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## RAY BRADBURY

**Born:** Waukegan, Illinois; August 22, 1920

**Died:** Los Angeles, California; June 5, 2012

*Bradbury played a leading role in winning a large readership for science fiction in the 1950's by producing works with well developed characters, provocative themes, and an attractive literary style.*

### BIOGRAPHY

Ray Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Illinois, on August 22, 1920, the son of Leonard Bradbury and Esther Moberg Bradbury. One of his older twin brothers died before his birth, and a younger sister, Elizabeth, died in infancy when he was seven.

Despite economic problems that took his family twice to Arizona in search of work, and despite the deaths of two siblings, Bradbury's memory of his early years is positive. In *Dandelion Wine* (1957) and other works, his boyhood home in Waukegan becomes Green Town, an idyllic if somewhat fragile midwestern town, where children enjoy the pleasures of playmates their age balanced with the opportunity for solitary explorations of a surrounding countryside.

In 1934, the family moved permanently to Los Angeles, where Bradbury soon adapted to his second beloved home. Los Angeles attracted him, in part, because it was a center of the entertainment industry which Bradbury had loved since at least the age of three, when he saw the 1923 film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Throughout his life, Bradbury devoured the fiction of wonder and adventure: radio, motion pictures, comic books, pulp and slick magazines, and the novels of such authors as Edgar Rice Burroughs and Jules Verne. At the age of twelve, he and a friend

found themselves unable to await the next sequel in Burroughs's Mars series and, therefore, wrote their own.

Bradbury had begun writing stories and poems as soon as he learned how to write. He made his first sale as a teenager, contributing a sketch to the George Burns and Gracie Allen radio comedy show. In high school, he also developed an interest in theater that continued throughout his writing career.

After finishing high school, Bradbury plunged into writing, trying to make himself quickly into a professional. He joined a science-fiction organization, studied with science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein, and worked with several other successful pulp fiction and screenwriters. He set himself the task of writing a story a week, while living at home and earning money selling newspapers. His first published story was "Hollerbochen's Dilemma," which appeared in *Imagination!* in 1938. He wrote his first paid science-fiction story, "Pendulum," in collaboration with Henry Hasse, and it appeared in *Super Science Stories* in 1941. Soon Bradbury was publishing regularly in pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*.

When he married Marguerite McClure in 1947, he was a well-established writer, publishing more than a dozen stories each year. "The Big Black and White Game" appeared in *Best American Short Stories* in 1945, and "Homecoming" was selected for the O. Henry Awards *Prize Stories of 1947*. In the year of his marriage, Arkham House published his first story collection, *Dark Carnival* (1947); many of these stories were reprinted in the highly regarded collection *The October Country* (1955).

From then on, his fiction was regularly recognized with awards and selected for anthologies. In 1949, the year the first of his four daughters was born, the National Fantasy Fan Federation selected him best author of the year.

Bradbury's career continued to advance and then to diversify after 1949. *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) became one of the first science-fiction works to receive serious attention from the mainstream literary establishment when reviewer Christopher Isherwood praised it highly. (In 1977-1978, the play version would receive five Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards.) Then followed a pattern of publishing collections of stories interspersed with new novels and other activities that included screenplays, musical theater, drama, and poetry. His best-known fiction appeared before 1963: *The Martian Chronicles*, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), *Dandelion Wine*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962), and five collections of short stories. Each of the novels either grew from earlier published stories or was constructed of earlier stories worked together into a longer work. During this period, he also traveled to Ireland, where he worked on the screenplay for director John Huston's 1956 film version of Herman Melville's classic novel, *Moby Dick* (1851).

After 1963, Bradbury continued to publish short-story collections, but he devoted more of his energy to other areas, especially drama. His first collection of short plays, *The Anthem Sprinters and Other Antics* (1963), grew out of his six months in Ireland. He produced two shows based on his own works: *The World of Ray Bradbury* (1964) and *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* (1965). His other works in the 1960's included a cantata and a film history of America for the 1964 New York World's Fair. Though his interests in fiction and drama continued into the 1970's, he also turned his attention more decisively toward poetry, publishing three volumes and then collecting them into a single volume, *The Complete Poems of Ray Bradbury* (1982). During this period, he wrote much nonfiction prose for magazines ranging from *Life* to *Playboy*.

Film productions of Bradbury's works include *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), *The Illustrated Man* (1969), *The Martian Chronicles* (1980), and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1984). Of these adaptations, only French filmmaker François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* was widely praised by film critics. Many

of Bradbury's short stories have been adapted for television, some with great success. His own animated short film, *Icarus Montgolfier Wright*, was nominated for an Academy Award in 1962.

After 1980, Bradbury collected some of his early detective stories in *A Memory of Murder* (1984) and then published a detective novel, *Death Is a Lonely Business* (1985), and a gothic thriller set in Hollywood, *A Graveyard for Lunatics* (1990). In 1985, he began a series of adaptations of his own stories for a cable television series, *The Ray Bradbury Television Theater*. His awards include a life achievement award from the World Fantasy Convention (1977), a Gandalf "Grand Master" award at the Hugo Award Ceremonies of 1980, the Jules Verne Award (1984), the PEN Body of Work Award (1985), a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (2002), and the National Medal of the Arts (2004). His wife of fifty-six years, Marguerite, died in 2003, survived by Bradbury and their four daughters.

Bradbury's achievements are mainly in fantasy and science fiction. His drama and film scripts have been well received, but his poetry has not. Continuing attention from literary scholars and cultural historians suggests that he will surely be remembered for the powerful and thoughtful storytelling that brought him to prominence in the 1950's. Bradbury's achievement opened a generation's hearts and minds to the worlds of imagination and wonder in fantasy and science fiction, beginning an era of wide popularity for and of scholarly interest in genres that had been on the fringe of modern culture.

#### ANALYSIS

Literary critic David Mogen has characterized well the central motif of Ray Bradbury's fiction: joyous absorption in the experience of living. In each of his major works, this joy in living plays a crucial role. Mogen sees this attitude in Bradbury's own life—in his prolific career with its many directions and in his nonfiction accounts of his life and career. One could guess this about Bradbury merely by looking at his book titles, not only those that recommend enthusiastic exploration or offer medicines for melancholy but also those that are drawn from visionary poets such as Walt Whitman and William Butler Yeats.

The dominant thematic note in Bradbury's fiction is a kind of hopefulness for humanity. Mo-

gen and another critic, Gary K. Wolfe, have noted that Bradbury's optimism has roots in two major Western myths that have been important to many American writers: the frontier and the Garden of Eden. For Bradbury, the stars are the new frontier, humanity's next field of exploration and expansion. The stars also become a new Eden, an extension of the hope for new beginnings that idealistic explorers saw in America and that F. Scott Fitzgerald so eloquently captured in his description of the "fresh, green breast of the new world" at the end of a novel Bradbury admired, *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

Mogen sums up Bradbury's hopefulness by describing him as a visionary "who believes the human race will conquer death through spiritual rebirth in unearthly new frontiers." Bradbury's readers are aware of the dark elements in his fiction, however: the tales of terror collected in *The October Country*, the threatening ravine that cuts through Green Town, and the technological dystopias (of which *Fahrenheit 451* is the main example). Bradbury is acutely aware that human beings are capable of evil and contain darkness. He seems to see humanity as destined ultimately for transcendence of the kind described by nineteenth century American Romantic authors such as Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in which humanity approaches becoming godlike. Yet Bradbury also sees humanity in the present as blind to its best interests, selfish, turning technology to destructive rather than creative and imaginative ends, in continuous danger of self-destruction.

In a discussion of *The Halloween Tree* (1972), a lesser-known fable for young readers, Mogen illustrates what Bradbury sees as one of the greatest dangers facing modern humanity, the paralysis of imagination before the fear of death. This is also one of the main themes of *Fahrenheit 451*, and it appears in many of Bradbury's works. The purpose of the tale of terror, for Bradbury, is to help the individual human imagination symbolically confront its mortality. If people fail to face and deal with their deaths, they become the victims of terror, and the results of this victimization often include a drive for meaningless power and the impulse to impose a single order upon human experience.

In several of his works, this imposition of order appears as attempts to turn off the imagination, which is a source of multiple ideas of order.

*Fahrenheit 451* offers a vivid picture of a society so afraid of death that it attempts to be a happiness machine, filling people's lives with empty, supposedly painless electronic stimuli and censoring all the great ideas and great books in the history of civilization. While such a society believes that it is escaping death somehow, it is in fact running directly toward death in the form of a military holocaust. The two major Green Town novels, *Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, show individuals facing death and the temptation to grasp evil power to evade death.

Bradbury's works show his optimistic faith in a fulfilling human destiny in some future time and place, and they also show his understanding of the barriers that humanity must overcome on its journey to this destiny and of the human limitations people are likely to carry with them into any future.

## THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

**First published:** 1950

**Type of work:** Short stories

*Americans explore and colonize Mars, then abandon the colony. When atomic war breaks out on Earth, a few refugees return to Mars after Earth civilization is destroyed.*

In the 1940's, Bradbury had established himself as a highly popular short-story writer. When a Doubleday editor encouraged him to try connecting some of his stories into a unified, novelistic collection, Bradbury quickly responded with *The Martian Chronicles*, a group of stories about people from Earth colonizing Mars.

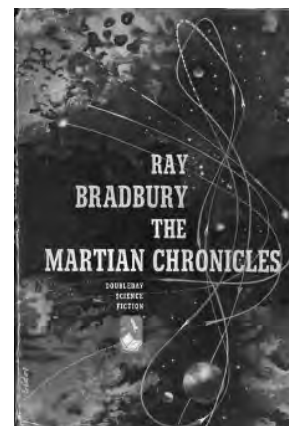
The idea of the colonization of Mars had long fascinated Bradbury. When he produced *The Martian Chronicles*, he had published more than ten Martian stories, and he continued to produce more after the book was published. This book became the first of several Bradbury works that are called novels not because they have the traditional plot characteristics of the novel but because they are somewhat unified collections of related stories, rather like Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). Bradbury repeated this form with varying success in *The Illustrated Man* (1951) and *Dandelion Wine*.

*The Martian Chronicles* is an apt title. Bradbury structured the book as a loose chronicle, beginning in 1999 with the first expedition to Mars and ending in 2026, with what is probably the last. The chronological ordering establishes a strong forward movement in the first one-third of the book, which deals with four exploratory expeditions from 1999 to 2001. Roughly the middle onethird contains stories and episodes which, though placed from 2001 to 2005, are not very sequential. They seem more like a gathering of incidents illustrating aspects of a colonial period. The final third of the book, though it spans 2005 to 2026, really concentrates on the beginning and the end of this period. In 2005, atomic war begins to destroy Earth civilization, draws most of the Martian colonists back to their home planet, and effectively brings an end to space travel. In 2026, Earth is devastated, but a remnant of idealists from Earth escapes to Mars, hoping to start over.

While the overarching structure of a chronicle binds the book together at the beginning and end, there are other important unifying elements. One major element is the metaphor of the frontier. Bradbury repeatedly returns to the idea of Mars as a new frontier. The planet is a new world (like America), populated at first by predominantly peaceful, intelligent beings much like humans, though they have telepathic powers and a slightly different technology. The Martians find themselves playing the role of Americans Indians in the frontier metaphor, resisting invasion somewhat haphazardly until almost completely wiped out by a plague of chicken pox accidentally brought from Earth. There are no "Indian wars," but the abandoned cities and artifacts of Martian civilization become objects of interest, wonder, exploitation, and wanton destruction by the later colonists. The Martians, after their demise, produce converts, people who believe that the Martian civilization was better than their own and set out in various ways to imitate what they believe it was. This motif of conversion into Martians remains important throughout the book and becomes its final note.

The colonial phase begins with a Johnny Appleseed character who dreams of the desert world becoming a green world and sets out on foot to plant trees over large areas. Bradbury's episodes and sketches present positive and negative aspects of the United States' colonial history. On the neg-

ative side are exploiters and materialist dreamers who ignore the spiritual significance of this new beginning and seize upon the dross—the chances for wealth and power available on a comparatively free frontier. On the positive side are those who come to Mars in search of spiritual freedoms denied on Earth. Among them is a large group of southern blacks who see in Mars the chance to gain what the United States has denied them. Their story, told in "Way in the Middle of the Air," may seem rather naïvely conceived when read by twenty-first century readers, but sketches such as this one gave Bradbury a reputation for radicalism in 1950. Among the spiritual questers is William Stendahl, who in "Usher II" prefigures themes in *Fahrenheit 451*, using Mars to escape from anti-imagination book censors on Earth and to take a poetically just revenge upon some of them.



In the last third of the book, Bradbury complicates the frontier metaphor by foregrounding the Eden myth that stands behind it and mixing in the new terror that existed during the period following World War II when he produced this book—the threat of atomic holocaust. In long years of war, Earth finally reduces itself to rubble, and at the last a small group of people flees to Mars, determined to start over and do things right this time. The image of a remnant of the spiritually pure leaving behind a hopelessly corrupt civilization to start anew is, of course, at the center of the American myth of the frontier.

"Pioneers" bringing their purity to an innocent and empty place evokes the idea of Eden regained, where a truly new start is possible. Added to these elements, however, is a feature that points to the profundity of the optimism behind this book that so vividly portrays humanity's failures and weaknesses. Remaining on Mars are the remnants of an ancient and wise Martian civilization and perhaps even some actual Martians. For humans to be converted into Martians, to become products



of the place and its native spiritual presences, may lead to a true advance for humanity beyond the blind and selfish passions that have once again produced holocaust.

The idea of a saving remnant of the spiritually chosen pervades the Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition. It also is important to Bradbury and appears regularly in his stories. This mythic pattern is one of the more important indications of optimism in Bradbury's fiction. He often tells stories such as this one, in which civilization dies because of its failures of wisdom, compassion, and imagination. Nearly always, however, the pattern includes a small new beginning by those whose vision is cleansed by suffering and who vow to preserve the best of the past and leave the worst behind, and this pattern converts Armageddon into a step toward salvation.

As the first work of American science fiction to gain a truly broad reading public, this book is of considerable historical importance in modern American literature. Although literary critics disagree about the book's artistic merits, *The Martian Chronicles* promises to remain in print as a popular favorite.

## FAHRENHEIT

**First published:** 1953

**Type of work:** Novel

*In a future United States, a man dedicated to burning all of humanity's great writings discovers he has been mistaken.*

*Fahrenheit 451*—named for the temperature at which paper ignites and burns—is Bradbury's best-known novel and is probably also his best. Based on an earlier story, "The Fireman" (1950), and developing the censorship theme that appears in several other Bradbury works, this novel presents the dystopia that Bradbury may fear most.

In a future United States, the lowest common denominator of culture has imposed its ideas of happiness upon the whole culture. The universal idea of happiness has become an extrapolation of sitting in front of a television with a six-pack of beer, free of hard work, of complex human relationships, and of the disturbing stimulation of the

ideas and images of the great artists and thinkers. In the future, television screens can be all four walls of a room. There, the viewer participates in the families and adventures that appear on "the walls" by subscribing to and then acting out a viewer script. When the walls fail to interest, one places receivers in the ears and blankets the mind with pleasant sound that blocks out awareness of self and world.

Montag, the protagonist, is a "fireman." His team's job is to burn books and arrest their possessors. Not all books are outlawed—only those that stimulate the imagination with their complex ideas or vivid images of human possibility, those books that encourage people to aspire toward thought and experience beyond the ordinary.

Though this story is often compared with George Orwell's dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), the two books differ significantly. An especially important difference is the role of government. The tyranny of an oligarchy in *1984* is matched by the tyranny of the anti-intellectual majority in *Fahrenheit 451*. Bradbury's novel partakes of the atmosphere of anticommunism following World War II. The government seems distant, unconcerned with life in Montag's city, involved instead in the threat of atomic war that hangs over the nation. Beatty, Montag's boss, in a series of lectures on the history and theory of the firefighters' work, makes clear that the firemen act on behalf of ordinary people who know what happiness is, who want to be sure that everyone is happy, and who want to extirpate any who fail to conform to this idea of happiness. Book collectors are discovered and exposed by their neighbors, acting from a sense of civic duty; no secret police are required.

Montag's story develops rapidly and inexorably in three stages. Part 1, "The Hearth and the Salamander," presents a series of discoveries that lead Montag to steal and read from the books he is supposed to burn. He meets an imaginative young girl, Clarisse, who opens him to ways of seeing that he finds attractive. He discovers that his wife, Mildred, is not happy, despite her self-deluding assertions to the contrary, and that he is not happy either. Their lives are empty and teeter on the edge of selfdestruction, held back only by the constant vacuous stimulation of electronic media and drugs. Montag is the salamander, the dragon of dangerous fire, but he discovers that his hearth

is cold, that his home lacks spirit and love; it has no central animating principle. When he sees a woman who prefers to be burned with her books rather than to give them up, he realizes that they must contain something of great importance. He begins to read the books that he has almost unconsciously been hiding away in his home.

In part 2, “The Sieve and the Sand,” Montag tries to understand the wisdom he believes is in his books, which include the Bible and poems such as Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” (1867). He finds that, in several ways, his mind is like a sieve; he does not know how to make sense of what he reads without any intellectual training or context. Frustrated at the futility of his efforts, he takes dangerous risks. He contacts Faber, an unemployed professor in whom he once confided, and becomes aware of the possibility of rebellion. He finds himself bursting to talk about what he has read and tries communicating with his wife. These activities bring him increasingly to the attention of Beatty, who has long suspected that Montag does not fit the fireman mold. Part 2 ends when Montag’s team answers an alarm that brings them to his own house.

Part 3, “Burning Bright,” tells of Montag’s escape from his job and the imprisoning city. He becomes a fugitive when he kills Beatty rather than betray Faber. Montag concludes that Beatty wanted to be killed, that he manipulated the crisis before Montag’s burning home in order to bring about his own death. This observation highlights one of the more puzzling aspects of the novel, which is how to read Beatty’s character. Beatty is the spokesman for the majority point of view, yet the arguments he offers for keeping literature out of people’s hands and destroying those who insist upon reading are filled with references to and quotations from the very works he opposes. Montag’s final realization seems to suggest that Beatty, like Mildred, deludes himself into believing he is happy. Beatty, however, unlike Mildred, may come to understand his duplicity, leading him actively to seek death.

Montag’s harrowing flight brings him finally to a hearth, where vagrants gathered around a fire warm themselves and form a community. He soon learns that they have met there to receive him into their fragile underground—a group of rebels who survive relatively unmolested in the countryside and whose rebellion consists essentially of memo-

rizing great books in preparation for the day when they can be written down again. These people can help him understand the books they remember, and he himself can become a “book” by sharing what he has managed to remember from Ecclesiastes and the Book of Revelation. As he joins this community, atomic war comes to the nation, and the city he has left behind is consumed in flames. They believe that all the other cities are also being destroyed and therefore that their rebel group represents the phoenix, the new civilization to arise from the ruins of the old.

Bleak as this novel may appear, emphasizing as it does some of the worst things people can do, it nevertheless ends with an expression of hope that goes beyond the idea of the biblical saving remnant suggested by the phoenix image. One of the rebels speaks for them all, and probably for Bradbury, when he says, “We know all the damn silly things we’ve done for a thousand years and as long as we know that and always have it around where we can see it, some day we’ll stop making the god-dam funeral pyres and jumping in the middle of them.” In order to know what those silly things are and where they lead, one must have the books that tell about them. One of the reasons the society of *Fahrenheit 451* fails is that it made a happiness machine that erased the past and prevented people from imagining the future. With their minds locked in the present, they could do nothing to stop the fiery holocaust from falling upon them.

## DANDELION WINE

**First published:** 1957

**Type of work:** Novel

*Twelve-year-old Douglas Spaulding and his friends in Green Town, Illinois, in the summer of 1928 have adventures that teach them about the joys and the pains of living.*

*Dandelion Wine*, like *The Martian Chronicles*, was constructed from previously published stories. Bradbury made a significantly greater effort to turn these stories into a unified book, however, by revising the stories with care and by writing connecting material. He also provided a greater impression of unity than in *The Martian Chronicles* by

dropping the stories' original titles and using no table of contents. *Dandelion Wine* is perhaps the most autobiographical of his novels. Elements of Bradbury can be seen in both Douglas Spaulding and his younger brother, Tom. Green Town, on Lake Michigan, is similar to Bradbury's childhood home, Waukegan, Illinois, and the Spaulding family is like the Bradbury family.

Readers have noticed the similarities between *Dandelion Wine* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. Bradbury's book differs in that the predominant point of view is preadolescent, so that the spiritual anguish and the problems of sexuality that are important in Anderson's book are virtually absent in Bradbury's. The childish exuberance in the feeling of being alive that is a central theme both exceeds the energy and falls short of the profundity one sees in George Willard, Anderson's youthful protagonist. Bradbury presents a vivid picture of a boy's life in a small midwestern town early in the twentieth century.

In the summer of 1928, Doug awakens to the momentous sense that being physically and spiritually alive is a great gift, and he begins to keep a written record of his life. This consists of two lists: One contains events that happen every summer like rituals—"Ceremonies"; the other contains new and unprecedented events—"Revelations."

Once Bradbury has established Doug as a boy awakening to a sense of the wonder of life and wanting to understand it in his imagination, the structure of the book falls into a collection of sketches and stories, roughly chronological. Each story is well-connected to the overarching structure, often in several ways. The story may contain a ceremony, a revelation, or a combination of the two, and it may contribute as well to one of several thematic patterns that structure Doug's awakening.

One of the main patterns is that of loss. Doug, his brother, and their friends interact with a number of very old people during this summer. One ancient man becomes their time machine, transporting them to the wonderful places he has been by telling stories. A Civil War veteran who cannot remember which side he was on, Colonel Freeleigh can nevertheless still picture and describe vividly the day he saw a giant herd of bison on the prairie or a battle in the war. Before the summer is over, he dies. So does Doug's great-grandmother, who loved to repair the shingle roof each summer. His best friend

moves away. A pair of elderly ladies permanently park their electric car after hitting a pedestrian. The trolley makes its last run and is replaced by a bus. Doug is almost present at two killings. The arcade's ancient mechanical prophetess, the Tarot Witch, finally breaks down. Great and small, parts of Doug's world slip away, and with the realization that he is richly alive comes the realization that he must die.

At the end of the summer, Doug becomes mysteriously ill. His brother, Tom, realizes that Doug wants to die because he has lost so much during the summer. This will-to-death also arises from a deeper source, Doug's fear of facing and accepting his own mortality, an experience that Bradbury says he had when he was thirteen: "I discovered I could die, and that scared the hell out of me. And I thought, 'How do you escape *that* knowledge? Well, I'll *kill* myself.'"

Doug is cured by a kind of magic, when his friend the local junk man gives him two bottles of fragrant air to breathe in. Like the bottles of dandelion wine that the boys and their grandfather produce throughout the summer, these bottles contain reminders of the richness of life to be enjoyed in those moments when it might be forgotten. Doug realizes this; he also comes to feel an obligation to live in order to pass on to others the wonderful, if temporary, gift of life that he has received. His first success at passing on this gift comes when he restores his grandmother's magical power to produce delicious meals out of a chaotic kitchen after the too-orderly Aunt Rose ruins her cooking by organizing her. *Dandelion Wine* is a particularly rewarding novel for younger readers, but its fanciful humor and vivid portrait of small-town life can be enjoyed by older readers as well.

## SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

**First published:** 1962

**Type of work:** Novel

*Jim Nightshade, Will Holloway, and his father, Charles Holloway, must face their deepest fears and desires when a dark carnival tempts them to surrender their souls in exchange for meaningless power.*

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes." In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1605), the witches speak these lines as Macbeth approaches for his second meeting with them. He has come because he has found his ill-gotten power empty and insecure. The witches speak out of sympathy for the evil they have cultivated in him. When Charles Holloway quotes these lines in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, he is also speaking of the sympathy of the evil that lurks always in the hearts of the good for the greater evil in the hearts of those who have given in—who have agreed to trade something for nothing, thus converting themselves into grotesques who feed on the pain and fear of others.

Quasi-allegorical in form, this novel, like *Dandelion Wine*, is set in Green Town and seems aimed at young readers. Two boys deal with the temptations of evil presented by Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show. Will Holloway and Jim Nightshade are best friends and neighbors. Will, son of Charles, was born just before midnight, Jim, just after midnight on Halloween Day. Will seems the natural child of reason and goodness, but fatherless Jim finds in himself an attraction to danger, to power, and to evil. Their friendship binds them together in mutual dependence and defense.

The novel is divided into three parts. In the first, "Arrivals," the Cooger and Dark carnival comes to Green Town at 3 a.m. on a Friday, the week before Halloween. No sooner does it arrive than impossible things begin to occur. Miss Foley, a teacher, is terrified upon seeing her treasured little-girl identity eaten away by age in the maze of mirrors. The boys meet a boy who is revealed to be Cooger, having somehow returned to the age of 12, and through their accidental interference with the magical carousel that changes people's ages, they age him to 120.

The mirror maze and the carousel are the main instruments that the carnival uses to capture those lonely people who dream of gaining power by transforming themselves. The mirror maze shows them what they want to be and makes them fear old age and death. The carousel, by carrying them backward or forward, makes them the age they believe they wish to be. However, Dark, the show's proprietor, a version of the illustrated man from Bradbury's second story collection, always

cheats, never giving people exactly what they believe they want but rather some extreme version of it. As a result, they tend to become his slaves, wanting another ride on his machine, and so they become part of his traveling freak show.

In Jim, Dark sees a potential partner, one who might help him carry on the show. Jim's desire is to become instantly older and more powerful. Bradbury does not explore this desire; rather, Jim seems to be a projection of the otherwise invisible dark side of Will. By the end of the first part, Will and Jim have gained enough knowledge of Dark's work to realize that he will catch and destroy them to use them if he can. In the second part, "Pursuits," the boys hide from him and try to discover a way to deal with him. By themselves, they find they cannot, though they are resourceful in their opposition. They enlist the help of Charles, Will's father.

Charles Holloway combines elements of both Jim and Will in his own past. He married late, after trying to make himself into his own ideal for thirtynine years. He found eventually that life is not simple and fine, that one never becomes the ideal one dreams. Instead, as he tells Will, a person makes choices from one moment to the next, living into the future in a constant struggle against the temptations of nonbeing. There is no final arrival, only pursuit. Will's struggle to stay with Jim and protect him is parallel to Charles's struggle to come to terms with himself. Charles's main regret is that he took so long to begin his life, so he is susceptible to the carousel's temptation to roll back the years.

Charles is janitor at the Green Town library. There the most intense phase of the struggle begins. The second part ends when Dark makes his way into the library early Sunday evening, disables Charles, and captures Will and Jim. Charles almost gives in to death in this scene, to the power of the Dust Witch, one of Dark's accomplices, to stop





one's heart. In the face of death, Charles realizes that human life is a bleak and meaningless joke. This nihilism leads him not to despair, however, but to laughter, for in the face of mortality, desire and temptation appear ridiculous. His laughter repels the witch and becomes the weapon by which he defeats Dark in the last part, "Departures."

Charles rescues Will and, together, they finally recover Jim from Dark's power, using the forces of laughter, kindness, and joy. With Dark's death, the freaks become free of their magic prison, represented by the tattoos that cover Dark's body. The carnival dissipates. Charles points out, however, that humanity is not free of temptation, for the desire for empty impossibilities is in them all, and there will be many other attempts to exploit this desire in their long lives.

Critical reaction to Bradbury's second traditional novel was mixed. Those who disliked it found it overwritten. There are many passages in the novel that remind one of Whitman's *Song of Myself* (1855), with sentences of many clauses celebrating and elaborating a scene or realiza-

tion. As a result, the novel is not efficient in its development and, to some readers, seems inflated with unnecessary poetic prose. Others, however, respond positively to the fast pace of the action and to the marshaling of fantasy elements that produce an entertaining adventure/allegory.

#### SUMMARY

Throughout his career, Bradbury has exhibited both an enthusiasm for experience and an awareness of the weaknesses that repeatedly bring humanity to the brink of self-extinction; those elements are the hallmarks of his fiction. In his science fiction and in the fantasies based on his childhood, Bradbury has produced a memorable and influential body of writing, notably in *The Martian Chronicles* and *Fahrenheit 451*. With moving and imaginative stories told in a lively, poetic style, he brought American science fiction and fantasy to the attention of a mass audience, helping to make possible a renaissance in these genres.

Terry Heller

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- A Memory of Murder*, 1984
- The Toynbee Convector*, 1988
- Quicker than the Eye*, 1996
- Driving Blind*, 1997

*One More for the Road: A New Short Story Collection*, 2002  
*Bradbury Stories: One Hundred of His Most Celebrated Tales*, 2003  
*The Best of Ray Bradbury: The Graphic Novel*, 2003  
*The Cat's Pajamas*, 2004  
*A Sound of Thunder and Other Stories*, 2005  
*The Dragon Who Ate His Tail*, 2007  
*Now and Forever: Somewhere a Band is Playing & Leviathan '99*, 2007  
*Summer Morning, Summer Night*, 2007  
*Ray Bradbury Stories Volume 2*, 2009  
*We'll Always Have Paris: Stories*, 2009  
*A Pleasure to Burn*, 2010  
*The Collected Stories of Ray Bradbury: A Critical Edition – Volume 1, 1938–1943*, 2011

#### LONG FICTION

*Fahrenheit 451*, 1953  
*Dandelion Wine*, 1957  
*Something Wicked This Way Comes*, 1962  
*Death Is a Lonely Business*, 1985  
*A Graveyard for Lunatics: Another Tale of Two Cities*, 1990  
*Green Shadows, White Whale*, 1992  
*From the Dust Returned: A Family Remembrance*, 2001  
*Let's All Kill Constance*, 2003  
*Farewell Summer*, 2006

#### DRAMA:

*The Anthem Sprinters and Other Antics*, pb. 1963  
*The World of Ray Bradbury: Three Fables of the Future*, pr. 1964  
*The Day It Rained Forever*, pb. 1966  
*The Pedestrian*, pb. 1966  
*Dandelion Wine*, pr. 1967 (adaptation of his novel)  
*Madrigals for the Space Age*, pb. 1972  
*The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit, and Other Plays*, pb. 1972  
*Pillar of Fire, and Other Plays for Today, Tomorrow, and Beyond Tomorrow*, pb. 1975  
*That Ghost, That Bride of Time: Excerpts from a Play-in-Progress*, pb. 1976  
*The Martian Chronicles*, pr. 1977  
*Fahrenheit 451*, pr. 1979 (musical)  
*A Device Out of Time*, pb. 1986  
*On Stage: A Chrestomathy of His Plays*, pb. 1991  
*Wisdom 2116*, 2010

#### SCREENPLAYS:

*It Came from Outer Space*, 1952 (with David Schwartz)  
*Moby Dick*, 1956 (with John Huston)  
*Icarus Montgolfier Wright*, 1961 (with George C. Johnson)  
*The Picasso Summer*, 1969 (with Ed Weinberger)

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Ray Bradbury seems always to have known what he wanted to do and how to get it done. Of the initiatives he has taken in his life, which do you think have contributed most fruitfully to his writing?
- Identify the resemblances between the Martians and American Indians in *The Martian Chronicles* and explain what they contribute to the total effect of the narrative.
- Montag is a grown man at the beginning of *Fahrenheit 451*, but what evidence do you see that he matures in the course of the novel?
- Some books probably intended for young readers turn out to be valuable reading for adults. Is *Dandelion Wine* such a book? Explain your response.
- Is Bradbury more convincing in his depiction of the dark side of life or in his hopefulness?
- Critics are inclined to discount the importance of popular writers in popular modes such as those Bradbury practices. What aspects of Bradbury's work entitle him to the status of serious writer?

## Ray Bradbury

### POETRY:

*Old Ahab's Friend, and Friend to Noah, Speaks His Piece: A Celebration*, 1971  
*When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed: Celebrations for Almost Any Day in the Year*, 1973  
*Where Robot Mice and Robot Men Run Round in Robot Towns: New Poems, Both Light and Dark*, 1977  
*Twin Hieroglyphs That Swim the River Dust*, 1978  
*The Bike Repairman*, 1978  
*The Aqueduct*, 1979  
*The Haunted Computer and the Android Pope*, 1981  
*The Complete Poems of Ray Bradbury*, 1982  
*Forever and the Earth*, 1984  
*Death Has Lost Its Charm for Me*, 1987  
*With Cat for Comforter*, 1997 (with Loise Max)  
*Dogs Think That Every Day Is Christmas*, 1997  
*I Live By the Invisible: New and Selected Poems*, 2002

### NONFICTION

*Teacher's Guide to Science Fiction*, 1968 (with Lewy Olfson)  
*Mars and the Mind of Man*, 1973  
"Zen and the Art of Writing" and "The Joy of Writing": *Two Essays*, 1973  
*The Mummies of Guanajuato*, 1978  
*The Art of the Playboy*, 1985  
*Zen in the Art of Writing: Essays on Creativity*, 1989  
*Yestermorrow: Obvious Answers to Impossible Futures*, 1991  
*Conversations with Ray Bradbury* (Steven L. Aggelis, editor), 2004  
*Bradbury Speaks: Too Soon from the Cave, Too Far from the Stars*, 2005  
*Match to Flame: The Fictional Paths to Fahrenheit 451*, 2007

### CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:

*Switch on the Night*, 1955  
*R Is for Rocket*, 1962  
*S Is for Space*, 1966  
*The Halloween Tree*, 1972  
*Fever Dream*, 1987  
*Ahmed and the Oblivion Machines: A Fable*, 1998  
*The Homecoming*, 2006

### EDITED TEXTS:

*Timeless Stories for Today and Tomorrow*, 1952  
*The Circus of Dr. Lao, and Other Improbable Stories*, 1956

### About the Author

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Eller, Jonathan R., and William F. Touponce. *Ray Bradbury: The Life of Fiction*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004.  
Reid, Robin Ann. *Ray Bradbury: A Critical Companion*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000.  
Touponce, William F. *Naming the Unnameable: Ray Bradbury and the Fantastic After Freud*. Mercer Island, Wash.: Starmont House, 1997.  
Weist, Jerry, and Donn Albright. *Bradbury, an Illustrated Life: A Journey to Far Metaphor*. New York: William Morrow, 2002.  
Weller, Sam. *The Bradbury Chronicles: The Life of Ray Bradbury*. New York: William Morrow, 2005.

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