. His two mottoes are "I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right."
- ▣ **Squealer** - The pig who spreads Napoleon's propaganda among the other animals. Squealer justifies the pigs' monopolization of resources and spreads false statistics pointing to the farm's success. Orwell uses Squealer to explore the ways in which those in power often use rhetoric and language to twist the truth and gain and maintain social and political control.

Characters

- ▣ **Old Major** - The prize-winning boar whose vision of a socialist utopia serves as the inspiration for the Rebellion. Three days after describing the vision and teaching the animals the song “Beasts of England,” Major dies, leaving Snowball and Napoleon to struggle for control of his legacy. Orwell based Major on both the German political economist Karl Marx and the Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Ilych Lenin.

Theme: The Corruption of Socialist Ideals in the Soviet Union

- ▣ *Animal Farm* is most famous in the West as a stinging critique of the history and rhetoric of the Russian Revolution. Retelling the story of the emergence and development of Soviet communism in the form of an animal fable, *Animal Farm* allegorizes the rise to power of the dictator Joseph Stalin. In the novella, the overthrow of the human oppressor Mr. Jones by a democratic coalition of animals quickly gives way to the consolidation of power among the pigs. Much like the Soviet intelligentsia, the pigs establish themselves as the ruling class in the new society.

Theme: continued

- ▣ The struggle for preeminence between Leon Trotsky and Stalin emerges in the rivalry between the pigs Snowball and Napoleon. In both the historical and fictional cases, the idealistic but politically less powerful figure (Trotsky and Snowball) is expelled from the revolutionary state by the malicious and violent usurper of power (Stalin and Napoleon). The purges and show trials with which Stalin eliminated his enemies and solidified his political base find expression in *Animal Farm* as the false confessions and executions of animals whom Napoleon distrusts following the collapse of the windmill. Stalin's tyrannical rule and eventual abandonment of the founding principles of the Russian Revolution are represented by the pigs' turn to violent government and the adoption of human traits and behaviors, the trappings of their original oppressors.

Theme: continued

- ▣ Although Orwell believed strongly in socialist ideals, he felt that the Soviet Union realized these ideals in a terribly perverse form. His novella creates its most powerful ironies in the moments in which Orwell depicts the corruption of Animalist ideals by those in power. For *Animal Farm* serves not so much to condemn tyranny or despotism as to indict the horrifying hypocrisy of tyrannies that base themselves on, and owe their initial power to, ideologies of liberation and equality. The gradual disintegration and perversion of the Seven Commandments illustrates this hypocrisy with vivid force, as do Squealer's elaborate philosophical justifications for the pigs' blatantly unprincipled actions. Thus, the novella critiques the violence of the Stalinist regime against the human beings it ruled, and also points to Soviet communism's violence against human logic, language, and ideals.



Theme: The Societal Tendency toward Class Stratification

□ *Animal Farm* offers commentary on the development of class tyranny and the human tendency to maintain and reestablish class structures even in societies that allegedly stand for total equality. The novella illustrates how classes that are initially unified in the face of a common enemy, as the animals are against the humans, may become internally divided when that enemy is eliminated. The expulsion of Mr. Jones creates a power vacuum, and it is only so long before the next oppressor assumes totalitarian control. The natural division between intellectual and physical labor quickly comes to express itself as a new set of class divisions, with the “brainworkers” (as the pigs claim to be) using their superior intelligence to manipulate society to their own benefit. Orwell never clarifies in *Animal Farm* whether this negative state of affairs constitutes an inherent aspect of society or merely an outcome contingent on the integrity of a society's intelligentsia. In either case, the novella points to the force of this tendency toward class stratification in many communities and the threat that it poses to democracy and freedom.

□

Motifs: Songs

- ▣ *Animal Farm* is filled with songs, poems, and slogans, including Major's stirring “Beasts of England,” Minimus's ode to Napoleon, the sheep's chants, and Minimus's revised anthem, “Animal Farm, Animal Farm.” All of these songs serve as propaganda, one of the major conduits of social control. By making the working-class animals speak the same words at the same time, the pigs evoke an atmosphere of grandeur and nobility associated with the recited text's subject matter. The songs also erode the animals' sense of individuality and keep them focused on the tasks by which they will purportedly achieve freedom.

Motifs: State Ritual

- ▣ As *Animal Farm* shifts gears from its early revolutionary fervor to a phase of consolidation of power in the hands of the few, national rituals become an ever more common part of the farm's social life. Military awards, large parades, and new songs all proliferate as the state attempts to reinforce the loyalty of the animals. The increasing frequency of the rituals bespeaks the extent to which the working class in the novella becomes ever more reliant on the ruling class to define their group identity and values.

Symbols: Animal Farm

- ▣ Animal Farm, known at the beginning and the end of the novel as the Manor Farm, symbolizes Russia and the Soviet Union under Communist Party rule. But more generally, Animal Farm stands for any human society, be it capitalist, socialist, fascist, or communist. It possesses the internal structure of a nation, with a government (the pigs), a police force or army (the dogs), a working class (the other animals), and state holidays and rituals. Its location amid a number of hostile neighboring farms supports its symbolism as a political entity with diplomatic concerns.

Symbols: The Barn

- ▣ The barn at Animal Farm, on whose outside walls the pigs paint the Seven Commandments and, later, their revisions, represents the collective memory of a modern nation. The many scenes in which the ruling-class pigs alter the principles of Animalism and in which the working-class animals puzzle over but accept these changes represent the way an institution in power can revise a community's concept of history to bolster its control. If the working class believes history to lie on the side of their oppressors, they are less likely to question oppressive practices. Moreover, the oppressors, by revising their nation's conception of its origins and development, gain control of the nation's very identity, and the oppressed soon come to depend upon the authorities for their communal sense of self.

Symbols: The Windmill

- ▣ The great windmill symbolizes the pigs' manipulation of the other animals for their own gain. Despite the immediacy of the need for food and warmth, the pigs exploit Boxer and the other common animals by making them undertake backbreaking labor to build the windmill, which will ultimately earn the pigs more money and thus increase their power. The pigs' declaration that Snowball is responsible for the windmill's first collapse constitutes psychological manipulation, as it prevents the common animals from doubting the pigs' abilities and unites them against a supposed enemy. The ultimate conversion of the windmill to commercial use is one more sign of the pigs' betrayal of their fellow animals. From an allegorical point of view, the windmill represents the enormous modernization projects undertaken in Soviet Russia after the Russian Revolution.

Flammenheit 451

Ray Bradbury
Flammenheit 451



Ballantine Books



Summary

- ▣ Guy Montag is a fireman who lives in a society in which books are illegal. His job is not to extinguish fires, but to light them. He burns books, and all the firemen wear the number "451" on their uniforms because that is the temperature at which books burn.
- ▣ But the role reversal of the firemen is not the only difference between present-day society and the world in which Montag lives. People of Montag's world take no interest in politics or world issues. The only point of life is pleasure.

Summary

- ▣ Montag's wife, Mildred, spends her time watching the televisions that take up three of the four walls in their parlor, or listening to the seashell radios that fit snugly in the ear. It isn't until Montag meets a young girl named Clarisse that he realizes that there might be more to life than the electronic entertainment that absorbs everyone. Clarisse makes him think about the world beyond the wall television and seashell radios; she makes him wonder about life.

Summary

- ▣ This newfound curiosity gets Montag into trouble when he takes an interest in reading the books that he's supposed to burn. When Captain Beatty, the fire chief, realizes that Montag has traded sides, he forces Montag to burn his own home. To save himself, Montag kills the fire chief and escapes the city. A manhunt ensues on live television, but when Montag eludes the authorities, an innocent man is killed in his place to appease the audience.

Summary

- ▣ Montag finds a group of educated, vagrant men who remember great novels so that when the world returns to an appreciation of literature, they will be ready to help out. He joins them. As they are walking away from the city, a bomb destroys the place that was once Montag's home. Knowing they will be needed, the men turn back to the shattered city to help rebuild a society that has destroyed itself.

Guy Montag

- ▣ Montag is the protagonist of the story. He is a fireman who realizes that the world is wasting away because people live only to be entertained. They no longer interact with one another in meaningful ways, and they have done away with anything that suggests experience and feeling outside of their wall televisions and seashell radios.

Other Characters

- ▣ Clarisse is an unusual young girl who lives next door to Montag. She refuses the entertainment that society offers and prefers to enjoy the outdoors and conversations with her family. Before her death, she awakens Montag to the idea that there is more to life than burning books and watching television.
- ▣ Mildred Montag: Mildred is Guy Montag's wife whose only purpose in life is sitting in the parlor and watching television. She is intensely unhappy, so much so that she attempts suicide, but she doesn't realize that she is so miserable.

Other Characters

- ▣ **Captain Beatty:** Captain Beatty is the fire chief for whom Montag works. Beatty is knowledgeable about books, and he is the one who knows that Montag's allegiances are shifting when Montag becomes interested in saving books.
- ▣ **Faber:** Faber is a retired English professor whom Montag met in a park long ago. When Montag needs help understanding what he reads in the contraband books, he turns to Faber.

Theme

Knowledge versus Ignorance: Montag, Faber, and Beatty's struggle revolves around the tension between knowledge and ignorance. The fireman's duty is to destroy knowledge and promote ignorance in order to equalize the population and promote sameness. Montag's encounters with Clarisse, the old woman, and Faber ignite in him the spark of doubt about this approach. His resultant search for knowledge destroys the unquestioning ignorance he used to share with nearly everyone else, and he battles the basic beliefs of his society.



Symbols

Blood: Blood appears throughout the novel as a symbol of a human being's repressed soul or primal, instinctive self. Montag often "feels" his most revolutionary thoughts welling and circulating in his blood. Mildred, whose primal self has been irretrievably lost, remains unchanged when her poisoned blood is replaced with fresh, mechanically administered blood by the Electric-Eyed Snake machine. The symbol of blood is intimately related to the Snake machine. Bradbury uses the electronic device to reveal Mildred's corrupted insides and the thick sediment of delusion, misery, and self-hatred within her. The Snake has explored "the layer upon layer of night and stone and stagnant spring water," but its replacement of her blood could not rejuvenate her soul. Her poisoned, replaceable blood signifies the empty lifelessness of Mildred and the countless others like her.

Motifs

Paradoxes: In the beginning of “The Hearth and the Salamander,” Montag's bedroom is described first as “not empty” and then as “indeed empty,” because Mildred is physically there, but her thoughts and feelings are elsewhere. Bradbury's repeated use of such paradoxical statements — especially that a character or thing is dead *and* alive or there *and* not there — is frequently applied to Mildred, suggesting her empty, half-alive condition. Bradbury also uses these paradoxical statements to describe the “Electric-Eyed Snake” stomach pump and, later, the Mechanical Hound. These paradoxes question the reality of beings that are apparently living but spiritually dead. Ultimately, Mildred and the rest of her society seem to be not much more than machines, thinking only what they are told to think. The culture of *Fahrenheit 451* is a culture of insubstantiality and unreality, and Montag desperately seeks more substantial truths in the books he hoards.