



FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

Fahrenheit 451

Nicolas Roeg on Fahrenheit 451

I've always felt that, although Truffaut was greatly revered and admired, at the same time, in terms of film and how much he loved film, he was underestimated. Because he was known to be a literary man, someone who was enormously fond of literature, he was adopted by a very literary set. But in fact his love of literature was separate from his love of film. I think that's why, many times, he has been underestimated as an essentially visual person. I enjoyed working with him tremendously on *Fahrenheit 451*, which was a film very much to be 'read' in terms of images.

I remember there was a lot of criticism of *Fahrenheit* to do with Francois' knowledge of English. The critics complained that it was so stilted. But that had all been quite deliberate. He hadn't even wanted to place it as an English film, or to suggest that the language was necessarily English. The script was written first in French, deliberately, so that it could be translated into English, then translated back into French, because he wanted to lose the English idiom completely, then finally translated back into English. He wanted it set – and I thought this was a marvellously futuristic idea – in a time when people had lost the use of language. After all, the whole premise of the film was to do with losing a literary background. And that was completely missed by the critics.

There was even one little clue which Truffaut put inside the film, because he didn't want this to be mistaken. There was a scene where Montag and Clarisse are sitting talking; they can see the fire station, and a man comes up and puts a note through the letter box. Montag explains why that is, people reporting on each other. Clarisse says, oh, he's just a common informer; and Montag says, informant. Stilted things, stilted phrases: that was absolutely putting the dot on the 'i'.

François was aware of that, and he realised that images were things to be read. Like the scene where Montag is sitting in bed with comics. Those comics were very carefully designed; they were a form of shorthand, so that the news could be read in pictures. The beauty of the language wasn't what was important. It was like a rather intimate film where language means a lot, but we no longer have the language. So you virtually have to read the pictures. It implies there will come a time when people will still have all those emotions, but you have to read them through other indications, other signs. It was a sign language once, and maybe we'll go back to that.

François thought the stranglehold of the written word was going to be equalled, if not superseded, by the idea of images. I guess it takes a long time; he thought it was coming quicker. But in some ways one forgets how quickly things have changed. For instance, he wanted no written signs, and in the fire station there was nothing written. It was very difficult to work those signs out. But think about how road signs have changed. Once when you drove down the road you'd have to read dozens of things – road bears to the left, school ahead – but now they're just children with a stripe through them, so we can drive anywhere in Europe. At the time that was a very filmic

thought: the essence of film. I'm sure that was why he was attracted to the story.

I'd hate it to be forgotten just how much of that kind of a filmmaker he was. Not just charming stories and enchanting acting. For instance, he wanted to make a film with small children, babies, just to get their expression at the point when words aren't quite understandable. We had a scene in *Fahrenheit*, with a baby lying in his pram in the park, and the fire chief turns him over and finds a book underneath. Another aspect of that is the scene at the end with the book people – who are all wrong. The veneration of literature – which he loved – is all wrong. The boy who is reciting from Stevenson, reciting after the old man, has got it wrong. And there are twins who announce themselves as *Pride and Prejudice*, Part One and Part Two, but of course there isn't a Part One and Part Two in *Pride and Prejudice*. All these things were missed by the very people who had revered him as a literary filmmaker.

Every single piece in the construction of the film was visual. I remember when the art department brought a beautifully made model of a fire engine into the office of Cyril Cusack, who played the fire captain. It was like the model that a ship's captain would traditionally have had in his cabin. But François said, no, no, go to a toy shop and get me a toy. Because that sort of skill is already gone from the world. It was a toy world in which all the skills had been lost. When we discussed the look of the film, he said, I don't want it to have a reality, I want it as a Doris Day film, with little shining colours. We had great trouble, because at that time people were going for a tremendous realism. I was ordering huge lights, to make it high key, glossy, like Technicolor.

He also wanted a certain sense of awkwardness in behaviour patterns. After all, things change subtly. I've always noticed that films set in any sort of future very rarely draw on the present. But just imagine someone a hundred years ago trying to predict the present. I live in a house that's a hundred years old. Its internal functions are different, the carriages outside are different – but it's a mixture. Things don't all go away. That's why we began *Fahrenheit* with those aerials and things on top of suburban houses, although inside the houses are sliding doors – which don't work.

Changes are so subtle: relationships, manners, our behaviour. I thought it was quite a frightening film in that respect. But it's very difficult to read that. It's easier to see something you can be totally in awe of. Something which is part of your life and has taken on another aspect is much more difficult to believe in.

François was rather sanguine about the failure of *Fahrenheit*, critically and commercially. One time when we were having dinner he said, it must have been a bad film. I asked why? He said, nobody went to see it. In terms of his filmmaking, I don't think he pulled back after that at all. But *Fahrenheit* might have been a stretch which he was not given the chance to do again. And he wasn't a man to explain himself. He'd rather go on: a futuristic present-day person. He was wonderful about the past. He told me how he hated costume pictures where they tell you these were the clothes they wore from 1490 to 1498, and then these clothes were worn from 1498 to 1502. He said, I like to have a lot of clothes, sort of turn of the century, and just put them in a basket and have the artists try some of them on. After all, the jacket I am wearing is 15 years old. I am not always in fashion.

Nicolas Roeg talks to Richard Combs, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1984/85

FAHRENHEIT 451

Directed by: François Truffaut

©: Vineyard Films Ltd

an Enterprise-Vineyard production

Produced by: Lewis M. Allen

Associate Producer: Mickey Delamar

Screenplay by: François Truffaut, Jean-Louis Richard

From a novel by: Ray Bradbury

Director of Photography: Nicolas Roeg

Film Editor: Thom Noble

Art Director: Syd Cain

Production/Costume Design Consultant: Tony Walton

Colour by: Technicolor

Music by: Bernard Herrmann

Made at: Pinewood Studios

uncredited

Executive Associate: Jane C. Nusbaum

Production Manager: Ian Lewis

Assistant to Producer: Susan Allen

Assistant Director: Bryan Coates

Personal Assistant to Mr Truffaut: Suzanne Schiffman

Continuity: Kay Mander

Casting Director: Miriam Brickman

Additional Dialogues: David Rudkin, Helen Scott

Camera Operator: Alex Thomson

Special Effects: Bowie Films, Rank Films Processing Division,

Charles Staffell

Assistant Art Director: Ron Benton

Associate Costume Designer: Yvonne Blake

Chief Make-up: Basil Newall

Make-up: Paul Rabiger

Hair Stylist: Joyce James

Sound Recordists: Bob MacPhee, Gordon McCallum

Boom Operator: Charles McFadden

Sound Re-recording: Otto Snel

Sound System: Westrex Recording System

Sound Editor: Norman Wanstall

Electronic Sound Effects: Barry Gray

Unit Publicist: Catherine O'Brien

Cast

Oskar Werner (*Guy Montag*)

Julie Christie (*Linda Montag/Clarisse*)

Cyril Cusack (*the captain*)

Anton Diffring (*Fabian*)

Jeremy Spenser (*man with the apple*)

Bee Duffell (*the book woman*)

Alex Scott (*'The Life of Henri Brulard'*)

uncredited

Gillian Lewis (*television announcer*)

Ann Bell (*Doris*)

Caroline Hunt (*Helen*)

Anna Palk (*Jackie*)

Roma Milne (*neighbour*)

Arthur Cox (*male nurse 1*)

Eric Mason (*male nurse 2*)

Noel Davis (*TV announcer 1*)

Donald Pickering (*TV announcer 2*)

Michael Mundell (*Stoneman*)

Chris Williams (*Black*)

Gillian Aldam (*Judoka woman*)

Edward Kaye (*Judoka man*)

Mark Lester (*small boy 1*)

Kevin Elder (*small boy 2*)

Joan Francis (*bar telephonist*)

Tom Watson (*sergeant instructor*)

Denis Gilmore (*'The Martian Chronicles'*)

Fred Cox (*'Pride'*)

Frank Cox (*'Prejudice'*)

Michael Balfour (*Machiavelli's 'Prince'*)

David Glover (*'The Pickwick Papers'*)

Judith Drynan (*Plato's 'Dialogues'*)

Yvonne Blake (*'The Jewish Question'*)

John Rae (*'The Weir of Hermiston'*)

Earl Younger (*nephew of 'The Weir of Hermiston'*)

UK 1966©

112 mins

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

Jules et Jim (Jules and Jim)

From Fri 4 Feb

Philosophical Screens: Jules et Jim

Thu 10 Feb 20:20

The Representation of Women in Truffaut's Films

Fri 18 Feb 18:20

THE LITERARY TRUFFAUT

Anne and Muriel (Les Deux Anglaises et le continent)

Sat 5 Feb 12:20; Thu 17 Feb 17:50 (+ intro by actor Kika Markham); Tue 22 Feb 20:25

Fahrenheit 451

Sat 5 Feb 20:45; Sun 13 Feb 12:40; Sun 27 Feb 18:40

The Story of Adèle H (L'Histoire d'Adèle H)

Wed 9 Feb 20:55; Sat 12 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 18:20

The Green Room (La Chambre verte)

Thu 10 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:40; Wed 23 Feb 20:40

THE HITCHCOCK TRUFFAUT

Shoot the Pianist (Tirez sur le pianiste)

Tue 1 Feb 20:50; Fri 11 Feb 18:30; Sat 26 Feb 13:20

The Bride Wore Black (La Mariée était en noir)

Fri 4 Feb 20:45; Sun 13 Feb 18:00; Sun 27 Feb 12:10

Finally Sunday! (Vivement dimanche!)

Sat 5 Feb 17:50; Sat 12 Feb 12:30; Sun 27 Feb 15:00

Mississippi Mermaid (La Sirène du Mississippi)

Sun 6 Feb 12:40; Fri 18 Feb 20:35; Fri 25 Feb 18:00

La Peau douce (Silken Skin)

Sun 6 Feb 18:20; Sat 12 Feb 17:20; Sat 26 Feb 15:30

The Woman Next Door (La Femme d'à côté)

Tue 8 Feb 20:30; Mon 21 Feb 18:10; Thu 24 Feb 20:30

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