

Research paper  
2 (3), 17-34, Fall, 2024

## From Page to Screen: The Enduring Relevance of *Fahrenheit 451*

Vali Gholami<sup>1</sup> | Ramin Salehi Saheb<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, English and Linguistics Department, Faculty of Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Kurdistan, Iran.

(Corresponding Author) E-mail: [v.gholami@uok.ac.ir](mailto:v.gholami@uok.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup> M.A. English and Linguistics Department, Faculty of Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Kurdistan, Iran.

E-mail: [ramin.salehisageb@uok.ac.ir](mailto:ramin.salehisageb@uok.ac.ir)

### Article Info

#### Article type:

Research article

#### Article history:

Received: 12 Oct. 2024

Accepted: 06 Dec. 2024

#### Keywords:

Ray Bradbury,  
*Fahrenheit 451*,  
Adaptation,  
Truffaut,  
Bahrani

### ABSTRACT

In an era where classic literature is continuously reimagined through film adaptations, *Fahrenheit 451* stands as a prime example of how stories can be transformed across different media. This research explores the adaptation process of Ray Bradbury's iconic novel, examining how its dystopian narrative has been reinterpreted by two different directors: François Truffaut (1966) and Ramin Bahrani (2018). Employing theories from adaptation studies and especially drawing upon the canonical work of Hutcheon (2006), this study explores how these filmmakers navigate the transition from textual storytelling to visual representation. Truffaut's adaptation, rooted in the 1960s, remains faithful to the original narrative -- preserving its core themes, while Bahrani's modern version reconstructs the story to reflect contemporary societal issues. This comparison reveals the complexities of adapting fiction into film, highlighting the struggle between maintaining authenticity and embracing creative liberty. The study emphasises how each director's choices regarding setting, character portrayal, and technological advancements reflect their unique vision of the narrative. By analysing these adaptations, the research underscores the dynamic relationship between fiction and film, demonstrating how stories evolve over time to resonate with diverse audiences.

Cite this article: Gholami, V., Salehi Saheb, R. (2024). "From Page to Screen: The Enduring Relevance of *Fahrenheit 451*". *Journal of Linguistic Studies: Theory and Practice*, 2 (3), 17-34.



© The Author(s).

Publisher: University of Kurdistan.

DOI: [10.22034/jls.2024.142718.1200](https://doi.org/10.22034/jls.2024.142718.1200)

## 1. Introduction

Fahrenheit 451 is a dystopian novel written by Ray Bradbury and published in 1953. It can be firmly argued that it is among his finest works. The title of the book holds particular significance, as it refers to the temperature at which paper burns. The novel follows the story of Guy Montag, a firefighter whose role is unexpectedly not to extinguish fires, but to burn knowledge, specifically books. Eventually, Montag becomes disillusioned with his work, leading him to quit his job and dedicate his life to preserving and safeguarding literary texts. A key question that arises is how Bradbury conceived the idea for writing this novel. Phil Nichols (2013) explains that one small paragraph in the book about how the dystopian government used to cut the classic literature into small pieces for radio reflects upon the creation of the story in Bradbury's mind. He maintains: "when Bradbury wrote these lines, he was himself on the brink of becoming a script writer for film and television, and his work in the visual media would involve adapting existing stories to suit the screen" (p. 1). He concludes that in order to do his job, he needed to make all these stories shorter. Later in his career, though, he would somewhat happily recall the indignity he had suffered when asked to cut one of his own full-length radio plays into three-minute episodes to better suit the scheduling requirements of NBC radio so that is how he came to write the story about such a hostile government towards knowledge and books.

This article examines two film adaptations of Fahrenheit 451. The first is the 1966 adaptation, directed by François Truffaut, with a screenplay written by Jean-Louis Richard. The second adaptation analysed in this paper is the 2018 film, also titled Fahrenheit 451, directed by Iranian-American filmmaker Ramin Bahrani, who additionally authored the screenplay. The 2018 version of Fahrenheit 451 diverges significantly from both Ray Bradbury's original novel and the 1966 film adaptation. This divergence can be attributed to the role of the director as a central adapter in the adaptation process. As Linda Hutcheon suggests, directors are often the primary agents responsible for interpreting and transforming source material (p. 82). In the case of Fahrenheit 451, the distinct approaches taken by the directors of both the 1966 and 2018 adaptations illustrate how different filmmakers can reshape a narrative to reflect their own vision and the cultural context of their time. The 2018 adaptation, for instance, alters the setting and reconfigures the sequence of events, reflecting not only changes in technology and society but also the director's personal interpretation of Bradbury's themes. These variations highlight how adaptations, even when based on the same literary work, can differ widely due to the creative decisions made by the filmmakers.

## 2. A brief note of previous works

Malgorzata Marciniak, in her article "The appeal of literature-to-film adaptations" (2007) explores the reasons why adaptations are appealing to watch. He believes that one of these reasons lies in the desire to create. The directors often get so excited by the writer's work that they decide to share the aesthetics experience by trying to complete the work on screen and to find out how "unwholesome" works can be transformed into another media. Adaptations remove the boundaries between the text

and the screen and they force directors to search beneath the surface of the text and recreate it in visual and aural medium (2007, p. 62). Readers of a literary text actively construct their own interpretations of the depicted settings, fostering a receptiveness to alternative representations of the same work. This dynamic explains the considerable appeal of adaptations, as they offer fresh perspectives on familiar narratives. In his article “Literature on screen: A History in the Gap” (2007), Timothy Corrigan sheds light on the importance of “Specificity and Fidelity” in adaptations: “Specificity assumes that different representational practices, such as literature and film, have individual material and formal structures that distinguish and differentiate them from other practices. Conversely, fidelity is a differential notion that purportedly measures the extent to which a work of literature has been accurately recreated (or not) as a movie” (2007, p. 31). These two terms are crucial in both classical literary texts and their adaptations. As he asserts, “Due to the canonical status and historical longevity of a Shakespeare play or a Dickens novel, cinematic adaptations typically have little chance of usurping their authority; thus, the adaptation is often perceived as ‘unfaithful’ to some extent” (p. 32). Therefore, specificity suggests a sense of textual purity revealed especially through and in its proper discipline, and fidelity to a source suggests the rights of the original that must be acknowledged and ideally adhered to (p. 32).

In an article titled “Adaptation and Mis-adaptation,” Francesco Casetti discusses what are commonly referred to as “bad adaptations,” which will henceforth be termed “mis-adaptations.” He claims that sometimes mis-adaptations happen because “the movie does not distance itself enough from the source, rather it remains attached to it” (p. 88). He also mentions that, “mis-adaptation sometimes caused by an excess distance not of closeness, the transformation has been too ambitious and the journey from the text to the derivative text has been too long so, the connection between the two has been lost” (p. 89).

Maytawee Holasut in an article examines Truffaut’s adaptation, noting that, “In terms of its transpositional capacity, Truffaut’s adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451* retains the core elements of the novel, namely the plot and the main characters, with some alteration to the context and setting of the story” (p. 6). He claims that Truffaut’s adaptation is trying to picture James Bond in a post-apocalyptic world. “Truffaut’s vision and aesthetic translates into a kind of arty espionage film with very little fancy gadgetry involved, while dispensing with the apocalyptic atmosphere and tone of the book entirely” (p. 6). He further argues that one of the major changes in the setting of the film was the replacement of the mechanical hound, which could detect shifts in the protagonist’s emotions, with a shaking fire pole, symbolizing the protagonist’s wavering faith (p. 6). However, the extradiegetic narrative situation remains the same just like the original literary text.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

Adaptations have a long history, and numerous theoretical frameworks have emerged to analyse and understand the process of adaptation. Most of them assume that the story is the common denominator and all that transports across different media and genres. However, Linda Hutcheon further argues

that:

through different modes of engagement narrating, performing, or interacting. In adapting, the story argument goes, “equivalences” are sought in different sign systems for the various elements of the story: its themes, events, world, characters, motivations, points of view, consequences, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on (p. 10).

According to Hutcheon’s claims, themes are the most straightforward elements to adapt. To support this assertion, one can examine the film adaptation and the novel *The Godfather*, both of which explore themes such as power, masculinity, patriarchy, and family. Therefore, as Hutcheon says, “many romantic ballads were derived from Hans Christian Anderson’s stories because of their traditional and easily accessible themes, such as quests, magical tasks, disguise and revelation, and innocence versus evil” (p. 11). Utilising and adapting themes also helps an adaptation maximising its fidelity to the source material. For example, consider the 2004 film *Troy*, directed by Wolfgang Petersen, which is based on Homer’s *The Iliad*. By retaining central themes such as honour, vengeance, and the consequences of war, the film stays true to the essence of the epic while reinterpreting its narrative for a modern audience. There are some notable changes in the adapted film, such as the portrayal of a romantic relationship between Achilles and Briseis, but the core events and characters remain largely the same. In terms of themes, the movie emphasises ideas that are deeply embedded in Homer’s *The Iliad*, particularly the themes of pride and the desire for immortality through remembrance after death. These themes are strongly highlighted in the film, preserving the essence of the original poem. Consequently, themes not only serve as the easiest element to adapt, but they also enhance the fidelity of the adaptation, ensuring that the emotional and philosophical core of the original work is maintained.

Characters are also one of the most crucial elements in any adaptation. Murry Smith argues that characters are crucial because they engage the receivers through “recognition, alignment and allegiance” (p. 4). Hutcheon also believes: “The theatre and the novel are usually considered the forms in which the human subject is central. Psychological development (and thus receiver empathy) is part of the narrative and dramatic arc when characters are the focus of adaptations” (p. 11). When readers engage with a book, they create mental images of the entire story, especially the characters, which take shape in their minds. Therefore, the process of transforming and bringing those characters to life on the silver screen is a significant task. Naturally, readers are not always pleased with the interpretation of their beloved characters. For example, imagine you have always envisioned James Bond as a tall man with blond hair and blue eyes, only to see the character reimagined as a woman or a person of colour. Such changes can challenge long-held perceptions and often lead to mixed reactions from audiences.

To further explicate this, Philippe Hamon (2001) asserts that “The separate units of the story (or the fabula) can also be transmediated just as they can be summarized in digest versions or translated into another language” (p. 264). Hutcheon supports this idea and further states, “But they may well

change -- often radically -- in the process of adaptation, and not only (but most obviously) in terms of their plot ordering. Pacing can be transformed, time compressed or expanded" (p. 11). Therefore, based on these ideas, one can conclude that adaptations do not always follow the same pacing or narrative order as the original work, and these differences may lead to significant changes in focalization or point of view. Such alterations can reshape how the story is experienced and understood by the audience, offering new perspectives or emphasizing different aspects of the narrative. Hutcheon argues that modes of engagement are essential in an adaptation, stating, "it permits us to think about how adaptations allow people to tell, show, or interact with stories" (p. 22). This highlights the importance of how different media formats enable audiences to engage with a narrative in unique ways, influencing both the delivery and reception of the story. Whenever you read a book, you can decide where to stop, you can imagine the scenes as you desire and you can reread a part several times but in adaptations you cannot do that. Hence, Hutcheon believes once we start to watch an adaptation and move to the showing mode, our abilities become more limited because we stuck in an unrelenting forward story. As Hutcheon explains, "We no longer are in imagination but we are in the realm of direct perception, which is a mixture of both detail and broad focus" (p. 23). This suggests that adaptations shift the experience from an imaginative, personal interpretation of a story to a more concrete, sensory engagement, blending specific details with a broader narrative perspective.

Hutcheon further asserts that the "showing mode" (as seen in plays and films) immerses us through a combination of aural and visual perception, while the "participatory mode" (such as in video games) immerses us physically and kinaesthetically. However, while all these modes can be considered "immersive" to some extent, only the participatory mode is typically referred to as "interactive" (p. 23). She continues by arguing that neither reading nor watching films is a passive experience; rather, both are imaginatively, cognitively, and emotionally engaging. In the participatory mode, however, we are also physically active, further deepening our engagement with the narrative (p. 24). In the telling mode, engagement begins in the imagination, as the narrator in the book you are reading conveys information that prompts you to visualise the story. This process also occurs in adaptations, but in this case, the telling mode is combined with the showing mode. Instead of merely imagining a scene, the director presents it for you, using visual and aural elements to bring it to life. Ultimately, Hutcheon argues, "Keeping these three modes of engagement—telling, showing, and interacting with stories—in the forefront can allow for certain precisions and distinctions that a focus on medium alone cannot" (p. 27). This approach helps to clarify the unique ways in which different forms of adaptation engage audiences and deepen their understanding of the narrative.

These modes of engagement, according to Hutcheon, do not occur in a vacuum. She states, "We engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic" (p. 28). This highlights that the way we engage with adaptations is shaped not only by cultural and

personal factors but also by the broader material, societal, and economic contexts in which both the creation and reception of the work take place. This is why we often witness significant shifts in story context in adaptations. For example, the Korean film *Oldboy* (2003) is considered more successful than its American remake. Indeed, the differences in reception between the original *Oldboy* (2003) and its American remake could be attributed to the reasons Hutcheon mentions, particularly the influence of cultural context on the adaptation process. Susan Friedman, in her lecture “Whose Modernity? The Global Landscape of Modernism,” notes that “In shifting cultures and therefore sometimes shifting languages, adaptations make alterations that reveal much about the larger contexts of reception and production. Adapters often ‘indigenize’ stories” (Friedman, 2004).

#### 4. The Film and the Novel

Both the 1966 and 2018 film adaptations of *Fahrenheit 451* hold considerable narrative potential, which underscores the continued relevance and connection between the novel and its cinematic interpretations. With today’s advancements in cinematic technology, virtually every element of a book can be transformed into a film. The result of this is the widespread popularity of adapting pre-existing stories. Transforming stories into films is a complex and challenging endeavour, and *Fahrenheit 451* faced its own set of difficulties in this process. Filmmakers face unique challenges when adapting a work of art into a film, with one fundamental difference being that film relies on visual narration rather than a linguistic one. Unlike literature, which unfolds through language and allows for more expansive exploration, film operates in real time, which imposes constraints on the narrative. As a result, the film’s storytelling is often more condensed and streamlined compared to the original text.

A comparison of famous film scripts reveals that they typically do not exceed 125 pages, whereas books often span at least 200 pages. This stark difference in length reflects the constraints of cinematic storytelling, which requires more succinct and focused narratives compared to the expansive, detailed nature of written literature. Alena Plášilová (2015) explains that filmmakers are often compelled to distil the adapted material to its core essence, which may result in the omission of detailed descriptions, internal monologues, or even certain characters from the original book (p. 3). A clear example of this is found in the 1966 film adaptation, where François Truffaut makes no attempt to explain why the same actress plays both the roles of Clarisse and Mrs. Montag. Plášilová argues that here the role of the audience becomes more active, while the narrator’s influence weakens, as viewers are free to interpret and imagine any image, detail, symbol, or object in the film according to their own perceptions (2015:4). This essay argues that directors and screenwriters often strive to reimagine classic adaptations in a way that resonates more with 21st-century audiences. A prominent illustration of this is the 2018 adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*, directed by Ramin Bahrani, which reinterprets the original narrative to align with contemporary societal concerns and technological advancements.

Upon examining the setting, one can observe an advanced society that appears somewhat

incongruous with a government that actively opposes books and the dissemination of knowledge. It is therefore believed that the director, who also wrote the screenplay, chose to strengthen the narrator's role by creating an image that would be easier for the audience to visualize and relate to. This decision likely aimed to make the story more accessible and engaging for contemporary viewers. George Bluestone believes that every novel needs to be adequately adjusted in order to meet the requirements of the film format. The changes that an adapter must make to the source material ultimately transform the content of the novel into its own paraphrase. The difference between the original story and the resulting adaptation can sometimes be so striking that the audience might be tempted to believe the adapter never actually read the novel they were adapting. As a result, the success of the newly created adaptation cannot be guaranteed in advance, even if it is based on a best-selling novel (p. 62). Meanwhile, there are some adaptations that fail to do justice to the original novel, such as *The Divergent Series*, which suffered from a poor adaptation and received only an 11% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes. Bluestone offers an interesting perspective on this, asserting that "destruction by the adapted film is inevitable". By 'destruction,' Bluestone refers to the idea that the content of the source material is not merely transferred from one artistic form to another, but is transformed into something entirely different. In this sense, the film director cannot be viewed simply as a translator of an established author's work, but rather as a new author in their own right (p. 63).

#### **4.1 Background of the Films**

*Fahrenheit 451* originally started out as a novella called *The Fire Man*. It was written in the basement of the library at The University of California at Los Angeles in 1950. Bradbury was poor and he could not afford his own office, therefore he rented the university's typewriter for a dime per half an hour and got down to work. Laurent Buzereau retells the story of writing *Fahrenheit 451*: "Bradbury finished the novella approximately in nine days and wrote about twenty-five thousand words which was roughly a half of the future novel" (p. 167). *The Fire Man* was published in *Galaxy* magazine in 1950. Bradbury added another twenty-five thousand words and in summer of 1953 he was offered to sell some of his works to *Playboy*. Bradbury sold *Fahrenheit 451* for four hundred dollars and the novel came out in four issues of the magazine. Nine years later, in 1962, French director François Truffaut decided to adapt *Fahrenheit 451* into a film. Initially, he intended to shoot the film in France, but encountered several challenges that prevented him from doing so. Samuels, in *Encountering Directors*, explains that Truffaut initially wanted to cast Jean-Paul Belmondo in the leading role, as Belmondo was one of the most famous actors in France at the time. However, due to limited financial resources, Truffaut was unable to afford Belmondo or produce the film in France. As a result, he decided to relocate the production to England (p. 44). The film preparations took four years of Truffaut's time. Baecque and Toubiana (2000) explain that "Truffaut had been nurturing the project for four years, through four different versions of the script with four different screenwriters. At least a half dozen producers had shown interest in it, and about twenty actors had been considered" (p.

216).

By 1966, when Truffaut was finally ready to make the film, he no longer possessed the same energy or enthusiasm he had four years earlier. However, these were not the only challenges he faced. Since the film was being produced in London and the dialogue was in English, Truffaut did not have complete control over the production. This shift in language and location further complicated his ability to maintain full creative oversight. Truffaut was not in complete control of the dialogues and he could not ever be sure that if a line is correct or not. Later Truffaut admits that: "after seeing *Fahrenheit 451* over and over again, I realised I should give up the idea of making film in English until I really know the language" (p. 220). The challenges did not end there; even the actors posed difficulties for Truffaut. Oskar Werner, who played the lead role of Montag, deliberately sabotaged the filming process and was in constant conflict with Truffaut. The director had to contend with Werner's capricious behaviour throughout the production, adding further strain to an already troubled project.

The 2018 adaptation differs significantly from François Truffaut's earlier version. Directed by Bahrani for HBO, this iteration introduces notable changes, including the portrayal of the protagonist as a younger and more physically robust character. Additionally, the film employs more explicit and confrontational language compared to Truffaut's adaptation. Another significant change introduced by Bahrani in his adaptation is the updating of the setting and events to appeal to contemporary audiences. This shift led to substantial modifications to the plot, in some cases altering it beyond recognition. Highlighting this, Odie Henderson in an online review on Roger Ebert website (2018) writes that: "Fans of the novel may find these new additions to be blasphemous" (p. 1). While fidelity to the source material is not the sole requirement for a successful adaptation, it is widely regarded as one of the most critical factors contributing to its success.

Bahrani and his co-writer generally retain the essence of Bradbury's original message; however, their interpretation somewhat distorts the novel's concepts, reshaping them to align with modern sensibilities and cinematic conventions. In attempting to transform a discourse on governmental suppression into a sci-fi spectacle, designed for mainstream entertainment, Bahrani's film resembles a cinematic Frankenstein's monster -- a clumsy creation pieced together from mismatched elements that fail to cohere effectively.

#### 4.2 The Question of the Novel

The central narrative in *Fahrenheit 451* is the state-sponsored banning and burning of books. Guy Montag, the protagonist, is a fireman charged with ensuring that secret stores of books, wherever they turn up, are erased with fire. Montag genuinely loves his work in the beginning. "It was a pleasure to burn" (p. 1) is the first line of the novel but he quickly questions why and whether what he is doing is right. Montag has allies and enemies -- the first character he meets is Clarisse, a young girl who seems insane because she does not fit in. She refuses to obey the rules and she asks difficult questions. Mildred, Montag's wife, is the opposite -- a ghastly, empty woman who worries about her



“friends” and buying a fourth TV screen for their living room rather than the world around her. Beatty, Montag’s boss, spouts propaganda and urges Montag to stay on course, trying to convince him that the firemen are “custodians of our peace of mind.” (p. 55). Faber, an aging former professor, gives Montag the push he needs to finally rebel.

In the world of Fahrenheit 451, books are banned not because of a government’s orders but because people wanted them gone. Beatty, Montag’s captain and the novel’s ambassador of state propaganda, explains that “the bigger the market, Montag, the less you handle controversy!” In needing to please more diverse groups of people, information had to be more of a nice blend of “vanilla tapioca” (p. 56). The books Beatty, Montag and the firemen burn are quickly realised to be symbols for ideas, intellectualism, questioning, disagreement. These things can certainly exist or be done without books, though at the time, the alternatives television, film and radio were much less pervasive.

Although the subsequent actions stem from a desire to avoid confrontation, they are also reinforced by the state as a means of ensuring the populace remains pacified. The programmes broadcasted over the airwaves are devoid of substance. For instance, Mildred is enamoured with *The White Clown*, a show she describes in the novel as featuring a group discussing the greatness of an unspecified idea (p. 19). Faber acknowledges that television has the potential to convey the same information as books, but it ultimately falls short. As he puts it, “There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what the books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us” (p. 79). School teaches “an hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history, of painting pictures, and more sports” (p. 29). Clarisse, Montag’s messenger into a world of questioning and critical thought, grieves the loss of other hallmarks of thinking and social interaction. The architects have eliminated front porches from houses because, as she explains, “they didn’t want people sitting like that, doing nothing, rocking, talking; that was the wrong kind of social life. People talked too much. And they had time to think” (p. 60). As the narrative unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that what is truly material here is not just the content of communication, but the manner in which people converse, the subjects they discuss, how they engage with ideas, and even the specific times and spaces in which they are permitted to think and speak. The firemen’s practices aim to sever the connection between books and the individuals who possess them by destroying the books themselves. Meanwhile, the police precede the firemen, clearing out the living. “You weren’t hurting anyone; you were only hurting things,” a rationale that fosters cognitive dissonance. The fireman convinces himself that he is not harming anyone, as the book, being inanimate, is not alive. However, after Montag begins questioning the burning, he is confronted with a woman who refuses to leave her books. Books begin to take on life: a book “they catch fire, almost obediently, like a white pigeon, in his hands, wings fluttering” and they “fell like slaughtered birds” as he burnt. Later they lay “like great mounds of fishes left to dry” and “titles glittered their golden eyes, falling, gone” (p. 35). It does not seem coincidental that this

kind of description comes along with Montag's witness of a woman burning herself alive. The narrative progresses to blur the distinction between books and people, to the point where they become so intertwined that, by the end of the story, books take on the qualities of people (or, conversely, people become akin to books). The people of this alternate tomorrow are ultimately seeking comfort—a freedom from worry, sadness, and confusion, which they believe they have found in a world dominated by dull television shows, superficial schooling, minimal social interaction, and the absence of books. Early in the novel, it becomes clear that this comfort is hollow. Clarisse asks Montag, "Are you happy?" (p. 7), a question that appears to spark his journey of self-reflection. However, as the story unfolds, we learn that months prior, Montag had met Faber in the park and had kept his phone number, suggesting that his questioning began earlier than we initially assumed.

Samuels explores how the book grapples with the concept of happiness, particularly questioning what truly constitutes happiness for the characters. The narrative examines the tension between superficial contentment and genuine fulfilment, challenging the characters' understanding of what it means to be truly happy. She explains that at the end of the story, civilisation is destroyed by a nuclear bomb; those left, Granger's wanderers carrying books in their minds, will start anew. Will they be able to construct a better world from the ruins of this one? It is not clear, and the book really provides no answer to what that world might look like. Montag screams at Mildred that reading and talking about ideas might help us avoid making the same mistakes (p. 20).

Meanwhile, Zipes (2008) critiques Fahrenheit 451 for its hypocrisy, arguing that it condemns the masses for resisting intellectualism while simultaneously positing that an elite group—represented by the intellectuals in Granger's group—will be responsible for addressing society's problems. To Zipes, this solution is insufficient, as it "defends humanity but has no faith in the masses" (p. 194). Zipes critiques this as elitism, suggesting that it is the intellectuals who will save humanity from itself. However, this essay contends that the contradiction is not entirely indefensible. It is plausible that, through enlightenment and a new understanding, characters who are not part of the 'elite' --such as Montag -- can come to recognize the importance of the exchange of ideas for the well-being of society.

Fahrenheit 451 seems to highlight a problem that simultaneously contains the potential solution: if what is lost is not only knowledge but the connection between humans that animates that knowledge, then it is this connection that might ultimately save a world like the one depicted in the novel. Though Clarisse challenges and unsettles Montag, she also connects with him on a personal level -- she likes him and understands him (p. 26). She shares vulnerable moments with him that, though not "intellectual" in nature, bridge the gap between the lonely Montag and the broader world. While the ability of Granger's group of wanderers to rebuild society from the ashes of one destroyed by humans is notable, it is the capacity for people to learn, understand, and communicate with one another that offers a more profound sense of hope.

### 5. Truffaut's adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*

Truffaut's adaptation preserves the core elements of the novel, maintaining the same plot and characters, yet he also introduces his own distinctive touch to the narrative. In "Journal of *Fahrenheit 451*" (1966), Truffaut further adds that his intention was to create a "James Bond in the Middle Ages" by incorporating elements such as Griffith-era telephones and old-fashioned clothing (p. 45). Holasut (2010) discusses how Truffaut conveys the novel's alternate history through a retro-futuristic design (p. 38). He further elaborates on the presence of the monorail, which glides from the urban centre to the suburban countryside, contributing to the futuristic atmosphere of the setting. At the same time, the totalitarian nature of the regime is symbolised visually through the Firemen's dark, militant uniforms, which convey a sense of foreboding and authoritarian control (p. 39). However, Truffaut did not adhere strictly to the events or elements of the novel. A clear example of this divergence is his replacement of the mechanical dog from the book with a trembling fire pole, which detects Montag's change of attitude whenever he is near it. This fire pole, in contrast to the mechanical dog, serves as a symbol of the wavering loyalty of the system's subordinates. One aspect, however, that Truffaut remains faithful to is the extradiegetic perspective of the novel. In the film, the camera consistently focuses on Montag's actions, rendering the narrative from his point of view. Holasut addresses this change and argues that "this alteration results in removing the context of the nuclear war that will eventually obliterate Montag's city at the end of the novel" (p. 40). Upon further analysis, Holasut suggests that what remains in the film is more akin to an art-house portrayal of a reformed book burner who ultimately fails in his attempt to challenge the system that controls the access to and consumption of knowledge (p. 40). From this, one could argue that the film does not seek to transpose the novel's symbolic representation of literature and reading as essential to humanity, but rather highlights the presence of various media—whether books or television—as the central focus.

In Truffaut's adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*, Oscar Werner's portrayal of Montag remains largely faithful to the character in Bradbury's novel, capturing much of the protagonist's internal conflict and desire to overthrow the oppressive system that forbids reading. Although Werner's performance adds a unique depth to the character, the essential motivations of Montag are preserved, particularly his yearning for intellectual freedom. However, Truffaut makes notable alterations in the relationships between Montag and other characters. While Bradbury's novel centres on the friendship between Montag and Faber, a retired literature professor and inventor, Truffaut omits Faber altogether. Instead, the film focuses on the dynamics between Montag and two female characters, Clarisse and Linda. In the novel, Clarisse plays a pivotal role as the curious, free-spirited young woman who opens Montag's eyes to the world of books and encourages him to question the status quo. In Truffaut's adaptation, Clarisse, portrayed by Julie Christie, takes on a similar function but also fills the role of Montag's love interest, effectively combining the roles of Faber and Clarisse from the novel into one character.

Truffaut also makes a significant change by renaming Montag's wife from Mildred to Linda, another role played by Christie. Linda's character is an obsessive consumer of the state-sponsored television programme, ominously named 'The Family,' which symbolises the pervasive presence of media in the domestic lives of the populace. This alteration highlights the film's shift in focus from the book's symbolic representations of humanity to the medium of television itself. As Holasut argues, Clarisse in the film not only represents humanistic values, curiosity, and intellectual engagement -- as she does in the novel -- but she also serves as a 'Bond Girl' figure, embodying both Montag's intellectual awakening and his emotional attachment. Holasut explains that Clarisse acts as "sort of Montag's 'Bond Girl,' standing in for both the assisting role of Faber as well as Montag's love interest. Clarisse approaches Montag to stir his interest in reading and questioning the world just as in the novel" (p. 41). Meanwhile, Linda, who mirrors Mildred's role in the novel, remains a passive consumer of the oppressive media system, reinforcing the film's emphasis on the dichotomy between books and television. Holasut further contends that the alteration of these two female characters is "to foreground the dichotomy of the text; the conflict between the mediums of book and television" (p. 42). In this way, Truffaut shifts the narrative focus away from the novel's original exploration of humanity and its relationship to literature, instead emphasizing the tension between different forms of media as a central thematic concern.

As for other characters, particularly Beatty -- the antagonistic captain of the firemen -- Truffaut makes minimal changes in his portrayal. Beatty remains a staunch defender of book burning and is still consumed by his own contradictions, eventually meeting his fiery end in a manner consistent with the novel. Thus, while Truffaut's adaptation introduces significant shifts in certain character dynamics, particularly through his reimagining of Clarisse and Linda, it preserves the core of the novel's moral conflict, albeit through a different lens focused more on the media itself. The setting of Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* presents a distinct atmosphere that deviates from the novel's more distinctly American Cold War backdrop, instead drawing heavily on European influences, particularly from the post-war context. While Bradbury's novel evokes a sense of an alternative future for the United States, shaped by the tensions of the Cold War and the fear of totalitarian control, Truffaut's adaptation, made in Europe (primarily in England), is undoubtedly informed by the European experience of fascism, war, and authoritarianism.

The visual design of the firemen in the film also echoes the imagery of Nazi forces, specifically resembling the SS in Nazi Germany. This comparison is amplified by the casting of Oscar Werner in the lead role of Montag, as his portrayal and appearance lend a certain gravitas to the suggestion of Nazi-like authority. Additionally, the presence of German actor Anton Diffring in a recurring role further strengthens this reading. Diffring was well known to audiences at the time for his portrayals of Nazi officers in various war films such as *The Colditz Story* (1955), *Reach for the Sky* (1956), and *Operation Crossbow* (1965). His casting in Truffaut's film thus invites a strong association between the authoritarian regime in the film and the oppressive regimes of Europe during the mid-20th

century.

Moreover, the 'Nazi' reading of Montag's world is not only suggested through these visual and casting choices but is also self-consciously referenced within the film. In one scene, the Fire Chief explicitly insists that even Hitler's *Mein Kampf* be burned, reinforcing the connection between the regime in the film and the totalitarian ideologies of Nazi Germany. This inclusion highlights Truffaut's intention to link the censorship and repression in *Fahrenheit 451* to the historical context of fascism, subtly suggesting that the dangers of book burning and state control of information are not limited to any single nation but are part of a broader, global history of authoritarianism.

Hutcheon suggests that when a work transitions from a 'telling' medium, such as a book, to a "showing" medium, like film, the audience becomes acutely aware of the transformation, as elements of the fictional world that were once implied must be made tangible (pp. 22, 27). This notion is somewhat debatable in Truffaut's adaptation, especially since Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* features an array of futuristic technology. Watching Truffaut's film after reading the book can feel peculiar, as Truffaut deliberately avoids modern technology in favour of outdated objects. For instance, the fire truck resembles something from the 1940s, and the telephone appears to be from the early 20th century. Tom Whalen argues that these anachronistic elements -- such as the rocking chair, the eye-test chart, and the pastoral landscape glimpsed on a matchbox -- serve as constant reminders of a past that feels detached from the present (p. 187). Together, these objects not only emphasize the characters' fading memories and the things they have lost but also point to the idea that the past, preserved in books, offers a connection to a different world. While the science-fiction elements in Bradbury's novel evoke a sense of timelessness, Truffaut's use of antiquated objects calls into question the origins of this timelessness, suggesting that it is rooted in a past that has been overshadowed by the present.

In Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, certain types of written materials, such as instruction manuals and government records, are permitted to exist, as they serve functional purposes for the state. However, in Truffaut's adaptation, this loss of text is taken further, with written words entirely erased from Montag's world. In the film, buildings are identified by numbers rather than names, people read comics devoid of captions or speech balloons, and the fire department's files contain only images and numbers, not any textual content. Nicholas argues that this choice by Truffaut was particularly bold, noting that while a novel can remain vague about the visual details of the world it constructs, a film cannot avoid making those details visible. A logical consequence of this decision is that, in Montag's world, literacy is almost entirely absent, with the only possible exceptions being those who were alive before the rise of the current regime or individuals who have been covertly taught to read (p. 18).

The absence of text in the film serves to heighten the impact of the book-burning scenes, where we are offered tantalizing glimpses of title pages curling into flames. In these moments, our gaze is irresistibly drawn to the text, making the act of destruction all the more poignant. This visual focus

on the burning books emphasizes a key point in Hutcheon's discussion of "medium specificity" (pp. 33-38). In this case, the visual representation of books being consumed by fire has a more immediate, visceral impact than the verbal depiction of the same scene in the novel. The film's ability to 'show' the destruction of books, rather than simply 'tell' us about it, amplifies the emotional and thematic weight of the act, highlighting the profound loss of knowledge and culture in Montag's world.

The portrayal of Montag in Truffaut's adaptation diverges significantly from the character as depicted in Bradbury's novel. One notable difference occurs when Montag first reads a book in the film; Truffaut presents this moment as a revelatory experience, where Montag seems to savour every letter on the page, even appreciating the minutiae like the publisher's name and the copyright details. This contrasts sharply with the Montag of the novel, who already possesses the ability to read and craves books for the wisdom they contain. Truffaut's Montag, in this sense, appears more like a child experiencing reading for the first time, awakening to the world of books with a sense of wonder and discovery. Nicholas argues that Truffaut's adaptation challenges the original framework of Bradbury's novel by offering a fresh interpretation of how the elements within Montag's world interact. Through this refracted lens, Truffaut reimagines Montag's intellectual awakening, positioning it not merely as a desire for knowledge but as a profound, almost primal rediscovery of literacy and thought. This interpretation invites viewers to reconsider Montag's character and his intellectual rebirth in a new light, providing a distinct reading of Bradbury's themes (p. 20). Truffaut's film, then, is not just a straightforward adaptation, but a reflection on the nature of learning and self-discovery, transforming Montag from a man seeking wisdom into one experiencing the transformative power of reading for the first time.

### 5.1. Bahrani's Adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*

The opening sequence of Bahrani's *Fahrenheit 451* is a series of burning books. The books are shot in extreme close up to focus the viewer on the unsettling act of fire eating paper we can almost see the threads of each page being unwoven by the growing flame. We see beloved words of classics eaten by expanding black rings, we see grotesque bubbles grown in paper by heat expand before they pop into a full flame that engulfs the page. The camera cuts quickly, so the viewer barely recognises the work before the next is burnt. As I Lay Dying, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Lolita*. Linda Costanzo Cahir (2006) warns us not to use the word "better" while watching an adaptation (p. 12). Surely, the question should not be whether the film is as good as the book, but rather whether it remains sufficiently faithful to the book. This impact works on two levels in Bahrani's version. As the audience, we see something we were only asked to imagine when reading the novel. Bradbury uses clear metaphors to bring the burning books to life, but the images are still only in our imagination. In just the opening sequence of Bahrani's film, we are alarmed, enchanted, disgusted, horrified by the image of pages burning. As Mazzocco explains: On a deeper level, the act of burning functions both as a spectacle and as a metaphor for the government's strict control over all forms of information. In the novel, Beatty frequently acknowledges that firemen are scarcely needed anymore,

as so few physical copies of books remain. For the inhabitants of this dystopian future, witnessing books being burned might be as shocking to them as it is to us. (p. 45).

These opening sequences complicate the book's mantra that "people didn't want books anymore, so they got rid of them." (p. 56) That statement undoubtedly oversimplifies one of the book's core messages. However, the film, through the aforementioned scenes, introduces a complexity that is difficult to convey through words alone. Visuals, in this context, can serve both a troubling and enlightening role: troubling in the way we, almost voyeuristically, observe events unfold in real time and react instantly; and enlightening in the stark reality of witnessing books being burned and children being indoctrinated, evoking memories of similar acts throughout history. The visuals, in a subtle way, heighten the connections we make to our contemporary situation as well as allusions to the past. Both of these scenes conjure a more sinister feeling through this complexity. A reading of this film would be incomplete without considering the ways it deals with "the other." The book raises the issue in some quite obvious ways, those who question society's norms or who dance to their own music, so to speak, are eliminated as in the case of Clarisse, and the woman who burns herself alive rather than abandon her books and the pursuit of ideas. Montag himself, when he reaches the apogee of his awakening, has to flee the city to escape persecution and joins a group of vagabonds who must also live on the outskirts because of their nonconformity. The film extends this concept, portraying those who flee as "Illegals" or, as the book refers to them, "EEL" (members of the resistance). They are relegated to a subclass of citizens, with their identities—down to their fingerprints—erased as punishment for their so-called crimes against societal happiness. It is made clear early in the film that one becomes an EEL when they are caught with "graffiti," the term society uses to refer to literary contraband. As the film progresses, we see distinctions between those who are EELs and those who are not. The EELs are a diverse group more women and non-white people than the only other groups we see, the firemen, who are predominantly white men.

This decision carrying significant meaning. Bahrani meticulously crafts the scene in which Montag, accompanied by Clarisse, encounters a group of EELs (the resistance), paralleling the group of wanderers in the novel who preserve significant works through memory. Unlike the thinkers in the book, who primarily remember canonical works by white men, the "vessels" in the film represent a more diverse group, both in identity and in the literature they carry. For instance, a Black woman preserves Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, a Black girl carries Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and an Asian woman holds *The Little Red Book of Mao Zedong's* quotations.

Strikingly, the books they carry often align with their identities, and the scene is staged as a tableau, deliberately arranged to resemble books on a shelf brought to life. While these sequences do not explicitly address race or otherness, it is evident that Bahrani aims to underscore how minority identities and perspectives have been marginalized, if not erased, in this dystopian world. Furthermore, the resistance's fight against the mechanisms of the state encompasses a celebration of diversity. The film conveys this message subtly, relying on the casting choices and the careful staging

and filming of these scenes to evoke these themes without directly addressing them.

Throughout the film, Bahrani integrates a wide array of technologies capable of storing or transmitting information, reflecting the complexity of this alternate future compared to the 1950s setting of the novel. While the giant TV screens in Montag's house mirror those described in the book, the film expands this vision with television feeds displayed on skyscrapers, turning Montag into a literal larger-than-life hero. A constant feedback loop exists on "The 9," a state-controlled broadcast and internet hybrid. Other technological elements include Yuxie, a personal assistant that doubles as a surveillance device, servers, and the "Dark Nine," a digital refuge where the EELs upload texts.

Bahrani juxtaposes these modern tools with remnants of older media, such as film strips, postcards, and pen-and-paper artifacts. Montag's secret stash contains not only books but also items like a canister of 35 mm film from *Singin' in the Rain*, an old VHS tape of a blockbuster, and a postcard of Washington, D.C. Similarly, Beatty keeps a pen locked in his safe, using it to write quotations from classic works on cigarette papers before burning them. This blending of old and new media suggests that while specific formats may become obsolete, they are always replaced by new mediums, shifting the focus from the medium itself to its purpose and use.

This theme, present in Bradbury's novel, is brought into sharper focus in the film's closing sequences. The EELs discover a way to splice DNA from a bird with their collected 'graffiti,' enabling the encoded information to be disseminated widely across other animals—rendering it virtually indestructible. Montag is entrusted with delivering a transponder so the bird can connect with a Canadian scientist. In the final scene, as Beatty confronts and kills Montag, the bird is released through a hole burned into a barn full of books. It soars into the twilight, joining a flock of other birds in a striking visual metaphor.

This moment, in which the bird -- carrying humanity's collective knowledge -- survives while the people die and the books are burned, underscores a central message: while books themselves hold importance, their ultimate value lies in the enlightenment and connections they foster. Unlike the novel, where Montag joins the vagabonds and memorizes a book, the film ends with his death. Yet in his sacrifice, Montag achieves understanding, embodying a resistance to the state's attempt to suppress knowledge through fire -- a resistance that endures despite his death.

## 6. Conclusion

In addressing the question of which adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451* is superior, it becomes clear that neither is inherently better; rather, they serve different purposes. Truffaut's 1966 film remains more faithful to Bradbury's novel, capturing its themes with an artistic, minimalist approach suitable for its time. Conversely, Bahrani's 2018 adaptation appeals to younger audiences by incorporating modern elements and diverse representation, even at the cost of deviating from the source material. Truffaut's version reflects the creative constraints and cultural sensibilities of the 1960s. By preserving much of the novel's tone and structure, it offers viewers a closer alignment with



Bradbury's warnings about censorship and societal complacency. Its stylistic choices, including the casting of Julie Christie in dual roles and its restrained use of technology, lend the adaptation a timeless, contemplative quality. In contrast, Bahrani's adaptation modernises the narrative to engage with contemporary audiences. By integrating themes of digital surveillance and diverse perspectives, it broadens the scope of Bradbury's cautionary tale. While these updates make the story more accessible, they also transform its essence, presenting a more action-driven portrayal of resistance. Ultimately, both adaptations underscore the enduring significance of *Fahrenheit 451*. Whether through Truffaut's fidelity or Bahrani's innovation, the story's core message -- the necessity of intellectual freedom and human connection -- remains relevant across generations. These films exemplify the ways in which different eras interpret and reimagine literary classics, enriching our understanding of Bradbury's enduring masterpiece.

### References

- Baecque, A., & Toubiana, S. (2000). *Truffaut*. University of California Press.
- Bradbury, R. (1953). *Fahrenheit 451*. New York. Ballantine books.
- Bluestone, G. (1957). *Novels into film*. University of California Press.
- Buzereau, L. (2003). *Fahrenheit 451, the novel: A discussion with author Ray Bradbury*. University of California Press.
- Corrigan, T. (2007). *Literature on screen: a history in the gap*. Oxford University Press.
- Cahir, L. C. (2006). *Literature into film: Theory and practical approaches*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Casetti, F. (2008). Adaptation and mis-adaptation. In R. Stam & A. Raengo (Eds.), *A companion to literature and film*. Blackwell.
- Friedman, S. S. (2004). *Whose modernity? The global landscape of modernism*. Humanities Institute Lecture, University of Texas at Austin.
- Hutcheon, L. (2012). *A theory of adaptation*. New York. Routledge.
- Holasut, M. (2014). "Objectifying the Fetish: Revisiting François Truffaut's Adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*", *Journal of Liberal Arts*, 14(2), 33-49.
- Hamon, P. (1977). "Texte littéraire et métalangage". *Poétique. Revue de Théorie et d'Analyse Littéraires Paris*, (31), 261-284.
- Henderson, O. (2018). *Fahrenheit 451*. RogerEbert.com.
- Marciniak, M. (2007). "The appeal of literature-to-film adaptations". *Lingua ac Communitas*, 17(1), 59-67.
- Mazzocco, J. (2018). *Fahrenheit 451 in 2018: Can film bring Ray Bradbury's classic into the modern age?* Yale National Initiative.
- Nichols, P. (2013). Classics cut to fit? *Fahrenheit 451* and its appeal in other media. In L. Bloom (Ed.), *Critical insights: Fahrenheit 451* (pp. 92-106). Salem Press.
- Plášilová, A. (2015). *Comparison of the film and book Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury*

[Unpublished Thesis, Charles University in Prague]. Charles University in Prague Repository.

Samuels, T. (1972). *Encountering directors*. Putnam.

Smith, M. (2022). *Engaging characters: Fiction, emotion, and the cinema*. Oxford University Press.

Truffaut, F. (1966). "Journal of 'Fahrenheit 451'". *Cahiers du cinéma*, 180, 18.

Whalen, T. (2007). The Consequences of Passivity: Re-Evaluating "Truffaut's Fahrenheit 451". *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 35(3), 181-190.

Zipes, J. (2008). "Mass degradation of humanity and massive contradictions in Bradbury's vision of America in Fahrenheit 451". In H. Bloom (Ed.), *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451*. Bloom's Literary Criticism/ Infobase Publishing, 3-18.