

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

SETTING BOOKS ON FIRE:
LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF BOOK BURNING
IN *AUTO-DA-FÉ* AND *FAHRENHEIT 451*

by
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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of English
of the Faculty Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
April 2021

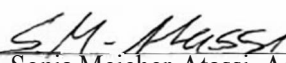
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor Dr. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi for her guidance and invaluable advice during the process of planning and writing my thesis, and for helping me develop this project.

I would like to thank Dr. Kathryn Maude for her insightful feedback and words of encouragement, and Dr. Adam John Waterman for his suggestions. And thank you to Dr. David Currell for supporting this idea from the beginning.

I would like to thank my family for their unconditional support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Maria Henri Hafez

for

Master of Arts

Major: English Literature

Title: Setting Books on Fire: Literary Representations of Book Burning in *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*

This thesis studies the literary representations of book burning in two twentieth century novels: *Auto-da-Fé* by Elias Canetti and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. Book burning is a cultural and historical phenomenon which is analyzed in this thesis in its literary representations in order to understand the significance of this act within various contexts.

The first chapter of the thesis analyzes Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* which was published in 1935 and situates itself within the context of the interwar years. The end of the Weimar era and the rise to power of totalitarian regimes in Europe has a significant impact on Canetti's representation of book burning and on the significance of this act within the narrative of the novel. In *Auto-da-Fé*, book burning marks the end of an important period of European history and represents a moment of liberation to the protagonist Peter Kien who joins his library in the flames.

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is the focus of the second chapter of the thesis. The dystopian science-fiction was published in 1953, in a postwar context, and deals with book burning as a totalitarian tool for imposing ideology. Moreover, key elements of the Cold War such as censorship and the rise of mass culture are addressed in the novel's depictions of book burning. The last section of this chapter approaches book burning as a subversive tool of resistance in Bradbury's novel and studies its use as a way to preserve culture rather than destroy it.

The third chapter of the thesis is a comparative study of the analyses made in the previous chapters. *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* are read and analyzed together in order to uncover the similarities and differences in their representations of book burning.

The multiple analyses of book burning reveal the various ways in which this act can be interpreted depending on the historical circumstances and narrative elements of the novels which represent it. This thesis concludes by tackling a recent instance of book burning in Lebanon and reflecting upon the state of this practice in the twenty-first century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
ABSTRACT	2
INTRODUCTION: BURNING QUESTIONS ABOUT BOOK BURNING	5
1.1. Research Questions and Description:	7
1.2. Theoretical Framework	10
1.3. Literature Review	14
1.3.1. Literature on Book Burning	14
1.3.2. Literature on Auto-da-Fé	16
1.3.3. Literature on Fahrenheit 451	18
UP IN FLAMES	23
2.1. Biblioclasm in Auto-da-Fé	23
2.1.1. The Funeral Pyre of Modernity	24
2.1.2. The Auto-da-fé of the Library	34
2.2. Burning for Liberation	42
2.2.1. Dreams and Reality, United in the Flames	43
2.2.2. The Surrealism of Book Burning	46
FIGHTING CULTURE WITH FIRE	50
3.1. Libricide in Fahrenheit 451	50
3.1.1. The Fire of Totalitarianism	53
3.1.2. The Heightened Reality of the Cold War Years	61

3.2. Facing the Fire of Resistance.....	70
3.2.1 A Spark of Resistance.....	70
3.2.2. Burning to Remember.....	74
WHERE THERE ARE BOOKS, THERE IS FIRE	79
4.1. The Universality of Book Burning	79
4.2. When Beliefs Lead to Destruction.....	81
4.3. The Absence of Flames.....	83
4.4. The Reader, Between the Regime and the Leader	85
4.5. The Ashes of Culture Rest in Memory	90
CONCLUSION: BLAZING A TRAIL FOR THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY	97
5.1. Lebanon, Phoenix Against Its Will.....	99
5.2. Burning Through the Screen?	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	108

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: BURNING QUESTIONS ABOUT BOOK BURNING

Book burning is a powerful and versatile tool which has been used for centuries as a symbolic act, or with a purpose of cultural and ideological oppression. The most significant act of symbolic book burning to me, an English literature student living in Beirut, is the burning of the history textbooks by Lebanese student protesters in November 2019. A group of students gathered in front of the Ministry of Education and set fire to their history textbooks. They were protesting against the governmental censorship of history and purposeful omission of all historical facts and events from the civil war onwards. This protest is mentioned in a few articles only, and not remembered as a defining moment of the October 17 revolution. However, witnessing this act of book burning on television was an eye-opening moment for me. I watched these young students questioning the historical narrative given by the government, the same narrative which was given to my class eight years before. Watching them burn the books, and reading about the protest, took me back to my teenage years when my friends and I, just like the students, were painfully aware of the missing information in our history textbooks. The protesters' motives were not generational but national, they were expressing a fundamental flaw in the educational system, a missing piece in national memory and identity. Their book burning brought up in me a deep-seated feeling of resentment for the missing pieces of our education. This incident made me realize the immense power held within an act of book burning. This book burning is significant to me because the act which was, in my mind, associated with destruction

and oppression, acquired a new meaning. In the fire emanating from the pages of the history textbooks arose a sense of resistance to the imposed narrative and a spirit of unity among the protesters and the ones, like me, watching from their television screens. Witnessing the students set fire to censored history books, I understood that book burning is not simply cultural destruction and censorship, but a powerful act with an important significance which varies according to the context and way in which it is enacted. For this reason, I am dedicating this thesis to the investigation of the significance of book burning in its literary representations.

Burning a book is a significant act because of the importance of books themselves in regard to what they represent, primarily culture and knowledge. Humans have been setting fire to books for many centuries in acts of book burning which still fascinate scholars to this day, one of the best known examples being the burning of the library of Alexandria. Book burning is a historical act of cultural destruction and it is often acted out as a tool of censorship, control, or as a way to eliminate opposing religious or political beliefs. The literary representations of book burning are also historical in that they are highly influenced by the context from which they emerge, and they acquire significance from this context. However, books are complex and involve readers, writers, narratives, materialities, and ideas. Thus, despite finding great significance in historical and cultural contextualization, book burning is also conceptually and symbolically meaningful. In literary representations, this meaning can emerge from the characters' actions, the narrative, and the purpose given to books within the novels which represent their destruction. The aim of this thesis is to analyze literary representations of book burning in two twentieth century novels, Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*, published in 1935, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, published in 1953,

in order to explore the various significances of book burning in relation to the novels' context and within their narratives. Book burning, in its literary representations, has the capacity to adapt and embody a significance according to the context from which it emerges and the literary details of its representation.

1.1. Research Questions and Description:

This study is guided by research questions which help frame the analyses of literary texts and allow for a focused and oriented reading of the existing literature on the novels and on the topic of book burning. It argues that the practice of book burning is versatile and holds a different meaning according to the historical circumstances in which it is represented in literary texts.

Who is burning books and libraries? *Auto-da-Fé* depicts Peter Kien's individual act of book burning whereas *Fahrenheit 451* represents both individual and government-sponsored collective book burnings. What is the motive behind book burning? What is the perpetrator's desired outcome? These last questions can be summed up into one guiding research question: Why are books and libraries being burned? Uncovering the reasons behind each fictional book burning is important to the understanding of these literary representations and to attempt to extract patterns of similarity or of difference between them. What are the consequences of these book burnings? Going further than the motive behind the act, this project tries to study the consequences of the act in the novels and the effects that the book burnings have on the characters and the worlds they live in. In addition to unpacking the fictional realms of the novels, this project focuses on the socio-historical contexts of their publication. How does the context of each novel affect or shape its representation of book burning? The

analyses of *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* are grounded in socio-historical context of the novels and their publication. This framework, in addition to a theoretical framework, helps answer the questions mentioned above as it opens new possibilities for comparisons between fictional and real-life events. All in all, this web of questions guides the project and directs the literary analyses of *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*. The research questions are interrelated and woven into each other as the study of literary representations of book burning develops throughout the project.

This thesis focuses on two literary texts, selected according to their relevance to the topic of book burning, its representation, and the context in which these novels emerged. *Auto-da-Fé* is the first literary text which will be addressed and analyzed in this thesis. As opposed to *Fahrenheit 451*, Canetti's novel does not tackle the subject of book burning as a central theme in the narrative. The importance of books and libraries to the protagonist is made clear from the beginning, and book burning is only referred to in dreams until the final scene of the novel in which the act of book burning is committed. The selection of this novel is mainly based on two reasons. Firstly, *Auto-da-Fé* represents an entirely different form of book burning than can be seen in Bradbury's novel, it is a private act, committed by an individual. Secondly, book burning is represented as a result of a descent into madness, it is not only shown as a tool of cultural destruction, but also as an act of self-destruction. Despite the novel showcasing the act of book burning in its last scene, this thesis reads the act as a central theme of the novel, as a climactic ending that comes as a consequence of the previous narrative events. In introducing the socio-historical context of Canetti's novel, Donahue describes it as "responding to particular crises of the Weimar era" (1). Indeed, the novel's original German-language version, *Die Blendung*, was published two years after the end of the

Weimar Republic and after the infamous Nazi book burnings on the Opernplatz in Berlin. The influence of these acts of cultural destruction, although less explicit than in *Fahrenheit 451*, is present between the line of Canetti's novel which takes place in an unnamed city, presumably Vienna, and emerges in the interwar years. In addition to the historical and cultural context, book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* is studied in this thesis in relation to the blurring of reality and dreams and the protagonist's motives in self and book destruction.

Fahrenheit 451 is a renowned science-fiction novel revolving around the topic of book burning. The choice of this novel as a primary text of the thesis is not only based on its tackling of book burning, but of the importance of the governing authorities in the narrative, and on the aspect of cultural destruction as censorship. The other factor that contributed to the selection of *Fahrenheit 451* as a primary text is its representation of book burning as an act of resistance. This aspect of the act constitutes an important part of the thesis. The practice and representation of resistive book burning is not common in literary texts, and its representation in *Fahrenheit 451* is interesting and subversive as it comes as an act of resistance which uses the regime's tool of oppression for a revolutionary purpose. Published in 1953, the dystopian novel emerged after the Second World War, and in the midst of the Cold War. The influence of the Nazi book burnings of 1933 on Bradbury's narrative is undeniable. The aspect of government-ordered book burning with a goal to eradicate a certain culture or an idea is reminiscent of the rhetoric used by totalitarian regimes to indoctrinate society. In addition to reflecting the history of book burning in the twentieth century, *Fahrenheit 451* evokes some important aspects of the Cold War which is an important element of its historical context. An important amount of the existing body of literature on Bradbury's text

elaborate on this subject. Indeed, the influence of McCarthyism is widely written about, as well as the role of mass culture in the United States in the 1950s.

While this thesis situates itself at the intersection of the fields of literary and cultural studies, it extracts ideas from each publication and adds new analysis by focusing on the significance of the act of book burning in the novels as a practice of cultural destruction and investigating the reasons that lead to this destruction. Another novelty that this project offers is the reading of *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* not only as in-depth studies in chapters one and two, but in comparison in chapter three. The thesis attempts to find a common thread linking the different practices of book burning in the novels and tries to establish common characteristics that would allow to provide a general understanding of book burning across various literary contexts. By analyzing the literary representations of book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*, and by comparing the differences and similarities between these representations, this thesis establishes a general understanding of book burning in literature. The research questions guide this thesis to achieve a study of various kinds of book burning in the two novels, in the first two chapters such as book burning as a totalitarian tool and book burning as an act of resistance. The importance of the third chapter lies in its comparison of these various kinds of book burning and the attempt to find common characteristics and differences to the various literary representations of book burning.

1.2.Theoretical Framework

This project is based on a thorough theoretical framework which guides the analyses of the two novels. This allows us to draw a link between the literary representations of book burning and a wider theoretical perspective, and to situate the

project between the fields of literary and cultural studies. Both of these field are crucial to this study because book burning stands as an act of cultural destruction which explains the importance of cultural studies, and because the representation of book burning in novels and its analysis calls for the intervention of literary studies. The general theoretical cultural framework of this project relies heavily on previously published works studying book burning through history and its significance as an act of cultural destruction. Some of these important references are Matthew Fishburn's *Burning Books* (2008) and Rebecca Knuth's two important books on the subject, *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction* (2006) and *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century* (2003). The latter book is useful in the study of Bradbury's novel as it represents "regime-sponsored" book burnings. While grounding her studies in historical examples, Knuth establishes a theoretical framework to investigate the causes of destruction and the extremist ideologies pushing for the annihilation of books and libraries. Key definitions are extracted in this thesis from Fishburn and Knuth's books in order to define and differentiate various kinds of book burning in the two novels. Fishburn and Knuth's works provide an essential basis for the analysis of book burning in relation to the socio-cultural and historical contexts of *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*.

Another key text which frames the analysis of the two twentieth century novels is Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. A defining work of the twentieth-century, the book analyzes totalitarian movements of the time, such as Nazism and Stalinism, and provides an understanding of totalitarian methods of control and indoctrination. Arendt published this work in 1951, after having immigrated to the

United States in 1941 to flee the Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany. This book about totalitarianism situates itself between the period of publication of *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* and is relevant to the analysis of both literary works. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is an essential component of the theoretical framework and stands in as a work from the twentieth century dealing with a contemporary issue whereas Knuth's books were published in 2003 and 2006 and deal with a phenomenon of the past. In this thesis, information from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is applied to the analysis of both Canetti and Bradbury's novels. Arendt's book, although it was published before Bradbury's novel, offers an essential and contemporary perspective on totalitarian regimes of the twentieth-century and allows this thesis to ground the historical context of totalitarianism within this period of time. Indeed, totalitarianism is a defining element of the two novels' historical contexts. *Auto-da-Fé*, situated during the interwar period, was published the same year as the issuing of the Nuremberg laws which legalized and reinforced Nazi ideology; two years prior to this, in 1933, Hitler was elected as chancellor of Germany. This confirms that Nazism was already firmly in control at the time of publication of *Auto-da-Fé*. However, Canetti's novel does not directly convey the influence of totalitarianism on its narrative. Yet, Arendt's description of the totalitarian leader can help in shedding light on the novel's protagonist Peter Kien. This thesis draws an analogy between the totalitarian leader and Peter Kien, and between the army and the protagonist's books. In the second chapter of this thesis, Hannah Arendt's work intervenes as an insightful theoretical and historical basis to understand totalitarian practices and governmental control of the masses. The influence of totalitarianism on *Fahrenheit 451* is clear through the depiction of an oppressive regime and the portrayal of public book burnings which highly resemble Nazi book burnings.

The Origins of Totalitarianism is an essential work in chapter two as it provides theoretical and conceptual basis to the argument that Bradbury's regime is a totalitarian one and it uses book burning as a tool for indoctrination and the imposition of ideology, like the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century described by Arendt.

In the first chapter, *Auto-da-Fé* is analyzed in relation to its interwar context, and to the protagonist's behavior, connection to his library, and states of consciousness. This thesis bases itself on *Surrealism: Key Concepts* to draw connections between *Auto-da-Fé*'s book burning and the author's constant blurring of dreams and reality in the narrative. Surrealist concepts are relevant and critical to the understanding of Peter Kien's simultaneous book burning and self-destruction. Surrealism is a defining movement of the twentieth century and, like *Auto-da-Fé*, is in conversation with the psychoanalytical movement which was also a turning point at the time. This represents a similarity between the movement and the novel, which both hold the dream/reality relationship as a central theme. Surrealism and *Auto-da-Fé* are united in their opposition to the dream/reality dichotomy of psychoanalysis. It is made clear in chapter one that dreams and reality are woven into each other in the narrative, which is a continuation of surrealist thinking and principles. However, psychoanalysis opposes dreams and reality as separate states of consciousness which is strongly disputed by the surrealist movement, as Jean-Michel Rabaté explains in the third chapter of *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, titled "Freudian Origins". The interaction with psychoanalytical principles is not the only element which joins surrealism with Canetti's work, but surrealist concepts are applied to the analysis of the novel in order to understand the protagonist's book burning and the connection between the destruction of the library and the blurring of states of consciousness.

1.3.Literature Review

The literature review is divided in three parts consisting of texts grouped together, and each part is focused on a particular topic related to literary representations of book burning. The first part uses existing literature revolving around the act of book burning. These texts study the act of book burning, its history, its causes and cultural significance. The second part engages with existing literature about Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*, and the third part is focused on academic texts and analyses of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. The division of the literature in three parts allows this project to better extract useful information on each subject and to have a structured idea of what has already been written about book burning in the field of cultural studies and about the novels in literary studies.

1.3.1. Literature on Book Burning

As mentioned above, Knuth and Fishburn's writings about book burning are important to the development of this project as both authors discuss this topic in depth. Fishburn writes about book burning by grounding his study in history and extracting conclusions from his historical and cultural analyses. In *Burning Books*, Fishburn touches upon the notion of utopia and sets a parallelism between book burning and utopia, stressing on the "obsession with purity" (11). This observation is applicable to the study of both of the novels on which this project bases itself, as the protagonist of *Auto-da-Fé* and the government of *Fahrenheit 451* are in constant search for a false utopia found through destruction. The theme of utopia is not directly tackled in this thesis, but it is a starting point to investigate the reasons and motives behind the book

burnings. In addition to his focus on the Nazi book burnings, the “bibliocaust” (36), the author writes about Canetti’s novel in his fourth chapter without going into great detail. Fishburn’s mention of both Bradbury’s and Canetti’s works establishes a link between the cultural and literary study of book burning, a link that this project attempts to strengthen.

Knuth’s texts are important due to the in-depth discussion of book burning as an act of cultural destruction and violence, and because they provide this project with two central words that help define the act of book burning in each novel. In *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*, Knuth defines and extensively writes about the term “libricide”, which is “an identifiable secondary pattern or sub-phenomena occurring within the framework of genocide and ethnocide” (viii). This term is used in this project to analyze the actions of the regime in *Fahrenheit 451* and their implications on society. In this book, Knuth also writes about the destruction of libraries and its consequences on cultural memory, which is also an important concept to tackle in Bradbury’s novel. Knuth provides a “theoretical framework for libricide” (49) based on ideologies and concepts of internal and external destruction. Therefore, this publication by Knuth provides an essential framework to the analysis of book burning in *Fahrenheit 451*. Knuth’s second book, *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction* (2006), seems to be a continuation of the first one, and centers around the concept of “biblioclasm”, which is defined as “a purposeful action that is rooted in moral repugnance of judgment” (18). Knuth puts libricide and biblioclasm in conversation with each other, the former being “an organized form” of the latter (28). Biblioclasm is described as an act of destruction

and vandalism, and is used in this project in the analysis of *Auto-da-Fé* to investigate the motives of the protagonist Peter Kien in burning his library.

All in all, these three texts provide an important framework to further ground this thesis in the field of cultural studies. Extracting information and important notions from these works, this thesis applies these concepts in literary analyses. The texts mentioned below represent an existing body of literature revolving around Bradbury's and Canetti's books and will situate the project within literary studies.

1.3.2. Literature on *Auto-da-Fé*

This part of the literature review englobes the literature about Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*. Donahue's *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti's Auto-da-Fé* (2001) is an important part of this body of literature and of this project. It thoroughly analyzes the novel in relation to context and narrative structure. Donahue stresses the "rupture with literary modernism" (8) that *Auto-da-Fé* symbolizes and its relation to Kantianism. This project aims to relate Donahue's ideas of an end of modernism in *Auto-da-Fé* specifically to the final climactic scene representing book burning. Corina Stan also writes about this novel symbolizing an "end" in "Visions of the End of Culture: Civilization, Barbarism, and the Realm Beyond Forgiveness". This article, inspired by Donahue's influential ideas, focuses on the role of culture in the novel and its downward spiral. However, this project diverges from Stan's statements on book burning, the scholar sees "the image of books burning at the end of *Auto-da-Fé* as symbolic of Canetti's conviction that his contemporaries were unworthy of the culture they had inherited" (131). As opposed to Stan's analysis, which is reliant on the intentions of the author, this project is detached from Canetti's intentions while writing the novel. Here, the analysis of *Auto-da-Fé* is reliant on the analysis of the journey of the protagonist and how his path, his passion for

books, and his obstacles lead him to set his library on fire in the climactic ending of the novel.

The narrative structure of *Auto-da-Fé* is a central topic of discussion within the literature about the novel. O'Neill dedicated the fourth chapter of *Acts of Narrative: Textual Strategies in Modern German Fiction* to Canetti's novel. O'Neill lays out the "various conceptions of blindness" (84) which is relevant in this thesis in relation to the novel's original German title, *Die Blendung*, which translates as "the blinding" in English. The scholar's detailed analyses on narrative structure and strategies in *Auto-da-Fé* help frame the reasoning of this project within the narrative structure of the novel, and allows it to track a narrative and character-based evolution that finally leads to book burning. Although this thesis is not focused on the *Auto-da-Fé*'s narrative structure, it does take blindness as an essential element in the analysis of book burning. The theme of blindness is revealed in chapter one to be significant not only in relation to the original German title, but to the protagonist's attempt at liberation from reality and his search for freedom.

A large part of scholarly material about Canetti's novel is focused on the madness and mental instability of the protagonist, Peter Kien. Maia's "Elis Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*: From the Antithesis of the Crowd-Man to the Madness of Power" relies on Canetti's other publication, a theoretical study titled *Crowds and Power* (1980). This project does not base itself on this later publication by the novelist, but extracts Maia's interesting observation that the protagonist perceives his books "as an army" (35). A number of other works focus on the madness of Peter Kien, such as Zuylen's "Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé*: The Scholarly Malady" and Martens' "De(ar)rangd Minds, Mindless Acts and Polemical Portrayal in Kleist and Canetti". Maia's argument is

essential to the study of book burning in relation to totalitarianism. The first chapter of this thesis tackles the Kien's perception and treatment of the library as an army in order to make a connection with the interwar context of totalitarianism.

1.3.3. Literature on *Fahrenheit 451*

The amount of academic writing on *Fahrenheit 451* is wide and varied, each writer approaching the novel from a different perspective, leading to a variety of interpretations. In *Ray Bradbury* (2015), David Seed dedicates a book to the influential author, with the third chapter focusing on the novel at hand "*Fahrenheit 451* in Contexts". Seed analyzes this "postwar American dystopia" (83) by establishing book burning as a tool to exert power and by studying the symbolism of fire which "changes significance" (97). The idea of a changing meaning of fire in book burning is used in this project and expanded upon. Fire symbolism is not directly analyzed but it is implicated in the various analyses of the changing significance of book burning. Indeed, the project goes into depth about the significance of book burning, and adds to Seed's ideas the concept of resistive book burning, which gives yet another meaning to the fire. In the second chapter, book burning is studied as an act of resistance in two narrative instances in the novel. Moreover, in "Impediment to Knowledge and Imagination in Bradbury's Dystopian Novel *Fahrenheit 451*" Atasoy provides an important socio-political framework to the novel, mentioning the influence of the Cold War and the Second World War and political ideologies such as McCarthyism on the writing and content of Bradbury's work. The context of the Cold War plays a significant role in this thesis' analysis of *Fahrenheit 451* as McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare are influential phenomena which shaped the social atmosphere of the United States during the Cold War and which are found to be important influences in Bradbury's depiction of

book burning. Moreover, Seed and Atasoy's writings explain that the government enforces a false sense of happiness, defined by blissful ignorance, through the prohibition of knowledge. Book burning is therefore a tool for the destruction of knowledge and the ideological manipulation of society. The desire for happiness, which is instilled by the government, is also mentioned in James Filler's "Ascending From the Ashes: Images of Plato in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*". Filler's analysis is insightful as it brings Plato's concept in conversation with Bradbury and analyzes concepts of freedom and knowledge. Like Seed, Atasoy sees the book burnings of *Fahrenheit 451* as acts of censorship and control, as does this project which adds the ideas of cultural destruction and erasure of memory to this facet of censorship.

The role of television as mass media to control a population is accentuated in the novel and in the literature about it. Evan Brier writes about this subject in *A Novel Marketplace: Mass Culture, the Book Trade, and Postwar American Fiction* (2012). The second chapter of this work relates the real-life concern about mass culture and the emergence of the paperback with the events of *Fahrenheit 451*. Brier's intervention sheds light on the reality which is adapted to a science-fiction narrative and by which Bradbury's fictional world is grounded. The rise of mass culture and simultaneous downfall of books is studied in the second chapter in an attempt to find a link between the two phenomena. This project agrees with the influence of mass culture but sees it as an indirect cause for book destruction, an exploitative tool used by the government which targets the knowledge held within books. Hurtgen's "Achival Domination in *Fahrenheit 451*" is in line with this statement and sees televised media as a tool of the repressive state apparatus. An important observation that this article adds to the conversation around this novel is the "shift from a cultural archive composed of

books... to a televisual archive” (37). In this project, this statement is expanded upon to discover the link between book destruction and cultural memory, and the consequences of book burning on culture and society.

There is a body of literature analyzing *Fahrenheit 451* in relation to Foucauldian concepts of power and surveillance. Texts such as Pundin’s “A Foucauldian Study of Power Structures in *Fahrenheit 451*” and Joodaki’s “Supervision Without Vision: Post-Foucauldian Surveillance in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*” accuse the role of the state and its abuse of power to control society. Pundin’s article showcases the ambivalent nature of power in this text and its “possibility of subversion” (174) which is taken in this project to mean the possibility of resistive book burning as subversive power. The subversive nature of book burning occupies an important role in this thesis. Resistive book burning will be explored, although not in relation to Foucauldian concepts, in *Fahrenheit 451* as opposed to oppressive book burning imposed by the regime. The concept of resistive book burning reveals the complex nature of the act and its use as a powerful tool of resistance.

The literature referenced above helps frame the analysis of book burning and study the various meanings which this act embodies in the contexts of the novels, taking into consideration the historical circumstances of *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*. In the first chapter of this thesis, I analyze Canetti’s work and its representation of book burning, focusing on the final chapter of the novel and the scenes representing Peter Kien’s dreams. Additionally, the concept of modernity plays a significant role in the protagonist’s destructive actions and is a key element of the analysis of *Auto-da-Fé*’s book burning in the interwar years. The second chapter constitutes an analysis of *Fahrenheit 451*’s representations of book burning. The approach to book burning taken

by Bradbury is different than Canetti's. In the science-fiction novel, the act of book burning is a central theme of the narrative and is analyzed in this thesis in relation to the influence of totalitarian ideology and propaganda. The contemporary historical circumstances of the Cold War and mass culture are taken into consideration in the study of government-mandated book burning. I also analyze resistive book burning in two scenes of Bradbury's science-fiction. Although, in the two chapters, I approach *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* separately, I attempt to find common characteristics and differences between Bradbury and Canetti's literary representations of book burning in the final chapter of the thesis.

The third chapter of this thesis is a comparative study of the conclusions made in the two previous chapter in order to put the novels in conversation with each other and to compare Canetti and Bradbury's literary representations of book burning. Two articles stand out in the mention of the two novels together in relation to their representation of books: Tatjana Barazon's "Des Livres dans la Tête: La Bibliothèque Imaginaire chez Bradbury, Canetti et Joyce", and Benoît Tane's "Biblioclasme, fin du livre et fin des livres (Bradbury, Truffaut, Canetti)". Barazon and Tane approach each novel separately before comparing them. They both focus on the representation of books in relation to the human body and the human mind. Fishburn mentions both novels separately, but Barazon and Tane's articles are the only two articles which put *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* in conversation with each other. This thesis, focusing on book burning specifically, uses these articles in the third and final chapter to analyze the relationship between book burning and the mind, and more specifically memory.

All in all, the research questions mentioned above frame the various analyses of book burning and allow us to come to the conclusion that book burning is indeed a versatile and subversive act. The literary representations of book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* have a different significance as the act comes out of various historical and cultural circumstances. Book burning is revealed to be a powerful tool with the potential to destroy or to preserve the pages being consumed by the flames.

CHAPTER 2

UP IN FLAMES

2.1. Biblioclasm in Auto-da-Fé

Elias Canetti's novel, *Auto-da-Fé*, was first published in 1935 in German as *Die Blendung*. It was translated to English by C.V. Wedgwood "under the personal supervision of the author", as is mentioned in the novel, and this translated version was published in 1947. An examination of the socio-historical and cultural context of publication of the novel is important to the understanding of the novel's literary representation of book burning, which is analyzed here in relation to the narrative and to the protagonist's motivations.

It is important to establish the specific ways in which book burning is read in this chapter. This chapter argues that book burning comes as a consequence of the context from which it emerges and as a moment of liberation, but this act of cultural destruction is significant in itself and points to a number of other issues. In *Auto-da-Fé*, book burning is directly mentioned in two instances which will be closely analyzed: Peter Kien's dream and the final climactic scene depicting the immolation of the protagonist along his twenty-five thousand books. This section approaches book burning in relation to the social and cultural issues taking place in the interwar period and bases itself upon Rebecca Knuth's view of book burning as biblioclasm in *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction* (2006). Kunth defines "modern biblioclasm" as an act of cultural destruction which "occurs when books and libraries are perceived by a social group as undermining ideological goals, threatening the orthodoxy of revered doctrine, or representing a despised

establishment” (2), adding that it is “a signal that social discord has progressed to a critical point and that the foundations of moral civilization are at risk” (2-3). Knuth’s description of book burning as biblioclasm is rooted in the state of social affairs and their effects on civilization. Indeed, biblioclasm comes as a reflection and as an outcome of troubled social and cultural circumstances which are prominent issues addressed in this chapter zooming on *Auto-da-Fé* and the interwar period. Although book burning is a private and individual act in the novel, it is referred to in this thesis as biblioclasm because, as is analyzed in detail below, book burning reflects the state of modernity in the interwar years and a modern European society in crisis. The downfall of the Weimar Republic in Germany and the subsequent election of a fascist leader had serious consequences on the cultural sphere as artistic freedom gave way to censorship and a suffocation of the arts. *Auto-da-Fé* appeared in a period of transition and seems to be placed at the edge of modernity, portraying a protagonist holding on to the past.

2.1.1. The Funeral Pyre of Modernity

Published during the interwar period, *Auto-da-Fé* appears at a time of cultural and historical instability in Europe as it was published during the late interwar years and four years before the start of World War II. Europe was recovering from the destruction of the previous war while at the same time welcoming artistic innovation and scientific discoveries. However, the 1920s and the 1930s saw the rise of a number of totalitarian figures throughout Europe. Indeed, Mussolini came to power in Italy in 1922, Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany in 1933, and Franco won the Spanish civil war in 1939. Thus, European society was undergoing significant changes politically, which would naturally affect the cultural sphere and deeply trouble the modern European

subject. Placed between two devastating world wars, the novel interacts with this instability by incorporating elements of a waning modernity and rising totalitarian ideology. After the violence and conflicts engendered by World War I, and with the progressive rise of totalitarian regimes and dictatorial figures, the world found itself at a crossroads during the interwar years. In Germany, the year 1933 marked the end of the Weimar Republic, two years before the publication of *Auto-da-Fé*, and the election of Adolf Hitler as chancellor. Elias Canetti's novel situates itself between the fall of the Weimar era and the rise of Nazism, in a moment of decline and rebirth, which highly influenced not only the representation of society, but of culture as well within the fictional narrative.

The Weimar period is known for letting culture flourish freely and birthing new artistic movements. From Bauhaus architecture, Dadaism in the fine arts, and German expressionism in theater and cinema, the Weimar period encouraged artistic experimentation and discovery. Therefore, its downfall deeply affected the cultural sphere, especially seeing as it was followed by an era of censorship and restricted freedoms. In *The End of Modernism: Elias Canetti's Auto-da-Fé*, William Donahue dedicates an entire chapter to the ways in which the novel acknowledges and reacts to Weimar culture. Donahue singles out neoempiricism and neo-Kantianism as the main philosophies of the time which Canetti represents and criticizes primarily through two characters. Originally, the author wanted to give his novel the title "Kant Catches Fire" which, while it did not make it to the final version, is further proof of the argument stating that neo-Kantianism is embodied by the protagonist Peter Kien and that the character, who indeed catches fire in the last pages, is highly inspired by the philosopher's ideas. Donahue asserts in his third chapter that Peter Kien, owner of the

most impressive private library of twenty-five thousand volumes, the protagonist whose journey ends in complete destruction, is the representative of idealism and neo-Kantianism: “Kien is only Kant in his uncorroborated but grandiose claims to academic status and in his inconsequential daily habits” (98). Thus, Kien’s identity as a neo-Kantian is based on his identity as an academic and on his devotion to the intellect. In this section, I demonstrate that Kien’s neo-Kantian identity, his intellectualism, is threatened by the library, which is ironically the very thing which defines his intellectual identity. It is significant to dwell on explanations of the emergence of neo-Kantianism and the role of this philosophy in the interwar period in order to understand the downfall of Peter Kien. Donahue states that neo-Kantians viewed their ideas as “an antidote to this process of cultural disintegration” and that this philosophy represents “the last grand attempt of Western philosophy to establish a unified Weltanschauung before the rise of radical pluralism, or what we now call the postmodern condition” (99). Therefore, neo-Kantianism, embodied (sometimes satirically) by Peter Kien, represents a resistance to the death of the Weimar culture and attempts to put a stop to the slow rise of postmodernism starting in the middle of the twentieth century. If neo-Kantianism represents the old decaying world and postmodernity represents the emerging new world, then Kien, the figurative of neo-Kantian philosophy, is the last tie to the old world. His constant refusal of change and his fear of integration to the outside social world is a refusal to integrate this new world and a rejection of its values and culture. Kien isolates himself in his library and takes books as his sole and truest window to the world. Donahue writes that “neo-Kantians sought to reestablish the line of demarcation separating the *Verstandeswelt* (world of intellect) from the *Sinneswelt* (world of sensory experience), a vision that was held to be prerequisite to the expression

of Kantian autonomy of the individual” (80). Kien’s intellectualism is his tie to the modern world, but this intellectual identity is rooted in his library which will itself cross the neo-Kantian demarcation mentioned above.

Donahue goes on to specify that Canetti criticizes the dissolution “of the connection between individual and society” (81). Thus, we are presented with opposing ideas as Canetti reinforces neo-Kantian ideas through his protagonist and simultaneously criticizes the values of this philosophy, which defends the division of one’s world between the intellect and the sensory, and by denouncing the disconnection of modern society and the drawbacks of excessive individuality. However, on the other end of the spectrum, one finds postmodernity’s pluralism which is strongly opposed by Kien. The interwar period’s changing and contradictory social and cultural atmosphere is personified by the figure of the protagonist. In *Auto-da-Fé*, Canetti does not represent his vision of the changing world in black and white nor in a series of dichotomies, but he conveys the picture of a world submerged in contradictions, of a modern society in crisis. This is a result of the transitory state of the interwar years, passing from a war to another, from the Weimar Republic to the Nazi state, and witnessing the decline of modernity. As mentioned above, the neo-Kantian figure, Peter Kien, is holding on to the old world, but Canetti does not depict an idealized picture of this character. The lonely, self-absorbed, obsessive Peter Kien is both a representative and a criticism of the old world, a simultaneous longing for the neo-Kantian separation of the intellectual and sensory experiences, and a negation of it, as will be expanded upon below.

This chapter argues that the literary representation of book burning in Elias Canetti’s *Auto-da-Fé* is a commentary on the social and cultural atmosphere of the interwar period, focusing on the decline of modernity and the rise of totalitarianism.

This claim is supported by analysis of the novel in relation to the times it represents. In order to understand the significance of the act of biblioclasm in *Auto-da-Fé*, Kien's relationship to his books will be studied, along with the representation of the library itself and the reason behind its destruction. The final biblioclasm is a commentary on the social and cultural crises of the interwar years.

Peter Kien is a sinologist whose only source of stimulation in life are his academic research and his famous private library. His profession entails the academic study of Chinese history, sociology, literature, philosophy, etc. The inclusion of a protagonist whose profession is sinology is significant to the study of modernity in the novel. In "Review: Reading between Chinese Modernism and Modernity: A Methodological Reflection", Lingchei Letty Chen provides key characteristics and explanations of Chinese modernity. Chen gives the example of "Shanghai's urban culture of the 1930s and 1940s" (177) and asserts that "Western imperialism had been a primary force pushing China into the modern era" (181). An important point made by Chen which is relevant to the analysis of Peter Kien is that Chinese modernity is highly influenced by Western concepts such as Enlightenment, it is "an unattainable state" which "symbolizes a modern self-identity which the male protagonist seeks, who almost always ends up in a serious identity crisis" (179). In *Auto-da-Fé*, Kien the sinologist is undergoing an identity crisis and holding on to an "unattainable state" of modernity. The novel offers a parallelism between the China's modernity and Kien's crisis. His profession as an expert in Chinese culture and civilization is a link between his desire for prolonged modernity and the unfulfilled Chinese modernity described by Chen. This is further confirmation that Peter Kien is reaching for the "unattainable state" of modernity. His book burning and suicide are a symbol of surrender, giving up the ideals

of both Western and Chinese modernity, because himself and the library embody both cultures. The burning of the library is a refusal to live in the unknown present beyond modernity, and a reluctant acceptance of the failure of modernity to persist in the interwar context of the novel.

Canetti makes it clear from the first pages of the novel that Kien's identity and his sense of self are highly dependent upon his library: "He himself was the owner of the most important private library in the whole of this great city" (p. 11). This sentence is the first of many examples of Kien being introduced as the library owner and of him being defined by it. The role of the library, along with the fact that Kien dedicated his life to academia and sinology, showcase the importance of the intellect to the protagonist. Subsequently, the intellectual experience is an important theme in the novel and is symbolized by the library. Canetti continues the introduction of Kien by elaborating on his relationship to the library: "His passion for it, the only one which he had permitted himself during a life of austere and exacting study, moved him to take special precautions" (p.11). This passage from the novel specifies that Kien does not allow himself other passions of life, his only passion is his library. Going back to neo-Kantian principles, one would normally associate passion with the sensory experience. Canetti further describes the sensory experience, beyond the intellect, felt by Kien through his books: "Greatly daring, he glided along his shelves and softly felt the backs of his books... Ecstasy seized him, the ecstasy of joy and long-awaited consummation" (89). This passage is striking because, not only does it describe the sensory experience at the site of intellectualism, but it provides the image of the library as the site of consummation, the pinnacle of all sensory experiences. With this image, Canetti does not blur, but shatters the neo-Kantian demarcation between the intellect and the sensory.

Kien's passion, his experience of the sensory, is the library, the world of intellect. The elimination of the neo-Kantian distinction between the sensory and the intellect, or the body and the mind, conveyed through a character seen primarily as a neo-Kantian figure, is an obstacle to the survival of the old world in the face of pluralism and emerging postmodern values. Canetti describes Kien's experience of the library not solely as an intellectual experience, but as a bodily and sensory experience. In this way, Kien's neo-Kantian demarcations between body and mind, sensory and intellect, are no longer present. This further accentuates his crisis of identity as a subject striving for modernity and his displacement from society, and from now on, from his library. In sum, Kien is the representant of the old world in the narrative of the novel and his overwhelming dedication and passion for his library, the site of both sensory and intellectual experience, is the thing that negates his neo-Kantian identity. Moreover, the library has been tainted by the social world, by Therese, the very definition of anti-intellectualism and the enemy of reason. Therese is Kien's former housemaid who he married after thinking she duped him into thinking she treated books with respect and admiration. As the narrative progresses, Kien realizes that Therese is his polar opposite and is indifferent to the pursuit of intellectualism. She treats the library as a commodity and sees books as potential for revenue. Subsequently, the now impure library threatens the intellect, it is an obstacle to the survival of the old world and a threat to Kien's identity as the guardian of the values of this world.

Having established the transitional crisis of the interwar period and the underlying significance of the library as a threat and an element of discontinuity, this section studies the final act of cultural destruction, Kien's biblioclasm, as a consequence of these concepts. Canetti divided *Auto-da-Fé* into three parts, each representing Kien's

journey as his mental state regresses. Canetti's puts the mind at the center of the narrative and of Kien's journey as the "head" is referred to in all titles: "A Head Without a World" (part one), "Headless World" (part two), "The World in the Head" (part three). These titles are representative of Kien's path as he starts out as a recluse intellectual (part one) who is then thrown into a world he despises (part two) and finally himself and the library are tainted by the outside world and by society (part three). In the last chapter of the third and last part of the novel, the author depicts the final climactic scene of book burning and self-immolation. In the context of this analysis, the title "The World in the Head" is taken to refer to the state of the world in the interwar period creating a constant conflict in the head of the protagonist Peter Kien who is clinging to modernity and being pulled towards the unknown. The shifting "world" thus creates a fragmented subject torn between a waning modernity and a threatening future. Within the narrative of the novel, "The World in the Head" refers to the protagonist carrying his books within him wherever he goes, as he states "I could live in a cell, I carry my books in my head" (436). There is a veritable symbiosis between Peter Kien and his books, they live within him. Books are not just physical objects, they form Kien's mind and identity and are an inherent part of him. This explains the act of self-immolation in the last chapter of the novel because as he commits suicide, he kills every book that has ever lived within his mind and protects himself and his books from "the world" outside the head. Kien is a living embodiment of the library. The burning of the library is a destruction of the physical books, and the burning of the sinologist is a destruction of the books which live in his head through memory. Thus, the final simultaneous act of biblioclasm and self-destruction is a destruction of books in their abstract and physical form, it is the simultaneous acceptance that modernity is not

achievable in the present interwar context, and desire to protect the culture of modernity from what the future of western thought and civilization holds. This future is presented as an unknown entity, like society which Kien does not understand nor wants to integrate. To the protagonist, society represents a future he does not understand and cannot be a part of, a future which holds no place for his values, for modernity. In the final chapter, Canetti makes it clear that Peter Kien's biblioclasm is an attempt to remove his library from the present world he lives in and disapproves of: "he has taken the letters prisoner, all of them, and will not let them go again" (463). He recalls the instance of a man who was burned and left no trace behind, mirroring his desire to leave no trace of modernity and intellectualism in this world: "Earlier they burnt a man's possessions with him, a will was nowhere to be found and there was nothing left, nothing but bones" (463). Similarly, after Kien's biblioclasm, there will be nothing left of him and the library, the embodiment of himself and of his life, will be gone. In his final act of book burning, he is shut off from society as he locks himself in his library, and he closes all doors to the future in his death and the death of books, and he takes with him all remaining traces of modernity.

Furthermore, the act of biblioclasm is symbolic of the fragmented identity of the interwar period. It has been demonstrated above that the library symbolizes a move away from neo-Kantianism, an ideology of modernity, of what is called in this chapter the "old world". The burning of the library can be read as a reaction to the "undermining of ideological goals", as Knuth writes. Kien's biblioclasm is a result of the rejection of the death of the old world and a repudiation of the emergence of the postmodern in the interwar years. Moreover, Peter Kien, carrying his books within him, burns himself. As mentioned, the protagonist carries his books in his mind and is in

possession of a mental library. His act of self-immolation is thus an additional burning of the books, albeit not as physical objects. Kien's second biblioclasm is a destruction of the books within him, a burning of the ideas and philosophies which shape his identity. By destroying himself and burning the library within, Kien kills the neo-Kantian within. As was argued before, his library was no longer a safe haven of modernity, it was tainted by the outside world and by the sensory/bodily experience. But Kien's mental library was untouched, so his self-immolation and implied burning of the library within symbolizes more than a rejection of the death of modernity, it stands for a denial of what Donahue calls the "postmodern" and for a refusal to integrate the future. In a fascinating passage, Kien himself longs for a future that could resemble the past:

The future, the future, how was he ever to get into the future? Let the present be past, then it could do no more harm to him... He longed for the future, because then there would be more past in the world. The past is kind, it does no one any harm ... If we had no senses, then we might find the present endurable... He bowed before the supremacy of the past. (158).

This passage clearly conveys Kien's resentment of the interwar present and the changing state of culture and society, he longs for a prolonged state of modernity. But, as mentioned earlier, modernity is an "unattainable state" to the Chinese expert. With his biblioclasm, Kien longs for a return to the past and refuses to live in a future which will be an extension of the despised present rather than a continuation of the modern past. Book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* is a destruction of Kien's intellectual identity, mentally and physically. Donahue included "the end of modernism" in the title of his book about Canetti's work. In this thesis, I make a distinction argue for the end of modernity, taking Chen's statement as basis: "Modernism, understood as reflexive expressions through creative means in the modern lifestyle and experience, is a form of

critique of modernity” (175). Modernism is the creative expression of the contemplation of modernity. I do not refute Donahue’s argument of the end of modernism but in this thesis, I only focus on modernity and state that in *Auto-da-Fé*, Kien’s actions are a consequence of his coming to terms with the realization that modernity is declining. He strives to reach for it but the “unattainable state” has already vanished. I argue that Kien’s biblioclasm marks the death and end of modernity, and the refusal of the fragmented subject of the interwar period to integrate the uncertain future beyond modernity. In “Visions of the End of Culture: Civilization, Barbarism, and the Realm beyond Forgiveness”, Corina Stan writes that “the scenario of the end of culture” in *Auto-da-Fé* “is both a farewell to a world perceived as belonging to the past, yet to which East-Central European intellectuals are particularly sensitive since there is a sense in which they live anachronistically in a belated phase of modernity; and an indirect commentary on the contemporary world” (142). Thus, Kien’s biblioclasm is an end of culture as the modernists know it, a symbolic end of modern civilization, driven towards reason and enlightenment, and a rejection of the contemporary world by the intellectual. *Auto-da-Fé*’s book burning symbolizes the funeral pyre of modernity, of the old world, whose ideas and philosophies are already decaying and giving rise to new and emerging ways of thinking.

2.1.2. The Auto-da-fé of the Library

In the year of publication of *Auto-da-Fé*, during the interwar years preceding the second world war, Nazi ideology had already gained significant influence and popularity in Europe. The interwar era, as was mentioned before, is a period of transition, but it is also a time during which the totalitarian regimes of the Second

World War were asserting power and control. For instance, in Italy, fascism was already established since 1922 following the end of the First World War. In Germany, as mentioned in the introduction, Hitler became chancellor during the interwar years and in 1935, the same year that Canetti's novel was made available, the Nuremberg Laws were passed. According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, the Nuremberg laws "institutionalized many of the racial theories prevalent in Nazi ideology". The fact that the year of issuing of these laws coincides with the publication of the novel confirms that Nazi ideology is doubtless to have influenced the narrative of *Auto-da-Fé*. For example, Canetti clearly depicts the anti-Semitism of the time through the character of Fischerle who Donahue describes as "an icon of perverse anti-Semitic stereotyping" (2). Although the analysis of this character is not relevant to this study, it is important to point out what he stands for in the historical context of the novel. In addition, an important historical event that confirmed the prevalence of Nazi ideology during the interwar years are the Nazi book burnings. In May 1933, one of the most infamous book burnings in history took place in Bebelplatz (formerly Opernplatz). The *Cambridge University Library* details the historical book burning undertaken by the "German Student Association" in an attempt to "remove undesirable professors from their posts, to blacklist "un-German" books and to purify libraries according to the National Socialist principles". It was a public performance of censorship and ideological purification with the goal of indoctrination. The *Cambridge University Library* describes the book burnings as organized public events, a macabre celebration of cultural destruction: "students in over 20 university towns across Germany marched in torchlight parades to public book burnings. Students threw books onto bonfires, accompanied by marching bands, songs, incantations, fire oaths, speeches and ritualised

ceremonies”. In *Auto-da-Fé*, published two years after the public book burnings in Bebelplatz, Canetti depicts an instance of book burning. The difference between the real and fictional book burnings is striking at first glance, as the Nazi book burning was committed by a collective in a public ritualized performance, and Canetti’s biblioclasm is performed by a tormented individual in the privacy of his home. The historical public book burning of 1933 is ideological whereas the fictional book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* is symbolic and has opposite characteristics as it is privately performed and briefly described. The ideological and public book burning in Bebelplatz was a performance because it was advertised as the “purification” of German culture. The public and performative characteristic of the book burning points to its function as an act of propaganda, similar to the government-mandated book burnings depicted in *Fahrenheit 451*. The sinologist’s book burning seems to have the opposite characteristics because it is a consequence of his personal and internal struggles. However, some similarities arise between ideological book burning and Kien’s biblioclasm, considering the context, as mentioned above, of established oppressive regimes in Europe. This is not to claim that the biblioclasm in *Auto-da-Fé* is a reproduction of the Nazi book burnings which occurred two years prior to the novel’s publication. However, it is an attempt to extract information from the novel that might point to the influence of totalitarian leadership in Europe on the representation of book burning in Canetti’s novel.

Auto-da-Fé is the title of the English translation of the original German-language version, *Die Blendung* which translates to “the blinding”. These titles are strikingly different and the choice of the English language title not as “the blinding”, the literal translation from German, but as “auto-da-fé” is significant in regards to the act of book burning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* divides the definitions of auto-da-fé into

two categories: the historical and the figurative. In the historical section, book burning is defined as “the execution of a sentence of the Inquisition; *esp.* the public burning of a heretic”. This definition shows that auto-da-fé is a condemnation, it is a public performance of punishment, and it is reliant on the act of burning. Moreover, the reference to the Inquisition is reminiscent of the issues of coexistence in the West. Problems of religious coexistence between Christian and Muslim in Al-Andalus during the Inquisition is reflected in Canetti’s work through the depiction of diversity as a main issue. Peter Kien is the perpetrator and the victim of the auto-da-fé, being closed off to all difference and diversity in his life. In the figurative section of the definition, book burning is “An act of destroying something (*esp.* a piece of art or writing) by burning; *spec.* a burning of material considered offensive, subversive, or heretical”. Here, auto-da-fé refers to cultural destruction, which brings forth the idea of book burning. In the novel, book burning strays from the historical definition because it is a private act, not performed within the narrative but briefly described. However, Kien’s biblioclasm does resemble the auto-da-fé of the Inquisition because it is the consequence of a regime. As will be demonstrated below, book burning in the novel is related to the consequences and influence of totalitarianism and the unilateral power of a leader. In addition, book burning in the narrative embodies the figurative definition of auto-da-fé not only because it is an act of cultural destruction, but because it implies the burning of something disapproved of and rejected. It will be proved below that in the novel, book burning is the auto-da-fé of Peter Kien and of his army of books.

It has been mentioned on multiple occasions in the existing body of literature on *Auto-da-Fé* that Peter Kien acts as a leader figure to his books which are viewed as his army. For instance, in Elias Canetti’s *Auto-da-Fé: From the Antithesis of the Crowd-*

Man to the Madness of Power”, Maia describes Kien as the “prototype of the paranoid ruler” (28), “seeking an absolute supremacy of his intellect” (29), adding that he is the “prototype of the totalitarian self” (32), “a despotic ruler, using his books as an army” (35). Indeed, Canetti writes a passage which conveys these ideas of books as army and Kien as their leader:

As he paced up and down them, the shelves grew longer, the library rose up again as of old, more inviolate, more withdrawn, so that his enemies appeared all the more ridiculous. How could they have dared to quarter this living body, this whole, by closing the doors? No tortures had prevailed against it. With hands bound, tortured week after horrifying week, it had remained in very truth unconquered. A sweet air coursed once again through the reunited limbs of a single body. They rejoiced in belonging once again to each other. The body breathed, the master of the body breathed too, deeply. (89)

This paragraph carries great significance in regards to the analogy mentioned previously. The library is described as an impressive and intimidating “living body”, it is a source of power, a barricade against the “enemies”. The language employed by Canetti in this passage points to the image of the library as an army and establishes a clear demarcation between the territory of the library, “unconquered”, and the outside world of “enemies”. Furthermore, Kien is labelled as “the master of the body”, he is the leader of the paper army whose walls guard him against the outside world. The use of the word “master” suggests Kien’s total control over the library, the leader of the army of books has total control and the power of creation and destruction of his paper legion. The undefeated and united army of books protects him from the world which is a threat to his power and sovereignty.

Kien’s status as the leader of the library has been established, there remains to uncover the kind of leader he is towards his army of books. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt writes about the nature of totalitarian power:

“Totalitarianism strives not toward despotic rule over men, but toward a system in

which men are superfluous” (457). Peter Kien does not strive to rule over men as his relationship with the outside world is minimal and any interactions with it come with resentment. However, he does attempt, throughout the novel, to cut all ties with the social world. The sinologist considers that the element to his survival, to the maintaining of his power and success, is his library. Although he fails in this endeavor to cut himself off from the rest of humanity, Kien’s desire to build a life around this notion that “men are superfluous” and to focus instead on his rule and control of his library gives him the characteristics of a totalitarian leader. Arendt also elaborates on the “Leader principle” of totalitarian regimes, stating that “every functionary is not only appointed by the Leader but is his walking embodiment, and every order is supposed to emanate from this one ever present source” (374). Indeed, in the case of Canetti’s novel, the functionaries of the regime are considered to be the lively body of books, and these books are ruled and controlled by Kien. They are not only a part of his intellect, but also a part of his physical body. In the passage quoted above from *Auto-da-Fé*, Canetti equates the breathing to the body of books with the breathing of their master, Peter Kien. Without him, the paper army would be nothing but paper, it is his intellect and his control which give it the power of collectivity, of the formation of a library from this body of books. Arendt asserts that the totalitarian leader exercises “absolute monopoly of power and authority”, which applies to Kien’s behavior towards his army of books and his territorialism over his library. It would be erroneous to say that Kien is a totalitarian leader due to the absence of many key characteristics of a totalitarian regime such as the masses, propaganda, terror, etc. What this paragraph argues is that Peter Kien embodies a figure resembling a totalitarian leader, he possesses some characteristics that allow us to compare his actions to those of such a leader, mainly his

total control and power over his army of books. Kien and the library are each other's shield from the outside world, from the ignorant masses. As long as he retains total control of the army, Kien continues to behave like a totalitarian leader in his territory of books. The library is his territory as the novel begins and he is in full control of the army of books. He is the leader of the books, the figure evoking the totalitarian leaders in power during the interwar years in Europe, the most relevant in this context being Hitler. Canetti's words in the description of the library, coupled with Arendt's "leader principle", show that Kien evokes the figure of the totalitarian leader, his land being the library and his army being the books..

As the novel progresses, the power dynamic of total control crumbles and the leader, Kien, loses control of the paper army. After his marriage to Therese, Kien's status as leader of the army wanes. Therese takes control of the library, denies him access at times, and even kicks him out of the home. As a consequence, Peter Kien becomes estranged from his library, the leader is exiled from his own territory. The library lives on in his mind and intellect, but his control and authority over the physical body of books are shattered. The army of books no longer protects him from the outside world, but is invaded by it. The library, conquered by Therese, is tainted, it is not the army that Kien boasted about at the beginning of the novel. Consequentially, the characteristics of the totalitarian leader in Kien as well as the image of the books as army, have failed and resulted in exile and loss of authority. In the final chapter of *Auto-da-Fé*, Kien returns to his library and comes to terms with the loss of control over the books: "A letter detaches itself from the first line and hits him a blow on the ear... It hurts. Strike him! Strike him! Another. And another. A footnote kicks him. More and more. He totters. Lines and whole pages come clattering on to him. They shake and beat

him, they worry him, they toss him about among themselves. Blood, Let me go!” (463). Upon his final return to the library, Kien finds himself in a bloody battle with his books. Every single element of the book, from lines and footnotes to individual letters, are rejecting the presence of Kien in his former territory. The leader, having lost all authority and legitimacy over the library, is being beaten by his former army. But Kien fights back: “With formidable strength he grasps the book and snaps it to. So, he has taken the letters prisoner, all of them, and will not let them go again. Never!” (463). Determined not to give up his complete power and dominion over the library, Kien destroys the books and himself, so as not to let the library exist as a free entity. This book burning, as a result of the library “undermining the ideological goals” of the leader, is regarded here as a biblioclasm. The failure of the figure evoking the totalitarian leader to establish power and control over the figurative army ends in the burning of both entities, the ruler and the army.

Book burning is once again symptomatic of the larger socio-political circumstances of the times, specifically the interwar years. This period saw the rise of Nazism and totalitarian regimes in Europe, before they seized total control and exercised complete dominion. In this context, Kien’s biblioclasm can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the burning of the books demonstrates the failure of the almost-totalitarian leader of books and the fragility of such regimes. Most interestingly, Canetti’s use of cultural destruction, the tool of propaganda of totalitarian regimes (for example, Nazi book burnings of 1933), to showcase the failure of such regimes and their leader, is subversive and proves the fragility of such power structures. The auto-da-fé that is book burning is originally a totalitarian tool of punishment but is used to denounce this very regime. Secondly, the fact that books are portrayed as an army

points to the fact that censorship and the control of cultural production was already imminent. The concepts of culture and army are normally different and not associated with each other. An army is an organized body, strict and regimental; whereas culture is endless, beyond limits, creative and open. Canetti restricts culture to the image of a militarized and robotically organized structure of government. Therefore, book burning, as the auto-da-fé of culture, is a message that censored and restricted culture cannot thrive. Circling back to the notion of book burning as auto-da-fé, it is the execution by fire of the figure resembling the totalitarian leader, and the burning of culture as a denunciation of any attempts to restrict culture.

2.2. Burning for Liberation

Book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* is significant on a cultural scale in regards to the context of the interwar years because it is represented as an expression of the troubles and conflicts of the time. Peter Kien's biblioclasm is additionally significant when analyzed in relation to the protagonist individually and his destruction of the thing he values the most, his library. It has been mentioned that book burning appears in the final chapter of the novel as the climactic act of suicide and destruction. Book burning is also depicted in the seventh chapter of the novel, titled "Mobilization", in a scene recounting Kien's dreadful dream. These two key events in the novel are studied in parallel within the framework of surrealism. The surrealist artistic and literary movement is known for its engagement with the subconscious, reality, desire, etc. As is confirmed in *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, the surrealist movement interacts with psychoanalysis, as both movements thrived in the interwar years. Jean-Michel Rabaté, in *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, confirms surrealism's "Freudian origins" (46) while making the important clarification that surrealism moved away from psychoanalysis as it disapproves of the

separation of dreams and reality, described as “the trap of dualism” (52). Similarly, Canetti engages with Freudian concepts according to Donahue who provides a thorough analysis of the novel in relation to Freudian concepts. Donahue states that “psychoanalysis makes its appearance in *Auto-da-Fé* as a popular but fatally flawed brand of blindness to a world that will not be ignored.” (152). Thus, *Auto-da-Fé* and surrealism both engage with psychoanalysis in a critical way as an significant movement of the interwar period. Most importantly, what joins the novel and the surrealist movement is the rejection of the psychoanalytical “the trap of dualism” through the representation of reality and dreams as a continuum. In this section, book burning is revealed to be an essential element of this representation This section focuses on the depiction of surrealist elements in Canetti’s novel in order to understand the significance of book burning within *Auto-da-Fé* and within the surrealist movement.

2.2.1. Dreams and Reality, United in the Flames

The comparison is grounded in the framework of surrealism. Although Canetti’s *Auto-da-Fé* is not labeled here as a surrealist work, it does offer elements of surrealism and scenes that strikingly evoke the twentieth century movement. The incorporation of surrealist components in Canetti’s work is not surprising as the movement gained popularity and recognition in the interwar years. The specific elements that link *Auto-da-Fé* to surrealism are found in the dream sequence (p.39-41) in part one and the final chapter (p. 457-464) in part three. Primarily, the common theme in both sequences of the novel is book burning. The key principles of the surrealist movement are “the philosophies of the dream”, explained by Georges Sebbag in a chapter of *Surrealism: Key Concepts*. Sebbag states that, in surrealism, “the dream and the waking state are

two communicating vessels” (170). Indeed, there is not only a connection between dreams and reality, but a continuity. In the same book, Jean-Michel Rabaté refers to Breton, writing that “the main axiom is that reality is a single undivided continuum: dreams belong to it and keep a productive interaction with everyday life” (53). Firstly, the continuum between dream and reality is clear in *Auto-da-Fé* in the dream sequence, as Canetti abruptly describes Kien’s passage from the conscious to the unconscious state. The author ends a paragraph writing “I cannot sit by her all the time she is reading” and starts the next one with “That night he saw a man standing, fast bound, on the terrace of a temple,…” (39). There is no transition from Kien’s alertness to his sleep state. Canetti does not provide any indication of a switch, until the dream state is made clear through the descriptions later in the passage. This lack of transition is symptomatic of the surrealist dream/reality continuum. In surrealist fashion, Canetti blurs the distinction between reality and dream, between the conscious and unconscious states: Kien’s dream is a part of his reality, and vice versa.

Secondly, the events of the dream and of the final chapter further support the claim of surrealist influence in Canetti’s work. Elaborating on the surrealist “philosophies of the dream”, Sebbag adds that “the dream does not remind us of the past but of the future” (170). In the novel, the sequence of book burning in the dream (part one) appears before Kien’s biblioclasm (part three). The main element that ties these two passages together is the representation of book burning, the final scene of book burning seems to be a manifestation of the dream’s book burning into reality. The book burning of the dream reminds him of his destructive actions in the future, entangling dream and reality. In both passages, the books are portrayed as helpless in the flames, victims of the fire, whereas Kien is meant to be their savior: in the dream: “He must run if he was

to save them alive” (39), “How can I rescue the books!”, “it endured a martyr’s death” (40); and in the final scene: “Then he heard the despairing cries; they were the books screaming” (461). Another similarity in the portrayal of book burning in the different, but connected, scenes is the image of the flames: in the dream, Canetti writes “Kien stretched out his arms to the books, now blazing to heaven” (39), “He saw a book growing in every direction at once until it filled the sky and the earth and the whole space to the very horizon” (40); and in the final chapter, he depicts the flames as follows: “he was aware of a reddish glow. Hesitantly it spread across the black gaping heavens” (461). Both of these, extracted from dream and reality, portray the flames of biblioclasm in a grandiose manner, as streaks of fire reaching the sky, piercing through heaven. The image of heaven in both cases suggest a move beyond physicality, beyond the dichotomies of the dreams and reality, and serve to establish book burning as a manifestation of the surrealist in Canetti’s novel. Therefore, the similarity in the portrayal of book burning in the dream/reality continuum further accentuates the surrealist characteristic given to the destructive act. Book burning is the element which ties dreams and reality and allows the surrealist continuum to exist in the novel. Canetti blurs the transitions and distinctions between the states of consciousness, thereby achieving a unification between them, dreams and reality exist within each other. The burning books are the common thread between these sequences, and it is hard to distinguish Kien’s reality from his dreams. To Kien, book burning exists in all planes of consciousness, it is in dreams just as it is in reality, book burning is the main surrealist element in Canetti’s work.

2.2.2. The Surrealism of Book Burning

The final chapter of *Auto-da-Fé* depicts two instances of book burning: the burning of the library of the Theresanium, as witnessed by Kien, and the actual biblioclasm committed by the protagonist. The passages from this chapter quoted in the previous paragraph are from Kien's perspective of the events at the Theresanium. In contrast, Canetti's does not provide a description of the flames nor the book burning committed by Kien. In the final paragraph of the novel, Canetti details Kien's actions and recounts the steps of his final acts, but leaves out any description of the burning of the most important private library, which has been glorified and praised throughout the novel. The entire novel and narrative have been leading up to this undescribed moment. The paradox of this biblioclasm is that it is climactic in what it represents, which is the complete destruction of a life, and anti-climactic in the lack of descriptive representation assigned to it. Accordingly, book burning can be characterized as the supreme point of *Auto-da-Fé*, referring to the surrealist movement. In *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, Richardson and Fijalkowski expand on this notion, based on Breton's ideas, writing that the sublime point (or supreme point) is "the location at which 'life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be the perceived as contradictions'" (248). They add that "the surrealists never sought to realize the Sublime Point" (254), meaning that they did not attempt to represent it because it is a concept beyond simple representation. Therefore, the lack of descriptive representation of book burning in Kien's biblioclasm points to its interpretation as the surrealist sublime/supreme point of the novel. Another criterion that makes book burning the supreme point is the cancellation of contradictions mentioned in Breton's definition above. Before the books

are set aflame, Canetti provides this description: “The letters rattle inside the book. They are prisoners, they can’t come out”, “Powerless, the letters are knocking to be let out” (463). The letters, prisoners of books and their physicality, find freedom in their destruction. The death of books is equated to the freedom of a new life beyond the prison of physicality in the moment of book burning, the supreme point. Richardson and Fijalkowski accurately describe this surrealist concept:

This ‘point’ is where they cease to function as oppositions, where opposition itself loses its strength. It has no material or any other sort of ‘reality’, since it is reality itself. It is a ‘point of the mind’ (or the spirit) that dissolves in the moment of its realization, since at that moment there will no longer be a ‘mind’ at all, for it will have consumed itself in universal radiance. (248)

The supreme point does not abolish the distinction between life and death, between the physical and the intangible, but moves beyond these oppositions. It gives the death of something physical an immaterial life, through the “universal radiance” of the flames. Lastly, Peter Kien considers book burning to be his revenge against his brother and against his experience of the world to which he does not belong: “He threatens them with death by fire. That is how he will avenge himself on all his enemies!”, “George will get no books. And the police won’t get him.” (463). In death through book burning, Kien will remain in possession and in control of his library. The destruction of books leads to unity in the fire, between Kien and his library. The last lines of the novel state: “When the flames reached him at last, he laughed out loud, louder than he had laughed in all his life” (464). Kien’s last act in the narrative is a laugh, which is accentuated in its loudness. This is extremely uncharacteristic of the intellectual and of his actions throughout the novel. In fact, the laughing shows that Kien has been liberated in death and in destruction, through book burning. This laugh comes across as a sigh of relief, not as a cliché laugh of revenge. Kien finds freedom in

the consummation of his body and the body of books by the flames. He is isolated from the world as he immolates his life, but finds togetherness in with the books in the fire. This entangling of contradictions in a single moment is again demonstrative of the surrealist sublime point. Book burning is the surrealist moment in *Auto-da-Fé*, it is the sublime/supreme point which melts dream into reality, the desired destruction of Kien and his library, it surpasses the physical and liberates the self.

The theme of blindness, evoked in the original German title *Die Blendung*, is recurrent throughout the narrative and is something that the protagonist is deeply concerned with. Canetti offers two interesting interventions on blindness by the protagonist. Firstly, Kien addresses the subject at the beginning of the novel: “Kien took a private vow that if he should ever be threatened by blindness, he would die of his own free will” (p. 22). He goes on to take pity upon the blind because they do not have to opportunity to read. Thus, at the center of this theme of blindness is the concept of reading and of books. Kien states that he would commit suicide if blindness came knocking on his door, meaning if his ability to read or to be connected to his books was ever in danger. The second passage on the subject comes later in the novel:

Blindness is a weapon against time and space; our being is one vast blindness, save only for that little circle which our mean intelligence – mean in its nature and in its scope – can illuminate. The dominating principle of the universe is blindness. It makes possible juxtapositions which would be impossible if the objects could see each other. It permits the truncation of time when time is unendurable. Time is a continuum whence there is one escape only. By closing the eyes to it from time to time, it is possible to splinter it into those fragments with which alone we are familiar.

Kien had not discovered blindness, he only made use of it: a natural possibility by which the seeing live. (p. 71)

There is a shift in the perception of blindness. At first, blindness was taken in its literal sense, as a disappearance of sight and a threat to the intellectual and his reading. In the second passage, blindness is figurative, it is not the absence of sight, but the

voluntary shutting of the eyes in order to escape reality. The last sentence proves that blindness allows for a perspective to emerge, a perspective which is different from reality and whose sole purpose is to escape from it. The moment of the blinding is both an undesired threat to books and libraries, and an escape from reality for Kien to join the mental library he formed in his mind when he was kicked out of the physical one. In the last chapter, book burning is the blinding: Kien's biblioclasm threatens the library as it goes up in flames, it is also an escape from reality for Kien and his mental library. The blinding fire suggests freedom, that the destruction of books and of the self could result in the liberation of culture and of the self. In this way, the claim that book burning is *die blendung* adds to the argument of book burning as the surrealist sublime point because once again, the moment of destruction is a moment of contradictions molten together to form the perfect fire.

The blinding brightness of the flames creates this moment characterized as the sublime point and surpasses all contradictions by providing ultimate freedom in destruction.

Book burning takes on a multitude of meanings in *Auto-da-Fé*. It is principally a response to the transitional nature of the interwar years during which the novel was published. The interwar period, with the decline of modernity and the rise to power of the totalitarian regime in Germany, is a primary influence on Canetti's representation of book burning. Biblioclasm marks the end of modernity and the denunciation of rising totalitarianism. Book burning is also a moment of contradictions, the surrealist point of the novel in which the fire of Kien's dream incorporates his reality and liberates the self. In its representation of the auto-da-fé of culture, Canetti's novel speaks out against the censorship of culture, which is a fundamental topic in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*.

CHAPTER 3

FIGHTING CULTURE WITH FIRE

3.1. Libricide in *Fahrenheit 451*

Ray Bradbury's dystopian science fiction novel *Fahrenheit 451* was published in 1953 and depicts book burning as a government-ordered act of destruction done by firemen whose job is to start fires rather than extinguish them. The title, referring to the temperature at which books burn, directly invokes the subject of book burning and puts it at the forefront of the narrative. The act of book burning is a governmental tool in the dystopian world of *Fahrenheit 451* and it is normalized and encouraged by society. Bradbury's representation of book burning touches upon a number of issues which are prominent in the socio-historical context of the 1950s. The rise and fall of totalitarian regimes, the imminent nuclear threat, and the emergence of mass culture and mass consumption, are some historical circumstances from the middle of the twentieth century to take into consideration when studying the representation of book burning in *Fahrenheit 451*.

In Bradbury's novel, book burning is a collective, organized and public act of cultural destruction. It is an implementation of the government's ideology. Captain Beatty is the authoritative figure, representative of the government and its ideology, the safekeeper of oppressive book burning. He says: "A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon"(56), "Burn all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean" (57). Beatty justifies the burning of books by stating the inherent danger of books. The flames of their destruction are purifying society, the destruction he talks about is total. It is not necessary to destroy a few books, firemen

must “burn everything” and strive for total destruction, the obliteration of books. This is the government’s ideology on book burning expressed through the character of Captain Beatty.

In *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*, Rebecca Knuth defines libricide as “the regime-sponsored, ideologically driven destruction of books and libraries” (5) which “is a solution that employs violence and compromises human rights in serving a collective good that is narrowly defined by ideology” (9). In *Fahrenheit 451*, libricide serves the ideological purpose stated by Captain Beatty: “Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against” (55-56). The ideology which motivates libricide is to make all humans equal in their ignorance and subsequent bliss by eradicating books. Beatty further explains himself: “We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought” (59). According to this ideology, if the conflicting ideas engendered by books make the population confused, then thinking must be eradicated through the destruction of books. This is the ideology which justifies libricide in this novel according to Beatty, the “collective good” mentioned by Knuth is an erasure of knowledge and culture in order to attain “happiness”. The happiness that comes as a result of this ideologically driven book burning is ignorance, passivity, the absence of intellectualism and ideological conflicts and debate. Libricide results in a society which is numb to reality and unaware of the complexity of life. Knuth details the characteristics of libricide beyond ideology and writes about the connection between books and human identity. Knuth states that a community is defined by its culture and

knowledge production: “a living, developing community is inseparable from its records... destruction of these records reduces cultural viability and influences retrogression” (2). If society’s identity and prosperity is reliant on cultural records, then the destruction of these records by libricide leads to a fragmented collective and represents an attack on society itself.

Knuth goes on to write that “Libricide, in fact, shares the same theoretical universe as genocide, government-authorized mass murder that is the most horrific aspect of twentieth-century political history” (6). The connection between twentieth-century genocide and libricide is especially relevant in relation to *Fahrenheit 451*’s historical context. Published after the Second World War, the novel is a response to the atrocities committed by totalitarian regimes. In “The Flight from the Good Life: *Fahrenheit 451* in the context of Postwar American Dystopias”, David Seed confirms the influence of historical events on the narrative, asserting that Bradbury “confirmed that the main burnings he had in mind were those which took place in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany” (237). I can therefore argue with certainty that the book burnings in the novel are libricide and that they have a strong connection to genocide, with the author’s reference to Nazi Germany evoking the censorship and destruction of unwanted ideas by a totalitarian government. In addition to genocide providing a theoretical base for the understanding of libricide, Knuth adds that “kinship between books and humans provides a theoretical framework for libricide” (5). In sum, libricide is primarily connected to two concepts: genocide and the relationship between books and humans. Books and literature form a community’s identity and build collective knowledge within a society. Libricide, the mass murder of books and ideas, is thus the obliteration of society’s identity and the erasure of collective knowledge. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the

ideological libricide ordered by the government instills a false sense of happiness to a society whose identity and cultural memory have been burned with the pages of the books. In this sense, I trace a connection between libricide and genocide in Bradbury's novel as the ideological burning of books causes, not the mass killing of people, but the mass destruction of society's identity and cultural knowledge. Culture and knowledge having been thrown into the fire, humans find themselves with a fragmented identity. Society is comfortable in its passivity and in the reality that has been imposed upon it as a result of the government-ordered libricide.

The context in which *Fahrenheit 451* is situated does not draw from one overarching historical event, but from a number of significant happenings. This is made evident in the narrative of the novel, and in the meaning that is to be unpacked in Bradbury's representation of book burning. It is impossible to write about libricide without referring to the Second World War. This war is considered in this thesis to constitute the historical background against which *Fahrenheit 451* was written. Additionally, the novel is directly linked to the Cold War, which constitutes its present and its reality. The past and present, representing key historical circumstances, are analyzed in Bradbury's text in direct relation to the representation of libricide.

3.1.1. The Fire of Totalitarianism

As mentioned above, Bradbury explicitly stated the important influence that Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia had on the writing of *Fahrenheit 451*. In *Burning Books*, Matthew Fishburn studies the history of book burning stressing on events of the twentieth century. Fishburn reports that the Soviet Union underwent a loss of "between 100 million and 200 million books destroyed through combined military and ideological

attacks” (125), and that the Nazi ideology “relied on a complete dismantling of the cultural edifice: universities, archives, museums, the press, right down to privately owned bookstores, were all victims of the operational imperatives of the new German space” (121). Libricide falls under the rubric of this cultural dismantling both in Soviet Union and in Germany as well as in the fictional world of *Fahrenheit 451*.

Having established these intentional similarities, it is significant to highlight the characteristics that make the government of *Fahrenheit 451* a totalitarian authority and the way the ruling authority uses libricide as an oppressive totalitarian tool. I draw on Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to situate the novel within the framework of totalitarianism and analyze the act of book burning accordingly. Arendt establishes loyalty and isolation as two key characteristics of the masses living under totalitarian rule (323-324). In Bradbury’s dystopia, society is indeed depicted as a mass of people living in subjugation and in isolation. Mildred Montag, the protagonist’s wife, is the archetype of what Arendt calls the “mass man” whose loyalty, according to Arendt, “can be expected only from the completely isolated human being” (323). Mildred’s isolation is not only defined by her intellectual emptiness and lack of communication with the protagonist Guy Montag, but by the literal walls which captivate her day and night: “Well, wasn’t there a wall between him and Mildred, when you came down to it? Literally not just one wall but, so far, three!” (41). In this passage, Guy Montag refers to the televised walls in their household which are creating a literal and figurative separation between him and his wife. Mildred is isolated from her spouse emotionally as well: “How do you get so empty? He wondered” (41). Montag comes to the realization that his wife is lost in the media she consumes from the televised walls every day, she is isolated within them, and only loyal to “the family” represented on

television. She gives Montag up to the authorities after having discovered the books he had hidden in their house: “‘Was it my wife turned in the alarm?’ Beatty nodded” (111). After giving Montag up, knowing he would probably be killed by the firemen, she flees in front of him without a look: “Mildred came down the steps, running, one suitcase held with a dreamlike clenching rigidity in her fist” (108). Mildred’s actions showcase her disloyalty to Montag but prove her complete loyalty and allegiance to the government. Her mental and physical isolation, along with her loyalty to the authorities and their ideology, make Mildred Bradbury’s example of the mass-man and support the argument that the government in *Fahrenheit 451* is a totalitarian one. Book burning comes in as a tool through which the totalitarian authority is able to isolate its population and acquire such loyalty. Arendt states that “Total loyalty is possible only when fidelity is emptied of all concrete content, from which changes of mind might naturally arise” (324). Thus, loyalty and isolation, which are the defining features of a society ruled by the totalitarian state, are achieved through book burning, the elimination of anything that might contradict the ruling totalitarian ideology.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, this is done through the destruction of books by fire. By way of libricide, the government in the novel eliminates all possibility of independent thinking with the pretense of achieving happiness for all. The act of thinking is seen as shocking and forbidden by the characters: “The man’s *thinking!*” (17), “‘They want to know what I do with all my time. I tell them that sometimes I just sit and *think*. But I won’t tell them what.’” (20). Captain Beatty confirms this totalitarian strategy by saying “If you don’t want a man unhappy politically, don’t give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him, one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war” (58). The elimination of independent thought results in the formation of

uniform and obedient masses. In order to eliminate freedom of thought and opinion, the totalitarian government eliminates books, which are essential triggers of thought and intellectualism. Arendt confirms the threat that culture poses to totalitarian movements: “Intellectual, spiritual and artistic initiative is (as) dangerous to totalitarianism ... more dangerous than mere political opposition. Total domination does not allow for free initiative in any field of life, for any activity that is not entirely predictable” (339). Books pose a threat to the totalitarian ideology in *Fahrenheit 451* and must be burned in their entirety. This ultimately leads to the blissfully ignorant, loyal, and isolated mass man. The role of the firemen, the book burners, is essential to the maintaining of “happiness” and the control of the mass man in the novel. Beatty calls the firemen the “Happiness Boys” and adds “I don’t think you realize how important *you* are, *we* are, to our happy world as it stands now” (59). The firemen are a governmental organization and their role is to ensure that the totalitarian ideology is being followed in society by destroying anything that might threaten this ideology, i.e. by burning books. Libricide is an ideological tool, a mass murder of books, used to maintain a false sense of happiness, to create a society which finds quietude in its ignorance.

Propaganda is an ideological tool used by totalitarian regimes to subjugate the masses. The *Holocaust Encyclopedia* outlines the Nazi regime’s use of propaganda to establish and maintain power, highlighting the regime’s use of “sophisticated advertising techniques and the most current technology of the time to spread their messages” as well as Hitler’s creation of a “Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda to shape German public opinion and behavior”. There is a parallelism between the Nazi regime’s propaganda techniques and those used by the ruling authority in *Fahrenheit 451*. Firstly, the use of “technology” and “advertising

techniques” translates in the novel as the incorporation of televised walls within each home and the collective addiction of society to intrusive and interactive programs. According to Arendt, totalitarian movements “conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself” and “shut the masses off from the real world” (353). In the novel, the government achieves this through propaganda as the “lying world” is constantly recreated within the televised walls and safeguarded by the firemen. This world is also maintained through censorship and cultural destruction. Libricide eliminates the possibility of free thinking and the desire to yearn for intellectualism and something beyond the monitored television programs. Book burning is thus a tool of propaganda in the totalitarian regime and the successful indoctrination through “technology”, which was used in Nazi Germany as propaganda films such as *The Eternal Jew* (1940), is highly reliant on the eradication of books from society. Secondly, the Nazi ruler’s addition of a ministry dedicated to propaganda and to ensuring the spread of the totalitarian ideology resembles Bradbury’s governmental branch of firemen in the novel. Their role as an institutionalized organization is to prevent and prohibit the use of books which are the enemies of the totalitarian ideology in the narrative and to “shape” behavior. The function of book burning within the totalitarian regime is further confirmed by the dynamic between propaganda and this act of cultural destruction. I argue that, in *Fahrenheit 451*, institutionalized book burning and the use of technology are two propaganda tools which are highly reliant upon each other to achieve the successful indoctrination of society. Institutionalized book burning allows for nation-wide censorship and the creation of the isolated and loyal mass man. Technology and television allow for the broadcasting of propaganda and government-approved content

through the media which leads to further isolation of the individual between the televised walls. Together, book burning and technology, both enabling totalitarian ideology and functioning as tools of propaganda, allow for the complete and successful indoctrination of society in Bradbury's novel. As mentioned above, Mildred represents the epitome of the mass man and it is now clear how totalitarian propaganda succeeded in her indoctrination and in shaping her mind and opinion. Her obsession with the television programs, coupled with her belief in the necessity of burning book at all costs, even at the cost of losing her husband, show that propaganda, book burning and television, succeeded in distancing her from reality and making her believe in the totalitarian narrative.

Arendt stresses on the importance of propaganda in totalitarian regimes, especially in Nazism, and provides an important example: "The Nazis have proved that one can lead a whole people into war with the slogan 'or else we shall go down'" (348). It is made evident through this sentence that fear mongering plays a significant role in totalitarian propaganda. Accordingly, book burning, which has been established as a totalitarian tool of propaganda, also plays a significant role in the government's use of fear tactics. Two key factors which give book burning the fear-function of totalitarian propaganda are the narrative it is given and the performance of the act. The narrative given to book burning is similar to Arendt's quote of Nazi propaganda mentioned above. To paraphrase, it argues that the regime ensures survival and prevents the fall of society. In *Fahrenheit 451*, institutionalized book burning is not only undertaken for the false happiness of the masses, but also to redirect society and set it on the right path of simple-mindedness. Captain Beatty talks about the negative consequences of reading books and pursuing intellectualism and expresses the doctrine's opinion on books

saying “All of them running about, putting out the stars and extinguishing the sun. You come away lost.” (59). Books are believed to disorient and unnecessarily confuse the reader, and their destruction thus prevents any feelings of confusion. Not only is society in the novel taught to resent the act of thinking, but they are taught to fear books and to resent any thought that might puzzle them and perturb the status quo. This plays into the afore-mentioned fear-mongering used by totalitarianism to subdue the mass, book burning’s function as a tool of propaganda is further strengthened by this aspect of terror and by instilling the fear of books. Arendt highlights propaganda and terror as two instrumental tools: “Propaganda (...) is one, and possibly the most important, instrument of totalitarianism for dealing with the nontotalitarian world; terror, on the contrary, is the very essence of its form of government” (344). Thus, I argue that book burning falls under the rubric of terror because it serves as a tool of propaganda while being the “essence” of the totalitarian ideology in the novel.

Additionally, the performance of book burning plays a significant part in its characterization as propaganda and its characterization as an instrument of terror. Bradbury portrays book burning as a public and ritualized act done by an institutionalized organization with special gear and material. Book burning is not only an act but a performance carefully orchestrated to instill fear. Bradbury begins the novel by describing book burning in a theatrical way: “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”, “a gorging fire that burned the evening sky red and yellow and black”, “the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch” (1). The first passage of the book describes the fire in a succession of images and allegories, it heightens the experience. The fire becomes an experience to the reader, it is a

melancholic show which allows us to characterize this first act of book burning as a performance in its representation. Then, Bradbury describes the firemen's uniforms: "the salamander on his arm and the phoenix-disc on his chest" (4). Both the salamander and the phoenix are part of folkloric stories about fires which gives the firemen an aura of greatness in the eyes of society. The association of firemen with these symbolic images give them power and enhances their image as guardians of "happiness". For this reason, they are feared and seen as an authority. The external image of the firemen is significant in the consideration of their actions of book burning as terror. Moreover, the dystopia represents book burning as a ritual: "You were simply cleaning up. Janitorial work, essentially. Everything to its proper place. Quick with the kerosene! Who's got a match!", "This woman was spoiling the ritual" (34). The ritualization of book burning gives it a feature of sacredness which adds to the element of terror and makes disobedience more feared and unwanted. Finally, Bradbury portrays the performance of book burning as a public act, a show of strength: "Always at night the alarm comes. Never by day! Is it because fire is prettier by night? More spectacle, a better show?" (36), "People ran out of house all down the street" (37). The experience of book burning can be conceived as aesthetic to the spectators, it is mesmerizing to look at and terrifying to think about. The aesthetic beauty of book burning distances the spectators from the experience and its grandiosity adds to the element of fear instilled in people as they watch this great show of force and are reminded that it could happen to them at any time. All in all, the performance of book burning consists of its theatricality, highlighted through description and the use of words such as "spectacle" and "show", the heavily symbolized apparel of firemen, its ritualization and its public performance. The message of terror which the government is sending to its people through book burning

is possible primarily because of the performative nature of book burning. If the books were taken by the government and being burned in private, it would remove all function of propaganda and terror from the act. In this case, the significance of book burning would drastically change, being denied its theatrical performance. By putting on a show as they set the books on fire, the authorities are giving more significance to the act of book burning and provoking feelings of terror and dread in the spectators. I see the performative character of book burning as a confirmation of its role as a tool of propaganda and most importantly, as a way for the government to instill totalitarian terror. These elements of representation serve to prove that the act of book burning in *Fahrenheit 451* goes further than propaganda and embodies totalitarian terror. The novel represents libricide as terror in two fundamental ways: firstly, through the fear of books themselves through propaganda and indoctrination; secondly, through the performance and theatricality of book burning which makes it an act to be feared and avoided by members of society. *Fahrenheit 451* is thus heavily influenced by the troubled past of oppressive political rule in Europe, notably by twentieth-century totalitarianism, in its representation of book burning. Furthermore, the contemporary historical circumstances in which the book was published holds a great influence on its depiction of libricide.

3.1.2. The Heightened Reality of the Cold War Years

Fahrenheit 451 was published at a time of turmoil in the United States as the Cold War came to dominate the political and cultural fields as a result of an escalation of tension with the Soviet Union. The cultural atmosphere of the United States was heavily influenced by the political circumstances of the Cold War. Indeed,

governmental efforts of censorship and supervision had a significant impact on the cinematic and literary fields. Much like the impact of totalitarianism on the novel, the influence of the Cold War is noticeable within the narrative of book burning and atomic threat in Bradbury's work. *Fahrenheit 451* being a science-fiction novel is a notable fact primarily because of the rise of science-fiction and the growing interest in the genre during a time of political uncertainty and technological advancements. In "Review: The Cold War and SF", Leerom Medovoi expands upon the role of science-fiction as a response to the socio-political climate. The genre is associated with the looming atomic threat and the struggle to come to terms with what Shippey calls, in "The Cold War in Science Fiction, 1940-1960", the "possibility of nuclear extinction" (211). Medovoi further contextualizes the anxieties of American society:

The 1950s, for example, were also marked by the widescale suburbanization and corporatization of everyday life. In that decade, then, the hand-wringing over the term "conformity" alluded not only to the feared evils of Soviet totalitarianism but also to a perceived loss of American individualism at the hands of the new forms of mass standardization. These various anxieties clearly interacted with one another. (516)

Bradbury introduces these American anxieties in his dystopia as he presents a world in which conformity rules over a disappearing American individualism. The author portrays American individualism as weakened because society is stripped from cultural freedom, which is an essential component of individualism. Bradbury uses book burning in the science-fiction narrative as a primary tool to express the anxieties of Cold War American society. He conveys the image of weakened American individualism during the Cold War through the depiction of censorship and restricted freedoms. In the narrative of *Fahrenheit 451*, the nation-wide destruction of books and libraries was followed by the growing interest, which turned into an obsession with Mildred, with television programs. In *Fahrenheit 451*, society is both conformist and

anti-individualistic, representing the fears and anxieties of American society in the 1950s. These two characteristics are negated through the character of Professor Faber. His inability to conform to the world as it is, devoid of books and ideas, lead him to a life of exile and loneliness. Faber's refusal to accept book burning as a standard institutionalized practice makes him an outcast, an anti-conformist (not in his actions), unable to integrate society. However, he is not a revolutionary because he hides his individualism and does not speak up for his beliefs. Faber describes his journey: "I'm one of the innocents who could have spoken up and out when no one would listen to the 'guilty', but I did not speak and thus became guilty myself. And when finally they set the structure to burn the books, using the firemen, I grunted a few times and subsided, for there were no others grunting or yelling with me, by then." (78). Faber provides two notions of the guilty citizen: the first refers to the people who are 'guilty', in the eyes of the government, of having and reading books. The use of quotation marks for this version of guilt demonstrates that this is not the real meaning intended by the use of this word. The second mention of guilt in the passage above is done without quotation marks and is used by Faber to refer to himself, guilty of his silence, of his conformity. In this subtle way, Faber demonstrates that conformity to the current state of society and acceptance of book burning equates guilt. Faber is guilty of not fighting against book burning and is thus guilty of conformity and anti-individualism. Moreover, book burning itself leads to conformity in the lack of thought and effaces any remaining individualism in society. The whole nation, having accepted libricide as a necessity, is guilty of conformity and anti-individualism. In "The Flight from the Good Life: *Fahrenheit 451* in the Context of Postwar American Dystopias", David Seed touches upon the anxieties studied here and writes about "an abiding fear which runs through

American dystopian fiction of the 1950s that individuals will lose their identity and become the two-dimensional stereotypes” (225). This falls in line with what I have demonstrated in this section about the fear of conformity and the guilt resulting from an acceptance of cultural destruction. The fears of conformity and of loss of individualism, characteristic of science-fiction and dystopia, are brought to life in Bradbury’s work through the representation of government-mandated libricide. Thus, book burning brings out the anxieties of Cold War American society and grounds the novel in dystopian science-fiction as it causes complete societal conformity and threatens American individualism.

McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare were defining aspects of the Cold War period in the 1950s. In “McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare”, Landon R. Y. Storrs introduces the two historical events: “The Red Scare refers to the anticommunist fervor that permeated American politics, society and culture from the late 1940s to the 1950s, during the opening phases of the Cold War with the Soviet Union”, this phenomenon came to be labeled as McCarthyism which “remains an apt label for the demagogic tactic of undermining political opponents by making unsubstantiated attacks on their loyalty to the United States” (2). The Red Scare and McCarthyism denote a period of state control in regards to soft power as multiple Hollywood personalities were blacklisted for having been accused of having ties with the communist party and, according to Storrs, “ten directors and screenwriters spent six months in prison. For more than a decade beyond that, they were blacklisted by Hollywood employers.” (8). The arts were targeted in what went beyond an attempt at censorship and became veritable punishments by the state on the accused artists. According to Seed, “the situation in the United States was serious enough for the American Library Association

to issue a manifesto in 1953, the same year that Bradbury's novel was published, which proclaimed that "the freedom to read is essential to our democracy" and which set out to protect exactly those rights which have disappeared in *Fahrenheit 451*." (237). The influence of this period on the novel and the part it plays within the narrative is undeniable. The censorship present in both reality and fiction is ordered by the government and hits the cultural field which is considered to have a strong effect on political and social life. The Hollywood blacklist of the Second Red Scare is similar to the endless list of authors whose works are thrown into the flames in Bradbury's novel, "the wall with the typed lists of a million forbidden books" (31).

The analogy between the repression of perceived communist subversive learnings in the Cold War and the burning of books in *Fahrenheit 451* is also a symbolic one. On a surface level, the Second Red Scare can be associated with the narrative's libricide because the color red is often considered to symbolize fire. Thus, the flames of book burning refer to the current state of cultural threats in which the novel was published. The analogy between the flames and the Second Red Scare runs deeper within the book and is manifested in Bradbury's description of the firemen:

Montag looked at these men whose faces were sunburnt by a thousand real and ten thousand imaginary fires, whose work flushed their cheeks and fevered their eyes. These men who looked steadily into their platinum igniter flames as they lit their eternally burning black pipes. They and their charcoal hair and soot-colored brows and bluish-ash-smearred cheeks where they had shaven close; but their heritage showed... Had he ever seen a fireman that *didn't* have black hair, black brows, a fiery face, and a blue-steel shaved but unshaved look? (30)

The description of firemen is heavily packed with allusions to fire and color: "flushed", "burning black", "charcoal", "bluish", "black". Blue and red are the colors of fire at different temperatures, and black is the color of ashes, it is the aftermath of the flames. The firemen embody the flames in this passage by wearing the colors of fire on

their skin. There is a symbiosis between fire and man, they are so lost in their profession, so deeply indoctrinated, that they become the oppressive tool themselves. As was mentioned above, the Second Red Scare is associated with fire as well because of the color red which it holds as a representative symbol. Consequentially, I link the Second Red Scare to the firemen themselves, who are the visual and symbolic image of fire and of their profession. I argue that book burning is a direct reference to the Cold War and the period of McCarthyism which encouraged the repression of subversive content and behavior. The novel's characterization as a dystopia adds to the complexity of the representation of book burning as a nod to the Second Red Scare. Bradbury's dystopian world provides an image of a frightening future by including the present state of affairs, i.e. the circumstances of the Cold War. As a science-fiction dystopia, *Fahrenheit 451* is a narrative presenting an exaggerated worst-case scenario by heightening the socio-historical context in which it was published. It is not a handful of Hollywood actors who are blacklisted, but all of the past and present authors and their entire body of work. Literature and the written word are the subversive element which replace McCarthy's dreaded communism. Book burning does not only stand as a representation of the Second Red Scare, but as Bradbury's heightening of this phenomenon in a dystopian world as a warning against a dreadful future if McCarthyism was taken to the extreme. In this Cold War context, book burning stands as a warning against the fine line between the endorsement of oppressive behaviors and the fall into a regime of censorship and cultural destruction.

The period of publication of *Fahrenheit 451* coincides with the rise of mass culture in the postwar years. The various technological developments allowed television to flourish into an influential industry, which is reflected in the novel through the

dominion of visual media. Another aspect of mass culture that considerably grew in the 1950s is the popularization of the paperback. In “The ‘Incalculable Value of Reading’: *Fahrenheit 451* and the Paperback Assault on Mass Culture”, Evan Brier explains the relationship between paperback and mass culture: “in the 1950s, the cultural authority of critics and intellectuals began to be usurped by the “cultural power” of institutions of mass culture, paperback publishers included.” (57). This period seems to inhabit the transfer of “cultural power”, or literary power in this case, to the paperback and mass culture. This change in the book trade industry came with the rise of popularity of the science-fiction novel in the middle of the twentieth century. Brier confirms that “By 1953, the paperback was enabling the genre’s emergence as a viable commercial entity.” (61) so the rise in popularity of mass culture and of science-fiction are simultaneous. It is then particularly significant and somewhat subversive that Bradbury published a story tackling mass culture as a societal problem in the form of a science-fiction novel. Brier writes about the novel’s relation to the issue of mass culture and the paperback stating that it is “an attack on and warning about mass culture”, an “anti-mass culture novel” and “a quintessential product of the convoluted web of paradoxes in which the postwar book trade was enmeshed.” (65). *Fahrenheit 451* does explicitly reject mass culture through the depiction of television as a thought-killing, obsessive medium with deceptive content. Books are regarded as the thing that could possibly save a society lost in consumption. In the context of postwar mass culture, Brier sees the destruction of books as a consequence of the sovereignty of mass culture rather than a cause of censorship:

The emergence of profit-driven mass culture led to the decline in popularity of the book, which led to political support for the elimination of books that could be exploited by totalitarian institutions. The elimination of books was a process,

an inevitability, it seems, in the context of the marriage of capitalism and scientific advancement, and not a matter of decree.(69).

This statement goes in line with Beatty's speech about society's gradual disinterest in books and their willful abandonment of literature rather than the government enforcing the disappearance of books. However, what is not mentioned here is that content, rather than medium, is what really triggers the downfall of books in Bradbury's novel in the context of postwar mass culture and that mass culture's negative impact was primarily on the content of books rather than their form. Captain Beatty's narrative states that book burning came as a natural transition after people's search for quick leisure and immediacy in their free time: "Then, in the twentieth century, speed up your camera. Books cut shorter. Condensations. Digests, Tabloids", "Whirl a man's mind around about so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcasters that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-washing thought!" (52). He suggest that, because of the transformed state of publishing, injecting minds with fast and meaningless content, society became disinterested in literature, in reading and intellectualism. Beatty's words evoke the rise of mass culture and its effect on written publications, his reference to the diminished length of books and to their replacement with tabloids points to a significant change in content with mass culture. The act of thinking has become unnecessary as easy content is being digested by everyone in a time during which capitalism and mass culture are two sides of the same coin. I read Bradbury's novel as "anti-mass culture" because, in this context, book burning symbolizes the end of culture as it was known before these developments. Books are completely eliminated because the information they hold has become not only disposable, but unwanted. People no longer search for the knowledge held within books because mass culture provides entertainment and escapism.

Fahrenheit 451 responds to postwar period during which it appeared and projects the death of books and literature to make way for simpler content. Beatty mentions *Hamlet* not as a play, but as a “one-page digest in a book that claimed: *now at least you can read all the classics*” (52). So, the classics are burned along with philosophy and all “time-wasting” content. Faber, the voice of intellectualism, validates this argument in his interaction with Montag:

It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books. The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisions, but are not. No, no, it's not books at all you're looking for! Take it where you can find it, in old phonograph records, old motion pictures ... There is nothing magical in them, at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us. (78-79)

Faber expresses the consequence of mass culture and its impact, not on books, but on their content. In his awakening in the novel, Montag was not rebelling against book burning because he wanted to save the books in their physicality, but because he had a thirst for knowledge, he was on a quest to reconstruct the ideas lost in the flames. Faber confirms that what could be previously found in books can be found in any other medium, even television. This confirms that the popularity of television during the postwar period was not the problem, nor was the rise of the paperback. I argue that the content which is being projected to the general public is the reason for the decline of books and the simultaneous rise of mass culture. In this context, book burning is a consequence rather than a cause, as Brier stated. This section demonstrates that libricide is the result of a changing culture in the postwar period, the mass destruction of books is the consequence of an indifference towards the content and knowledge that these books hold as society's attention is turned elsewhere. If *Hamlet* has been reduced to a “one-page digest”, the work itself is forgotten, Shakespeare's words are surplus which

nobody looks for in this dystopian society. The play is thus thrown into the flames of oblivion.

3.2. Facing the Fire of Resistance

As has been demonstrated above, the past and contemporary socio-historical context of *Fahrenheit 451* lead to the novel's immersion in themes of totalitarianism, cultural censorship and destruction, and governmental control. The events of the Second World War and the Cold War have significantly shaped Bradbury's narrative of culture being either destroyed by the government or willfully pushed aside by society. As a result, a theme of resistance naturally emerges within such a narrative depicting books being effaced from society. In this thesis, I expand upon two notable representations of resistive book burning in the novel.

3.2.1 A Spark of Resistance

Ray Bradbury represents resistive book burning in a scene in which the act of book burning is itself an act of resistance against institutionalized and government-ordered libricide. In this passage, a group of firemen, after having received an alert, rush to a woman's house and break down her door in order to set her books on fire. The first words that come out of the accused woman's mouth are: "Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out." This quote refers to Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley being condemned to a burning at the stake in 1555. They supported Reformation in England and were thus accused of heresy and sent to death by fire, they are referred to as the Oxford Martyrs. The quote is said to have been uttered by Latimer to Ridley in their final moments. The

inclusion of this quote as the woman's first, and some of her only, words is significant because she too is being accused of treason, not against the church but against the government. Here, Bradbury draws a comparison between the long history of auto-da-fés and burnings at the stake, and the novel's use of book burning as condemnation. Like Latimer and Ridley, books are regarded as treason and should therefore be burned. The quote is expressive of a spirit of resistance beyond the flames. The woman, as well as the Oxford Martyrs, knowing they will soon be consumed by fire, know that their deaths are symbolic and will light a "candle" that "shall never be put out", i.e. a spark of resistance. This spark goes beyond her act of resistive book burning and affects Montag himself as it entices him to question his profession and form an alliance with Faber. The woman's condemnation lights a spark of resistance in Montag and inspires him to rebel against the burning of the books and to clandestinely steal a copy of the Bible from her collection: "Montag had done nothing. His hand had done it all, his hand, with a brain of its own, with a conscience and a curiosity in each trembling finger, had turned thief." (35). This further confirms the analogy between the events of 1555 and the passage in *Fahrenheit 451* because the theme of religion is brought into the narrative: Montag steals the Bible, the religious book which sparked turmoil in sixteenth century England and which essentially led the Oxford Martyrs' deaths. Furthermore, by quoting these words to Captain Beatty, the accused woman is foreshadowing her resistive actions in the rest of the passage. She anticipates that she will "play the man" as she uses the man's own tool of oppression, book burning, as a tool of resistance. Similarly to the English protestants, the woman dies as a martyr, not as a victim. She re-appropriated the fire which was meant as condemnation and then became subversive, a symbol of resistance.

Following these developments, the woman proceeds to hold on to her books as the firemen spilled kerosene all over her house: “The woman knelt among the books, touching drenched leather and cardboard, reading the gilt titles with her fingers while her eyes accused Montag. “You can’t ever have my books,” she said.” (35). As the firemen try to pull her away from the pile of books, she does not bulge and continuously asserts her presence while remaining calm. She willingly takes her place among the books, in solidarity and in a desire to unify herself with the books. The words she says to Montag are decisive and reproaching. She is not threatening the fireman, but asserting that the books will never be his or the government’s to burn. Her use of the word “ever” is meaningful in the context of her resistance because, by saying “ever”, she is implying that the books are not theirs to burn, they are hers to take with her to eternity. She lived with her books and she is prepared to die with them. Her resistive book burning is all the more significant because in no instance are the books seized by the firemen. Although they scatter them all over the house and drench them in kerosene, the woman’s presence and persistence is a refutation of the firemen’s intended destruction. In the novel, the authorities use fire to separate people from their books but the woman subverts this practice by joining the books in the flames. I argue that the woman’s book burning and self-immolation is an act of resistance because she achieves eternal unity with her books in the flames.

At the end of the scene, Bradbury depicts the woman gaining further control of the situation and revoking the firemen’s purpose in invading her home by starting the fire herself: “On the front porch where she had come to weigh them quietly with her eyes, her quietness a condemnation, the woman stood motionless. Beatty flicked his fingers to spark the kerosene. He was too late. Montag gasped. The woman on the porch

reached out with contempt to them all, and struck the kitchen match against the railing.” (37). Her final act is a “condemnation” of the firemen and of libricide. The woman is not burned with her books at the hands of the government as she denies them the possibility of completing their task and sets herself and her books aflame. In doing so, she resists the firemen and finds power in this act of self-destruction. If she had stayed in her home while Beatty lit the kerosene, she would have been killed; but by starting the fire herself, she is in a position of superiority. I read the woman’s actions as a symbolic change in the significance of the act of book burning which cannot be considered as libricide in this passage but as resistance. Much like government-mandated book burning, her resistive book burning is a performance meant to provoke thought in people and encourage them to second-guess the firemen’s intentions. The woman’s calm composure and her confidence point to the fact that her self-immolation is not done out of desperation but out of revolt. Throughout the passage, her actions give more meaning to her final act as she remains immobile among her books, joins them in the flame and starts the fire herself: she refuses to be separated from the books, commits to an eternity with them, and sets everything aflame herself in a climactic moment of resistance. This passage represents an aspect of book burning which is different from cultural destruction and censorship. It is all the more significant because the means of oppression of the government is used as a tool of resistance.

In addition, a notable characteristic of this passage is the lack of description of the fire. In many other instances of book burning, Bradbury provides descriptions of the flames or of the books and their pages being destroyed by fire. Uncharacteristically, the author omits all description of the fire after depicting the woman’s final actions. In this way, Bradbury sets a clear demarcation between burning books as cultural destruction

and burning books as resistance. The lack of details suggests a transcendental nature to this resistive book burning. It surpasses representation through description and resists association with cultural destruction. Describing the flames and the woman's struggle would have removed all greatness in her act of resistance, Bradbury cuts the text short before the flames appear and therefore glorifies this book burning and presents it as an act beyond description, an act that transcends the flames. Resistive book burning provides a new significance to fire in *Fahrenheit 451*. The fire of resistance is not a fire of destruction, it is symbolic of rebirth as it suggests the birth of ideas of resistance from the ashes of the woman's martyrdom. Indeed, the image of her sacrifice stayed with Montag throughout the rest of the novel and inspired him to take resistive actions himself.

3.2.2. Burning to Remember

After Montag's escape from the city, he joins a group of exiled intellectuals called the Book People living beyond the borders. Before the protagonist reaches the Book People's settlement, he perceives their fire from afar: "he saw the fire ahead" (138), "The fire was gone, then back again, like a winking eye.", "That small motion, the white and red color, a strange fire because it meant a different thing to him. It was not burning, it was *warming*.", "He hadn't known fire could look this way. He had never thought in his life that it could give as well as take. Even its smell was different." (139). The distance fire seems foreign to Montag, who has been lighting fires as a profession. The Book People are considered the main body of resistance in the novel, and Bradbury depicts their fire in complete contrast to the firemen's flames which are destructive and all-consuming. This fire, however, is inviting, it is guiding as if Montag

was being guided to the light through the reflection of the flames. Bradbury offers hints regarding the Book People's use of fire, which he expands upon later in the chapter, while clearly putting it in opposition to the fire of libricide.

The Book People, led by Granger, are living embodiments of culture and literature. Upon Montag's arrival, they establish that the former fireman will represent the Book of Ecclesiastes. Each member of the group is a book: "I am Plato's *Republic*. Like to read Marcus Aurelius? Mr. Simmons is Marcus." (144). Granger goes on to cite the various authors and works of literature that each member of his group stands for. The Book People preserve books by memorizing them, they replace the pages with memory. This further confirms Faber's words previously about the importance and superiority of the content of books rather than the format. The Book People are the books, they are the culture that is being institutionally erased in the city. They created a shift in cultural memory. Their act of resistance is the transfer of the cultural archive of books from paper to memory. Culture and humans are thus one and the Book People are the archives of this civilization and its culture. In "Archival Domination in *Fahrenheit 451*", Joseph Hurtgen explains the government-imposed "shift from a cultural archive composed of books promoting an egalitarian society to a commercialized, televisual archive that manipulated its viewers to generate sales and disseminated messages of discipline to ensure obedience to the state." (37). Hurtgen's analysis of the shift in archival form refers to the consequences of the government's libricide destroying all written cultural archives and thus erasing society's cultural memory. The Book People resist against this archival erasure and revive cultural memory by holding the archives in their minds. This archival memory is resistive cultural memory against libricide and the erasure of culture. It results in the unification of the human and the book as the

Book People are called by the title they memorized. Just like the woman's act of resistance written about above, this resistive cultural archive, existing in memory only, is highly reliant on resistive book burning.

After running from a government which enforces book burning, Montag comes to realize that he is integrating a society which also relies on book burning, but for different purposes. Granger explains that the Book People's archive in memory came as a necessity and consequence to their own book burning:

We're book burners, too. We read the books and burnt them, afraid they'd be found. Micro-filming didn't pay off; we were always traveling, we didn't want to bury the film and come back later. Always the chance of discovery. Better to keep it in the old heads where no one can see it or suspect it. We are all bits and pieces of history and literature and international law, Byron, Tom Paine, Machiavelli or Christ, it's here. (145)

The exiled society practices resistive book burning because setting the books on fire is the only way to save them. Their process consists of reading the book, memorizing it, and throwing it into the fire. The flames are not destructive because the books live on in their memory and are orally shared within their close circle. They realize that what truly matters is not the physicality of the book as object, but its content and the knowledge that it holds, as Granger explains: "All we want to do is keep the knowledge we think we will need, intact and safe. We're not out to incite or anger anyone yet. For if we are destroyed, the knowledge is dead, perhaps for good" (145). As contradictory as it may seem, the Book People burn the books in order to preserve their knowledge. The survival of ideas and books' content entirely depends on the survival of the Book People and the preservation of their memory, which is now a cultural archive. They become the knowledge themselves and the content of the books is hidden within them, impossible to be detected by the government and its Mechanical Hounds. Their burning of the physical form of books allows for the survival of its content in the

memories of the Book People. This passage demonstrates that book burning is an act of resistance because it transcends the physicality of objects and permits the survival of knowledge and ideas through memory which has become this society's cultural archive.

Fahrenheit 451 offers diverse representations of book burning. The significance of this act varies in different circumstances and according to the context being taken into consideration. On the one hand, the novel is heavily influenced by totalitarianism which is an inherent part of its historical past, and the trail of cultural destruction blazed by totalitarian regimes. In this context, libricide is seen as an act of terror and propaganda. It is the killing of knowledge with the false promise of happiness. On the other hand, Bradbury's work is filled with underlying themes inspired by the contemporary historical circumstances in which it was published: the post-war/Cold War period. The social and political instability of the time, as well as the attempts at censorship and control led to the rise of anxieties in American society which are represented in the dystopia through libricide as it causes dreaded conformity and presents a risk to American individualism. The Cold War is also characterized by the rise of McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare, and the novel responds to those historical events by using science-fiction to present a scenario which takes the contemporary historical reality to the extreme and which exhibits book burning as a warning against the possibilities of falling into extremist ideologies. *Fahrenheit 451* is also released against the background of the popularization of mass culture and mass book burning is a response to 1950s society willingly leaving books behind and more importantly, the knowledge that they hold, for new and faster ways of consumption. These interpretations of book burning are painted with negativity and reproach of the times they respond to. Bradbury also offers hope in his representation of book burning as it is

depicted as a subversive act of resistance. Finally, the Book People commit their own resistive book burning in order to save knowledge from being destroyed and to incite its survival in the form of archival memory.

Bradbury ends the novel with the atomic destruction of the city and the exiled society finding its way back to the ruins. The theme of atomic threat, a common science-fiction trope, is once again suggestive of the Cold War period during which the atomic bomb presented a threat to society. The atomic destruction of the city is nihilistic but offers hope for the future and the formation of a new society. As the Book People head to the destroyed city, they take with them the cultural memory and knowledge they spent years preserving and memorizing. Granger offers the analogy of the phoenix in reference to their attempt to form a new civilization: “every time he burnt himself up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again. And it looks like we’re doing the same thing, over and over, but we’ve got one damn thing the Phoenix never had. We know the damn silly thing we just did.” (156). Like the phoenix, the humans are about to be rebirthed from the all-consuming flames and, this time, the memory of their mistakes and the memory of culture is on their side. Out of the ashes of the city, a new society which is based on knowledge and is appreciative of culture is about to be born.

CHAPTER 4

WHERE THERE ARE BOOKS, THERE IS FIRE

Auto-da-Fé and *Fahrenheit 451*'s representations of book burning have been analyzed independently of each other in the previous chapters. The two twentieth-century novels offer a depiction of book burning which is highly reliant on the cultural and political context from which they emerged. Each novel depicts book burning in different ways which resulted in different interpretations of the significance of this act of cultural destruction depending on the context in which it is represented. This chapter focuses on similarities and differences to be found in Canetti and Bradbury's fictional book burnings

4.1. The Universality of Book Burning

Canetti's novel presents grotesque and caricatured characters of which the protagonist, Peter Kien, is representative of the fragmented modern subject. Perhaps the most striking element about this fictional world is the inclusion of elements of surrealism within the narrative such as the blurring of the lines between dreams and reality, and the representation of book burning as the surrealist element in the novel. Surrealism is known particularly for the blending of dreams and reality, while book burning surpasses reality. As a surrealist element, it is not an element of dream nor of reality, it exists between and within both dreams and reality and surpasses the dichotomy. In Bradbury's narrative, book burning also surpasses reality. The novel falls within the genre of science-fiction and depicts book burning as its central theme. Subsequently, libricide is the science-fiction element of the novel, making it a tool to

envision and exaggerate humanity's future, which is a key characteristic of the genre. Additionally, *Fahrenheit 451*'s categorization as a dystopian novel with the overarching theme of book burning points to a pessimistic look into the future in which book burning is used as a dystopian tool.

The two twentieth century novels share a common ground in their representations of book burning as standing outside of reality. In *Auto-da-Fé*, biblioclasm, as the surrealist element within the novel, alternates between dream and reality; and in *Fahrenheit 451*, libricide represents the potential horrors of the future. Thus, book burning adapts to the reality it represents, while being deeply grounded in the socio-historical circumstances in which each of the novels was written. As seen in previous chapters, the interwar years, totalitarian regimes, post-war and cold war period are all highly influential on the authors' inclusion and representation of book burning in their narratives. However, despite the fact that the representation of book burning is tied to the circumstances the novels were produced in, it is undeniable that the surrealist, science-fiction and dystopian rely on the representation of book burning as a constitutive element of the narratives. Consequently, book burning is both grounded in reality, through socio-historical circumstances, and stands as a separate entity within the narratives of *Auto-da-Fé* (as a surrealist element) and *Fahrenheit 451* (as a defining element of science-fiction) as it defies reality and surpasses the present moment. In the fictional worlds of Canetti and Bradbury, book burning is reality and dream, it is present and future, it is a universal tool of representation of the human and cultural condition. This gives book burning a universal characteristic within all narratives, regardless of social and political circumstances of publication, the fictional representation of book burning is universal in its negation of a fixed reality and its place in imagining the

future. The detachment of book burning from being tied down, within the narratives, to a specific state of consciousness or to a temporal frame is what gives this practice its versatility and universality. In this way, book burning surpasses limiting definitions tying it down to destruction and censorship.

Book burning's place between dream and reality in *Auto-da-Fé* and between present and future in *Fahrenheit 451* has implications on the significance of culture itself in these narratives. Indeed, culture is a recurring theme, it is a crucial element of the human experience and it is essential to humanity on all planes of existence and regardless of time and space. So, the destruction of culture, though book burning, is a constant threat to humanity because it entails the destruction of the civilization's history, art, knowledge, ideas, etc. Culture often records the evolution and struggles of humanity, it is essential to the understanding of human behavior and the human mind. Therefore, book burning as cultural destruction is a threat to humanity because it is a threat to its history and to the prosperity of human knowledge. Even though book burning is not part of the present reality, it has been a part of the totalitarian past and it may play a role in the dystopian future. When used for destructive purposes, book burning is a threat to humanity because it is a threat to culture. Its universality and ability to surpass reality show that culture, regardless of when and where it is represented, is essential to humanity, and its destruction is as complex as its creation.

4.2. When Beliefs Lead to Destruction

The beginning of each chapter relates the novels' book burnings to Rebecca Knuth's definitions of the practice. Biblioclasm and libricide are respectively representative of Canetti's and Bradbury's representations of book burning. The

difference between these two definitions provides a clear perspective on the difference between the novels' representations of book burning. Canetti's biblioclasm denotes social unrest and moralistic intentions whereas Bradbury's libricide is a violent tool for the regime to impose ideology. Peter Kien commits the ultimate act of biblioclasm when he comes to the realization that, as Knuth puts it, "the foundations of moral civilization are at risk" (3). Biblioclasm in *Auto-da-Fé* is a consequence of the protagonist's refusal of the future and more specifically, of the future of culture as his moral principles are rejected by society and the modern subject becomes displaced. Libricide, on the other hand, is represented in *Fahrenheit 451* in the government's attempt at completely eradicating books from society as part of its ideological goal to dupe people into believing that they lead happy lives. Biblioclasm and libricide, although they both signify book burning, showcase the versatility of the act and the different meanings embodied by book burning.

In both instances, belief is a core component of the fictional representations of book burning in the novel. Book burning in general rests on the belief that books, and therefore culture, should be banned or destroyed. The use of the terms biblioclasm and libricide denotes a difference in the reasons that motivate the book burnings and way the acts are practiced. Biblioclasm in *Auto-da-Fé* stems from Peter Kien's rejection of the changing culture of the interwar years and is a symbolic action representing the end of modernity through the destruction of the culture of the past. This biblioclasm is related to Kien's strong belief in modernity and his subsequent attachment to neo-Kantian ideals, especially as he struggles to come to terms with the blurring of the distinction between the body and the mind in the library. In *Fahrenheit 451*, libricide is also a consequence of the imposition of belief system, but it differs from Canetti's

biblioclasm in that it is done on a nation-wide level and is enacted by the government. Thus, the reasons behind both book burnings are based on beliefs about culture. In Canetti's work, book burning is a consequence of the rejection of a new emerging culture, and in Bradbury's work, government-mandated book burning is a consequence of the rejection of the emerging culture. In *Fahrenheit 451*, government-mandated book burning is the consequence of a belief, which turns into ideology, against the ideas and values propagated by culture. In *Auto-da-Fé*, biblioclasm is not an attack against culture, but the expression of a belief about culture, a rejection of the future and a celebration of the past. Thus, considering biblioclasm as the end of modernity, to use Donahue's argument about Canetti's novel, and libricide as the end of culture, book burning is understood as an act that is essentially motivated by beliefs about or against culture.

4.3. The Absence of Flames

The stand against culture brings biblioclasm and libricide together in *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*. However, what sets them apart is the difference in the performance of this act of cultural destruction. Kien's book burning is a private and individual act whereas the firemen's book burnings are public and collective. This is an important contrast which sets the two representations apart and is significant in the study of book burning and the comparison of its literary representations. As I have shown, during the final passage of the novel depicting Kien's biblioclasm, the fire is not described, nor is the destruction of the library. On the contrary, and as we have demonstrated in the second chapter of this thesis, Bradbury often describes the firemen's book burnings, describing the pages going up in flames and the theatrical performance of the act. The

descriptive representation of the act is a significant difference between both fictional accounts of book burning. Government-mandated libricide is described in *Fahrenheit 451* on multiple occasions and pejoratively depicts the pages going up in flames, the pouring of kerosene, and the theatricality of the act. This kind of book burning has been described above as a totalitarian tool of propaganda and indoctrination. On the contrary, in Kien's biblioclasm, the flames and the destroyed pages are not described, but every action leading up to this moment is recounted in detail. These two representations, through the inclusion and omission of descriptions, prove the difference between ideological and symbolic book burning. In *Fahrenheit 451*, ideological book burning is destructive and targeted towards the indoctrination of society through the destruction and censorship of culture. It is a tool and a performative way for the government to assert control over the population and impose their ideology. In *Auto-da-Fé*, symbolic book burning is a consequence of the protagonist's dissatisfaction with the state of culture and the world. Kien's biblioclasm embodies multiple levels of symbolism as has been expanded upon in chapter one of this thesis. The lack of description points to the fact that symbolic book burning is beyond description. Symbolic book burning is not enacted for the sake of the destruction of culture, but for culture itself, for a belief in books and culture.

Kien burns his library and commits suicide in the process in order to achieve unification with the glorified culture of modernity. This is the case in *Fahrenheit 451* as well as the Book People's book burnings are not described but only talked about. Their resistive book burning is done for the purpose of remembering culture and saving it from the hands of the oppressor. In these two instances of non-descriptive book burnings in both novels, the destruction of culture is the result of the ultimate purpose of

the preservation of culture. The authors do not describe these book burnings because they are not acts of cultural destruction nor censorship, but acts of salvation. The contradiction of destroying culture in order to save it or to remember it renders these acts of book burning indescribable in Canetti and Bradbury's novels. Book burning is generally understood as an act of cultural destruction for the sake of oppression, but the perpetrators of the non-descriptive fires destroy culture with entirely different motives based on their love and appreciation of culture. Therefore, the description of book burning is a key difference between the two novels' representations of the act, and the lack of description is a common characteristic worth studying in this comparative chapter. The Book People's book burning in *Fahrenheit 451* and Peter Kien's biblioclasm in *Auto-da-Fé* are subversive because they defy the literal definition and purpose of this act of cultural destruction. The Book People and Kien are avid defenders of intellectualism and their love for culture pushes them to destroy it in order to save it from the rest of society. Their circumstances are not the same, but their motives can be compared and closely resemble each other. This purpose of cultural salvation through destruction is represented similarly in both novels as it is recounted by the authors with noticeable lack of description and detail. Thus, book burning as cultural salvation is represented in the novels as an act which transcends the flames because, although the pages are consumed by fire, the culture and content of the books is preserved (symbolically in *Auto-da-Fé* and through memory in *Fahrenheit 451*).

4.4. The Reader, Between the Regime and the Leader

Canetti and Bradbury's novels are both highly influenced by the social and historical circumstances in which they were written, namely the rise of totalitarianism.

In *Auto-da-Fé*'s context, totalitarianism is already on the rise in the interwar years and the depiction of the protagonist as evoking a totalitarian leader is proof of the influence of these historical circumstances. As for *Fahrenheit 451*, it engages with totalitarianism as an important part of its past and mimics the totalitarian practice of book burning as a tool of propaganda and terror. Although each novel interacts with totalitarianism in a different way, I compare both representations of book burning in relation to this historical context in order to find a common ground despite the differences.

Fahrenheit 451 takes totalitarian practices as a primary constituent of its narrative and depicts government censorship, ideological oppression and propaganda through book burning. Libricide as a totalitarian weapon of terror is an institutionalized act aimed at erasing cultural and collective memory in Bradbury's novel. In *Auto-da-Fé*, totalitarianism is evoked through the protagonist Kien embodying some characteristics of a totalitarian leader and thus standing in as a totalitarian figure in the interwar novel. In both chapters, I take Arendt's writings on totalitarianism as theoretical base to explain the leader's behavior and the regime's tools of oppression. Book burning's connection to totalitarianism is undeniable and each novel affirms this in its own way as Canetti focuses on the figure of the totalitarian leader and Bradbury represents the established and ideological totalitarian regime. An important difference in these representations is the meaning that books, as objects and cultural artifacts, are given in each of them. In the analysis of Kien as a figure of the totalitarian leader (chapter one), it was stated that books represent his army and are both his shield against the outside world and his demise as the army turns corrupt at the hands of Therese.

Canetti's evocation of totalitarianism is done through individual and private book burning whereas Bradbury's totalitarian book burning is a public and collective

act of destruction. These representations, although similar in the ideology they evoke, diverge in the way they are practiced and in the person or group committing the act. Canetti's perpetrator is a figure of a totalitarian leader and Bradbury's perpetrator is the totalitarian regime, hence the difference between individual and collective book burning. Totalitarianism is a common ground to various representations of book burnings, and allows for a range of possibilities in the practice of cultural destruction. The reasons behind these book burnings are, however, similar. Both the leader in *Auto-da-Fé* and the regime in *Fahrenheit 451* seek control through the flames: the leader attempts to control his army of books and the regime controls society through censorship and terror. Totalitarian book burning proves that the flames are not only the consequence of a desire to attack and destroy culture. The fire of book burning is an attempt at achieving complete and unequivocal control. Culture, as the chief opponent and challenger of ideology and imposed beliefs, is the target. The leader and the regime have the same overarching reason (although in different fictional and historical contexts) for totalitarian book burning which is control. The difference in these representations is manifested through the act of book burning itself.

The private and public characteristics of these representations of book burning not only show the versatility of the act, but also reveal much about the nature of totalitarian book burning. The regime's public performance of destruction as propaganda is a tool of indoctrination and a confirmation of the omnipotence of its authority. The leader's burning of the library points to the nature of libraries and the private act of reading. As a true connection forms between readers and their books, there exists a connection of dependency between the leader and his army of books. When he discovers that the army of books exists outside of his control, he sets it on fire.

Following the analogy of the reader, it is as though the privacy and the trust between reader and book is broken because books, as objects and as knowledge, exist outside of the author and of the reader. *Auto-da-Fé* depicts a private act of book burning by the totalitarian figure destroying his library in order to deny it an existence outside of himself, the creator of the army of books and its sole commander. The reader, and the book collector, hungry for knowledge, is compared to a totalitarian figure in pursuit of total control. The privacy of reading is destroyed, so is the intimate relationship between the reader and a book. Peter Kien is comparable to Walter Benjamin's "collector" in *Unpacking My Library* in his relationship to the library and the issue of losing ownership of it. Benjamin writes that "ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them" (69). Kien the collector loses ownership of his library following his chaotic marriage to Therese. Not only is the relationship of privacy between reader and book destroyed, but so is the relationship between collector and library. The library, a sanctuary-like location to the reader, loses its purity and its character of intimacy after being invaded by Therese. The leader destroys the corrupt army of books and the reader in him burns the library after the illusion of privacy is shattered, and ownership is lost.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, I read totalitarian book burning as a commentary on the reader's relationship to books as well. Bradbury's novel depicts totalitarianism and book burning as two elements of the science-fiction world that showcase a relationship of dependency. Government-mandated book burning is a tool through which the totalitarian regime controls and indoctrinates society, making it an act of terror which the totalitarian regime relies on. Without libricide and the erasure of cultural archives and memory, it would be impossible for *Fahrenheit 451*'s totalitarian regime to

indoctrinate society and instill a false sense of happiness. Like Canetti's book burning, Bradbury's representation of the act, in relation to totalitarianism, is read here as an image for the relationship between the reader and a book. Indeed, totalitarian book burning and mundane book reading have much in common. Bradbury's regime burns books to eradicate knowledge and subsequently indoctrinate and propagate its ideology. The pursuit of knowledge being a criminal offense, the punishment is made public as a lesson to others, to spread fear in a show of terror. Through this narrative of book burning and totalitarianism, the novel portrays the act of reading as a forbidden practice and a taboo, as an act of rebellion. Here, the relationship between book and reader resembles a forbidden paradise and the book is represented as an unobtainable object of desire. The readers of *Fahrenheit 451* are themselves immersed in this experience as the act of reading a book about a world where this action is criminalized creates a "meta" moment. Totalitarian book burning has an effect on the reader of the novel who, by turning the pages of Bradbury's novel, is resisting against censorship and asserting the triumph of culture and knowledge. The public performance of totalitarian book burning in this novel is also significant because, unlike *Auto-da-Fé* private act evoking the intimacy of the library, *Fahrenheit 451*'s performance of libricide is a commentary on a society-wide experience and on the universality of the reading experience. Within the narrative, and to the reader of the novel, reading is equated to fighting, it means going against the grain of oppression and opening oneself up to acquiring knowledge and honoring or celebrating culture. In *Auto-da-Fé*, on the other hand, the reader holds a less active role as the final act of book burning is anticipated following the protagonist's dreams. The reader of Canetti's novel is an observant of the downfall of the modern

society and the destruction of the library unlike Bradbury's reader who resists book burning by turning the pages the novel.

4.5. The Ashes of Culture Rest in Memory

In *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*, books have a double nature: they are physical and tangible objects while also being representatives of abstract concepts such as culture and knowledge. When the pages are burned, so are the ideas written within them. Canetti and Bradbury's novels share a common characteristic in their representation of books and their destruction: their connection to the human mind. Tatjana Barazon's "Des Livres dans la Tête: La Bibliothèque Imaginaire chez Bradbury, Canetti et Joyce" and Benoît Tane's "Biblioclasme, fin du livre et fin des livres (Bradbury, Truffaut, Canetti)" are two articles which put the novels in conversation with each other and study their different representations of books. One common theme in these writings is the connection between the books and the mind in the novels. Tane writes: "Exclure, voire détruire le livre, n'est-ce pourtant pas fondamentalement une mise en question du *medium*, c'est-à-dire de tout support extérieur de la communication? Ne peut-on pas relier dans ces conditions la fin du livre à une valorisation, qui est peut-être une revalorisation, du corps dans cette même communication?" (8). In this passage, Tane compares the destruction of the physical form of books, through book burning in the novels, to a "re-valorization" of the communication with the body. This evokes a figurative transfer of the book from concrete object and symbol of communication, to a bodily experience and an internal phenomenon. This section bases itself on these ideas and studies the connection

between the book and the mind in *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* and the implications of book burning on this connection.

In *Auto-da-Fé*, the protagonist carries his books within him, and more specifically in his mind, as he loses the object in its physicality and cannot access his library. Canetti asserts the strength of the protagonist's memory and its relationship to books and the library: "the library in his head weighted heavy" (169), "his memory was no less than a heaven-sent gift, a phenomenon ... Look only at the work in progress – pile after pile, parcel after parcel was loaded in" (210), "his memory worked only in relation to books" (319). The loss of the object does not equate the loss of its content, the physical books are out of Kien's reach, but the library lives on in his mind. Barazon describes Kien's attachment to his library as "une symbiose naturelle qui lui permet de les entrer dans sa tête" ("a natural symbiosis which allows him to put them in his head"). Kien's attachment to the library in its physical form and to the abstract knowledge it contains is what allows him to transfer this attachment to his mind and to use memory as a primary connector between him and his books. Canetti forms a relationship between books, the mind, and memory as the library transcends its physical form in Kien's mind and the books exist in the mind as memory. The transcendence of books from physical form to memory in the mind is a way for the protagonist to save them from what he calls "book-blaspheming humanity" (239). In *Auto-da-Fé*, the act of biblioclasm happens simultaneously as the protagonist's self-immolation. Kien's destruction of the library and of the self is a double book burning because he sets fire to books in their physical form while simultaneously burning, through the act of self-destruction, their abstract form as memory. The burning of the library and the death of Peter Kien is a destruction of the book as object as well as the destruction of memory.

In the final scene, book burning is depicted twice: in the flames which engulf the library, and in the suicide of Peter Kien. In his death is the death of the private library and the destruction of the memory of knowledge within him. In Canetti's novel, book burning comes in the form of the fire in the library and of the burning of Peter Kien. This leads to the destruction of books and knowledge both in the physical form and in the transcendental form which exists in the protagonist's mind and memory. I argue that the relationship between book, mind and memory is destroyed in the final simultaneous acts of book burning and of self-destruction because all elements of the trifold connection go up in flames. *Auto-da-Fé*, through the burning of books in their physical and mental form, represents the complete annihilation of knowledge and culture.

The relationship between books, mind and memory is also present in *Fahrenheit 451*. When Montag meets the Book People, he discovers that they also actively practice book burning. As seen in the second chapter, this subversive book burning is an act of resistance and an attempt to save knowledge by retaining it in memory. The name given to this group of revolutionary exiles, "Book People", suggests that their identity is defined by books. They are, as Granger called them, "bums on the outside, libraries inside" (146). Granger confirms this on multiple occasions and calls the members of the group by the name of the author whose work they memorized. Similarly to Kien's case, there is here a symbiosis between the reader and the book. In the case of Bradbury's novel, the symbiosis is heightened. On the one hand, Kien carries an entire library within his mind, but he does so out of fear and for personal purposes. The Book People, on the other hand, assign one book for each member of the group. What intensifies the symbiosis in *Fahrenheit 451* is the fact that the person who memorizes the book becomes the book. The practice of book burning is a transfer of the book itself from

physical object to human body, specifically the human mind. The human is the new and last version of the book. Granger explains the purpose of their community and the importance of their mission: “We’ll pass the books on to our children, by word of mouth, and let our children wait, in turn, on the other people. A lot will be lost that way, of course. But you can’t *make* people listen.” (146). It becomes clear through Granger’s discourse that the Book People’s purpose is the survival of knowledge and that their practice of book burning and memorization is the last recourse to save culture. He adds, “The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves is that we were not important, we mustn’t be pedants; we were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world. we’re nothing more than dust jackets for books, of no significance otherwise.” (146). Members of this community hold books within their minds and once the written word is memorized, it is burned and only exists as memory. Thus, the burning of the books by this group of intellectuals is the destruction of the physical form of knowledge and its transfer to the mind, culture now only exists as memory. As a consequence, culture, which no longer exists on paper, only exists in the mind. Memorization is thus the archiving of culture by the Book People, whose memory becomes the cultural archive of humanity. They attempt to safeguard all books and the cultural treasures of humanity in their minds because the books have been burned, and the libraries have thus disappeared. Book burning is the destruction of books in their physical form and the salvation of knowledge in the mind through memory.

The connection of book, mind and memory, although present in Canetti and Bradbury’s novels, differs in each narrative and becomes a relationship of books, memory and destruction (book burning). The reason for the incorporation of the knowledge of books within the mind is salvation in both novels. Kien wants to protect

his library from the outside world, but the burning of the physical and mental versions of knowledge leads to its complete erasure in all its forms. However, the Book People retain books in memory to save knowledge from complete destruction and oblivion and to use memorization as the archiving of culture. Subsequently, and contrary to Kien's biblioclasm, their book burning leads to the salvation of culture from total destruction and from subsequent oblivion. In *Auto-da-Fé*, books are burned in their physical form and in the mind, but in *Fahrenheit 451*, books are destroyed in their physical form in order to live on through memory and be passed on to future generations. Barazon writes about the concept of books in the mind:

Le livre se trouve dans la tête des hommes, et ce n'est pas l'objet matériel des pages reliées qui constitue la richesse du livre. C'est dans l'imaginaire de chacun que la bibliothèque est sauvée, et non pas par un effort de mémoire ou par la tentative de construire une forteresse de livres. Le livre doit devenir un contenu vivant dans l'imaginaire du lecteur pour se manifester comme vecteur de l'humanité. (61)

In this passage, Barazon rejects both the physical form of books and their existence as memory, and states that the "richness" of books is derived from their place in "l'imaginaire", i.e. the domain of the imaginary. This analysis differs from the one deduced here from the analysis of the two novels. The connection of books, memory, destruction does not apply if one were to take Barazon's statement as a basis because the scholar denies the role of memory in the immateriality of books. This section maintains the importance of memory as a constitutive element which plays a role in the transference of books from the page to the mind, and in their destruction. However, the role of the domain of the imaginary is an important concept to study in relation to book burning in the novels. Following the analyses previously made about the place of books in the mind and the subsequent significance of book burning, the question of the "imaginaire" is interesting as it is depicted as the "driving force of humanity" ("vecteur

de l'humanité"). This strong description suggests that the "imaginaire", because it is essential to humanity, is the source of the survival of culture. The "imaginaire" evokes the abstract, mysterious, intangible nature of books. Here, I take it to signify the place that books occupy in the mind. To Barazon, books can exist in the reader's mind without being engraved in memory as they are with Peter Kien and the Book People. However, this chapter argues that the characters go beyond the "imaginaire" by prioritizing the role of memory. It is memory, in both narratives, which determines whether culture is completely destroyed or saved by book burning. In *Auto-da-Fé*, the place held by the library within the protagonist's memory is what leads to the complete destruction of culture with book burning and self-destruction. In *Fahrenheit 451*, memory is the savior of culture and book burning is a tool to ensure the longevity and protection of knowledge. Thus, this analysis strays from Barazon's prioritization of the "imaginaire" and asserts that memory is in fact the driving force of humanity because it is the salvation of culture in the present and the archiving of culture, in the minds of the surviving Book People, for future generations.

Through their representations of book burning, the novels establish a connection between this act of cultural destruction and cultural memory. The collective book burning of the Book People in Bradbury's science-fiction showcase the aspect of rebirth in the flames as cultural memory is revived through the burning of knowledge in its physical form. The individual book burning of Peter Kien provides a bleaker outlook on cultural memory as it rejects the end of modernity and, as a consequence, portrays book burning as the mutual destruction of books and cultural memory. The connections between book burning and cultural memory, although they differ in both representations, make a case for the role of human agency in the propagation and

survival of culture. Book burning is tool at the hands of humanity is often used as a means of censorship and oppression. But as these novels have shown, book burning is a double-edged sword which also possesses the subversive capacity of being a tool for the prosperity of culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: BLAZING A TRAIL FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Book burning has proved to be a versatile act whose significance varies according to the context in which it is represented. The analysis of literary representations of book burning in two twentieth century novels, Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, puts forth the importance of book burning as an ideological tool and as a means of resistance. In Canetti's work, book burning is an individual and private act which encompasses the burning of an entire library and is accompanied by self-destruction. Peter Kien's biblioclasm is a consequence of his struggle to integrate society during the interwar years and his refusal to come to terms with the end of modernity. The destruction of the library, compared to an army, is also a result of his loss of control over it, like a totalitarian leader feeling his power slipping away. *Auto-da-Fé* does not only represent book burning in relation to the context of the end of the Weimar period and the rise of totalitarianism, but also as a surrealist element within the narrative which blurs the distinction between reality and dreams. Book burning as a surrealist element in the novel represents Peter Kien's liberation and a moment of voluntary blindness. Ray Bradbury also portrays book burning as liberation in *Fahrenheit 451* in the scene recounting a woman's resistance against the regime. The postwar context of Bradbury's novel stages totalitarianism as a primary influence in the representation of book burning which is used by the regime as a tool of propaganda and terror. Influenced by the past and present alike, the science fiction novel integrates symbolic analogies between book burning and McCarthyistic censorship and the rise of

mass culture in the United States during the 1950s. The separate analyses of book burning in both novels have allowed this thesis to trace common characteristics between the literary representations of the act. Indeed, a comparison of the novels' representations of book burning in relation to totalitarianism show the place of the reader within these narratives. The reading experience is a common theme, whether it is the privacy of the library or the resistive aspect of engaging with culture. The novels are also joined in the depiction of a relationship between books and memory. The destruction of books affects cultural memory and can lead to the obliteration or prosperity of culture, as the comparison of the narrative representations has shown in chapter three. In sum, book burning cannot be limited by a simple description of destruction. Although it sometimes does oppress and censor, it also represents a powerful tool for resistance. On many occasions, book burning has been read as a symbolic act: a surrealist point of climax representing the inclusion of the surrealist in the novel such as the lack of real representation and the blurring of dreams and reality, symbolic book burning is also a tool for liberation, an act of resistance, a denunciation of censorship, a metaphor for the reading experience, an expression of beliefs. It is in its symbolic representations that book burning finds its most powerful significance because it surpasses, and sometimes contradicts, the definitions which limit its description to a simple act of destruction.

I introduced this thesis with the example of the Lebanese student protesters burning history textbooks. Starting this project with the image of the protest in mind, I have strived to find meaning behind the literary representations of book burning. What stood out in all chapters is the impact of context on the significant of book burning, and the potential symbolic nature of this act. The conclusions made throughout the chapters

have allowed me to better understand the burning of the history textbooks in 2019 and to confirm that twentieth century resistive book burning is not entirely different from the one performed in the twenty-first century in Beirut. Having written extensively about book burning, I look back at the spark of curiosity I had while watching the flames from the screen of my television, and begin to understand the students' actions within the larger pattern of book burnings. I have written about twentieth century novels and their diverse representations of book burning and now, writing from Beirut in 2021, and looking back at the chapters of this thesis, I realize that the students' book burning, which almost went unnoticed in the events of the revolution, is an expression of a national anxiety and a symbol of a young generation's refusal to let history be silenced.

5.1. Lebanon, Phoenix Against Its Will

The students protesting in front of the Ministry of Education were hungry for change and reforms. They burned their history textbooks in a symbolic act stating their rejection of the current state of education. Students' anger is quoted in number of articles, *Arab News* reports a protester as saying "We learn information that does not resemble us. Why don't they teach us about Lebanon's current situation and the role of our generation in change?". Commenting on this student uprising, *Al-Arabiya News* explains the problematic state of the education system:

History lessons in school textbooks stop with the withdrawal of French troops in 1946 – three years after the end of France's 23-year mandate over Lebanon. But a lack of consensus over a common version of 1975-1990 civil war has led to it being completely omitted from the curriculum. Likewise, textbooks make no mention of key events afterwards, such as the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon in 2000 or the mass protests that ended Syria's military presence in 2005. (*Al-Arabiya News*)

The educational system thus provides a limited version of history to its students due to internal conflicts about the narrative of the civil war and the events that ensued. In “The Reform of History Textbooks in Lebanon: Collecting Conflict Memories in a Peace-Building Process (1996-2001)”, Betty Gilbert-Sleiman mentions a “state-sponsored amnesia” (129) and explains the Lebanese ruling authorities’ reason behind it: “the committee members fell into generalizations claiming that ‘the conflicts among the Lebanese have negative effects on national unity and stability’” (131). Indeed, the consensus was to silence history and impose national amnesia in order to supposedly preserve unity and avoid conflict. Lebanese history, in these textbooks and in education, is censored because it provides a purposefully incomplete narrative and is controlled by a corrupt establishment which refuses to provide a clear and unbiased version of events from 1975 onwards. The student protest is a part of the October 17 Lebanese revolution and, like this uprising, its aim is to cleanse the country of corrupt institutions and political figures and to get rid of the deeply-rooted sectarianism which is itself the reason for the censorship of the textbooks. History books are specifically targeted in this protest because they represent a censored, homogeneous national narrative imposed by the state.

The students’ book burning is an act of resistance because it is borne out of a revolution and because of its symbolic significance. Indeed, the resistive book burning of the history textbooks in an uprising against institutions and oppressive behaviors. The burning of the “state-provided” (*The Daily Mail*) books in front of a governmental institution of education makes this act of book burning all the more powerful. In this way, the act of destruction comes across as a message to the ministry and to the government as a whole. The burning of the history books is the burning of the

government's censored version of history. Gilbert-Sleiman point out a question which was never asked after the reform of the history textbooks: "What does it mean to be Lebanese after the war?" (134). The author implies that the missing piece of history has a direct effect on national identity. The students are burning this incomplete narrative of national history in the hopes of regaining the full and true history of Lebanon. In doing so, they would be joined by a unified and common national history which would allow for the reconstruction of a national identity, detached from government politics and sectarian interests. By censoring history, the establishment is drawing a veil over Lebanese collective memory and thus hindering the formation of a unified national identity. Collective memory is taken here to refer to a group's (here a population) shared memory of the past, of a shared experience, history or culture. The erasure of a considerable part of the national history from the educational curriculum has consequences on the way Lebanese collective memory is formed and thus directly affects national identity. The burning of the history textbooks is performed collectively and publicly by the students. This book burning is a collective statement asserting the new generation's rejection of censorship and of the limited historical narrative. The flames are a public expression of the students' desire for the formation of an accurate collective memory and national identity. This book burning is an act of resistance against the government, against corruption, and against a nationally censored version of history which hinders any attempt at forming a unified history of Lebanon and of its people. This resistive book burning is hopeful because out of the ashes of the "state-provided" history might arise a new and legitimate history of the nation.

The book burning of the Lebanese students is, in many ways, similar to the fictional representations of book burning analyzed throughout this thesis. The

parallelism between book burning in reality and fiction is striking and confirms book burning's significance as a historical act and the importance of its literary representations in relation to historical circumstances. As is the case in *Auto-da-Fé*, this book burning can be defined as a biblioclasm as it is founded upon morality and social uprisings and is targeted towards a "despised establishment" (Knuth, 2) which is the government and, more specifically, the ministry in front of which the protest was held. In Canetti's fictional world and in the students' reality, book burning is a symbolic act with intentions closely linked to an interest in the past. Kien's fire is a longing for a continuation of the past whereas the student's biblioclasm is a desire to rediscover the past in the hopes of re-forming the present and building a better future. In addition, a number of elements allow for the comparison of the students' book burning to the fires represented in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. The element of resistance in the students' actions has been demonstrated above and is comparable to the woman's book burning and self-immolation in the novel. In fiction and in reality, book burning's subversive potential appears as it manifests itself as an act of resistance. Another point which allows us to draw similarities between Bradbury's depiction and real life is the public performance of book burning. During the protests, and in Bradbury's representation of government-ordered book burning, the act is publicly performed and is meant to be seen. Book burning as performance is a statement, it is a message to the public. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the government sends a message of terror through cultural destruction; in the student protests in Lebanon, the young generation lights the history books on fire to send a message of positive and progressive change. Finally, what links Bradbury's representations of book burning to the students' demonstration is collective memory. In the science-fiction narrative, institutionalized book burning is meant to erase cultural

and collective memory for ideological purposes. However, the Book People's book burnings and subsequent memorization and embodiment of the books is an attempt at restoring collective memory. During the protest of the 21st of November 2019, as had been written above, collective memory was a key reason for the burning of the history textbooks. Thus, the common ground between both resistive book burnings (by the Book People and by the students) is the attempt to restore and revive collective memory.

The comparability of fictional and real book burning is a testament to the significance held within this act. Whether it lights a fire of destruction or of renewal and rebirth, book burning is a powerful tool used by anyone, from oppressive regimes, to revolutionaries, and tormented intellectuals. The choice of this subject for this thesis is relevant to me as a student in Beirut who, like the November protesters, is hoping to see a tortured country rise from the ashes of destruction. Canetti's depiction of the private library space being tainted and destroyed is reminiscent of the thousands of homes, of supposed safe havens, which were destroyed due to the August 4th blast. Bradbury's representation of a government's attempt to erase collective memory makes me wonder about Lebanon's half-a-century of missing history from public and collective narrative. Most of all, book burning and its imagery of simultaneous destruction and renewal makes me think about Lebanon, a country forced to embody the resilient phoenix, having to collect the ashes of its destruction over and over again and to rebuild itself, only to be set on fire anew.

5.2. Burning Through the Screen?

Throughout this thesis, book burning has been studied as a phenomenon of the twentieth century. The Lebanese protesters' actions are proof that book burning is still a significant act today and that it is used as a tool of oppression or resistance in various social and historical contexts and time periods. Book burning is not an outdated practice of the past but a relevant and timeless cultural practice, even though it has undergone significant changes as a form of adaptation to our times. Joseph A. Howley writes that "the memory of book burning becomes meaningful in the interface of serious anxiety about attacks on knowledge and rhetorical culture's confidence in its own resilience" (228). Indeed, the analyses made here have looked at book burning within the narrative of the past century and made conclusions about threats to knowledge and resistive resilience. The example of twenty-first century book burning by the Lebanese students is a confirmation that book burning has retained the characteristics as the protesters express anxiety about knowledge and the repression of history and show resilience through a sense of cultural unity and resistance. Book burning is the act which blends these values regardless of time and place.

Turning to book burning in the context of the twenty-first century entails looking at the materiality of books and their transformation from physical objects to electronic content. Today, knowledge and resilience are still at the center of the conversation about book burning but the twenty-first century is seeing a change in cultural practices, especially in the way culture is presented and shared. The conversation around book burning is bound to change as books themselves have undergone a transformation from the page to the screen. The book in its traditional physical form is still popular, and so is the book in its alternative form: as an electronic document. In "The Latest Forms of

Book-Burning”, G. Thomas Tanselle expresses anxieties about contemporary practices of preservation of content and reproaches these actions of prioritizing content while disregarding the materiality and physicality of the book. Tanselle cites practices of microfilming and electronic conversion and compares them to acts of book burning, claiming that, today, we live in “an age of book destruction” (271). In this article, book burning is seen as a prevalent practice of the twenty-first century which no longer involves fire but has turned into a digital practice. Tanselle writes that preservation “was never intended to refer to the preservation of physical objects containing texts, but only to texts abstracted from objects.” (272). The goal of computerization, digitization, microfilming, electronic conversion, etc. is not the preservation of the book in its materiality and physicality, but of its content. What the author considers book burning is the disregard to the book as object and the prioritization of content over form. To consider digital preservation an act of book burning is a strong statement which equates the destruction of books in the twenty-first century to the disposability of their physical form. However, as has been demonstrated in the above chapters, *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* are prime examples of the lives of books beyond their materiality (through memory), and of the relationship between form and content, which is not to be taken as a dichotomy. The novels provide examples within their narratives of book burning as book preservation, meaning that the destruction of the pages allowed for the prosperity of knowledge and of the book itself. There appears to be a rift between the novels’ representations of twentieth century book burning and the Tanselle’s idea of twenty-first century book burning as a “sacrificial offering(s) in the name of ‘textual preservation’” (272).

In Tanselle's article, twenty-first century book burning takes on another form, replacing fire with digitization practices and microfilming. At the center of this conversation is an opposition between book and text, between object/form and knowledge/content. The conclusion made in this thesis from the analyses of book burning influenced and contextualized in the twentieth century are that the destruction of the object does not necessarily equate the loss of content/knowledge nor the loss of form. The opposition of form and content is an essentialization which has been disproved by the analyses of book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451*. Form and content are found within each other, and the complexity of book burning is a statement to this. As the study of book burning in *Auto-da-Fé* and *Fahrenheit 451* have shown, the burning of the book object and simultaneous preservation of knowledge through memory allows for the book to survive. Although it does not live on in its original physicality, the book is still memorized as a book, not as random knowledge. An example of this is the practice of the Book People in *Fahrenheit 451* as they memorize the pages they burn and still refer to the knowledge they hold in their minds as books. Therefore, the form of books exists within their content, just as the knowledge is held within the physical pages. The screen is not synonym to burning books, it allows content to thrive in the form of a book, albeit modified in its physicality and materiality. Thus, although Tanselle is not wrong in pointing out the lack of attention to the physical pages in preservation practices, I argue against the assumption that this equates to twenty-first century book burning. Form and content are intertwined in the book and the survival of one entails the prosperity of the other. The books are not metaphorically burned in the twenty-first century, regardless of harmful preservation practices and electronic reading habits. If book burning was to re-surface in our present times, it

would do so in the same symbolic way that it did in the twentieth-century literary representations analyzed in this thesis. The Lebanese students' protest is an example of twenty-first century book burning as a symbolic and resistive biblioclasm, a practice exemplified in the novels and still relevant today. Canetti and Bradbury's representations of book burning have allowed us to reflect on this practice today and to come to the conclusion that book burning cannot be simplified to equate digitization processes. Book burning is a complex and subversive practice which surpasses simple oppositions and encompasses notions of freedom, oppression, resistance, identity, history and culture. In *The Library of Babel*, Jorge Luis Borges writes: "I suspect that the human species – the unique species – is about to be extinguished, but the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret" (85). Borges' words reflect the eternal nature of books, their resistance to change and independence from the human touch. Book burning is not the invincible library's enemy, nor is it its ally. It is rather a versatile tool, the purpose of which varies according to circumstances in which it is used and the hand igniting the flames. Whether books are read through the screen or on paper, the library remains "unlimited and cyclical" (85), lighting an eternal fire of its own.

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