

Introduction

I first became interested in translation when I took Ibrahima Wade's seventh block class titled "Advanced Language Study: Translation" my junior year. In that class we did translations from both English to French and French to English of various different texts ranging from business documents to fables. Following that class I decided to continue with translation during the summer and worked on translating a book of French fables into English. When it came to choosing a thesis topic I had it narrowed down to two possibilities; expanding on an essay about the connections between silence, guilt, speech, and innocence in *Phèdre* by Jean Racine which I had written the previous year, or doing a translation. Ultimately, I felt that it would be more interesting for me to explore something new. I have always been interested in the nuances of languages and the cultural differences that make each language unique, thus for me, this seemed like the ideal thesis topic.

I first read *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury when I was in 6th grade. I vividly remember reading it in English class as well as watching the 1966 film by François Truffaut and immediately loving the story, though at that point in time I didn't fully understand the social commentaries Bradbury was making. I then read the book several more times on my own and once more in a high school English class. When it came to deciding which book I wanted to translate I went to two of my friends who were English majors and asked them what their favorite books were and whether I could take a look at some of the ones that they had on their shelves. Out of the eight or so books that I looked at there were really only two that stood out to me; *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene which follows the story of a British journalist

who is covering the French War in Vietnam, and *Fahrenheit 451*. I chose *Fahrenheit 451* because it has always been one of my favorite books, I know the book very well, I admire Bradbury's writing style and his use of metaphors, and because I think it treats a topic that is extremely important, especially in today's world where books are starting to be replaced by electronic readers.

Many people, including myself, have believed for a long time that the main message that Bradbury was trying to get across was that censorship is a very real problem and that we, as a society, must beware the dangers of it. However, Bradbury has stated that was not what he was trying to get across, "I wasn't worried about freedom I was worried about people being turned into morons by TV. See we've never had censorship in this country, we've never burned books... *Fahrenheit* is not about censorship; it's about the moronic influence of popular culture through local TV news and the proliferation of giant screens and the bombardment of factoids." In many ways *Fahrenheit 451* was prophetic with regards to the influence of TV in today's culture. Even though *Fahrenheit 451* is very popular in junior high and high school curricula it doesn't change the fact that we, as a society, have become obsessed with TV and technology in general. Instead of reading paperback books many people have started using electronic readers, instead of teenagers settling in at home to read a book they are settling in in front of the TV. Bradbury's message to not become infatuated and controlled is one that is increasingly applicable today even though it may be impossible to return completely to books as sources of news, history, and knowledge.

In the early goings of my translation I was extremely nervous because of Bradbury's extensive use of metaphors in the book, and by the end, I discovered that this nervousness was well founded. Bradbury truly has an amazing imagination and I found it extremely difficult to translate much of his long and wordy imagery into French. The other main difficulty that I encountered was in deciding how to interpret phrases that could not be literally translated from English to French. The best example of this comes when Bradbury is talking about the living room of Montag's house and he shows through the vibrant parlor walls that the room is indeed "living." In French the literal translation of living room would be "salon," a word that in no way communicates the personification of the walls as living. To keep this double meaning I was forced to do a literal translation of the word living and the word room and put them together into "chambre vivante," and then to explain the reason for my choice in a footnote. While small things like this made this translation very difficult for me, I would have it no other way. It was very interesting for me to be able to interpret and paraphrase sentences so that the general meaning would still get across with the sentence still being something that could be said in everyday French.

The level of language in *Fahrenheit 451* uses, on the one hand, a simple set of sentence structure and, on the other, many compound words that were more difficult to translate into French. Some examples of the simple structures are words and phrases such as "it is," the vast use of "thing," and "then." Other more complex structures include "flapping pigeon-winged books" and "Seashell ear thimbles." Bradbury uses many short and choppy phrases, for example, the first sentence of the

book ("It was a pleasure to burn") as well as far more complex phrases, for example in the very next paragraph ("With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history").

Another facet of Bradbury's style can be seen in moments when he tries to break with the monotony, for example on page 2 when it is not Montag who is acting but is he who is being acted upon, "...where the silent air-propelled train slid soundlessly down its lubricated flue in the earth and let him out with a great puff of warm air onto the cream-tiled escalator rising to the suburb." The many variances of Bradbury's style made it very difficult to do a consistent and fluid translation of the book. I wanted to try to keep his simplistic approach as well as his more complex one while at the same time trying to reconcile the two.

While there are some specificities in *Fahrenheit 451* they are not really expressed in the dialogue of the book, mostly because it takes place in a futuristic society in which the government has tried to eliminate specificities. This is the point of Beatty's long speech regarding the decline of the book form and academia in the society. He states that in books there were too many different viewpoints and that minorities were being offended by these different ideas and thus people stopped reading. Diversity is therefore expressed in only a few ways, the first being Clarisse McClellan who thinks for herself and goes against everything that the government supports (the part where she talks about going to school and she says that sometimes she just sits and "thinks," something that no one else does), as well as

with books and the way books talk, and then by the middle of the book with Montag and the differences seen between the way he talks and what his actual thoughts are.

There were many difficulties that I had with this translation but I think the biggest trouble I had was with trying to stay as close to the original text as possible. There is a page in which Montag describes Clarisse's eyes as "clear dark" which would translate to French as "clair obscur," something that is also a technical term for painting, a connotation that I did not want to include. In the end I added an "and" in between "clear dark" to try and differentiate between the two but I was still not completely satisfied. Another way in which I tried to stay true to the text was by trying to respect the order of the sentences as much as possible however many times this was impossible because the syntax in French wouldn't make sense. Finally, I also tried to differentiate between the manner of speech of the different characters, in particular the way that Montag would talk to Beatty in a more formal and at the same time scared tone whereas when he would talk to Clarisse, or himself, his thoughts would be more free flowing and carefree.

Even though this was definitely one of the more time consuming theses I could have chosen, it has been well worth the effort. While I am only turning in the first third of the book for my thesis I have translated the entire book and just need more time to complete the corrections on it, something that I hope to be able to finish during the summer so that I can maybe publish it. Although the translation was very tedious at times because of the amount of time that I needed to spend sitting in the library each day instead of outside in the sun, I was able to continue it because I thoroughly enjoyed doing it. Many people have told me that if you are not

interested in your thesis it is nearly impossible to complete and I believe it. I will not be immediately looking for a job in translation or going to graduate school for translation because I want to take a year off from school and/ or finding a permanent job, from getting my feet wet in translation with the class I took last year and the work that I did over the summer I have become more and more interested in translation as a possible field to go into. I have come to thoroughly enjoy the inner battles I go through on every page between words such as “obscurité” or “le noir” to describe different kinds of darkness. To me translation is so fascinating not only because one is trying to convey the original author’s message but one is also trying to convey one’s own interpretation of the author’s message.

Finally, there are a couple people that I would like to thank for their contributions of ideas and time to this translation. Above all I would like to thank my thesis advisor Ibrahima Wade for getting me interested in translation in the first place and then for helping me almost everyday with corrections to my first drafts; his insight as a native French speaker was immeasurably helpful to me in trying to make my translation as easy to understand as possible for francophones. The other person I would like to thank is my mom, Ellen Burt. She is a French teacher who took me to France numerous times and got me interested in the language and the culture in the first place and she also helped me greatly with corrections when Ibrahima was kept busy teaching other courses at Colorado College and also abroad in France.