

INTERVIEW WITH RAY BRADBURY IN HIS LOS ANGELES HOME

15 December 1995

by John C. Tibbetts

Thirteen IDs. Appx. 60:45.

#1—ON JOE MUGNAINI

BRADBURY: The whole thing was a fabulous accident. Back in 1951 Maggie and I were walking around in Beverly Hills. And we came across a store that had been emptied recently. They had put on a benefit show and were selling paintings. In the window was this lithograph of a kind of Victorian gothic house for \$75. Well, I couldn't afford that. (Note: There are tape dropouts in the preceding.)

BRADBURY: So I went the next day and talked to the lady in the art gallery and offered to buy it on time. So I bought it and asked about the artist. She took me into the next room and there was this large painting of the lithograph, the original painting, in full color. I went ape—my god, I asked, how much is this? She said \$300. That was ridiculous. Then she showed me another painting, a huge thing, which I now own, a kind of Renaissance train moving across a trestle with no beginning or end, a metaphorical train with jugglers and clowns and Renaissance people. I thought, this man is reading my mind!

When I finally met Joe, I found out that the house in the painting was the one that was situated across the street from where I used to live, at Temple and Figueroa, down in L.A. I lived there 55 years ago and wrote a play about it, THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT (it's playing in town right now, at Wilton and Fountain, as a musical). It was still there when I met him. Later, it was moved.

ID #2—ATTEMPTS TO MAKE "SOMETHING WICKED" WITH GENE KELLY

BRADBURY: Later, I wrote a story about the train in Joe's painting--a screenplay for Gene Kelly, called DARK CARNIVAL. I carried out all the ideas I had been thinking about since high school, about this carnival coming to town, with a carousel that ran backwards, and so forth. You know, we had fallen in love with Kelly, and he used to invite us out to his house. He invited us to the premiere of his film, INVITATION TO THE DANCE. Walking home with Maggie, I told her I would tear off my right arm to work with him. She told me to go through my files and write something for him. I did, and I found my short story from WEIRD TALES, "The Black Ferris." I spent two months working out a treatment and a semi-screenplay of 70-80 pages. I gave it to him and he loved it. He took it to London and Paris and came back a month later, saying, *I'm sorry, Ray, nobody wanted to do it.* So instead I sat down and wrote the novel, SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES. So, the screenplay became the novel, which later became the screenplay.

I'm the strangest writer, I think, in the history of writing: I do all these things which start as poems, become stories, become novels, become screenplays, then novel or stories again. Like one of Joe's trees, that branch out all over the place.

I'm digressing, but, you know, Gene made the greatest musical ever made, SINGIN' IN THE RAIN. Which happens to be a science fiction musical, about the genesis of sound: You dream sound, then you build sound, then you *live* sound; that's science fiction. What happens to people's lives when sound comes to movies; what happens to people's lives when television arrives; what happens to them with the computer? That's all science fiction.

TIBBETTS: There's a correlation in music, I think, the way composers use themes and motifs. . .

BRADBURY: That's right. Like in Berlioz. Now *there's* a science fiction composer! He kept things around for years and developed them in things like the SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE. In his book, EVENINGS WITH THE ORCHESTRA, he has a science fictional chapter about a symphonic city of the future, Euphonia, I think. He influenced so many people who came later, especially the Russians.

ID#3—MORE ON MUGNAINI

TIBBETTS: Let's get back to Joe Mugnaini. What happened next?

BRADBURY: So I fell in love with Joe's work immediately. I said, how much is the second painting? Four or five hundred. The prices were impossible. I asked for his address and called him in Alta Dena, asking him if I could come up to visit. A friend of mine drove me up, because I've never learned to drive (I'm always driven somewhere by someone). I saw this gorgeous stuff and I said, *Look, let me be as honest with you as possible. I can't afford the gallery price. I don't mind bypassing the gallery. If the painting doesn't sell, I'll give you what you would have gotten from the gallery.* I told him I hoped it would sell, but I also told him I hoped it wouldn't! Two or three weeks later he called me and told me to come and get the painting. The first one I bought was the gothic house. I found out later he pulled the painting out of the gallery to give to me. That's really something, isn't it? So our friendship began on a note of his wanting to please me. I found that out years later. I made an agreement to buy both paintings over a year's time.

Then I asked him to do covers for some of my books. I had already made designs for them, rough sketches. I just put down the metaphor, crude as it was, and he took off from that. For DARK CARNIVAL I worked from some Mexican masks I saw at the Art Center College. The head of the College showed me a number of photographs and working from my ideas worked out a cover design that Derleth and I approved. (It's not a "selling" cover, because you put it down with other books, and the design disappears!) In the meantime, MARTIAN CHRONICLES and ILLUSTRATED MAN came out. Next was FAHRENHEIT 451 and GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN. I said to Joe, I need a cover for GOLDEN APPLES, can you

give me an example. He did twenty covers, jacket designs. I have a half dozen of them put away. I picked one and sent it to Doubleday.

For FAHRENHEIT 451 I introduced Joe to the Ballantine people. I had seen a sketch of his based on the mythology of Don Quixote, the figure in his armor with his hand over his eyes, the put-upon dreamer. I loved the image so much, I asked Joe to dress this knight in newspapers instead of armor and have him standing in a bonfire of books. The books are burning and he is burning. That became the metaphor for FAHRENHEIT 451. He later reworked that image for the Easton Press edition (and he also did a wonderful painting for me for Easton's SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES). That's the way we worked. I would give him suggestions on some occasions, and on others none at all.

TIBBETTS: Did seeing his drawings fuel your own subsequent work?

BRADBURY: It was a perfect marriage. I told him, *Don't show the characters' faces*. In a lot of illustrated works, they show you the faces of the characters, and the reader is disappointed, because it's not the same face in his imagination. I said, *Turn the faces away. The body can be almost anything and still represent the character*. He always did that. It's rare that you see the face, except for "The Dwarf," which is so grotesque you can see the face. . . . Anyway, I loved his illustration for the Easton edition of SOMETHING WICKED. And I made him do a duplicate for me. I've got that up in my FAX room.

We always had fights. For forty years, whenever I wanted to buy something, he'd offer to give it to me! I'd say, *Joe, for heaven's sake, you've got to value your things as much as I do*. I sent him a check for \$4000 for the "Dust Witch and the Balloon" image in the Easton edition, and he sent back \$2000. I sent that back to him and he donated it to the Goodwill or some Catholic like that. I finally had to accept the fact that that was the way he way. But, dammit to Hell, I don't want to take advantage of artists. Too many people do that; and a lot of gallery owners are not nice people. Now, I have two or three hundred of his things, sketches, bits and pieces of concepts, lithographs, paintings, etc. The griping thing about this is that I think that Joe never got the recognition that he deserved. When I think about Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline and others, all no-talented people, as far as I'm concerned—well. . . . And the "realist" painters like Andrew Wyeth, they are too popular to be taken seriously, I guess. Once in Chicago, between trains, I went out to the Art Institute to see a Wyeth show. There was a line around the block. I managed to get in, though. I thought to myself, *Please God, let the curator know who Ray Bradbury is!* [laughs] I don't pull rank like that most of the time! But I only had two hours between trains. It was an incredible show; and of course, I loved his father before him, when I was a child.

But the fact that nobody knows who Joe Mugnaini was rankles with me terribly. Anything I can do to change that, for the rest of my life, like talking to you, I'll do.

TIBBETTS: We hope to do that by inviting you to St. Louis next year to Archon to talk about him. People like me have a tendency to put both your names together. Few writers have been so well served as you have been by him.

BRADBURY: He was my brother, he was my twin. I was incredibly fortunate to find him. What if I hadn't gone by that window that night? That's really scary. His life would have been changed, and mine too! Forever. I can't think of any other illustrator for certain kinds of things like him.

CURRENT PROJECTS (continuing ID # 3)

BRADBURY: I'm finishing my vampire stories now, which I started forty-five years ago—"The Homecoming" and the other "family" stories. One of the first illustrations for the first story was by Charles Addams. And he started his "family vampire" stories around the same time. Addams and I had plans at one time to do a book together, but we never had the chance to do it. Now, my choice to illustrate the book is Ronald Searle. Have you seen his work on A CHRISTMAS CAROL? It's gorgeous; it came out about fifteen years ago.

ID #4

BRADBURY: I want to call the new book FROM THE DUST RETURNED, I think. I'm working on it now, some new stories. Now I'm trying to put a frame on it. I'm building the house and filling the rooms. Cecy is in the attic room, Timothy is over here, and there's got to be a stone gargoyle showing up at the door. When I was in Paris last July, I attended a double marriage held in a beautiful room with modern French murals by a civil servant, done with great humor. All of my friends, Maggie and myself, were there. And there was a three-year old little boy, so full of life, running around—you just wanted to grab him and shout, *Don't grow! Stay there; stay free forever!* I wrote a story about him, and now he's a member of the Family and he stays young forever—a variant of the older boy I wrote about in "Hail and Farewell," who goes from family to family. But this boy is different. He's three years old, and he passes from hand to hand in the family when there's been a death, and someone has to call for him. When I'm done "throwing up" the book, regurgitating it from my subconscious, the book will be finished. It will collect together all the Family stories, plus the new ones.

I don't know who will publish it. Knopf hasn't been behaving recently. They've neglected my books, letting HALLOWEEN TREE go out of print, just before Halloween! Come on! What am I supposed to say to that? I sent them a new fantasy, a children's book, a year ago, and they never acknowledged receipt, not even a note. These are people I've been working with for twenty-five years! So, you know the old saying, paranoids are not born, they're made?--well, I'm a little paranoid with Knopf; so the new book will go on to someone else. I hope to have it done by next summer.

ID #5. ON "ICARUS MONTGOLFIER WRIGHT"

TIBBETTS: You worked with Joe on the film adapted from "Icarus Montgolfier Wright."

BRADBURY: At one time, it was released by Pyramid Pictures. I don't know if there is a distributor for it now. I'd like to get hold of it now and cut about three or four minutes. I was much younger then, about forty-one or forty-two when I made that film. I hadn't yet learned much about timing. It didn't need to be seventeen minutes, but maybe just fourteen. Now that we have video cassettes, it might be possible to make a cut. I'm impatient when I look at it now; I say, *Come on! You've made your point! Let's get on with it!*

Joe gave us a thousand drawings. You couldn't stop him. You turned on the faucet and you couldn't find the handle to turn him off! We all worked for about a year on that thing, for free. This was in 1961. We got no money. Out at Format Films. George Clayton Johnson, who helped on the screenplay (it was his idea to do it in the first place), introduced me to the Format people. I worked on the script, and George may have done a preliminary script. I had meetings with Joe and the Format people. He brought in dozens of sketches every few days. Some of the sketches were better than the final things on the screen. They were freer. (Of course, if you work too free, you end up like Pollock—you vanish up your own backside!) I have quite a few of those sketches.

The film had a very limited release, in just a few theaters for a few days, late in the year. Then we got nominated by the Short Subjects Committee for the Academy Awards. There were five nominations, and we had a screening at the Academy. I went there with my wife and friends. They showed all five of the nominees, and everybody said it was a winner. I didn't think so. I don't kid myself. I know which of my works make screenplays and which don't. I was convinced that another entry called "The Hole" would win. It was about a black laborer digging a hole in the street, a bomb shelter. I thought people would think it a "safe" vision of the future. Mine was too far away. Space travel hadn't been invented yet. Mercury and Apollo missions were still years ahead. Who cared about space travel? Who knew anything? Sure enough, "The Hole" won the Award. Joe took his daughter Diane and I took my daughter Susan, and we dropped them at the Awards ceremony. Joe and I didn't go. We went back at ten o'clock and sure enough, it didn't win. All the way home, Joe was muttering, *God damned son of a bitch! Bastards! Etc., etc.*

ID # 6. MORE MUGNAINI ANECDOTES

BRADBURY: He had a vile tongue! I heard him lecturing in class at times, and he loved to shock people. Once at the Otis Art Institute, after I had only known him a few years, he invited me down to visit his class. He didn't tell me what kind of class it was. There was this naked girl lying there, you know? And I had never seen anything like that! A naked lady in public! I went into shock. Joe loved every minute of it. He said, *Come on in, Ray! Give her a bite! Give her a bite!* It's interesting, most men can't get away with that sort of thing; but Joe could. Bette Jaffe, who was one of his students, told me the same thing: He could say anything and get away with it. The women were never upset by it. Occasionally, Joe and I would go down to a

museum and look at paintings. Once we went down to see a Goya, which was a disappointing picture. In the middle of a gallery, a docent was leading a group of twenty people through, with all kinds of high-falutin' talk [burst of laughter]. And in the middle of it all, Joe through his head back and shouted, *Bull shit!!!* Well, all the pictures tilted on their hangers, dust fell from the ceiling, and the starch went up everybody's spine. Everybody marched out of the room like wooden soldiers. I hugged Joe and kissed him. I said, *Oh, Joe, I've been wanting to say that for years! To all those people who take Art so seriously!* And when I spoke at his Memorial Service [barely stifled sobs] I ended my speech by saying, *Wherever Joe is—and I hope he's somewhere—he's crying 'Bull shit!' and all the clouds are hanging wrong, and God's having a nervous breakdown!*

TIBBETTS: (I tell Ray about Joe's "Third Elephant" allegory.)

ID #7—ON STAGE WORK AND WRITING

TIBBETTS: Let's talk about something some of us don't know much about—your plays and your poetry.

BRADBURY: My life has been full of metaphors. Making metaphors. You can't pick a thing up unless you can put a handle on it.

I've been on the stage since I was twelve years old. I was forced into trying out for a Christmas show when I was in the seventh grade. I didn't want to try out, but my teacher made me. I ended up with the lead! That was a big mistake, because I was hooked. I fell in love with Chandu the Magician and Tarzan and Buck Rogers. In the meantime, I was acting on the stage and wrote the student talent revues. Theater's been a big part of my life. When I realized nobody was writing science fiction plays, I said, *What the hell, why shouldn't I write them?* And I've done about thirty plays now. They've been collected in a huge collection, ON STAGE. It was called a "chrystomathy" of Bradbury plays. A stupid word. I asked, *What the hell is that??*

And my poetry is all metaphorical. There's hardly a poem that doesn't represent a metaphor of some sort. Some of them are good, some aren't. I don't publish anything that's bad (I hope). I was influenced by the Old Testament, by *Moby Dick*. By Shakespeare. By cities. So I wound up in charge of the United States Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. I wrote the show for the top floor, the History of the United States—400 years in seventeen minutes flat, with a full symphony orchestra! And then the Disney people came and hired me to create the interior of Spaceship Earth at EPCOT. Same thing. Metaphors. And at the Space Museum here, I created a thing, WINTERS ON THE UNIVERSE. All astronomical metaphors.

TIBBETTS: It's a world thirsty for metaphors.

BRADBURY: You can't pick something up unless you can put a handle for it. I was down at Houston thirty years ago meeting all the astronauts—LIFE magazine had

sent me down. I tried to get them to fire me. They asked why? I said because I don't know what I'm looking at. A confusing bombardment of material. They said they believed in me. And they said I had 48 hours. And I came up with the metaphor of the Theater of History, with actors, scripts, directors, stages, rehearsals. And if you don't do all this, you get out in space and you're dead. The quickest death ever invented. You get up there with a leak in your suit and you're in big trouble.

If you look at all my work as a series of metaphors, you'll be well off. Everything has been emotional and unintended. I've lived the life described by Federico Fellini, who became my friend sixteen years ago: And he said at one point, *Don't tell me what I'm doing; I don't want to know!* And that's the way I've lived. I don't know what I'm going to do tomorrow morning. I didn't know what I was going to do today when I got up. And it leaves you free to be surprised, too. If I'm not surprised, you're not going to be surprised. I'm doing a one-act play right now, taking monologues from

ID# 8—OTHER PROJECTS—PLAYS AND SCENARIOS

BRADBURY: I'm doing a one-man play right now, taking monologues from some of my plays and stories. (more on seeing ballets. . . on Branagh's Shakespeare films) In the last ten years, I've done 65 scripts for my television series. And I had to wait forty years to get that kind of control. Every time I would have a meeting with NBC, they would try their best to leave their fingerprints on me. I had a meeting with NBC twenty years ago to do a series. They were going to bring in a writer from the James Bond series (I thought then I would need help with the scripts). So we're all gathered together in this room, talking about the series. Finally, one of the vice presidents speaks up and says, *Well, Mr. Bradbury, what we don't want is anything too high falutin'*. And I said, *High falutin'? I started in WEIRD TALES! I was in ASTONISHING STORIES! I was in SUPER SCIENCE STORIES! I was in CAPTAIN FUTURE! High falutin'?!!* Well, he realized he'd said the wrong thing. He pulled back and pondered, *What I really want from you is something like Franz Kafka!* I said, *Franz Kafka?? Franz Kafka?? Now that's high falutin'!!* And I went around the room, and I said, *'Bye. . . Bye. . . Bye!* I left, and that was the end of the meeting!

Similar meetings have occurred over the years, time and again. Finally, ten years ago, a producer came along and sent a year taking me to lunch and dinner, smoothing my feathers, assuring everything would be okay and that I could write all the scripts. I had the control. I was able to help in the casting. If something went wrong, I could help fix it. It's a damned good series. Out of 65 shows, I think we only had three clinkers. That's an awfully good average, isn't it?

TIBBETTS: Any future film projects?

BRADBURY: As for films, I've just finished a script of FAHRENHEIT 451 for Mel Gibson. He'll do it next year (although I'll believe it when the cameras start turning!). And I've just finished a new script of THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT for Disney. That should start shooting next summer, I guess. That project's been

around for years (mainly because of Roy Disney, a good guy). And a script for Doug Trumbull, who's putting together one of his show rides, where they crack your spine and jump you up and down. They're horrible! I hate 'em. But he wanted something with a brain, a heart and soul—I was for him part Scarecrow, part Tin Woodman [laughs]. For that I'm working with Buzz Aldrin, the astronaut, and Robert McCall, the artist. A good team. Supposedly, they're producing this thing, which will go into malls and museums somewhere. We'll see.

ID#9—ON MORTALITY

TIBBETTS: What do you think of others who are 75 years old and already turning in their sleep?)

BRADBURY: I don't understand them! I'm lucky. It's genetics. I've never been sick a day in my life. I've never been a hospital. My mother lived to be 79; she was never sick a day in her life. George Bernard Shaw is my hero. I'd like to imitate him and live to be 96 and have God hit me with a baseball bat on my 97th birthday and just knock me off the plate. By surprise! Don't tell me what's coming!

ID#10—TOUR OF THE HOUSE. . . FAMILY MEMENTOS, PAINTINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, etc. RANDOM DIALOGUE

ID#11—ON HIS HOME TOWN

TIBBETTS: Do you ever return to your home town, Waukegan, Illinois?

BRADBURY: I was there two years ago. The Ravine has been named after me. I scared the hell out of me when I was five. I went back and they've called it the "Ray Bradbury Park" with a "Dandelion Trail" leading down to the bridge. A gravestone is there with my name on it (laughs). I took my Aunt Neva back with me, and my first-grade girl friend with me (I called her in Michigan), and we went there and had a good cry (laughs). It's still a mysterious place. You don't want to be there at night, no matter what! . . .

ID#12—MORE TOURING THE HOUSE. . . The FAX room, the mimeo machine. . .

(MORE RANDOM REMARKS ON BOOKS AND MEMORABILIA. . . THE MUGNAINI TRAIN PAINTING. . . JOE'S LAST PAINTING. . . THE "SOMETHING WICKED" ILLO. . . G.K. CHESTERTON. . . PHOTOS OF HIS HOUSE IN TUCSON, ARIZONA, ON SOUTH FOURTH AVENUE (WHERE HE BEGAN WRITING STORIES AT AGE 12, IN 1932. . . ON "LITTLE NEMO'S" TWO CHARACTERS, "NEMO" AND "OMEN". . . ON TIM BURTON. . .)

ID#13. He signs my drawing of him.

Ray Bradbury: An Appreciation

by John C. Tibbetts

Ray Bradbury comes to the Lawrence-Kansas City area on November 14, 1997. He'll speak his mind (a fertile, insistent, and persuasive mind at that) at the Lied Center near the KU campus at 7:30 in the evening. After that, there'll be a book signing for his newest volume of short stories, *Driving Blind*. It's about time. The most popular fantasist and imagineer of our time has been everywhere else in the galaxy—but he's never been to our town.

If you miss him, it's your own damned fault.

What will he talk about? What he always writes and talks about—living forever! Having attained his own immortality, he'll enjoin you to claim your own. He'll unleash his quiver of exclamation points and hurl them like thunderbolts at you. He'll nail you to the wall. He'll talk about Mars and Heaven. About John Carter and Captain Ahab. About Flash Gordon and Walt Disney. He'll blaze like a skyrocket on the Fourth of July.

And, when you least expect it, the sly old fox will take a breathless pause—
--and casually scare the hell out of you.

Still a compulsive writer—even after an estimated ten million words—Bradbury admits: “My stories have led me through my life. They shout, I follow.” They have taken him from his boyhood in Waukegan, Illinois (re-named “Green Town” in *Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*), to the planet Mars (*The Martian Chronicles*), to the dark catacombs of Guanajuato, Mexico (“The Next in Line”), to the rain-soaked streets of Dublin (where he wrote the screenplay of John Huston’s *Moby Dick*), to the crumbling backlots of Hollywood (*A Graveyard for Lunatics*), to the theme parks of EPCOT and Walt Disney World (where he worked as an “imagineer,” or concept designer), and straight on into the future (*Fahrenheit 451*).

His primary themes are bound up in the twin locations of the “locomotive-hungry” country of Green Town, Illinois and the “white silent towns” of the planet Mars. For him, both represent frontiers of life and imagination. In Green Town children tremble on the threshold of adulthood (*Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*); and on Mars colonizing spacemen disseminate man’s seed into the cosmos. However, both worlds, he fears, are threatened by vanishing youth and the failure of imagination. Whether we are growing older or reaching out into space, Bradbury worries that all too often we try “to bludgeon away all the strangeness” and create worlds in the images of our own past. That is our strength and our weakness.

“If you look at all my work as a series of metaphors, you’ll be well off,” he tells me in a recent interview (I’m proud to admit that I’ve known Ray for more than thirty years). “Everything has been emotional and unintended. I’ve lived the life described by Federico Fellini, who became my friend sixteen years ago: And he said at one point, *Don’t tell me what I’m doing; I don’t want to know!* I don’t know what I’m going to do tomorrow morning. It leaves me free to be surprised.”

Ever the optimist, Ray sounds a warning to the nay sayers out there. “We have to get the Doomsters out of the way. Bring on a New Millennium and they lie down and play dead. At least an optimist can do things. And maybe I’m a fool, but that’s all right. Call me that, then get out of the way!”

In addition to the just-released *Driving Blind*, Ray has many projects in the works. “As for films, I’ve just finished a script of *Fahrenheit 451* for Mel Gibson,” he says. “He’ll do it next year (although I’ll believe it when the cameras start turning!). And I’ve just finished new scripts of *The Martian Chronicles* and *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* for Disney. And a script for Douglas [2001: A Space Odyssey] Trumbull, who’s putting together one of his show rides, where they crack your spine and jump you up and down. They’re horrible! I hate ‘em. But he wanted something with a brain, a heart and soul (I guess I was for him part Scarecrow, part Tin Woodman!). Along with Trumbull, I’m working with Buzz Aldrin, the astronaut, and Robert McCall, the artist. A good team. Supposedly, they’re producing this thing, which will go into malls and museums somewhere. We’ll see.”

One upcoming project occupies a special place in his heart—and in the hearts of those, who, like me, first encountered him long years ago in the pages of a short-story collection called *Dark Carnival* (1947). A number of stories therein chronicled

the activities of the Elliott family, a very peculiar family—a very peculiar family—numbering vampires, were-creatures, shape-changers, and telepaths. Now, Ray plans to revisit the Elliots, of Greentown, Illinois, and give us an update on their activities.

“I started these stories forty-five years ago. One of the first illustrations for the first story, ‘The Homecoming,’ was by Charles Addams. And he started his ‘Addams Family’ stories around the same time. Addams and I had plans at one time to do a book together, but we never had the chance to do it. I want to call the new book From the Dust Returned, I think, or just The Vampire Chronicles. I’m working on it now, some new stories. Now I’m trying to put a frame on it. I’m building the house and filling the rooms. Cecy Elliott, the telepath, is in the attic room; her brother, Timothy, the only ‘normal’ member of the family, is over here; and there’s got to be a stone gargoyle planted over the door. And there’s a new family member I’ll tell you about: When I was in Paris last July, I attended a double marriage held in a beautiful room with modern French murals by a civil servant, done with great humor. All of my friends, my wife Maggie, and myself, were there. And there was a three-year old little boy, so full of life, running around—you just wanted to grab him and shout, *Don’t grow! Stay there; stay free forever!* I wrote a story about him, and now he’s a member of the Elliott Family and he stays young forever—a variant of another boy I wrote about in a story called ‘Hail and Farewell’—who goes from family to family. But this boy is different. He’s three years old, and he passes from hand to hand in the family when there’s been a death, and someone has to call for him. When I’m done ‘throwing up’ the book, regurgitating it from my subconscious, the book will be finished. It will collect together all the Family stories, plus the new ones.”

Clearly, time stands still for the 77-year old Bradbury. Or, alternately, it marches on forever. I ask him what he thinks of people who are half his age and already turning over in their sleep.

“I don’t understand them! I’m lucky. It’s genetics, I guess. George Bernard Shaw is my hero. I’d like to imitate him and live to be 96 and have God hit me with a baseball bat on my 97th birthday and just knock me off the plate. By surprise! Just don’t tell me what’s coming!”

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RAY DOUGLAS BRADBURY is the most recognized and acclaimed master of modern imaginative fiction. The visionary zeal and poetic intensity of his stories, poems, plays, novels, television shows, and films transcend the restrictive labels of

science fiction and horror. Born in Waukegan, Illinois, the son of a power lineman, he moved with his family in 1934 to Los Angeles, his present home. His enthusiasm for science fiction led to the creation of his own “fan” publication, *Futura Fantasia*, in 1939 and his first story sale in 1941. From pulps like *Planet Stories* and *Weird Tales* he soon moved to “slick” publications like *Collier’s* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. The appearance in 1947 of his first story collection, the legendary *Dark Carnival*, and subsequent books *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and *Dandelion Wine* (1957) brought him not only worldwide popularity but the critical praise of literary lions like Christopher Isherwood and Aldous Huxley. “Ray Bradbury’s flamboyant rocket ships took him into high literary orbit,” writes science fiction historian Brian Aldiss.

Today, he is busier than ever. A short story collection, *Quicker than the Eye*, has just been published. Currently, he is continuing the saga of the Elliott Family of Green Town, Illinois with a new collection of stories about Timothy, Cecy, Uncle Einar, and some new members of the Family. . . .

Still a compulsive writer—even after an estimated ten million words—Bradbury admits: “My stories have led me through my life. they shout, I follow.”

BRADBURY/ Tibbetts/ page two

Thus, in a half century of writing, they have taken him from the Green Town of his boyhood (Waukegan), to the planet Mars (*The Martian Chronicles*), the dark

catacombs of Guanajuato, Mexico (“The Next in Line”), the rain-soaked streets of Dublin, where he wrote the screenplay of John Huston’s *Moby Dick* (*Green Shadows, White Whale*), the crumbling backlots of Hollywood (*A Graveyard for Lunatics*), and the theme parks of EPCOT and Walt Disney World (where he worked as an “imagineer,” or concept designer).

His stories are sheathed in a unique envelope of metaphor, imagery, and sound. Rockets travel “like pale sea leviathans” through “the midnight waters of space”; Halloween comes “in a fall of broomsticks”; and a dying woman leaves her “fossil imprint” in her bed. Bradbury is our foremost poet of the seasons, especially the “goblin leaves” and “bonfire skies” of October (his favorite month). His primary themes are bound up in the twin locations of the “locomotive-hungry” country of Green Town, Illinois and the “white silent towns” of the planet Mars. Both are frontiers. In Green Town boys tremble on the threshold of adulthood (*Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*); and on Mars colonizing spacemen disseminate man’s seed into the cosmos. Vanishing youth and the failure of imagination threaten both worlds. Whether we are growing older or reaching out into space, Bradbury worries that all too often we try “to bludgeon away all the strangeness” and create worlds in the images of our own past. That is our strength and our weakness. The consequences, as he shows in the chilling story, “Mars Is Heaven,” can be disastrous.

And yet Bradbury remains optimistic about mankind's future. "We have to get the Doomsters out of the way," he has told this writer. "At least an optimist can do things. And maybe I'm a fool, but that's all right. Call me that, then get out of the way!"

An Interview with Ray Bradbury in his Los Angeles home (15 Dec '95)

by John C. Tibbetts

(There are few dropouts in the first few minutes)

THE ASSOCIATION WITH JOE MUGNAINI

(You promised me you would talk about your association with Joe Mugnaini. Where and how did it begin?)

The whole thing was a fabulous accident. Back in 1951 Maggie and I were walking around in Beverly Hills. And we came across a store that had been emptied recently. They had put on a benefit show and were selling paintings. In the window was this lithograph of a kind of Victorian gothic house for \$75. Well, I couldn't afford that. So I went the next day and talked to the lady in the art gallery and offered to buy it on time. So I bought it and asked about the artist. She took me into the next room and there was this large painting of the lithograph, the original painting, in full color. I went ape—my god, I asked, how much is this? She said \$300. That was ridiculous. Then she showed me another painting, a huge thing, which I now own, a kind of Renaissance train moving across a trestle with no beginning or end, a metaphorical train with jugglers and clowns and Renaissance people. I thought, this man is reading my mind!

When I finally met Joe, I found out that the house in the painting was the one that was situated across the street from where I used to live, at Temple and Figueroa, down in L.A. I lived there 55 years ago and wrote a play about it, *THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT* (it's playing in town right now, at Wilton and Fountain, as a musical). It was still there when I met him. Later, it was moved.

ATTEMPTS TO MAKE "SOMETHING WICKED" WITH GENE KELLY

Later, I wrote a story about the train in Joe's painting--a screenplay for Gene Kelly, called *DARK CARNIVAL*. I carried out all the ideas I had been thinking about since high school, about this carnival coming to town, with a carousel that ran backwards, and so forth. You know, we had fallen in love with Kelly, and he used to invite us out to his house. He invited us to the premiere of his film, *INVITATION TO THE DANCE*. Walking home with Maggie, I told her I would tear off my right arm to work with him. She told me to go through my files and write something for him. I did, and I found my short story from *WEIRD TALES*, "The Black Ferris." I spent two months working out a treatment and a semi-screenplay of 70-80 pages. I gave it to him and he loved it. He took it to London and Paris and came back a month later, saying, *I'm sorry, Ray, nobody wanted to do it*. So instead I sat down and wrote the novel, *SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES*. So, the screenplay became the novel, which later became the screenplay.

I'm the strangest writer, I think, in the history of writing: I do all these things which start as poems, become stories, become novels, become screenplays, then novel or stories again. Like one of Joe's trees, that branch out all over the place.

I'm digressing, but, you know, Gene made the greatest musical ever made, *SINGIN' IN THE RAIN*. Which happens to be a science fiction musical, about the genesis of sound: You dream sound, then you build sound, then you *live* sound; that's science fiction. What happens to people's lives when sound comes to movies; what happens to people's lives when television arrives; what happens to them with the computer? That's all science fiction.

(There's a correlation in music, I think, the way composers use themes and motifs. . .)

That's right. Like in Berlioz. Now *there's* a science fiction composer! He kept things around for years and developed them in things like the *SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE*. In his book, *EVENINGS WITH THE ORCHESTRA*, he has a science fictional chapter about a symphonic city of the future, Euphonia, I think. He influenced so many people who came later, especially the Russians.

MORE ON MUGNAINI

(Let's get back to Joe Mugnaini. What happened next?)

So I fell in love with Joe's work immediately. The prices were impossible. I asked for his address and called him in Alta Dena, asking him if I could come up to

visit. A friend of mine drove me up, because I've never learned to drive (I'm always driven somewhere by someone). I saw this gorgeous stuff and I said, *Look, let me be as honest with you as possible. I can't afford the gallery price. I don't mind bypassing the gallery. If the painting doesn't sell, I'll give you what you would have gotten from the gallery.* I told him I hoped it would sell, but I also told him I hoped it wouldn't! Two or three weeks later he called me and told me to come and get the painting. The first one I bought was the gothic house. I found out later he pulled the painting out of the gallery to give to me. That's really something, isn't it? So our friendship began on a note of his wanting to please me. I found that out years later. I made an agreement to buy both paintings over a year's time.

Then I asked him to do covers for some of my books. I had already made designs for them, rough sketches. I just put down the metaphor, crude as it was, and he took off from that. For DARK CARNIVAL I worked from some Mexican masks I saw at the Art Center College. The head of the College showed me a number of photographs and working from my ideas worked out a cover design that Derleth and I approved. (It's not a "selling" cover, because you put it down with other books, and the design disappears!) My concept sketch for THE HALLOWEEN TREE attracted the notice of Chuck Jones. But before the film was completed, Warners shut down their animation unit. I wrote the book after that. A few years ago, Hanna-Barbera bought the novel and I turned it back into a screenplay.

For FAHRENHEIT 451 I introduced Joe to the Ballantine people. I had seen a sketch of his based on the mythology of Don Quixote, the figure in his armor with his hand over his eyes. I asked Joe to dress this knight in newspapers instead of armor and have him standing in a bonfire of books. That became the metaphor for that book. He later reworked that image for the Easton Press edition (and he also did a wonderful painting for me for Easton's SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES). That's the way we worked. I would give him suggestions on some occasions, and on others none at all.

It was a perfect marriage. I told him, *Don't show the characters' faces.* In a lot of illustrated works, they show you the faces of the characters, and the reader is disappointed, because it's not the same face in his imagination. I said, *Turn the faces away. The body can be almost anything and still represent the character.*

We always had fights. For forty years, whenever I wanted to buy something, he'd offer to give it to me! I'd say, *Joe, for heaven's sake, you've got to value your things as much as I do.* I sent him a check for \$4000 for the "Dust Witch and the Balloon" image in the Easton edition, and he sent back \$2000. I sent that back to him and he donated it to the Goodwill or some group like that. I finally had to accept the fact that that was the way he way. But, dammit to Hell, I don't want to take advantage of artists. Too many people do that; and a lot of gallery owners are not nice people. Now, I have two or three hundred of his things, sketches, lithographs, paintings, etc.

(Do you think Joe ever got the recognition he deserved?)

Hell, no! When I think about Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline and others, all no-talented people, as far as I'm concerned—well. . . . And the “realist” painters like Andrew Wyeth, they are too popular to be taken seriously, I guess. Once in Chicago, between trains, I went out to the Art Institute to see a Wyeth show. There was a line around the block. I managed to get in, though. I thought to myself, *Please God, let the curator know who Ray Bradbury is!* [laughs] I don't pull rank like that most of the time! It was an incredible show; and of course, I loved his father before him, when I was a child.

But the fact that nobody knows who Joe Mugnaini was rankles with me terribly. Anything I can do to change that, for the rest of my life, like talking to you, I'll do. He was my brother, he was my twin. I was incredibly fortunate to find him. What if I hadn't gone by that window that night? That's really scary. His life would have been changed, and mine too! Forever. I can't think of any other illustrator for certain kinds of things like him.

ON “ICARUS MONTGOLFIER WRIGHT”

(You worked with Joe on the film adapted from “Icarus Montgolfier Wright.”)

At one time, it was released by Pyramid Pictures. I don't know if there is a distributor for it now. I'd like to get hold of it now and cut about three or four minutes. I was much younger then, about forty-one or forty-two when I made that film. I hadn't yet learned much about timing. It didn't need to be seventeen minutes, but maybe just fourteen. Now that we have video cassettes, it might be possible to make a cut. I'm impatient when I look at it now; I say, *Come on! You've made your point! Let's get on with it!*

Joe gave us a thousand drawings. You couldn't stop him. You turned on the faucet and you couldn't find the handle to turn him off! We all worked for about a year on that thing, for free. This was in 1961. Out at Format Films. George Clayton Johnson, who helped on the screenplay (it was his idea to do it in the first place), introduced me to the Format people. I worked on the script, and George may have done a preliminary script. I had meetings with Joe and the Format people. He brought in dozens of sketches every few days. Some of the sketches were better than the final things on the screen. They were freer. (Of course, if you work too free, you end up like Pollock—you vanish up your own backside!) I have quite a few of those sketches.

The film had a very limited release, in just a few theaters for a few days, late in the year. Then we got nominated by the Short Subjects Committee for the Academy Awards. There were five nominations, and we had a screening at the Academy. I went there with my wife and friends. They showed all five of the nominees, and everybody said it was a winner. I didn't think so. I don't kid myself. I know which of my works make screenplays and which don't. I was convinced that another entry called “The Hole” would win. It was about a black laborer digging a hole in the street, a bomb shelter. I thought people would think it a “safe” vision of the future. Mine was too far away. Space travel hadn't been invented yet. Mercury and Apollo missions were still

years ahead. Who cared about space travel? Who knew anything? Sure enough, “The Hole” won the Award. Joe took his daughter and I took my daughter Susan, and we dropped them at the Awards ceremony. Joe and I didn’t go. We went back at ten o’clock and sure enough, it didn’t win. All the way home, Joe was muttering, *God damned son of a bitch! Bastards! Etc., etc.*

MORE MUGNAINI ANECDOTES

He had a vile tongue! I heard him lecturing in class at times, and he loved to shock people. Once at the Otis Art Institute, after I had only known him a few years, he invited me down to visit his class. He didn’t tell me what kind of class it was. There was this naked girl lying there, you know? And I had never seen anything like that! A naked lady in public! I went into shock. Joe loved every minute of it. He said, *Come on in, Ray! Give her a bite! Give her a bite!* It’s interesting, most men can’t get away with that sort of thing; but Joe could. Bette Jaffe, who was one of his students, told me the same thing: He could say anything and get away with it. The women were never upset by it. Occasionally, Joe and I would go down to a museum and look at paintings. Once we went down to see a Goya, which was a disappointing picture. In the middle of a gallery, a docent was leading a group of twenty people through, with all kinds of high-falutin’ talk [burst of laughter]. And in the middle of it all, Joe through his head back and shouted, *Bull shit!!!* Well, all the pictures tilted on their hangers, dust fell from the ceiling, and the starch went up everybody’s spine. Everybody marched out of the room like wooden soldiers. I hugged Joe and kissed him. I said, *Oh, Joe, I’ve been wanting to say that for years! To all those people who take Art so seriously!* And when I spoke at his Memorial Service [barely stifled sobs] I ended my speech by saying, *Wherever Joe is—and I hope he’s somewhere—he’s crying ‘Bull shit!’ and all the clouds are hanging wrong, and God’s having a nervous breakdown!*

ON EARLY DAYS, FIRST INFLUENCES, EPCOT

(Let’s talk about something some of us don’t know much about—your plays and your poetry.)

My life has been full of metaphors. Making metaphors. You can’t pick a thing up unless you can put a handle on it.

I’ve been on the stage since I was twelve years old. I was forced into trying out for a Christmas show when I was in the seventh grade. I didn’t want to try out, but my teacher made me. I ended up with the lead! That was a big mistake, because I was hooked. I fell in love with Chandu the Magician and Tarzan and Buck Rogers. In the meantime, I was acting on the stage and wrote the student talent revues. Theater’s been a big part of my life. When I realized nobody was writing science fiction plays, I said, *What the hell, why shouldn’t I write them?* And I’ve done about thirty plays now.

They've been collected in a huge collection, ON STAGE. It was called a "chryptomathy" of Bradbury plays. A stupid word. I asked, *What the hell is that??*

And my poetry is all metaphorical. There's hardly a poem that doesn't represent a metaphor of some sort. Some of them are good, some aren't. I don't publish anything that's bad (I hope).

(What are the major influences on your work since childhood?)

I was influenced by the Old Testament, by *Moby Dick*. By Shakespeare. By cities. So I wound up in charge of the United States Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. I wrote the show for the top floor, the History of the United States—400 years in seventeen minutes flat, with a full symphony orchestra!

And then the Disney people came and hired me to create the interior of Spaceship Earth at EPCOT. And at the Space Museum here, I created a thing, WINTERS ON THE UNIVERSE. All astronomical metaphors.

I was down at Houston thirty years ago meeting all the astronauts—LIFE magazine had sent me down—and I came up with the metaphor of the Theater of History, with actors, scripts, directors, stages, rehearsals. And if you don't do all this, you get out in space and you're dead. The quickest death ever invented. You get up there with a leak in your suit and you're in big trouble.

If you look at all my work as a series of metaphors, you'll be well off. Everything has been emotional and unintended. I've lived the life described by Federico Fellini, who became my friend sixteen years ago: And he said at one point, *Don't tell me what I'm doing; I don't want to know!* I don't know what I'm going to do tomorrow morning. And it leaves you free to be surprised, too.

CURRENT PROJECTS ("The Family," "Halloween Tree")

(What are some of your current projects?)

I'm finishing my vampire stories now, which I started forty-five years ago—"The Homecoming" and the other "family" stories. One of the first illustrations for the first story was by Charles Addams. And he started his "family vampire" stories around the same time. Addams and I had plans at one time to do a book together, but we never had the chance to do it. Now, my choice to illustrate the book is Ronald Searle. Have you seen his work on A CHRISTMAS CAROL? It's gorgeous; it came out about fifteen years ago. I want to call the new book FROM THE DUST RETURNED, I think. I'm working on it now, some new stories. Now I'm trying to put a frame on it. I'm building the house and filling the rooms. Cecy is in the attic room,

Timothy is over here, and there's got to be a stone gargoyle showing up at the door. When I was in Paris last July, I attended a double marriage held in a beautiful room with modern French murals by a civil servant, done with great humor. All of my friends, Maggie and myself, were there. And there was a three-year old little boy, so full of life, running around—you just wanted to grab him and shout, *Don't grow! Stay there; stay free forever!* I wrote a story about him, and now he's a member of the

Family and he stays young forever—a variant of the older boy I wrote about in “Hail and Farewell,” who goes from family to family. But this boy is different. He’s three years old, and he passes from hand to hand in the family when there’s been a death, and someone has to call for him. When I’m done “throwing up” the book, regurgitating it from my subconscious, the book will be finished. It will collect together all the Family stories, plus the new ones.

I don’t know who will publish it. Knopf hasn’t been behaving recently. They’ve neglected my books, letting HALLOWEEN TREE go out of print, just before Halloween! Come on! What am I supposed to say to that? I sent them a new fantasy, a children’s book, a year ago, and they never acknowledged receipt, not even a note. These are people I’ve been working with for twenty-five years! So, you know the old saying, paranoids are not born, they’re made?—well, I’m a little paranoid with Knopf; so the new book will go on to someone else. I hope to have it done by next summer.

PLAYS AND SCENARIOS

(How about plays and scenarios?)

I’m doing a one-man play right now, taking monologues from some of my plays and stories.

In the last ten years, I’ve done 65 scripts for my television series. And I had to wait forty years to get that kind of control. Every time I would have a meeting with NBC, they would try their best to leave their fingerprints on me. I had a meeting with NBC twenty years ago to do a series. They were going to bring in a writer from the James Bond series (I thought then I would need help with the scripts). So we’re all gathered together in this room, talking about the series. Finally, one of the vice presidents speaks up and says, *Well, Mr. Bradbury, what we don’t want is anything too high falutin’*. And I said, *High falutin’? I started in WEIRD TALES! I was in ASTONISHING STORIES! I was in SUPER SCIENCE STORIES! I was in CAPTAIN FUTURE! High falutin’?! Well, he realized he’d said the wrong thing. He pulled back and pondered, What I really want from you is something like Franz Kafka!* I said, *Franz Kafka?? Franz Kafka?? Now that’s high falutin’!* And I went around the room, and I said, *Bye. . . Bye. . . Bye!* I left, and that was the end of the meeting!

Similar meetings have occurred over the years, time and again. Finally, ten years ago, a producer came along and sent a year taking me to lunch and dinner, smoothing my feathers, assuring everything would be okay and that I could write all the scripts. I had the control. I was able to help in the casting. If something went wrong, I could help fix it. Out of 65 shows, I think we only had three clinkers. That’s an awfully good average, isn’t it?

As for films, I’ve just finished a script of FAHRENHEIT 451 for Mel Gibson. He’ll do it next year (although I’ll believe it when the cameras start turning!). And I’ve just finished a new script of THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT for Disney. That should start shooting next summer, I guess. That project’s been around for years (mainly because of Roy Disney, a good guy). And a script for Doug Trumbull, who’s

putting together one of his show rides, where they crack your spine and jump you up and down. They're horrible! I hate 'em. But he wanted something with a brain, a heart and soul—I was for him part Scarecrow, part Tin Woodman [laughs]. For that I'm working with Buzz Aldrin, the astronaut, and Robert McCall, the artist. A good team. Supposedly, they're producing this thing, which will go into malls and museums somewhere. We'll see.

ON MORTALITY

(What do you think of others who are 75 years old and already turning in their sleep?)

I don't understand them! I'm lucky. It's genetics. I've never been sick a day in my life. I've never been a hospital. My mother lived to be 70; she was never sick a day in her life. George Bernard Shaw is my hero. I'd like to imitate him and live to be 96 and have God hit me with a baseball bat on my 97th birthday and just knock me off the plate. By surprise! Don't tell me what's coming!

(Tour of the house: the Mugnaini train painting, family mementos, paintings, photographs.

ON WAUKEGAN

(Do you ever return to your home town, Waukegan, Illinois?)

I was there two years ago. The Ravine has been named after me. I scared the hell out of me when I was five. I went back and they've called it the "Ray Bradbury Park" with a "Dandelion Trail" leading down to the bridge. A gravestone is there with my name on it. I took my Aunt Neva back with me, and my first-grade girl friend with me (I called her in Michigan), and we went there and had a good cry [laughs]. It's still a mysterious place. You don't want to be there at night, no matter what!

(more touring: The FAX room: family cats. Posters and paintings and book jackets on the walls. The Mugnaini train painting. Joe's last painting, the SOMETHING WICKED illo. A couch filled with toy animals. Photos of his house in Tucson, Arizona, on South Fourth Ave. where he began writing stories at age 12, in 1932. Photo of Charles Laughton. The "chrestomathy". Books by G.K.Chesterton. (wrote two poems about Shaw and Chesterton) and published them in The Shaw Review. Talks about "Little Nemo," but his script was thrown out. Not comfortable with the Tim Burton "Nightmare Before Christmas." More on Burton. Signs my drawing. I recall the letter he sent me when I turned 50.

Essay for The New Times

Ray Bradbury: An Appreciation

by John C. Tibbetts

Ray Bradbury comes to the Lawrence-Kansas City area on November 14, 1997. He speaks his mind (a fertile, insistent, and persuasive mind at that) at the Lied Center near the KU campus at 7:30 in the evening. And about that, breathe his legions of fans, we can only say, It's about time! The most popular fantasist and imagineer of his time has hitchhiked across the galaxies, wrestled with Leviathan in the deeps, and lifted many a glass in the Dublin pubs—but he's never been to our town.

If you miss him, it's your own damned fault.

What will he talk about? What he always writes and talks about—Living forever! Having attained his own immortality, he'll enjoin you to claim your own. He'll unleash his quiver of exclamation points and hurl them like thunderbolts at you. The author of The Martian Chronicles, The Illustrated Man, Fahrenheit 451, Something Wicked This Way Comes, and Dandelion Wine will talk about Mars and Heaven. About John Carter and Captain Ahab. About Flash Gordon and Walt Disney. He'll soar like a skyrocket over the Fourth of July lawn. And, when you least expect it, the sly old fox will take a breathless pause--and casually scare the hell out of you.

Still a compulsive writer—even after an estimated ten million words—Bradbury admits: “My stories have led me through my life. They shout, I follow.” They have taken him from the Green Town of his boyhood (Waukegan), to the planet Mars (*The Martian Chronicles*), the dark catacombs of Guanajuato, Mexico (“The Next in Line”), the rain-soaked streets of Dublin, where he wrote the screenplay of John Huston’s *Moby Dick* (*Green Shadows, White Whale*), the crumbling backlots of Hollywood (*A Graveyard for Lunatics*), and the theme parks of EPCOT and Walt Disney World (where he worked as an “imagineer,” or concept designer).

His primary themes are bound up in the twin locations of the “locomotive-hungry” country of Green Town, Illinois and the “white silent towns” of the planet Mars. Both are frontiers. In Green Town boys tremble on the threshold of adulthood (*Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*); and on Mars colonizing spacemen disseminate man’s seed into the cosmos. He fears that vanishing youth and

the failure of imagination threaten both worlds. Whether we are growing older or reaching out into space, Bradbury worries that all too often we try “to bludgeon away all the strangeness” and create worlds in the images of our own past. That is our strength and our weakness.

“If you look at all my work as a series of metaphors, you’ll be well off,” he tells me in a recent interview (I’m proud to admit that I’ve known Ray for more than thirty years). “Everything has been emotional and unintended. I’ve lived the life described by Federico Fellini, who became my friend sixteen years ago: And he said at one point, *Don’t tell me what I’m doing; I don’t want to know!* I don’t know what I’m going to do tomorrow morning. It leaves me free to be surprised.”

Ever the optimist, Ray sounds a warning to the nay sayers out there. “We have to get the Doomsters out of the way. Bring on a New Millenium and they lie down and play dead. At least an optimist can do things. And maybe I’m a fool, but that’s all right. Call me that, then get out of the way!”

In addition to a just-released new book of stories, Driving Blind (which he’ll sign at the Lied Center), Ray has many projects in the works. “As for films, I’ve just finished a script of Fahrenheit 451 for Mel Gibson. He’ll do it next year (although I’ll believe it when the cameras start turning!). And I’ve just finished new scripts of The Martian Chronicles and The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit for Disney. And a script for Douglas [2001: A Space Odyssey] Trumbull, who’s putting together one of his show rides, where they crack your spine and jump you up and down. They’re horrible! I hate ‘em. But he wanted something with a brain, a heart and soul (I guess I was for

him part Scarecrow, part Tin Woodman!). For that I'm working with Buzz Aldrin, the astronaut, and Robert McCall, the artist. A good team. Supposedly, they're producing this thing, which will go into malls and museums somewhere. We'll see."

One upcoming project occupies a special place in his heart—and in the hearts of those, like me, who first encountered him long years ago in the pages of a short-story collection called Dark Carnival. A number of stories therein chronicled the activities of a very peculiar family—a very peculiar family—numbering vampires, were-creatures, shape-changers, and telepaths. Now, Ray plans to revisit the Elliotts, of Greentown, Illinois, and give us an update on their activities.

"I started these stories forty-five years ago. "One of the first illustrations for the first story, 'The Homecoming,' was by Charles Addams. And he started his 'Addams Family' stories around the same time. Addams and I had plans at one time to do a book together, but we never had the chance to do it. I want to call the new book From the Dust Returned, I think, or just The Vampire Chronicles. I'm working on it now, some new stories. Now I'm trying to put a frame on it. I'm building the house and filling the rooms. Cecy, the telepath, is in the attic room, her brother, Timothy, the only 'normal' member of the family, is over here, and there's got to be a stone gargoyle planted over the door. And there's a new family member I'll tell you about: When I was in Paris last July, I attended a double marriage held in a beautiful room with modern French murals by a civil servant, done with great humor. All of my friends, nt wufe Maggie and myself, were there. And there was a three-year old little boy, so full of life, running around—you just wanted to grab him and shout, *Don't grow! Stay*

there; stay free forever! I wrote a story about him, and now he's a member of the Elliott Family and he stays young forever (a variant of another boy I wrote about in a story called 'Hail and Farewell') who goes from family to family. But this boy is different. He's three years old, and he passes from hand to hand in the family when there's been a death, and someone has to call for him. When I'm done 'throwing up' the book, regurgitating it from my subconscious, the book will be finished. It will collect together all the Family stories, plus the new ones."

Clearly, for Bradbury, time stands still—or, alternately, it marches on forever. I ask him what he thinks of people who are half his age and already turning in their sleep.

"I don't understand them! I'm lucky. It's genetics, I guess. George Bernard Shaw is my hero. I'd like to imitate him and live to be 96 and have God hit me with a baseball bat on my 97th birthday and just knock me off the plate. By surprise! Just don't tell me what's coming!"

John C. Tibbetts

There used to be a file cabinet full of his television scripts. Now that's been moved. Where are they now? In the den? In the garage? In his Palm Springs home? Where's Moby Dick? In a closet? Under the sea?

A doctoral dissertation on Ray's script adaptations.

Yes, Ray does stipulate that he must do the screenplay for any future projects. Gibson has had three done in addition to Ray's. Gibson says they will start shooting in October. Spielberg's company is about to do Chronicles. Directing may be the guy who did Shawshank, Frank Darabont.

Another book, Ahmed and the Oblivion Machine, a children's book.

A third sequel to Death Is a Lonely Business, called The Rattigan.

Somewhere a Band Is Playing, a fantasy about immortals who gather and build themselves a city.

No publications yet of his screenplays.