

F. PAUL WILSON

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THE INTERVIEW

F. PAUL WILSON: I talk to Marty Greenberg rather regularly. For a number of reasons. He's involved in an anthology I'm involved in. And I do stories for him on a regular basis and he always has something interesting to tempt me with. He called me up and said, "We're doing a Bradbury Memorial--sounds like he's dead!--50th year in publishing, or something like that. 50th anniversary of his first publication; something like that. And we have a lot of writers who were influenced by him or really liked his stuff--doing a pastiche, a sequel, prequel to his work, using some of his characters. Would you be interested?" I always say no to Marty first, because I always have something else to do. And then I just thought about Bradbury. He's one of the the most important--he is--

His story, "The October Game" made me want to write horror. I read it when I was thirteen in Alfred Hitchcock's "Thirteen Stories They Wouldn't Let Me Do on TV." And it was-- I remember it was an August night and I sat there and read that book and that story and came to that last line--"And then some damned fool turned on the lights"--"Some idiot turned on the lights"--and it was one of those things where it was a delayed reaction. And then it just--the temperature in the room just dropped twenty degrees. My mouth--the jaw just dropped--and I said, "My God!" . . . We used to do that, sure. I just got sucked in to the whole deal of doing this and playing that game. It just seemed like a regular kids thing to do. And then he just dropped the bottom out of it. And I realize now re-reading it, I should have seen it coming. But I was just--I didn't quite understand why the mother was so upset. It just knocked the hell out of me.

I went back and after talking to Marty I re-read the story and still it holds up wonderfully. It's still an amazingly subtle piece. And it does what I really love fiction to do in the sense that it doesn't turn on the lights for you and show you--"And there was everyone with their hands dripping in gore; with Marion--somebody had Marion's eyes in their hand, intestines in their hands; and that's when the screaming began; and they ended like that--he took it one step back and let me fill in that scene of the looks in those people's faces. And the picture that I formed in my brain was much more real than anyone could describe. And that's one of the keys to effective horror fiction, to let the reader do some of the work in the really awful parts. . . You will fill in what you find most horrible. . . He has done most of the work for you, set up the scene, and now you fill in the colors.

I decided that was one of the most important stories in my genesis as a writer that I had to just do something in regard to that. And all along in the back of my mind, I am thinking--poor little Marion, who is really a victim between husband and wife and their war; someone's got to speak for Marion, has to see that she is avenged, so to speak. So I wrote "The October Game"--the "November Game," excuse me, as a sequel. And Marion gets her revenge on her Daddy. . .It's my story in the sense that it's my style and my voice. It uses his characters and sets the scales even.

I've never met the man. We've exchanged a few notes now and then. . .He writes postcards, basically. The last time I had any contact with him was during "The Phantom of the Opera" problem. When a bunch of us simultaneously discovered that Gaston Leroux was not

given any kind of credit in the playbill--at all. They credit cigars and Maytag washers for cleaning up things backstage; but they don't credit the author of the original story. So I wrote to Webber and to the Theater Guild; and then I heard Ray Bradbury was involved in the movement. So I wrote to him, saying, is there anything I can do? And he wrote back saying everything had been taken care of. But other than that I have no contact with him, other than being someone who has read him and enjoyed his work.

[Why does Bradbury suppress it, in effect?/ (1/2)]

It may be a part of his writing history that he wants to put behind him. . . It shows his versatility, too. That he can do just about anything. But I think he was a hungry young writer then, cranking them out for "Weird Tales." And he just may think it's too strong. And it is strong. For all its subtlety there is a lot of negative emotion throughout the story. It opens with a guy putting a gun back in the drawer, because that's not the way he wants to do it. And he wants to hurt his wife. And the only way to really hurt her is to take her daughter--their daughter, but he considers her her daughter, she looks so much like her. There's emotional violence before there's ever any physical violence.

[comments on finding his own style. Influenced by Pohl, Anderson, Heinlein. "Enemy of the State" one of his first authentic works.]

I didn't say so much I wanted to write like Bradbury. I said, I want to do that to people. I wanted to leave you gasping. Even though my fiction doesn't really do that--but again, I've changed since then. At that time, though, I wanted to do that to people, to leave them with their jaw hanging open. He set me on that road. When I decided I really wanted to be a writer. . . There's a lot of self-discovery in writing. Even if you're not aware while you're doing it, afterwards when you go back to it you see things. Things that were happening at that time are affecting you. Most fiction is a bit of a voyage of self-discovery. Unless you're cranking out hack work. . .